



NIDA HISTORY

N.I.D.A. is the oldest of the three DAs currently in Northern Ireland and owes its existence to a chance meeting of a group of campers in 1964. That summer would have passed into oblivion if they had not become friendly enough to get together for an impromptu barbeque on a Saturday night in Tollymore Forest Park. The June evening was perfect for the small party but suddenly it was no longer small. The smell of sizzling sausages soon attracted other campers. The evening ended with a singsong to the accompaniment of Bertie Rodgers playing his guitar. The next day the organisers reflected on the success of the previous night's party, and agreed to meet immediately after the summer holidays to discuss the formation of a Camping Club in Northern Ireland.

True to their word the six families met as arranged in August and decided to insert a small notice in the Belfast Telegraph inviting interested campers to a meeting on Sept. 4th 1964. Sixty people attended and it was agreed to form a club, which would be known as the Northern Ireland Camping Association until the 31st December and on the 1st January 1965 they would all join the Camping Club of Great Britain and Ireland.

This then was the start of what is now the Northern Ireland DA. From its beginning and up to 1977, and the formation of the Northern Ireland Region, Northern Ireland DA was part of the Club's North West Region.

In 1967 Ladies Week was introduced. This novel idea saw families arrive with their tents at Portballintrae during early August. The men settled their families in over a weekend, then headed back home to work, returning again the following Friday night and spending the weekend with their families again before packing up on the Sunday. The ladies (and their children) enjoyed their time together - tea parties, shopping, and socialising kept everyone busy while the men toiled at work.

In 1968 site fees were typically around 1 shilling (5p) per night and you had to pay 13p for a Forest Park. How times change.

Those present in Castlewellan Forest Park for the 1971 Easter Rally will never forget the horrendous weather we experienced. Being able to canoe around the tents probably paints the most graphic picture for those trying to imagine just what it was like. Little did we know at the time, but that weekend proved to be a major turning point for the DA. It was the occasion when many members said "enough is enough", and made the decision to become 'tin tenters'. In no time at all most had traded in their frame tents and bought the latest Sprites, Baileys and Coachmans.

In 1976 28 members of NIDA took part in the peace walk from Belfast to Crawfordsburn.

By 1977, and with two DAs now operating in Northern Ireland, an application was made to Club Headquarters for the formation of a Northern Ireland Region. This was successful, and the inaugural Rally was held at the recently opened Antrim Forum in 1978 keenly supported by both NIDA and County Down DA.

In 1979 we had a visit from a party of travelling Canadians on a tour of the British Isles – many of our members loaned their caravans to provide accommodation for them at Curran Park in Larne. This year also saw the first of three trips organised by George

Johnston to see the Blackpool Illuminations. Many stories came back from those very memorable trips, most of which are true !!

In 1980 NIDA entered a team in the TV quiz "Beat the Music". They were beaten in the first round but in true NIDA spirit they were not despondent.

In 1981 we did triumph – this time the occasion was the Mayor's parade during Larne Civic Week. This coincided with our Mid Summer Rally held at Drains Bay attended by the Club's National Chairman Vic Sinden and his wife Grace. After a massive amount of behind the scenes preparation and work, and the willing involvement of just about everyone on site, the NIDA float won the "Best in Show".

In the life of the DA we have, of course, come across numerous 'firsts'. In 1983 Lilian Newell was elected as our first woman Chairman, and in 1985 Ted Sherwood became the first member from Northern Ireland to be presented with the Club's Certificate of Honour.

In 1990 NIDA celebrated its 25th Anniversary in style – we had over 250 members at our Anniversary Rally at Greenmount. A sit down meal was provided for everyone on the Saturday and our members provided a wonderful show that evening – who will forget Violet's Hawaiian dancers or Jackie Craig's humour. Mind you it was not the first time NIDA had provided such professional entertainment.

There have been many, many more occasions of note, and people to recall and remember with fondness. The DA is constantly changing and evolving as its members grow and change. New venues are being found each year, while some of our old favourites have been and gone. Caravans and motorhomes now predominate the weekend meets and rallies, while trailer tents and frame tents are something of a curiosity to a generation not having served their apprenticeships in them.

Over the past years our members have travelled far and wide with their tents, caravans or motorhomes. We have been to NFOL Rallies throughout England and Scotland and also FICC Rallies across Europe. I am sure those tent campers who started it all would not have envisaged their club being represented at such events but they should be proud of the roots they provided. Let us hope that NIDA and the club as a whole flourishes for many years to come.