

SAIL TRAINING IN CANADA

Midland to Godridge
(via the North Channel and Georgian Bay)



03 August 2009 - 26 August 2009

By

Kerrie Jones

I found out about the Sail Training exchange through the Rona Sailing Project. The Project asked if I would like to go and expand my sailing knowledge. I had an interview in London and a few days later I had a phone call asking if I would like to go to the Great Lakes in Canada, along with Caroline Sellar from OYT Scotland. I gratefully accepted, and this was the start of my great adventure.



On arriving in Canada both me and Caroline were met by trustees of the project (Justin and Mal). We stayed with them for two nights before boarding our vessel which allowed us to see a little of Toronto. We saw the Toronto Tower, the sports stadium where the vessels are docked in the winter, and the project storage unit. The storage unit surprised me a little. It was an underground car park which was cold and very damp, nothing like where I am used to helping out in the winter. We were also shown where they hold their charity reunion events. This was an old train turning station. Justin and Mal showed us some pictures of the vessels and trips that Justin had previously been on. They also told us

about the project and the way that the project runs onboard

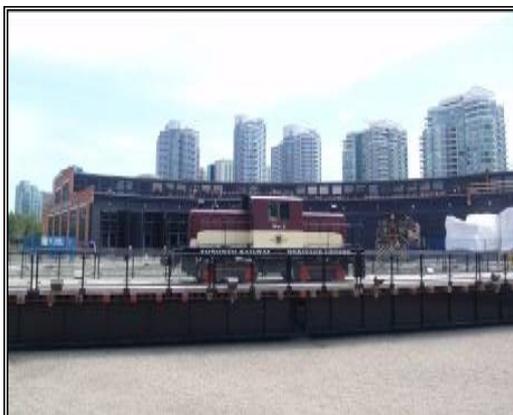


Toronto Tower



Baseball Stadium

We were picked up by a school bus from a local supermarket. The supermarket then helps the project with the food. Our first job was getting the food onto the bus as well as all the kit for the trip then all aboard for the bus journey to the vessel in Midland



The Turn Station



On the way to Midland



Previously I had sailed on Oyster ketch yachts with the Rona Sailing Project, but this was different, this was on the Toronto Brigantine vessels (72 foot Tall Ships). I had never sailed on this kind of vessel before. From the start I could see it was going to take a little while to get used to sailing, there were so many lines. The vessel we sailed on was called STV Pathfinder, her sister ship TS Playfare also sailed along with us.

STV Pathfinder

Not only was the ship different but as it was a lake, the movement of the water was different to how it was on the sea. I was told the waves on Lake Erie can be almost square. The lake's not being influenced by tides like in the sea and the waves are created by geography around the lake's shore line.



***Me Climbing to the Topsail Yard
Nice view from up here!***



The vessels sailed on and off of the moorings, which I had not done much of in the UK. I enjoyed looking out into the lakes from the topsail - this helped to show me the vastness of the lakes. I would then look on the chart to see where I had been watching. It made me think of what it would have been like for people that worked on tall ships like my ancestors had done. Up at the top of the topsail and on the bow spit were my best points on the ship.



Me Swimming off STV Pathfinder

We went on challenges around the ports so we could see what the port had to offer in addition to completing a challenge; of course the Brits won!. In one port we swam in an amazing natural pool with two waterfalls and then had a great mud bath! We had a sail furling then hoist, set and re-furl competition against the crew of TS Playfare in port - Go the Brits - as we managed to win the challenge - go STV Pathfinder!



When sailing at night we would hold a sunset ceremony to say thanks for a great day and for our great ship. The Captain would use this time as an opportunity to check the crew were wearing the right equipment for the evening - harnesses and lifejackets - and that we were wearing them correctly. We would take down the flags and sing and dance. For one song we all huddled together in a big circle and thanked the day, the next we all shouted as loud as we could spelling out the word SVT PATHFINDER with the wardroom leading followed by the trainees until we reached the R at the end when we all made a pirate's hook with our hands and shouted Rrrrrr!.

Caroline taking down the flag

On each course we had a film night, the film being projected on a main sail from a laptop and an overhead projector. We watched Around Cap Horn and Monty Python. Together everyone from both vessels sat, laid down or slept on the pontoons next to both vessels.

We had two camp fires this was great, singing all sorts of songs and sea shanties, we also had marshmallows and hot chocolate before bed, or on watch if you were unlucky!



Crews around the campfire

On the last night there was an acting night - you could sing, dance or act. The acts were judged, not only did this show how the groups had bonded and made friends, but it was a great way to round off a great trip.

The people I met were great and I made lots of new friends. All of the people on both ships were a lot younger than I was expecting; this included the skippers from both vessels; I was the second oldest. It was strange as at the Rona Sailing Project half the watch officers, mates and skippers are older than the wardroom in Canada. Caroline also came over on the same exchange program and we became great friends.

At the start of the program we were in different watches, both of them challenging, but we helped each other through and got to know each other well as we progressed. At the end of the first trip we were promoted to Petty Officers (PO's) on the same watch and we were able to work together, showing the Canadian trainees and wardroom how some things are done in the UK. Together we showed them how we stow sails, pipe to change watch and how we pronounce things, due to the Canadian accent confusing me at times!

All of the trainees had their unique personalities - some had huge fears of heights, but with a little help I managed to get them not only up to the topsail (top of the mast) but to work on the sails as well. A few had difficulty in learning the lines and knots. I helped them to learn through role-play and images. It was great teaching the young people ways of learning and getting over their fears and showing they can do what they want to do as there is always more than one way to learn.

Halfway through the trip both me and Caroline helped out preparing the vessel for the next trip doing work on the mouseings, the eye splices, tarring the ratings, sorting the blocks at the end of the yards and taking them back to deck level safely. We also stretched new lines to make jack stays - a safety line to attach on to in bad weather.



Conquer your fears

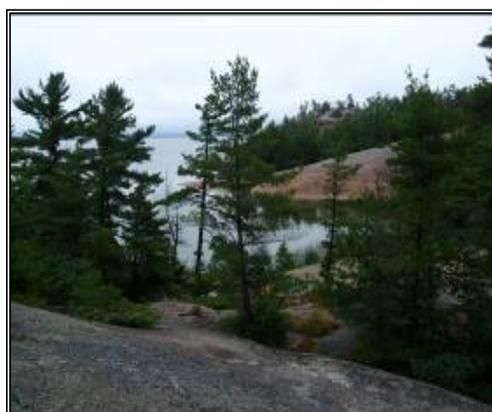
We encountered bad weather in our next trip and I was able to help shorten sail and assist in making the vessel safe for the trainees with the new lines to clip on to. Although his was great fun it was also scary at times; I was soaked trying to sort the sails and the yards as the gunnels filled with water. Most of the time the weather was sunny and we all caught the sun, some more than others. One one day we sailed out into the lake and the weather quickly started to turn bad - we found out there was a hurricane in the same bay and quickly retreated - returning to the port we had just left.



TS Playfair - weather is picking

The lakes were surrounded by dense woods and forests which were full of unusual rock formations and wildlife, much of which I'd never seen before.

Scenic views everywhere you look



Back in port on a change-over I had an encounter with a black cat that fell down the hatch and into the bin below, waking me from my bunk. We also had bats flying around the vessel - often flying into people as they worked or slept! Mosquitoes and 'biting' flies were also a problem for some onboard - luckily neither bit me!



One of our resident bats!

The wardroom stay on the vessel all summer and this shows as each of the wardroom know their job well and were able to help with any problem onboard. They also run a winter program whilst the vessel are out of the water. The programme includes lectures and training on the running of the vessels. In turn spending all this time with each other gives the Project a huge sense of commitment within the wardroom.



I had an amazing time learning and teaching others about the sailing both in the UK and Canada. It was an adventure of a lifetime and something that I will always remember.

Kerrie Jones
August 2009