

Experiences of Overseas Cricket Tours by Adrian Hawkes

N.B. This article was originally written primarily for an English audience but as adapted may still be of some interest to Australians

INTRODUCTION

About the time I commenced playing for my school Old Boys, Old Merchant Taylors in North London, in the early sixties they ceased overseas tours. They stopped going to Paris; they had also (with Pinner) toured Kenya, but somehow never got around to repeating the experience. A whole generation of cricketers then passed through the club, with no experience or opportunity for overseas touring – an experience which combines the pleasures of a holiday without the strangeness of feeling merely an outsider; where the hospitality of your hosts can open doors you never knew existed; where you can gain insights into foreign social and political cultures which I believe, short of having the privileged access of a journalist or diplomat, you would be unlikely otherwise to obtain as a mere tourist.

I had been to Cyprus and North America initially only as a tourist, and then subsequently on cricket tours; the latter were incomparably better and more enriching. I debated this point with the former M.T.S. Cricket Master, Bruce Ritchie, who – maybe tongue in cheek – suggested that overseas cricket tours amounted to little more than cricket and drink and that in fact players learned less of a country than they would merely as tourists.

Given that O.M.T. cricket teams did not tour overseas in the 1970s and 1980s, I was slightly fortunate to get the opportunity through other clubs. Much though I enjoyed playing for O.M.T.s, I always thought it sensible to play for at least one other team so as to play with cricketers of ability from a wider cricket and social background, and with different attitudes and philosophies towards the game.

EUROPE

Paris: I used to play for Demi-Johns (a team based on former members of St. Johns College Oxford. The qualification was that you had either gone to St.

Johns or not!) Overseas trips with this club started almost by accident – a pub conversation about wishing to take a side to Paris, (where a cricket friend had been in the British Embassy) which developed into an attitude of “why not try?”. Thus started about 15 years of the most enjoyable long weekends’ cricket trips I have experienced. France is, of course, as everyone knows, the Olympic Silver Medalist at cricket (won by Britain in the Paris Olympics of 1900). This event was re-enacted in Paris in 1987 as was also in 1989, the 1789 match which had to be cancelled because of the French Revolution. The M.C.C. 1989 side had a number of players with first class experience, but lost!

While the standard of cricket was thus reasonably high, I always said I did not wish to take anyone to Paris who just wished to play cricket. Nevertheless, cricket could act as a marvellous lynch-pin and excuse for a long weekend in Paris and Northern France in warm July and August nights.

The Standard Athletic Club played in the forest of Meudon near Versailles. It was the only sports club of which I am aware whose club house was opened by the Queen. The atmosphere was reminiscent of Somerset Maugham’s short stories as were some of the tales of personal liaison which formed part of the background gossip. The cricketers were more than competent on the field, often a polyglot mixture of Dutch, Pakistani, Australian, South African and English. Off the field, there were a hard core of players who over the years introduced the teams to more restaurants, bars and brasseries than I can remember, as well as filling us in on the detail of French business and political life.

Switzerland and Italy: Arising from these beginnings, Demi-Johns subsequently received invitations to play in Italy, where I organised two tours. We played against Turin, and against Milan and Northern Italy at Lake Como. Italy is an associate member of the I.C.C. and has in fact a representative team which has played at Lords; their sides (unusually) contain a number of native

Italians. Indeed there is an Italian cricket league playing as far South as Rome and Naples. One of the rules of the competition is that each team must contain a number of native-born players.

Milan C.C. was primarily an English expatriate side who had a vague connection with the Dexter family, which they believed to be much exaggerated. They played in a mountain valley halfway between Lake Como and Lake Lugano with the Lakes beneath and the mountains above, and the cows jangling their bells to the side (giving a literal meaning to "cow corner") – a very beautiful and peaceful scene, which was once enlivened by a party of Italians screeching to a halt in their car and the exclamation "Ah, polo!"

Cricket is still played at some Swiss schools. I have a print of cricket being played in Geneva as far back as 1819. Geneva played on an artificial hockey pitch overlooking the Lake, built above a reinforced concrete structure which apparently contains a hospital designed to operate in times of nuclear war. Because of the shape of Geneva at this point, it has been known for sixes to be hit out of Switzerland into France and on one occasion it is alleged a six was hit which not only went out of Switzerland, but also crossed the relatively narrow tongue of French land, and landed again in Switzerland on the other side! It is alleged that you do not need your passport to reclaim the ball.

Brussels: Firstly, a warning to any cricketer going round the bars in the evening. There are no public lavatories in Brussels, and you can easily see why the Mannequin Pis is the symbol of the City. The cricket ground immediately adjoins the battlefield of Waterloo and you bowl with the Lion Mound in the background. Again, the sides are very polyglot. I remember once facing an opening attack of the (deposed) Fijian Ambassador from one end and a former Pakistani under nineteen from the other – slightly worrying to see an opening bowler pull off a Pakistani national sweater. Fortunately, the wicket is a superb artificial wicket with relatively low and true bounce which makes batting a pleasure.

Cyprus: I obtained the opportunity to play in Cyprus through having joined Incogniti – another wandering side which gave me an opportunity to play on grounds and with players I would not have met through O.M.T. In perhaps one of the more frenetic weekend's cricket I have ever played, I captained an O.M.T. side at Durrants on the Sunday in (for England) hot weather, rushed off the field and after 2 pints of Shandy was taxied to the airport, slept overnight at Larnaca Airport in Cyprus and

was on the cricket field by 11.00 am in the morning in temperatures well over the 100 degrees having been driven with a military escort in the no-man's land between the Greek and Turkish forces. The inability of my body to compensate for the heat and lack of sleep gave my bowling a semblance of flight, which by fortune led to my picking up a number of wickets of batsmen who could not believe I was bowling as slowly as I was!

Cypriot cricket is played on artificial wickets, but the outfield is a thick couch grass. Effectively you can only ever score one run along the ground; otherwise you hit the ball in the air. I can remember a Cambridge Blue hitting elegant cover drives with all his force, which just about reached extra cover, while a more uncultured batsman at the other end slugged over the top far more effectively. The Forces sides were usually fit young men, who either played tip and run or relied on the true bounce of the artificial wicket and hit cross batted shots either over cover or mid wicket. Slow bowlers tended to do better than seam bowlers.

NORTH AMERICA

U.S.A. and Canada: Cricket in the U.S.A. and Canada goes back a very long way. It was certainly played in California during the 1849 gold rush, and the international Canada v U.S.A. matches are the oldest international cricket matches in the world and pre-date the Ashes.

I played in Ontario, Canada for half a season after leaving school. This included the coldest match I have ever had the dubious pleasure of playing. We played in April before the snow had lifted on a frozen grass pitch in a blizzard. It was rather like playing on linoleum. All the players wore anoraks and gloves; the batsmen were the only persons to keep warm. Generally, wickets were matting on concrete which is very bouncy and fast, and assists good backfoot players who can hook and cut. It also assisted wrist spinners.

Many years later, through playing with friends in Incogniti, I obtained the opportunity to join Lytham St. Annes on a tour of Southern California. This is always one of the more nerve-racking things to do; to join a side where you only know one or two players and you feel you have to "prove" yourself. Then in my late 20s, though never quick, I did from time to time open the bowling even though I have only ever used a five pace run. For some reason, the Lytham Captain invited me to open the bowling in the initial tour game (with no net practice behind me). I am sure most bowlers can well recall their

first ball of the season, whether in the middle or the nets. Mine was very little different, slow and stiff, and looping down on its way to the keeper. There was a slight hiss in the slips who came up two paces and the keeper came up to the stumps. Luckily for me, my second ball had a semblance of rhythm and must have hit a spot on the seam. It pitched and seamed away, flying past the batsman virtually at chest height while he was still raising his bat. It hit the keeper's gloves in front of his face with (to my mind) a crack which could be heard round the ground. The slips let out an audible sigh and retreated. The keeper went back again. I relaxed and thereafter thoroughly enjoyed the tour, although I was always described in the local Lytham press reports as "Adrian Hawkes, who comes from the South!"

Very few native Americans play; the majority of players are West Indian or Asian, with the odd English or Australian cricketer. The quality of their best players who make the national side is probably just about County 2nds or Minor County standard. The Hollywood Cricket Club still exists although no longer does it have the fame which it had in the 30s under the captaincy of Sir Aubrey ("round-the-corner") Smith.

SOUTH AMERICA

Chile, Argentina and Brazil: When O.M.T. began to think of touring abroad again in about 1987, Australia then seemed too ambitious and expensive a project. Originally, there were thoughts of going to South Africa, although these were dropped primarily because of the social unrest. Arrangements were made to tour Chile, Argentina and Brazil. The standard of cricket in Chile and Brazil is low, but this is more than made up for by the hospitality of the hosts, and the magnificent scenery. Argentine cricket is stronger, and is supplemented by professionals who can make a significant difference. Indeed, Argentina plays in the I.C.C. Minor Nations World Cup, and does have a significant history of cricket going back early into the last century. While the atmosphere and tradition of the grounds are reminiscent of the British Empire, most of the players, who speak impeccable English are in fact native born Argentinians, whose loyalties tended to become slightly strained or confused by the Falklands war. Cricket is still played in some of the schools, although the standard is not that high.

AUSTRALIA

New South Wales: Again, because of contacts made, I was invited to go on three tours of Australia

– (or to be more precise New South Wales) with Dick Hawkins XI. The late Dick Hawkins who played at Lords for Eton before the war, was a throw back to pre-war country house cricket. He owned his own cricket ground which adjoined an imposing Georgian Manor in the Midlands. Tea used to be provided in a thatched pavilion by the ladies who allegedly milked the cows in the morning!

He was originally invited to tour Australia out of a casual remark when his wife was judging at the Royal Agricultural Show in Sydney. This again tends to indicate the casual way in which overseas tours germinate.

What can one say about Australia? I think possibly for all English cricketers it would for cultural and historic reasons be the best place in the world to tour. The standard of first grade cricket – even excluding State and Test cricketers – is in my opinion significantly higher than that of English Club cricket. Even without their Test and Shield players, the standard is equivalent to an English County Second Eleven. For example, a bowler who the next year played for England, was relegated to Fourth Grade as he was not taking wickets. Frequently, County 2nd XI players who come out for a season, never make it past 2nd Grade. O.M.T. Saturday 1st XI would generally equate to 3rd-4th Grade in Sydney. The attitude is very serious, with compulsory practice at least once a week. Matches are generally played over two days, usually successive Saturdays and most matches will only be single innings. This may mean that a successful middle order batsman might have only about 10 innings a season. They thus tend to bat very seriously to make the most of the limited opportunities they have. It all adds up to an intensity not generally experienced in English Club cricket. Young players tend to mature earlier, but generally give up grade cricket at a relatively young age, especially if they have demanding jobs.

A grade side will run about 5 senior sides on a Saturday. They also run age based competitions at under 17, 19 and 21 level in which the future Test and Shield players will usually have played. There are also a number of minor (non-grade) competitions at a lower level and players do continue into their forties or later. However, even these games tend to be in some type of formal competition (usually limited over) with a league table. Unlimited over (declaration) cricket outside the contest of a competition is unusual.

This has meant that for touring English Club sides like Dick Hawkins, who tended to play declaration cricket and use slow bowlers, the opposition was playing a relatively unusual form of cricket for them. They were not used to declarations or trying to buy wickets. This could work to our advantage.

Ironically, my only tour of Australia outside N.S.W. was with the visiting O.M.T. party, when I joined them in Perth, following on to Adelaide and Sydney. [An extra week would have had to be added to the tour to have covered Melbourne and Brisbane.] Much of the cricket was what was disparagingly called in England "declaration cricket". On good wickets, it proved very difficult to bowl out a side batting second, especially as darkness falls early c 6.30pm or earlier. My major memories are not so much of the cricket, as of New Year's Eve in Sydney on the harbour, arguably the best place in the world for such an occasion.

Australian sides are supposed to be notorious for sledging. Personally, I have never encountered sledging of a deliberately abusive nature although once when I batted for 70 minutes for 0 not out to try to save a game the odd remark was made! (We lost in the twenty-second over of the final hour). The most amusing example I encountered was when we played a New South Wales Country Eleven at the S.C.G. and opened out batting with a very experienced silver-haired batsman then aged 65. Nor surprisingly, their opening bowler felt slightly offended by this "silver-haired coon"; tried to bounce him first ball and was promptly hooked through mid wicket for four. The "silver-haired coon" was over fifty-not-out by lunchtime.

The only time I encountered serious Australian sledging was in England, when Incogniti defeated Wimbledon with their various overseas guest players. We had an opening batsman of considerable ability but who had given up cricket for the Summer to take examinations. He was thus totally out of touch against some very good bowling on a green wicket. By the time I joined him, he was in the 80s but still playing and missing and snicking over the top. The Australian bowlers, one of whom subsequently went on to play Shield cricket, had begun to exhaust their limited vocabulary of profanities; he had a most effective and amusing method of dealing with the problem. "Terribly sorry, old chap; that was far too good for me", he used to smile up the wicket as the ball sped through (or over) the slips for four. In my experience, aggressive fast bowlers are used to meeting aggression, but have limited ability to deal with a

batsman who continues to laugh to them and still snick fours.

CRICKET FROM AUSTRALIA

I had been fortunate to make a few cricket contacts on my three tours to Australia but being over forty on arrival, I had serious doubts as to whether I would be able to find a standard of cricket low enough to accommodate me. In fact joining the Cricketers' Club of New South Wales proved ideal. Not only at a social level was one able to mix with cricketers of all abilities and occasionally meet some very talented cricketers or ex-cricketers – such as Doug Walters, Neil Harvey, Alan Davidson, Arthur Morris, Garry Sobers, and Richard Collinge – but I was able to play with a number of club players who had played at a high standard, but by their mid-thirties or older and with families wanted to play a less demanding and time intensive form of cricket than Grade – and also travel. In Australia, we were fortunate enough to play on grounds such as the S.C.G., M.C.G., the Gabba and Bradman Oval, Bowral. We also managed to start a very competitive "over-40s" competition and later an over 50s competition, in which occasional ex-Shield or Test cricketers would play. I managed to have the fortune to captain the last cricket side to play on the SCG in the 20th century, and also found myself captaining a Cricketers' Club side when it won the over 40s Premiership, with players with Test and First class experience playing under me. I hasten to emphasise ability had little to do with it. It was good fortune. Overseas tours by the Cricketers' Club were very rare when I joined in 1988. There were all the old concerns expressed – would enough people be interested? Would we be able to get fixtures? Could we afford it? Yes we could!

Since 1989, we have undertaken 32 overseas tour – Asia (twice) (Hong Kong, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Jahore Bahru), Bali, the Cook Islands, England (5 times), Fiji, Hawaii, Italy, Kenya, Lord Howe Island, Malaysia, New Zealand (six times), Norfolk Island, North America West Coast and (separately) North America East Coast, Samoa, South Africa (twice), South America (Argentina, Chile and Peru), Sri Lanka, West Indies (twice), and Vanuatu. I doubt there are any amateur club sides in the world who have undertaken more overseas tours over this period – apart from possibly the Marylebone Cricket Club. I have been on seventeen of these trips, and in retrospect regret that I missed the opportunities to play on Test grounds in the West Indies, and in Auckland, [New Zealand]. We are already in preliminary planning for a possible return tour to Sri Lanka in 2018. Short

5 day tours each year to a different city in New Zealand are becoming popular.

New Zealand: Both the grass and the weather conditions are very like England. From relatively limited touring experience, I would liken their players' attitudes to Yorkshire – very competitive, slightly dour, and with a slight chip on their shoulders versus Australians. As in Australia, the Test and 1st class players are expected to turn out for their club sides. Richard Hadlee once commented he was expected to help with the minor tasks (eg getting the covers off, re marking the wicket) just like any other club player. Even for Australians, New Zealand is cheap, and also a very beautiful place to tour. The major problem for Australians is adjusting to the slow, low and seaming wickets. The major cricket grounds are charmingly old-fashioned and relaxed – and still feel like cricket grounds with very low key security and good crowd behaviour. I watched the initial New Zealand v Bangladesh Test Match in Wellington, and could have reached out and shaken hands with the players, so minor was the security between the public and the players' pavilion.

Bali: Bali is a part of the Indonesian Cricket Federation, but quasi-independent. Because of the weather, cricket is played all year round. They play on grass wickets, but it is fair to say their facilities are limited. What makes Bali markedly different is a strong push to promote cricket in the local native schools, so that it can develop. This has enabled them to attract I.C.C. funding to improve their grounds. They currently run an international 8-a-side tournament at Easter, which is attracting sides from all over the world. In mid winter (ie June-July) the weather conditions are ideal for cricket – c28°C with gentle on-shore winds. In mid-summer, with higher temperature and humidity, conditions are more demanding.

Vanuatu: About 70% of the players are indigenous, although like Bali, the administration is largely expatriate. Most of the cricket is based around the capital, Port Vila. The wickets are artificial-green, carpet matting on concrete. The general standard I would equate to an English Club Sunday 2nd XI, but a representative side can be more challenging. The wickets encourage strong bottom hand batting and most runs tend to be scored on the leg side. The ground at Independence Park, Port Vila is arguably one of the most attractive locations in the South Pacific – although to my mind, the most attractive and atmospheric ground in the South Pacific is ...

Norfolk Island: The ground at Kingston is one of the oldest in Australia, over 160 years old, and was originally constructed in 1838 (when the commandant's rose garden was levelled while he was away in Sydney!) Close to the ocean, it has the now romantic ruins of the convict prison to one side, steep volcanic pine covered hills to the rear, a beautifully preserved early 19th Century Government House and a golf course to the other side, and the best preserved row of genuine Regency buildings in the Southern hemisphere. A significant proportion of the population are descended from the Bounty mutineers, originally from Pitcairn, and there is an annual cricket match between the "Bounty XI" and the Rest. Sport is extremely important to the Norfolk Islanders (as is drink!). They are extremely hospitable and will take you on at any sport, from bowls or golf, tennis, touch rugby, soccer and cricket. They are always keen to play off-island opposition.

Lord Howe: Lord Howe only boasts a local population of about 400, outnumbered by a strictly limited number of tourists. They used to manage to raise two sides who played once a week, but the 24 hour demands of the tourist industry has now made this difficult. In the 1950s, they held their own against a strong NSW side, captained by Keith Miller. Their standard is now much weaker, but still very hospitable. The island itself is World Heritage listed, and one of the most beautiful places I have visited.

SE Asia: It is perhaps unfair to lump together Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur but there are a number of similarities. The cricket is almost entirely expatriate although Malaysia probably has more local players and the major clubs are prestigious and very well resourced. The pavilion at Singapore is a marvellous relic of colonial times. The Royal Selangor Club in Kuala Lumpur is of a similar standard, as are the two major clubs in Bangkok, at the race track, and at the Polo Club. The demand for and price of membership of all these clubs are both high. Personally, with the exception of Hong Kong, I found the heat and humidity very demanding, and detracted from the enjoyment, but for most of our team, it has been a popular destination. The standard of the best teams is quite high – by English club standards – and the number of players is sufficiently large that the clubs can usually raise adequate sides to play touring sides. Indeed I do sometimes wonder whether Hong Kong and Singapore are sometimes slightly jaded by the number of touring sides passing through.

West Coast America and Hawaii: As a generalisation, the number of expatriate white, largely ex-English players appear to have reduced over the past 20 years, while the number of Asian and West Indian players has increased. To a degree, teams are based on racial identity. To some extent, the Cricketers' Club followed the route taken by Don Bradman who celebrated his marriage with a honeymoon cricket tour to North America. We also had a honeymoon couple on our tour, and wrote to Don Bradman who sent us a letter of congratulation. However, while Bradman scored 3782 runs at an average of 102 with 18 centuries and also took 26 wickets in 52 overs,[not bad for a chap on his honeymoon!] our player did not achieve similar figures! I still recall expressing some disappointment at bowling a bad ball at Cowichan ("Oh, bother"... or words to that effect), only to be mistaken by an elderly female ex-British spectator, for one of those vulgar Australians! San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Vancouver have flourishing club competitions, and are becoming popular stop-overs by Australian club sides on their way to England. In Hawaii, the cricket is largely restricted to one ground at Diamond Head in Honolulu, although the roots of cricket allegedly go back to Scottish settlers in the 19th Century. At last report, there were some Asian teams playing in Oahu but not mixing with the longer established cricket in Honolulu.

South Africa: The Cricketers' Club were fortunate enough to be able to send two sides to a cricket festival in Port Elizabeth, going onto Cape Town and then up to Johannesburg, where we became the first team since the New Zealand National XI to beat Nicky Oppenheimer's XI at his superbly equipped ground. While "social" cricket is apparently diminishing in South African, it is still not unusual to get ex-Test or Currie Cup Players who will turn out in club games, especially against Australians. I personally found the cricket and the grounds to be very akin to good English Club cricket, although perhaps the players were slightly more intense and serious.

The recent success of Australian cricket and rugby at national level against South Africa also added a little edge.

Kenya: The cricket season in Kenya runs from June to April and the major centres are Nairobi and Mombasa. It is now truly an indigenous game, with 60% of the players African and 40% Asian, and relatively few white expatriate players – a major change since independence.

The major white expatriate team would be the Kenya Kongonis, who played a major role in the initial organisation of cricket, and are generally regarded as the "MCC" of Kenya. Until a few years ago, they did not play in any competitive league. There is now a major initiative to try to promote cricket in local (black) schools, but lack of resources – even money to buy boots, etc – can be a problem. While many clubs have professional players, it is not yet possible to make an adequate living solely from playing cricket. The major cricket clubs are generally part of a larger multi-function sports club, which tend generally to operate on racial / religious lines.

Sri Lanka: Cricket is one of the major unifying forces between Tamil and Singhalese, who were just emerging from a decade of civil war. Everywhere we went, we were asked what we thought of Murali's action and some replied honestly!

We had the privilege of playing on three international grounds, in Colombo, Kandy and Dimbulah, and in between, playing and staying in some of the most luxurious hotels I have experienced anywhere- way above the usual C.C.N.S.W. standard in magnificent and spectacular surroundings.

By now our regular core of players were beginning to show their age but nevertheless the cricket was generally competitive and close, although not always reflected in the results.

The Cook Islands: This tour was again originally sparked by a casual remark, which then took two years to organise into a cricket tour.

Slightly unexpectedly, the response was overwhelming with nearly 60 people wanting to go. Being at Easter in school holidays, and staying primarily in one resort in Rarotonga, it appealed to not only to the 19 cricketers but also their families. We were the first international cricket team to play on the island of Aitutaki. With its overwhelmingly spectacular lagoon, and seemingly watched by half the local population, we had an unforgettable experience.

The standard of cricket was not too competitive although we still lost one game and had moments of concern in others. The ACB is funding development and the major problem is to encourage the youngsters.

Samoa: After the popularity of the Cook Islands tour we took an all age party of about 100 to Samoa with about 25 players, sometimes playing two fixtures the same day on good quality artificial wickets. Samoa is famous for “Kirikiti”, played sometimes for days between different villages with over 50 players on each side. By contrast we played what is called “English cricket”. Samoa was a German-English condominium around the turn of the 19th century and the Germans tried to ban cricket pre WW1 as an imperialist plot. It now has no political connotations and the President joined us in barbequing a whole ox in the end of tour celebrations.

PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH CRICKET – FROM AUSTRALIA

How do Australian club cricketers regard England? What major differences do I perceive? Remember I was over 40 when I came here and never played top grade club cricket in Sydney. Let me start by quoting from an article in our local Manly paper :

“Manly [1st grade] cricket coach Mick Pawley has questioned the wisdom of off-season stints in England, fearing it is eroding playing standards at the club ... Pawley is advocating a rethink of the traditional hit and giggle sojourns to the U.K. Several Manly players make the trip to England each northern summer to play in minor leagues where the emphasis is as much on beer and women as runs and crickets.

“Twenty-five years ago when standards in England were better, it was a good education to play over there, but not anymore,” Pawley said. “I am yet to see a player in recent times who has gone to England in the off-season and come back a better player. Invariably they play in a competition that is third grade park cricket level, and they return in a relaxed state, and it takes them a couple of months to get used to the pace and competitiveness of first grade cricket. I’m not against them going over there – people have got to live their lives and it enhances them as human beings – but it does nothing for their cricket.”

Does the above annoy you, or do you wryly laugh and concede it may be true? What – if anything – would you want to do about it? Note Pawley concedes the experience may have enhanced them as human beings. I would make the following observations:

- In terms of natural ability, most Australians would concede English players are of similar ability BUT ...
- English players are perceived as softer, less serious, more immature, less fit, not so dedicated to practice, and are very often, poor fielders.
- There is relatively little strong club loyalty here, and talented youngsters will be identified early and EXPECTED to join a Grade Club, rather than stay with their nursery club.
- A talented 16-18 yr old could well face a current Test player in 1st Grade, and can expect a torrid baptism and no quarter. If they survive, they will become much tougher, harder cricketers at a young age. There are apocryphal stories of Mark Taylor’s first Grade debut, aged 18 v Lennie Pascoe [then an Australian opening bowler] and Steve Waugh’s debut as a 16 yr old v Greig.
- Mid-week practice once or twice a week is serious, very serious. Grade teams will have not just cricket coaches, but motivational coaches, physio and weight trainers, maybe a baseball coach to refine their throwing and a fully developed sponsor’s program.
- A promising youngster in 1st Grade will regard himself as only 2 steps away from Test or Rep honours; will often already be semi-professional; maybe will already have a bat contract.
- Above all they will have self belief, and will not be over-awed by reputation.
- From my perception, the general fielding standard of young English players who come out for a season, is poor. They are not used to continual hard fielding practice. Few of them can throw well.
- Essentially, Grade sides are young with an average age of about 24. By age 30, most players – for whom cricket is not their living – lack the time, and perhaps the intensity, to continue to train on at least two nights a week.

- Remember Grade cricket is the elite of a pyramid. Below Grade in Sydney is Shires Cricket – still played over 2 days with each Club having four adult teams; there are then numerous one and half-day competitive leagues, and finally a 16 team Veterans' competition on Sundays.
- There are also numerous district competitions in population centres outside Sydney. If serious, the best young players in the competitions will try to join a Grade club in Sydney. For example, McGrath came from a country town out West, and during his first year of Grade cricket, lived in a caravan, with very little spare money.

Australians do envy England its depth of club cricket, its social strength down to lowly village teams where 40 and 50 year olds still play. The son of a friend of mine, a 19 year old First Grader went to England one [English] summer, and his initial point of wonderment was the age of the people he was playing with – his captain was apparently nearly 40! The “average” club cricketer, who may never play First Grade, still harbours an ambition of perhaps going on an “Ashes” supporters’ tour, or playing a season in England, merely for the social enjoyment. As Pawley commented, it may enhance them as human beings, but does it make them better cricketers? Would you want to be a “better cricketer” if the social pleasures of the game were less?

TOURING ENGLAND – FROM AUSTRALIA

In the 1980s before I left England it was becoming more common for good young Australian cricketers to play a season of Club cricket in England. These were generally very good cricketers, some potentially future first class or Test players such as e.g. Langer and the Waughs. Gradually the number of Australian club players coming to England went up and now included many who had no ambition to play professionally but they did make enduring contacts. In the past decades C.C.N.S.W. has sent two such cricketers to England –very competent Club cricketers but no more.

Australian club tours of England were still rare and contained high class Grade Players (eg The Australian Old Collegians). This gradually changed with the advent of the internet and with increasing contacts. Now very average and elderly players – especially with the explosion of Veterans' Cricket in NSW about the turn of the century- could harbour serious ambitions of touring England as a cricketer.

I was ideally placed to assist in organising such tours because of over 25 years' senior cricket in the UK where I would generally play over 50 games a season. I was also shocked at the prices commercial organisations charged for transport and accommodation and pioneered for C.C.N.S.W. the extensive use of University accommodation on tour which was remarkable value for money. We also used self drive vehicles which gave people great flexibility on non game days though meant someone had to remain sober in each car on game days!

Our first UK tour was for 3 weeks in 1997, organised by phone and airmail letters. Including airflights it came in at under £2000pp. The advent of the internet has since made such tours significantly easier to organise.

Since 1997 we have “spread our wings”, covered different parts of England, organised 4 more UK tours and included side trips to places such as Paris, Amsterdam, Dublin and Malta, and now Scotland . We have yet to venture into Wales.

These tours have proven so popular that now we are the victims of our own success. We have taken up to 30 players and organised a fixture every day or in some cases two fixtures a day. The problem of numbers can be overcome by organising more fixtures.

The other “problem” is increasing player age. Players who came in 1997 still want to come although 20 years older and their mobility and ability have decreased. This means we need to be slightly more careful about the quality of our opposition who are sometimes impressed by our name to believe we must be better and younger players than most of us are.

This is where the depth of club cricket in England, its social strength down to lowly village teams to which I have previously referred, comes into play. Some village grounds are superb – good wickets, beautiful scenery, picturesque club house and a pavilion which can be a centre of local life serving food and drink with congenial company well into the evening, and on the field providing good opposition for our more elderly players. What is there not to like?

I anticipate possible future problems if players continue into their sixties. Can we get sufficient younger players? Will the younger or older players be discouraged from coming? What sort of fixtures should we organise? Should we organise separate Veterans Tours or leave that to the Associations? I

have no firm answers but would rather have the problems that come with popularity than cancelling planned tours for lack of support. Time will tell. Apparently the fastest growing cricket playing demographic in Australia is in veterans' cricket.

FUTURE TOURS WITH C.C.N.S.W.

When the Cricketers' Club commenced overseas touring in 1989, the general principle was, to adapt Captain Kirk, to seek out new places, and boldly go where we had never been before rather than repeat former trips, so that hopefully, one generation of club cricketers, over a 10-20 year period, would be able to see much of the world. We have since then repeated trips to South Africa, the West Indies and the UK as well as frequent trips to New Zealand. There were at last count, about 187 countries in the world where cricket is played. Some well enough organised to justify affiliate or associate status. One problem – at least in the Pacific Area – is to send teams from established countries like Australia which are “bad” enough to give the locals a chance. There is limited pleasure for the locals, in continuing to play sides who are far too good for them, however eminent the players. Thus N.S.W. used to send a side to Vanuatu containing some Test players such as Lawson, Clark and Matthews – and they won very easily. When the Cricketers' Club went, both in Vanuatu and Norfolk Island, the locals thought they genuinely had a chance, as did the players in Bali. Indeed, we actually lost one game on these tours, and had several relatively close wins, which did much to promote enthusiasm in local cricket, especially in Norfolk Island. (Read the article in the 2001 Wisden). For that reason, the suggestion of a Cricketers' Club tour to a small cricket community is often enthusiastically received. In future years, there may be possible tours to places like Nepal and Tonga and perhaps also the Philippines and Japan. Future tours to the UK may be combined with add-ons in Europe and the Mediterranean. There is also the possibility of a tour to the UAE if we go in their winter-i.e. our summer.

India is obviously a major playing cricket nation where the Cricketers' Club has contacts and has toured once. I was in Kashmir about 20 years ago, when tension was less. The cricket season there was different to the rest of India which plays in their winter/ our summer winter. In Kashmir, it is high and cool enough that they can play in their (Northern Hemisphere) summer and the scenery is magnificent. I fear for the foreseeable future, a tour of Kashmir is probably impracticable, as is a tour to Pakistan but a tour to Bangladesh, perhaps at Christmas, is certainly a challenging possibility.

Further afield, I have always fancied Nepal – which is popular in Australia for trekking expeditions – but which also has a flourishing cricket competition

In Central America, cricket has been established in Mexico for over 150 years. It is also played in Costa Rica and Belize. A trip could be combined with the southern USA, especially Texas and Florida, maybe even incorporating Bermuda, and the Bahamas.

We have contacts in the Gulf States and were intending to play in Mauritius on our way to Kenya – the problem was Mauritius Airlines, not the cricket.

And then there is Europe and the Mediterranean. Given 3-4 weeks, I have visions of organising a Mediterranean tour – perhaps Cyprus-Corfu-Malta-Gibraltar – Morocco – or Spain/Portugal or Israel. Or perhaps a coach trip going up through Italy to Switzerland-Germany-France-Belgium-Holland – or even North to Denmark and Norway. There was a local team in NSW, the 'Kookaburras', now defunct, which used to specialise in off-season tours to Europe but they had a practice with which I strongly disagree – no woman could come on tour.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST?

So long as families do not feel dragooned, nor feel obliged to come along and watch the cricket which may bore them, I would always advocate that wives and girlfriends should come on cricket tours. They civilise and make the general atmosphere of a tour more humane and happy. Anyone who goes on an overseas tour **just** to play cricket must be mad. The advantage of a cricket tour is that you can both be an individual, with no obligation to always be with or support the team, and yet have the advantage of the usually incredibly generous invitations and hospitality of the host clubs, and individuals. To my mind a cricket tour is much less regimented than the standard packaged coach tour abroad and gives much more room for individuality.

Cricket is played in most of the imaginable places on Earth, and in some of the unimaginable places (e.g. Gallipoli in 1915). If someone has the drive and imagination to organise a tour, he will be able to find local teams to play against, and a party of 11 or 12 persons to take with him. In my experience, the only limitation is that of the imagination.

AMH July 2017