

ASTO James Myatt International Exchange UK to Canada 2014 Ailish Parham



ASTO International Exchange Programme 2014

**with Sail and Life Training Society
(SALTS)**

Standing on the dock (I now struggle to call it a pier) waiting to join the ship the conversation darted nervously on where everyone had travelled from. I, running late as always, had just arrived and stood to the side of the circle compiled of 20 something people and listened curiously. So far it had been concluded that the farthest travelled was a guy from Texas and to everyone this seemed to be impressive. I stood stunned. With the combination of this information and my lingering jet-lag it hit me just how far I had travelled. One hour (due to time differences) and four plane rides later I had finally made it.

Growing up on an island of sheep, wind and no trees a.k.a the Shetland Isles travelling to Canada and on in to Alaska to participate in the international exchange has been the most life changing and greatest thing I have ever done. Just to get to the interview with Lucy and James I had to catch two planes to Southampton, at that time the furthest I had ever travelled alone. So to be given the opportunity by ASTO and the James Myatt Trust to fly across the world and sail in the Pacific was really incredible if a little daunting.

The boat I sailed on was an incredible Gaff rigged Schooner named the Pacific Grace launched in 2001.



She is one of two boats operated by The Sail and Life Training Society (SALTS) out of Victoria, Vancouver Island, BC. Their mission is to develop the spiritual, relational, and physical potential of young people through sail training, shipboard life, and associated activities in a Christian environment. As their mission states, the organisation has a strong Christian ethos. This is used in a very meaningful way to create a tight knit, loving community on board.

The first day was spent organising our possessions and ourselves and eating! I was placed in forward watch with Sam (First Mate) and Mel (volunteer watch leader).



Our 4 hour watches were split into 30 minute segments either at the helm, on lookout bow or stern, listening to the radio or on standby (really rest time to take pictures and chat!) After picking bunks and unpacking we were treated to lovely barbecued wild Salmon and then had Halibut for our dinner too. It was delicious and coming from Shetland where you are never more than 3 miles away from the sea this really made me feel like I was back home.

Forward Watch

After slipping lines in Prince Rupert we headed straight to Ketchikan; our entry into Alaska. There we were greeted by a very serious customs officer who motored alongside to check our passports. As I was the only British person on board, and had never been in America before, I was told I had to travel back with him to land and get my finger prints taken. This small adventure made me feel like a bit of a criminal though it proved to be quite a laugh as I was given



Riding in the back of the police car to get my fingerprints taken.

sweets by the officer after he took my prints. He must have sensed that I was quite nervous!

At first I was a little unsure about the boats' ethos on sharing our story and finding out how fascinating human beings are. I think this was because I had never been encouraged to do anything like it before and knew that if I did it was not going to be an easy thing. But by day 3 I was prepared to do it. Finding out how incredible everyone on board was and admiring how different the human race is was a very important aspect of the programme. This was exemplified by the boat Service on day 7 of the trip (Ship Sunday). It was a breath-taking night and we had anchored under an extremely clear starry sky in a tiny bay just south of Tracy Arm, Alaska. We were all sat on deck wrapped up in blankets listening to the crew play calm music on their guitars. The skipper asked a few people to share their stories. One boy told of his brothers' struggle with Cancer and another about a very saddening life-changing family event. Although it was terrible to hear, the evening really made me realise that every person has an amazing strong story compiled of both tragic and extremely wonderful experiences that make up their life and shapes them into the amazing person they are.

There were many great games and events organised to bring the trainees together too. The crew held 'Mug-ups' every night which involved the crew playing instruments and the trainees singing to any song from the SALTS song book. There was a huge range of song choices from sea chanteys to hymns to modern classics! This time every evening really brought everyone together to enjoy each other's company and to have fantastic fun. The games played were also cleverly based around bonding and listening to each other and included 'Big Booty' a noisy clapping game where you needed excellent listening and memory skills.



Me with the flowers from my Secret Friend.

On day 2 of the trip 'Secret Friend' was also organised for the duration of trip. We were each given a name of someone on board who you had to secretly do nice things for. I made my secret friend a bracelet, cookies, made him first in the queue for Sunday dinner, bought him playing cards and gave him sweets. The person who was my secret friend was amazing. They gave me flowers and chocolate, allowed me to pick a song at 'Mug-up' and on a freezing watch made a cup of tea in an Alaska mug

which I was to keep! At the end of the trip we had great fun trying to guess who had been our 'Secret Friend'- mine was GA a volunteer watch leader. This was something that made everyone feel really special and was a great way to encourage compassion and generosity.



The landscape in British Columbia and Alaska was breath-taking with very picturesque tree lined fjords. The water was so stunningly clear due to the melted ice which gave everything a dazzling blue glow. To be able to view great attractions such as the glacier at Tracy Arm we had to navigate small channels full of small 'grizzlies' or icebergs. I had a slight Titanic moment when I was able to say "Ice-berg dead

ahead" which was awesome. We also were able to launch a rubber dinghy and tow a small ice piece back to the boat and hack it into chunks to turn it into slush or 'Snow Cones' which was very cool! To top it off we also swam in hot-springs next to a beautiful roaring waterfall.

The wildlife was incredible too. Every day we saw some species of Whale including Killer Whales, Humpback Whales and Sperm Whales. It really was a "Whale Highway". We saw so many that people began not to care if one had been spotted. On day 9 of my voyage we saw Humpback Whales bubble feeding. This was unbelievably breath-taking as not only did we get to see them but we also used a hydrophone so we could hear their calls to each other underwater. This is definitely the most special and majestic thing I have ever seen and probably will ever see.



During the trip I also came to realise that only 3 people including myself had not sailed with Salts before. The amount of repeat trainees on board was a real fascination for me as having sailed on other boats this had never been the case. After finishing the trip I realise now why this was the case. The atmosphere created on board the ship is like no other I have ever felt before. You feel so secure and safe and welcome and appreciated that you never want to leave, but as you have to, you immediately want to return to sail with them again.

In my interview with Lucy and James for this exchange I was asked the question "What is Sail Training all about, and what are the benefits?" I errrrd for a few seconds then proceeded to say that it was about developing team work skills and pushing yourself to do things you never thought you could. Although to some extent these are valid positives of sail training I now realise after taking part in this exchange that sail training means so much more. In brief, the atmosphere created on board gives you the opportunity to be the person you truly are, encourages you to discover your strengths and greatly increases your confidence whilst having the greatest fun ever!

I would like to give huge thanks to The James Myatt Trust for enabling this journey and to ASTO for giving me the opportunity to experience it. I would also like to give a special thank you to Marcia at ASTO for all the organisation she did and help she gave me, John Hamilton for giving me a place to stay and showing me around Vancouver on my way out and to Tony Anderson and all the crew at SALTS for making my voyage so incredible.

P.S- I apologise for the over-use of the word incredible but there really was no other word suitable to describe how incredible my trip and experiences were!



My voyage route.

“They that go down to the sea in ships,
that do business in great waters;
These see the works of The Lord,
and his wonders in the deep.”

Psalm CVII