

TEXAS TRIP JUNE 2012

After spending the night in Edinburgh 10, very excited country music fans boarded a plane in London on Sunday 3rd June to begin their Texas adventure

Just in case we got lost or forgot who we were we all sported matching T Shirts (courtesy of Blargoans) decorated with our NNCMC logo, the caption 'we're gonna play in Texas' plus our names. As you might imagine we received lots of looks/comments some people thought we were a band going to play music in Texas --- not the kind of playing we were planning---

Our flight to Dallas passed much quicker than I thought we were well fed and watered free drink when ever we wanted --- not that we took advantage of course--- and our individual entertainment screens showing a good selection of movies.

On arrival in Dallas our initial comment was 'It's hot' however our air conditioned mini bus was waiting for us to take us to our hotel which was in the Southfork area. Tired as we were due to the 6, hours we had lost we agreed the best plan was to keep ourselves going so after a quick shower and change we took a walk and found a Brazilian restaurant to eat in. Well this was the first of many great dining experiences you helped yourself to salad &veg then the waiters came round with all types of meats charcoal grilled in various spices. They then carved them of skewers at the table and just piled our plates until we forced them to stop all washed down with a free round of drinks. It was still very warm shame to waste it so we sat around the pool until it closed at 10.pm then finished the party inside giving the duty free a pounding.

Sadly we didn't sleep as well as we thought but we were up early raring to go ready to do the Dallas tourist bit . The hotel took us in their courtesy bus to visit Southfork Ranch, now I'm sure most of you will remember that's the home of The Ewing's where the 70's T.V. series Dallas was filmed however we were informed that much of the filming was done on a set in the studio and the ranch was used mainly for the outside scenes. Anyway we enjoyed our visit the rooms were all as they were in the series, lots of memorabilia including the gun that shot J.R. and the pool where they used to hold their famous barbeques.

Following that we took a 15 minute trip on the Dart – the train—to Downtown Dallas and after we rehydrated ourselves we had a walk around a visited the JFK museum on Dealey Plaza. We found it very interesting the permanent exhibition examines the life, death and legacy of President John F Kennedy the exhibit features films, historic footage and hundreds of photographs and artifacts that chronicle Kennedy's 1960 presidential

campaign. The snipers perch, and storage space where a rifle was found remain preserved as they were on that fateful day. We stood on the grassy knoll and on the x on the road depicting the spot where he was shot and saw the widow where the fatal shot was fired from. We had our dinner in Dallas before darting back to the hotel where again we had the pool to ourselves so party time again.

Following a good breakfast we felt better and were ready for our transport when it arrived to take us back to the airport to pick up our mini bus --- first stramash---. When we booked the bus we stipulated that we needed seating for 10, people and our luggage well it had seats for 14, people no luggage space at the back. Guy on duty totally unhelpful no wonder when he was verbally attacked by irate Scotsmen who took control of the situation and pulled out the back row of seats. Well this didn't go down well and within minutes a non too happy manager appeared refused to negotiate, ordered them to put the seat back in, mortified no option but to do as they were told then pile the luggage in.

Eventually we were on our way to Snyder after a couple of pit stops arrived late afternoon to discover that our hotel was located about two miles from the coliseum so not really within strolling distance of the festival venue.

To explain why we found ourselves in a small town like Snyder for 5, days was that when we decided to holiday in Texas I contacted Tracy Pitcox to ask if he knew of anything on in the area and he said he was hosting a 5 day Texas Swing festival in Snyder. Tracy is the agent we have used to take artists like Justin Trevino, Landon Dodd, Leonna Williams & Amber Digby across to our festival so he was delighted we had decided to attend his event.

Anyway after a few moans and groans that someone would have to drive up and down to the shows all week we got organised and away to the coliseum, slightly late for the barbeque – trust us--.

Clearly we were expected, on arrival Mellisa director of Snyder chamber of commerce and the Mayor were there to welcome us and give us VIP passes. We couldn't believe the reception we received you would think we were celebrities everyone came over chatted to us the girls had to dance with all these tall Texan cowboys complete with boots and Stetsons – needless to say we coped—Now very quickly the boys noticed something missing A BAR apparently because the coliseum is part of the college campus it is prohibited to sell alcohol,-- 5 days at a country festival without a dram I don't think so--

Needless to say it didn't take us long to find out that it wasn't iced tea everyone was drinking out of the red tumblers on sale in Wal- Mart – sorted—The mini bus became our bar for the week and the liquor store server our best friend we purchased a polystyrene cool box filled it with ice when needed and that was us set.

When we were in Wal-Mart we noticed that they were selling the new Alan Jackson C/D called *Thirty Miles West* released that day so a few copies were purchased and played frequently through out our trip. Brilliant album love all the tracks

On our return to the hotel the heavens opened and it was thunder and lightning all night and sadly not much better in the morning. However we hadn't planned venturing very far that day we had a wander around Snyder then spent the day and night at the festival. On arrival we received a warm welcome from Tracy, got interviewed for the local paper where later in the week we made front page news and also were interviewed for some country music radio stations.

At dinner time Tracy and his staff took us to Skeets restaurant which became our tea time haunt nightly great food very reasonably priced. As you are all aware our committee love to wind each other up, so Ally was presented with T Shirts one bright pink labelled Kitty Manager and the other bright orange which said Tour Guide—he wore them proudly—

Next morning was still a bit damp and overcast when we set off for a visit to Lubbock which is where Buddy Holly came from, we spent a very nice couple of hours wandering around his museum. The museum is informative and a great showcase of Buddy's contribution to music, although his career only lasted 18 months Buddy has been described as the single most creative force in early rock 'n roll. Many items were donated by Waylon Jennings, the glasses worn by Holly which were recovered at the crash site were there as is many personal items from his childhood. Holly was a great friend and mentor to Waylon teaching him to play the guitar, before he became bass player for The Crickets. Waylon was scheduled to fly on the plane which crashed killing Buddy and the band --- luckily for country music he didn't --- Across the street is a statue of Buddy and a walk of fame naming all the famous musicians and stars from the area. The boys then did some shopping in a Western Wear store lots Wrangler jeans purchased, girls chose to have a glass of wine before heading back for another Skeets dinner a quick wash and change then back to the coliseum.

Tonight Mellisa and Tracy had us on stage where they officially welcomed us then presented us with festival T Shirts, of course yours truly was left to return the compliment and give a speech. Along with enjoying the music tonight we got lots more dances definitely getting into the two steps, four steps shuffles and slides not so sure about the guys though, they' re not getting enough practice spending too much time at the van, wonder why!!!

Still slightly overcast this morning but following a light breakfast we made our way to visit Abilene and our first stop was to visit Frontier Texas Museum. Brilliant place telling the story of Texas between 1780 and 1880, learning us how the area was transformed from open prairie populated by buffalo and Indians to the ranchlands and towns of pioneer

Texas. Life sized holographic figures told stories of real people who lived and died on the Texas frontier you could feel the terror of a wolf attack; buffalo stampede state of the art technology made this very interesting.

Next stop was to Buffalo Gap beautiful quiet peaceful area where a historic village interprets the history of the area from the late 1800's until 1920. A 21 building complex from the founding of the area, including 1875 log cabin, train depot with separate waiting room for the blacks, jail and court house, doctor surgery, school and church nice couple of hours spent absorbing it all.

Back to get fed at Skeets where we were by now on first name terms with the servers receiving complimentary starters from the manager then another great night of music and dancing. Despite good intentions we didn't have an early night on return to the hotel we decided it was still a beautiful night we would have a night cap in the car park well you've guessed. Alan Jackson on the C/D player we were joined by other people heading home from the festival so we had to be sociable –yes a car park party--

After a rough start some worse than others it was just as well we had agreed the night before to have a lie in and chill out morning then head back to the coliseum in time to hear Landon Dodd kick things off at midday. We had our sensible heads on that day not a lot of drinking plenty dancing but sadly all too soon it was time to bring the festival to a close and for us to say our goodbyes to all the new friends we made.

To round up over the duration of the festival we heard some great western swing music, the artistes were all respected and first class musicians many we weren't familiar with apart from the ones who had played at our festival and some who had been on the television series Tru Country. If I was to be honest we would have preferred a bit more traditional country music but as we were at a western swing festival which is the official music of the state of Texas then we knew what to expect and boy these Texans just couldn't get enough of it.

Leon Rausch was one of Bob Wills' Texas Playboys and lead vocalist now clearly a legend in his own time and one of the most awarded country music entertainers in Texas. He sang many numbers recorded by Wills including *San Antonio Rose*, *Bubbles In My Beer* & *Faded Love*.

We all enjoyed the music of Curtis Potter which featured some honky tonk standards. At the start of his career Curtis played in the Hank Thompson Band, he had his first major hit with *You Comb Her Hair Every Morning*. Recently Curtis has appeared on The Grand Ole Opry and released an album called *The Survivors* with friends Darrell McCall and Tony Booth which features some great traditional country music.

Darrell McCall one of the better known and popular acts of the event, started his career in Nashville working as a harmony singer with artists such as George Jones, Faron Young & Ray Price, later joining the bands of Faron Young & Hank Williams Jr. The 70's brought several top hits for Darrell including *There's Still A Lot Of Love In San Antone* & *Pins and Needles In My Heart*. McCall along with wife Mona (who joined him on stage to sing a few

duets) continues to play all over the country making frequent appearances on the Opry stage and records on the Heart of Texas label, his newest album is called *Keeping Up With Tradition*. Tracy was telling me that Darrell and some of the other Heart of Country recording artistes are coming across to Britain and Ireland next year.

One of the younger acts to appear Jake Hooker along with his band The Outsiders played a very enjoyable set and was also a great guy to talk to. Jake was born listening to the sounds of traditional music through his father Tommy's West Texas band. Jake formed his own band at the age of 14 and began performing when by the age of 18 he was playing bass and singing full time. Jake moved to the Fort Worth area of Texas in 1998 where he became a firm favourite, he clearly was influenced by the sounds of Ray Price, Johnny Bush & Faron Young, his graceful image on stage and along with his voice and very talented band made his stage show very entertaining.

Billy Mata affectionately known as the Ambassador of Western Swing was clearly one of the crowd's favourite winning many awards in the field of traditional western swing music. Mata started his career in the 70's declaring his intention to stick to with his passion of real country music performing music the way he prefers. His western swing career was jump started when he became a regular singer with Bob Wills and frontman for The Playboys. Billy and his band called The Texas Tradition are a remarkably dedicated band handpicked by their common interest in Texas Swing. They played like they were having fun providing real danceable country music.

Jody Nix another well established artist in the world of western swing he has been in the business for over 50 years playing dances and shows all across Texas he leads the Texas Cowboys a fine dance band who had the floor fill on every song. In the past Jody has worked with Ray Price, Marty Robbins, George Strait & Moe Bandy and currently they play 100 plus dates each year.

Kelly Spinks comes from a long line of musician and his love of traditional country music is very strong he said he stated playing the fiddle at the age of 13 and has never put it down. His spot showed that he remains true to the old school sound of fiddles and steel, shuffles and waltzes. Over the years Kelly has had the opportunity to work for many of his greatest influences such as George Jones & Johnny Bush and its obvious why he has received the title of 'West Texas Entertainer Of The Year'.

Justin Trevino a true country artist who went down a storm when he played at our festival in 2011, his powerful high pitched voice deceptively smooth but with a piercing edge is made for singing good old fashioned Texas country music. Justin has released a vast selection of albums featuring some excellent songs including *Texas Honky Tonk*, *I Turn to The Wine*, *Face To the Wall* & *Take One As Needed For Pain* I could go on and on. I think this quote from Tracy Pitcox sums the great man up "Justin is one of the most important individuals in the preservation and promotion of country music, few individuals are accomplished as an entertainer, songwriter, engineer, producer he excels in all aspects of the music business" he certainly excelled for us over the weekend.

Landon Dodd another artist who went down well in Halkirk, although a relatively newcomer in the business music has always been a big part of his life. Landon along with his band the Dance Hall Drifters has opened for stars like Gene Watson, Johnny Rodriguez & Moe Bandy he is certainly the full package a talented musician and singer with an award winning voice. Landon sung many of his songs from his C/D *Call Of the Wine* which was appreciated by all the fans who enjoy a hard core country act—we all included of course, it was great catching up with him---

Some may say they kept the best to last there's certainly no denying that Bobby Flores bought the festival to a close by putting on a sensational performance. He carries a six piece band that features three fiddles and professional studio musicians that are obviously the best in their field. Bobby is a multi - instrumentalist, vocalist, arranger, producer, composer and first class session musician who has featured on over 400 albums, C/D's and singles including performances on major labels, he also enjoys composing and performing with string quartets. Bobby treated us to a selection of his great songs from his many albums including. *Lonely Street, In the Corner Of My Mind, Born To Loose & Are You Teasing Me* a truly superb musical experience

Next morning it was up and away again to Brady, on arrival we went straight to visit Tracy's Heart Of Country Museum, an excellent showcase of the history of country music. Over 100 artists are represented in the museum with stage costumes, musical instruments autographs and much other memorabilia. About 80% of the pieces have been donated by the artists or their families including a personal home juke box belonging to Barbara Mandrell a red white and blue guitar which was Buck Owens, Jim Reeves's 1956 tour bus stands outside the building. Tracy initially had all the memorabilia in the office before the museum was built and officially opened in 2000, when Justin Trevino and Ron Williams cut the ribbon at the official opening. The museum is free and run by volunteers it also has a C/D, book and souvenir shop.

Following a swim and freshen up we were expected at Tracy's house for a barbeque at 6.00pm, where we were made very welcome, aside from Tracy his wife Charla his brother and family, joining us was Justin Trevino and his wife Cissie, Mona & Darryl McCall, Charlie band member who had been with them in Halkirk his partner and Sharon Tracy's office manager. Tracy was the perfect host we sat outside around the pool enjoyed a yummy barbeque washed down with buckets of ice cold beer and whatever we wanted from a fully stocked bar. Now in the company of such great musicians, no surprise the most natural thing to happen was that Justin would play guitar and sing some of his powerful ballads just listening to that voice again was awesome. They all had lots of tales and stories to tell about their time on the road, a night of great fun an experience that couldn't be bought.

After packing up again the next morning ready to hit the road again Justin & Sharon called for us to sample a real Texas country breakfast at their favourite café certainly set us up for the day. After a quick visit to the Heart of Texas office and studio to say our goodbyes we set off for San Antonio and the next chapter of our adventure.

On route we decided to have our first stop at Fredericksburg which is a charming little German town with a picturesque main street full of gift and craft shops, shame we didn't have longer to browse –some of us spent too much time in the wine tasting shop— wonder who they were !!!

On route we simply had to stop again in Luckenbach, don't know what we expected, town full of touristy things regarding Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings maybe well we couldn't have been further off the mark. No town just a few wooden buildings packed with character and nostalgia the real Texas we had a wander around and soaked up the atmosphere. There is the famous dance hall where you could just imagine the sound of the boots and the beer bottles clinking to the Texas swing music, many a famous person played on that stage and they still hold dances to top artistes. You go through the general store (its' like an Aladdin's cave) to get to the well stocked bar which is full of all sorts of quirky things , the wood stove in the corner is used to cook deer in the winter and makes a nest for the chickens in spring. We had to have a beer and sit outside on benches and listen to the jamming session or as they call it picking circle going on (apparently a daily event) Not much else for miles around there were more roosters with their chicks than there were people, but we're glad we stopped.

On to San Antonio which was to be our home for the next four nights, ideally situated hotel minutes from the famous River Walk. San Antonio is a beautiful city it's eight miles of river flows through the centre below street level and all the hotels, bars & restaurants are built along its banks. Our first night there we strolled along the River Walk, ate outside sipped margaritas then found a 'local' opposite our hotel.

All up early next morning ready to explore we had a wander round the shopping mall whilst waiting to see the Story of the Alamo in the Imax theatre before going to visit san Antonio's top tourist attraction itself. The Alamo stands in the middle of the town centre, it was built in 1718 as a mission and it was where Davy Crocket, Jim Bowie and Colonel Travis along with 186 others lost their lives fighting for Texas independence in 1836. To get out of the heat we paid a visit to Ripley's' Believe It Or Not Museum, its three floors of unusual and fascinating exhibits collected by the world famous traveller Robert Ripley, amazing and entertaining. Time for lunch and a beer at the Longhorn Saloon, which is a classic 1881 saloon aside from selling great food and beer it's also home to the Buckhorn and the Texas Ranger Museum. During the afternoon we did our own thing some shopped others did the Texas Trolley tour and others were lazy and lay at the pool. Tonight we had another amazing dining experience 7, of us decided we would like to eat Mexican and where best to go but the Mi Tierra Café in the Mexican market where we were entertained Mexican style in beautiful surroundings and enjoyed a Mexican feast. We strolled back to meet the others who had gone to Hard Rock café and had a few drinks in Dirty Nellie's Irish Pub.

Next day we were away for some thrills and spills to spend the day at Sea World and Aquatica the water park, in the group we had some thrill seekers who were up for anything so they went away and did all the huge flumes, slides & chutes while some of us were happy to go in the wave pool, lazy river and gentle slides. That done it was over to Sea World again for the brave their were some amazing roller coasters including Texas

first inverted roller coaster and one that had a 100foot high backward dive. Anyway if that wasn't your thing then like me there was time to catch some of the shows featuring the sea lions, belugas or wander round the penguin enclosure. We all met up and went to the Pirate 3D show, before going to Shamu Rocks fantastic show by the majestic killer whales set to music. Headed home late decided a pizza take away night cap off to bed was a good idea.

More relaxing day today it was a bit more overcast which was better for walking around, in the morning we took a boat trip up the River Walk where the guide points out all the places of interest. Then away to the 4D moving theatre for an action packed Simulator ride and a visit to Louis Tussaud's which houses 250 life like figures including the ones in the horror chamber yes I heard a few screams, didn't see much as I had my eyes shut. Longhorn saloon again for a beer and a bite before going our separate ways meeting up at night for another superb dining experience in the Rain Forest Café eating in tropical surroundings with animals birds & plants even a thunderstorm happening round about us. Found a pub got the D.J. convinced to play some country music for us had some dances and crack but once he changed to the head banging stuff across to our 'local' for our night cap.

Friday time to pack up and head to Fort Worth for the final instalment of our trip, our hotel was again in an excellent location right in the centre of the Stockyards in the midst of all the action. After getting ourselves unpacked and organised we excitedly headed out in the blistering heat for something to eat before making our way to the rodeo. Now I wasn't expecting the Calgary Stampede and although we thoroughly enjoyed the experience I did feel a little bit let down with the standard and the amount of events cancelled due to lack of competitors. However we did watch some thrilling events including bull riding and bronc riding, barrel racing tie down roping and other fun events.

We then got our first taste of Billy Bobs, which is the worlds largest Honky Tonk it was built in 1910 and was a large open air barn for housing cattle. It opened in 1981 as an entertainment centre and can house 6,000 people before it's full. Each weekend it hosts some of the biggest stars of country music in concert, does live music recordings, and holds its own rodeo. Aside from that it has a large collection of memorabilia, a concrete hand Wall of Fame, a guitar bar, dance floor and gifts shops. Shooter Jennings the only son of Waylon and Jessi Colter was playing he was a bit too loud and rocky for us so we went to the Long horn Saloon where we partied on firstly to a live band and then country music--- a late one---

Sat morning after we came to we all just wandered around and explored visiting the Stockyards and Cowtown museums also all the western wear, craft and gift shops before meeting up at night for a nice meal in Ricky's steakhouse then heading to Billy Bobs .Tracy had worked his magic again had arranged for us all to go backstage to meet Ronnie Millsap. Ronnie looked slightly older but otherwise he hadn't changed, he was born in Appalachia and was rejected by his mother as he was born partially sighted being brought up by his grandparents he had a troubled childhood then sadly he lost any remaining sight when at 6, years old he received a blow from a teacher. Ronnie was initially a R&B and blues singer in the Memphis clubs, after moving to Nashville his career in country music

took off and he made some cracking records containing numbers like *The Girl Who Waits On tables, Pure Love & All Together Now Lets Fall Apart*. Ronnie has a new album called *With Country Again* due out the end of this month featuring some of his favourites like *Am I Losing You, Back On My Mind Again & Even Fools Get Lucky* sounds like a great country album. Ronnie was nice and friendly took the time to chat to us and pose for photos. The walls back stage were decorated with signatures of all the stars who had played in Billy Bobs and yes they were all there Garth Brooks, George Strait, Willie Nelson, Alan Jackson and many more Following that we wandered up the street stopping at Pearls Dance Hall where Tommy Hooker (father of Jake whom we met in Snyder) and his band were playing. Pearls is one of the oldest establishments in the Stockyards it was built by Bill Cody in the late 1800 as a bordello. There are still pieces from then scattered around including a nude portrait of the Grand Madame herself and a long copper sheet metal bar.

They had been told we were in town and again took the time to come over and chat to us a late night resulted in a delayed start the following day, this might have been a deliberate ploy by the boys as a visit to the shopping mall was planned. However we did as much damage as we could in the couple of hours we were allowed before meeting up to have a wander around the aquarium. A fairly quietish night, we ate in Risky's barbeque (which was possibly the poorest meal of our trip) then went to the White Elephant Saloon again more live music and dancing under a roof covered with cowboy hats and Stetsons.

Monday morning some of us headed for a visit to down town Fort Worth, lovely city with beautiful buildings and amazing water gardens, time to recharge since it was a bit overcast we took the opportunity to chill at the pool for few hours. We had another lovely meal this time in H3 Steakhouse and finished off our night in the Basement bar listening to some great live country music.

The arranged trip the following day was to the Six Flags Over Texas theme park now 5 thrill seekers and myself went Jenny, Darryn & Ally just couldn't get enough of the mega rides whilst Alan and myself settled for the tamer options. This park has over 50 rides with some of the fastest, tallest wildest nerve numbing rides in the country .We all had great crack and got soaked on some of the water rides before heading home. That night we enjoyed an amazing meal in the Cattlemen's steakhouse, before having a few in the White Elephant.

Sadly our last day did some final bit of souvenir shopping watched the Stockyards cowboys herding the longhorn cattle through the street few hours at the pool before the dreading packing. For our last meal we decided to go back to the Longhorn Steak house where for our appetisers we had decided to try the local delicacy which was calf fries, we had found out earlier in the week they were calf's testicles. Apart from one we all tried and enjoyed just like pop corn chicken with a bit more flavour. Back to Pearls where Tommy Hooker was playing again said our farewells then across to the Longhorn to say

our goodbyes to the friends we made there, not a lot of hilarity tonight all very subdued tonight thinking about the travelling in front of us

Homeward bound next day no problems flights wet smoothly and before we knew we had landed back in a very cold miserable Edinburgh our trip of a lifetime had come to an end, but loads of memories never to be forgotten.