

## Great Britain Exchange 2005

Alison Hall



As one of four riders from around Australia, I was chosen to represent Australia in the 2005 Great Britain Exchange, organised by the Australian Pony Club Council. Rachel Seider (NSW), Nicole Barnes (NSW), Dylan Fisher (WA) and I were to represent Australia as international representatives in both riding and non-riding events in the UK.

The four of us along with our chaperone, Anne Barnes, flew out from Sydney early on August 11<sup>th</sup>, headed for Heathrow in London and then Ireland, with a stopover in Singapore. However, due to a ground strike in Heathrow, we had an unexpected but pleasing stop in Paris, France. After spending the majority of the day in a nearby airport hotel, we managed to get a flight that would take us to Manchester and then on to Belfast, Ireland.

Though a little behind schedule and very tired, we landed safely in Ireland where we met up with our host family, the de Courcy-Wheelers. The day after arriving, the 13<sup>th</sup>, we were taken through the lovely countryside of Ireland to a nearby one day event at Tyrella. It was at Tyrella we first met teams from Canada and South Africa. That evening, our host family had organised a BBQ, where we met and were introduced once again to the Canadian and South African teams, as well as riders from the nearby Iveagh Pony Club. It was great to mix with people from other countries and nationalities, and to learn about their riding experiences.

Whilst in Ireland, we were taken to local towns including Banbridge, Enniskillen and Lisbourne, where we stayed at Colebrook Castle and toured the renowned Enniskillen Equestrian College (some of us would have happily stayed on here, what a fabulous place to study and ride!), as well as various studs such as the racing stables of Scarvagh Horse Stud.

While in Ireland, we also competed in our first international competition against teams from Canada, South Africa, America and a couple of teams from nearby Irish riding clubs. The event was composed of equitation (showjumping) and a turnout class, judged on presentation and included a flatwork/hunter type class. We came 4<sup>th</sup> in the equitation and 1<sup>st</sup> in the turnout section.

The day before we flew to England, the 17<sup>th</sup>, we did a final tour of a nearby eventing stud, run by brothers Steven and Trevor Smith, also former Irish Olympians. Trevor kindly invited any of us to come and work for them for six months or so in the future, which I must say gained a lot of interest!

On Thursday the 18<sup>th</sup>, we flew to Birmingham in England, where we were to be staying at a livery, or stud, in Moreton. Over the next four days we were guests at the Tetrathlon Championships in Moreton. The tetrathlon championships consisted of swimming, shooting, horse riding (cross country) and running – a very interesting and entertaining event!

Whilst in England and staying in Moreton, we visited Warwick Castle and Stratford-upon-Avon, and also exercised horses staying at the livery which were competing in the championships; this included trail riding, gallop work and jump training over steeplechase fences.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> we travelled to Sansaw, where we were staying at the United Kingdom Pony Club Championships. While there we competed in the Horse and Pony Care section, against over twenty teams, including those from Canada, South Africa, America, England and Ireland. We also walked the cross country course, and were able to watch riders compete in eventing, showjumping and mounted games.

When the championships were completed, we then travelled with the other international teams to London, where we spent the following night and day exploring and touring around the city before flying back to Australia on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

The exchange trip was an amazing experience, and very rewarding. Not only have I gained a greater appreciation of horse riding and pony club on an international level, but have made friends for life. This has undoubtedly been the highlight of my horse riding career so far, and I wouldn't hesitate in encouraging any up and coming riders to participate in such an event, as it is the opportunity of a lifetime.

