

Bringing back to the 1980s the cross-Canada tour was becoming something of a rite of passage for every new foreign service officer. This year was no different with 18 new recruits embarking on what was sure to be one of the most memorable training experiences of their careers.

SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF CANADIANS

BY MARGARET BUHAJCYK



We all remember our cross-Canada tours. My group, Team Aurora, departed February 24, with an itinerary that would take us from Quebec to Nova Scotia, Manitoba, British Columbia and finally, the Northwest Territories. Our excitement was in part fuelled by the countless “crossCan” stories shared by our colleagues in the days leading up to our departure.

Over the next three weeks we had the opportunity to see Canada through the eyes of a myriad of different actors. From Quebec’s efforts to raise its international profile to Manitoba’s goals for the Northwest Passage and Nova

Scotia’s Atlantic Gateway Strategy, the role of the provinces in advancing Canada’s international objectives became

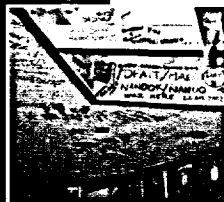
quickly apparent. We were also inspired by the ability of local NGOs, businesses and universities to mobilize their resources in support of Canadian values, opportunities and interests. While environmental issues were a common theme in B.C., the Western Canada Wilderness Committee took a more hands-on approach by leading us on a hike through Victoria’s old growth forest. The Asia Pacific Foundation introduced us to the concept of “global Canadians” and the National Microbiology Laboratory shared its lessons from the global SARS outbreak. In the north, we experienced Canada’s Inuit culture while watching the two-foot high kick competition at the 2008 Arctic Winter Games.

At the end of our tour, we had a chance to reflect on our experiences while biting into fresh Arctic char at Bullock’s Bistro, a crowded, Yellowknife eatery ensconced between walls that proudly displayed the scribbled signatures, business cards and photos of previous patrons.

We realized that the very diversity of Canada’s provinces, communities and professionals is what has enabled our country to remain actively engaged on such a broad range of international issues. Our meetings with academics, businesspeople, scientists and journalists broadened our professional networks and our perspectives.

And as we left Bullock’s that night, something familiar caught our eye. Etched deep into one of the window frames was a note: “DFAIT-MAECI, Team Nanook 2002.” Glancing slightly above, we noted that previous recruits had also left their mark. It was now our turn to continue the tradition.

Margaret Buhajczyk is completing her first assignment at the Secretariat for the Americas Strategy where she supports the coordination of Canada’s re-engagement in the Americas.



CONTINUING THE TRADITION (from left to right): Taryn Firkser, James Johnson, Margaret Buhajczyk, Brian Shipley, Scott Giesbrecht, Kaitlyn Pritchard, host Leon St-Arnaud of Vignoble Isle de Bacchus, Gerald Boamah, Richard Bruneau, Long Wu. Picture by Sree Sanyal.