

FIRST FITNESS CAMP FOR ABORIGINES

Sixty-six boys taking part in the first all-aborigine National Fitness camp in the State made a fine impression in Lennox Head recently.

In the first day and a half of their settling-in process for the week's camp, the youngsters, whose ages range from 10 to 15 years, were reserved, but thoroughly happy.

The camp director, Mr. Joe Bagnell, of Sydney, said the lads were a great crowd of boys. He had been vastly impressed by every aspect of their approach to camp activities.

He said that other camps had had coloured lads included in the groups and, in one instance, there had been an Eskimo boy.

The boys, at Lennox Head, come from reserves between the Kempsey district and Woodenbong. Some of them were seeing the sea for the first time.

Two art instructors from the East Sydney Technical College, Messrs. Garrie Collins and Bob Powter, said it was a new experience to see the approach being made to art work by the lads, particularly in their free expression and use of colour.

"It's a bit early yet, but some of the work they have done has been astounding for both the choice and range of colour," said Mr. Collins.

One day the lads were given their introduction to plaster work. They had to work quickly by incising their outlines on the drying plaster and then colour and complete their subject. In some instances, pippi shells and other shells were used decoratively, with smaller shells used as eyes.

There was an emphasis on sporting subjects, but some used the birds and animals of the bush and one lad concentrated on the aboriginal motifs which have become popular in contemporary designs.

"These lads have come from reserves, but it has been fascinating to see the evidence of the survival of the typical forms of the art of their people," said one of the instructors.

The camp activities for the boys included concerts and musical items, handicraft work, gymnastics, softball, football and bushcraft, which includes camp cooking.

Films were shown one Tuesday night by the district supervisor of Junior Farmer clubs, Mr. C. E. Purdue.

Mr. Bagnell said that the lads fitted splendidly into the routine of the camp. The sleeping lodges had never been kept cleaner or tidier and they did their washing up after each meal. Two of the boys were rostered each meal for serving on the tables.

Half a dozen of the boys took guitars to the camp, several mouth organs, and one of them, Albert Torrens, of Tabulam, played on a leaf although "these down here are a bit hard".

Three of the lads, Hector Mercy, 14, of Tabulam; Willie Donnelly, 12, of Tabulam, and Barry Roberts, 13, of Cubawee, became the "orchestra" for their camp concerts.

The boys came from reserves at Woodenbong, Tabulam, Cubawee, Cabbage Tree, Burnt Bridge, and other centres of the Kempsey district.

The Camp was an unqualified success and did much to capture public interest in the district and to break down some of those obnoxious North Coast prejudices.

Among the distinguished visitors to the camp was Mr. C. Ebert, Area Director of Education at Lismore, who was most favourably impressed. Mr. Le Brun, Manager of Radio Station 2LM, Lismore, visited the camp one evening and made a 30-minute concert recording. This recording which was broadcast over the station a few nights later was enthusiastically acclaimed by all who heard it.

Throughout the whole camp the children were a credit to the Managers, their teachers and to their people. The Area Superintendent of Physical Education, Mr. Walker, the Camp Director, Mr. Bagnell and indeed the whole staff, all said the camp was one of the happiest they had experienced. Mr. Walker referred to it as the "Camp of Laughter". The Director of the Camp and three of his staff had had no previous experience with aboriginal children and as a result of this camp are now ardently sympathetic. Mr. Walker became so interested he expressed his intention of returning to the North Coast soon to visit the stations and reserves from which the children came, to renew acquaintances.

On arrival at the camp the boys were organised into four Lodges, approximately 16 in each and called the Seagulls, the Cormorants, the Herons and the Redbills.

Special Night Activities

The special night activities organised for the boys were a Pirate Night, a Radio Night, a Campfire Night, a Film Night and a special Concert Night with a visit by Radio Station 2LM.

Other special activities of the week included beach sports, a sports carnival, an address by a Junior Farmer Organiser. There was also an educational tour by bus to Byron Bay where the Norco butter, cream and cheese factory was visited. A visit was also made to the Light-house. There was also special sports on the day visitors came to the camp and one of the special features was jousting from canoes in Lake Ainsworth with contestants armed with mops.

Inter-lodge Competitions

Inter-lodge competitions included table hygiene, Lodge and toilet cleaning, neatest assembly, pirate night dress, radio night, beach sport and canoe regatta with the point score finishing as follows :