

TOURS

President Anne: One of the biggest events in this year's Ladies' Branch calendar was the Tour to Canada. Two of the members of the group, Elaine Semple and Anne Marie Ross are going to tell us all about it.

Report on Women's Tour to Canada November 2005

Hats on Ladies !!

We had spent 18 months planning our three and a half week tour to the Canadian Maritime Provinces after selection in April 2004. As you can imagine, a great deal of our time was spent on deciding what we would wear. Captain Anne had her hands full as getting twenty four women with a variety of sizes and ages to agree was not an easy task but we all looked very smart in our Spirit of Scotland tartan and lilac curling gear. We had spent much less time composing tour songs, designing brooches etc but everything was in place well before our departure. --- *despite all of this we left still the best of friends.*

We all arrived at Glasgow Airport at 4.30am on 6th November full of excitement and very proud to have been chosen for the Scottish Ladies Tour to Canada. The first leg of our journey was to London, almost minus two of our group, as the airline had only kept twenty two seats for our group of twenty four! --- *but don't feel sorry for them ladies, they traveled business class, and got breakfast, which was more than the rest of us did.* But we then had an uneventful flight from Heathrow to St John's in Newfoundland where Muriel Fage our courier joined us---great lady wasn't she girls ---and this was when it dawned that the tour was a reality. All twenty four who had been selected had actually made it to Canada!

We realized the Canadians had been anticipating our arrival for months, spending as much time and effort getting organized as we had. Everywhere we went the hospitality, friendship and generosity we received was superb, at times overwhelming!

We were billeted in fifteen different houses during our stay so we saw more of how the Canadians lived rather than the usual visitor attractions. Sometimes we had fabulous en-suite facilities and separate rooms, other times we had difficulty fitting two of us in the room with our bags,---*and occasionally fitting two of us in the same bed,*--- but everyone was very welcoming.

Our first game was played at Bally Haly rink in St John's where the scene was set for the kind of welcome we would receive at all the rinks we visited....a piper to pipe us onto the ice, a guard of honour of brooms, local dignitaries to welcome us, food and drink and gifts galore! *I think this first event was quite an emotional experience for all of us.* In St John's we sampled our first of many delicious Pot Luck Dinners prepared by the members. Often on these occasions the men served the tables, cleared up afterwards and often provided the entertainment for us all. Please note all Scots men! ---*wrong AGM Elaine!*

Our three days in Newfoundland were quite leisurely, only two games of curling and some sightseeing. At the Opening Banquet we were all "Screeched"...this involved drinking hot rum (or screech), eating lumps of luncheon meat and kissing the cod! An interesting but hilarious experience --- *believe me Ladies kissing a cod is no fun!!* Fortunately the senses were a little dulled by the wine at dinner. The only hiccup so far was the loss of a pair of tartan trousers, however they did catch up with us later --- *smart trousers!!*

We flew on to Cape Breton for our first visit to Nova Scotia where we met up with our bus & driver, Ted, who would be with us on our journey through PEI and New Brunswick. Ted was a treasure who never complained about the weight of the suitcases he had to load on and off the bus every day or the high jinks on the bus and he was our staunchest supporter at all our games. ---***I hear he is recovering well from the hernia operation Elaine.***--- The pace of life increased dramatically with little sightseeing except through the bus window and occasionally time on the bus was spent cat napping. We heard more Gaelic spoken, more bagpipes & fiddles played and saw more Scottish dancing than anywhere in Scotland. The Canadians were disappointed that we didn't have a single Gaelic speaker in our group.

We moved on to PEI where we spent just two nights and visited four ice rinks but were invited on a private tour of Government House in the capital Charlottetown, where we had tea with the Governor and official photographs were taken for the newspapers! We were becoming used to celebrity status as we had already featured in the Cape Breton Post and The Times. Before leaving PEI over the Confederation Bridge we had lunch at the Lank's Farm...both Shirley and Gordon are former tourists ... where the farmers wives amongst us couldn't resist a trip round the farm for a few lungfuls of good farmyard smells!

We spent six nights in New Brunswick and curled at nine rinks where we were smudged by a member of the MicMac tribe---***which left us more or less sin free for the rest of the day***--- and we continued to have success in our curling. Our celebrity status was running high with two girls being interviewed for CBC radio, and then all our rinks were televised at Riverside CC in Carleton. Unfortunately we didn't see what was broadcast as we were on the move again. ***Yes Ladies, our curling impressed them that much!!***

The daily routine for the Lilac Ladies as we became known was usually up about 6.30am, shower, breakfast, meet at bus, travel to next rink, curl, lunch with entertainment, back on bus, small refreshment on bus, maybe a short snooze, curl at next rink, change, reception & dinner, entertainment , home with new billet and hopefully in bed by 1.00am!!

Liz Ross excelled at giving the vote of thanks and rapidly became known as Her Majesty, or our own ER. Her performance out shone that of our singing or performance of our skit but we got marks for effort. ---***Not Many!***

By the half way point we had played 64 games, thrown 4532 stones, leads and 2nds had swept 213 miles and all this on about 5-6 hours sleep per night!! We were getting tired but the adrenalin levels were still high and so was the intake of G&Ts! which we are sure kept any bugs away.

Our driver Ted left us as we headed for Nova Scotia so he was given an appropriate send off with lots of badges and I'm sure he had plenty stories to share with his friends.

One of the girls had a BIG birthday --- she was 60 --- so that was celebrated in style with cake with lots of candles, a wee drink and some naughty undies for her --- *I heard her say they were useless on the ice though !!*

Our time-out was spent visiting a maple syrup farm where we had a tour of the processing plant then had dinner...with everything covered in maple syrup but we justified all those extra calories as we now definitely needed the energy.

We were at day 19 and the curling to our amazement was still going well although

absent mindedness was setting in....curling shoes left behind at an ice rink, banners mislaid, wrong blouses worn, a map of Scotland being mistaken as a map of Canada, unbelievable, ... but this all meant that the fine box under the direction of Mein Fuhrer Rhona was getting fuller and could be put to good use later.

Week two had passed in a bit of a blur but week three started with a bang! Dozing on the bus had become a regular occurrence (or sheer necessity in some cases), but we got a rude awakening as we approached the town of Liverpool. The bus was attacked by Redcoats firing muskets who boarded the bus and insisted that they would escort us into town. Two Mounties then came onto the bus and arrested one of our group who was "charged with attempting to kidnap a Mountie"---*boy were the rest of us jealous, they were gorgeous*--- they'd been after her since Newfoundland where she'd first aired her intention of taking a Mountie home in her suitcase! If you had seen her case it was certainly big enough!

We spent our last eight nights in Nova Scotia where we played in eleven ice rinks, often unsure which town and ice rink we were in by that stage. The final weekend we stayed in luxury in a hotel in Halifax where we curled, partied and did some sightseeing with some of the girls from Canada who had come on previous tours to Scotland. On our penultimate evening we enjoyed a Lobster Supper and presented our captain with "This is your Tour" when we all gave her little mementos to remind her of the tour.....she might tell you what some of them are! This was a very fitting tribute to a super captain.--- By the end we were an exhausted group of women who were thrilled to have completed our tour visiting twenty nine ice rinks and only leaving two at which we had been defeated. We had slept in seventeen different beds, traveled 2100 miles on the bus, flown 8072 miles. The score was Canada 651 shots, Scotland 1082 shots .The tour had all gone very smoothly thanks to excellent organization by the Canadians, and we had met countless fabulous people along the way, many with Scottish connections.

The Closing Banquet hosted by Nancy Delahunt on the final evening was a grand event at which we all felt quite emotional. The Tour felt like it had flown by in many ways and in others it felt like months since we'd left Glasgow, cooked meals or ironed shirts! We were all presented with beautiful Nova Scotia crystal tumblers which we will all treasure despite the confusion they caused at airport security.

We had a long twenty hour journey home via Toronto (I know that's the wrong direction!) but we are all agreed that it was the most amazing experience. We were all immensely proud to have been part of such a successful tour and have come home with fantastic memories, met lots of Canadians with whom we'll keep in touch. Our group got on so well that we had formed our own Red Hat Society led by Anne-Marie! As we all said our farewells at Glasgow Airport we assured Anne that we would try to decide what to wear the next day without having to call her first.;

Three Cheers for our Captain - Anne!!!! (Applause).

President Anne: Thank you Elaine and Anne Marie.

USA Incoming Ladies' Tour 2006:

In November this year we will be welcoming twenty ladies from the U.S.A. Marion Craig will now report on the arrangements that have been made so far.

Vice-President Marion: Thank you President Anne.

The incoming USA Ladies Tour will arrive on Saturday 4th Nov 2006, and will be