

Festival paddock rocks on



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A WEED-INFESTED Sunbury paddock, littered with the remnants of rubbish bins and toilets, has been declared a site of national historical significance.

A study commissioned by Hume City Council recommends the windswept paddock, where thousands converged in the early 1970s for Australia's version of the US rock festival Woodstock, receive heritage protection.

The Sunbury festivals, held on Australia Day long weekends from 1972 to 1975, were the largest in Australia and represented a coming of age in the nation's rock music industry.

The first festival attracted 40,000 — more than twice as many people as any other Australian festival.

The events attracted performers that included AC/DC, Sherbet, Daddy Cool and big international bands such as Deep Purple and Queen. They also helped launch the Mushroom record label.

Consultants David Moloney and Vicki Johnson say the site and its "artefacts", such as the pull-rings from beer



Flashback: The crowd at the Sunbury Festival.

cans and rusting structures that were once toilets and rubbish bins, are important legacies of Australia's "youth revolution".

"The site commemorates the event which was Australia's major celebration of the new youth culture — its music, easygoing lifestyle and vaguely counter-cultural notions — as well as its associated consumerism and youth-oriented media," they say in the report.

Farmer George Duncan, whose father defied mainstream opposition and allowed festival promoters to

use his Glencoe property in 1972, believes the site should have been declared significant years ago.

Mr Duncan, 46, said promoter John Fowler had almost given up hope of finding an owner willing to host the event when, in 1971, he met George Duncan Sr through a friend.

"Dad agreed because he always wanted to do something for young people and would not bow to peer group pressure," Mr Duncan said.

He recalls Mr Fowler standing on the family property, surveying the river and sprawling hills which created a natural

amphitheatre before cementing the deal over a cup of tea with his father.

Mr Duncan worked as site manager at every event. He recalls Johnny O'Keefe's performance as the highlight and the drowning death of a young man as the only tragedy to mar the events.

One year a woman gave birth to a baby.

Mr Duncan said the festivals ended after four years due to financial problems and the promoters' determination that it did not become commercialised.

Mr Moloney and Ms Johnson said that by 1975 the communal spirit among festival-goers had been replaced by an alcohol-fuelled camaraderie.

There were ugly scenes as many young people were treated on site for the early stages of alcohol poisoning.

The Duncan family has since sold much of the original property for housing, leaving Hume Council the last landlocked parcel as part of a subdivision agreement.

Mavor Bill Muir said the future of the site which "put Sunbury on the map" was still being considered.

Heritage: George Duncan and his dog, Pica, with an original thunderbox in what remains of a toilet block at the disused festival site. Picture: PETER SMITH