

Annette Gross spends six months gathering lifetime of memories

BY SALLY BAIR
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PLUMSTEADVILLE — Just one year ago Annette Gross embarked upon a six-month trip which gave her a lifetime of memories and a solid introduction to the way of life of families in other countries.

Annette was an International 4-H Youth Exchange delegate from Bucks County and she traveled to the United Kingdom on a program which took her to 18 families in the countries of Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland. She lives at Plumsteadville with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Gross.

"I am so happy now that I went to the United Kingdom. They have such an organized program. Being an IFYE is a terrific way to see a country and learn to understand the people. It allows you to live with them and do as they do," she said.

One of the most common barriers to communication in another country was not there since people in the United Kingdom speak, naturally, English. This allowed for pretty good communication between Annette and her hosts, but it didn't mean that she missed all the fun of speaking another language. "It was interesting," she recalls. "Their terms are so different. They also talk quickly and you really had to listen. There were so many different expressions."

As far as understanding her, Annette said, "They didn't have much problem when I talked slow." She also pointed out that in the United Kingdom you can travel small distances and see large differences in language. She said, "Within 10 miles the accent changes."

In the United Kingdom, her stay was organized by the Young Farmers Clubs, which she characterizes as being "a big social club." Members of Young Farmers are rural youth between 14-26 years old. She adds, "They are very active members. They hold competitions, sports events, and educational programs. Often they meet once a week, except they do not meet formally from May through September because of farm work. If you're a young farmer, that is your social life. That is your circle of friends and it keeps you busy."

Annette said the clubs are most active in the winter, but she participated in many activities during her stay there. She explained, "We were lucky enough to arrive in time for the National Young Farmers conference, with 5,000 young farmers. We spent three days there." After that, she said she often met group members in her travels around the countries. There were three other American girls as IFYEs to the United Kingdom.

Annette hails from a dairy farm in Bucks County where she is very much at home milking cows. She spent 10 years as a 4-H member there, including being a teen leader, and participating in sewing, baking, dairy cow and dairy goat projects.

She said that English farms are generally "mixed farms with sheep, beef, and some dairy." She visited a lot of sheep farms and ate a lot of lamb while there. In England farms average about 200 acres, and this dairy farmer's daughter visited two dairy farmers who had British Friesian cows. Annette said these dairy animals are more compact than dairy animals in the United States.

On a good farm the average might be about 17,000



Annette shows sister Amy the routes she traveled during her tour as an IFYE. Gasoline was expensive there, she noted, priced at 2.50 for an Imperial gallon.

Annette is engrossed in the travel and souvenir brochures she accumulated during her six-month trip to the United Kingdom. She brought home along with the printed material, a lifetime of memories.



pounds of milk, but on average farms milk production ranged about 12,000 pounds. She said she was surprised at the number of milking parlors in use in England, often with as few as 40 cows.

In the dairy industry she said, "There were not as many pedigreed herds, and commercial dairy herds were common."

The countryside was often rolling hills which reminded her of her home in Southeastern Pennsylvania, but she said one distinction between fields in the United Kingdom and those in Bucks County are hedgerows. "Hedgerows mark all fields, and they are basically designed to keep the sheep in. In Wales there are stone walls along the fields."

She characterized Welsh farms as somewhat smaller than English farms, and said that the more mountainous areas lend themselves to keeping sheep. "Wales is very rugged, with some parts really barren and some green," she said, adding that farming there is more difficult and machinery is smaller than in other countries she visited. Slate mines were a big industry in Wales.

She found in Wales that all people could speak both Welsh and English. Store signs and road signs are in Welsh, and in her families, only Welsh was spoken in conversation among themselves at the table.

In Scotland, which is known for its sheep, she visited the county of Ayr, the home of Ayrshire cattle. She stayed on a farm, however, which had pedigreed Herefords.

Annette visited Northern Ireland, and said, "I wasn't afraid while I was there. The people are brought up with



Seated outside her Bucks County home, Annette Gross displays a souvenir kilt she purchased on her trip to Scotland.

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the violence and they get used to it." She learned more about the political situation there, and explained that 95 percent of the Northern Irish are protestants who are very strongly attached to British Rule. She also noted that the Irish Republican Army wants to bring down anything that represents the government. She stayed in a family in which her host father had been a policeman for 31 years. A pleasant aspect of her visit was the "fine Irish hospitality."

The United Kingdom faces similar problems with its agriculture to those in Pennsylvania. She said that the United Kingdom is losing 40,000 acres each year to housing and industry. Therefore, there are a lot of government farm programs channeling money to farmers. In some cases government grants are available for as much as 40 percent of the cost of constructing buildings. There are grants which encourage them to keep farming, and in Wales, farmers can get paid for reclaiming fields. There are also "hillside grants" for the number of sheep kept on the hillsides.

While the countries she visited were further north than Pennsylvania, the Gulf Stream has a moderating effect upon the weather, Annette explained. "They don't have the long hot period we do. They could plow in January and seed at the end of February." They average only about 24 inches of rainfall yearly despite their reputation for having rainy weather. Annette said, "There are unpredictable showers, but there is never much rain at a time." She said hay is often baled while still damp and left outside to dry further.

Ireland, known as the Emerald Island, gets more frequent rains.

Annette said she found her hosts to be "pretty well informed about the United States. They are interested in knowing how we do things and to learn how they are different." She said her host families were much like her real family in their lifestyle, although she found that young people lived at home longer than in this country.

She found the cost of living higher, with incomes lower than in this country. Clothing is much more expensive and food is 1½ times as expensive as here. An interesting aspect of food shopping for the rural farm wife is the

widespread home delivery of milk and other commodities, far into the countryside. There is a mobile grocer, a butcher, a baker and even a "fish and chips" man, Annette explained.

Gasoline is very expensive there, costing \$2.50 for an Imperial gallon. She said, "They think we should have to pay more for our gas."

Meals were plentiful and frequent she found. Breakfast was a large meal of bacon, eggs and sausage, and at 10:30 a.m. there would be tea with currant loaf, thinly sliced in Wales and thickly sliced in England.

The noon meal was a large one, consisting sometimes of roast beef, yorkshire pudding and potatoes. Many people had their own greenhouses and grew their own small tomatoes, but Annette found that salads are not on the menu out of season as they might be here. She said food was often served on the dinner plate, with only vegetables being passed later for seconds.

There is another tea at 4:00 p.m. She pointed out that tea is always brewed, and milk is added to the cup before the tea is put in. Scones, shortbread or biscuits might be served in the afternoon.

Desserts might be a pudding or other sweet, but more than likely it would be served with cream, according to Annette. "Basically they serve a lot of the same foods, but it was prepared differently," she stated. She enjoyed cooking some American-style meals for her hosts.

A surprise for her was to learn of their loyalty to the Royal Family. "I was really surprised that they thought so much of the Queen. They think that their Royal Family is the envy of most of the world."

She was there during the elections, and she said most people were happy with having Margaret Thatcher elected prime minister. "The fact that she was a woman was not important. She was a conservative, and they were

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