

GREAT BRITAIN UNDER 19 RIFLE TEAM SOUTH AFRICA 2005



Following a painful one and a half hours at check in, the team relaxed in departures before heading to the gate for our 8pm take off. Having boarded the plane at 7:40, some of us were understandably confused when the plane had not pushed back by 8:30. An announcement by the head of cabin staff requesting the presence of Mr S-J at the front door (immediately, please), confirmed that it was indeed us that were the cause of the delay. As Mr S-J trudged back to his seat after his adventure on the tarmac, he revealed that the cause of all the fuss was the failure of a certain team member (no name mentioned), to remove last years luggage tag. We landed at Johannesburg at 7.30 the following morning, wide-eyed and ready to rock and roll (well, what would you expect after an 11 hour flight!). The 2.5 hour trudge around Johannesburg airport looking for a way to get ourselves and our luggage out, provided much amusement for the exhausted travellers. When all was said and done, we were greeted by Deon Burger and treated to a scrumptious braai at his home before making our way to our police barrack accommodation on the outskirts of Pretoria.

Following the neck breaking, near crash journey to the Cullinan diamond mine, the monsoon-like weather soon brightened up. The cool dude Chapman flaunted the plastic (and of course his gentlemanly finesse) and bought a rather large, shiny stone, whilst Mrs S-J was extremely thoughtful purchasing 8 assorted gem stones for the team that will serve as a memento of our trip to the mine. The excursion to St. Joseph's Care Centre brought us all down to earth and proved an extremely humbling experience as we were confronted with the very real problem of AIDS in South Africa (in the district that the centre cared for, approximately 27% of the population were HIV positive). After another delicious braai, a short trip to a local mall allowed certain team members to buy extortionately cheap items of clothing before venturing to a steakhouse for supper.

After a slightly later start to the day, we braved the breakfast 'porridge' and made our way to the bushveld experience that was to occupy us for the next two days. Making an important stop for flip-flops half way, we were pleasantly surprised at the quality of our camp. Once orientated, we went for a swim and a game of water polo. A walk in the bush aimed at teaching us a bit of fieldcraft and a game drive filled the remainder of the afternoon. Dinner was served in the bush and was barbecued warthog, barbecued vegetables and a traditional South African potato/rice mix dish.

A 6am start allowed for an early morning game drive and the chance to see a few more animals. We all then braved the 10 metre abseiling tower (including Mr and Mrs S-J, the former who is rather afraid of heights and the latter who had never done it before!). The afternoon was taken up by a hugely amusing raft building exercise; Team 1 may maintain that they finished the course first, although Team 2 would argue that the objective was to complete the course on a raft, not an assortment of floating planks and barrels held together by nothing more than a few arms and legs. A very close volleyball match and a talk on bow hunting preceded the most delicious braai yet, which was followed by a second successive night of sleeping under the stars.

Another 6am start saw us packing and leaving what we had to come to regard as a very comfortable home for the past two days. However, even without the bush we still had an action packed day in store. An hour's drive saw the team to the Magaliesburg Canopy Tour, where for three hours the team (Commandant and Adjutant included) zip lined across treacherous chasms and daunting heights. While some members of the team were unaware that braking was necessary in order to slow down, the entire team had a thoroughly enjoyable time and were both sad and glad to be back on firm ground for lunch. Another lengthy drive brought us to a large flea market, where the art of haggling was positively encouraged. Gifts and souvenirs aplenty, the team finally returned to the police barracks, where after a quick swim and shower, Captain 'Arti'. Commandant of the barracks provided an exquisite traditional SA braai. We were fortunate to be able to use the event to thank and bid farewell to Therese, Jeanine and Ruan, who had set up and run the previous two days amazing activities.



Despite being woken at 5am by the other users of the accommodation adjacent to the boys bedroom, a lie in was very much welcomed by all members of the team. We headed to the mall refreshed and ready to part with some serious cash. Lunch was taken in a very tasty Italian restaurant. Stomachs bulging we headed for our third and final game drive, with the hope of adding to our tally of animals spotted. This we duly did as a family of rhinos kindly posed for photos directly in front of the truck.

Upon arriving back at the accommodation however, it was discovered that Kim's phone had decided that it liked the game drive so much, that it wanted to stay there forever. A late night poolside chess battle between Chapman and McQuillan followed the tidying of the rooms and packing away of clothes in preparation for our departure the next day.

An early start saw us loading the vehicles and heading for Potchefstroom, where we were received by Cedric and Bets van der Vyver, and treated to mid morning nibbles before heading on to Kimberly, a further four hours away. The evening was taken up by a swim, dinner, and the discovery of Dan as the team's number one chess master. *[guess who wrote this. Editor]*

Yet another pre dawn rise was needed in order to make it to Kimberly's big hole on time. Despite the misplaced assumptions of many team members, all were treated to a wide range of differing activities, including a diamond dig (well done to Peebs on discovering the much coveted green centred diamond) and old fashioned skittles range. Sunbathing and swimming was par for the course in the afternoon, as well as further games of chess that saw McQuillan's first defeat of the tour by Matt Millar. At the end of a long day, all team members retired to their beds after a tasty dinner at an Italian joint.

The team reloaded the vehicles and set off for Bloemfontein at 11am, eager to meet the challenge the legendary Bloemfontein wind. An intriguing game of 'Guess Who' ensured that the drive was an exciting one and all arrived wide eyed and keen to explore the new range. After setting up the accommodation and playing a quick game of rugby, we headed into 'Bloem' to a Mediterranean restaurant for dinner, where we enjoyed excellent service, we were pretty well the only customers that evening!

A 6am start was needed to ensure that breakfast and the weighing of triggers and rifles could be fitted in before firing commenced at 300m at 9am. Unfortunately for Dan, his rifle bag strap snapped and sent his bag hurtling towards the earth resulting in a broken foresight before shooting began. The sight replaced, all team members had at least one good shoot and many valuable lessons were learnt. The 'big' event of the day however was the shattering of the rear windscreen of the vehicle. Chapman's dream world theory suggested that the cause of the incident was a stray bullet that caught us at precisely the right angle, although more general consensus blamed the heat on a fault in the glass.

The final day of the Free State Championships saw shoots at 300, 600, 800 and 900 metres. All had a relatively easy start at 300, although a fishtailing wind at 600 and a vicious 4 o'clock wind at 800 and 900 caught many shooters out and sent scores plummeting to the low 40's or high 30's. That didn't stop Peebs from putting in a 54 ex 55 at 600, or Dan and Tom putting in 47's ex 50 at 800 and 900 respectively.

The traditional warm up match for the SABU main meeting, the Scottish Sword, was shot in devilish conditions at the longer range. Scores were generally high at 300, with Chappers managing an excellent 50.4, however 900 metres was a different story as scores were again in the low 40's or high 30's. Helen Taylor was top score at 900 with what was a superb 45.3. After lunch, the team again ventured to 300m, before moving back to 600m, to pit their combined skills against the wind in a practice team shoot. Although it was a very hard afternoon, the team worked well and showed signs of flourishing in the coming days. The formidable storm that had been brewing behind the targets finally hit the range half an hour after shooting finished, and such was the ferocity of the wind that many tents were lucky not to be ripped out of the ground and deposited in Zimbabwe.

After the storm of the previous evening, all team members hoped that the morning would bring more docile conditions. The Gods duly obliged, and a short range team match practice was shot in a relatively calm right to left wind. After lunch, more team practice followed, this time at the longer distances of 800 and 900m. The wind increased steadily throughout the shoot, and coupled with changes through zero, the coaches had to have their eyes glued to their scopes to catch the changes. Although scores could have been higher, the team was functioning well as a unit and hopes were high for a good performance against the South Africans on the Monday. After an extremely welcome lie in, the team headed to Bloemfontein to shop, do laundry and wander around the waterfront. With the Internet café closed, we spent much of the afternoon in the cinema before heading to dinner at Butchers Brothers, one of Bloemfontein's better steakhouses. Despite not being 'that hungry', Peebs promptly ordered the 1 kilo steak. After what looked like a crippling break at the 750g point, he pucker up his strength to polish off the rest, chips 'n all. The team then headed back to camp and got their heads down in preparation for the following days team match.

Following a 'Queens I' in the morning, in which top score was Kim with 103, the afternoon saw the first of the two matches between the GB U19's and the SA Juniors, the International Junior Long Range Match. Consisting of 2 and 15 at 800 and 900, the match is a long and tiring one, requiring coaches to be at their best for anything up to 70 minutes. Coupled with the searing heat on the range, it was not hard to see why some team members struggled. When the dust had settled, it was revealed that the SA Juniors had triumphed over the GB U19's by a margin of 854 to 812. Our top score was Hunter with 143, followed by Richardson on 141. The evening was spent enjoying the overseas team braai at Reyneke Park, which enabled all team members to spend a bit more time getting to know their South African opposite numbers.

Next day, a brisk 7 o'clock wind that gradually swung through 6, 5 and 4 and back again as the day progressed ensured that all shooters had to watch out for changes from a right to left wind, especially at long range. Matt Millar's superb 50.9v at 300m set the standard for the day, closely followed by Benest on 50.5v and Hunter on 50.4v. 600, 800 and 900 were contested in much harder conditions however, and scores were proportionately lower. The evening was spent chilling out in camp in preparation for a busy day on the range the next day.



The morning was taken up by the first stage of the States Presidents Cup, the SA equivalent of HM The Queens Medal. After two possibles at 300 and 500, Peebles was unlucky to finish on 102, whilst Millar and Richardson were tied for top spot on 103. Almost all scores were above 100, meaning that, since the first stage score is carried forward to Stage II and used to determine the finalists, all of the GB U19 were in a good position for stage 2. The Grand continued in the afternoon with a further shoot at 600 followed by the final 900m of the meeting. Both shoots were contested in fishtailing winds (something we had come to expect), and a score of 44+ at 900m proved to be a very good effort. The evening was spent thanking those individuals who had made the trip possible with the Team's official dinner at the New York restaurant in Bloemfontein, where gifts were presented as a token of the team's appreciation.

After waking up to typical Bisley conditions (howling wind, lashing rain etc.), the majority of the team were looking forward to gaining a few points on the South African 'rain amateurs'. Alas, it was not to be, as the range committee decided that shooting in the rain was a no no, due to the fact that the targets were not waterproof and they had to be preserved for the World "F" Class championships that followed the bisley. Alternative arrangements were made, and we found ourselves heading to Bloemfontein's waterfront once again. After enjoying lunch in an Italian restaurant, the team with our SA counterparts went to the cinema and enjoyed, what will surely grab next years Oscar for Best Picture, Miss Congeniality 2. The rest of the time was spent shooting some pool and enjoying an evening meal before heading back to camp for a much needed sleep.

The day started looking like the heavens could open at any moment, however as the day progressed the chances of rainfall slowly ebbed away. State Presidents II was shot in the morning in overcast conditions and a relatively simple downrange wind, although all shooters had again to be wary of being caught out by a change in direction, something made rather harder by the lack of a clear and reliable mirage. The Junior Protea Match was shot in the afternoon, and resulted in another victory for the SA U19's. In both matches, it was a case of the South Africans

winning the match, rather than GB losing it. The SA U19's shot remarkably well and the training that they had undertaken after losing both matches last year certainly paid off. The evening was spent enjoying the Protea dinner, where appreciation presents were handed out by some of the teams.

Following a much welcomed semi-lie in (8.30am get-up), Major Fraser awoke us with the news that four team members, Chapman, Hunter, Peebles and Richardson, along with Ross McQuillan, had qualified for the State Presidents Final, a GB U19 record. The rest of the morning was spent enjoying the last of the sunshine, with certain team members opting for the final day, 'tactical burn'. Conditions for the final were far from easy. The heat was certainly a factor, and at times the conflicting mirage/flag combination proved a tester for the five shooters. In the end, it was the RAF's Dave Calvert who finished top of the pile, with a superb 297 ex.300. Top shot for us was Ross with 287, followed by Hunter on 286, a fantastic effort given the conditions. The evening saw us hosting the South Africans for our farewell braai, an occasion thoroughly enjoyed by all.

The final day of any tour is rarely a particularly joyful occasion. After three weeks in sunny South Africa, the prospect of returning to cloudy Blighty didn't seem like a terribly inviting one. Thus it was with heavy hearts that we departed Bloemfontein at 9am, leaving behind the range that we had come to call home for the past 10 days. The tour has provided all team members with invaluable experience, and I think all will agree that we will rarely compete in such testing conditions as those we encountered on the Bloemfontein range. The GB U19 tour is one that we hope will continue to run for many more years, allowing more young people to experience not only the shooting, but also the fantastic hospitality and generosity of the South African people.

Postscript:

The whole team thank all those, far too numerous to name, both in the UK and South Africa for the enormous support, help and encouragement without which the 2004 Tour to South Africa could not have taken place. It was outstandingly successful in all aspects and none of it would have been possible without your efforts. Thank You. A photographic record, which you are encouraged to examine whenever you can visit, is held in Derby Lodge.

UNDER 19 INTERNATIONAL PROTEA MATCH

Great Britain	300m	600m	900m	Total
Tom Hunter	49.04	48.02	49.03	146.09
Matthew Millar	48.04	49.02	49.03	146.09
Kim Buffoni	47.02	47.07	48.04	142.13
Daniel Richardson	50.02	47.01	45.00	142.03
Scott Benest	47.04	46.02	47.03	140.09
Helen Taylor	43.02	47.03	37.00	127.05
	284.18	284.17	274.13	842.48

Coaches: Tom Chapman & Malcolm Peebles

South Africa	283.22	286.21	284.20	853.63
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UNDER 19 INTERNATIONAL LONG RANGE MATCH

Great Britain	800m	900m	Total
Tom Hunter	73.05	70.02	143.07
Scott Benest	69.04	67.01	136.05
Matthew Millar	67.01	67.01	134.02
Helen Taylor	70.06	61.06	131.07
Kim Buffoni	69.05	58.01	127.06
Daniel Richardson	69.01	72.06	114.07
	417.22	395.12	812.34

Coaches: Tom Chapman & Malcolm Peebles

South Africa	432.31	422.25	854.56
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