

## Sophie Zych-Watson

### UK to Canada James Myatt Trust / ASTO Exchange

I won't pretend that I was able to contain my excitement as I picked up the phone to learn that ASTO and the James Myatt Trust were sending me to Canada. I definitely won't pretend that I didn't dance around my room in celebration, barely able to string a sentence together as I was told that I would be sailing with the Canadian Sail Training Society 'S.A.L.T.S,' on the first trip of their summer season. None of it seemed real.

The adventure only got better and more exciting from that moment on. Thanks to the brilliant people at ASTO I was able to book flights to Canada in April, giving me a whole two months of exploring and adventuring around the country before I was to even step foot aboard the Pacific Grace. My travels were incredible. I hiked in the snowy Rockies, swam in waterfalls, kayaked through impossibly blue lakes, white water rafted, trekked through ancient forests, surfed in the Pacific, roadtripped northern BC and Alberta – the list goes on and on. Along the way I saw so many amazing things and met so many interesting people from all over the world. I felt incredibly lucky to have been given such an opportunity.



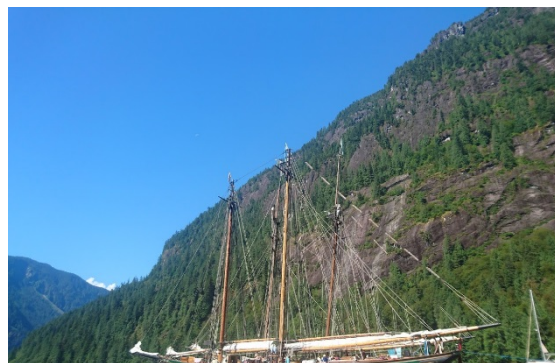
*Lake Agnes, Alberta*

Regardless of where I was or what I was doing, I couldn't for one second forget what awaited me at the end of my eleven-week trip. Every moment seemed to be leading up to the day I would finally step aboard the Pacific Grace and sail for the horizon. The sense of adventure every new day brought only reminded me of how exhilarating it would be to finally go to sea on a Tall Ship. The time I spent kayaking lakes or paddling a raft through white water only made me desperate to cut through waves under sail. So when joining day finally arrived, it did not disappoint.



*The Nahatlatch River, BC*

As a Watch Leader for Ocean Youth Trust Scotland, with our two steel-hulled yachts, I don't have much experience with Tall Ships. So it is safe to say that I was completely blown away by the sheer size and beauty of the Pacific Grace as she lay alongside in Victoria. A 115' Gaff Schooner, all polished wood and gleaming paintwork, she looked like something straight out of the history books. It was a gorgeous sunny day and The Grace was attracting quite a crowd of admirers along Victoria's waterfront. To be one of the lucky few to actually step aboard, alongside the other



*Chatterbox Falls, Princess Louisa Inlet*

twenty-eight young people joining S.A.L.T.s for Trip 1, was a thrilling and humbling experience.

The first few hours on-board, unsurprisingly, passed in a whirl-wind of action. I met the lovely professional and volunteer crew on *The Grace*, who welcomed aboard every member of the trainee crew on a one-to-one basis – something that I really enjoyed as it gave everyone a chance to talk about what we hoped to get out of the voyage. From there the arriving crew all had opportunity to pick our bunks and stow our kit – and get to know one another. It was very interesting to speak to a group of young people from another country who were mostly new to sailing. I was thousands of miles from home and on a boat unlike any I'd sailed before, and yet there was a lot of familiarity to be found. It would seem that the beginning of any sail training voyage always starts in the same way – with nerves, excitement, a sense of comradeship and the feeling that something amazing is about to happen.



*Pacific Grace, Malaspina Strait*

As we slowly made our way out of the harbour and into the maze of little islands surrounding southern Vancouver Island, I tried to covertly make sense of the rigging. While I have previously sailed on a gaff ketch, the sheer size of everything and the difference in terminology had me outside of my comfort zone. Regardless, there is something very satisfying about raising sails without the assistance of mechanical winches and other modern fixings, and I soon put aside my worries. The crew had been sorted into three different watches and it was around this time that everyone really started to get to know one another; every aspect of hoisting the sails and running a watch needed us to work closely as a team, and together we managed to successfully get the boat underway. There's nothing like the struggle to raise *The Grace's* immense main sail to really bring people together.

After spending the night anchored at Thetis Island, we learned that we would be attempting to sail all the way to Chatterbox Falls, a beautiful waterfall at the head of the Jervis Inlet, surrounded by forested mountains and cliffs on all sides. With such a gorgeous destination to motivate us, even the 3am anchor watch wasn't so difficult. Especially with a sky full of stars to entertain us through the night. The next day the excitement mounted exponentially as we were met with perfect sailing conditions, 20 knots of wind and beautiful sunshine

accompanying us as we raced up the Sunshine Coast towards the Thormandy Islands. I was surprised that the boat remained so level, as I am used to lighter challenge yachts that enjoy scaring the crew by heeling at as steep an angle as possible. I was even more surprised that lifejackets were only necessary at night. Shout out to OYT Scotland for ingraining our life-jacket practise so deeply that I now feel incomplete without one. Sadly, the wind



*Pacific Grace, Inside Passage*

dropped completely in the early evening and we had to motor the final stretch to the mouth of Jervis Inlet, anchoring nearby in anticipation of reaching Chatterbox Falls the next day.

When we arrived at our destination, all the hype genuinely did live up to the reality. We were able to anchor right beside the waterfall, with towering cliffs surrounding us on all sides. Hundreds of little waterfalls cascaded into the valley and the tallest peaks were still capped with snow. All of this was accompanied by the constant booming and thundering of Chatterbox Falls, the sound of hundreds and thousands of tonnes of water crashing against the rocks. From the boat the falls were hidden behind trees, but we could see huge clouds of spray misting above the forest. After launching the ship's dories (like canoes but 100% more unstable) and paddling ashore, the waterfall came into view. It did not disappoint; a solid wall of white water, hurtling over the rocks at a terrifying speed. Standing in the spray felt like standing in a sandstorm; it took a force of will to stand in front of the icy droplets for any amount of time.



The rest of the voyage passed in a similar fashion, adventure being the key theme in everything we did. I challenged myself not to say no to anything; so, far too often, I found myself jumping from the rigging into freezing cold water, or shakily climbing to the top of



*Mast Climbing, Savary Island*

the masts to touch the topmost flags, or wrestling the topsails down while precariously balancing on the bowsprit webbing. At various points in the voyage, we were able to rig a huge rope swing from the gaff pole – kudos to a very pregnant Elska for doing an impressive swing and backflip from the bowsprit. We were also lucky to experience the Grace on all points of sail and in perfect conditions; serenely goosewing-ing before the wind along the Malaspina Strait, or beating into the wind around the south side of Vancouver Island.

The furthest and most northerly point of our trip brought The Grace to Caasel Lake and Falls, where we again had the opportunity to go ashore and explore our surroundings. Here it was actually possible to climb behind the falls – if you felt brave enough to wade through sheets of stinging water to get there. We also visited a few islands, most notably Savary island, which was so popular among the crew that we visited it on both the outgoing and the return sail. Highlights of our visits there included beach combing, football with The Swift's crew, and rowing the dories at sunset.

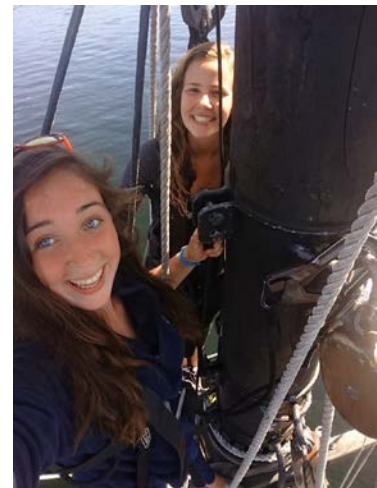
One of the most memorable parts of this voyage with SALTS was the real sense of community apparent from day one. As with any sail training voyage the crew is expected to become a strong team, but the sea staff onboard the Grace went above and beyond to help



establish a sense of unity among the crew. There was a huge spectrum of different ages and backgrounds to be found among us all, but at meal times we were encouraged to share our experiences and stories, and discuss our perspectives on different topics. Every evening the entire crew gathered below decks to participate in 'Mug Up.' Mug Up is an absolutely brilliant idea and is something I hope to introduce back on our boats in Scotland. After a short debrief and a word of thanks for everything we had experienced that day,

an eclectic mix of instruments are brought out by the staff and all 36 of us sing at the top of our voices – 'Wagon Wheel' and 'Louie Louie' among the crew favourites. Each night, the cooks would accompany this with mugs of hot drinks and cakes. Happiness all round.

With all of this to say goodbye to, it was a fairly emotional farewell on the docks at Victoria, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank The Grace's crew and volunteers for making me feel so welcome on-board and for an all-round amazing voyage on The Grace. I would also like to say a massive thank-you to ASTO and the James Myatt Trust for sending me to Canada and giving me this opportunity – I have learned a lot and should I ever return to Canada I would love to work with SALTS again. I hope to put into action some of what I have learned from Canadian sail training back in the UK.



*Made it to the top!*