

FORMER BLUES PLAYERS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

by Marie Davies

BLUES CANADA TOUR 1994

30th Anniversary

Today at the Former Players' Spring Lunch, which is being hosted in the CMC Marquee, many of the 1994 tourists will be enjoying a reunion of a memorable tour across the Atlantic.

At the end of the 1993/94 season, 22 players – including Paul Alston as captain – flew to Canada for a two-week tour, playing games against four Canadian clubs. The players were accompanied by Tour Managers Bruce Willey (Club President), Ian Bullerwell (Club Chairman), Dr. John Hood who was in charge of rugby laws and stats. Kevin Brind combined playing with fitness and physiotherapy. Several Followers also made the journey to support the team.

I am grateful to the former Keeper of the Records, the late Jack Pope for his meticulous record keeping and itinerary details of the tour.

The tour uniforms certainly impressed the clubs visited, especially the blazer badge which incorporated the traditional Bedford Eagle and Castle, accompanied by the red maple leaf of Canada.

The first club played was James Bay in Victoria on Vancouver Island. This club was founded in 1886, the same year as Bedford, and it was good to see the international shirt of Budge Rogers on display in the clubhouse. Bedford won 36-19 with Andy Finnie in fine kicking form.

Still on Vancouver Island, the squad moved north for their next game against Nanaimo Hornets. Nanaimo is a coastal town with a picturesque log cabin clubhouse. Bedford won comfortably 65-15 and also held their own in the club's regular post-match beer drinking competition – apparently sitting astride logs!

They then took the ferry back to Vancouver which was the base for the rest of the tour. The next fixture was against Pocomo, on the outskirts of Vancouver.

The 1975 touring team also played them and there were two photos of the visitors in the clubhouse – one taken outside Goldington Road and the other outside the Pocomo clubhouse. There were many familiar faces in the photograph including John Cooley whose son Jonathan was in the 1994 squad 19 years later. Another fine win for the Blues 46-10.

The final fixture was against Fraser Valley Select played at the Exhibition Park Stadium, a massive sports complex in Abbotsford.

Unfortunately, Cameron Glanvill ended up in hospital when he was injured tackling Jason Simons who was playing for Fraser Valley. Jason, a Kiwi, came to England the following year and played for Bedford for two seasons. This final game brought another victory for the tourists 39-7.

Between matches there was sightseeing and beautiful scenery to enjoy, while the more energetic activities were skiing and rafting. The tourists were given a warm welcome on and off the field by their hosts and apparently 'all in all' and without going into details, it was a very memorable tour! Hence when I asked for outstanding memories the response was an emphatic, 'What goes on tour, stays on tour!' No doubt those memories will be shared around the lunch table today!



25TH ANNIVERSARY OF CANADA TOUR 1994



CANADA TOUR 1994

The only memories shared with me:

Ben Whetstone. As Ben suffered a recurring injury on arrival, he didn't play at all – well not on the field! His memories mainly involved food, drink and partying!

Pete Garrett. His memory was the complete surprise he experienced, when, Andy Finnie sat at a piano post-match and the whole party discovered he was a very accomplished pianist!

Several tourists mentioned Andy's fine kicking form especially in the first game when the Pacific winds caused his final conversion to alter course three times before it went over from the touchline!

Jonathan Cooley. Probably the visit to the Pocomo clubhouse and seeing his father in Bedford's 1975 touring team photo on the wall.

Cameron Glanvill. Not a pleasant memory! Trip to hospital in the final match with a broken arm.

Jimmy Chandler. Jimmy's memories were mainly of 'off the field' activities involving cars and fire-extinguishers! Jimmy hastened to add he remembered the incidents as an observer, not a participant!

Georgie Harris-Bristow. Although only four years old in 1994 Georgie remembers Steve arriving home from Canada with a cuddly toy for her – a moose, which she still has.

Andy Finnie was the top points scorer with 53 – 16 conversions, one drop goal and six penalties.

Vince Turner was the top try scorer with four.

Vince is unable to be here today as he is awaiting back surgery.

15 of the touring party are here today. Sadly two of the players left us far too soon – both legends at Goldington Road – the 'larger than life' Steve Harris in 2007 and the 'Bedford through and through' Mark Howe in 2012. The then President and true gentleman Bruce Willey sadly passed away in 1999. Bex, Mark's wife, is certainly not a stranger at the club and we are expecting Pat (Harris) Parry and Andrew to join us today.

Most of the tourists still live and work locally. Ben Whetstone is the club's recruitment officer and serves on the Former Players' Committee alongside Cameron Glanvill and Jimmy Chandler. Ashley Tapper continues to coach rugby at Bedford Modern School. Vince Turner lives and works in Cambridge and Matt Deans is in the Metropolitan Police and coaches' junior rugby at his son's club in London.

We wish them all a happy reunion – 'Once a Blue, always a Blue!' and in Rudi Strauli's words, 'Friends, forever!'

Tourists present today! Paul Alston, Ben Whetstone, Ashley Tapper, Jimmy Chandler, Andy Finnie, Pete Kemble, Cameron Glanvill, Tim Taylor, Pete Garrett, Mark Sharp, Matt Deans, Paul Allen, Steve Freeman, John Egan, Richard Stidolph. Also welcome to Dr. John Hood who looked after any injured tourists.