

Katie Kiskaddon Chowdhury was a first timer at the 2015 Scottish Weekend. We loved having her, and, judging from what she wrote in the Montreal Branch newsletter, it sounds like Katie had the kind of Scottish Weekend experience we hope everyone will have. Katie let us share her article.

Searching for an opening concept to describe my experience attending Scottish Weekend by myself, I veered between “big” and “overwhelming.” So I’ll settle on “all-encompassing.” The West Virginia countryside was different enough from Montreal, but as I followed the Scottish flags down dirt roads and was greeted by the organizers at the camp, it hit me that I had landed in a separate world for the weekend. In that world, the rules were a bit different.

Setting, or, Rule #1: No Alarm Clocks, Only Bagpipes

I slept in a cabin full of friendly young University of Maryland students and alumnae. After late nights, mornings began with the distant call of **Dan Emery’s** pipes, growing steadily louder as he wove his way among the cabins. Days were full and tiring, but the mist on the lake in the morning and the velvet black sky sprinkled with stars at night provided snatches of rest. The food was delicious and varied and kept us skipping.

Classes, or, Rule #2: “Put any Foot Forward”

Dance classes were led by **Antoine Rousseau**, **Janet Walker**, and **Ellie Briscoe**. I took the intermediate/advanced technique classes, which were...challenging (you wanted me to be challenged, **Margaret Gomersall!**). There were also basic and social classes offered. There were two dance classes Saturday morning, a specialty music class Saturday afternoon, and two dance classes Sunday morning, including a combined class. A ball review was held Saturday afternoon, followed by time to shop for ghillies and a jam session with the musicians (I could hear the music well enough as I lay exhausted in bed for a brief rest before supper). The technique classes focused on footwork, timing, and covering, and we were also encouraged to think of something we needed to work on and hold it in mind while dancing. From Antoine Rousseau (who kept ill-advisedly trying to demonstrate things with me as his partner) I was reminded that at the end of the diamond poussette, “Put any foot forward, Kah-TEE. I don’t care which one!” Antoine also mercifully demonstrated the low-impact versions of various steps. In another class, we learned the joys of the KFO turn: yes, it stands for Kilt Flip Opportunity. I enjoyed many of the dances taught, including Ayrshire Craig, Highland Rambler, and a new strathspey in honor of **Fred Eustis**, The Registrar.

Dances, or, Rule #3: “Don’t Look So Guilty”

The dances on the program for the Friday night welcome dance were fairly simple. However, even my best attempts at a brave smile wavered, surrounded as I was by over 100 wonderful dancers who seemed to be the native inhabitants of this Shangri-la that I had stumbled upon. Some of the young crowd leaped so high I thought they’d have to be tugged down like helium balloons. After dancing City of Belfast with **John MacLeod**, he told me, “Don’t look so guilty. You have nothing to feel guilty about.” Several people liked the dance so much they requested it again. John and I danced it through a second time. “See,” he said at the end, “Didn’t that work better?” It did. I loved

dancing to the pipes in The Duke of Atholl's Reel, and the prize for cutest dance name goes to The Highlandman Kissed His Mother. Saturday night, we gathered in our finery for the Highland Ball, which began with a Grand March. The dances were more complex, but I felt somewhat prepared after the ball review. I had some wonderful partners, including Dan Emery for The Castle in the Glen, **Geoffrey Selling**, and others too numerous to name. Again, I loved going wild at the end, dancing to the pipes for The De'il Among the Tailors. I danced every dance both Friday and Saturday, and I could hardly walk on Sunday.

Music, or, Rule #4: Wave your Finger in the Air to Hear It Again

Scottish Weekend focused not just on dancing but also on music, though many of the musicians were also dancers. Frequently people would request that a dance be danced and a tune played one more time by putting their fingers up in the air. This happened quite frequently, often because of the excellent music. Friday night, we all wanted to repeat the strathspey Delvine Side more than once. It was amazing to dance to such a great ensemble: **Jim Lindsay** on accordion; **Liz Donaldson**, **Julie Gorka**, and **Dave Wiesler** on piano; Dan Emery on pipes; **Ralph Gordon** on string bass and cello; and **Anne Hooper** and **Becky Ross** on fiddle.

Other Fun Stuff, or, Rule #5: If You're Wearing Wool and It's 98 Degrees...You Might Be a Scottish Country Dancer!

As if the Highland Ball didn't tire us out or keep us up late enough, it was followed by a ceilidh, which was basically a talent show. Some performed dances (I don't know how they stayed upright at that point), some played music, some told stories, and in between acts anyone in the crowd could shout out "you might be a Scottish Country Dancer" jokes. I sang in Dave Wiesler's music class's parody of "Will Ye No Come Back Again."

Conclusion

I left Scottish Weekend exhausted, a bit shell-shocked, but happy. Indeed, as the program we received said, "If you don't have fun at Scottish Weekend, you won't be happy in heaven." So many people encouraged me to come back next year, and I could see that this really was a time out of time and an event to be looked forward to all year by the participants. I'm already Facebook friends with several of the dancers, though I did decline Geoffrey Selling's very insistent and generous invitation to host me for the Delaware all-night Hogmanay dance. Truth is, I valued spending a weekend caught up in the "controlled abandon" of Scottish Weekend. But I'm quite happy to be back home with my friends in the Montreal branch.

Quiz to Test Comprehension

1. What is a KFO turn? (Hint: Men, you'd better be wearing something under your kilts.)
2. Which foot do you put forward at the end of the diamond poussette? (Trick Question)
3. What are some other Scottish Country Dancer jokes? (To get you started: "If you refer to ibuprofen as 'vitamin I'..." / "If you have 4 salt and 4 pepper shakers on your dining table...")

- Katie Kiskaddon Chowdhury