

## 2006 Australia Exchange

My adventure began last December with my trip to London. In London I shopped, saw the sights, including a trip on the London Eye and finally attended my first formal interview. I enjoyed my time in London and never imagined that I would actually be selected, so was shocked when I got a phone call while on the train to the airport. Though I must apologise to the commuters on that particular day because I had to ring everyone I knew and scream at them in excitement.

Time flew between December and May because through the cold days of the winter refit Ocean Youth Trust Ireland I always had the excitement of my trip ahead. I finished sailing Lord Rank just the week before leaving giving me just enough time to prepare for my trip.

Finally 20<sup>th</sup> May I left Belfast City airport with a mixture of emotions and two days later I was in Australia and walking around Circular Quay not knowing which way to look first with the Opera House one way and the Harbour Bridge the other. It was here that I first met Pippa Knight from the Tall Ships Youth Trust who would be my sailing companion for the next four weeks. I had five days hostel living in Sydney taking in the sights of the zoo, the Blue Mountains and just generally adjusting to life “down under”.

When I first saw the Young Endeavour I was amazed by her beauty and size and once onboard could not believe my eyes when I saw televisions, a washing machine and showers, not normal luxuries in my sail training experiences. Already I knew I was in for a good time. On arrival Pippa and I were made welcome through a presentation ceremony when we received a certificate from the Young Endeavour Youth Scheme officials and members of the Australian-Britain Society.

Following this we had a couple of hours to settle in and meet the staff and find our way around the boat before the arrival of the 24 youth crew. During this time I discovered that I would be known as a super, which is short for supernumerary, basically meaning that I was part of the youth crew but training to become an assistant watchleader on the second voyage.

With the youth crew onboard we cast off and made a short passage to what must be one of the most wonderful anchorages, right in front of Sydney Opera House, what a sight from aloft at night. The attitude and enthusiasm of the youth crew was fantastic, they were there to have fun but also to learn and take part as a team and in the first night everyone bonded well through a series of teamwork and trust building games.

Between Sydney and Brisbane I could see the youth crew developing immensely both in confidence and teamwork skills due to the great programme that has been developed by the youth scheme and the way in which the staff carry it out keeping the atmosphere light-hearted and fun mainly through humour and cross-dressing.

By the time Command Day arrived and the youth crew had to elect a command team you were looking at completely different people. These were people who had overcome fears and seasickness and had learnt to live in the confined space of the ship but had also become sailors at the same time. The Command Day involved the youth crew taking complete control of the ship right down to preparing the meals, not an enviable task given the standard our chef had already set. The youth crew took it in their

stride getting the ship through many of the set waypoints as well as completing other set tasks and most importantly they got us to our destination in Brisbane.

The fun didn't stop there the following day we carried out what I think is an excellent part of the Young Endeavour youth scheme and that is the half day sail. The half day sail involves taking out Young Australians for a cruise who for numerous reasons cannot complete a full voyage. This was a chance for the youth crew to give something back to the youth scheme.

The last day for the youth crew was a sad and emotional time and for me it was sad to lose all the friends that I made but at least I still had another voyage to go. The next five days were a chance for me to relax, do some sightseeing and prepare for the next voyage. For the second voyage I was promoted to assistant watchleader which involved me carrying out watch-leading duties under supervision. This voyage was therefore more challenging for me and for the crew who had to battle with seasickness due to the high winds and rough seas. The activities on the second voyage were similar and just as much fun and I really enjoyed the challenge of my new position as well as the privileges, such as use of the staff mess. Too soon we arrived in Mackay where I was to leave the ship.

While I was sad to leave the Young Endeavour I knew my trip was not yet over but now I was heading off to explore on my own with my first stop in Cairns. During my week in Cairns I wasted no time and booked on a five day PADI Open Water Dive course, because where better to learn to dive than at the Great Barrier Reef. After that I was off again this time to New Zealand where I met up again with Pippa Knight in Auckland. Together we booked on the backpacker bus, "Kiwi Experience" and explored both North and South Island. New Zealand is an amazingly beautiful country with a range of sights and wild activities to both see and take part in. Whilst there I did a sky dive, a canyon swing, a heli-hike on a glacier, snow skiing, blackwater rafting, kayaking and horse-trekking all before returning back to Belfast where I will stay for three days before joining Lord Rank in Cadiz for the Tall Ships Cruise in Company.

I would now like to thank ASTO, The Australian-Britain Society, The Young Endeavour Youth Scheme, Ocean Youth Trust Ireland and everyone involved in making this once in a lifetime experience possible. Overall the trip was a life changing experience and something I will always look back on with wonderful memories. I gained a lot personally not only sailing skills but I gained in confidence and independence that will always be useful in the future. I have also brought back many ideas from the youth scheme which I hope to be able to introduce on future voyages.

So once again many thanks to all and to anyone reading this who may be thinking about applying for this exchange let me say, go for it!