

SATURDAY 22nd March – the journey to South Africa, by This Correspondent

While some of the team had assembled on Good Friday evening, the majority got together over breakfast on Saturday morning before joining the baggage masters and going through the process of weighing luggage and redistributing items until they made the miserly 20kg limit. Our baggage masters were stricter than any airline ever would be, just to be on the safe side in the avoidance of excess baggage charges.

As it turned out, the transit through check-in, customs and security was smooth despite all the rifles, even if punctuated by several fairly lengthy waits. Or rather, it was mostly smooth: somehow Rick Shouler lost track of his phone and wallet through security, which earned him the nickname "tour blond".

It should be said at this point that a tour diary is not intended to be an accurate reflection of events but rather a document that seeks to balance fact and a record of performance with an unremitting endeavour to highlight those little foibles that endear each team member to the others and allow a diverse group to bond. Big foibles are even better. And screw-ups will not be missed.

As soon as immigration had been cleared, memories returned, for many, of the previous summer's (pre-Palma) "test" of free samples of gin and tonic in Terminal Three: this time, the same stand was giving out free Baileys "with a hint of coffee"...

Most of the team set up camp, as is traditional, in O'Neills. Meanwhile Messrs Townsend, Ball, Alexander and Underwood went to caviar house, as is also traditional. They rejoined us with Martin referring to the "shablayyyyy" they'd consumed.

It should also be pointed out at this early stage that Great Britain tours are more serious affairs than they once were. Our opponents' levels of performance have risen over the years and so have ours needed to. As such, the social side of the tour is a bit more limited, with the focus firmly on performance. As such, any reference to alcohol, fun, freedom etc. in the period before serious shooting starts is likely to be fairly gleeful...

Various team members received reports from loved ones in Surrey that it was snowing heavily there; and we could see a little bit of it ourselves. And we poor souls were all in the departure lounge ready to go somewhere sunny – shame!

Steven Thomas was one of the first to use the toilet after our take-off that was more than an hour tardy. He may well also have been one of the last – he emerged after several minutes just as Ed Compton arrived, and exclaimed "Ah – you're a plumber Ed, aren't you?!".

The early moments on the plane were duller than they might otherwise have been, owing to the failure of the entertainments system and the need to reboot it. Chris generously offered to plug his laptop into the system because he "had plenty of

videos on it". Jumbo reviewed it, however, and concluded that it might not be entirely appropriate.