

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, I set out on my adventure to Canada, after facing many difficulties in the months previous to going I was very keen to get on that plane. Upon landing in Sydney, I was greeted with the rest of my team, Lucy Blenkiron (SA), Emma Puckey (VIC), Chase Naylor (QLD), Jared Newham (NSW), Janet Hamblin (NSW) and Tim Ling (VIC), soon after we made our journey to the Londonderry pony club grounds where we would spend the next three days as a team, training and doing fun activities such as boat riding around the Sydney harbour, bowling, visiting the botanical gardens and getting photos in front of the opera house. The Newham family were very kind and gave us fantastic horses to train on over the three days, at first I thought the training camp was going to be really scary but after seeing everyone else ride we were actually pretty even in our riding and coach Tim was quite impressed (thank god). Now, I forgot to mention but I had the most fantastic team members, coach and manager, we got on so well and if anything was going to distance us from each other it would have been that first shopping trip, a few disagreements on what we should have for breakfast but eventually coming to a satisfactory agreement and we were happy! By the time it came to boarding the plane for Canada we were already like a family, even referring to Tim and Janet as mum and dad, I learnt more about these people in one night of nonstop talking than I have in 5 years of a friendship, that's how well we got on.

After Lucy's bright idea of pulling an all-nighter the night before our 14-and-a-half-hour plane ride to Vancouver we then arrived at Sydney airport at 6:00 am the next morning looking and feeling like zombies, this of course was because 'apparently' it would help us sleep on the plane, WRONG! in fact when we landed in Vancouver not only had we lost 1 day of sleep, but now 2. We met our host family at the airport and they took us back to their house where we were greeted by their three kids and WAFFLES! After 3 meals of aeroplane food there was nothing better to see than fresh cooked Canadian waffles.

During the first 4-5 days of the tour we stayed in single person dorms at the University of British Columbia, which might I add was amazing, breakfast, lunch and dinner provided for us. We met the other teams here also (USA, Canada and Great Britain) it was awkward to begin with which was expected but after some get to know you games we were still pretty awkward, it took us all maybe three days to step away from our team mates and introduce our selves to the other teams. During our time at UBC we went to the Canada day celebrations which was on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July which also included setting sail out around the edges of Vancouver for a relaxing cruise followed by a stunning display of fireworks to conclude Canada day, we went to a 4D cinema (fly over Canada), checked out the different fish and native animals at the Aquarium, visited Granville Island which had a cute little market by the water's edge in the middle of the city, hiked up Grouse mountain (top 10 hardest mountains to climb, ( true fact not just my opinion), went dragon boat racing which is where about 20 people are in a canoe type boat with paddles, we were in a boat with the Brits and we had to race the Americans and Canadians, our boat won! We also went to the privately owned equestrian centre 'Thunderbirds show park' where we watched the grand prix show jumping and enjoyed the luxury of being a VIP. Although these activities seem hard to top, my highlight was the bike riding around Stanley park, Lucy and I shared a tandem bike and well I don't think we stopped laughing the whole time, I sat at the back and spent most of the time sightseeing while Lucy peddled. Some of these activities were done whilst we were staying at our host families also, on one of our free days with our

hosties we took some time to relax and do something that we wanted so we went shopping!

Our next adventure was catching a boat across the water to Vancouver Island where we stayed at Queen Margaret's school, here we participated in a few horse related activities, firstly we did a few mounted games demonstrations for the pony club members and showed them a few techniques for improving their games, we also did a practise day which allowed us to have some practise on the different horses and have a bit of a friendly competition with our mixed teams. We toured around Victoria for a while and made sure we got a good look into the beautiful aspects of the city before we headed to the whale watching, 3 hours spent out on the water surrounded by beautiful killer whales.

After a 2-hour boat ride from Victoria we were straight on the bus and traveling another 3 hours to whistler, this was my favourite part of the trip, we stayed in the athlete's village about 20 minutes from whistler itself. We participated in the most thrill-seeking activities such as zip lining, after catching the gondola up we took 5 different lines from the top of the mountain all the way down, for me this was really scary because I am petrified of heights but I knew if I didn't do it I would regret it for the rest of my life so I bit the bullet and did it, one word, WOW! Our next adventure was white water rafting, breathtaking views, ice cold water and there's no doubt about it, it was too much fun for words. Whilst at whistler we enjoyed the peak 2 peak gondola ride, a buffet dinner at the mountain top restaurant, shopping and treetop adventure.

The last week was spent between host families and a different university about 20 mins from Campbell valley, during this time we did a few more little activities including swimming at the beach, swimming at a house featured in the Netflix series 'Riverdale' and chilling out with the other teams before the competition that took place on the second last day, it was close competition the whole way through with the horses keeping it an even playing field throughout the day, it was neck and neck between us and the Brits, so close in fact that we finished 2 points behind them, we were pretty happy with that considering they compete pretty much every weekend as opposed to once a month or if you are in Tas then twice a year. Our teamwork shined throughout the day and I believe our close friendships was what ultimately helped us to stay close to the Brits as well as our skill and the horses we had. Tim was a great calming influence on us as nerves were a plenty for the duration of the championships, his super coaching techniques benefitted us on the day, matching us with horses that suited us and giving everyone a fair go at being in the games.

As a whole this was the best experience of my life and I don't believe anything can really top this, I have treasured the memories and friendships that I have made on this tour and look forward to catching up with these people in the future, of course this trip would not have been possible without help from the community, pony club Tasmania, Tasmania pony and riding club, mum and dad, the organisers of the tour, pony club Australia and everyone else involved. I am extremely grateful for the time I spent in Canada, I feel extremely privileged, not only to be selected to represent Australia but to also participate in the tour with the best people beside me, they made the trip the absolute best they could for me and I hope I did the same for them. Thankyou Pony club Tasmania for the support you have given me toward IMGE 2017, thank you just doesn't feel like enough but for now it will have to do.

-Georgia Elias