SOUTH AFRICA CRICKET TOUR

We arrived at O.R Tambo international airport in Johannesburg, and enjoyed a fascinating afternoon in the apartheid museum learning about the dark ages of racial segregation and how protesters brought about change and democracy. Afterwards we transferred to the high performance centre of the University Of Pretoria, where we spent the evening relaxing and enjoying the amazing facilities. The next morning, we had our first training session in the nets, then spent the day in Johannesburg at the Gold Reef City theme park.

The next day brought our first match of the tour, with the ‘B’ team taking on Hans More school. The boys produced a strong bowling performance to bowl out their opponents for a relatively low total, but were slightly rusty with the bat and fell short. While the ‘B’ team were in action the rest of the squad enjoyed a fascinating tour of Pretoria, visiting landmarks including the Voortrekker monument to the Dutch Afrikaner people who founded Johannesburg and the Union Buildings where the end of the Apartheid policies was negotiated. In the evening we all enjoyed some fantastic hosting, staying at houses of students of Hans More.

It was then the turn of the A team to take on Hans More and after a strong start from our hosts, spinners Christian and Tom bowled accurately to restrict the Hans More batsmen. With Ankush leading from the front, the Caterham boys put in a strong effort with the bat but lacked the firepower to chase a strong target. After the game both squads enjoyed a ‘Braai’ (traditional South African barbeque) and spent our evening with the hosts.

After saying goodbye to our first set of hosts, we then travelled to Pretoria to take on our next opponents, Centurion High School. Both teams showed glimpses of potential, but were beaten by our opponents in what was a fantastic learning experience for us all as we witnessed some of the best schoolboy cricketers in South Africa ply their trade. In the evening we were met by our hosts from Eldoraigne High School, and we were treated to a meal at a local restaurant. On our last day in the Gauteng area, the A team took on Eldoraigne in a short form game, and inspired by a majestic half century from captain Simon, Caterham posted a strong target of 141 in 25 overs. Eldoraigne lost early wickets, but just managed to make the target in a tense finish. The ‘B’ team also played against Sutherland High School and showed huge improvements, coming up just short in a valiant chase of a fairly big target. On our final evening with our second set of hosts many of us were treated to traditional South African cuisine by our hosts.

The next morning we left Eldoraigne and set out for the Mabula game reserve, a couple of hours drive north of Pretoria. After checking in, we set out in search of the ‘big five’ on our first game drive. Our guides led us to all the best spots for sightings and after spotting countless Wildebeest, Impala and Zebras, we struck lucky and witness a group of Lions relaxing in the evening light. We were able to park fairly close (but not too close!) and soak in the fantastic scene before heading back to the lodge for the night. The next morning, we braved a 5.00AM start for a chance at seeing some more fantastic wildlife, and our commitment was immediately repaid as we witnessed a female Cheetah attack and kill an Impala. Such a scene is rare even by the standards of the game reserve, and we were simply awestruck by the feat that we had just witnessed. The rest of the game drive did not disappoint as we saw Hippos, Giraffes and Crocodiles in their natural habitat, in what was a fantastic end to the first leg of our tour. We returned to the game reserve and soon departed for the airport to fly to Cape Town.

Cape Town brought its own unique atmosphere, as we spent our first morning taking in the spectacular views from the top of table mountain, before enjoying the V&A waterfront complex and the facilities of our lagoon beach hotel. On our final rest day we took a trip to Robben Island, and were taken on an emotional but fascinating tour of the island. We were then led through the prison which Nelson Mandela and other members of the ANC were wrongly imprisoned, and a former political prisoner on the island explained the awful conditions which prisoners were kept in. With our mid-tour break from cricket over, the A team took on Pinelands school. The match was a thriller, with Pinelands chasing Caterham’s target in the last over. The closeness of the game epitomised the improvement of the Caterham boys since the start of the tour. The B team also lost, having put pressure on their opponents with some tight bowling.

We then drove east to Paarl, where we were greeted by our final set of hosts at Paarl boys school, a famously strong rugby school, but an unknown quantity at cricket. After staying the night with our hosts, we spent the next morning in the township of Mbekweni, playing and coaching cricket to the young children who live there. The positivity and enthusiasm of these children in the face of the difficult conditions in which they lived was inspiring, and the experience was life-affirming and humbling for many of us. Due to a waterlogged pitch, the B team match was cancelled that afternoon, but the A team took on our Paarl hosts in a T20 fixture. Toby and Antony bowled viciously in a successful opening spell for Caterham, but unfortunately the team could not keep up the barrage and Paarl posted a total which proved out of reach. Once again we were treated to a fantastic Braai and spent some more time getting to know our hosts.

Then came our final matches of the tour against Paul Roos high school in Stellenbosch, another school famed for its rugby history having produced over 50 ‘Springboks’ players. We were first treated to another delicious lunch, before both teams played 35 over matches. The A team posted a challenging total, after some classy batting from openers Simon and Ankush, but our hosts batted sensibly and saw themselves home with a few overs to spare. The B team produced their best performance of the tour, almost chasing down a large target thanks a solid batting performance led by a captains knock from Caelan. That evening we enjoyed a final meal at a gourmet burger restaurant in Stellenbosch and reflected on the past few weeks, giving out awards for standout performers with the bat and the ball from each team. We retired to Stellenbosch hotel for our last night, then caught an early flight home the next morning, tired but having had the experience of a lifetime.

Thanks must go to Mr Batty for organising such a great tour, and Mr Taylor, Mr Muttitt and Mr Patterson for assisting us. All the boys loved the experience, and the wealth of good cricket and amazing cultural enrichment allowed everyone to make strides as both cricketers and people.

George, Fifth Year