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School Rover

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The Laura Festival

(No offence to any staff member on the trip; it's only the African Queen's manner of expression) Peggy Chigeza

The Laura Festival was held from June 21 - 24, 2007. Djarragun College had the chance to show off the dances that some of our students perform. It took a lot of preparation to overcome the logistics to make it a success. Lots of time and planning was done up to the day we headed for Laura.

The theme this year was 'Respect and Recognition' of country, culture and people. Laura Festival is held every two years and it is always a big event. It has been taking place for the past 25 years

The Trip

We had 32 students and 17 staff members. Everything was packed and ready to roll. The first stop was at Mt Molloy. Instructions were to stop before the bridge for lunch but there were two bridges close to each other. Two vehicles stayed at the first stop and the other six proceeded to the big bridge.

The second stopover was at Lakeland for a fuel refill before taking off to Laura. All the vehicles had a refuelling and passengers had some food to eat. Staff had the chance to buy capuccinos and review the journey to that stage. The Ford took off in front and headed in the Cooktown direction. We had a nice drive considering that all of us in the car had not been before to that part of Queensland. We had a splendid view of the Black Mountains.



(left - Island boys' and girls' teams; cluster of blue igloos shaded by a canopy of green; above - Ms Peggy & Aunty Harriet - guardians of the bread basket)

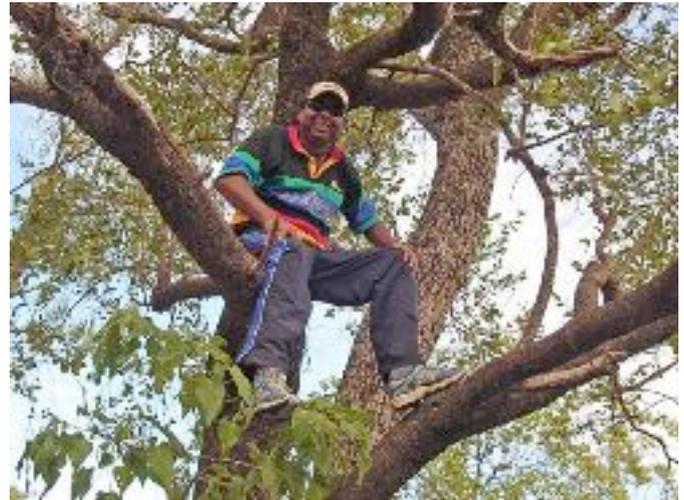


We then retired and guess what? In the tents, one could hear snoring. I wished someone had taped that for the records.

Friday

Despite the harsh weather conditions, everyone made an early rise and had to shower and be ready for breakfast at 8.30 a.m. We had to reset the camp and those going for the Rock Art left at 10.30 a.m. **Alan E** and **Alan G**, **Tekoa**, **Rudra** and **Vimal** remained to reset the camp.

Before we realised it, we had done the kilometres to Cooktown and got onto the turn-off which was 144kms from Laura. 'You must be joking' is the response that Mr Shankaran got from all of us in the car. We were tired and all we wanted was to get to Laura. Finally, we headed back to Lakeland and got onto the right road.



Mr. Vimal is exposing some of the primal skills that still survive in his family tree



Meanwhile, I am told that those who went on the right route were busy setting up the tents. By the time we got into Laura, it was just before dusk and everyone cheered us. What a good start to the camping !!

The Olympic Canoe champion (**Tekoa**) and the best high jumper (**Alan G**) could not put a 3-metre rope up the tree, until our very own tree climber, **Vimal**, came on board. He leapt like a monkey and was up in seconds. **Auntie Harriet** said he really must have been a naughty boy growing up. **Mr. Tekoa** had to ask for a ladder from the sanitation trucks that happened to pass by our camp. **Aunt Harriet** wanted to outsmart the boys by climbing the tree while Ms **Peggy** sat and continued taking notes.

Everyone was quick to set up camp and get ready for a meal. We utilized whatever equipment we found. Eventually, everyone had something to eat and was happy. Staff had coffee and sat around the kitchen area, talking. Students sat around the fire with the Aunties getting ready for the dances.

Mr. Tekoa told **Alan G** to stick his finger in the bulb sockets to test for power. Meanwhile, **Aunt Thelma** had to be rushed to Lakeland to do some shopping. The driver missed a turn and consequently came back two hours later. Everyone in the camp decided to call **Michael Yeatman** "Big Brother". Big Brother watched everything that was happening.



Michael Wailu & Gandy Buie are putting idle hands to good use during the preparations

Mr. Vimal spoiled with chocolates everyone who remained at camp. Before we knew it, it was time for lunch and the sandwiches were ready in no time at all. By this stage, we had managed to have all utensils in the kitchen except the frying pans that were packed in one of the buses by “Big Brother”.



Rock Art

One of our short tours took us to the rock art of Aboriginal people in the famous Laura caves. Ms **Deb Hancock** was first up the steep rock, followed by all the energetic students. 'Big is beautiful people' were left behind. Despite a short stature, **Gandy** helped Ms **Linda McKeown** up the slope.

Ms **Leanne Standen** was chatted up by someone who claimed to be the last member of the Kelly gang on one-day release from jail. He had asked Ms **Jade** to immortalize him in a shared photo. She thought that the container in his hand was the cause for his brazen forwardness. On closer look, she found out that it was just a bottle of flavoured milk.



Mr. Gracey keeps the heat on in the kitchen

We had lunch and students busied themselves getting ready for the official opening at 3.00 p.m. Time is a vacuous notion in Laura because Jeremy the organiser came around at 1.30 p.m. and said to us, “Djarragun is now performing at 2.00 p.m.” Like busy bees, everyone quickly made sure that everything was ready for the performance.

The Official Opening

The official opening was breath-taking and packed with emotion. We observed a moment of silence for lost souls and then the Chief continued his speech. He looked over 80 years of age. The grand parade was headed by the Kamanji people. They had a shield - “Loyi Yu”.



Mr Craig tackles the hotplate as a Sizzler's al fresco impromptu gourmet

Competition started with a group from Innisfail and they did a dance called 'Galloping'. The second group were the 2003 champions from west of Rockhampton - Woorabinda. They did the following dances - Criss-cross Eagle Dance; The Old Man Dance; Disability Dance; Creation Dance; the Rainbow Serpent Dance and a Spirit dance.

Djarragun outnumbered the other troupes and performed the Open dance followed by dances for the Honeybee, Cassowary, Crocodile, Kangaroo and Mosquito.

Island dancing by the Djarragun troupe kept true to form and impressive costuming and the intricate dhoeri (headdress) worn by each of the dancers added to the mystique. Other dancers came from Injinoo (near Bamaga), Aurukun, Palm Island, Rockhampton and Brisbane.

HIGHLIGHTS OF LAURA

Ms Deb and **Ms Maryanne** had the opportunity of seeing and meeting everyone at Laura since they were painting the murals on the contemplation sitting rooms.

Big Brother was always watching and being close to where food was being prepared. He received free tapping from **Ms Linda** to calm him down.

The snoring team and rumbling noises kept everyone awake at night and should have been an item for its own trophy in the Festival.

Mr. Tekoa thought that a Laura ghost was active because branches had fallen over his tent.

Allan E received royal service from Linda - coffee in bed!! He requested brekkie in bed but unfortunately did not get it because it does not happen in Linda's household.

Allan G took **Allan E's** kettle away and we could not find it in the morning and thought someone had taken it during the night. We could say that it was the case of the 'pot' calling the kettle back.

Allan G was convinced that he could have been an episode of John Edwards show, 'Crossing Over'. Perceived contact with the Quinkin spirit had him wanting to go through the walls of the tent still attached to his earthly frame.

Big sister, Jade was seemingly transfixed, staring at the bonfire for ages. We wondered what was going on in her mind. We noted that **Big Sister, Jade**, always sat in the director's chair. The Director never sat in his own chair for the entire period.

Mr. Gracey's sleep-talking provided proof for the final conviction that a seance was definitely being conducted in this secluded Quinkan region traditionally recognized as a location rampant with ancestral spirit forms and ghostly apparitions.

Mr. Rudra serviced the buses in Laura and guess what? He could not telephone his wife because he did not know her number off by heart. Ooh, what a father - despite having all the connections and the knowledge of thousands of car parts!! - he has been nonplussed by ten digits.

Outcomes & Promotion

Many people studied our noticeboard and asked more questions about our college. This was an ideal time for good bonding of students and staff. It was an occasion for nice experiences and happy memories.

Saturday morning was windy. **Mr. Tekoa** thought the shade tarpaulin had fallen over his tent; **Ms Linda** thought it was raining. **Mr. Allan** heard nothing.

We had to be ready this time for the dances. So after breakfast, preparations began on time. There were so many people by now and so many groups to perform.

Performances by all groups were outstanding and we enjoyed watching each and every dance because it was different and provided varying types of excellence.

We had a late lunch at 3.00p.m. because performers cannot dance when they are too full. Afterwards, during free time we managed to go around the stalls buying souvenirs.



Staff performed many different tasks to maintain a smooth operation. **Mr. Rudra** took care of the filming side and all electrical issues; **Mr. Tekoa** was BBQ man and also night watchman. He loved the BBQ job. **Mr. Gracey** was basically voted as the best kitchen hand ever. He was the Minister for Water and held the diplomatic post for Chinaware. At one point, he even challenged **Mr. Tekoa** on the BBQ with **Mr. Craig**. **Admiral Vimal** took charge of the entire fleet and navigated safe passage and calm anchorage.

Big Sister Jade was in charge of the Aboriginal group and baby sitting "big brother". **Mr. Saggi** initiated all the grass skirt making and dances. He also loved preparing sandwiches. **Mr. Craig** was spotted putting up tents and taking care of the Aboriginal paintings and was our second helper in the kitchen hand department. **Mr. Allan Edwards** was the Handyman. Just ask Allan for heavy lifting and the technical manoeuvres for mobilization. **Mr. Alan Gazir** was the torch guy and, oops, I had almost forgotten that he was the spokesperson extraordinaire. **Ms Linda** took care of all the uniforms and helped in salad preparations and making coffee for other staff members.

Ms Peggy was Director of Public Services. If hungry, ask Ms Peggy for food and the allocation of duties, such as, **Mr. Tekoa** at the BBQ and, finally, the Rover story for the school newsletter. **Ms Deb & Ms Mary Ann** painted the lovely mural and were responsible for driving the students to the Rock Art. **Aunty Harriet** was the kitchen helper with lots of potential at being guard and making sure everyone was happy. **Aunty Thelma & Ms Nancy** made sure that all tasks were done and often sat by the fire with the students practising singing and dancing

Student Duties

Sophie Billy re Camp tidying : Did not realize that EMU parades can also be done at camp. 'Brian the Handyman' is set to overtake the 'Bob the Builder' song. **Gandy Buie** was voted Best Helper by all staff. You could hear everyone saying, "Need anything, ask Gandy." **Karen Noah, Maria Marou** and **Annie Mabo** prepared all sandwiches, oops, and cleaning of all saucepans and scraping the BBQ. **Michael Yeatman** 'big brother' was always watching and staying close to where any food was. He could be heard asking, "When are we eating or having supper?" every 30 minutes.

Sunday

By the time we got up everyone was tired and ready to go home. **Ms Peggy** and **Aunty Harriet** made brekky for before everyone else woke up and, when everyone was up, each was treated to a brekky of everything and anything. Oops, we had to go and see the competition of the digeridoo. **Chulkul Neal** took part and, guess what? He won the competition for being the smallest, as well as the confident one. He was promised a scholarship. The rep still has to call the school to arrange this.

We left Laura with good memories and everyone really enjoyed themselves. First stop was at Lakeland and everyone had to remind Vimal to turn in the right direction this time. It was a tiresome return because everyone now was looking forward to coming back home to have a rest. The convoy was just as before but boarders left immediately after brekky because they had to come back to school to sort out their shopping before going home for the holidays. Everyone was happy to come home at last. Overall, this was really a good trip for students and staff.

Thanks to organizers and participants for adding another notch to the Djarragan Belt of Achievement and Success.