

# Sibford Scene

## Olympic Report

Four years of waiting. August arrived and we started to make our way to Sydney. This trip was made even more exciting because family and friends were joining us. I was very concerned that everyone would catch the right plane and get to their accommodation on time. I shall never organise another trip for anyone!

Arriving in Sydney is now like going home, their TV, radio, and papers have all the same news that we thought we would leave behind. Fuel, Government, Crime, Trains etc. We had left terminal three in the rain and arrived in the rain. Not funny!

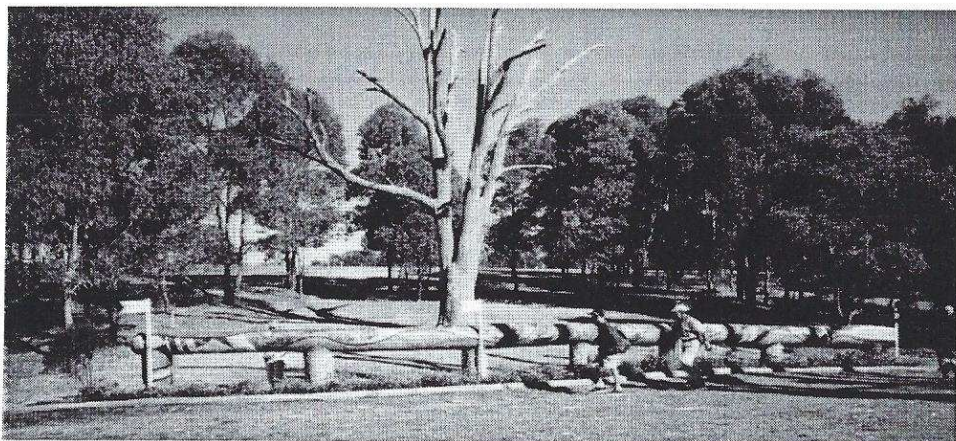
Putting on our coats and gloves we went out on site to see how things had progressed. After meeting up with the builders who comprised of Alan Willis & Sons from England + five Australians, Mike's first job was to walk the course to check all the jump positions, height, and 'look'. This may sound easy but it takes time and some things have to be changed. One fence had been varnished and when it rained it turned white, so that had to go. It was then the fun time of dressing and painting the fences. Painting fences is helpful to the horse in certain areas. At the water jumps the wooden rim at the top of the steps were painted white to define the line for the horses. Paint can also make a fence stand out if the wood is blending into the background. In other places the painting was for the spectator, two fences were painted by Aborigines, and they were amazing. They sit and paint with bits of rag, brushes and stencils and come up with beautiful pictures not only abstract but with scenery and people in.

During one afternoon we were putting out some posts when Mike noticed a very quiet plane head-



ing in our direction, in the next moment it hit the ground. We both looked at each other and jumped into the truck. As we rushed over to the Fokker I was trying to wave to one of the Aussie builders to ask what to dial for emergency services, he just waved back! To our relief, as we crested the hill we could see the pilot and his mate getting out of the cockpit. All they wanted to know was where they were. Within minutes the police, security, ambulance, and fire engine had arrived. Because of the Games and the grass it was a major incident. The plane had just been restored and was on a test flight, the pilot did a brilliant job of landing, quite reassuring as he is an airline pilot!

The horses and riders(athletes) arrived during August, the Americans chose to arrive on site early, do their two weeks quarantine and then went into the Blue Mountains for three weeks to get the horses acclimatised. The other nations with not quite so many funds came straight to the site, did the two weeks quarantine, and then the competition. It did not seem to give the US an advantage and would be interesting to know if they would do that again. The British horses flew from the UK via Dubai with Lufthansa which took 28hrs. All the vets were amazed how well the horses travelled and put a lot of it down to the fans that they had in the planes which kept the urine smell down and also the horses cool. The Brits had also paid extra to give the horses more room. It was a brilliant sight to see all the best horses in the world from three disciplines (Eventing, Dressage, & Show Jumping) working all around you. The area for the horses to work is very impressive and the stables are in a large barn area with everything to hand that you could imagine. The vets have their own centre and the farriers their own forge. There are areas to lunge, twelve schooling arenas, an uphill gallop, a sand



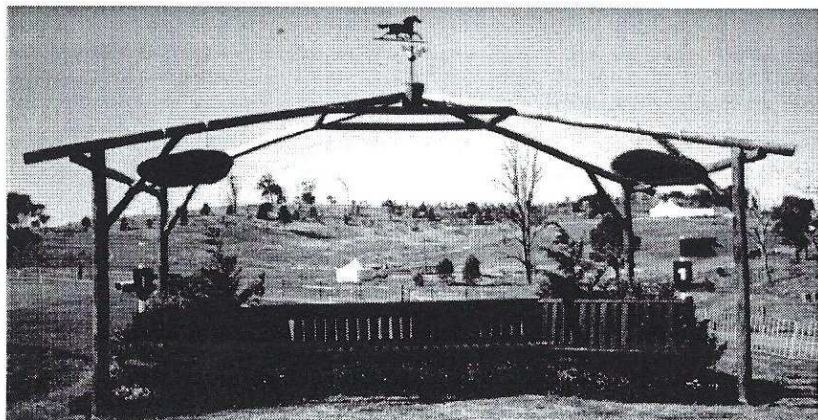
circular gallop, cross country fences and eight kilometres of tracks to ride on. I was lucky enough to have the job of painting white posts along the grass track next to the gallop and some of the arenas, it was not a great job but I got a good tan and saw the world's best practising. I came to the conclusion that the Event horses are the most graceful.

Another relief was how good the going (ground and grass) was, they still had to water the grass track up to the day of competition but it was good. It had taken four years of continuous badgering but with all the great praise the Organising committee realised it was worth the effort.

As the Opening Ceremony grew nearer, so did the excitement and enthusiasm. We were very lucky to be invited to a cocktail party in the city on the night that the flame passed through. We watched it along the Circular Quay and past the Opera House from the British Consulate. It was the most amazing street party you could ever wish to go to, the Australians had really started to enjoy the Games and get behind them. Another amazing evening was the Opening Ceremony; we had not planned to go and then a friend had two spare tickets. We were thrilled and impressed with the effort everyone had gone to.

Family and friends arrived in the right place at the right time! The weather turned hot, and we were now ready for the competitions.

The Australians certainly did a good job of looking after the horses, competitors and grooms and it was considered the best Olympics so far. As far



as the spectators were concerned the transport worked well but there was still a lot of walking. There were people walking and sitting everywhere, even in the long grass where there were no end of snakes. They had "Beware of snakes" & "No Smoking" signs on the cross country which was quite different - luckily we did not hear of any bites. We had a couple of entertaining moments. Loos were needed in the Ten Minute Box for the riders and shade for the horses. So on the evening of the competition we had a couple of beers and waited for everyone to go home. The building team + digger moved loos and a couple of other things into place. We still needed shade! The organisers could not get any so we drove over to the practise arenas and loaded two tents on their sides onto the trailer and stole them! The poor steward went mad, but the horses got their shade! You should have seen the officials faces in the morning, but it worked! The day of the cross country was very warm but not humid, and the horses all coped very well. The standard of horse preparation by the riders, vets and trainers was brilliant, they left nothing to chance. For me the most nerve racking part was watching the Brits, we so wanted them to do well. Having watched the TV since coming home, it was amazing how all the top riders made the odd mistake and could have dropped out. I have to say the TV coverage was the best I have ever seen. Well done the BBC. The sad thing about having the individual competition directly after the team competition was not really being able to celebrate their success. There was also a problem with Sydney flu which affected a lot of us (I missed the individual competition) and five people ended up in hospital.

I would love to go back to the Equestrian site in a few years and see how it has matured, there is talk of having some competitions there next year and with their Gold winning team they should have funding.

After the Equestrian had finished we took off to the city to have an evening boat trip on the harbour which not only took in the tourist sites but we were able to see all the enormous boats in for the Games. Sunday lunch was spent with family and friends eating Kangaroo and singing Waltzing Matilda. It was then back to wonderful Sibford even if it was raining. It is sad to think that our visits to Australia have come to an end. Mike has now been asked to be involved in Athens for 2004, but we expect that this may be a little different to Sydney!

Sue Etherington-Smith

Sydney 2000  
David & Barbro Dyer

Well we made it. Thanks to the generosity of friends and relations. Never to be forgotten.

It all started a long time ago. Mike had been working on a set of plans for weeks of a site that looked more like a battle field from World War 1. Certainly not the place to build a fair cross country course for the Olympics.

The news came on Christmas Eve 1996, Mike had got the job to design the cross country course for the Sydney Olympics 2000. We were all thrilled and so proud that he had landed the top job.

Then after the Christmas celebrations reality set in. Mike had been selected from a list of 22 course designers. Was it too big a job? Would it all go wrong? It was a long way to Australia would he get the support he needed?

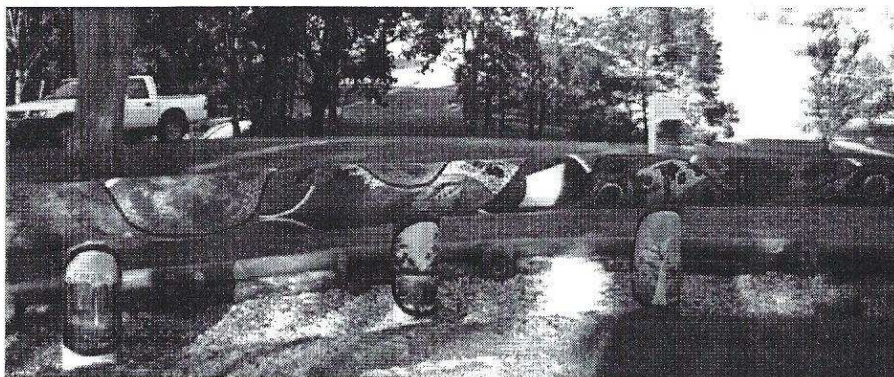
Well we certainly found out how far it is to Australia. We met friends at Heathrow and travelled to Sydney via the "Black Hole" in Los Angeles. We arrived safely thanks to advice from friends to drink plenty of water and walk up and down the plane regularly.

We went to the desk to collect the hire car only to be told most of the roads in central Sydney were closed to traffic due to the Games. It is easier by train. 'Not Likely'! We went by car into the centre parked outside the office, collected our tickets and set off for our house in Cecil Hills. On the way we past Wonderland Amusement Park. (This was the Park and Ride site for the Equestrian) We then passed the event Entrance which was huge, and the main arena looked magnificent with flags, banners and flowers.

The next morning we set off early, (we thought) to watch the first day of dressage. We joined the queue to enter the car park - onto the queue to park - walk to the queue to board the bus to the event - join the queue to

be searched before they check the tickets to let us in! Eventually we reached the stadium, found our seats, at last we were in ( we had only missed the first four competitors!) After the dressage we went to see the cross country course. Mike was walking the course with the Press. It was very hot and luckily for us Sue was driving round in the ute (truck) with drinks, so we were able to have a lift, and see all the fences. It was a long way round (7,450mtrs). The jumps looked very impressive, the builders had done a good job, it looked an Olympic Course.

The next day was Team Cross Country day and we were not going to be late! Our bus joined the queue past the main entrance that was full, there were thousands of people everywhere. On to the next entrance further round the course, not where we had planned to view from. People were walking in all directions to get to the jumps they wanted to watch. We finally made our way across the snake infested hills to the jump we wanted to see. It was the third fence, a massive log painted by an Aborigine artist to look like a serpent. This really was the star of Sydney 2000 for us.



The crowd was enormous, every fence was surrounded by cheering flag waving fans enjoying themselves. Every competitor from which ever country, was cheered and encouraged, but when the Aussies rode by they just went mad. The cry was Aussie Aussie Aussie oi! oi! oi!

this changed by the performance of Andrew Hoy to Aussie Aussie Assie Hoy! Hoy! Hoy!

Well this was it - the Olympics. The course was riding well the going was good, most of the horses finished well and some within the time. It could not have been better the crowd was enjoying every moment, Mike looked pleased that it had gone so well.

Next day was Team Show Jumping. The crowd was unbelievable, they cheered everybody, even the tractors levelling the track. It was great to get a Silver medal.

The Individual Competition followed on, the cross country was even better. There were so many good performances by both horse and rider, it was a pity they could not all win Gold.

The verdict on Mike's course was very favourable some thought he should get a Gold medal.

I think all the sports world wide should thank Australia for putting on such a wonderful Olympics.

After the competition we went to visit friends, we had a real Aussie BBQ with Mavis (ne:) Bishop and her husband in Toongabbie, a lovely part of Sydney. The next day we went to the flat in Sydney that Sue and Mike had rented. It has a wonderful view of the Harbour Bridge, Opera House and Circular Quay. The Circular Quay is the oldest part of Sydney and is very busy with the Ferries, Water Taxis and all types of boats sailing up and down all day and night. In the evening we went on a Dinner Cruise round the Harbour. The lights and fireworks were fantastic and there were several liners moored up being used as hotels for the Games. The next day (Sunday) Sue had arranged a Celebration Lunch for family and friends (including an Australian Gold medallist)! at Peats Bite. This is an open air restaurant on the Hawkesbury River, which can only be reached by boat or sea plane. We spent a wonderfully relaxing day eating and singing in the sunshine. Mark Phillips, Carl Fletcher and myself were presented with Birthday cakes, which we shared with everyone. A Birthday that we will never forget.

The next morning we flew to Auckland to stay with Taffy and Joan Williams. Taffy was a boarder at the Friends School around 1947.

He had a 1948 school photograph, and it was great trying to put names to all the good looking boys and girls. The A team looked so young and happy, AJ. Ma J, Burgess, Brigam, Prior, Herbert, McCarthy, Darlington, and Bishop.

We visited the hot springs in Rotorua and had a swim in the hot baths, this was certainly better than the early morning swims at Sibford School in the unheated pool in 1947, we must have been mad. Then onto the Bay of Islands where Captain Cook landed in 1769 he must have been a very brave young man to confront those savage looking Maori warriors so far from home. The one who greeted us on the boat in Paihia with a challenge told us later that his father was a Scotsman.

We are now home with a few photographs and a lot of memories of Sydney 2000.

