

Nimbin MardiGrass

30th April and 1st May 2011

19TH CANNABIS LAW REFORM RALLY AND GATHERING

Nimbin GoodTimes Souvenir Liftout

MardiGrass 2011 - What happened?

by Bob Dooley

The massive piece of organisation that is MardiGrass, with dozens of events at multiple venues, looked like coming unstuck as Nimbin was best by torrential rain in the last week of April.

With Peace Park out of action due to the delayed skatepark construction, a thorough clean-up of the old steel skatepark site was undertaken, and a marquee erected there, but as the rain fell on Friday, organisers hastily re-scheduled people and events for the Nimbin Hall, fearing it would be the only dry performance area in the town.



No doubt because of the rain, the roll-in of visitors on Friday afternoon was merely a trickle. Wet conditions hampered the stall-holders setting up along the already-closed roadsides, but by evening there was a healthy-sized crowd to watch the opening ceremony, with didge and gum-leaf smoke, and the drumming circle and entertainments that followed, and the organisers grew a little more optimistic.

When Saturday dawned overcast but dry, spirits rose higher, and the bright sunshine that followed, continuing until the following Tuesday, had organisers positively crowing. "We have been blessed by nature," said Michael Balderstone. "Creation is on our side - we've got the good karma!"

Certainly, when the sun came out, everyone shined. The Hemp Olympix provided hilarity galore,

even on the abbreviated course, and winning the Tug-of-Peace gave everyone something to cheer about, while at the Bowlo the Pro Pot Art Tattoo Show also packed them in to appreciate another expression of cannabis culture.

At the 'Mind Candy' forum panels on Saturday afternoon, many highly qualified experts looked at historical, mythological and medicinal issues, and their implications for influencing the drug policy debate in Australia. Catherine Williamson, who organised the forums, said several speakers, including Bond Uni criminology professor Paul Wilson, expressed shock and amazement at the level of police operations, calling it a "heavy handed response to a very minor crime."

None-the-less, the police were relaxed about the afternoon's 4.20 observance, which saw the street closed while the Big Joint was rolled across the crowd, beachball-style, accompanied by appropriate chanting - perfect for YouTube.

The Kombi Konvoy rolled into town, snaking its way colourfully around town to cheers from the thousands of assembled hordes, while expert commentary was delivered from the vantage point of the Hall's verandah roof.

Meanwhile, the Showground filled to its capacity, and while very wet underfoot, the campers had "the time of their lives", with food and a wet canteen on-site, even though more than 100 vehicles ended up having to be pulled out of the boggy ground.

With no doof on the Saturday night this year, the village remained the focal point, and shops and cafes stayed open until after midnight, and the hall was packed to enjoy the Comedy Club, leading in to the Harvest Ball, which saw 5-600 people dancing to A French Butler Named Smith and Oka.

Essie Thomas, who organised the great line-up of music on four stages throughout the weekend, was very thankful that all the musicians were so easy-going, and didn't mind late changes to times and venues. She was also full of praise for the staging and sound crews who did such a great job, especially at the magically transformed market stage.

With so much money up for grabs in the Float Competition, and glorious sunshine, it was no surprise that Sunday's Parade was jam-packed with colourful statements, including those from the Sea Shepherd and anti-Coal Seam Gas groups.

Led by 'Chicken' Laurie, who is expecting her fifth baby, and is the first Bundjalung MardiGrass Queen, the march exuberantly made its way along Cullen Street, to the sound of a massed drumming ensemble which featured many of Nimbin's legendary percussionists, while seemingly everyone in the crowd held up cameras.

Impassioned speeches followed at the skatepark marquee, and the winners of the Float Competition were announced



King Farook

- the ever-popular Gunja Faeries dancers taking \$1000 to split between the 30 or so of them, with the four Royal Highnesses, 'The Maypoles' splitting the second prize, and Welshy receiving a well-deserved voucher at Happy High Herbs for his emu-riding, spliff-toking Polite-man.

HEMP President Michael Balderstone said, "I'm happy that everyone had a really good time, and learnt a lot. Medical cannabis is on a roll, and with the legal approach taken in the US, and also initiatives in Australia, it's just a matter of time until the Drug War crumbles."

Financially however, MardiGrass did not do so well. With no fenced-off area at Peace Park, fewer armbands were sold, and according to Michael Balderstone, "It's early days, but we're likely to lose between \$10,000 and \$20,000 this year." "If any businesses who made a good return on the weekend would like to make a donation, we'd love to hear from you," he said.

Nimbin HEMP Embassy

NIMBIN CANNABIS LAW REFORM RALLY and MardiGrass, the annual gathering on the first weekend of MAY.

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Nimbin MardiGrass 2011



19th Annual Cannabis Law Reform Rally



MardiGrass's biggest bust?

by Hal Williams

A woman in a blue uniform informed me that the animal with its nose a millimetre from my left trouser pocket was a drug-detecting dog, and that its behaviour indicated that I had an illegal substance in my possession. Imagine my surprise.

I was in "food street" near the Nimbin pub on MardiGrass Saturday, scanning the menu boards for lunch options. Two male officers searched me while a female officer took my backpack apart in slow motion. I was inwardly smirking at the bag search, because my backpack is an utter tip, and a possible health hazard. I have found some very old fruit in there on occasion; it can be quite unsettling. Not today, unfortunately, but there was no pot either. We all knew it was about my left trouser pocket, because that sniffer dog didn't say maybe.

Out came my little yellow pouch – papers, roach card, a little brass pipe and the offending ziplock baggie. I got my pouch back, smoked pipe and all, but the baggie I didn't see again. "Do



you have anything sharp in your pockets?" Nup. Police hands dipped gently but efficiently into those pockets while I stood in the street with my arms stretched out to my sides.

"Take off your shoes." Really? Really. I took off my shoes. The police found the feet I had hidden inside them. The officer in charge told me that if I had no previous offences, I had the option of receiving a caution. "Do you want to take that option?" Bugger. This right to silence thing isn't all it's cracked up to be. "Yes," I said. "Go with these

officers." At the police station I was suddenly worried that my punishment would entail being stuck there for hours while the MardiGrass fun went on without me. I needn't have worried. Within minutes I was summoned to a desk to sign a caution form. Another offender being processed was told he would have to leave Nimbin and stay away for 24 hours. "If you come back and you are found here during that time, you will be arrested."

The man said he had to catch a bus from

Nimbin the next day, which was either quick thinking or true, and had the sentence commuted to cover just the area around Rainbow Lane.

Cool. My criminal past consists – quite literally – of two parking tickets and two minor speeding fines, offences committed years apart over a period of about 34 years. This lack of form has been an embarrassment at times, but now here I am: blooded – a real crim at last!

I walked out into the rain and joyous noise of MardiGrass celebrations, a free man again, and oddly happy.

New directions in policing MardiGrass

Police were "very chilled out" this year, according to MardiGrass organiser Michael Balderstone.

"They've stepped back a bit from the riot squad years," he said, observing that there were no police horses this year, either.

However, there was a high level of resourcing for the operation, with 108 officers rostered for duty over the three days, 70% drawn from the local area, the rest from Sydney, including members of the Tactical Response Group and Dog Squad.

Despite the heavy police presence, organisers were pleased with the high level of liaison with police this year, particularly from Commander Dave Longfield, both with briefings before the event, and frequent meetings during the weekend.

Organiser Andrew Kavasilas said, "The police commended the Jungle Patrol volunteers on their training, communication and crowd control strategies. And the praise is well-deserved."

The Northern Star's Domenic Feain reported that police made 43 drug detections during the weekend, resulting in 28 seizures, including 654 grams of cannabis, 14 grams of hash, 35 grams of magic mushrooms



and 15 grams of rolled joints.

Andrew Kavasilas said, "It was good to see that anti-social behaviour and other alcohol-related problems were basically non-existent this year."

In total, 19 charges were laid, including one for drug supply as a result of the operation, the budget for which has not been released.

MardiGrass legal observers reported no matters of concern about police procedures or behaviour by those arrested, and commented that the police appeared to be mostly fair and non-discriminatory, exercising discretion where appropriate.

As usual, police stayed out of the Parade, preferring to watch it from the pub verandah, and may have scored a kind of public relations hit by losing the Tug-of-Peace.

"We hope we are seeing a new era of community festival management by the police," Mr Kavasilas said.



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