

GB UNDER 19 TOUR DIARY - SOUTH AFRICA 2014

Saturday 29 March - Arrived Jo'burg approx 06.30. Met by Deon Burger and his daughter, Margaret. Collected minibus, hire-car and a trailer for each and drove a couple of hours or so to Cedric and Bets house in Potchefstroom. All very tired. Cedric and Bets very kindly gave us a ample cold lunch after which we drove to the Artillery Barracks just outside town where all the male members were to stay for the night. Single rooms, adequate with comfortable beds, showers etc at end of corridor, lots of hot water which was very welcome. Had dinner in Potchefstroom with Cedric and Bets; very good meal accompanied by the sound of a burglar alarm from across the street. Girls, Alice and Aimee, stayed with Cedric and Bets.

Sunday 30 March - All slept well and arose about 09.00. Packed up and drove to "Mike's Place" for brunch. Team ate huge portions. On to Checkers to buy provisions for the next few days breakfast. Drove a few kms out of town to Manzini Farm, about a mile down a track off the road. Lovely setting, with round thatch roofed huts and dormitories of varying sizes built around the old farm house. The new owner, of 2 weeks, and his partner were clearly still getting used to the place however were very keen to do things right. After allocating who was sleeping where it was time for dinner. The previous owners very kindly organised and cooked a typical SA braai in the grounds. We were joined by the England Commonwealth Games "shotists" of David Luckman and Parag Patel accompanied by the team manager, Simon Belither and team coach, John Leighton-Dyson. They had just flown in and were due to have an extensive training camp on the Potchefstroom range for the rest of the week; then shoot the South African Championships in Bloemfontein the following week. This was all part of preparation for the Commonwealth Games to be held in Edinburgh just after Bisley this year. The Under 19s and England team conversed all evening giving the youngsters the opportunity to pick the experts brains on all shooting matters.

Monday 31 March- Breakfast outside together at 08.00. After clearing up the team spent the morning at the farm taking things easy. Surprisingly only the Commandant, Richard Benest, the Adjutant, Simon Fraser, and Christian Nunan had a swim in the pool. The others sat in the sun listening to music and threw a ball about for a while. Had lunch at a Premi Patti restaurant in Potchefstroom, then met up with the England camp at Cedric and Bets's house. We drove in convoy a few kms to a bullet making factory. We all found this fascinating. We then moved onto a lion farm where there were lots of lions of varying sizes in a few compounds.



The owner grabbed a cub and let us all hold it whilst having photographs taken. The cub was remarkably placid however after a while it clearly had had enough of us. We ate dinner at the farm next to the lions and at dusk they duly roared for us.

Tuesday 1 April – Arose early again, getting used to it now. Had breakfast outside again, getting used to that too. Into the vehicles and drove a couple of hours to “Africa’s Stonehenge”, by the Val river on the outskirts of Parys. Here the team put on river safety kit in preparation for paddling down the river. After the briefing the team realised the necessity of wearing the safety kit when each inflatable with 2 members in was pushed into the river from the bank about 10 foot above the water.



Fabian Amy and the Commandant didn't partake in this and drove into Parys in search of a huge hole that a meteorite had made a long time ago. The search was unproductive but they found the local museum, lovely old building, however that was closed. The river party had been successful, having spent most of the time in the river rather than in the canoes. All completely soaked but smiling. After showering and changing we eventually all had lunch, the female contingent must have lost their soap or something like that. The dining hall of the conference centre was cavernous and we were rather lost in it. Lunch was accompanied by a short electric storm, maybe God was warning us not to eat too much. Journey back to Manzini was rather quiet, paddling and swimming in and on the Val must have taxed most. Rested and watched the sun go down. Drove into Potchefstroom and had the first battle over the use of IT at the dinner table. This resulted in Simon banning use as soon as the food arrived. Not much conversation after that though the journey back in the minibus was pretty lively.

Wednesday 2 April - Usual fresh air breakfast outside then team building activities for the morning. This in the main worked well, all the different tasks being designed to bring the team together in a helpful caring way. However when 1 task resulted in raw eggs and flour being thrown at one another the helpful caring atmosphere was in danger of collapse and a conflict resolution team were nearly brought in. At this point the half time whistle was blown and time out was taken to clean up. Some must have had more egg and flour to clear up than others judging by the time taken. The 2nd half of the morning was taken up with a blind fold communication exercise, volleyball and tug-of-war



After lunch a shotgun clay trap was set up and the team all had 10 clays. The trap was operated by the shotgun instructor's 3 small children with great aplomb. To finish the activities we had 5 shots using a scoped .22 rifle at clay discs set up on a log about 25 yards away. After helping clear up we gathered in the open sided hut by the small reservoir and had the first briefing regarding shooting in Bloemfontein. Whilst this was going on, it was accompanied by 2 very sudden brief thunderstorms with plenty of lightening. The day was completed by a game drive around the farm in an old Mercedes Uni-Mog dating from the late 1950s. Lots of animals were spotted, however being quiet proved problematic for some.

Thursday 3 April - Got up at 06.00, packed, had breakfast at 07.00, packed the vehicles and left at 08.00. Drove in convoy to Cedric and Bets to pick up the trailer, then drove to the range at Bloemfontein, which took about 4 hours with a couple of stops. We unpacked the rifles, built them up, checking everything then locked them up in the armoury. We then drove to our accommodation at Kwagga Lodge on the outskirts of Bloemfontein. It was a motel type establishment with jolly comfortable beds, the most important thing.

Friday 4 April - Up early again, though it's now no problem whatsoever. Had a good breakfast, then off to the range where we shot 3, 6 & 8 hundred metres. It was pretty hot and difficult by standards we were used to in England. That evening we ate at Gray's College for Boys and had a typical school dinner which was very welcome. Back at Kwagga Lodge we had a debrief led by the Commandant where we all chipped in by explaining what we had done well and what we needed to address to do better. This virtually covered everything and made us all think about what we actually had to do to fire a good shot before the conditions changed. We all realised that getting the shots away quickly was absolutely essential.

Saturday 5 April - Shot the last of the Free State competitions this morning. Drove to Grays College to have lunch then back to range to shoot 300 & 900. After shooting we attended the Free State Prize giving in the bar at the range. The team picked up a lot of medals. That evening we ate at a Spurr restaurant on the waterfront in town. It was so noisy nobody could converse. Good food though.

Sunday 6 April - No shooting today, the South Africans have a day of rest on Sunday. Quite right too. We had a quick debrief in the pool room to look at plots, nothing too heavy as we had covered the basics previously; just a few reminders. We drove to Maselspoort a few kms away for a relaxing day. Had a really good old fashioned Sunday lunch in the restaurant to the accompaniment of a lady playing the piano non-stop for a couple of hours.



Afterwards the team sat around on the grass, played with a ball and swam for the rest of the afternoon. In the evening we collected pizzas and ate them back at Kwagga Lodge.

Monday 7 April - Had to get up really early as the opening ceremony at the range for the SABU meeting started at 07.15. Aimee Clarke who had been appointed Captain raised the flag as the Under 19 representative. Had 3 individual shoots at 300, 600 & 600 again. Conditions pretty steady, most coped pretty well. Had a practice team match in the afternoon whilst the locals had inter club matches. It didn't go particularly well which knocked the wind out of our sails somewhat; food for thought. We talked about it during the evening and wondered how we could do better; which we obviously would have to do to have any chance of beating the SA Juniors.

Tuesday 8 April - All desperately trying to cope with conditions with varying degrees of success. Christian Nunan's elevation knob on his sight dropped off during a shoot and had to borrow Simon's. Thankfully the RAF came to the rescue and lent Christian a spare sight. We didn't shoot in the afternoon, more SA provincial matches, however Christian sighted in his rifle with the borrowed sight. Getting back to Kwagga Lodge in the middle of the afternoon gave the opportunity to rest a little and prepare score sheets for the next day. We had dinner at Grays College again by which time the team had perked up somewhat with lots of banter.

Wednesday 9 April - We all shot at 300, 600 & 800 with varying success. Had a team practice shoot at long range in the afternoon. Team drills were much slicker, however there were quite a lot of indifferent shots fired. Commandant made comments to that effect. We then changed into No 1s for the first half Prize Giving. Lots of medals given out with some going to the Under 19 team members. Went to the Long Horn steak house, which was very good however some fell asleep at the table.

Thursday 10 April - State Presidents 1 was fired with most doing well. Had lunch in the main hall, then fired 800 and 900 in the afternoon. Very hot all day; team resorting to wet scarves around their necks to bring the temperature down. In the evening SABU had a reception at Reyneke Park. The Commandant announced the Under 19 team and the Captain, Aimee Clarke, addressed the hordes thanking SABU. It was a bit of a long evening however the team had the chance to meet up with the SA Juniors.

Friday 11 April - Arrived at the range at 07.00 to prepare for the State President's stage 2. Team members fired with varying results. Probably the hottest day thus far. At lunch I gave the team a short briefing regarding the practiced drills.



We won the match by 30 pts, the firers mostly performed better than expected, the coaches coped very well indeed. Had to get a move on after the match to get to Grays College for dinner which once again was very good. The people running the catering there couldn't be more helpful. Had a very quick team debrief in the pool room on returning to Kwagga Lodge. Had to be quick as some were literally falling asleep.

Saturday 12 April - Up again very early, left for range at 06.30. Had the 2nd match versus the South African Juniors in the morning. Team performance a little more slick, however the winning margin was reduced to 15 pts. This was due to the SA team performing considerably better particularly at 900 metres where they equalled our gun score.



The afternoon saw the final shoot, the State President's Final. The Under 19s had 4 in the final, Seth Dowley, Alice Southall, Fabien Amy and Seb Sander. The Commandant, Richard Benest also qualified. Having half the team in the Final was a pretty good show. Parag Patel was a very popular winner. The Under 19s asked Parag if he would like the team to carry him in the chair. Parag accepted the invitation with a big smile. After the announcement Parag was duly carried about half way to the bar, which was a jolly good effort, then the rest of the way in the back of Peter Bramley's pick up. David Luckman had won the Grand Aggregate with a record score dropping just 2 points from 665, so a very good bisley for the England Pair. At the prize giving the team performed their carrying duties very competently before picking up quite a few awards. They looked very smart in their No 1s. That evening we had our last meal in Bloemfontein, at the New York Restaurant. Good fun but restrained as the team relaxed after the concentration of shooting was over.



Sunday 13 April - Last early morning at Kwagga Lodge, this time 05.30. Cleared rooms, packed everything into vehicles and trailers. Deon Burger led the way to his home in Pretoria, where we left a trailer in his garage. We then drove to Rietvlei reservoir where we stayed for one night. We divided into 3 three chalet type huts next to the reservoir, very quiet and idyllic. After a short game drive we went to the Karoo Cattle and Land Restaurant for another fine meal at which the Commandant ate his first steak of the tour, everyone was more than ready for bed.

Monday 14 April - Up early as we had a long drive to Hazyview via the Sudwala Caves. At breakfast we discovered that the girls had slept downstairs on the settees as they had found some mouse droppings on their beds. This caused some amusement as Aimee spends half her life up to knees in horse manure. The first stop was at the Sudwala Caves; an ancient massive hole in the rock with all sorts of stalagmites and stalactites. The guide told us that the acoustics in the cave were perfect and that concerts with world class artists were held there. She then invited us to sing to hear. The only taker was the Commandant who sang the first verse of the Victoria College Carmen, the school song in Latin. We had a very restful lunch at Le Fera then drove onto Loerie Farm outside Hazyview. It was a rather isolated establishment, rather rambling in nature with plenty of space and we had the place to ourselves; absolutely ideal. We ate at a Spur restaurant at Penny Bridge a mile or so down the road. All the waitresses were awfully enthusiastic, kept rushing about and singing. Most of us too tired to take much notice. Needless to say we had an early night and had no trouble going to sleep.

Tuesday 15 April - After breakfast drove a mile or so down the road to an activity centre to do more messing about on water.



After the first expedition on a river in the first week the team were old hands now and coped well with the rapids and water jumps however the group leader didn't allow the tallest, 9 metre, jump as it was deemed too dangerous.

After changing and drying off we had lunch in a lovely restaurant across the road which was privately owned. It made a change to be in an establishment with it's own character rather than a franchised chain. We sat outside in the garden next to the river eating to the sound of running water. After the leisurely lunch we shopped for provisions to make a braai in the evening at our accommodation. On returning, some had a swim in the pool which was very refreshing. In the evening everyone cooked their own meat on the braai so there were no complaints. No one had any trouble going to sleep until the torrential rain woke the lighter sleepers in the middle of the night. The early night was a good idea as we had to get up very early 04.45, to be ready to drive to the Kruger Park at 05.15.

Wednesday 16 April - Most got up ok however we set off a little behind schedule, but still managed to get to the Kruger Gate at 05.55. We were greeted by a line of vehicles waiting for the gate to open at 06.00. The waiting vehicles were almost jostling with each other to get in front, all rather strange as the Park was open for 12 hours and not lacking in space being bigger than Israel apparently. We all had to sign the usual disclaimers about relations not getting too cross if we ended up in the tummy of something big and wild, or words to that effect. At this point Deon Burger told us not to expect to see too much as it was not unusual to spend all day in the park and only see Impala. Well we saw millions of Impala and lovely as they were, we couldn't help thinking that Deon's comment was rather apt. However within minutes we saw a herd of elephants only a few yards from the vehicle.



The day continued in that vain and we saw just about everything except wild dogs. The animals were mostly only a few metres from the vehicle and this caused excited chatter from some; during one of these excited moments, one member of the team was heard to comment that the poor animals might need to borrow our ear defenders to save their ear drums from damage.





The only mishap during the day was one of the team being violently ill out of the door of the vehicle. That was a bit awkward as it is forbidden to get out of the vehicle. Apparently a German tourist had done just that not long ago and got eaten by a lion. The group thought they were going to have to spend the night in the park as the gates shut at 18.00 on the dot. There was an audible sigh of relief in the vehicle when the gates appeared in the distance. We ate at Topolinos in Penny Bridge and went to bed very tired.

Thursday 17 April - Another early start to go to an animal rehabilitation sanctuary, Moholoholo, a couple of hours away and had to be there for 10.00 to attend a lecture about how the place deals with animals that have ended up there. The lecturer gave a very polished talk on how they operate to try to get the animals out in the wild again. Of course that is not always possible. After we stroked a cheetah, spoke to some hyenas, fed some vultures whilst they sat on our arms, they are quite heavy birds with smelly breath. The stars of the place were the honey badgers. There had been a National Geographic programme made at the sanctuary about these badgers recently. Watching these animals it was obvious that they were pretty intelligent and the only way to keep them in their pen was by an electrified fence.



We had lunch at the Upper Deck restaurant just down the road. It had a lovely view across the veldt from the first floor dining room with a big balcony. In the afternoon we drove up into the hills surrounding the Blyde River Canyon to a place with amazing views across a valley and the round rock formations, the Three Rondavels.



Took a team photograph here after buying the usual touristy stuff however there is a limit to the number of elephants one can buy. On the journey back to our base to stopped in Sabie at a restaurant called the Wild Fig and had the best meal of the tour. It was privately owned and the owners had put a lot of effort into making the place have it's own character as well as having jolly good food. No trouble going to sleep when we got back to base.



Friday 18 April - Today we didn't have far to go, just down the road to another activity centre to do a canopy tour, whatever that was to be. On arrival it became evident that it was whizzing down zip wires attached by a harness. The practice was pretty straight forward and the mood was good natured as we drove up to the start point in the centre's pickup. When we arrived on the first platform and saw the first run, things went a bit quiet as the team took in the length of the run, couldn't really see the end, it was so far away and the wire was goodness know how high above the ground, couldn't really see that either. The Commandant went first, before he had a chance to change his mind we believe. The rest of the team followed on though the girls took the opportunity to admire the view for a long time before setting off. There were 6 runs and the concerned looks soon turned into broad smiles as each was completed.



After lunch we went to look at a couple of waterfalls, very picturesque, lots of water falling down all over the place. We had our last evening meal at the Kuka Restaurant & Cocktail Bar close to our base where the Commandant was given a rather nice ice cream whilst the whole staff sang a South African version of Happy Birthday, or something like that. Commandant, rather taken aback by this was prompted to say a few words. He congratulated the team on the two wins in the matches, in particular the manner in which the team worked together and presented the Merit bar from the bisley. He then went on to thank all those who had contributed to the success of the tour on the South African side, especially Cedric and Bets in Potchefstroom and Deon Burger who accompanied us during this last leg. Finally he made sure that we didn't underestimate the contribution that Simon Fraser had made, not only to the tour, but to the entire Cadet shooting movement.

Saturday 19 April - Left early to drive back to Johannesburg. For some reason there were more in the car than the minibus on the first leg which took two and a half hours. On the way it was Alice's turn to be sick out of the window, must have caught Fabien's bug; couldn't stop as there was no time. We did however have a brief comfort and breakfast stop at a service station type place. The view from the gents lav' was amazing, a big plate glass window overlooking a watering hole for the usual African animals. For the second leg some of the car occupants transferred to the minibus, not sure why. The end of the second leg saw us at Deon's house in Pretoria, where we changed into number 1s and had some refreshments. All Deon's family were there and we spent a very pleasant hour chatting about the tour. It was then time to leave for the airport, we drove in convoy which took about 40 minutes, handed back the vehicles and said our goodbyes to our hosts who had become friends. The British Airways double decker aeroplane left more or less on time and we arrived at Heathrow early in the

morning ten or so hours later. We got on a coach to Bisley and had our final debrief etc at Derby Lodge where our farewells were made. Most departed with parents, however one team member promptly went down to Century range, met up with his school and sat in the coaching chair to help some younger members of his shooting team.

All in all, a dam fine tour!

Finally we thank all those who in every way made our tour possible and enabled our success.

