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Asto International Exchange Canada 2013
St Lawrence II



From getting the initial phone call saying I had been accepted on to the exchange until I stepped on to the plane in Glasgow, it all felt a little unreal. There I was, traveling across the mighty biggest pond and landing in soggy Toronto, to a humid 24 degrees. The first few days were spent exploring a city where you navigate by sky scrapers, hiding in air conditioned shops, escaping to the mini paradise of Toronto Island, going to a Baseball match and taking it all in before heading east to Kingsville.

After being in the Country for four days and slowly getting use to the constant sunshine, it was time to find St Lawrence II, my home for the next month. Although seeing Toronto had been exciting, this was why I was here, to go sailing. As I packed my bag for the final time, an overwhelming sense of appreciation for everyone that made it possible for me to be here hit me and I knew that I had go for it and make the most of every minute.

Walking across to the boat, Captain Chafe came over and introduced himself before I joined the line up of sea staff and was introduced as Leading Seaman Prince. I had no idea what this meant but decided to stick with rule number one and look cool. Next we were all divided up into our watches and I was briefed by Watch Officer Cooney and Petty Officer Mountaney, with a hand from the Executive Officer Stewart.

Going down below I was given a bunk in the PO's mess. The domestic walk-through concluded with a brief visit to the ward room and I became instantly jealous-they even had their own table! I was taken aback as there was no saloon and only the cook was allowed in the galley, I soon realised that things were quite different to what I was use to back home.

As part of our deck walk we had to go aloft and reef the course sail. Generally speaking I'm not afraid of heights however balancing on a thin metal wire and clinging on for dear life was certainly an experience. I realised at this point that I was going to have to get very good at tying knots with one hand!

Briefings complete, it was time to slip lines and put up some sails. The next twenty minutes was a bit of a blur, as commands were yelled from the quarter deck and we all tried to

keep up! I've never seen such rapid sail hoists and the frustration of not knowing where lines were and therefore being out of my comfort zone was soon lost as before I knew it we were sailing in Lake Ontario, in gorgeous sunshine and I was reaching for the factor sixty.

After a few hours of tacking around Kingston we headed back in and tied up, stowed the sails and the trainees had some shore leave. The evening was spent with a couple of the other sea staff, getting to know them and relaxing into the Canadian banter. Back on board the trainees slept on deck however I opted for the quieter option and went below.



Soon it was time to get up and begin the morning routine of deck scrub (brush handles not included), breakfast and then slipping lines. Similar rocket pace to the previous day although this time we had to pick our way through a Laser competition just outside the harbour. Sails set, engine was off and we were flying South towards Oswego, NY State.

As well as getting my head around the ropes, I was coming round to the idea of the division between the ward room and everyone else, realising that the program I was on was more focused on the skills encompassed by sail training, and less on the youth development that I was used to back home. I was also beginning to get used to the cuisine on board, confused by the lack of pesto and the abundance of Kraft Dinner.

After a brilliant days sailing the sun was setting as we came into Henderson Harbour so we did a sunset watch. This consisted of the Captain doing a deck inspection before everyone sang the sunset song and then went round telling their life's ambition. It was brilliant to finally have the watches and the Ward Room altogether.



The next day saw some of the biggest swells I would experience during this trip, and oh my were they big! So-much-so it was time to rig some jack stays and send people below. I stayed forward with the trainees that were on watch but before long the cook had to abandon dinner so I went below to see what I could do. Ten minutes later it was time for a jam sandwich auction on deck as I literally couldn't find ingredients to make another meal.. and when I ran out of bread we moved onto wraps-it was a crazy hour of jam madness. It was great to finally feel like myself, helping out and getting people enthusiastic because up until now I had been trying to understand how it all worked!

Naturally after we'd finished dinner the weather calmed down, everyone began to turn back to their usual colour and we entered American waters. Hats off to the trainees, they were absolutely brilliant throughout, looking after each other and totally on board with the program.

I think no matter who you are or what your role is on board, it always takes a few days to settle into a new boat, but once you do, that's when the magic really begins.



Arriving in Chaumont Bay, NY State, myself and Laura (the other exchange from the UK) had our first of many experiences with USA border control. After a few tense phone calls they decided we were allowed in (we even got a stamp in our passports!), although I still think they just took pity on us as we were definitely due a shower.

Wondering around Chaumont I couldn't get over how helpful everyone had been since I arrived in Canada. This was quite possibly because I had a strange accent and looked lost most of the time. But the kindness of people was overwhelming, whether it be the bus driver that drove us around Kingston to find the best restaurant or Lisa, the lady who worked in the cafe at the bus station, who drove us to our accommodation because she lived nearby and didn't want us paying for a taxi. Eating an ice-cream in the village a gentleman called Don came across and began talking to us, telling his tales of his time at sea. Then we realised that he had sailed on SLII as a teenager and was very keen to hear about Sailing Training in the UK, and how on earth we had ended up in Chaumont!

Next stop was Clayton, NY State, sailing through the Thousand Islands and past some of the biggest freighters I've ever seen. Getting stuck into the navigation and the running of my watch was great (even if I was rubbish at remembering to ring the bell!).

Heading back to Kingston after an amazing first voyage I was glad I still had another month in the country. The voyage ended with a ship's concert and a hilarious fashion show

done by one of the watches, before a film on the main sail and some freshly baked brownies.

Time for a weekend away in Spencerville with Laura from Bytown. She was the most amazing host, taking us to Ottawa and Brockville, feeding us the loveliest of food and giving us the most comfy beds! I was still a tourist, but this time I wasn't lost! I can't thank her enough for that weekend.



Monday morning and time for the last trip of the exchange. The weekend away gave me time to take in all that had happened on the previous voyage and get myself excited for the next one. Arriving at the boat there were a few tank issues so we took the trainees away and played some games including giants, wizards and dwarfs, which did get quite competitive even though there were only ten of us!

Once underway it became quite apparent that with only four trainees, there really is not much time for rest! However waking up for the early anchor watch, I was treated to one of the most gorgeous sunrises I have ever seen. Nothing could have spoilt this moment, apart from being told we need to weigh the anchor, which can only be done by hand (there isn't even a sneaky lever in the engine room..).

Anchor stowed it was time to go sailing! And time to be hit with trainees suffering from severe homesickness. When Sofer, a WO suggested we play spoons I thought this was a great idea until I discovered they didn't have chocolate mousse..perhaps I'm just spoilt back in the UK!

Perfect timing, the wind picked up and we began doing some brilliant tacking up to Half Moon Bay, then onwards to Picton. I managed to helm for a while which was great. As soon as we were busy again everyone began to relax and enjoy themselves. As we had less people on board everyone was doubling up on tacking stations so it was hard work!

Next stop Picton, the land of pootang and Mosquitos. I have never been bitten by mosquitos like that before nor eaten pootang, so it was quite an experience!

Onwards to Cape Vincent, NY State for a battle re-enactment complete with cannons, guns and costumes, however sadly not on our boat. Before arriving however we had to go through a squall with thunder and some water spouts began forming nearby so naturally it was a tense few minutes whilst be doused our sails and altered direction! It did however mean I got to use my oilskins for the first, and last time, so packing them hadn't been a complete waste of space.

The wind then totally died down and even with all our attempts to create some extra propulsion (mainly using the fire hose and both dories with rowers in the water) we gave in



as the dories are not the most straightforward boats to row. Team UK did however execute some fantastic donuts.

Time for a swim before the sun set then furling the sails and lowering the saltire that XO had hoisted earlier. Kai tonight consisted of lots of deep fried oreos, probably not something I am in a hurry to try again! However a beautiful sunset concluded a brilliant day.

Next day was one of learning some traditional navigation with Bielicki, my WO for this



voyage. We played around with Sextants which was brilliant, repeating it over and over until we nearly matched the GPS. We got as much sail up as we had on the boat and oh my did it look amazing! That, mixed with some chilled music on the deck speakers meant a nice relaxing day, with the wind picking up enough that we could tack into Cape Vincent harbour to be greeted by the locals. Then it was time to meet border control again, however this time things went a little more smoothly and off to buy some anti-bite relief!

It was a mini-festival in Cape and we had a two day rest here so time to take it all in, see



the other boats and take part in a re-enactment. When we realised there were no showers it wasn't a problem, we just went for a swim. I could get use to fresh water sailing! Our final sail as part of the exchange back to Kingston we did in company with Le Revenant, another boat that was in the re-enactment. Luckily I was staying on for another two weeks, delivering the boat to Toronto then sailing through to Lake Erie to join the Tall Ships America Challenge. However coming back into Portsmouth Olympic Harbour for the last time I was on top of the world.

The exchange has been an incredible one, one which I couldn't have prepared myself for and which I will never forget. Even though up until the day I left Canada I was referred to Prince, the exchange, I still felt so part of SLII. This was made possible by the amazing friends I made whilst on board. Leaving the boat was emotional, not only because I was leaving some brilliant people but it was the end of my Canadian adventure.

The aim of my experience was to continue ties between Sail Training organisations, hopefully bringing a little part of the UK to Canada and vice versa. It was certainly a huge learning opportunity, both with the hard and soft skills, from learning traditional navigation to experiencing a new training program. Now with the exchange coming to an end, I want to support and enthuse others to not only get involved in Sail Training, but to go on an adventure.

My adventure would not have been possible without the James Myatt Trust and Lucy, James and Marcia at ASTO. Thank you all for creating this wonderful opportunity, not only for me but those previous and hopefully those in years to come.

Thanks also for the support from Ocean Youth Trust Scotland, the team on Spirit of Fairbridge and of course my family and friends back home who encouraged me throughout the process. I remember reading exchange reports on the ASTO website two years ago and thinking to myself that this sounded like a pretty awesome opportunity, so If you are a young person reading this now and want to go on an adventure, send it your application- what is there to lose?

