



The Great Britain Team

to the

6th MLAIC World Long Range Championships

1-8 September 2007

*Good Hope Shooting Range, Atlantis,
Cape Town, South Africa*



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Team Captain:

Len Jackson

Team Members:

George Arnold

Karl Bailey

Mike Alexandre

Report

by *Len Jackson (Team Captain) and Gill Morgan*



Len Jackson (Team Captain), Karl Bailey, George Arnold and Mike Alexandre converged at London's Heathrow Airport on Thursday 30th August for an overnight flight to Cape Town. George and Mike travelling early morning from Jersey had the added complication of an extra set of customs to export and import the guns through, before all four had to go through the same rigmarole at LHR - the accompanying 44 kg of "lead weights" caused no problem at all!

By 4.30 the team, plus Karl's wife Trish and Mike's wife Gill and son Callum were happily ensconced in the British Airways Executive lounge enjoying a relaxing glass of wine and hot meal prior to boarding at 7.30 pm.

On arrival in Cape Town the following morning it took just 15 minutes to complete passport formalities and collect baggage, and a further TWO hours for us to import the guns. Half an hour per gun! Despite landing at 8.20 it was 11.30am before the somewhat jaded group emerged to a warm welcome from members of the South African organising committee who had been there from around 8.30am!

We were somewhat luckier than the Norwegian team who turned up at the same time to see if their guns had arrived. They had arrived two days earlier, but the guns were apparently taking the "scenic route" courtesy of BA's lost baggage policy!

It was blowing a gale as we picked up our two hired VW Sharons (which were an upgrade from those originally booked) - required to accommodate the five trolleys full of luggage we had. It also helped to have 6 drivers, as we all drove at some time during the fortnight.



We were then escorted to our Guest House, the Sunset Beach Hotel and Guest House in Milnerton, (www.sunsetbeachhouse.co.za) just outside Cape Town, by Dupli one of the local shooters. The Guest House, our home for the next seven days, was superb and we would highly recommend it to anyone visiting Cape Town.

After unpacking we found a restaurant five minutes drive away for some lunch. We were so hungry by then that we would have eaten anything, and too tired to notice we were the only customers! To be fair, the chef - he did seem excited to have some customers - did us proud, cooking us a "buffet" for around £4.50 per head which included; prawns, chicken, beef, mussels, squid, fish in soup, salads, carrots, creamed spinach and chips, followed by "a sweet buffet" of chocolate cake, coffee cake, tapioca, crème caramel and jelly and custard, all washed down with Castle beer - an interesting combination. While it was quite possibly the worst meal we had the entire trip, it was edible, it did not make us ill, it filled us to bursting point, and the warm welcome and cold beer were impressive.

Fortified, we then did a recce to the Range so the guys knew the way next morning, spotting a mongoose and beautiful blue helmeted guinea fowl which were prolific inhabitants of the range. Our first signs of African wildlife!

After a good night's sleep, we awoke the next morning to the promise of a spectacular view across the bay TOTALLY obscured by low cloud and drizzle. We were to hear more than once during our stay "Cape Town can have four seasons in a day!" We headed for the range where although the autumnal start gave way to spring sunshine, the flags of the competing nations were standing straight in the rather stiff breeze. The team was issued with information packs - complete with obligatory free sample of biltong - which they were rarely without the entire holiday - percussion caps and black powder, followed by registration and weapons scrutiny, which had been moved forward to allow the teams to have Sunday off. George Arnold and Karl Bailey were shooting original weapons, while Len Jackson and Mike Alexandre had reproductions. Teams from South Africa, USA, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Germany and Great Britain were competing and the morning gave an opportunity to re-acquaint with old friends and meet new ones. The Norwegians were finally smiling as their guns had arrived that morning none the worse for wear.



The military range, for those who have not visited, was impressive with its backdrop of Table Mountain, and beautiful white sand dunes (which looked like snow) stretching into the distance, carpets of wild flowers (particularly stunning after the rain), and meandering wildlife (such as the guinea fowl) totally unperturbed by the loud noises. Outside the club house a braai (barbeque) was prepared with lunch of Oryx stew being cooked in a traditional poinke which looked rather like a witches cauldron, but the contents when served were delicious!

Sunday dawned clear and sunny, with a noticeable drop in the wind. The view from the Guest House was indeed spectacular, with huge rolling Atlantic waves breaking on the beach 200 yards away, and behind that Table Mountain rising out of the sea towering over the bay and Cape Town. You can understand why the Capetonians revere the mountain, it dominates the skyline from wherever you are.

With a day off to do some sightseeing the GB party set off for Cape Town to visit the famous V & A Waterfront shopping centre, followed by a trip up Table Mountain by cable car. This was particularly harrowing for Trish who is afraid of heights, but she coped by keeping her eyes closed all the way up. More spectacular views from the top, even though the famous “table cloth” of low cloud scudded over it while we were up there. Awesome!

Monday was the first practice at 300, 400 and 500 metres, with all four team members shooting well in the warm sunshine with slightly less breeze. The well organized, if laid back, South African hosts organised Braai packs for the competitors which they took over to the barbeque area to have cooked at lunch time. There was a seemingly endless supply of biltong as well. At one point Mike found himself translating what an American competitor was trying to tell a South African shooter and he commented “Three nations divided by a common language!”



Trish & Karl Bailey

George Arnold

Gill Morgan

Mike Alexandre

Len Jackson

Meanwhile, the girls and Callum went to West Coast National Park, a huge nature reserve famed for its beautiful wild flowers which are quite spectacular in spring. It did not disappoint, and in addition to the flowers and stunning coastline, tortoises and ostrich abounded and we also saw kudu, zebra, dassies, lizards, ibis and guinea fowl, and had lunch at a beautiful old colonial mansion turned restaurant with weaver birds flitting around our heads as they flew in and out of the nests. Recommended to anyone visiting the area.

Tuesday saw the 600, 700, 800 and 900 metre practices, with concerns expressed about the weather turning the following day when the competition proper was due to start. I have to say, the weather forecasts seemed to be spot on every time - unlike the ones we get at home! Trish, Gill and Callum went off to Boulder Beach to visit the penguins, and got their first sight of whales in the bay, before continuing on to Cape Horn.

Tuesday evening the group made their way to the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town, the oldest surviving building in South Africa built in the 1660s and the regional headquarters of the South African Army in the Western Cape. Inappropriately dressed in lightweight suits, and summer dresses (that was just the team of course) we all froze waiting for the organising committee in their relaxed South African way to set out the chairs for spectators, and place half a dozen lanterns to light up the podium. An hour and a half later, a bagpipe band (the strangest Scottish regiment we had ever seen) began the opening ceremony, followed by speeches of welcome from; The President of the MLAIGB, The South African ML President, John Austin, the Sponsor, the Commanding Officer of the Regiment, and a message was read out from Bucky's widow.



Mike Alexandre, Len Jackson, Karl Bailey, George Arnold

The flags of the competing nations were hoisted and the 6th MLAIC World Long Range muzzle Loading Championship was officially declared open by a single but resounding cannon blast.

As promised, the weather on Wednesday for the start of the Championship was horrendous. Torrential rain greeted the competitors. The 300 metres event was concluded, but by the

time the 500 metre event began it was obvious to all it was impossible, although it took the organisers a further twenty minutes to officially call it a day, by which time everyone looked like drowned rats. For some reason the braai organised for Wednesday evening was cancelled too! On the way back to the Guest House the GB team stopped off at the shopping mall to buy some waterproof clothing - which, needless to say was never actually used as the weather improved from that moment on! Then it was back to the guest house to attempt to dry hats, sweatshirts and jackets using the small borrowed electric radiators and bathroom hairdryers. Our rooms looked rather steamy, but for all the wrong reasons!

Karl Bailey won the first GB medal of the Championships with a score of 35.01 in the 300 metres original class. Mike Alexandre making his debut on the world stage found himself partnering Geraldine Lemoine of France. Despite initial nerves he was pleased to shoot a 34.02 including two V bulls, with Len Jackson scoring 37.00 just above him.

The next day the weather was much better, and while Trish, Gill and Callum went horseriding in wine country, and then visited a Cheetah outreach programme where they had the opportunity to get close up and personal with a magnificent cheetah, the men had a lot to fit in, shooting 500, 600, 700 and 800 metres in an attempt to catch up from the previous day. Len Jackson did exceptionally well at 500 metres, finishing



The British Team preparing to shoot

14th out of 40 just 5 points off gold, Karl got silver and George Bronze in the original. At 600, solid shooting from everyone and another bronze medal for George. Mike was disappointed with his showing at 700 metres, as was Len Jackson, with everyone tiring it was noticeable that the scores were slightly lower all round at this event, but at least Karl ended up with bronze. Wednesday's cancelled Braii was



The Team Captains

tacked on to the end of the day and Trish, Gill and Callum joined the four shooters with everyone tired but in good spirits, delicious food and plenty of beer it was a fitting end to a long day.

Mr Pedersoli himself turned up to witness a number of his guns in use, enabling Mike to compliment him on some of his guns, and bend his ear about the problems he had had with his Pedersoli Gibbs. Mike was assured if he had any problems at all in future he was to go straight to the great man himself! We were also invited to visit the factory if ever we were in Gardone, Italy.

Friday saw the final two individual events at 800 and 900 metres, with Len in 13th with a score of 52.01 in the 800 metres and Mike scoring 43.02 in 27th place, and a silver for George with a 32 in the original class, it was a good start to the day. Kobus de Villiers of South Africa scored a 60.01 in the 800 metres with an original, which would have given him a medal in the replica class as well! In fact he excelled at all distances except the 300 metres when Howard Markham of the USA won Gold. At 900 metres George replicated his 32 to earn another silver for GB. The mid range team events followed on, where GB excelled particularly at 500 metres, with Mike Alexandre shooting a personal best, GB finished just 2 points behind South Africa in second place, and overall aggregate fourth just 6 points off bronze medal position. Unfortunately,

there was a protest by the USA over the French and both George and Mike had to sit on the arbitration committee (as the French and USA contingent were not eligible). It was decided to deal with it immediately, rather than wait until the end of the day, which meant those involved missed lunch, and starting their next shoot late and under pressure. It clearly affected both shooters' concentration but Mike

in particular as it was his first experience of an arbitration committee. In the end South Africa won team gold, France silver and USA bronze.

Saturday, the final day of a long hard week. With the 700 metre event being dropped from the programme due to lack of time, the long range aggregate was taken from 800 and 900 metres only and won by South Africa, from Switzerland in silver and USA in bronze again. Despite a strong showing at 800 metres, GB were disappointed to finish in 5th position overall thanks to a disappointing shoot at 900 metres, with only Captain Len Jackson recording a worthwhile score in that event, although both George and Len scored V Bulls to earn themselves a special badge. By mid afternoon everyone was back at the guest house, packing ready to leave the following morning and getting ready for the presentation evening held at a hotel on top of a hill with the spectacular sight of the lights of Cape town spread out across the bay down below us. All participants were presented with a placque, Len received a special award for being Team Captain, George and Len were awarded a badge of honour for the V bulls at 900 metres, and George and Karl received their silver and bronze medals.

Notable achievements by our opponents included; Japie Maritz of South Africa who won the 500 metre gold, 800 metre bronze, silver at mid range aggregate, and topped the scoring in the mid range team event. Kobus De Villiers with his



The International Teams



Left: Karl Bailey

Right: George Arnold



exceptional gold medal haul in the original class also scored the second highest long range aggregate score in the team event, with South Africa winning gold in both the long and mid range team events. 16 year old (yes sixteen!) Jason Di Bona of South Africa won individual gold at 700 metres, impressively five full points ahead of his nearest rival and compatriot Casper Badenhorst. The formidable Swiss husband and wife of Sylvia and Josef Ruoss excelled as well, Sylvia winning gold at 600 metres, while husband Josef won gold at 300 metres and bronze at 900 metres. Josef topped the mid range aggregate score sheet with Sylvia in third! It was Geraldine Lemoine, however, who got an award for best female average.

Mr Pedersoli gave a special award (a Pedersoli rifle) to the two shooters with the highest score with a Pedersoli gun and these went to Per Ostby of Norway (good job his gun turned up!) at mid range and Lee Shaver of the USA who won the Long Range Aggregate medal.

So, competition over our thoughts turned to seeing a bit more of the Western Cape. Our grateful thanks to Dupli who kindly agreed to allow the guns and accompanying shooting paraphanelia to be deposited in his gun room for the following week while we made our way up the Garden Route.

We traveled to Knysna on Sunday where we stayed for three nights. First stop was the Plettenburg Bay Game Reserve in the hope of seeing some of the "Big Five". It was an interesting and extremely entertaining visit, with our guide - called "Forget" - a brilliant story teller who made the visit totally "un-Forget-able"! As we drove through the gate, with Len in the driving seat of the Sharon, Trish and Gill shouted "Stop, we want a photo of the giraffe". Len's answer of "What giraffe" had everyone in stitches. It was 5 yards from the car, but all Len could see was legs which he mistook for trees! We got close up to rhinoceros, giraffes, hippos (well their eyes and ears anyway) and within 5 yards of an incredibly beautiful lion





- whose lioness and two cubs were not quite so sociable. The only animal we missed was the buffalo, but we saw zebra, wildebeest, hartebeest, waterbuck, springbok, blue cranes, ibis, vultures, and two land rovers as our first one broke down while we were surrounded by rhinos, zebra and wildebeest!

The following day we visited the Knysna Elephant Park where we got close up and personal with the elephants, both adult and babies, all orphaned. It was quite humbling to be so near to these huge, but gentle creatures, and realise what mankind has done driving them to near extinction over the years to harvest their ivory.

Next, Plettenburg Bay again, this time a boat trip to see the famous whales. The boat trip was interesting, as the boat was launched from the beach, pushed by a tractor and “shot” into the sea. Once there we were privileged to see a large school of dolphins (around 60) swimming in and out of the huge waves, getting incredibly close to the shore. They cavorted quite happily around the boat entertaining us all, stunning creatures and I so many of them. The Whales were slightly more reticent, with one (thankfully) small lone Right Whale swimming directly underneath our boat, much to the horror of our pilot, in an attempt to lose us. Finally we got within about 50 metres of a pod of whales, much larger than the small character we had upset (they grown up to



60 ft long and weigh up to 100 tonnes), who spouted and rolled around and did not pay us much attention. Then the dolphins caught us up, and came over as well as if to say “They’re boring, look at us, look at us!” Horrific to think that these beautiful whales had also been hunted and killed in vast numbers over the years.

Coming back to shore, we all had to hold on tight, as the engine was cranked up to full speed and the boat was raced on to the beach. The engines automatically kicked up as they hit the sand and once the boat beached it was towed up the beach by the tractor. An interesting experience, although I’m not sure that the tour guide and pilot were used to quite so much attention being paid to the boat and its engines, rather than the wildlife!

Knysna’s delights more or less exhausted, our next stop was Oudtshoorn deep in ostrich country. There were ostrich farms all over the area with ostrich in vast numbers, happily grazing in the fields as we passed. We stayed one night in the Baron hotel. Our first trip was to the incredible Cango Caves, the biggest caverns we had every visited. They are immense and the word spectacular just does not do them justice. They used to hold concerts in one cavern for two and a half thousand spectators. The acoustics must have been amazing, but unfortunately, with only one entrance it got rather hot inside



and they stopped doing this in the mid 1990s. However, our guide did play the drums (with extreme proficiency) on some of the rock formations, It was sad to see how souvenir hunters had broken off the baby stalactites as souvenirs, sheer vandalism, by ignorant people who do not understand the consequence of their actions. However, the caves are still astounding and definitely a must see if you visit the area. Leaving the caves, we continued on over the Swartburg mountain pass, mainly dirt road, built by engineer Thomas Bain over the Swartburg Mountains, with the help of 250 prisoners. Breathtaking views over the valleys below, and some extremely hairy turns with steep drops at the side, but definitely worth the effort, before we dropped down into the small town of Prince Albert, very colonial and very quiet for lunch.

Next morning we were on our way to Montagu in wine country to visit some vineyards, on the penultimate day of our trip. The scenery changed dramatically, from the awesome mountains, some topped with snow, to fynbos covered desert and finally the luscious green valleys covered in vineyards. Passing through the Klein Karoo, desert and fynbos, we came upon Ronnie's Sex Shop on the Route 62 in the middle of nowhere. We had to stop, and sample the delights of the Roadkill Café! Ronnie himself served us with cold beer and explained that it was originally opened as a farm shop but customers were in short supply. Ronnie returned to Cape Town to earn some money, leaving his brother in law to mind the premises. After a drunken night out, his brother and friends painted out the word "farm" and substituted the word "Sex" and were amazed to find business took off, because people kept stopping to take photographs. They opened a bar, café and shop selling tee shirts with "Ronnie's Sex Shop" emblazoned across them and have high hopes of making a profit this year. They have a website; www.ronniessexshop.co.za. Visits to a couple of vineyards, to sample the delights were made in the afternoon. We stayed in beautiful thatched guest rondavals in Montagu with a resident troop of baboons just around the corner providing plenty of photo opportunities. The guest house owner said they often throw stones at people out walking and Gill was heard to mutter "Wonder who they learned that from!".



Lasting memories will include the friendliness of our South African hosts, regardless of their race or background. They are so proud of South Africa, and all made us promise to return to their beautiful country and were keen to show us its beauty and hospitality. The magnificent scenery from mountains to coast it is without doubt one of the most beautiful countries you could ever visit. The biltong, which became the team's constant companion – wonder what they are all chewing now! The incredible animals we were privileged to meet, from the dapper well manicured lion to the gentle giant elephants and wallowing whales, from the screeching ibis to the doe eyed ostrich. The bright coloured flowers, particularly the Bird of Paradise, Bougainvillea and jacaranda. I would like to say also that despite concerns over safety, we felt totally safe the entire trip. A huge thank you to the organizing committee, and our hosts, particularly Willie de Beer, Johann Theron, Merwe Van Rensburg, John Austin, Corena de Beer, Johan De Beer, and Dupli. Silke and Gail at the Sunset Beach looked after us admirably and we look forward to visiting them again, and although our other hosts only had brief visits from us, all accommodation was excellent and we would happily recommend all of them.

*Len Jackson (Team Captain)
& Gill Morgan, September 2007*

