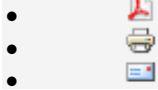


CPARC History

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COOBER PEDY AMATEUR RACING CLUB

The Coober Pedy Racing Club was started up in 1969 with the aim of bringing together town and station people – “to make new friendships and renew old ones”. Among the names that are associated with the early days of the club are Ian Rankin, Dick Nunn, Ron Gough and Frank Cresp.

Father Frank Cresp remembers the seed being sown at a lunch in the dining room of the original Opal Inn Motel to celebrate the baptism of Michael Coro. It was on Christmas Day 1967, or thereabout.

Father Cresp said to Ian Rankin, the owner of Mabel Creek sheep and cattle station, “We’ve been talking about this race meeting long enough. It’s about time we did something.” Ian agreed. He immediately called for attention and fixed a date for a meeting early the following year of people who might be interested. At this meeting a number of station people and business people donated or lent quite a bit of money to start things off. A committee was elected, with power to co-opt others. Ian Rankin was elected President, Frank Titheradge Secretary and Frank Cresp Treasurer.

There was no town council in Coober Pedy in those days, and, in fact, the town and the opal fields were mainly located on Mount Clarence station. This is how it came about that Charley Kunoth, who owned Mt Clarence station, donated the land, which is now owned by the race club. He came in one Sunday to help choose a site for the racecourse. After looking at two or three sites, the present one was chosen. Charlie said, “I’m not going to let you fellows have this land for nothing. I want a cent a year for it.”

Work got underway to build the track, yards and other facilities, including a bar. This was all with voluntary labour, and being desperate for workers, anyone who was willing to work was more or less recognised as a committee member.

Some weeks later, having realized that they hadn’t put that keen supporter of a racing club Dick Nunn on the committee, they made him Patron of the club. Dick, who managed Anna Creek cattle station for the Kidman company, went on for many years to supply the majority of the horses

that took part in the races. He had the horses walked from Anna Creek to the town, which took some three to four days.

Ian Rankin remained President until 1972 or thereabouts. He was followed by Ron Gough, who mined for opal. He and his wife, Jenny, lived underground in what is now part of the Old Timers Mine museum, one of the present day tourist attractions in Coober Pedy.

Frank Titherage remained Secretary of the club for some years before moving to Lightning Ridge.

As Treasurer, Father Frank Crisp did all the legal work and bookwork to get the club up and racing. He knew the station people through his parish work and through raising money for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the Ambulance Service and sports groups. He stayed on as club Treasurer until he left Coober Pedy in early 1972, by which time a bank had been established in the town and their staff took over handling the finances.

For some thirty-eight years the race meeting was held over the Labour Day long weekend in October, but, as this was almost always a time of very windy, hot weather, as well as clashing with the Oysterfest at Ceduna and other events in South Australia, in 2007 it was moved to early August.

From the beginning, the race carnival has been a two-day event, although the weekend traditionally kicks off with a cocktail evening on the Friday night. The first year Faye Naylor held this in her dugout and everyone who was there remembers the big dust storm that came up. In following years the cocktail party was hosted by the Hospital Auxiliary at the Italian Club. Each year station people arrive in town with their horses and swags in time to meet up with old friends at the club (which, from the beginning, was open to all nationalities) and to enjoy the hospitality of the town throughout the weekend.

Each year, thoroughbreds and stock horses compete in separate races and gymkhana events, as was envisaged by the Ian, Frank, Dick, Ron and others when they first planned a racing carnival in the town. Thus, there are flat races and children's events. The flat races are the same as are run on any city or country racetrack, with both local and visiting jockeys riding, using racing saddles. Town and station people ride in the gymkhana events, using standard stock saddles.

The race meeting has grown with some ten races being run on both Saturday and Sunday in recent years, as well as gymkhana events, such as egg and spoon, musical chairs and barrel races. The feature race on Saturday, the Coober Pedy Cup, was run over 1,000 yards until 1972, when, with the introduction of the metric system in Australia, it was converted to 1,000 metres. From inception, this race has been sponsored, and the cup donated, by the Coro family of the Opal Inn, and so the race became known as the Coober Pedy Opal Inn Cup.

On Sunday, the feature race is the Ladies' Bracelet Race, for which Tony Wong has donated an opal bracelet as the prize since the race carnival began. The Miners Store 1,000m Stakes race was introduced in ??? Prizes for other races and events have been donated over the years by local Coober Pedy businesses. Although the town has many different Christian denominations: Anglican, Serbian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Assemblies of God, and Catholic, it has always been the unwritten duty of the Catholic priest to encourage such donations, following in the footsteps of Father Cresp, who had been such an enthusiastic early supporter of the race club. Over the years during which he was the priest in Coober Pedy he rustled up some amazing prizes.

An important identity in the early days was the race caller, Bob Kemp, who managed Mount Barry Station.

Memorable riders include Garry Birchmore, who won the cup in 1977 and 1979 and then again thirty years later, in 2009, although, prior to that last win, he had not even been on a horse for five years. Another was an Aboriginal stockman named Bred from Welbourne Hill station. **(Does anyone have any more information about him?)**

Great horses are remembered. Perhaps the greatest was *Heart Starter*, who won the Cup four times, as well as the Bracelet Race the first year. He came from Mabel Creek and was owned by Ian Rankin

Cup Winners have been:

1969 *Heart Starter*

1970 *Heart Starter*

1971 *Fire Beau*

???

2009 *Kingston Sea*, ridden by Garry Birchmore

2010 ???

And the winners of the **Bracelet Race** over the years have been:

1969 *Heart Starter*

???

2009 *Cool Saab*

2010 *Gallant Nett*

Some of the most successful owners have been Ian Rankin, Bob Kempe, Peter Giles, Neill Brett and Bill Petrie.

Gymkhana events, such as the Texas barrel and relay races, become extremely popular as the years go on. The last event on the gymkhana program is the Stock Whip Challenge. Initially it was known as the Cadney Park Challenge but then, with the death of Tony Thon, who had been an active member of the committee, the name was changed to the Tony Thon Stock Whip Challenge. In this event the first year's record, achieved by ((**WHO?**)), has never been bettered! Each year the prize of \$200 jackpots, and this is donated to a charity when it reaches \$2,000. Consequently, every ten years since 1970, this sum has been gratefully received by an appropriate local charity. The Old Timers Mine has sponsored this event in recent years.

After a full day at the races on the Saturday, many people go to the Opal Inn in the evening for the big social event: the Race Club Ball, now known as the Coober Pedy/Oz Minerals Race Ball.

From the beginning, funds raised from the Tote and from the auction of the stock horses were donated to The Flying Doctor, The Mine Rescue Service and to the local ambulance service. Of course, it is only the horses involved in the fun events that were auctioned off and only for the weekend – the duration of the race meeting. If your horse was good enough to win you shared the prize with your jockey: one took the ribbon the other the trophy. Nowadays, instead of auctioning horses for the whole weekend, only the two 1,000 metres major races, the Opal Inn Coober Pedy Cup on the Saturday and the Miners Store Stakes on the Sunday, are Calcutta auctions, with punters bidding for horses before each race.

With the changing of the guard some aspects of the meeting necessarily changed. After Dick Nunn died, horses were no longer brought in from Anna Creek. Later Mount Barry station supplied horses and, of course, individual owners continued to bring in their own horses.

Ron Gough died on 21st August, 1991, and was succeeded by Brian Jones. (Brian actually took over in 1990 because of Ron's illness.) Then Trevor McLeod took over as President, while other Presidents have been John Stillwell and M. (Harry) Harrison. Peter Rowe became president in 2004-5-6 (??); he instigated ??? Among the club Secretaries have been Trevor Weatherill (who died in December, 2010), D. Thomas, M. Day, Trevor McLeod and Ms Lyn Freeman.

Other changes have occurred. In 19(??) it was decided, because of some difficulties, not to have a Tote and so bookmakers were invited to operate on the course each year. Then in 2005 (??) the betting side of the meeting was dispensed with altogether, apart from Calcutta bidding on the two big races. It became very much a family weekend, with additional fun events and many more events for children introduced. Camel racing was tried and this continued for some years, while (????) saw the introduction of motor bike events, which have proved popular and are now held on both Saturdays and Sundays.

A major sponsor who came on board in recent years is OZ Minerals, and, in consequence, the name of the annual race meeting has been changed to The Coober Pedy OZ Minerals Annual Race Meeting and Gymkhana.

Some of the early identities associated with the racing club are still celebrated today in the names of races. Goughies Tilting the Ring on Saturdays and Father Frank Crisp Barrel Race for Motor Cycles and the Dick Nunn Memorial Consolation Race on Sundays celebrate Ron Gough, Father Frank Crisp and Dick Nunn respectively.

******Definition*
s of CALCUTTA:

1. A combination of a lottery and an auction, commonly known as a "sweepstake", from Dept of Racing, Gaming and Liquor.

2. From Google -- One definition of "calcutta" is a type of side bet placed on the participants of a sporting event by persons not competing in the event. This definition states that the right to bet on a particular contestant is won at an auction prior to the start of the event. A probably related but somewhat different definition is the calcutta pool established by the participants in a fishing tournament. In this case, the actual participants bet against each other by placing money in a pool and then dividing it up after the event according to a payout schedule set up prior to the start of the event.

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