

Q150 Steam Train –Writers Train August 2009

On a bright sunny morning on 17th August many enthusiastic and excited folk dressed in their country gear were gathered on the platform at Roma Street Station awaiting the arrival of the Q150 Steam Train.



Among those eager travellers were Nick Earls, Kim Wilkins and her son Luka, Hinemoana Baker (2009 Arts Queensland Poet in Residence) Kate Eltham (CEO of the Queensland Writers Centre) and me representing Book Links and the Qld branch of the CBCA. Suddenly the call went out..."All aboard!" and with a number of puffs and toots we were on our way to meet and greet many people along the route to Charleville.

Our first stop was to be Toowoomba where we were to stay overnight and the authors would present a talk at the City Library. This part of the journey was so interesting. Once we left urban Brisbane I couldn't believe the number of people who came out of nowhere to greet the train, wave and take photos at every side road, rail crossing or bridge. It brought home to me what a wonderful occasion this was to connect with rural communities.

To ascend the Toowoomba Range we needed 2 steam engines ... one of which took me back to my teenage years when I travelled by train and ended the journey with soot all through my hair and face. But it was so much fun standing out on the platform, waving to the country folk and getting soot in my eyes! Fortunately we left that soot emitting engine in Toowoomba.



In Chinchilla the authors were welcomed by a number of town and out-of-town people at the local library where they enjoyed listening to the stories told.

Another meal at the local pub and a night's sleep in a motel, then it was on to Roma.

The landscape had changed considerably by now ... flat paddocks for miles ... all dry except for those farmers fortunate enough to access irrigation. Hinemoana, who hails from New Zealand, was intrigued by the kangaroos hopping away after being startled by the train. But still, where possible, the locals were there to wave us on.

The Roma Art Gallery and Library was a great venue for the authors to present their talk. There were a number of writers in the audience which led the conversations to take a different slant from the previous talks. Nick even managed to renew an acquaintance with a lady he had met while travelling on the first Writers Train in 1990. This rekindled many happy memories.



I flew home from Roma but the others continued their train journey to Charleville where I believe the townsfolk welcomed them with open arms. It was a wonderful 3 day experience and I, as well as many Queenslanders and train buffs who travelled from near and far, will remember the Q150 Steam Train as a very special event in my life.

Beth Green