

Campfire Songs

Here are some good old Campfire Songs. The Campfire Songs I have tried to include here are ones that are not that easy to find. Some of these bring back memories of Day Camp and camp counselor days, a long, long time ago. Please send me your favorites and I'll include them here:

Campfire's burning, campfire's burning
Draw nearer, draw nearer
In the gloaming, in the gloaming
Come sing and be merry.

Table of Contents

- * Sarasponda
- * Hey Lollie
- * Clementine
- * Tie Me Kangaroo Down
- * Green Grow the Rushes
- * Waltzing Matilda
- * Waltzing Matilda -- An Older Version
- * Taps - The Story of Taps
- * Scout Vespers
- * Charlie on the M.T.A.
- * The Scout Who Never Returned
- * Dixie
- * Down in the Valley
- * Home on the Range
- * Hot Time In the Old Town Tonight
- * Red River Valley
- * Shenandoah
- * On Top of Old Smoky
- * Oh! Susanna

Sarasponda

Sarasponda, sarasponda, sarasponda ret set set.
Sarasponda, sarasponda sarasponda ret set set.
A doray-oh, A doray boomday-oh.

A doray boomday ret set set, ah say pa say oh.
Boom-be-da, boom-be-da, boom-be-da, boom

[Split group into 2 parts. Sing through together, then one group continues singing the "boom-be-da" part, while the other sings through the verse. Then switch.]

Hey Lollie

(This is the classic campfire song for which you make up verses as you go)

Hey Lollie, lollee,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.
Hey Lollie, lollee,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.

This is a crazy kind of song,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.
You make it up as you go along,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.

When calypso singers sing this song,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.
It sometimes lasts the whole day long,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.

First you invent a simple rhyme,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.
Then another one to rhyme,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.

While you catch on I'll sing a verse,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.
Then you do one that's even worse,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.

I know a boy named Sammy--C, (or use another name that rhymes)
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.
He sings "Hey Lollie" in just one key,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.

Tonight we've chosen another key,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.
You won't be hearing from Sammy--C,

Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.

He sings "Hey Lollie" day and night,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.
It never seems to come out right,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.

I know a man name Mr. Jones,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.
When he sings, everybody groans,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.

The singer you fast the getter it's tuff,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.
To line up makes that you won't muff,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.

Let's put this song back on the shelf,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.
If you want anymore you can sing it yourself,
Hey Lollie, lollee, lo.

Clementine

In a cavern, in a canyon, excavating for a mine,
Lived a miner, forty-niner, and his daughter Clementine.

Chorus

Oh my darling, Oh my darling, Oh my darling Clementine,
You are lost and gone forever, dreadful sorry, Clementine.

Light she was, and like a fairy, and her shoes were number nine,
Herring boxes without topses, sandals were for Clementine.

Drove she ducklings to the water every morning just at nine,
Hit her foot against a splinter, fell into the foaming brine.

Ruby lips above the water, blowing bubbles soft and fine,
Alas for me! I was no swimmer, so I lost my Clementine.

In a churchyard near the canyon, where the myrtle doth entwine,
There grow roses and other posies, fertilized by Clementine.

Then the miner, forty-niner, soon began to peak and pine,
Thought he oughter join his daughter, now he's with his Clementine.

In my dreams she still doth haunt me, robed in garments soaked in brine,
While in life I used to hug her, now she's dead I draw the line.

How I missed her, how I missed her, how I missed my Clementine,
Until I kissed her little sister, and forgot my Clementine.

Now ye Scouts all heed the warning to this tragic tale of mine,
Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation would have saved my Clementine.

Tie Me Kangaroo Down

The first verse is almost spoken or narrated

There's an old Australian stockman - lying, dying...
And he gets himself up onto one elbow
And turns to his mates who are all gathered around
And he says....

I'm going, Blue; this you gotta do,
I'm not gonna pull through, Blue, so this you gotta do . . .

Chorus:

Tie me kangaroo down, sport
Tie me kangaroo down.
Tie me kangaroo down, sport
Tie me kangaroo down.

Watch me wallabies feed, mate
Watch me wallabies feed.
They're a dangerous breed, mate
So, watch me wallabies feed.

(chorus)

Let me wombats go loose, Bruce,
Let me wombats go loose.
They're of no further use, Bruce,
So let me wombats go lose.

(chorus)

Keep me cockatoo cool, curl
Keep me cockatoo cool.

Don't go actin' the fool, curl
Just keep me cockatoo cool.

(chorus)

Take me koala back, Jack
Take me koala back.
He lives somewhere out on the track, Mack
So, take me koala back.

(chorus)

Mind me platypus duck, Bill
Mind me platypus duck.
Don't let him go running amuck, Bill
Just, mind me platypus duck.

(chorus)

Play your diggeridoo, Blue
Play your diggeridoo.
(Dying) Like, keep playing it 'til I shoot through, Blue
Play your diggeridoo.

(chorus)

Tan me hide when I'm dead, Fred
Tan me hide when I'm dead.
So, we tanned his hide, when he died, Clyde
And that's it hangin' on the shed.

(chorus)

Green Grow the Rushes

This is a very old folk song. I present here the Scout version and a published version -- you will understand the difference. This song is structured like the 12 Days of Christmas, in that it builds as the verses progress, until at the end, the singers respond with all 12 lines. It is not sung to a "stock" tune -- you will have to find someone who knows it to learn the tune.

Here is how the Scout version begins:

Leader: I'll sing you one ho

Group: Green grow the rushes ho,
What is your one ho?

Leader: One is one and all alone and ever more shall be it so.

That is the basic form. Here is the second round:

Leader: I'll sing you two ho

Group: Green grow the rushes ho,
What is your two ho?

Leader: Two, two little Boy Scouts, Clothed them all in green ho (or Cub Scouts in Blue)

Leader and Group: One is one and all alone and ever more shall be it so

So, you can see how it goes. Here are the other 10 lines:

Twelve for the Twelve Apostles
Eleven for the eleven who went to Heaven
Ten for the Ten Commandments
Nine for the night (nine??) bright shiners
Eight for the April rainers
Seven for the seven stars in the sky
Six for the six proud walkers
Five for symbols at your door
Four for the Gospel makers
Three, three the rivals

According to "Rise Up Singing" published by Sing Out publications the song was first printed in "English Country Songs" by Broadwood and Maitland in 1893. Here are the lyrics:

One is one and all alone and evermore shall be
2, 2 the lily white boys, clothed all in green-o
3, 3 the rivals
4 for the Gospel makers
5 for the symbols at your door
6 for the 6 proud walkers
7 for the 7 stars in the sky
8 for the April raiders
9 for the 9 bright shiners
10 for the 10 Commandments
11 for the 11 that went up to heaven
12 for the 12 Apostles

Waltzing Matilda

Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong,
Under the shade of a coolibah tree,
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me.

Chorus:

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me,
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled,
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me.

Down came a jumbuck to drink at that billabong,
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed him with glee,
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tuckerbag
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me.

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me,
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tuckerbag,
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me.

Up rode the squatter mounted on his thoroughbred,
Down came the troopers - one, two, three,
Whose that jolly jumbuck you've got in your tuckerbag?
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me.

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me,
Whose that jolly jumbuck you've got in your tuckerbag?
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me.

Up jumped the swagman, and sprang into the billabong,
You'll never catch me alive said he,
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me.

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me,
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong,
You'll come a waltzing Matilda with me.

Traditional Australian - almost became the official national anthem a few years ago. Pity it didn't! The chosen song is full of pomp and ceremony, fancy words and downright rubbish.

I [David Morrison] can explain some of the Australianisms if you wish.

Waltzing Matilda -- An Older Version

(A.B. Paterson)

Oh, There was once a swagman camped in a billabong
Under the shade of a coolabah tree
And he sang as he looked at his old billy boiling
"Who'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me?"

Who'll come a Waltzing Matilda, my darling,
Who'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me
Waltzing Watilda and leading a water-bag
Who'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me.

Down came a jumbuckto drink at the water hole
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed him in glee
And he sang as he stuffed him away in his tuckerbag
"You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me."

(Repeat Chorus)

Down came the squatter, a riding on his thoroughbred
Down came policemen, One, two and three
"Whose is the jumbuck you've got in your tuckerbag
You'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me."

(Repeat Chorus)

But the swagman, he up and he jumped in the water hole
Drowning himself by the Coolabah tree
And his ghost may be heard as it sings in the billibong
"Who'll come a Waltzing Matilda with me?"

(Repeat Chorus)

Taps

Sing with reverence.

Day is done

Gone the sun
From the Lakes
From the hills
From the sky
All is well
Safely rest
God is night.

Fading light
Dims the sight,
And a star gems the sky,
Gleaming bright,
From afar,
Drawing nigh,
Falls the night.

Thanks and praise,
For our days,
Neath the sun,
Neath the stars,
Neath the sky,
As we go,
This we know,
God is night.

Here we stand,
Hand in Hand,
Wishing Peace,
Freedom, Joy,
To each man,
When there's love,
In our hearts,
God is night.

The Story of Taps

Taps was devised during the Civil War. In 1862, the Union Army of the Potomac, under Major General George McClellan, was transported to the Virginia Peninsula to launch a campaign against the Confederate capital at Richmond. The Army met stiff resistance at the outskirts of Richmond. After a series of battles, McClellan, a cautious general by nature, and misinformed as to the strength of the Confederate army confronting him,

elected to "change bases" - a carefully worded synonym for retreat - to a site to the south, on the bank of the James River.

During this retreat, the Army of the Potomac was forced to stand and fight the pursuing Confederate army at Malvern Hill. The Confederate army, rather unwisely, charged the Union line and was defeated. The battle of Malvern Hill was fought on June 28 - July 1, 1862.

On July 2 (134 years ago today), in a miserable rain, the Army of the Potomac completed its depressing and embarrassing retreat to Harrison's Landing on the James River. The retreat was a grim disillusionment for the North, which had expected a short war. For the Army of the Potomac, it was its darkest and saddest hour.

Encamped at Harrison's Landing that summer was Brigadier General Daniel Butterfield. He was the commander of the 3rd brigade of the 1st division of the Army of the Potomac's 5th corps. A fairly undistinguished officer otherwise, General Butterfield had an ear for music. Previously, he had observed that his brigade's bugle call caused confusion in camp, because it could not be distinguished from that of other brigades. So he devised a unique bugle call for the 3rd brigade.

Now, in camp along the James, he noted that the regulation evening bugle call for lights out was neither musical nor inspirational, nor tranquilizing. He devised a alternative tune for his bugler, which, after a couple of attempts, became Taps. The tune became popular, and soon the entire Army of the Potomac was using the call in place of the regulation call for lights out.

Eventually, Taps was adopted by all Union armies, and became official army regulation. Taps remains regulation to this day.

The story of Taps is particularly appropriate for July 2, given that today is the anniversary of the Army of the Potomac's long retreat to the Harrison's Landing camp.

Scout Vespers

I have two versions, here. The most common one I only have the one verse of. I have that in the 1963 issue of the Boy Scout Songbook, and the Wood Badge Songbook that I recieved in 1995 when I took the class.

Softly falls the light of day,
While our campfire fades away.

Silently each Scout should ask
Have I done my daily task?
Have I kept my honor bright?
Can I guiltless sleep tonight?
Have I done and have I dared
Everything to be prepared?

Second version (From my Wood Badge Songbook.)

Quietly we join as one,
Thanking God for Scouting fun
May we now go on our way,
Thankful for another day.
May we always love and share,
Living in peace beyond compare.
As Scout may we find,
Friendships true with all mankind.

Quietly we now will part,
Pledging ever in our heart,
To strive to do our best each day,
As we travel down life's way.
Happiness we'll try to give,
Trying a better life to live,
'Till all the world be joined in love,
Living in peace under skies above.

CHARLIE ON THE M.T.A.

Let me tell ya of a story 'bout a man named Charlie, on a tragic and faithful day.

He put ten cents in his pocket, kissed his wife and family, went to ride on the M.T.A

Chorus:

But did he ever return?

No, he never returned, and his fate is still unlearned. (Poor old charlie).

He may ride forever 'neath the streets of Boston, he's the man who never returned.

Charlie handed in his dime at the Kendel Square Station and he changed for Jamaca Plains.

When he got there the conductor told him, "one more nickel," Charlie couldn't get off that train

Well all night long Charlie rides through the stations, saying, "What will become of me?
How can I afford to see my sister in Chelsea or my cousin or Roxbury?"

Charlie's wife goes down to the Scully Square station, every day at a quarter past two.

And through the open window, she hands Charlie a sandwich as the train goes a rumbling through.

The Scout Who Never Returned

[Tune: Charlie On The MTA]

Let me tell you of a story of a Scout named . . . ,
On that tragic and fateful day;
Put his/her Scout knife in his/her pocket;
Kissed his/her dog and family;
When to hike in the woods far away.

Well, did he/she ever return?
No, he/she never returned.
And his/her fate is still unlearned:
He/she may roam forever in the woods and mountains,
He/she's the Scout who never returned.

Now you citizens of [town name],
Don't you think it's a scandle
How ol' [Scout's name] got lost that day?
Take the right equipment; TAKE ALONG A BUDDY,
When you hike in the hills that way.

Or else you'll never return,
No, you'll never return.
And your fate will be unlearned: (just like [Scout's name])
You may roam forever in the woods and mountains,
Like the Scout who never returned.

Dixie

I wish I was in the land of cotton,
Old times there are not forgotten;
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixieland.
In Dixieland where I was born in,
Early on one frosty morning';
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixieland.

Chorus

Then I wish I was in Dixie, hooray! Hooray!
In Dixieland I'll take my stand to live and die in Dixie;
Away, away, away down south in Dixie. [Repeat.]

There's buckwheat cakes and Indian batter
Makes you fat, but that don't matter;
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixieland.
Then hoe it down and scratch your grabble,
To Dixieland I'm bound to travel,
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixieland.

Down in the Valley

Down in the valley, the valley so low,
Hang your head over, hear the winds blow.
Hear the winds blow, dear, hear the winds blow.
Hang your head over, hear the winds blow.

Down in the valley, walking between,
Telling our story, here's what it means.
Here's what it means, dear, here's what it means,
Telling our story, here's what it means.

Roses love sunshine, violets love dew,
Angels in heaven know I love you;
Know I love you, dear, know I love you,
Angels in heaven know I love you.

Build me a castle forty feet high,
So I can see him as he rides by;
As he rides by, dear, as he rides by,
So I can see him as he rides by.

Writing this letter, containing three lines,
Answer my question, "Will you be mine?"
"Will you be mine, dear, will you be mine,"

Answer my question, "Will you be mine?"

If you don't love me, love whom you please,
Throw your arms round me, give my heart ease.
Give my heart ease, dear, give my heart ease,
Throw your arms round me, give my heart ease.

Throw your arms round me, before it's too late;
Throw your arms round me, feel my heart break.
Feel my heart break, dear, feel my heart break.
Throw your arms round me, feel my heart break.

Home on the Range

Oh give me a home where the buffalo roam,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

Chorus

Home, home on the range,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

Where the air is so pure, and the zephyrs so free,
The breezes so balmy and light,
That I would not exchange my home on the range,
For all of the cities so bright.

The Red man was pressed from this part of the west,
He's likely no more to return,
To the banks of the Red River where seldom if ever
Their flickering campfires burn.

How often at night when the heavens are bright,
With the light from the glittering stars,
Have I stood there amazed and asked as I gazed,
If their glory exceeds that of ours.

Oh, I love these wild flowers in this dear land of ours,
The curlew I love to hear cry,
And I love the white rocks and the antelope flocks,
That graze on the mountain slopes high.

Oh give me a land where the bright diamond sand,
Flows leisurely down in the stream;
Where the graceful white swan goes gliding along,
Like a maid in a heavenly dream.

Then I would not exchange my home on the range,
Where the deer and the antelope play;
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

Hot Time In the Old Town Tonight

Late last night when we were all in bed,
Mrs. O'Leary left her lantern in the shed.
Well, the cow kicked it over, and this is what they said:
"There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight!"

When you hear those bells go ding-a-ling,
All join 'round and sweetly you must sing.
And when the verse is through, in the chorus all join in:
"There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight!"

For dramatic effect, shout out "FIRE, FIRE, FIRE" at the end of the first verse.

Silly variant:

Ten nights dark when bed we all were in,
Old Leary lady hung the shed her lantern in,
And when the kick cowed it over, she eyed her wink and said
"There'll be town hot in the time old tonight!"

Red River Valley

From this valley they say you are going,
We will miss your bright eyes and sweet smile,
For they say you are taking the sunshine
Which has brightened our pathways a while.

Chorus

Come and sit by my side if you love me;

Do not hasten to bid me adieu,
But remember the Red River Valley,
And the girl that has loved you so true.

I've been thinking a long time, my darling,
Of the sweet words you never would say,
Now, alas, must my fond hopes all vanish?
For they say you are going away.

Won't you think of the valley you're leaving,
Oh, how lonely and sad it will be,
Just think of the fond heart you're breaking,
And the grief you are causing to me.

From this valley they say you are going,
When you go, may your darling go too?
Would you leave her behind unprotected,
When she loves no one other than you.

As you go to your home by the ocean,
May you never forget those sweet hours,
That we spent in the Red River Valley,
And the love we exchanged 'mid the flowers.

I have promised you, darling, that never
Will a word from my lips cause you pain,
And my life, it will be yours forever,
If you only will love me again.

They will bury me where you have wandered,
Near the hills where the daffodils grow,
When you're gone from the Red River valley,
For I can't live without you I know.

Shenandoah

Oh Shenandoah, I long to see you,
Far away you rolling river,
Oh Shenandoah, I long to see you,
Away, we're bound away across the wide Missouri.

I long to see your smiling valley, . . .
'Tis seven long years since last I saw thee, . . .
When first I took a rambling notion, . . . To sail across the briny ocean.

On Top of Old Smoky

On top of old Smoky, all covered with snow,
I lost my true lover from courting too slow.

Now, courting is pleasure and parting is grief,
And a false-hearted lover is worse than a thief.

For a thief will just rob you and take what you have,
But a false-hearted lover will lead you to the grave.

And the grave will decay you and turn you to dust;
Not one boy in a hundred a poor girl can trust.

They'll hug you and kiss you and tell you more lies,
Than cross ties on a railroad or stars in the skies.

So, come all you young maidens and listen to me,
Never place your affection on a green willow tree.

For the leaves they will wither, and the roots they will die,
You'll all be forsaken and never know why.

Oh! Susanna

I come from Alabama with my banjo on my knee,
I'm going to Louisiana, my true love for to see.
It rained all night the day I left, the weather it was dry
The sun so hot I froze to death, Susanna, don't you cry.

Chorus

Oh! Susanna, Oh don't you cry for me,
For I come from Alabama with my banjo on my knee.

I had a dream the other night, when everything was still;
I thought I saw Susanna dear, a coming down the hill.
A buckwheat cake was in her mouth, a tear was in her eye,
Says I, I'm coming from the south, Susanna, don't you cry.

I soon will be in New Orleans, and then I'll look around,

And when I find Susanna, I'll fall upon the ground.
But if I do not find her, then I will surely die,
And when I'm dead and buried, Oh, Susanna, don't you cry.