

## SAIL TRAINING INTERNATIONAL CANADIAN EXCHANGE 2008

Three years ago I was in the position that many of you may be in at the moment. I was, for the first time, about to step on to *John Laing* for a voyage feeling nervous, apprehensive and not quite sure what to expect. Now, three short years later, I am sitting on board the *Caledonia*, a 245ft square rigger, in the beautiful Saguenay Fjord in Quebec, Canada after being selected to go on the ASTO international exchange.

My journey started on a wet day in January, heading into Central London for a formal interview feeling very nervous. Luckily my nerves soon calmed and I had a fantastic time in London but never really believed that I would be selected. However a few weeks later I received an e-mail saying that I had been selected to go to Canada and sail on the *Caledonia*.

As far as I was concerned June couldn't come fast enough. The final days of my university exams were only a week before my trip was due to start, making it almost impossible to concentrate on them, but finally the 4<sup>th</sup> June came and I was at Heathrow ready to start my adventure. Initially I had a day in Montreal and 2 days in Quebec City to give me a chance to do some sightseeing and take in some of the French Canadian culture. Eventually the day came to join the boat. I went down to the port to watch her come in and, after what seemed like an age, a tall 3 masted vessel appeared on the horizon coming round a bend in the St. Lawrence River, looking majestic in the morning sunlight. Finally she docked and the time had come for me to properly start my Canadian adventure.

I was nervous when joining the boat but the crew made me feel at home straight away. I had been thrown straight in at the deep end and was working on the boat as a deckhand. After a few introductions and a chance to put my kit in my cabin I was put



straight to work on a deck wash. I'm pleased to say there is no such thing as a free ride!

My first few days were hard work and a steep learning curve but some of the most rewarding. One of the hardest jobs in these first few days was helping to replace one of the boats anchors. This involved pulling 5 shots (450ft) of heavy anchor chain onto the dockside in the pouring rain, requiring immense teamwork, which really helped me to bond with the rest of the crew.

After a couple of days in Quebec City we left on the first of 3 trips up the St. Lawrence River to the Saguenay Fjord and back. This was the first time that I had ever sailed a square rigger before and I was apprehensive about going aloft for the first time. However once I had overcome my initially fear I



looked forward to working aloft at every available opportunity. The relatively small numbers of deckhands and the tight schedule the boat had to keep to meant that there was often a large amount of sail work and sail changes to be done everyday.

By the 2<sup>nd</sup> week I had managed to learn where all the different control lines were and became an effective member of the team, whilst being given the opportunity to take on roles with greater responsibility, such as doing bridge watches and tender driver. Bridge watch gave me the opportunity to learn about the IALA B buoyage system, or as I may have announced "the buoys are the wrong way around"! In Canada and the US reds are left to starboard and greens to port when heading up river.

During one of my days off from the boat I got the chance to go whale watching in the St. Lawrence and Saguenay Fjord and despite it being one of the wettest days of the trip I, along with several other staff members, were able to see fin, minke and blue whales. Along with the official whale

watching tours we were also lucky enough to sail up the Saguenay Fjord with a group of beluga whales surrounding the boat.

Unfortunately my 3 and a half week stint on the Caledonia went all too fast and just as I felt I had really got to know everyone and know the boat it was time to leave. My final night onboard fell on Canada Day in Quebec City; this gave everyone the excuse to give me a fantastic send off that I will remember forever.

Back in the UK and I went straight back onto *John Laing* for the 1<sup>st</sup> Tall Ships race from Liverpool to Måløy keen to apply some of the skills that I had learnt in Canada. It just so happened that the 2 Canadians that were doing the exchange the opposite way were on this trip enabling me to, hopefully, help them have as fantastic a trip as I had.



I would like to thank Ocean Youth Trust South, ASTO and Canadian Sailing Expeditions and everyone else involved with making this amazing experience possible.

During my time over in Canada I had the chance to meet up with some fantastic people, some of whom had sailed on many sail training boats throughout Canada and worldwide. This gave me the chance to chat about and share sail training experiences, enabling me to learn and develop as a sail training volunteer.

My time in sail training began those 3 years ago with my first voyage on *John Laing*. Now Ocean Youth Trust South has given me the opportunity to sail on *Laing* to Scotland, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Poland and Norway and now go on exchange to Canada. If you are reading this and are



the same nervous, apprehensive person that I was not really sure whether to sign up for a trip on board John Laing I have one piece of advice. GO FOR IT!! It really is adventure under sail, and you never know where that one voyage may take you 3 years down the line.



Ben Martin