

Scotland/Canada Friendship Tour

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Way back in January of 2010 the CCA sent out an application form to all of its affiliates asking those women interested to apply to go on the 2010 Scotland/Canada Friendship Tour. The selection process from my understanding was not based on your curling ability (thank goodness), but on what you do for curling in your area.

I hesitated thinking that this was one of those 'too good to be true' deals. After speaking with my husband, he said: "If you don't apply – you're not going". Well since I was born in Scotland and most of my relatives are still there and my favourite thing to do is curl and socialize, I thought I would give it a chance; so I applied.

Months went by and I almost forgot about applying when I finally got word that I was accepted. Hooray – myself and 23 other women from across the country (except Quebec, Manitoba or Saskatchewan for some reason). I was elated. Then, I got an e-mail asking for money for the trip – hold up I said – I may be getting older, but I am not stupid, so I contacted Leslie Kerr (NOCA Executive Director) and asked if this was a scam or what? Leslie had Fran Todd (whom I had met at the Scotties here in Sault Ste. Marie) to contact me and assure me that this was on the up and up. Then I really got excited.

E-mails went out from Donna Duffet (Captain of the group), Cindy McFeeters (clothing director) and others and things started to go in a hurry.

Long story short (ha ha). The 24 of us met for the first time at the Toronto airport and friendships started from there.

We arrived at London Heathrow then flew to Glasgow where we were loaded on a bus to Stirling. By this time some of us had been on 'the road' for 24 hours – but we were high on anticipation. We went to our hotels, met our Courier from the Royal Caledonia Curling Club (RCCC) Brenda Macintyre who is also President of Ladies Branch. We also met Vice-President Clair McLaren, Junior Vice-President Jenny Bain, and Honorary Treasurer Sadie Anderson. RCCC is equivalent to our CCA.

Saturday November 6 was the beginning: We curled against the Stirling Ladies, took a tour of Stirling, had a cocktail party and opening banquet – this was the beginning of many many calories.

Sunday November 7 - Forfar – where we were billeted out and my Bunkie and I stayed with an older couple (Elsie & Davie) Elsie was a BBC actress in her time and we chatted for a long time about her many episodes on BBC TV. We curled and had supper at the Forfar Golf Club.

Monday November 8 – off to Aberdeen with a bus tour of the city, lunch at one of the Ladies' homes and curled that afternoon. Another reception/dinner.

Tuesday November 9 (my birthday) – left for Elgin at 9 a.m. and curled at 11:45 a.m. – lunch at a very nice place then back on the bus for Inverness – dinner at the hotel.

Wednesday November 10 – bus to the Inverness Ice Centre – curled and had lunch – back on the bus to visit Urquhart Castle – reception at the Town House – what a place – very swanky.

Thursday November 11 – on the bus for 8:30 a.m. and off to Kirkcaldy. We visited the House of Bruar – a very fine shopping centre with great cashmere etc. At the House of Bruar there was a statue of a Highlander in memory of the WW11 vets who died. The Canadians laid our poppies at the base of the statue and sang O Canada – a very moving experience even for those who were watching. We were back on the bus to Kirkcaldy where we curled, went home with our hostesses and had dinner at Lundin Links Hotel. Our hostess was great – lots of laughs and we stayed up talking about the differences in the RCCC and the CCA – which we can talk about another time.

Friday November 12 – left at 9:00 a.m. for Kinross and curled, had lunch and back on the bus at 2:15 for Perth. We curled the Perth ladies at 3 PM – had supper at the Ice Rink and then bussed to the Royal George Hotel.

Saturday November 13 – On the bus for 8 a.m. and travelled to Kelso (southern tip of Scotland). Time was allotted for shopping and those who wished to do so went with some of the Ladies. Some opted to just ‘chill’ at the club. We ate lunch and then curled at 1:30 pm against the Border Ladies. We left on the bus for Edinburgh at 4:30 and arrived at Murrayfield (curling rink) to meet our hostesses.

Sunday November 14 – 10:30 a.m. we met at the rink and there was a City tour arranged where you would be on your own for lunch and shopping – a tour of the Royal Yacht Britannia was arranged. This is the day that I went with my Uncle and Aunt and cousin to visit an outdoor/indoor market and spend some time with family. I had to be back at Murrayfield at 4:30 p.m. to go with hostesses and change for dinner at the Royal Scot Club. Our hostess that evening had cross country horses named Daisy and Elvis. This daughter was quite accomplished in this sport.

Monday November 15 – Curled the Murrayfield Ladies at 10 a.m. – had lunch and left for Lockerbie at 2:30 p.m. went back with our hostesses to dress and then to Supper. Our hostess and her husband had 280 head of milk cows so in the morning Monique (my Bunkie) and I headed down to the barns to see if we could help – we were just in the way, but the process was amazing. We had fresh from the cow milk and cream that morning – delicious.

Tuesday November 16 – Curled at 10:15 a.m. versus the Lockerbie Ladies had lunch and curled again at 2:30 p.m. – we went home with our hostesses and dressed for dinner at Dryfesdale House Hotel.

Wednesday November 17 - on the bus for 9 a.m. and curled the Dumfries ladies at 10. Lunch and back on the bus to depart for Stranraer at 2 p.m. We visited the Bladenoch Distillery in Wigtown before reaching the North West Castle Hotel. This is a hotel owned by the McMillan family and we were greeted by Hammie McMillan and his sister Gayle Munro. Nothing like rubbing elbows with world champions – they were so down to earth and great fun. We had an informal supper at the hotel.

Thursday November 18 – 10 a.m. half of us curled the Stranraer Ladies had lunch and the other half curled at 2:40 p.m. I should mention that the 4 sheet curling rink is right inside the hotel so we didn’t have to move very far – it was great to leave the suitcase and dress in our curling clothes and walk down to the rink – what a place. Hammie was actually curling second on his men’s league team and Gayle curled against the afternoon group. I had received so many gifts from my relatives and from every one of the places we visited that I had to send 2 boxes home from Stranraer – hopefully they get here before Christmas.

Friday November 19th – 9 am on the bus heading for Burns Country. We had lunch at the Ayre Ice Rink then curled the Ayr Ladies. We met our hostesses. We took the bus from the ice rink to May Steel’s home where we were all greeted with great warmth and friendship and had a great meal. Our hostesses picked us up there and we headed back to their homes for the night.

Saturday November 20th – left for Kilmarnock (Ayreshire) and curled the Galleon Ladies. After lunch we went back to Ayr and were picked up by our hostesses. At 6 PM we were in Curler’s Court. Now this is a very secretive organization where we were summoned by law to appear and go through the rituals of becoming a sister curler. I can say that all 25 of us who applied to Curler’s Court were accepted and passed the gruelling tests. ‘Nuff said.

Sunday November 21st - we had the morning off with our hostesses. My Bunkie went golfing at Troon ladies club with our hostess and I wandered the beach and spoke with the locals – great deal. We met at the Ayr Ice Rink at 1:45 and departed for Hamilton. We arrived at the Hamilton rink, met our hostesses and went home to change for supper at Marion Craig’s home.

Monday November 22nd – 10 a.m. curled the Lanarkshire Ladies and had lunch then left at 3 pm to go to Glynhill Hotel. The rest of the time was our own so I went and stayed with my cousin and his wife overnight – did laundry – went to the pub and met the rest of my relatives – great night.

Tuesday November 23rd – left my cousin's house at 7 a.m. and got to the bus for 9 am to travel to Greenacres Ice Rink. This rink is in the middle of nowhere, but is a great facility. We met Eve Muirhead who was kind enough to show us her medals and have her picture taken. She is a very quiet girl off the ice. We curled the Greenacres ladies at 10 a.m. had lunch and curled again against the Harvies Ladies. We had wine and cheese at the rink and took the bus back to Glynhill Hotel at 8 p.m.

Wednesday November 24th – Traveled to Braehead Ice rink. This is situated right inside a mall. We curled at 10 a.m. had lunch and took a tour of Pollok House – great history. We bussed it back to the hotel, changed, and bussed it to Anne Airey's home for supper. We left there at 10:45 p.m. – back to the hotel.

Thursday November 25th – We travelled back to Braehead Ice Rink at 9:15 and curled the Waterfront Ladies at 10. Lunch again and back to the hotel at 4p.m. We had our closing banquet at the Glynhill Hotel. We had made such great friends, no one really wanted to say goodbye. There were a lot of tears.

Friday November 26th – 7:00 a.m. bussed to Glasgow Airport. The flight left at 9:20 to Heathrow where some went from there to Montreal, Calgary, Vancouver or Toronto.

In a nut shell:

- We travelled 1600 kms in Scotland
- We (as front end) swept over 24.5 kms
- We threw 7.4 TONS of granite
- Slept an average of 6 hours per day
- Made great friendships
- Ate mega tons of great food
- Sang our hearts out
- Danced as late as they would let us
- Drank a dram or two
- Stayed in houses from cottages to castles
- Met and rubbed elbows with some of curling's greats
- Would do it again in a heartbeat if they would only let me.

This tour has been going on since the early 1950's and it is the first time I ever heard it existed. I thank Leslie and the CCA for putting out the call for applications and recommend anyone apply – it is the experience of a lifetime.

The 2015 Scottish Ladies will be coming to mid-Canada (Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba) and I hope that I can return some of the hospitality. I have spoken with Fran Todd and asked her to please put my name forward if there is anything I can do to repay.