

SOMSEN CAMPING WEEKEND AT IJZERLO

by Johan F. Somsen [1089]

This time it fell to my share to write an article about the Somsen camping weekend since the regular contributor and organiser of this activity, Wim Somsen [518], could not be present because of a holiday. I have learnt that this has hurt him an awful lot.

This year we had our Somsen Camping Weekend 2002 again quite close to the place of our roots: at the **camping-farm Hoftijzer** in IJzerlo. That is less than a mile away from the **Somsenhouse**, the place of the old *Sumpsstedeken*, where our common ancestor toiled to stay alive and besides could spare the time to propagate.

No less than 48 of his descendants gathered together at the campsite for a relaxed and extremely pleasant weekend. For some of them the stay even lasted nearly a week.

It all started five years ago in the days of our first great Somsen Reunion in August 1997. For a number of Somsens the campsite was the proper place for their stay in the *Achterhoek*. From this base they could take part in all the reunion activities. As early as the reunion week the plan arose to turn this collective camping activity into a recurrent annual happening.

We had this weekend for the sixth time now and it must be said that the enthusiasm among the participants is great. The number of campers is not too big, though, but in addition many other Somsens know how to find their way to IJzerlo to join the festive barbecue on Saturday evening. Also in the future every member of the Somsen family is more than welcome to come and have a look.

This year the second big Somsen Reunion that was held in Baldwin, Wisconsin, in the USA, dominated the camping weekend. Not less than seven out of the eight Dutch participants of the American reunion were present in IJzerlo. Of course this implied that there were a great many stories about this American reunion. There was also a huge amount of videotapes; during the barbecue video films were shown about the Baldwin reunion.

Another tradition, which has developed over the past five years, is the pilgrimage to the Somsen tree, which we planted during the 1997 reunion near the *Japikshouse*. This is the farmstead from where in 1851 the first Somsens emigrated to the USA. At the end of the Saturday afternoon the keen observer may notice a motley procession of Somsens moving towards the *Japikshouse* along the country-lanes that are usually very quiet. Always all of them are a little tense. In fact, it is an extremely unusual gathering. We always bring a few bottles of Dutch gin for Mr *Veerbeek*, the present inhabitant of the *Japikshouse*. Everybody hopes that he is going to offer some of it. We have – being very optimistic as always – carefully tucked away our glasses in our pockets or handbags. Next, after having greeted the *Veerbeek* family,



*Editorial meeting on the campsite:
From the middle turn to the left: Ben [396],
Margriet [2878], Jan [679], Gree [53], Johan
[1089], Ada [75] and Theo [227]*

there is always a semi-official event. Theo Somsen [227], our chairman, delivers a short speech. Then the whole procession moves to the small field with the tree. What will the lime-tree be like this year? And every year the tree has grown taller thanks to the good care of Mr *Veerbeek*. Then there is mirth all around and Mr *Veerbeek* will offer one of the bottles that we brought. It is also such an indissoluble part of the ritual that nobody protests against it and so we will all stand there in the field near the tree – very often in the company of a few horses – sipping from our glasses.

The most spectacular philosophical ideas arise during this event. Actually, nobody wants it to come to an end and this also goes for Mr *Veerbeek* and his wife. We simply keep on talking and when the glasses are refilled then there will be more than enough reason to continue our philosophical contemplations. Again and again this is such a beautiful moment, which is hard to express in words. We do hope that we can repeat this many more times.

Let these final words be an invitation for the large group of Somsens that have never experienced these rituals.

Don't forget to bring a glass! ■