

Snowy Mountains come alive

THE SMALL SNOWY MOUNTAINS TOWN OF ADAMINABY CAME ALIVE FOR ITS 150TH CUP DAY WITH SOME SPECIAL GUESTS ENSURING IT WAS A DAY TO REMEMBER WORDS & PICTURES: JOHN ELLICOTT



Kevin Sweeney drives Norm Gardner's Ishshah to victory at Adaminaby. The stalwart jockey had four winning rides

Broad-hatted bushie Lynley Miners was cock-a-hoop. All the great ideas his race committee had planned to make Adaminaby's 150th race meeting one of the biggest and best yet had come to fruition.

"I thought I'd send a letter to the Governor-General telling him of our community and our great day planned and if he'd like to attend," said Miners, the Adaminaby Race Club president. "I wasn't holding out much hope.

"When we got the letter back saying he would accept our invitation I started jumping in the air!"

Sir Peter and Lady Cosgrove arrived in their government Caprice at the pretty Snowy Mountains course right on time, in the pretty valley west of Cooma on a warm spring day.

If the small town, famous for its Big Trout sculpture, was to have its major dignatorial catch in the Governor-General it was to net another key visitor.

They'd also hooked Channel Seven's Sunrise presenter Sam Armytage – she was keen to help out, having spent more than 20 years of her life growing up on Bolaro, a famous grazing property opposite the racecourse.

The Governor-General's personal staff and security personnel melded in with



Racing action during Adaminaby Cup Day

the mountain crowd like trout in a snowy stream, with 3000 packing the venue.

A ride past by two horsemen, Ron Dowell of Gundagai, and Mick Batchelor of Grong Grong, reliving the deeds of the Light Horsemen of the First World War, precluded the official opening by Sir Peter, who said it was the first race meeting he'd attended since the Melbourne Cup and this was "just as important" and "today [Adaminaby] is the most important race meeting in Australia."

The organisers were all too aware of the changeable mountain weather – only six years earlier the Adaminaby meeting was abandoned after snow blanketed the course and made riding too dangerous.

For the club's special 150th day, Mother Nature had turned on all the right taps.

The course looked magnificent after spring rain and Miners had taken to the snowy grass on the course proper with his hay cutter and had everything looking ship-shape.

As in the poem, The Man from Snowy River, all the locals had gathered to the fray to help in the big day including Gillian Kolve who put together a magnificent floral stand bedecked in snowy regional flowers, and also arranging a special bouquet for Lady Cosgrove.

The committee had even put in his and hers toilets for the first time in history for the jockeys, who have often lamented

their tiny digs at Adaminaby (but they keep coming back, including veteran hoop Kevin Sweeney who rode four winners for the day).

People who had grown up in the region made the meeting a chance for a family reunion including the Yens and the Shanleys.

The Shanleys won the last Adaminaby Cup (in 1956) at the old course, which was flooded by the rising waters of Lake Eucumbene during construction of the Snowy Hydro scheme in the late 1950s.

In those days the locals protested at having their town flooded and losing their racecourse but they were given a reprieve and found life went on – 10 kilometres away – when the town and racecourse stands were moved holus bolus to their present locations.

Adaminaby is a club steeped in history (as the old course is now steeped in water). A 13-year-old boy was one of the early winning riders at the old course.

The Shanley family raced a number of good horses at the track and at Cooma over several generations.

The full-bearded Matthew Shanley was one of the early Monaro pioneers and ran sheep around Adaminaby in the late 1800s.

“He was a lover of the turf and always sent his horses out to win,” his obituary in a Cooma paper said.

He'd always have two or three horses entered in a race and reward his winning horse with a bottle of lemonade.

Adaminaby had a two-day race meeting during the 1900s and up to 600 visitors and locals would dance away until dawn after the races.

A later Shanley, Fred, raced a number of good horses including Rohini, Bracing and Man of Law, the first two winning in Sydney. When Man of Law came back to the Monaro to race he broke two race records in a day.

Two Shanley descendants, Gemma Collins and Sue Chambers, were among the big crowd at Adaminaby and were honoured the photo on the front of the racebook showed a Shanley horse winning the Adaminaby Cup at the last meeting on the old racecourse.

The winning cups were on display for the crowd and inspected by Sir Peter and Lady Cosgrove.

The later-day Adaminaby course is famous as the setting for part of the movie *Phar Lap*, chosen because



A full podium for Fashions on the Field at Adaminaby's big 150th race meeting



Samantha Armytage with the Ladies Classic Fashions on the Field winner



Ladies dressed up for the day with former MP Peter Cochran at Adaminaby

the nearby bare hills made it look like Mexico, where Big Red last raced.

Many locals were extras in the movie and some were at the 150th race meeting to relive the feeling of the movie.

They all remembered how the late and great jockey Roy Higgins was in charge of the racing scenes in the 1982 production, and how he held sway at the local Snow Goose Hotel reliving some of his famous turf victories.

It was fitting a leading light in the entertainment industry was at the course – Sam Armytage – to help judge Fashions on the Field.

Her father Mac and mum Libby were also on course reminiscing over their time managing Bolaro. Sam met up with one of the club committeemen who had given Sam her first job in a ski hire shop.

Sam was a little tearful as she recounted her time growing up on Bolaro and attending Adaminaby races where she remembered picking up betting tickets on the ground at the end of the day – not many winning tickets (she ended up winning on the last race though for the 150th with Definite Time, but had to sweat out a 30-minute protest. Fittingly, Sam presented the Bolaro Cup to the winner).

Sam had been going to the races since she was a little girl and then later as a young woman before her media industry rise. Racing was part of her blood, just as was riding the Snowy Valley and swimming in the nearby Murrumbidgee.

“I spent the first 23 years of my life here so it brings back very strong memories,” Sam said. “It was a great place to grow up in as a kid. This is a unique race meeting and shows what racing is all about. It is a very important part of country life.”

For Lynley Miners the day couldn't have gone better, he'd met the Governor-General – something he thought he'd never do in his lifetime – and everything was double at the races: double the crowd, double the bar takings and double the money raised by the Adaminaby P & C for the local school.

He might also of thought he was seeing double – was that really the world's former greatest sprinter Takeover Target being walked down the Adaminaby course proper by his trainer Joe Janiak in between races?

No Lynley, you weren't seeing double!

RNSW



Deciding on a winner at Adaminaby



AJC President Lynley Miners with Lady and Sir Peter Cosgrove at Adaminaby races 150th birthday bash



Some of the old Cups on show at Adaminaby races