

# BoxtyFest at The Joe Mooney Summer School 2013

*Nancy Woods*

2013 WAS designated the year of *The Gathering* by Fáilte Ireland. It was also the 25th year of the annual Joe Mooney Summer School in Drumshanbo. We Irish are a superstitious lot so with austerity at its worst and the year ending with unlucky 13—what were the prospects ahead? A bit doubtful—at best. “Forward planning” was the buzz word at all tourism meetings. Traditional culture and heritage events to attract the diaspora back to their roots were high on the agenda for all festival planners, and the promise of financial support was an extra encouragement.

In keeping with a very old Leitrim tradition, the Joe Mooney Summer School committee

■ *Waiting anxiously for results of competition: Sinéad Woods (Dublin) Síoifra King (N J), Nancy Woods Brendan & Agnes Agnew (Longford)*



■ **Dettie McNiffe judging the BoxyFest**

embarked on a new event –to include a BoxyFest in their 2013 programme. The idea was to encourage all boxy enthusiasts to make and enter their favourite boxy recipe at the BoxyFest—perhaps a recipe handed down from generation to generation keeping alive an old and cherished Leitrim tradition.

Planning this new and exciting event during the Joe Mooney Summer School was a new challenge taken on by Regina Mc Loughlin, herself a big boxy fan! She ran the idea past our local award winning food expert, Dettie McNiff, who generously offered to provide tastings of her own popular boxy, as well as judging the entries for the BoxyFest competition. Regina called on all boxy makers to cook and display their individual talent on a plate—with an attractive prize of a cheque

for 100 Euro

The response was great. Paddy Macs` premises on High St was appropriately decorated for the big event. Dettie set up her very impressive display. Soon visitors and locals were lining up for a tasting of her delicious fare. Before long, the High St was teeming with Summer School visitors taking their boxy onto the street, while enjoying the open air music from the Ceili Time Band, and watching the set dancing which was in full swing. Regina also managed to include a celebratory tasting of organic wine!

For the competition, a long table was laid and competitors arrived from all corners, Arigna, Drumcong, Cloone, etc. the boxy looking very appetising and inviting. The long table was just about long enough to hold all the entries.



■ Dettie McNiff holding the winning entry made by Phyllis Moran with Clare Mc Loughlin and Regina McLoughlin (organisers of BoxtyFest)

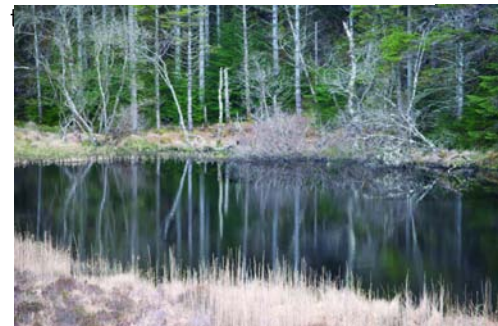
What a wonderful display and what an extremely difficult task for the judge!

After much tasting and deliberation, Dettie picked up the winning plate of boxty while everyone waited anxiously for the winner to be announced. Regina had the honour of naming the lucky winner. It was Phyllis Moran's plate of boxty. Congratulations to Phyllis and well done to Regina for making the event a huge success.

Look out for greater things planned for BoxtyFest 2014.

*Long live Mr. Spud!*

PHOTO BY BLÁITHÍN GALLAGHER



water. The reflection is so perfect, it is hard to tell which is reality and which is image.

We descend under the high cliffs along an ancient track. How was it created and how many feet and hooves have travelled up and down it since? By the time we get to the bog road the sun has well disappeared behind the plateau opposite. The valley floor is darkening. Out across the vast plain stretching to the Atlantic, lights begin to appear. The western sky is streaked with pink and orange. Heading towards the buses one cannot but be awed by this landscape, shaped by millions of years of earth movement and thousands of years of man's influence. And grateful to the farmers and land owners who allow us to share such a special place for the day.

*Footnote: I recently came across this piece which I wrote nearly ten years ago after a particularly glorious day out on the Leitrim hills. That was before I had ever heard of shale gas or hydraulic fracturing. And the thought occurred, what if in another 10 years walkers taking the same route were looking down on an industrial landscape?*

## Hillwalking in Leitrim

Christina Guckian

It is a beautiful clear morning as the buses head for Rossinver and turn left. We pass the Organic Centre, Lough Melvin spread out on our right. Heading uphill, the engine of the bus begins to protest at the steepness of the incline.

Eventually we alight and walk up a track for a short distance before heading across open ground. It is a mild October day, not a breath of wind stirs. As we go higher an undulating landscape of bog opens out all around, russet, amber, terracotta. Can there be so many shades of brown? The climb begins to take its toll, breathing becomes laboured. The cairn where we are headed seems very far away.

But with stops along the way to admire the view we eventually reach the highest point at over 500 metres. We are on top of the world. Kinlough is at our feet, Lough Melvin stretching eastwards from it, to the north Assaro Lake. From this height, Bundoran and Ballyshannon appear as small clusters of buildings. Tullan Strand is clear and beyond it St John's Point. Slieve League presents its south eastern shoulder. Classie Bawn castle sits beyond the sweep of Mullaghmore beach. After refreshing the soul with views and the body with food we head south to Arroo Lough, the

upside down Australia and on to the standing stone. What is the significance of this stone, why was it put there? Who knows? In this bleak beautiful landscape perhaps the answer is best left to the imagination.

We head westwards, dropping down and climbing up according to the contours of the land. The clouds begin to thin and the sun breaks through. The wet patches of bog pull on tired legs. Steep slopes rising ahead look intimidating from a distance but, thankfully, become less so close up. Eventually a green grassy mound emerges up ahead and the final climb to 452 metres is made.

We are on top of the world again, twice in one day. Here clear sunlight reveals the majestic sweep of Glenade Valley in all its glory. Every field, every hedge, every car on the road can be seen far below. No sound reaches us. Still not a breath of wind stirs. Looking south, the oblong lake on top of the mountain bookended by its two gravel beaches is perfectly still, not a ripple breaks its surface. It is a perfect mirror.

Reluctant to leave the glorious viewing point but conscious of the sun beginning to slip behind Truskmore we head down towards the lake. Someone throws a pebble, the "mirror" cracks. It seems wrong to disturb such perfection. But within moments perfection is restored. As we walk in single file around the lake's edge, another line of people walk upside down, footstep for footstep in