



GREAT BRITAIN UNDER 19 RIFLE TEAM SOUTH AFRICA TOUR 2002



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Commandant: Jeremy Hakim
Adjutant: Craig Stewart
Armourer: Peter Medhurst

Team: Chris Cotillard
James Headon
James Hodge
Steven Howard
Peter Stock
John Thompson
Owen Vallis

At Easter time the GB Under 19 Rifle Team head south for their now established tour of South Africa. However this year's selected individuals, from the 2002 squad, were to experience something completely different.

After a gruelling Maple Taste the team arrived at Heathrow and checked in, ready to say goodbye to 'life as we know it'. However, our hopes were a bit premature. About half an hour into the flight the Captain came over the speakers to announce that there was a minor emergency and that we would have to return to London. The problem arose - as no surprise to any of us - in the seat next to Jeremy Hakim, our Commandant, who had been stopped at every security point before boarding. A small electrical fire in one of the seat's in-flight entertainment systems meant that we were to be delayed by about 24 hours. Cheers "Shifty"!

Having landed in Johannesburg we encountered the heat and bureaucracy before collecting our combis (minibuses) and driving to the police barracks at Pretoria with the help of Hannes van Rooyen. At Pretoria we met Christo Lauterbach, our guide for the next few days and set off for our first real taste of South Africa including dirt roads. Having arrived at Middlepath Farm we had a taste of what was to come, real food! The food there was nothing like that in Britain: it actually tasted of something. This trip was destined to do nothing to help our waistlines. That night we went out on a hunt, looking for Kudu or Waterbuck but the moon was too bright and they saw us. Next day Christo managed to get us into Madikwe Game Reserve where we saw an abundance of wildlife including kudu, impala, springbok, wildebeest, giraffes and many more although unfortunately the big five eluded us. It was a truly amazing experience.

From the natural to the unreal, we moved on to Sun City. This large "entertainment" complex, based around a couple of big architectural spaces full of slot machines, is dominated by the kitsch but undeniably imposing Palace of the Lost City. Off to the wave pool to cool down! The next day we went to Gold Reef City, South Africa's answer to Alton Towers as well as a village museum to "yesterdays' gold mining and way of living". After much persuasion and with help from Craig Stewart we got Jeremy on the 'scary' looking rides. We found one ride with just one big loop. After being strapped in with both shoulder harness and leg straps, nothing happened, then suddenly the train flew forward and around the loop. I don't think I have ever heard people scream so loudly! Cedric and Bets van der Vyver met us at the entrance to the city and led us to their house in Potchefstroom where the team enjoyed an incredible Braai (barbecue).

This year's team was to go through a unique team building experience, with command tasks and trust exercises in the morning and rafting in the afternoon. Jeremy and Craig managed to provide us all with a classic moment by getting into their raft with their backs to each other and then wondered why, when they started to paddle, they were not going anywhere! At the end of the day there was yet another fantastic Braai awaiting a now very tired team! Saying goodbye to Cedric and Bets until Bloemfontein, we headed south for Kimberly, home of the Big Hole, for three days of relaxation, tourism and a fantastic

game drive. One of many highlights of the stay at Kimberly was going to a Spur Steakhouse, another of our kind sponsors. The food and service were excellent.

With the touring part over it was now time to settle down to business at Bloemfontein. Whatever we were told at Maple Taste before we set out, it could not prepare us for the conditions to come. On arrival we went to have a look at the range to find the South African Palma Squad having difficulties; we were instilled with everything but confidence. However on our first day's shooting we found that it wasn't too bad, as long as you had your wits about you but that was easier said than done! On the first practice day, Chris Cotillard and James Headon showed us that it was possible by getting 50.7 and 50.3 respectively.

The Hamilton on the first Friday produced a good team performance with solid shooting from Chris Cotillard, James Headon, James Hodge, Peter Thompson and Peter Medhurst.

Saturday would be a testing day. The morning was the warm up individual match, the Scottish Sword, where yet again Chris Cotillard proved himself with a 98.8 finishing 22nd and Owen Vallis with a 96.6 finishing 34th. The rest of the day was devoted to the Under 19 Long Range match. This would show us really how little we knew about the weather conditions in South Africa. With one flag going one way, another going in completely the opposite direction and the mirage that couldn't decide which way it wanted to run, the coaches really had their work cut out. The South African Under 19's showed their knowledge by scoring 1192.74 to our 1108.46. However we were still in high spirits as we had learnt a lot from the match.

As the team started to find their feet some good scores began to come through, the Dewar Cup saw Chris Cotillard with a 99.7! In the Dalrymple the two Peters led with Peter Stock 102.5 finishing 68th and Peter Medhurst with 102.11 finishing 49th. One of the highlights had to be Chris getting into a tie shoot for the Dave Smith Cup at 900 metres. After a very close shoot Chris ended up second in the competition with a 50.3. Steve Howard shot a very credible 102.6 coming 74th in the State Presidents First Stage.

The two Peters again managed to do well in the Col R Bodley at 900 metres, Peter Stock 44.3 and Peter Medhurst 45.2 finishing 50th and 36th respectively. This merely highlighted how hard the conditions could get! Peter Stock was in a tie shoot for the B class in the Jack Mitchley at 300 metres with a 50.5, showing James Headon 49.7 and James Hodge 49.6 that it is always better not to mess up that crucial shot! After coming second in the tie shoot Pete ended up 21st overall in the competition. This year everyone was fortunate enough that no matter how badly (or well) you shot in the State Presidents First Stage, you had a second chance as everyone qualified for Stage Two. This saw some solid shooting from everybody but more importantly from John Thompson 145.17, Owen Vallis 147.12, and Peter Medhurst who all qualified for the Final. The day of the Final was not as easy as it looked but the eventual winner was John's dad!

The team was thoroughly focussed for the Under 19 International, our big team match. Owen Vallis was selected as the Match Captain and Head Coach, more than well deserved. James Hodge and Peter Stock coached the other target. After 300 metres we were only behind by three points. However, 600 metres proved costly, putting the team 19 points behind. We knew that we had to put all that behind us and with the help of some very good coaching and shooting, the whole team dropped only nine points at 900 metres. Unfortunately the South Africans only dropped four and won the match with 870.61 to our 846.59. As Owen later pointed out at the Protea dinner, for two Under 19 teams to only drop nine and four points at 900 metres, was youth shooting at its best and, with that, the South Africans deserved to win.

On Sunday, after a very successful farewell meal with the South African U19 team on the previous night, the team said goodbye to Bloemfontein and headed for the airport at Johannesburg. We unanimously voted that this had to be one of the best trips that any of us have gone on. Our thanks go to Jeremy Hakim, Craig Stewart and Peter Medhurst for putting up with us for three weeks. To all our sponsors, hosts and those who put so much effort into youth shooting very warm thanks. And finally a very big thank-you to Simon Fraser whose hard work and dedication made this trip possible.



