

Thoughts on organizing an ale. By Karen Agee

People seem to want a mixture of the following from an Ale;
Performing for the adoring public, performing for other dancers, time to hang out together to socialize, sing and drink, relaxed pace, interactions with one or two other teams, dancing with everyone, and learning from each other.

People don't like; getting lost, driving around, waiting for each other, rain, cooking on camp stoves, sleeping on the ground, and leaving at the end of the weekend. But, they put up with all these and more quite cheerfully.

We deliberately chose camping together to maximize contact among the different teams. Fixing breakfast was more fun when you could chat with people and be sure that you weren't missing any of the action. It was also easier to pace yourself.. hurry and eat, things are getting under way or we have plenty of time, no one else is kitted up yet. This arrangement made it easy for those who wished to stay up all night carrying on to do so, and allowed those who needed more sleep to get that.. no worrying about rides or getting back and forth. Another consideration was to not have people drive after drinking all evening, avoiding possible tickets or accidents. Waiting for things to get going was pleasant when there were folks to meet and yak with.

Sleeping indoors and showers have great appeal. Perhaps there is some way to get the best of everything. If the ale comes back this way, I think we'll look for a camp retreat with cook/dining hall and showers. Sounds expensive though.

Our general approach to ~~the~~ organizing the weekend ~~saw~~ to:

- 1) to get someone to act as correspondent & send off the invitations
- 2) figure out what we wanted the weekend to include (workshops, tours, mass dancing, food, etc) then try and fit it all into the allotted 2-3 days.
- 3) from this tentative schedule we tried to figure out what all was ~~inv~~ involved with each segment of the day. ie) the contra dance. either sat or sun evening, check out several ideas for location, pick the best by what ever criteria you choose.. location, cost, restrictions on drinking.. reserve it and pay for it, arrange for music, sound system, and in the case of the barn, some people to sweep it out and occupy it before the dancers arrived.

This process went on for each event.

The co-ordinators tried to see that everything would flow smoothly,, one event from the next. The tour planners drew up maps with directions on how to get from one place to the next. (The host team being the only group to go to the wrong place at the right time.. too many chiefs). The co-ordinators also kept an eye on the 'things people want from an ale list' to keep on track and tried to keep the schedule from getting too cramped. We found we had to not try to do everything we thought would be fun. By the time the teams started showing up there was nothing to do. Well, almost.. someone had to pick up bread from the bakery for the dinner since the caterer fell ill.. and we had to pick up those extra microphones from the store.. did anyone tell Dale how to get to the campgrounds?... After all the planning and careful foresight, the unimaginable happened. As I drove into the park I was greeted by the sheriff. He told us to turn around and leave. There was a riot brewing and the park was closed. And he had no interest in discussing it. But as you know, we were allowed in after the tear gas had cleared and the senior skip day party moved elsewhere.