



CANADA 2000 Tour Diary



The team assembled at Bisley on Saturday 5th August. We were bid farewell by Colin Cheshire and others and set off to Heathrow, where we were efficiently checked through by Debbie from Sportworld and experienced baggage master Nigel Ball. A 9 hour flight later we arrived in the evening sunshine of Vancouver and transferred by coach to the Rainbow Motor Inn at Chilliwack.

Despite the long journey there was a team push towards a 'settling in' social evening. The whole team (minus Nick Tremlett, who preferred to stay in and play with his laptop) set off for an evening at Friendly Mike's bar, where we enjoyed - but didn't take part in - the karaoke, received free pitchers of beer from Mike himself, and received the rare distinction of being described as 'cool' by the locals.

With three days rest before the start of the BCRA meeting, serious team preparation got underway. Recreational activities ranged from the pedestrian to the downright dangerous. With a team that included several pilots it was not surprising the pleasure flights were booked, but it was the Army Major Alwyn McLean who was allowed the controls on take off on his first ever lesson, along with two rather nervous passengers. Derek Lowe, already an accomplished pilot, flew capably over Vancouver and back, and bounced just twice on a tricky landing in cross winds. Other activities included (in ascending order of dangerousness) golf (balls lost 27), fishing in the salmon-rich Frazer River (fish caught none), horse riding (sore backsides two), and only one person was brave enough to attempt the Valley of Death water slide at Cultus Lake.

On Sunday evening we were invited to an informal gathering at Bob and Kay Pitcairn's house on the hills overlooking the Frazer River. We met some of the local shooters and range staff, enjoyed warm hospitality, admired Bob's self-built house of red cedar and his impressive collection of embroidered badges from Canada and Bisley.

Competition got underway in earnest on Wednesday 9th. Seven ranges in one day took some getting used to, but the reputation of the General de Vokes range lived up to all expectations. This has to be one of the most scenic ranges in the world, with 24 targets going back to 600 yards, with the backstop of a wooded mountain directly behind and seriously impressive snow capped rocky peaks further in the distance.

Vice-Captain Chris Hockley set the ball running by coping with the early morning sunlight and shadows at 300m and recorded 50.8 to win the Victoria Match, counting out Frazer Valley's Leroy Whitnack. Most of the team recorded possibles during the day but with lower central counts on the smaller V bull. Alex Pilgrim however shot a superb 50.10 at 300m followed by a 50.6 at 500m to win the McDonald Stewart 1st stage, by 1V bull from Jeff Brookes of the USA team.

David Calvert then started his Captain's innings by winning the Lt. Governor's 1st stage, over a Queen's I course, with 105.14. This was 5Vs clear of Ed Bergsma of the USA in 2nd, and Peter Griggs in 3rd, a further 2 Vs behind. David followed this with a 50.8 to win the Westminster match at 500m, a V ahead of Nigel Ball and D. Adams (USA). David's consistent shooting left him leading the day's aggregate with 1 off, with the next placed Brits being Nigel Ball and Jon Cload hot on his heels.

Thursday's course of fire saw the shooters move back to 600m and experience the Chilliwack wind in full force. With trees surrounding the whole range, the entrance road to the range allowed the wind to rush in and swirl off the trees at the other end, making 500 and 600m a lot more challenging than the shorter ranges. The weather was again hot with strong winds but this did not stop David Calvert again finishing on top for the GB team dropping just 2 points, to lead the TR aggregate so far with 3 off out of 555.

In the first match of the day, the Duff Stewart, Bob Best of Canada topped the list with 50.9, with Louisa Weidman and Nigel Ball 1V behind. Following this the 2nd stage of the MacDonald Stewart was shot at 400 and 600m. John Lloyd of the USA had 100.11 to complement his 100.13 the previous day and win the Aggregate with 200.24. Peter Griggs was 2nd with 199.17 and Alex Pilgrim 3rd with 198.28.

Leroy Whitnack won the Vancouver at 500m with 50.6, ahead of Bob Pitcairn and Alwyn McLean on countback. The final individual shoot of the day was the Past Presidents Match at 600m. David Calvert continued his run with 50.5, just behind John Benjamin of the Douglas Ridge Rifle Club, with his 50.6 winning on countback from Nigel Ball. The rest of the afternoon was taken up with team shooting. For the Regional Teams Match at 600m GB divided into three teams, and the team of Chris Hockley, Reg Roberts, Alex Pilgrim, Martin Millar, Peter Griggs and James Bullock won, dropping 9 points.

A frontal weather system brought about a change in weather on Friday to cooler, misty conditions. The ammunition we were using, which was A Max bullets and Varget propellant, and made for us by Jim Bullock, proved its grouping capabilities in the benign conditions. GB dominated the first few places of the Lt. Governor's 2nd Stage at 400 and 600m, with Chris Weeden winning with 100.17, Alex Pilgrim 2nd with 100.14 and Nigel Ball 3rd with 100.12.

The Flintoff Memorial at 500m was won by Nigel Ball with 50.9, when the lowest score returned by a GB team member was 49.3 by the Vice-Captain. The last individual shoot of the day, the Vern Barclay at 600m, saw Michael Dunia from the USA win with 50.7, with David Calvert 2nd on countback and Clint Dahlstrom 3rd. David's 50 was enough to secure him the Grand Aggregate, from Nigel Ball and Nick Tremlett.

With the Grand finished and most of the shoots out of the way, the programme eased up. The afternoon of team shoots was at a fairly relaxed pace and started with the Sir Arthur Currie Teams match at 600m. Easy conditions prevailed and the GB Blue team, which had won the Regional Teams Match, left the mound feeling very pleased with 299 out of 300, only to find that one the USA Gold team had beaten them by 2Vs.

The final day of the meeting was a gentle morning's work compared to the previous days, with just the Lt. Governor's and Life Governor's matches to resolve. Sunshine over the targets returned to the General de Vokes range and gave one or two sight picture problems at 600m, keeping the high scores lower than usual. However, Nick Tremlett managed a 50.7 to go with his previous one in the Life Governor's and win with 100.14, ahead of David Calvert and Clint Dahlstrom on 100.13. John Stevens was 4th with the last 100, with 11Vs.

The Lt. Governor's Final at 600m followed after lunch, by which time the wind had increased in strength, varying from 1/2 minute left to 3 1/2 right. As a result the average score was 72, when 74s would have been the average on any other day. Nigel Ball and David Calvert went into the final on level scores, having to carry all previous stage scores through. Nigel dropped his last for 74.6 but was quickly informed the Captain had dropped 2, leaving Nigel victorious, David in 2nd, and Bob Best 3rd. This also left Nigel overtaking David in the Visitor's Aggregate on 824.99, to win by a single point.

INTERNATIONAL MATCH

The International Match was competed over one range per day for four days, against the USA Goodwill team and the British Columbia team, over 300, 400, 500 and 600m. This unusual format allowed us to swap shooters with coaches, rehearse team drill (putting up the flagpole always takes a special amount of practice), and effectively treat each range as a match in itself. On the first day the USA team, consisting of shooters from neighbouring states of Washington, Oregon and further afield from California, put up good competition but finished 6 points behind GB, the Canadians being further behind. On the 2nd day GB increased their lead by 2 points over USA, and another 3 after the third day. A 14 point lead going into the final range sounded like a good cushion, but the range scores indicated the closeness of the match.

Going into the final day of the match we were confident but could not allow any margin for error. There was a slight stutter when a pilot shot, curiously attributed to a pilot, overshot the runway and landed well above the target on the backstop. 5 points lost but the remaining 9 shooters dropped just 11 to finish 5 points above the USA at this range, and 19 points overall. Alex Pilgrim top scored for GB with 199.27, ahead of Alwyn McLean and Mike Fugeman on Vs.

At the conclusion of four days of excellent shooting, the team chaired Nigel Ball from the range and rounded off their successful meeting by accepting a huge haul of trophies. One of the concurrent teams trophies was a bugle which, by tradition, had to be blown by the Captain of the winning team. The Captain in this case nominated John Stevens as someone who could actually play the bugle. After blowing and converting a sighter through it, he finished off with a high note that resonated around the mountains, brought the audience to their feet, and put the icing on the cake for a very successful GB visit.

The team were on a high and celebrations were in order. All the team donned tour shirts and caught the Saturday night fever in downtown Chilliwack. We were missing Reg Roberts, who showed peerless family dedication by driving 9 hours overnight to Kimberley to be with wife and children. The rest of us danced the night away at the Good Times Cabaret, with live music and the DJ giving us special dedications, and yet more free pitchers of beer. We had to admit it, we all loved Chilliwack!

A relaxed morning after saw us up bright and bleary eyed to set off in various directions for a four day break. Seattle was a popular destination and two vans set off for the border. Jon, John and Chalky used their scuba diving qualifications to dive the wreck of HMCS Saskatchewan, off Vancouver Island. They then entered the United States for a possible record shortest time - upon being directed to the immigration office at Roberts Point they were required to pay US\$9 each for a ninety day permit, and having no American currency between them they u-turned the car and headed straight back to Canada. The senior members of the team enjoyed the air show on Sunday and then drove north in the "Variety Club Sunshine Bus" to enjoy a relaxing few days of golf and scenic views at Whistler Mountain ski resort.

Thursday 17th saw the team check out of the Rainbow Motor Inn and transfer by coach to Vancouver Airport for the flight to Ottawa. After a four hour flight we arrived and collected our baggage, picked up four vehicles and a hire van to carry team kit and rifles, and set about finding the Baron's Hotel. What should have been a straight forward journey then turned into a comical farce with the hire van and four team vans all snaking round the suburbs of Ottawa trying to get on and off the freeway. After a couple of three point turns in industrial estates and an inquisitive escort by the Ottawa Police, we finally made it to the Barons Hotel just before 11pm. Early enough then to troop across the road en masse and introduce ourselves at the nearest watering hole.

DCRA MEETING

Friday was the standard settling in day at Connaught and we moved kit and team into the classroom which was to be our base for the meeting. Practice shoots and ammunition testing were accompanied throughout the day by Canadian cadets in the neighbouring classroom practising, tuning and producing random noises from bagpipes and drums. By the time most of us shot in the 2nd detail of the Ottawa Regiment at 800m it was 7pm and becoming very gloomy. Many experienced 'interesting' sight pictures and elevations but most held together in the gentle breeze. The Captain again showed us how it should be done by winning the match with 75.13, a V ahead of Raymond Gross of Michigan.

Saturday's shooting continued along similar format to the Bisley Imperial meeting, with two more chances of getting it right before the Grand Aggregate started in the afternoon. What might've been expected as Canadian weather didn't materialise, instead producing squally showers and strong north-westerly breezes. Even so, several 75s were achieved at 500yds in the Gooderham, the best TR score being from Scott Murray of Ontario. Top placed GB were Martin Millar in 4th, with 75.11, and Gabrielle O'Leary 5th, also with 75.11.

For the Army and Navy Veterans, at 900m after lunch, the wind became strong and reminiscent of many a Corporation. Initial details had to contend with an 8 minute bracket, with up to 14 minutes of left wind. Later details had a mere 6 minute bracket. For many it was an afternoon of fun, rather than serious, competition as scores over 65 were clapped into the team portacabin. Nick Tremlett and Neil Moxon got to grips with the conditions and scored 72.4 and 72.6, the latter winning the match outright.

That evening we attended a barbecue and reception for all visiting teams, in the DCRA marquee. Warm jackets were the dress code as the evening cooled significantly. A special ceremony inaugurated into the DCRA Hall of Fame several well known Canadian shooters from past and present, their shooting achievements being read out in comprehensive detail.

The weather continued its blustery and cool conditions through to Sunday, prompting one Canadian to liken the conditions more akin to Altcar than typical Connaught weather. The Tilton at 300m and 600yds required between 0 and 2 minutes at the shorter range, and only half the team recorded possibles. Alwyn McLean found the minute wide V bull more than most to come off with 50.8, which along with 50.7 at 600yds won him the match. Pat Vamplew from Ontario was second, 2Vs behind.

The Tilton concluded the introductory matches and competition hotted up for the MacDonald Stewart Grand Agg, which started in the afternoon with the MacDougall at 300m and 500yds. The wind continued to be fickle, but with more at stake 12 members of the team scored 98 or higher over the two ranges. The Captain again set the pace with 100.17, followed by Nick Tremlett on 100.14 and Chris Hockley on 100.9. The first aggregate to be completed was the Champlain, which consisted of all pre-Grand matches. Steve Negus of Australia began what was to be a very successful meeting for him by winning with 321.40 out of 325, with Jeremy Langley of the Athelings 2nd on 318 and Nick Tremlett 3rd, also on 318.

Monday morning saw the return of more typical warm weather, and allowed some high scoring in the morning. The fishtaling wind was still enough though to require a 6 minute bracket at 800m in the afternoon. 4 of the team went clean in the Col. J.C. Brick at 500 and 600yds, Nigel Ball having the highest V count with 100.13. In contrast, the Norman Beckett at 300m and 800m, produced only two full houses from the team, with Chris Hockley winning the match on 100.13 and Jon Cload 2nd with 100.11. 800m was an

interesting shoot for some, not least of all Chris, who managed his possible with a 1 1/4 minute wind bracket when most of the team pored over shots that wandered left and right by up to 7 minutes.

Meanwhile Jon Cload had been quietly going about the business of going clean all day, which with 1 off for the Grand put him firmly in the lead, with David Calvert and Chris Hockley the next best for GB with 3 off. Jon followed up his day's success when we hosted an evening with the Athelings at the legendary Bells Corners eatery Foody Goody's. Jon only managed to lose one of the Athelings, who was left behind in the washroom when the vans departed. This represents a marked improvement on the efforts of 1998 when the whole team disappeared.

Tuesday's matches were the Letson and Alexander of Tunis, the Canadian equivalent of the Queen's 1st stage and Corporation. A day then for steadying nerves and making it or breaking it in the Grand. The morning was hot, humid, and wind flags only flicked a little at 600yds for the Letson, ensuring high scores. There were 6 scores of 105 within the GB team itself and 52 from the whole field. Nick Tremlett was highest for GB with 105.16, but all were surpassed by Steve Negus's superb 105.19. At 900m gentle breezes required little more than 5 minutes wind allowance and produced 4 possibles from the team. David Calvert's 50.6 was eclipsed by 1V by Pierre Tremblay. Jon Cload's 50.4 won him the Klondike Aggregate, the total of all matches in the Grand to date. His 453.50 was one point ahead of David and two ahead of Steve Negus.

We awoke on Wednesday morning to heavy rain and arrived at Connaught to discover that all morning's shooting was cancelled due to rain damage to targets. Shooting got underway in the afternoon after the rain, and in damp and humid conditions half the team achieved a maximum score of 100. Significantly Jon Cload dropped a point to allow David Calvert to sneak into the lead of the Grand, on a higher V count. Steve Negus remained in 3rd place, counting out Nick Tremlett and Paul Charlton of the GB Barbarians. In the evening it was the turn of the overseas teams to host a reception for the Canadian shooters, and the GB team were assisted by the Athelings, Barbarians, BDMP Germany, Australia and USA.

Thursday saw the conclusion of the Gibson, at 300m and 600yds, in weather which could not have been a starker contrast to the previous day. Clear skies and a fresh north westerly wind allowed little room for error. However, there were still 15 scores of 150, the best being 150.26 from Barry Langille from New Glasgow. Alex Pilgrim came in 2nd with 150.21. As a result of the previous morning's wash-out, scores for the Gibson also counted for the Governor General's Qualifier. With so many 105s in the 1st stage the cut off was expected to be high, but nevertheless a combined total of 3 off over a Queen's I and II course caused many frowns. Half of the team managed to go through to the final with David Calvert leading the team again, on 255.34, in 2nd place behind Steve Negus on 255.42.

Various aggregates were concluded with more success for GB. David Calvert won the All Corners and Maple Leaf Aggregates, and went into the final match of the Grand 1 point ahead of Steve Negus and 2 ahead of Jon Cload. Jon won the Long Range Aggregate with a record score of 235, although he missed out on a 50.0 with one of those shoots, scoring a V bull last to count. John Stevens repeated the feat at 300m the next day.

To end the day there was a tie shoot for the Presidents, which due to the weather was truncated to one range. 5 people finished on 50.9, including Nigel Ball and David Calvert for GB. Having impressed on the team the importance of attention to detail, the Captain had imposed a fines system for any errors during the tour. Team coffers were swelled significantly, when he arrived at the tie shoot without ammunition. Upon delegating a runner to fetch some, he then fired his first sighter at 500yds with a 600yd elevation, and managed to fire 6 shots to count. Neither his effort or Nigel's 24 was enough to displace Alain Marion's 25.4.

Friday saw the conclusion of the Grand Aggregate with the Gatineau, at 900m. By the time the top 75 competitors in the Grand shot at 9.45am the wind had picked up a little and a 73 was par gun score. It was not a problem for David Calvert though, how scored 75.11 to win the match and the Grand with 727.96 ahead of Steve Negus by one point and one V bull. David had dropped just three points during the entire Grand, and all in one shoot, the Norman Beckett at 800m. Jon Cload rounded off his excellent meeting with a 75 to secure 3rd place in the Grand, with Nick Tremlett finishing 4th. Alex Pilgrim finished 8th, with Neil Moxon, Chris Hockley and Nigel Ball finishing in the top 20. Following the Gatineau came the Patron's, again at 900m. With the Grand finished and thoughts now turning to team matches, the team put in steady but unremarkable scores in the strengthening wind. The match was won by Alain Marion with his second 75 of the morning.

Nine of the team were in the Governor General's Final. The wind was strong but once shooting got underway it appeared remarkably consistent at 800m. Alex Pilgrim found her way to a 75.9, which coupled with a 150 in the 2nd stage gave her a very strong position going into the last range. Derek Lowe also found form to record a 74 to go with his 150. Conditions became strong enough at 900m to cause aberrations and Pilgrim's progress was temporarily halted when she finished with a 69.3 for 294 in total. Derek also finished on 294.

Out of the shadows came Neil Moxon, who with a 149 going into the final shot two superb 74s to finish three off. This caused a ripple of excitement to go through the GB camp, only to see Alain Marion to finish on the same score with 7 more Vs than Neil. After a long delay to wait for all shooting to finish and stats to produce the result, Alain was chaired from the range by his fellow shooters. Thunderstorms swept over Connaught shortly before the prize-giving and the heavens opened, clearing up in time for the GB team to pose with their trophy haul, albeit in rapidly fading light.

TEAM MATCHES

The first match on Thursday 24th was the Outlander at 600yds and 900m, a match for visiting teams against teams from USA and Germany. GB went with tradition and entered two evenly distributed teams as BCRC Blue under David Calvert and BCRC Red under

Chris Hockley. With a wind bracket of 3 minutes at 600yds and 6 minutes at 900m it was hard work for the coaches, but we managed to secure first and second place with GB Blue finishing on 1167 and GB Red on 1159. Part of the reason for our success was a slightly novel strategy at 900m. With a start time of 4.15 and 105 minutes in which to complete four shooters firing 2 and 15, chief coach Nick Tremlett predicted the wind would calm down within an hour and both teams relaxed for 40 minutes before even getting down on the firing point.

Some confused looks came from other shooters and the range staff but the tactic paid off, the first 2 shooters bearing the end of the tricky wind and while all other teams had finished well within time our last shooters got down in wind that had eased from a bracket of 7 to 11 minutes to a steady 5-6 minutes. Top scorer in the Blue team was Martin Millar, finishing with a 75 at 900m and coached by Reg Roberts.

Friday afternoon saw the Commonwealth Match, for teams of 12 at 800 and 900m. GB set the pace at the first distance, dropping a point per man to lead by 4. At 900m we started to employ the strategy that worked so well for us in the Outlander, but with a wind that wouldn't die and a tighter time limit, it wasn't as effective. It was a fickle 4 to 10 minute wind, but in the end it was the variable light conditions that leaked elevation shots and allowed Canada to sneak into the lead and win by 2 points. It was a disappointment to lose our first match of the tour, but the closeness of the result set the standard for the following matches.

Early morning on Friday saw the start of the Canada Match, for teams of 8, at 300, 500 and 600yds. Canada got down to business and finished the range dropping only 2, with GB 5 off. At 500yds we lost ground by a further 2 points. Going back to 600yds we knew we could recover the 5 points if the wind picked up. It duly obliged and Canada dropped 10 points to our 5. Canada were one point ahead with one man to finish, and attention turned to Jim Paton, who finished with a 49 to leave GB winning on 1185 with 133 V bulls, Canada 2nd with 119 Vs, and Australia 3rd a further 5 points behind. David Calvert continued his Captain's innings with our top score of 150.21.

AUSTRALIA MATCH

The 45th Australia Match was held after the conclusion of the DCRA Meeting, on Sunday 27th, with the participating teams being Great Britain, Australia, Canada, USA and Germany. Another early start at 300yds, with cool and overcast weather. After the previous days' matches this was always going to be tight, but no one would have predicted just how tight it turned out to be.

At 300yds Great Britain set off in the gentle headwind, needing just small corrections either side of zero, and recorded 4 off, with the Australians a point behind. The level to which the team were focused on the job in hand was highlighted back at 600yds, when the range officer kindly requested over the tannoy that the GB team van left behind the 300yd firing point was removed before shooting commenced at 600yds. When shooting did get underway, sensing Australia snapping at our heels, we dug in and recorded a record range score of 396, with Reg Robert's target, not for the first time in the tour, going clean. Australia dropped 6 and Canada 9, five of which included a crossfire. The teams broke for lunch in the mess hall with GB ahead of Australia by 3, and Canada a further 12 points in third. Clearly, this gap between three teams was absolutely nothing with the long range in the afternoon and the wind flags and temperature lifting.

At 800m, the wind fishtailed and shooters from all teams suffered stops and waits. GB finished ahead again but lost some of the advantage to Canada, who dropped only 9 to leave them 7 points behind GB with the final distance to go. Teams huddled before the start of 900m. The Australian team stirred roused themselves with renditions of Waltzing Matilda and their national anthem. It seemed to do the trick when solid scores of 49s came in for them and they finished first with a total of 1952 with 174 V bulls, 1 point below the record score. Great Britain's lead had been whittled away throughout the 900m range and frantic calculations were done to work out what we had to play with. The pressure was on coaches and last men down Chris Weeden and David Calvert finished 47 and 49 respectively, but it was just one point less than Australia on 1951.194. The attention then switched to Canada who had been quietly going about business and the far end of the range. An excited score spotter for Canada dashed back to his team to report the news and a ripple of announcement passed through all teams - Canada had finished a point ahead of Australia on 1953.179 - a record equalling score. Alex Pilgrim achieved the highest score on the day with an excellent 198.27, ahead of Ben Dombowski of Canada with 198.22.

Congratulations and commiserations were passed all round for what had to be one of the closest fought International matches ever. The teams retired to the prize giving tent and what was initial disappointment for the GB team quickly gave way to friendship and respect for fellow competitors who had all participated in such a fine match. Proceedings for the formal presentation of the Australia Trophy to the winning Canada team concluded with moments of huge hilarity as trinkets and medals were handed out, thanks were given to everyone involved, and the range staff tried and succeeded to have the last and longest laugh.

That evening David Calvert debriefed the team in his own way by reminding us that the objective of any touring team is primarily to represent ones' country and perform as a unit to the best of our abilities, which we did, even if we came away without the greatest prize of all. The team fines were summarily read out and charged, which included such gems as "sending rifle bolt on R&R", "cross-firing ten times during 100m grouping exercise", and "phoning a room during a crucial plot development in a movie". All that was left to do then was to end the tour in our own inimitable style, by partying the whole night long at Vox night club.