

CULTURE

# The milky way

Milk has been part of the Aussie diet since a bull, a calf and four cows arrived with the First Fleet. The 20th century brought an evolution in milk containers – from the humble billy to the high-tech carton, reflecting advancing knowledge, technology and changing lifestyles. Today we each drink an average of 2L per week. More than 2.3 billion litres of drinking milk was produced last year, one-quarter of the total milked from our 1.6 million dairy cows. The rest was used for dairy products, such as 349,400 tonnes of cheese and 128,400 tonnes of butter.

NATSUMI PENBERTHY

## 1960s > CARTONS

The daily milk round began a slow decline from the 1960s as household fridges became commonplace. Disposable cartons appeared in supermarkets, although Australia remained attached to the bottle. Glass milk bottles with messages like "Please return me before I turn into a carton" appeared in some states. Though they first developed in the 1930s, it wasn't until the advent of the easy-open spout in the '60s that cartons really caught on. Today there are as many styles of container as there are varieties of milk and even the humble bottle has its modern plastic imitator.



## 1940s > FOIL CAPS

Disposable caps kept the lip of the bottle clean. Coloured aluminium caps, recycled as Christmas decorations, became popular in the late '30s. Colours eventually indicated different types of milk, for example light blue often signified skimmed milk, red regular, with gold, the crème de la crème. Regardless of colour, magpies and currawongs regularly pierced them for a cheeky early morning drink.



## 1930s > HEALTH CONCERNS

The Australasian Medical Congress in 1923 reported that more than a quarter of infants admitted to Melbourne's Children's Hospital with tuberculosis were infected from milk. It took until the late 1940s for pasteurisation to become a legal requirement, but milk packaging began to reflect advances in medical knowledge from the mid-twenties onwards, with innovations like aluminium caps and health notices printed on paper cartons, the earliest versions of which appeared in 1933.



PHOTOS: JAMES BRAUND AND MUSEUM VICTORIA/AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC THANKS PAUL WALSH FOR HIS ASSISTANCE

**1880s** ◀  
**MILK BILLY**

Tin or glass billies were left outside homes perched on fences, porches or hung in trees. Standardised ladles would apportion quarts, half-pints and pints from a 'churn' on the milkman's cart. Pennies left in the billies as payment were often pilfered by opportunistic thieves. Billies were used until around the 1930s.

**1890s** ▶  
**LIGHTNING STOPPERS**

Glass milk bottles took over from metal billies because glass could be sterilised more effectively. The first of the glass bottles were topped with ceramic, rubber and wire 'lightning stoppers' – prevalent around the turn of the century. These proved difficult to clean and were eventually phased out around 1910.



**1910s** ◀  
**BRANDED BOTTLES**

Branded bottles, popular from the 1910s to the '50s, and sometimes distributed by state governments to dairies, ensured that bottles were returned to the issuing dairy for refilling. Milk-bottle detectives were employed to track down missing bottles, often found being used as vases.



**1920s** ▶  
**WIDE-NECKED BOTTLES**

In 1884, Dr Hervey Thatcher of New York invented Thatcher's Common Sense Milk Jar, which was sealed with a waxed paper disc. Australia slowly followed suit and wide-necked bottles with 'milk wads' – waxed paper discs pushed into the neck – were common from 1915 up until the 1940s.



**AGS CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**



**A history of giving back**

*The AG Society celebrates 25 years of contributing to our great country.*

**T**HE YEAR 2012 is an important milestone for the Australian Geographic Society as we celebrate our 25th anniversary, no small achievement in today's fast-changing world.

We have a number of birthday events planned for the year and trust that you, our members, may be able to join us in the celebration. Aside from the festivity, 2012 will also see us announce some major fundraising initiatives and partnerships.

In its first 25 years the AGS has raised millions of dollars for Australian science, exploration, adventure and conservation, in addition to community projects, and we as Trustees are fully committed to raising that bar even higher. The widespread calls for assistance in today's challenging and difficult times are many, varied and mostly deserving, but we feel the role of the AGS is more important now than ever, and as Trustees intend to set the Society on an exciting new path for the next quarter of a century.

Through the pages of this journal and together with *AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC Outdoor* magazine and our website you'll be able to follow our journey and I trust become part of the Society and its endeavours. I encourage you to continue to support our work through subscribing to this journal, as it is our largest financial supporter.

From my fellow trustees I wish you all a happy and I trust prosperous New Year. I hope that we may see you in the bush or at one of our events in 2012.

Safe travels.

**GREGG HAYTHORPE, CHAIRMAN AG SOCIETY**

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