



Our trip to the USA started about a year before they called our flight for boarding. The paperwork can be daunting with so much to organise; car hire, hotels, flights, nominations, forms to get the guns out of Australia, forms to get them into USA and more forms to get them back into Australia again. However, don't let this put anyone off, there are so many shooters that make this trip an annual pilgrimage (and I can now see why) and they are willing to help. We tapped into this knowledge and soon found out the best hotels, the cheapest way to upgrade your car, how to avoid the queues.

The morning of the flight dawned and we duly reported to customs at Brisbane airport to be told "you can't fly today, your paperwork is wrong." We duly showed Mr Grumpy, the customs officer our emailed instructions from his colleague in the city. Gradually Mr Grumpy transformed into Mr Not Quite So Grumpy before finally settling on being Mr If Only Everyone Else At Customs Was As Efficient As Me, there would be no problem'

Thirty minutes later and we are sitting toasting the start of our

American adventure in the departure lounge. Several hours, meals, spilt food and films later we land at LAX where everybody apart from us seemed to be an armed policeman

I have never seen so many firearms in an airport in my life before perhaps that is why our shotguns casually appeared on the luggage carousel along with the suitcases!

Passing through very rigid security we eventually joined our internal flight to San Antonio where we arrived a couple of hours later, grabbed a cab to the hotel, showered, changed and went for a beer at San Antonio's famous Riverwalk which is a riverside walkway which loops around the centre of town and is host to many restaurants, bars, cafes and clubs. We got to about the third one before settling in for the afternoon.

By this stage we had not been to bed for about 32 hours and were feeling jaded. A little urban myth had developed in that a pilot friend said that the best way to avoid jet lag was to drink through it. It was a unanimous decision to give it a go.



Layout



Ammo

**WELCOME TO THE  
WORLD SKEET CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Grandstand with spectators



Shoot Off



Later that evening as I watched two of our female entourage dancing on the bar in Coyote Ugly I realised

was heard to mutter something about "didn't think I had put that much bloody weight on." His wife Paulette couldn't contain herself any longer and erupted into laughter and confessed to being witness to the swap. It turned out to be a long fortnight for the perpetrators of the crime as time after time Glenn sought revenge in many a varied and interesting way, but those are not for publication.

that as soon as the room stopped spinning that we would call it a day, wake Craig up (again) and stagger back to the hotel.

We still had some free time before the shoot began and so we visited a couple of local gun clubs for a practice round or two.

Next day was a relaxing chill-out and recover day that saw us meeting up in Hooters for lunch (Well it was centrally located and easy to find). What a great place Hooters is, very entertaining and I learnt afterwards that they also serve food. How novel!

Trainer Hale is just a small local club where we shot a couple of

One thing that we had already noticed about San Antonio was just how friendly everybody was and how very much they seemed to like the visiting Australians. Wherever we went people were friendly, helpful and keen to engage you in interesting conversation.



Gun Shop

Every bar we visited seemed to be occupied by ex-navy who had all visited Melbourne (pronounced Mel - born) at least once during their service and insisted on buying us a drink or two, and who were we to turn down that good ole fashioned Southern hospitality?

We also discovered that clothing was extremely cheap in America and so arranged a Jeans and T-shirts trip. In one particular shop Glenn Walker had selected a pair of jeans which he left on the counter while he went to try on some other clothes in the changing room. Whilst out of sight his so called mates thought it was hilarious to swap the jeans on the counter for an identical but much smaller pair... Apparently later that evening while preparing to go out for dinner, Glenn grunted, groaned and grimaced his way into his new jeans and

High House



Grandstand



rounds. It was interesting to watch the local sheriff cruise by and call in to the club's gun shop to buy some more buckshot for his pump action. He politely refused our invitation to join our squad for a round.

We also visited San Antonio Gun Club whose score-board still displayed the results from the weekend shoot where a certain Mr Mal Briggs had shown them how well the Aussies can shoot.

The clubhouse here was spectacular with some fabulous examples of taxidermy on display including a huge brown bear and a leaping lion, leather armchairs and polished wood are the norm here. Interestingly a Mexican theme influenced the building of the trap houses and each one displays a different style of Mexican architecture. No brick and tin roof here more terracotta tiles and white-washed plaster - very Alamo.

Talking of which, a handful of us enjoyed a very interesting tour of the Alamo. Well worth the \$5 if you ever get the chance.

The next day we went to the World Shooting Complex itself, situated about 20 minutes out of town it really is quite something the first time you go there.

Turning off the main road and stopping briefly for the obligatory photo at the granite entrance sign and flags, you then drive along the entrance road to the complex. Climbing gently up hill along a tree-lined avenue you come to a cross-roads where you stop to take in the 671 acres of space that has just opened up in front of you!

Glenn Walker acted as our unofficial tour guide and gave us a detailed description of the layout from our high vantage point. These words can never do it justice as it really is massive. There are countries in Africa smaller than this place!

There are 45 separate skeet layouts including a separate range for the 5 practise layouts including one layout specifically for doubles (they only have pads on stations 3, 4 and 5). Down the hill past the enormous Beretta stadium, are the administration offices which are situated just behind the hall of fame museum. To the right sits the grandstand stadium which seats 1,000 people and further around are the first row of layouts and a seemingly endless array of permanent gun shops and associated retailers which had my wife reaching for the credit card. The camping area holds about 200 powered sites. There were armed police patrolling the grounds on quad bikes. There is a fully manned and secure gun storage facility, on site ammunition dealer selling nearly every brand you can think of (sub gauge ammo seemed to be about  $\frac{1}{2}$  the price that it is here in Australia). The Yanks threw their hulls away unlike the thrifty Aussies who eagerly gathered up any spares to bring back and re-load!

The layouts themselves are arranged in 3 rows of approximately 15 layouts per row. These rows run left to right along the side of a gently sloping tree lined hill which provides adequate cover for fall-out. Such is the size of the place that you drive to your layout.

There were nearly 1000 shooters taking part this year from all over the world which was evidenced by the many national flags fluttering in the hot Texan air outside of the clubhouse and thanks to some good work from Paul Johnstone we had the Australian flag flying proudly for the first time ever this year.

There were 19 Australians who made the trip including several first timers who were easy to spot as they were the ones walking around with their mouths gaping open and pointing at things in awe.

As first timers you are entitled to a free lesson with one of skeets great shooters and coaches Mr John Shima. This took place the day before the competition started and is conducted in the main grandstand arena. Out of the 100 or so first time shooters there were only about 12 or so people who turned up which was surprising.

John is very entertaining and a terrific coach, graced with that rare ability to see almost instantly the subtle changes required to help you to improve your game. We spent the best part of the morning with him trying to learn as much as possible from this true wizard of skeet coaching and it was a morning well spent as all who attended were feeling confident.

And so to the practice layout... Buy a token from the office or

ammo store and drive up to the practice layouts at the very top of the hill overlooking the complex, hand your token in and have your name added to the list. As soon as one of the five layouts is free you will be squadded and sent to your layout.

My personal observation was how quick some of the Americans tend to shoot (making Laurie Chelepy look slow). In that I mean there seemed to me to be very little set-up for the shot, they almost seemed to be in a hurry to get the shot over with and get off the pad. I observed this to be the case throughout the competition except for the likes of Todd Bender and Wayne Mayes etc the top shots who were all working on their pre-loads about two shooters ahead, maybe this is a component that separates the good from the great?

My very first ever shot at the world grounds was when I found myself in a practice squad with 5 very serious, high fiving, exuberant Americans. They were all very friendly but also very serious. The one shooter in particular was very focused indeed and had obviously come to win. Now I consider myself to be capable of shooting the targets quickly when the need arises. I can see the targets very early and I am graced with quick reflexes (often to the detriment of my scores). However this guy shooting in front of me was amazing, he was so quick that he was hitting the targets at my hold point and yet he looked like he had all the time in the world. I later found out that leading up to the competition he was shooting 500 targets a day! Talk about training hard to fight easy. No wonder he was a regular visitor to the shoot-off arena over the week.

Several members of our party had new guns with them and they took the opportunity to have their guns professionally fitted by Todd Nielsen who is a man who travels the country with his mobile workshop offering top quality gun fitting. For those people who tell you not to bother with this I would say that everyone that had their gun fitted shot better scores afterwards. I personally had developed a habit of mounting my gun incorrectly something which was quickly cured by Todd and I went on to shoot better than I ever have.

However this made me realise that the training we receive from John Shima, the facility to shoot 500 targets a day in practice, with the confidence of having a gun expertly fitted is not something we have widely available in Australia - yet.

Todd Bender is in Australia again now currently for the second year in a row with his coaching clinics and I think it is only a matter of time before other coaches realise how much potential and enthusiasm there is here in Australia.

The World Shoot is divided into two events held over the 8 days, being a Mini World and Main World. When you receive your paperwork you will know your squad number, shooter position, layout number and time of shooting for each and every event throughout the competition. I have to say that it all ran like clockwork. Very impressive.

All events are shot as 100 targets in one visit (except 12 gauge which is 2 x 125 targets in the Main World). All of the referees are paid professionals so you simply turned up on time, shot and left. It was not uncommon for shooters to shoot then leave the grounds to go shopping or go back to their hotel. It was very simple to just check the internet to see if you were required to go back for an evening shoot off.

Shoot-offs: Every afternoon prior to the shoot-offs commencing everyone is asked to stand silently to attention and face the stars and stripes while the American national anthem is played and it is a most inspirational thing to witness and makes you realise how very patriotic the Americans are.

A few people had told us how the targets were different and we didn't fully understand it until we saw it for ourselves.

Shooting White Flyer targets which have a high dome design. They require more initial energy to launch them yet their increased wind resistance causes them to decelerate quicker than what we are used to. The end result being that they are initially harder to pick up in your vision and slow down at a different rate. They were also very, very consistent.



These characteristics needed adapting to, some people struggled more than others and some good excuses were heard (and duly recorded) but this is part of the experience of travelling to these events to experience the differences and learn to adapt and improve.

It was a real eye-opener to see how well the top shooters can shoot especially doubles and even with a .410. If you tried to guess the calibre of the event simply by watching the targets break you would be hard pushed to tell the difference between a 12g hit and a .410 hit!

Again I think it brings us back to practice, if we had the ability and facility to shoot the sub-gauges as often and as cheaply as the Americans can then we would definitely be up there with them. I spoke on several occasions to the referees, when asked about the standard of Australian shooting they all remarked not only on how good we are but that how good we could be if we had access to world class training on a regular basis.

We had a fabulous time in America. Made so because of the help of our fellow Australians and we learnt such a lot, nothing new particularly but more about how much we had forgotten, I personally went there shooting terribly, had some coaching, had my gun fitted, worked hard and came home with a world title. Will we be going next year? Most definitely yes!

Attendees Australia Mal Briggs, Laurie Chelepy, Frank Cooper, Mike Corbett, Gil Farish, Fab Francione, Nigel Hughes, Paul Johnston, Leonie Johnston, Lorraine Hughes, Sim Neoh, Shane O'Brien, Cathy O'Brien, Craig O'Neill, , Max Oakley, Paulette Walker, Glenn Walker, Linda Watson. Attendees New Zealand Richard Boenders, Michael Hertz, Michael Kinmond, David Mackenzie, Mervyn Pratt, Irving Stevens, Kerri Wrigley.

There were over 125 medals and cash prizes brought home by Australian and New Zealand competitors for ladies, sub senior, sub sub senior, Oklahomas and Lewis Class – far too many to list. Some excellent scores were shot, with a number of personal bests being achieved and two perfect scores for Gil Farish in the 20 and 28 gauge events and some world titles for Glen Walker, Paulette Walker and Nigel Hughes.

Australian grade placings only are listed MINI WORLD 12 gauge Paulette Walker 89 E Grade 6th, 20 gauge Paulette Walker 93, D Grade 5th, 28 gauge Lorraine Hughes 97 B Grade 8th.

MAIN WORLD Doubles Glenn Walker 98 C grade 1st, Fab Francione 91 C grade 6th, Paulette Walker 89 D grade 5th, 12 gauge East Shane O'Brien 123/125 B grade 3rd, Paulette Walker 118/125 E grade 3rd. 12 gauge West Paulette Walker 113/125 E grade 9th. 12 gauge Shane O'Brien 245/250 B grade 8th, Paulette Walker 231/250 E grade 5th. 20 gauge Nigel Hughes 99 B grade 1st, Paulette Walker 96 D grade 1st. 28 gauge Gil Farish 100 AA grade 4th, Lorraine Hughes 99 B grade 2nd, Nigel Hughes 98 B grade 3rd. .410 gauge Nigel Hughes 96 B grade 5th.

HOA Nigel Hughes 534/550 B grade 5th.

HAA Nigel Hughes 622/650 B grade 5th, Lorraine Hughes 618/650 B grade 9th, Glenn Walker 626/650 C grade 1st, Paulette Walker 592/650 D grade 3rd.

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