

## KIWI FIDDLERS, EDINBURGH TATTOO

The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo often travels beyond Scotland. Kiwi fiddlers have been involved in the Tattoo since Wellington in 2016, so when it came to Sydney this year, a trip across the ditch was a no-brainer. Eight Kiwi fiddlers and several Aussies joined the Shetland fiddle group Hjaltibonhoga - which means Shetland, my spiritual home.

Making the total fiddlers up to 40 were: Ruth Budden, Anne-Marie Forsyth and Charlotte Naden from Auckland, Ann Goodbehere, Mary McDonald and Lynne Scott from Wellington, plus ex-pat Kiwis Karen and "Jacko" Jackson, who currently live in Alice Springs.

After a pleasant Saturday afternoon playing SCD music for the Killara Club's social dance, four of us were whisked off to our team hotel in Parramatta. There we met up with old Shetland, Scots and Aussie friends, and squeezed in a last few bars of fiddle practice. That was probably the most relaxed part of the whole week....

Each day began with an early bus trip to the ANZ Stadium at Sydney's Olympic Park. Our music (15 pages or so) had been distributed several months previously, as it had to be not only learned but mostly memorised beforehand. Rigorous music rehearsals were interspersed with learning the steps and formations for the Hjaltibonhoga act, which was built around the Tattoo theme of All Points of the Compass. We also had to learn (and re-learn) our positions and cues for entries and exits, and try to march in step. These were long days, frequently returning to the hotel at 11pm.

For many of these practices, and for meals, we used spaces within and near to the Stadium, which is <vast>. Access to different levels was via vehicle-width external spirals, and we frequently walked up and down the four levels to our next event. At sometimes 20,000 steps a day, fitness levels certainly shot up: by the end of the rehearsal period we were even able to chat on the climb up!

But it was worth it when we walked out on the field in front of the replica castle, to the cheers of up to 35,000 people. There's a huge thrill in being one of almost 1600 performers, the biggest Tattoo cast ever.

Memorable moments were many, but the standout ones were a plaintive duet between an oboe and a didgeridoo on the castle battlement (an unexpectedly beautiful combination), and the privilege of playing for the very last performance of the Lochiel Marching Team, which is disbanding following the death of its longtime coach.

Would we do it again? Once the long days and sore feet have receded into more distant memory, I would say it's very likely.

Lynne Scott