



Great Britain Tour Diary 2006

Wednesday 16th August

The foiling of a major terrorist plot to bring down substantial numbers of aeroplanes en route from Heathrow to North America is not the ideal backdrop to the start of any tour that involves several dozen rifles and thousands of rounds of ammunition, but heck it's a lot better than the non-foiling of such a plot. Today, according to the papers, would have been the day. But it wasn't, and nor was it the day we were to leave. That's tomorrow. But it did mean a rather larger amount of luggage packing and re-packing both at home and at Bisley.

We had started off expecting to be able to take a 25kg rifle box, a 23kg case (including 5kg of ammo), a 10kg piece of hand luggage and a briefcase or similar. Then it seemed that we could take a 25kg rifle box, a 23kg case and a clear plastic bag containing nothing of any entertainment value on the plane. Given that, for each member of the team, that would include a full shooting kit bag, scope, heavy shooting jacket etc, we looked destined for the first Canadian Naked Fullbore Rifle Championship. But then things started to return to normal and it seemed we could take the gunbox, the case, and a laptop-sized piece of hand luggage. And then, eventually, we returned to something similar to our starting point, but with a much more stringent restriction on the size of the "briefcase" than before.

For those who had tried to pack much earlier than normal and had responded to each change in the rules by trying to re-pack in a manner that conformed, the whole episode was a considerable inconvenience. For the large number of team members who left it until the last day, as usual, it was just fine!

Star of the first day, or rather the first few preparatory hours, of the tour was definitely Jon Sweet, Baggage Meister. "Twenty-sree-punkt-vier kilos? Dass ist much mehr zan twenty-sree kilos. You vill haff to go offen re-pack it, Dummkopf!" Yes, we were adhering much more tightly to the maximum weights, just in case, and a good thing we did too as it turned out because not all the staff were inclined to be lenient.

Thursday 17th August

Departure day dawned, supposedly in the middle of the NSRA Championship but it didn't seem as if too many people were up early to shoot. Then again, we're not used to a Bisley that is not ringing to the sound of *loud* bangs.

Bit by bit, things came together. We were fed, the coach arrived, the gun boxes went on, then the cabin baggage that was destined for the hold, then the cases and then, eventually, us and our real hand luggage.

At the airport, a surprisingly smooth journey around the M25 was followed by a smooth check-in of the rifles and a pretty smooth check-in of us and our bags. We seemed to have timed it perfectly to arrive *just* before the hordes of Canadian senior citizens arrived bang on the three-hours-before-the-flight opening of check-in.

I say a "pretty" smooth check-in because a mysterious very, very tall bloke in a GBRT blazer was said to have got to check-in first, checked himself and rather a large number of bags in and then headed upstairs to the departure lounge, leaving various team members wondering what had happened to their luggage! As Hinch recalled, "Danny was made Assistant Baggage Master on his first GB tour, and he has never been promoted since!" The upshot of all this was that, while he and a few others managed to jump the security queues quite quickly, the rest of the team was left trying to assuage the airline staff, some of whom seemed to be a bit narked that one or two bags were 0.25kg overweight. Not sure why they were concerned, given the relative gravity of some of the team...

So we got through security reasonably quickly after taking off just about all of our clothes to have them X-rayed under the new regime. That left us with more time than usual to kill in the shops. Except we couldn't take too much in our hand luggage and we couldn't take water onto the plane and nor, Hinch, could we take newly acquired champagne on board.

That left not a lot of buying to do, hence an hour or two in O'Neills for many of the team – this is a serious team, remember, getting into condition for the competition to come.

The lengthy period in Departures also meant that business could be done – Mike Walton on his mobile and laptop, close to closing a deal, and Matt getting a free lunch after bumping into one of his clients!

The restriction on liquids on board meant that only a few team members bothered to buy water in the terminal. The paucity of water was presumably behind Ed Compton's bizarre query (pardon the pun) to Matt: "Can I have a suck of yours?"

There was no restriction on brain cells on board, however, so it came as something of a surprise when Nick Brasier and Reg arrived at the gate with David Armstrong's passport. Then again, I suppose he ought to have been somewhere in its vicinity when they decided to heed the "Boarding" signs.

Reg was on particularly good form at this point though, declaring "I've slept with Hinch and Pugsley before". I'm not sure how happy they were at this public "outing".

Onto the plane and the team had seats not all that far from each other – well they were on the same plane, anyway. For about five minutes, very very tall bloke stomped around proclaiming "I'm very very tall, I should have an exit row seat so I have enough leg room!" Exit row seats were in very short supply though – only eight of the team members had them. Eventually, one fool caved in and let him swap seats. "Fool" because he had denied management their revenge for very very tall bloke's scuppering of the best laid check-in plans. Oh well, we'll get him later...

It's OK; the cabin crew did it for us. Sure, it wasn't so good that one of them was overheard to say something very rude about another passenger, nor was it so great that they kept forgetting to bring drinks, but in a way it was amusing to hear just how indignant had been the refusal to issue the very, very tall bloke with more wine. "No, ah ave med a day-seezyun an we are not going to tok about eet eneh more. You cannot ave wine."

Eventually, after a pretty dull flight, the team landed in Ottawa. Or rather, as the captain put it, the Great Britain Rifle Team and Danny Coleman arrived in Ottawa. I can't think what he meant. Everything seemed to run smoothly until the police seemed not to know what to do to deal with the simultaneous importation of 50-odd rifles. That took up a *lot* of time. But that's OK – it gave Danny an opportunity to lark around in a wheelchair, including falling out of the back of it...

Once we had been permitted to enter Canada and had somehow managed to lose a couple of the bus-fulls of people on the way to the hotel, there was some discussion as to whether we were supposed to be driving WNW or in fact South-East. The former was clearly the case but it was all way beyond Ed, who said "It feels weird that we were in the UK this morning. We're not even in Wales, we're in Canada!" Weird indeed.

And then to the Barons Hotel, to the traditional warm welcome, and to Melanie calling Irina in from her day off in order to help out with our rather large party for dinner that hadn't quite been mentioned to the restaurant staff!