

# International Mounted Games Exchange 2015

12<sup>th</sup> July – 26<sup>th</sup> July 2015

Virginia

United States of America

The Australian team for the IMGGE 2015 was Natasha Clayton (NT), Julia Devitt (NSW), Tessa Forbes (WA), Caitlan Lloyd (SA), Pyper Page (TAS), Tim Morton (Coach) and Anne Cotton (Chaperone).

Communication with the team before the tour was through phone calls and email. A pre tour training camp was organised by Tim who liaised with Anthony Newman from Londonderry Pony Club before flying out to USA.

The team flew into Sydney on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> July, where we all met and caught the train to Penrith. We were met by Ron Devitt who transported us all to Londonderry Pony Club where swags and food were supplied by the member and the Devitt family. Anthony and Michelle arrived after work to meet us and discuss plans for the next few days. Thursday morning saw the arrival of seven ponies that were lent to us for training by the Newman and Devitt families. Training consisted of 2 x two hour blocks which gave Tim a chance to see the riders in action and assess their skill level. The late afternoon was the beginning of our team bonding. We were transported to the Penrith Panthers Leagues Club where we had a game of Aqua Golf, played games in KAOS which was a games room for younger people before going out for dinner at Rashay's. Back to Londonderry Pony club again to run through WH&S issues when travelling with the team as well as going over the code of conduct and stressing the importance of the Buddy system. Friday morning we were transported to Sydney by Anthony and Michelle to our hotel at Sydney airport. Once settled in the team made their way to Paddy's Markets to hunt down souvenirs then walked to Darling Harbour to see the Winterfest. We caught a water taxi to tour around the harbour, see the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Luna Park and the Opera House. On arrival back to our hotel our uniforms had been delivered – unfortunately with some omissions but better than nothing.

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July, we caught the shuttle to the International Terminal. The Devitt family met us there to take our excess clothes home with them. We then boarded our flight to Fort Worth, Texas. Sixteen hours later we landed on the same day, 35 minutes later. We had forty minutes to collect our luggage, go through immigration, customs and make our connecting flight to Washington. On arrival into Washington after just making the flight as they were closing the doors, we were minus our luggage and after lots of question, realised that we had flown into the wrong airport. We were at Ronald Regan instead of Dulles International where our shuttle to hotel was. After negotiating with local transport companies, we were delivered to our hotel. All the girls wanted to stay together in one room so after some mattress removal, they settled down with room service for the night. Unfortunately, after giving the team a talk about what to pack in their backpack when

travelling for emergencies, only Tim and I had a change of clothes and toiletries – I think they will remember this valuable lesson when travelling again.

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July saw the arrival of our lost luggage at 4.00am. Tim had organised a morning training/recovery session in the hotel gym and pool before breakfast. The tour supervisor had contacted me the night before and advised that we were to be picked up at 3.00pm so we had a free morning. We caught a taxi to White Oaks Shopping Mall for some retail therapy and to get sim cards for our phones so we were able to keep in touch on the American network without the cost of expensive calls. We were collected from the hotel by bus where we were introduced to Jackie Horn who would be looking after the tour as well as the English team. We were taken to Northern Fauquier Community Park where we met up with the USA team and our host families. Whilst waiting for the Canadian team to arrive some of us went over to the Tri County Feed and Tack store to have a look around. Everyone had dinner which was supplied by CWPC and then took part in a Daniel Stewart Clinic. This clinic gave us ideas in how to improve our performance through positive thinking and gave us the tools to do this. We all then made our way home with our host families.

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July – After breakfast with our host families we all met the bus at Northern Fauquier Community Park for our tour to Skyline Drive, Front Royal and Skyline Caverns. After touring the caverns we travelled further into the Shenandoah National Park for lunch and viewed a film about the park. It was then back on the bus to Elk... where the ranger Stacey gave us a talk on the Black Bear which is native to the Virginia area. We also learnt what to do if we come across a bear. Back on the bus again back to Northern Fauquier Park to be taken home by our host families.

Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July. Our host families transported us to Great Meadow for a Fun Day. Everyone thought this was to be the friendly competition but the teams ended up assisting the riders of the local pony clubs in improving their games skills as well as up skilling their ponies. It was very rewarding to see the coaches and international riders work with the pony club members and see lots of smiling faces. Towards the end of the morning, the international riders all gave a demonstration of their games skills before having hotdogs for lunch. Great Meadow has a beautiful steeplechase race track and it also where the Gold Cup polo competition is held, we were able to look over the facilities and watch a polo team train. Ponies were packed up and then riders had a free afternoon with their host families.

Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> July – We all had an early start to meet and catch the bus to Williamsburg. Lunch was at Steels Tavern was a traditional affair with a colonial salad, chicken pot pie and ice cream. Riders were then given free time to wander about the town and experience the colonial days before going on a walking tour and learning all about the Virginian legal system and parliament. On returning to the walking tour we visited a blacksmith forge and the stables where the gorses were kept. We were introduced to the Golden Big Horse which through a selective breeding program are purposely being bred and exported to Europe. After our tour of Williamsburg ended we were back on the bus to the Golden Corral for an

early dinner which was an all you can eat buffet with every food imaginable – a good opportunity to fill up on vegetables. Then it was back on the bus to the Ocean View Motel to spend the night. After rooms were allocated everyone went to the beach for a swim and when it was dark, everyone retired to the swimming pool. Later that evening the riders all ordered pizza and played cards.

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July. 5.30am start this morning to catch the bus over the Chesapeake Bridge Tunnel to Chincoteague Island. We then boarded a pontoon boat for viewing of the wild ponies on Assateague Island. For lunch we stopped at McDonalds where the owner had some tame ponies we could pat, then on to a wildlife tour and lighthouse viewing. We were supposed to spend time on the beach at Assateague Island, but the riders were tired, so it was another long bus ride with an unexpected side tour of Annapolis before meeting our host families in Sandy Springs, Maryland.

Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July. Change of plans today. As riders were very tired from the 12 hours on the bus, the coaches and chaperones suggested that a quiet ‘down’ day would be a good idea. We were taken to Arundel Mills Mall for retail therapy and the purchased of extra suitcases to get our shopping home. After a few hours shopping we all then went back to one of the host families Tim and Rumsey Keefe, where we had a pool party and dinner.

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July. After breakfast we all met at the Adventure Park for ropes course and zip lining. We had a delayed start due to thunderstorms, so we had an early lunch of Taco’s in a packet before tackling the course. Everyone had a great time from the beginner’s course to the more challenging. After finishing up we made our way to Laurel Park Racecourse where Time Keefe had arrange for us to meet with the Maryland Jockey Club for a welcome and a present of a cooler bag, cap and note book. One of Tim’s horses won so we all had our picture taken for the winning photo. We were also given access to the mounting yard to see the horses saddled and paraded before the race as well as touring the facilities. It was then back to Tim and Rumsey’s for another pool party and BBQ. Riders were broken into groups to do skits but this was very successful and Tim (Aust Coach) ended up being thrown into the pool. As this was our last night with our host families, gifts and thank you cards were given out.

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July. Today was one of the hottest we had experienced. Over 40 degrees. We toured the Washington Monuments by bus and then had a photo opportunity at the Lincoln Memorial before disembarking at the Natural History Museum. Riders were given a scavenger hunt list but due to the extreme heat didn’t fill many of the requests. Today was the day the air-conditioning on the bus decided it had had enough and blew warm air so it was cooler outside in the scorching heat. As we all boarded the bus we made our way to Popes Creek, Maryland to the Hrunnda family estate for indoor camping. This was an original tobacco plantation home with the original homestead consisting of three stories as well as slave quarters. We went for a swim in the Pontomac River to cool down and had a short tour on a motor boat before returning to the house for dinner.

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July. We all had the opportunity to have a sleep in today. After breakfast we were transported to Gilligan's Crab Shack and private beach where the day was spent swimming, boating, playing volley ball and water sports. The owner of the Crab Shack provided us with lunch and the afternoon was another tour up the Pontomac for those who were not swimming. We were interviewed by a local paper and returned to the house for photos. Most of the teams didn't take part, but the Australian's were happy to challenge the USA to a volley ball match so action photos could be taken. Dinner this evening was a Crab Feast where everyone had a taste of the local crabs as well as a BBQ.

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> July. This morning we said goodbye to our hosts Sarah and David Hrunda and boarded the bus to Staunton to visit the Frontier Museum. This museum was a recreation of the types of houses of the people who settled in America from the Native Americans, Africans to the Europeans. Approximately 1 hour into our visit we were hit by a massive storm where we all got completely drenched, so it was wet and soggy bus load of people to arrive at Penymeryl Farm. Everyone settles in and the afternoon was spent boating, swimming and playing games. The evening entertainment was in the games room where some watched a DVD, played cards or took part in the new game developed whilst on tour – hydration pong.

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> July. Another early start to breakfast before we boarded the bus to the Natural Bridge. We visited the Indian Village, walked to the waterfall, attended a talk on the Natural Bridge and had lunch at the visitor center. Back to Penymeryl for a free afternoon. Tim kindly organised the Australian team to go on a trail ride through the countryside around the farm which was enjoyed by all. It was then dinner and back to Natural Bridge for the Drama of Creation light show.

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> July. Riders were encouraged to have a sleep in this morning. After brunch we made our way to the Virginia Horse Park Centre to have a look at the gear and the ponies we would be using for the competition. There was Tack shop across the road where we went and made purchases. We took team photos of the riders before the opening ceremony at 6pm. After the ceremony it was back on the bus to Penymeryl for dinner.

Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July. Bus trip to the Virginia Horse Park to watch the USPC junior and Senior Games championships. This was a good opportunity to look at the hoses we would be using in the competition tomorrow night. Tim and the riders all took notes and compared these so ponies and rider could be matched up. Lunch was at the Horse Park and it was an opportunity to catch up with other riders and officials. Teams had to man a booth with the USA IPE riders to answer any questions anyone had about international competitions and tours. Back to Penymeryl for our official dinner that wasn't going to happen, but after some arranging happened. Teams provided after dinner entertainment by miming to songs which was better than the skits they did early on in the tour.

Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> July. Back to the Virginia Horse Park to watch the final of the games competition. Lunch was at the horse park before going back to Penymeryl to prepare for the evening competition. The team spent the afternoon with Tim doing some skills training and team bonding. All too soon it was back on the bus for the trip to the competition. Riders assisted their pony handler to saddle their ponies and warm them up then it was the opening parade and start of the competition. It was a closely contested competition with the results coming down to the last race. The final results Australia 1<sup>st</sup> – 60 points, Great Brittan 2<sup>nd</sup> – 59 points, Canada 3<sup>rd</sup> -57 points and USA 4<sup>th</sup> – 54 points. After ponies were untacked and owners thanked we all attended a pizza party before heading back off to Penymeryl for the riders to let off some steam.