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Study Abroad Trip Opens ABAC Student’s Eyes to Scotland

TIFTON- Trading the pine trees of south Georgia for the rugged terrain of the Scottish countryside was not exactly the trip Victoria Powell had in mind when she decided to study abroad this summer.

But now after spending two weeks in the sheep-strewn meadows of Scotland, she can’t stop talking about the place, the people, and the food, which included haggis, she encountered in her whirlwind adventure away from the classrooms of Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.
“I never thought about going to Scotland, but I loved it,” Powell, a sophomore from Statesboro, said. “The trip was two weeks long between my spring and summer classes here at ABAC. I have traveled abroad before, but not without family. So not only was this my first time to Scotland, but it was also my first time solo on a plane full of students who were going to study in other countries. I went with students from all over the state.”

A double major in forestry and accounting, Powell chose this particular study abroad trip offered by the European Council (EC) through the University System of Georgia (USG) because it fit into her summer break between taking classes at ABAC.

The European Council is one of five regional councils operating under the umbrella of the System Council for International Education of the USG. The EC sponsors summer study abroad programs for USG students and transients at eight locations in Europe that run two to five weeks. Courses are taught largely by faculty from USG colleges and universities, and students combine classroom experiences with group and individual travel as they earn academic credit at their home institution.

Powell can’t talk enough about her experiences while in the Scottish Highlands. While taking classes abroad she explored the towns of Edinburgh, Glasgow, St. Andrews, and even squeezed in a weekend trip to London.

That weekend excursion gave her the opportunity to see the Tower of London and Big Ben. But her top pick in London was Westminster Abbey.

“All the monarchs are buried in Westminster Abbey, along with Sir Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, and, ironically, Mary Queen of Scots,” Powell said. “Her son, James, had her exhumed and put in Westminster.”
In Edinburgh, she hiked Arthur’s Seat in Holyrood Park. Arthur’s Seat is a dormant volcano, and Holyrood’s highest point is just a short walk from the heart of Edinburgh. She also visited Underground Edinburgh.

“Underground Edinburgh was like a ghost tour,” Powell said. “It scared me knowing that some of the town was built on top of a burial ground. And the Scottish Highlands were magnificent. British commandos (Great Britain’s version of the U.S. Special Forces) used to train there. I found out that a lot of scenes from the Harry Potter movies were shot in the Highlands. The author, J.K. Rowling, has a home in Edinburgh. Another student and I were tempted to track her down but thought better of it.”

She said St. Andrews was her favorite place to visit.

“St. Andrews is where golf was invented,” Powell said. “It is also where Prince William met Kate Middleton. We went to see St. Andrews Castle and its cathedral. The castle was the official home to all of the bishops and archbishops during The Middle Ages. We were taken underground and saw how the castle and ruined cathedral connected to each other.”

Powell says Scotland differed in a number of ways from the United States.

“They add tax into the cost of an item so there is no sales tax,” Powell said. “If the price is $5 then that is what you will pay. Starbucks was the only place in all of Edinburgh that had any kind of wireless connection. And the weather was absolutely crazy. It changed every five minutes. In the morning it could be sunny, by noon you needed a jacket, and in the afternoon it could be pouring rain. The beach in Edinburgh was absolutely freezing.”

Tasting the food in Scotland was also a unique experience.
“Scotland’s foods are all meat and starch, lots of potatoes and fish,” Powell said. “I tried haggis. I was not a fan of it. But they had the best fish and chips I have ever tasted. Their grocery stores are very small. Most of them are no bigger than an office in the U.S. They aren’t huge buildings, more like one or two small rooms.”

Powell’s visit to Scotland coincided with a crucial time in the country’s history. She was in the country when the Scottish people were in the midst of trying to determine if they wanted independence from England. The kingdoms of England and Scotland merged in 1707 when the Acts of Union ratified the 1706 Treaty of Union and joined the two parliaments of England and Scotland together, forming the Kingdom of Great Britain. She talked to a mixed group of Scots to get their views.

“Everyone had their own opinions and concerns regarding Scotland’s independence,” Powell said. “Some of them wanted to separate from Great Britain while others were worried about what that independence would require, such as the production of their own currency and if they would want to be a part of the European Union.”

Scotland’s history was a very visible theme throughout Powell’s visit. She toured the National Library of Scotland which houses the “lost” letter written by Mary, Queen of Scots. She also was able to see letters written by the United States’ Founding Fathers to Scottish political figures.

“The Scots honor and cherish their history, as well as constantly remembering those who died to preserve it,” Powell said. “You can’t go into a church without seeing a war memorial. That includes Westminster Abbey. Inside Holyrood Castle, dead-center, is a war memorial that
looks like a church. They even have a memorial for the women who supported the troops during the wars.

“I met a woman who was born and raised in the United States but now lives in Lithgow. I asked her about all the memorials. She said there are so many memorials in Scotland, and Europe as a whole, because battles from World War I and World War II were fought on their home soil. They take war very seriously.”

Powell was intrigued by the interest in the military because she would like to join the U.S. Army Reserves one day. In fact, before making ABAC her college of choice, she was going to attend the University of North Georgia to participate in the cadet program. A Stallion Day experience at ABAC sidetracked that plan.

“The students were doing the hay bale contest at the time,” Powell said. “I saw the hay bale shaped like a tractor and thought that ABAC was where I wanted to be. Everyone was so nice. I felt at home here. Then at lunch that day I was selected for instant admission, and I haven’t looked back.”

Powell is a member of the ABAC Shooting Team and works at the college’s bookstore when she is not focusing on her academics. Upon graduation from ABAC, she plans to return to Statesboro to help run her father’s accounting firm as a silent partner while furthering her education in forestry.

Ultimately, Powell would like to receive her doctorate degree in genetics. Her ambitions in the field of forestry are to find a way of creating a faster-growing tree and determining a way to use the fibers of a pine tree to establish an alternative fuel source.