

Robbie Crow
ASTO International Exchange 2012
Canada Exchange – STS Fair Jeanne



So, here beginneth the writings on (one of) the Canadian Adventures in 2012! It all started with a letter – isn't that how the best things start? Yes! A letter to those lovely people at ASTO telling them how wonderful I was and how well I would represent them in foreign countries. They must have thought it was good – I got invited for an interview. So, there I go – pottering down to London on my own – *like* a big grown-up. Has anyone ever noticed that the seats on the sleeper trains are really uncomfortable? Note for any Scottish applicants next year – the cheaper prices do not include a bed on said 'sleeper service'. I arrived there with plenty of time, 6 hours in fact, so I had a wee wander around London – now I know why I prefer the sea. So, the interview came and I went in to meet Lucy et al, they seemed nice. I had my interview, then I went on to Essex for another meeting – I could probably write a whole story on the time in Essex alone, but let's not go there! Shortly after my interview, about a week or two I think, I got a phone call from Lucy saying 'Hi Robbie – we want to send you to Canada!' my reaction? 'Oh, that's good – isn't it?' I'm not the most over-joyous of people – but this, in Robbie world, is akin to saying 'ya beauty!' (for any non-Scottish readers, please read: 'oh, how fabulous!').

So, time passed on while I was at Uni – and, before I knew it, it was time to start packing for going to Canada. Sadly, due to other sailing commitments in the Tall Ships Race, I could only go to Canada for 8 days – but I wasn't going to let this spoil my fun. So, off to Edinburgh airport I went, luggage in hand, and on a plane

to Newark I embarked. They were showing Toy Story 3 – best movie flight, ever! At Newark, I had a very close encounter when the wrong gate was announced on arrival, and my plane was nearly missed. However, after some nice American help, I made it on to the plane with minutes to spare – apparently the captain hadn't even arrived yet. I did offer to take his place, but...

We, I, arrived in Ottawa on time and in one piece – this is always a bonus. I met the Bytown Brigantine representative, Peter, and off we went to the vessel. We had to pick up another crewmember, and trustee, on the way – but that wasn't a problem. I had, however, forgotten how hot it was in Ottawa in June... That was a problem! We arrived at the boat and, oh, what a site she was! Coming from only sailing modern-rigged vessels, she was quite different from what I'm used to. We went to the pub, when in Canada – this is something one must always do on the first night, for some food and then I boarded the vessel. First impression? 'What? THEY HAVE A MICROWAVE!'



So, anyway, I got on and met the staff – who I couldn't remember in the morning – and then, it was bed time... I was tired!

****NB: the above came from my memory, the following comes from a diary****

"So, it's the first day – THERE'RE TOO MANY SAILS!"

On the first full day, it was time to start learning about 'square riggers'. This boat was a brigantine, which means that it has 2 masts, the forward one being the 'square rigged' one. There was a lot to learn – but many to teach... This wasn't a youth voyage, it was an adult one, which meant that we were going to get taught a lot. One of the PO's (petty officer) – Lassard – started off by teaching me how to secure the hanks by 'mousing' them – something which I've yet to take to OYT Scotland, they'll find out I've done it when they can't get their hanks undone in a force 8... This was in the morning. After that, it was TIMMIES TIME! For anyone who has not been to Canada, timmies is unlike anything in this country... It's the best hot drinks and muffins. Ever. And it more or less makes a Canadian, Canadian. With timmies in hand, John sat down with me and went through all the sails – I can still name them all to this day – *Main, Stays'l, Course, Tops'l, T'gallant, Inner, outer & flying jib!* While I was doing this, cookie – Ellen – had to go and get food for the voyage; \$1300 CAD was spent on a 6 day voyage – my finance officer would kill me, but I'm not Ellen... Once everyone had arrived, it was time to start to get to know the boat and everyone else on it. Everyone came, we all had the safety talks, and it was time to set sail the next day. But first, sleep!

“Square riggers: brilliant fun, no rush at all!”

The first full day sailing took us from Kingston to Gananoque (about 20nm). It was very good fun, and we all had the chance to ‘go aloft’ on the first day – brilliant fun. This is something we’re not allowed to do on our boats, so to have the experience of doing it was excellent. The main thing that I learnt about Square Riggers on this day, was that they weren’t built for speed – they were built for practicality. Coming from challenge yachts that, in the words of one of our first mates, *“Go 10 knots everywhere”* it was quite a shock to see her struggle to get up to 6 knots, however – this was no bad thing. I discovered that one of these vessels was a terrific learning environment and that it was an exceptional leadership-training tool for all of the young people who sail her. The amount of knowledge that you have to have just to run the deck on one of these vessels is impressive, and I take my hat off (well, I would have if it wasn’t so sunny) to all of the staff who sail them. Upon arriving at our destination, In Gananoque they had outdoor showers, those were an experience...

The second and third days were much the same – we were learning how the boat sailed and how we all worked together as a team. These boats really are about teamwork, much more than any other Sail Training vessel I’ve sailed on. There are no winches on these boats, and the sails are pulled up solely by hand; if you don’t work as a team, you ain’t gonna get nowhere. From that point of view, these vessels are phenomenal for sail training. On the second day we went to Brockville and on the third we went to Clayton in the USA.

“Met by the mayor!”

So, Clayton! It’s a place full of history – and full of people who love boats; couple those two elements together, and you get people that love old boats. We were



met by a horde of locals and tourists who all wanted to see this *tall ship* come in to port. Once we arrived, we were met by the mayor – who loved that there was a Scotsman on board, not so happy when she found out I lacked a kilt and bagpipes – and we decided we’d all like to go to the local, and world famous, boat museum. We got to see lots of old boats – and this made us realize how lucky we

were to have bunks, an engine, and even a microwave!

“Cannonballs & cold showers”

The final stop for the voyage was a little place called Pickton – a place, as it turned out, that Fair Jeanne would only just fit in. This sail was, in my opinion, probably one of the best sails – ever! We're not allowed to climb aloft on our vessels at OYT Scotland – mostly because they're modern rigged so the only 'things' to climb are the masts; getting to go aloft in square rigged vessels really is a great experience, for sailors old and new. Seeing the boat run at her best from a station above the deck is truly amazing and an experience which I shall never forget. Not only was this brilliant, but we met another sail training vessel... WAR! Yes, the vessel has cannons... and yes, we got to use them! Of course, as any fledging 'adult' will tell you – cannons are very dangerous and must not be used inappropriately. However, they can be used on a boat to fire at friendly vessels – apparently! I have asked our operations manager for them, but I was told 'no', in no uncertain terms. Firing a cannon is something that every ship's crew should do – honest!!



We arrived in Pickton – and there was only one shower! It was, however, cold – so no-one else, apart from me, chose to use it. I'm not used to the heat!! On our final night in Pickton we had a quick look around, but everyone was shattered – so a night on the boat it was to be! We left early the next morning to go to an anchorage for our final night on board the boat – a place called Colin's bay. The sail there was nice, but we spent all of it planning the evenings activities – the talent show! This involved each watch submitting a talent entry to the show, there were two watches – so we had to come up with something! Our Watch Officer, Ken Lidsay, was a massive fan of sea shanties – subsequently, much to our skipper's dislike back here, I have become a fan also – so we were to sing a sea shanty! For anyone who knows it, it was called *Haul away Joe!* But we – being a lovely, caring watch – decided to alter the words to suit each crew member! How wonderful of us – the captain was called Sam Drennan...

*Oh, when drennan was a new XO, the ship would never sail for him
Away! Haul away! We'll haul away joe!
Now that he's a captian, they it does what ever he tells it
Away! Haul away! We'll haul away Joe!*

The other watch decided to do a ship's circus show, which was met with much enjoyment and hilarity! Everyone enjoyed the night, and it made everyone come together well on the final night together! On the last day, everyone helped to clean the vessel and move her back to her port in Kingston – it was a wonderful voyage,



one that we will all remember with great fondness and affection.

On the last night, everyone had went home – but my flight wasn't until the next morning. So, with the crew – we all went to see a newly released movie – *Brave!* I don't think I've ever been asked to translate so many Scottish words in my life... The next morning, it was time to go – so Peter and I went off in his camper van to the airport – 4 hours early! Oh well, they had timmies there – all was good! I got on the flight to Newark (which was delayed) and I got on the Newark flight just in time. Once I was on, I met a rather 'interesting' woman from Bathgate, and – due to her 'interestingness', I managed to score a free upgrade to first class – you can't complain, can you...?

Now that I'm back home, I've had a chance to reflect on what the voyage truly meant to me. It showed me, first and foremost, that the skills I learnt on board our vessels at home are truly transferrable in the sailing world. The rigging, ropes and sails may be different – but the tools needed to work them remain the same; teamwork, determination and confidence. I needed to see these attributes put into action with other vessels before I would trust my own abilities within these classifications. The work that BBI do is exemplary and the fact that their sea staff are so young is the biggest accolade that can be given to the organisation. I loved my time on board their boat, and I will be extremely thankful to everyone who welcomed me, and allowed me to go.

I would personally like to thank all of the staff on board the boat, and especially the awesome cook – Ellen and to our WO, Lindsay, who gave me determination and spirit which I have endeavoured to bring into all of my voyages this year.

The final thank you

I'd like to say thanks to all of the guys at Ocean Youth Trust Scotland for nominating me for this opportunity. I'd also like to thank Lucy, Marcia and the guys at ASTO for bringing this all together – and lastly, but by no means least, to the James Myatt trust who fund this extraordinary experience. I know you guys will be inundated with applications next year, mostly because I've been telling everyone they should apply for it!!



