

Churchill & District News 2015 Short Story and Poetry Competition

Writing Competition Presentation Night - Writers rewarded

The fourteenth annual Writing Competition Presentation Night saw the Co-Operating Churches filled with eager award winners as they awaited the award giving.

The Writing Competition Presentation Night is always a good opportunity to acknowledge and thank our supporters and sponsors.

A special welcome was extended to the guest presenters of awards, who were also thanked for attending and taking time in their busy schedules to be present.

Russell Northe - our local MP, an ongoing supporter of our paper and a contributor of a regular column.

Darrell White representing Latrobe City Council, a major ongoing sponsor. Darrell also contributes a regular column.

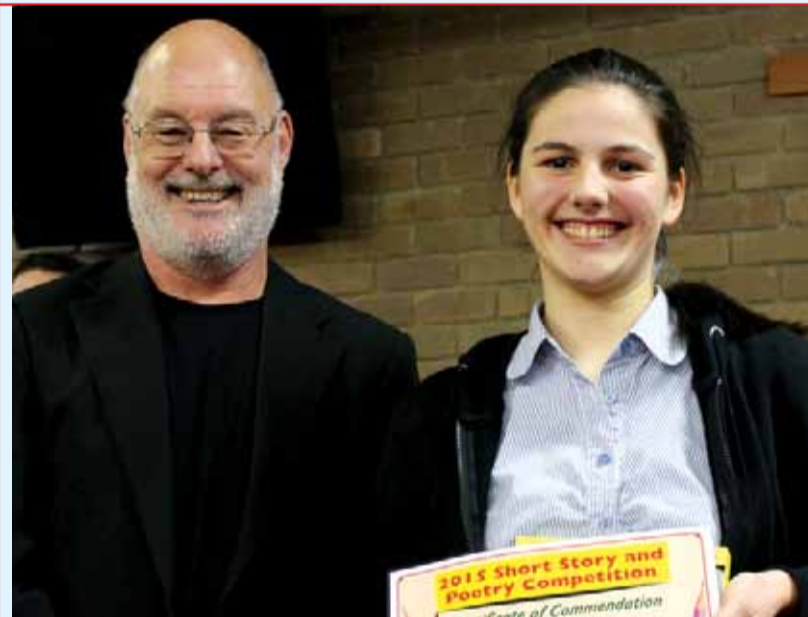
Alan Roach from GDF-Suez, a major ongoing sponsor.

Liz Hart from the School of Applied Media and Social Sciences, who is special to us as she was instrumental in helping Churchill News to re-start. She helped with providing a student to learn the Quark Publishing program and teaching it to Val Prokopiv, our then editor, as well as making payment of the rent on the room provided at the then Monash University.

Leo Billington from The Rotary Club of Hazelwood and District - an annual sponsor which gives part of its sponsorship to the Writing Competition.

Reg Grissotto from Churchill Lions Club - a great supporter of our paper and its activities.

Merrilyn Grissotto from Churchill Lioness Club, which has been an annual sponsor of our Writing Competition. It was sad to report that the Lioness Club has now gone into recess, but Merrilyn was gladly welcomed to do this last presentation. The Lioness Club was thanked for all they have done for our town.



Peter Gray from AMPWORKS - an annual sponsor of our Writing Competition and the provider of our P.A. system for the Junior Fishing Competition.

Ian Combridge - Chairperson of the Co-Operating Churches in Churchill. The church is very supportive of Churchill & District News and is indeed the origin of the paper.

Also acknowledged as sponsors for this event were: Allen and Unwin Publishers -

which supplies books for prizes. Reader's Emporium in Traralgon which donates four vouchers each year. Churchill News Agency - which contributes goodies for our primary school participants.

A total of 180 entries over ten categories was received.

The biggest support came from the primary schools of Boolarra, Churchill, Lumen Christi, and Hazelwood North. The local schools are wonderful supporters of the competition.

A special word of thanks was extended to Principals, teaching and support staff for ensuring the children's entries arrived on time, and to mentors who support and encourage the children as writers. Those efforts are appreciated.

The Team Leader of Churchill & District News, Ruth Place, told the audience that the paper is run entirely by dedicated volunteers. The Writing Competition Presentation Night

is an opportunity to thank them publicly for their efforts on behalf of this community. "We have such a great team, with everyone working hard at their responsibilities to produce the paper, and also to go the extra mile with events such as our writing Competition, Junior Fishing Competition, (November 7 from 9am-3pm), Sports Come-and-Try Days (we had our tennis come-and-try on September 21,) all of which as

you can imagine takes hours of work. "I feel privileged to work with such a dedicated group of talented people. It is rewarding volunteering for your community," she said.

Ian Combridge, Chairperson of the Co-operating Churches, was invited to say a few words. He thanked the C&DN team for all their work and encouraged the writers to keep up their efforts. Awards were then presented.

Winners of the 2015 Churchill & District News Writing Competition

Category 1 Children 7 and Under Short Story/Poem. Kohen James "900 Tomatoes" 1st. Brian Parkes "A Giraffe in my Bed" 2nd. Jessica Duffy "The Magic Wish" Equal 3rd. Isabella Davies "My Wish Came True" Equal 3rd. Ruby Turner-Jellis "The Girl and

the Witch" Equal 3rd. Lila Kerslake "Molly's Birthday", Encouragement Award. Poppy Tetzlaff "Poppy's Dream", Encouragement Award. Hudson Berechree "Toys about WWE", Encouragement Award. Sarina Shireff "The Silly Witch" Illustrations. Annalyse Braun "Optimus Prime Saves the Day" Illustrations. Blake Luxford "The Witch", Illustrations. Lucy Booth, "The Brave Boys", Illustrations. Tory Russell "Princess Tory", Illustrations. Category 2 Children 8-10 years Short Story and Poem. Claire Pendlebury "Grounded", 1st. Maddison Salmon "Summer's

Diary", 2nd. Luke Marchionne, "Blue Tongue Lizards", Equal 3rd. Ally Perez "The Princess and the Unicorn", Equal 3rd. Chloe Dudek "Fairy Dust", Encouragement Award. Rebecca Ericson "The Witch, the Girl and the Dragon", Encouragement Award. Jarrod Guy "The Cards" Encouragement Award. Zoe Nickson "The Book of Mischief", Encouragement Award. Charlotte Di Toro "Cat Mania", Encouragement Award. Tahlia Runge "Narmi the Cat" Encouragement Award. Jasmine Thompson "The 3 Sisters and Jasmine", Illustrations. Category 3 Children 8-10 Short

Story. Eve Cornell "The Dragon" 1st. Bethany Blakeley "New Idea", 2nd. Lily-Rose Williamson "Fairy Tale", Equal 3rd. Kate Chisholm "Maddison's Worst Birthday Ever", Equal 3rd. Jasmine Croft "Rice Day", Encouragement Award. Harry Van Rossum "Apes of Wrath", Encouragement Award. Justin Barrett "Prisoner of War", Encouragement Award. Gavin Richards "The Adventures of Magical Drawer and Sound Hound", Encouragement Award. Category 4 Children's Poetry 11-13 years. Abdus Sami "The Whispering Forest", Encouragement

Award. Category 5 Short Story 14-18 years. Tessa Just "Meg's Exciting Adventure", 1st. Courtney Gallert "Piano", 2nd. Courtney Gallert "Listen Up War 90", Encouragement Award. Category 6 Poetry 14-18 years. Tessa Just "Remembrance", 1st. Category 7 Adult Short Story. Graeme McIntyre "The Pool", 1st. Kaye Yarnold "Friends", 2nd. Kaye Yarnold "Alone", 3rd. Category 8 Adult Poetry. Kaye Yarnold "Unknown", 1st. Florence Blucher "Music of the Spheres", 2nd. Florence Blucher "Silvery Light",

Encouragement Award. Category 9 A Children's Story. Tessa Just "Chaos Gets Lost", 1st. Belinda Battilana "The Owl Named Bundy", Encouragement Award. Category 10 A Drabble. Tessa Just "Why?", 1st.

Category 1: Children 7 and Under Short Story/Poetry



900 Tomatoes

by Kohen James

One day I saw 900 tomatoes dancing in my garden.

Some were tap dancing.

Some were doing ballet.

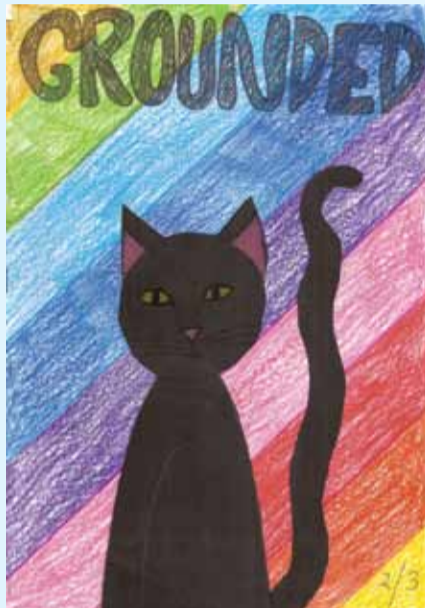
Some were crazy dancing, and some were hip hop dancing.

It was funny.



Category 2: Children 8-10 years Short Story and Poem

by Claire Pendlebury



BANG!

I heard a noise. I ran down stairs. BANG!

I heard it again. It's my cat. My cat fell down the stairs. I got up, then walked in the kitchen to get some breakfast. I put some bread in the toaster. The toaster popped and

scared my cat Missy. She ran down the hallway and didn't stop . . . She hit in to the glass door. The door shattered. My mum came out, 'WHATS GOING ON OUT HERE?' I said to mum it was the cat, but she didn't believe me, not

for a second. So guess what? I get grounded for 10 weeks, which I thought was definitely over exaggerating. I ran upstairs to my room and started kicking the wall. My dad came up stairs and says . . . IF YOU KEEP IT UP WE WILL DOUBLE IT!

Category 3: Children 8-10 years Short Story

The Dragon

The golden pillars stood tall like giants. Around them wrapped vines, intertwining with each other. Staircases with golden banisters made a maze which ran around the palace. Bright statues of dragons guarded open doorways. Stained glass windows glistened with light in the afternoon sun. I ran up the steps and a flash of sunlight shone in my eyes. 'I heard a deep growl behind me. I turned to see a mystical creature. As it came closer it became clearer. I looked back at the doorways. One of the dragons was gone! I gasped. That creature is a dragon? Scared I threw the stick at it. The creature caught it in its mouth and came closer towards me. I stepped back and turned to run but it was a dead

end. The dragon kept coming closer and closer. I closed my eyes. Suddenly, I heard a clank at my feet. I opened my eyes and saw the dragon with big, innocent eyes. I looked at my feet and saw the stick I'd thrown. "Oh," I said. "You like to play fetch!"

by Eve Cornell



Category 10: A Drabble

Why?

by Tessa Just



'Why had she run away?' Margret lay on the wet ground and shivered. 'Why had she been so stupid?' The cold wind blew and Margret was sure that there was sleet mixed with the rain. 'What if no one finds me?' she thought. Pain flowed up her broken leg. She tried to move it and nearly fainted. Why had she allowed her temper to get the better of her? How sorry she was for her actions now.

"Help!" she called feebly. Wait! Was it possible, had she actually heard someone call her name?

"Help", she called, "please come quickly!"

Category 5: 14-18 Years Short Story

Meg's Exciting Adventure

by Tessa Just



Meg looked at the tree.
 "Hey," she called to her two sisters, who were scratching nearby. "I think tree climbing would be fun."
 "Don't be daft," clucked Betty.
 "Chooks don't climb trees," agreed Milly.
 "Chook-ma and Chook-pa used to," Meg said.

Yes, but Mum and Dad didn't," declared Betty.

Meg thought for a bit. She turned her head one way and then the other way. She scratched her head.

"True," she mused. "But Dad used to flutter all the way to the top of the barn roof to crow in the morning."

"Roosters do that, not hens like us," chided Milly. "It's too adventurous."

"But I like adventures," whined Meg. "Like the time the fox got into the hen house."

"Meg!" screeched Betty horrified. "We don't talk about that."

"All the deaths," moaned Milly. "How can you like that?"

"Well," said Meg, a trifle uncomfortably. "I didn't like what happened, but, well, never mind."

Meg wandered off, leaving her two aghast sisters to discuss all her bad points. She looked at the sky and sighed. 'It would be wonderful to be able to fly really high. But with these wings...' She sighed again. Meg squatted down and started to preen.

Five minutes later, she glanced up as a shadow passed over her. In a flash she was up and racing as fast as she could to find cover. Above her a wedge-tailed eagle came swooping down from the sky. Even from the height he had been, he had spotted this lone chook. And down he continued to come.

"Faster," Meg thought. "Faster, faster." Grass stems hit her face. Weeds caught at her feet. Meg stumbled and flapped her wings frantically.

"Wow." Meg was astounded. She had just propelled herself along. Meg flapped and ran, flapped and ran. Soon the chook house came into view.

"Hurry," she panted. "Inside! Eagle!" All the hens and the rooster rushed into the house. Meg dropped exhausted in her nest. The eagle gave an angry squawk and flew up and away.

Milly and Betty came up to Meg. "So," they both said. "Do you still like adventures?"

Meg thought... about the eagle; the mad run; finding out that she could fly for a bit. She looked back at her sisters.

"Yes," she clucked. "I still do." Milly and Betty looked at her as if she were crazy.

"But that eagle almost got you," screeched Milly, horrified.

"It almost got us," shrieked Betty, equally as horrified.

"But it didn't," said Meg happily. The two sisters looked at each other and walked off. Meg watched them go. 'Tomorrow,' she thought dreamily. 'Tomorrow I'll try tree climbing. But maybe I won't talk to Milly and Betty about it.'

With this happy thought, Meg settled down in her cosy nest and slept.

This story is based on three chooks we had who really were called Milly, Betty and Meg. In the end all three of them learnt to climb a small tree. Betty and Milly didn't like it as much as Meg did though.

Category 6: 14-18 Years Poetry

Remembrance

by Tessa Just

Bombs exploded, bullets stung
 Orders were to fight then run
 For the men who went to war.

Little food and dirty water
 Life was sometimes just manslaughter
 For the men who went to war.

Comrades fell and lay there dying
 The enemy continued firing
 At the men who went to war.

Some were young and some were old
 All of them so brave and bold
 Were the men who went to war.

Blood was shed, limbs were lost
 This war they fought, it had a cost
 For the men who went to war.

Stuck in brains; a nightmare's there
 A story that's too raw to share
 For the men who went to war.

Parents mourned and widows cried
 When papers told which men had died
 So many men who went to war.

Diggers buried at Gallipoli
 Never to return to their home country
 For many men who went to war.

The war was over, the living returned
 They told a tale that helped us learn
 About the men who went to war

So once a year, on a special day
 We think of the sacrifice they made
 Those men who went to war.

Category 9: A children's Story

C-h-a-o-s Gets Lost

by Tessa Just

The sun was just peeking through the blinds of Grace's bedroom when Chaos entered the room.

"Wake up, Grace!" he yowled as loudly as he could.

There was no movement in the bed. Chaos leapt up and swatted Grace's hair. Grace sleepily opened one eye.

"Go away, Chaos." Grace yawned, pulling the covers over her head. Chaos tilted his head, then jumped to the ground. He stalked out of the room in a

huff, his tail in the air.

Chaos headed downstairs. He paused as he passed the cat flap. It had just been put in and he wasn't supposed to go outside without someone around, but it allowed him to come back indoors anytime he wanted. He pushed it gently and it moved. He pushed harder and it swung out. He jumped nimbly to the side and just managed to miss being bumped on the nose.

"Oops" he meowed, then pushed his way out through the flap. The air was fresh and the sky was a beautiful pink and orange.

A butterfly flew past Chaos's nose and the temptation was irresistible. He tore down the path after it. It flew over the fence and Chaos didn't stop. He vaulted straight over the low brick wall and ran even faster. The butterfly led him on a merry chase. Up one street and down another. People stared as the kitten raced past them. Children squealed with delight.

As they neared a park, the butterfly flew so high that Chaos lost sight of it. He sat down and tried to catch his breath. For the first time he looked around at his surroundings.

"Grace," he meowed. "Where am I?"

Meanwhile, back at the Judson's house, Grace was on the move. She found that after Chaos had woken her, she couldn't get back to sleep. She could hear her parents, Craig and Susan moving about in their bedroom, so she decided that it was time to be getting up. After dressing quickly she made her way down stairs.

"Chaos," she called quietly. "Here kitty."

No Chaos. Grace couldn't help feeling a bit

worried. Normally he would come flying towards her. She started to search in earnest. The lounge room, the study, bathroom, laundry, kitchen. She even looked up the chimney.

By the time her parents arrived downstairs, Grace was frantic.

"Mum, Dad, I can't find Chaos anywhere."

Craig looked at his daughter sleepily. "He's probably behind the couch." He yawned.

"He's not," replied Grace, almost in tears.

"It's alright, honey," soothed her mum. "He'll be about somewhere."

"Maybe, but the cat flap was unlocked." Craig and Susan looked sharply at Grace.

"What did you say?" asked Craig, now fully awake.

"The cat flap was left unlocked. He's probably outside somewhere and I can't see him from any of the windows." Grace began to get horrible visions in her head. "He might cross the road. A dog might find him and kill him. He'll be lost and scared. Anything could happen to a kitten."

"Grace, calm down." Susan reached out and pulled her daughter into her arms.

"We need to start looking," cried Grace. "Mum, can we go now?"

Susan looked down at Grace's miserable face.

"All right. Get your gear on and let's go."

Chaos, meanwhile, was wandering all around the park. It was massive. He spotted some birds and once again the opportunity was irresistible. He charged at them and they scattered in all directions.

"Hey," cried Chaos. "That's not fair."

Suddenly a shriek pierced the air. "Kitten!"

Chaos whirled around and saw two hands reaching out to grab him. As the fingers touched his fur, Chaos bolted. He didn't care where he went. His only thought was to get away from those hands. They weren't Grace's and he knew it.

A loud wail rose behind him and Chaos pushed himself even faster. He flew across roads causing cars to screech to a stop. He veered around people. He ran and ran. His lungs began to hurt, but on he ran. He was so frightened by all the noise and confusion that at first he didn't hear his name being

called.

"Chaos!"

He jerked to a stop. What was that? "Chaos! Here kitty."

"Grace," he meowed, as loudly as he could. "Mum, did you hear that? That's Chaos calling. I know it! Chaos, here boy!"

"Grace," he called again. And then he was off. Round the corner he went and bolted straight into Grace's open arms.

"Oh Chaos." Grace hugged him tightly, but Chaos didn't care. He purred contentedly.

A hand reached down and Chaos looked up to see Susan gently rubbing his ears.

"Well, Chaos. You certainly gave us all a scare."

"I'm sorry," meowed Chaos, "but the butterfly was really tempting."

When they arrived home, Susan went in to phone her husband, who had left for work, to let him know that Chaos was found. Grace poured herself a bowl of cereal and ate whilst watching Chaos play with his mouse.

"Promise me you'll never leave the yard again, Chaos," she said.

Chaos glanced at Grace, and the mouse which he had just tossed up, bounced off his head. Grace giggled. Chaos shook himself and ran over to her. He climbed up onto the table and sat watching Grace eat.

"I was really scared when I found you weren't in the house."

Chaos glanced out the window. "I was really scared when I found out I was lost." He thought.

Just then a butterfly flew past the window. Chaos watched it longingly.

"I'll get you yet," he meowed. "Just not today. I'm too tired."



Category 8: Adult Poetry

UNKNOWN



by Kaye Yarnold

They had a love, these brave young men.

A love for a beautiful land
 They fought to keep us safe and free
 In mud and on burning sand

Some were never to return
 Their ANZAC blood ran free
 Across a foreign landscape
 For the sake of you and me

In peaceful fields across the world
 Our war dead lie in peace
 The ultimate price was paid
 In hope the guns would cease

For those who died and lay named
 We worship and give thanks
 But some they rest there nameless
 Still, heroes from the ranks

From the battlefields of France he came
 Our Unknown Soldier home
 Just who he was we'll never know
 But he didn't die alone

He gave his life with mates beside
 His aim in life was set
 To keep Australia free and proud
 For this, we'll not forget.

THE POOL

by Graeme McIntyre

Category 7: Adult Short Story

Fergus was struggling for breath as he neared the completion of his steep climb from the saddle to the top of the high ridge. The track had a rise in elevation of a little over two hundred metres at a gradient of 45% for the 500-metre climb. "Only a little way to go", he said to himself, "it's about one hundred or so metres to the top; if I live that long. Once I top this ridge I should then be looking over the small grassy plain almost into the front door of Williamson's hut, where I camped two years ago.

I hope I don't meet up with Ted this time. He said he and his wife Joy would be trying to walk from Licola to Adaminaby this summer, Joy was OK, but Ted really annoyed me with his boasting; to make matters worse he snored most of the night. Even the possums in the roof left the hut just so they could get some undisturbed rest. I really must get a lot fitter if I am to continue with my bush walking exploits in the future. It's back to the gym every day from now on after this trip Horatio my friend; no ifs, buts or ands about it. The way I am feeling now, I will need at least a week to recover from the last two weeks of walking"

Beside him padded his sole companion for this trek, a four-year-old German shepherd, cross breed dog named Horatio. Horatio also needed a break from the walk, and some time to himself to sniff around and familiarise himself with the many exotic and native animals that lived on the High Plains. Perhaps then he could hunt down some of the elusive creatures he had smelt so often over the past fortnight. He wondered what they tasted like, dried pre-packed hiking rations were starting to lose their appeal to slightly jaded taste buds.

The interconnected string of grassy plains towards which Fergus was struggling, formed only a small part of Victoria's famous High Country. He had travelled this route twice before and knew when he finished the climb, slightly to his right, tucked away in a small stand of mature Snow Gums would be the hut that was to be his shelter for the next two nights. He had been trudging along Victoria's Great Dividing Range now for almost two weeks. He needed this short break to rest for a while, and just relax.

Just at this moment the twenty-five kilogram pack on his back seemed to weigh a tonne. At fifty-two years of age he felt he was quite fit, but his stamina had its limits, and he had now almost reached that limit. This would happen many times over the next few weeks of his epic trip between Erica and Katoomba. Once at Katoomba he would be reunited with his Sri Lankan partner, Sarina, and his youngest child, Emmy, a girl of twelve. His two boys, aged seventeen and nineteen were visiting their maternal grandmother, who lived in Kandy in Sri Lanka. They had originally intended to come with him on this trip, but the offer of a free trip to Asia paid for by Ooma Janz appealed to them far more than a four week slog along the Great Alpine Walking Track in Victoria and New South Wales; carrying large, heavy packs. Fergus missed them for despite their frequent arguments he could have done with the company.

He had only met two other hikers on this trip, both going the other way, and a National

Parks ranger, who told him Horatio should be on a leash all the time while walking in a National Park.

As he topped the steep rise Fergus automatically glanced to the right. At least the cattleman's hut was still there, it had not been burnt down by vandals like so many of its contemporaries. Over the years these slab and bark huts had saved the lives of many hikers in the changeable weather of the high country, providing a safe haven from the late spring, early summer blizzards. He himself had avoided succumbing to hypothermia on Boxing Day several years ago when he was caught in a sudden summer snowstorm. The hut, which saved his life on that occasion, had been destroyed by a fire three years later; and had not been rebuilt.

Fergus saw that he would have some human company for the night. Among the trees, a few metres from the hut were two small domed hiking tents, their red, blue and yellow tops standing out sharply against the dull blue-green vegetation of the high country grasses. Hikers using the hut for sleeping purposes was not a rare occurrence, but most preferred to sleep in their own tent than share the nights rest with the wildlife; possums and bush rats, or snakes that occupied the huts for much of the winter each year.

Fergus however disliked the constant need to erect and pull up his camp each night.

It was not however the man made objects that attracted his attention. That honour fell to 'the pool'.

It was a new addition to the landscape since his last visit here about two years ago. It was so new it did not appear on the update of his hiking map that had been released last year. It puzzled Fergus, so he stopped to study his maps and his latest toy, an Apple I-phone.

According to his two-year-old map, and the latest GPS on his I-phone, the pool simply did not exist. It was about thirty or so metres in diameter, shining like a highly polished silver dish as its still surface reflected the late afternoon sun. Looking down in the pool it struck Fergus that it in fact resembled an eye, ovoid in shape with a fringe of low vegetation on the downhill side that looked like green eyebrows. On the uphill side the black-soil bank contrasted with the silver surface. Fergus thought that beach was where the animals, feral and other, came to drink at its clear cool waters.

As he watched 'the eye' seemed to blink at him, a sudden gentle gust of wind had riffled the water across its surface. The illusion was quite brief, lasting only a few moments, and then the breeze died as suddenly as it started; and the pool surface again became smooth and reflective.

He was suddenly brought back to the present by Horatio giving a low growl, as if to remind him they still had a few hundred metres to go before they could finish their walking for that day.

As Fergus approached the hut he started to sing, partially in anticipation of his day of rest, partly in anticipation of an all over wash in the pool, and partly to warn the occupants of the tents that another person had arrived. When his announced approach failed to arouse a welcoming committee, he thought "They must all be away exploring for the day. I'll probably see them closer to nightfall"

Unlatching the door Fergus entered the hut, leaving the door open so the stale smell drained from the interior. Although he was certain the hut had not been used for some time he saw there were two hiking packs on the floor under the table. It would be a tight squeeze, but then the hut often housed up to six people during the six to eight weeks of the cattle muster in late autumn.

Fergus spent the next couple of minutes lighting the fire and hanging his billy from one of the two hooks over the blaze. Opening his pack he took out his towel and soap and spoke to Horatio, "Lets go for a wash" then walked out of the door into the rapidly advancing twilight. Horatio did not obey, but simply whimpered and crawled under the bed so he was closer to the fire.

"Come on lazy bones" said Fergus, but this aroused no response from Horatio. "What the hell's the matter?" Fergus moved slowly to the door. He thought it was now too dark to walk across the plain to the pool, and as the water in the billy was now boiling he then decided to have a warm wash instead of a bracing cold dip in the pool.

Skilled by years of practice, Fergus quickly prepared a meal for both himself and Horatio. After eating and washing the dishes he unrolled and spread out his bedding. While relaxing in a very comfortable, hessian covered, bush timber chair Fergus read some of the book he had brought for each evening's entertainment. After reading for a while he paid a leisurely visit to the bushes behind the hut, extinguished the light and turned in for the night. He hoped not to be disturbed by any late arrivals, as the lodgers he expected to be with him in the hut had not yet returned, and it was now quite dark. Judging by the silence outside when he visited the bushes, neither had the occupants of the two tents. "Strange and stranger" said Fergus to himself, but stoked the fire, and snuggled down into his sleeping bag. He soon slept soundly.

Fergus was woken early next morning by the sounds of cattle, the lowing of a small mob, and the sounds of a cowbell. Large copper cowbells were attached to the bovine matriarchs of the herd when they were released onto the grazing lease last October. In theory the sound kept the group from scattering too far apart as they grazed the plains; in practice it simply made a small group of cattle easier to find during the muster.

By the light of his torch Fergus saw it was 4.30am and still quite dark outside. Being too early to start a new day, he put a couple of logs on the fire and slipped back into his sleeping bag. The next thing he knew it was bright sunlight and Horatio was pulling at his arm, whimpering to go outside. His watch told him it was eight in the morning and he really wanted to explore some nearby points of interest before continuing his trek the following day.

Opening the door he ushered Horatio outside. After a quick wash at the hut's rainwater tank he donned his hiking gear for the day. Visiting the trees where he had relieved himself the night before, he returned to the hut and prepared a snack for both himself and the dog. In a surprisingly short time Horatio returned and drank greedily from his nighttime water bowl. "Too lazy to walk to the pool" said Fergus. Horatio wagged his tail and devoured his breakfast.

Fergus carefully cleaned up the debris of his morning meal, washed his dishes, tidied the hut and packed his lunch for the day, filling his water bottle. He placed the day's supplies in his small backpack and, followed by Horatio walked outside. He had taken only a few paces towards the pool, when he suddenly realised there were no cattle grazing the quite large plain surrounding both the hut and the pool. This was quite strange, as the mob which had come in four hours ago at 4.30 were not visible grazing the lush grasses and herbs covering the alpine plain. He walked slowly towards the pool, and saw an object lying on the ground at the waters edge. It was a large copper cowbell still attached to a leather collar. He stopped and turned to speak to Horatio. The dog was sitting on the ground some sixty metres away, "Here boy" called Fergus.

Horatio did not move. Examining the black soil slope dropping into the pool, Fergus saw the hoof marks where the cattle had moved to drink at the pool, but there was no indication of what direction they had taken when they left after their drink.

Fergus now felt very uneasy. He walked slowly to each of the hiking tents and saw the flaps were open, quietly moving in the gentle breeze. There was nobody inside either of the tents and the packs inside were open with the hikers possessions scattered across the bedding. In one tent the preliminaries for an evening meal were set out on a sleeping mat. Judging by the state of the food, covered by both ants and maggots it had been on show for some time.

A sudden chill went through Fergus and at that moment he decided he would leave the hut and walk to the Forestry Camp some thirty kilometres further along the Dividing Range. There he could report all that he had seen at the pool and rest in more comfortable surroundings.

Once back in the hut he carefully packed his hiking gear, settled the pack onto his back and, followed by Horatio, set off on his long hike. At the edge of the plain he turned to look back at the hut and the pool, which glistened like polished silver in the morning sun.

It was late that afternoon when the Sambar stag topped the escarpment. Yesterday he had been quietly grazing on the Caledonia River flats when he had been targeted by two hunters and a pack of hounds. After twenty hours of crossing and recrossing the river, and carefully making his way across the rocky outcrops scattered along the escarpment, the stag felt sure he had shaken off both the pursuing hounds and hunters.

He was now tired and hungry, and here there was both food and water. He was certain he could eat, drink and rest for a while, then put another day between himself and his pursuers. He carefully approached the pool, looked round and started to drink, his muzzle stirring up the silt at the pool's edge.

As he greedily drank, the silt cloud rose and slowly surrounded his muzzle. He shuffled uneasily from foot to foot. Suddenly in the distance he heard the sound of hounds baying and they seemed quite close. He now wanted to lift his head and move on, but he could not. He seemed unable to move as the silt drift moved to the edge of the pool, and surrounded his hooves. He then simply vanished without a trace.

Three hours later the four hounds and two hunters topped the escarpment and looked towards the pool, but there was no stag to be seen. The only sign of his recent presence were his pugmarks at the edge of the pool, and a slowly receding cloud of silt.

As they topped the rise of the southwest of the pool one man turned to look for any sign of the stag. Half a kilometre and twenty metres below the pair the pool shone brightly, like polished silver in the late afternoon sun. It then appeared to wink at them as a faint breeze riffled its surface.

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