

# SINGABOUT

## FEBRUARY 2014

### BOOK REVIEW

#### **Born In A Tent: How Camping Makes Us Australian**

Bill Garner (2013)

A New South Book:

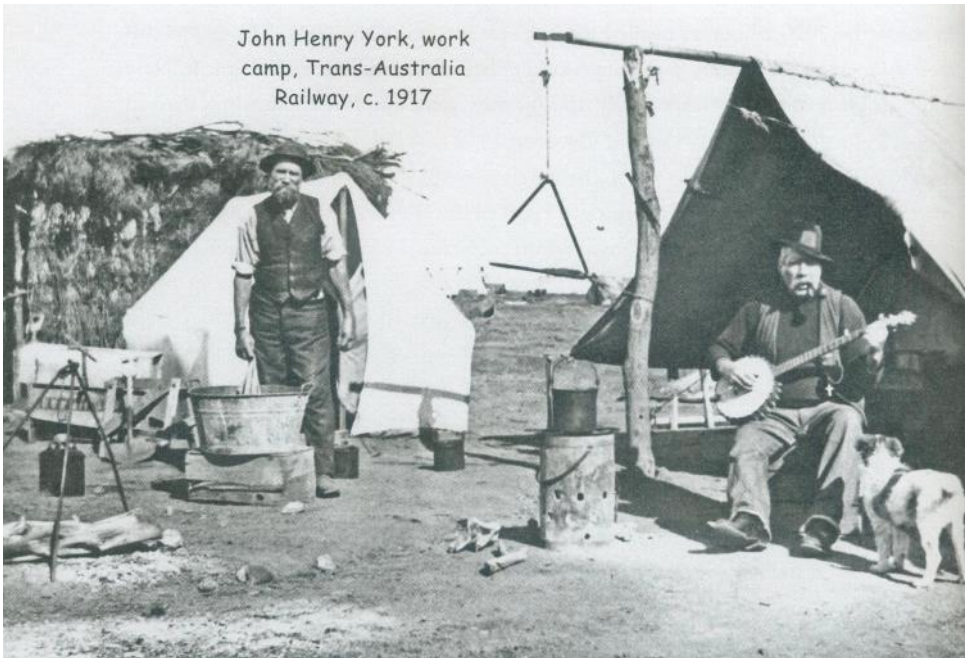
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This well researched and illustrated book sets out to establish that, for many of us, camping was the great influence in our love and enjoyment of this big country. Garner doesn't get distracted by spending too much time on the fact that the white settlement of Australian started off in rough (Government issue) tents erected around the Tank Stream ... the best little camping, fishing and gathering area on what we proceeded to name 'Sydney Harbour' ... to which the traditional owners had directed the new pale strangers, in the hospitality their culture demanded.



Fifteen chapters from “*A campers’ history of Australia*,” to “*The national camp*” (Canberra!) over 255 pages start from our “a modern end of the camping experience and a description of the various ways in which many of us or our ancestors came to camping ... through family holidays, the necessity of camping out when exploring, claiming, clearing and building on new sites - holidaying all over this wide and diverse country. The portability and utility of tents demands coverage of the light tents of Boy Scout camping ... and the hefty Army tents of the Cadet training of my own memory ... as well as the heavier and more dangerous area of “real Army” camps on the fringe of combat areas.



Some notable Australians are cited for the importance of the portable canvas home in their chosen “new land”. The early gold fields ‘townships’ with tents for homes, pubs, stores, Government Troopers’ establishments ... as well as later field workers like Daisy Bates, who tented to be with the Aboriginal people, with whom she worked. We are shown images of the inevitable explorers ... tenting their way across the land they are mapping ... and claiming!



Daisy Bates, aged about 77, camped by the Murray at Pyap, South Australia

I did like finding this paragraph from Tasmania, mid 19<sup>th</sup> century:

“On a sightseeing trip to Macquarie Harbour in 1842 led by Sir John Franklin, the Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen’s Land, the party of thirteen included his wife Jane Franklin and another woman. Twenty convicts carried the gear in kangaroo skin knapsacks. In a letter to her sister, Jane wrote that ‘we have all encamped together, at night, within a few yards of each other, in open tents, without a guard, and without a firearm amongst us, or a single instrument of defence’.”

The book is well written and gives a comprehensive view of the way in which the Australia in which we all live today was a natural site for the tent to serve:

**Survival:** from the first landing of huddled convicts and Marine Guards into a Port Jackson downpour,

**Exploration** ( ... exploitation ... annexation ...),

**Development:** Setting up new towns around the country / laying claim to new gold fields (... and the site of our seminal Eureka Stockade history! / laying claim to new land releases in the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century/,

**Recreation:** Extensively viewed in the context of family camping ... especially as we come into the spread of family ownership of cars (all lovingly recalled by Bill Garner!.)

*Bob Bolton*

