

MEDIA RELEASE

THE OLD BLACK BILLY GOES UPBEAT

Billycans used as an artist's canvas; billycans as sculptures; billycans fashioned as murals; ceramic billycans; billycans far removed from the usual utilitarian image of an outback cooking pot.

There's no doubt the old black billycan has come a long way since it first inspired the bush songs and poetry of Banjo Paterson, Henry Lawson and C.J. Dennis.

The billy was stock in trade for swagmen, stockmen, station owners and settlers as they pushed into the unknown scrub and lit their campfires under spreading outback skies.

And today, the billy remains part of contemporary culture, an essential feature in any stock camp or expedition, bush barbecue or picnic, horse ride or inspection from Cape York to Wilson's Promontory.

A handful of tea, a gum leaf and a pannikin of creek water is still considered the quintessential Australian thirst quencher.

This year the Outback Regional Gallery Touring Exhibition that turns billycans into an art form will be displayed at the 2003 Ekka in the Wool Pavilion.

Artists from throughout Australia have used billycans to depict scenic landscapes, flora, fauna, stories and legends. Some have created modern sculpture pieces or incorporated other mediums such as wool or silk in their finished statements.

Billycans bring together a brew of leading artists and artisans practicing in traditional and innovative media to provide a spectacular and uniquely Australian exhibition.

First derived as part of the Year of the Outback celebration, the Billycan exhibition is scheduled to tour Australia until 2008. Ekka organisers thank the generous support of the Queensland Government, Arts West, the Waltzing Matilda Centre at Winton and the Quilpie Arts group for allowing Ekka patrons to enjoy the display.

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