

Venue bursting with entertainment morning till night



By Melanie Collison

The earliest Scots were so fierce they'd as soon slice you apart with a broadsword as look at you. And those were the *women*.

On a day bursting with entertainment variety the women of Maddogs Cannoneers will give spirited demonstrations of various combat styles at the High River Highland Games Aug. 29.

Sarah Gosselin and Aryn Jones offer a taste of the hospitality the ancient Picts showed the marauding Romans in what later became Scotland. Their ferocity might daunt a mild-mannered man, but as it happens, their respective partners, Chris Thomas and Ryan Jones are cannoneers who enjoy their own battle era.

"I picked up a cannon a few years ago," Thomas says, as if it's something anyone just might casually do. "I looked on the internet." A history major at university, Jones is responsible for the authenticity of the group's 18th-century British Royal Artillery uniforms and demonstrations of cannon-lighting.

The Maddogs will be performing every half-hour, and provide a show more generous than you'd see in Scotland. Thrifty to the core, Scots schedule a cannon salute for 1 o'clock instead of noon to save on shot. Mind you, at the Highwood High School venue they're shooting blanks because safety is paramount.

Easier on the ears will be the Calgary Fiddlers, the baker's dozen exuberant teenagers whose musical expertise sees them touring internationally year after year. They'll be in the performing between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. in the ceilidh (Celtic party) tent.

In that same tent there'll be highland dancing for pleasure rather than competition during the day, and at 5 p.m. an Irish dance performance followed by a pipers' jam session, known as kitchen piping.

The headliners for the evening ceilidh are Calgary-based Fraid Knot whose members bring a rich blend of musical traditions and styles from diverse backgrounds. They were a huge hit last year with their traditional Scottish and Irish songs and century-old sea shanties, along with their original East Coast and Celtic rock.

The ceilidh tent is open to all ages, but there's also child-oriented fun throughout the day. Parents can take their tots to a bouncing tent, stop by the face-painting station, and do children's activities with them from 10 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. in the kids' area east of the vendors.

From noon to 1 p.m., the giant heavy events athletes take the youngsters in hand and teach them how to toss a scaled-down caber and throw a stone. Sign-up for the Wee Folk Heavy Events begins at 9 a.m. at the heavy events field.

All this, of course, is in addition to the highland dance competition, piping and drumming competition, massed bands performance, and sheep dog demonstrations.