

75th Anniversary of the First International Field Hockey Games Played in Canada

Saturday, October 3, 1936 - Australia vs Lower Mainland All-Stars

Monday, October 5, 1936 - Australia vs Duncan Ladies Field Hockey Club

The April 30, 1936 issue of The Cowichan Leader reported that *"since last summer the Duncan Ladies have been hoping that the Australian touring team might visit here on its way to or from the international conference at Philadelphia this year. Arrangements are now concluded and the Australians will arrive in Victoria on Saturday, October 1 and be guests of the Duncan club until Saturday night when they cross to Vancouver. A match will be played on the Cowichan Cricket and Sports Club ground on Saturday afternoon, October 1. This will be the first opportunity Duncan and district will have had of seeing a touring team, and it is hoped the many enthusiasts of the game will support the club in this enterprise. Vancouver will be the only other Canadian team played."*

When the final travel arrangements for the Australians were completed, an all-star Lower Mainland team played the visiting Australian team in Vancouver on Saturday, October 3rd, 1936 and the Duncan Ladies Field Hockey Team played them at the Cowichan Cricket and Sports Club grounds (now McAdam Park) on Monday, October 5th, 1936. These two games marked the first international field hockey games played in Canada.

There was much excitement in the Cowichan Valley about the game. The Thursday, October 1, 1936 issue of The Cowichan Leader read: *"The visitors are naturally strong and have a season's practice behind them, but it is felt that, however one-sided the game may be, it will be chance for Cowichan people to see an international team. The club, therefore is hoping for good support from the district in appreciation of the inclusion of Duncan in the tour. From there the Australian ladies will go east and southward for their first United States tour. They play at Milwaukee, Madison and Detroit and then go on to Philadelphia for the international conference at which representatives of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, South Africa, France and United States will also be present and will engage in tournament play. The Australians then turn westward to California where they will play several games with Los Angeles and other teams. Outside Duncan, Vancouver is the only place in Canada where the touring ladies will play. They arrive there tomorrow and meet the Lower Mainland on Saturday."*

This was followed by the announcement: *"Don't miss the hockey game Monday: Australian touring team v. Cowichan ladies. This is the only game the Australian ladies will play on the Island. Cowichan Cricket Club grounds, 3:30 p.m." and "Hockey - Australian touring team v. Cowichan ladies. Monday, October 5, 3:30 p.m.; admission, 25¢; children, 15¢; reserved seats, 25¢ at Staples' Jack Pot."*

After defeating the representative Lower Mainland team 10-1 in front of 1500 spectators during a heavy rainfall on a field described by one local paper as a quagmire, the

Australians travelled to Nanaimo on Sunday, October 4th where they were met, lunched, and driven to Duncan. There they were hosted at Queen Margaret's School for tea by the headmistress, Miss Norah Denny, before heading off to various family homes for accommodation.

Monday, October 5th, 1936 was a brilliant sunshiny fall day in Duncan. The visitors were treated to drives about the district in the morning. Photos were taken of the two teams in their uniforms, and the game started as scheduled at 3:30 p.m. The sports field outside the area of play was littered with red, yellow and orange maple leaves.

The October 9, 1936 issue of The Cowichan Leader read: "*How grass hockey should be played was demonstrated at the Sports Grounds on Monday afternoon by the Australian international women's team in administering a 15-1 defeat to Duncan's hard-working but outclassed side. With bright sunshine and a large attendance it was a gala afternoon, justifying the Duncan club's initiative in bringing the famous visitors for their only match on Vancouver Island and their second in BC. The Australians, on their way to compete in the world hockey tournament at Philadelphia, showed superiority in every department of the game, but especially in speed, ball control and team work. The Duncan ladies with a membership of only 20 to choose from put up a creditable team. They showed the benefit of practice in having the condition to stand the pace, but their rudimentary combination was totally ineffective against the perfect positional play of the Australians. . . . For most of the game, however, Duncan simply put up a stubborn and struggling defence against the well-engineered attacks of the brown tunics from 'Down Under' whose neat wrist passes and speed of foot sent them through the defence time and again. Miss H. F. Rea experienced a severe peppering in the Duncan goal, and though she used her stick, feet, hand and body (and once even her chin) to stop hard drives from all angles the score continued to mount. . . . The referees were Miss A. C. Magarey, secretary of the South Australia Women's Hockey Association, and Mr. H. A. M. Denny. . . .*

After the game the Australians were treated to dinner at the Black Cat Dining and Tea Rooms where they complimented the Duncan players on their game. '*We like your sunshine,*' they said, '*and the field is beautiful.*' Theatre was attended that evening. The next day the visitors were driven to Victoria to catch the ferry back to the mainland for their onward journey to the international conference in Philadelphia.

Marion A. Maxim, Corresponding Secretary of the United States Field Hockey Association sent a letter dated October 16, 1936 to Duncan player Winifred Dawson-Thomas: "*I have heard from several members of the Australian party who were most enthusiastic about their visit to Duncan and were thrilled by the country and by their reception from you.*"

The Duncan-Australia game must also have had great impact on local school children. Duncan High School reported in the October 8th issue of The Cowichan Leader that "*a number of boys have made the request that they be allowed to play grass hockey.*"

Written by Carolyn Prellwitz, September 8, 2011