As one of the four girls who flew out to join the remaining eight other GB Netball U21s (who were already in South Africa (SA) after winning the World University Netball Championships the previous week) we did not know what to expect!

Obviously the girls that were already in South Africa were going to be in high spirits but also tired from the championships and we had to fit and gel into this group as quickly as possible. At first I was apprehensive to go on my first “National Tour” but soon became accustomed to the routine and demands this level of netball requires.

I was only in South Africa for 10 days but 6 matches were to be played. After the long and uncomfortable plane journey (which entailed 4 girls, all over 6 foot sitting next to each other) we arrived in Cape Town. Fortunately for us we had no training on the day we arrived and could catch up on a serious lack of sleep from the flight.

On the Tuesday morning we had our first training session in Cape Town as the touring England U21 squad, followed by our first match against SA U21 in the evening. The stadium we played in was by far the most impressive I have been in, with seating around every side of the courts and even a court specifically for warming up. Neither the surroundings nor the SA team intimidated us though, with England confidently beating SA 48-37.

Satisfied with the performance, both coaches and players returned to the hotel where we were swiftly told to jump in the outside pool, which made an excellent substitute for an ice bath!

The second day consisted of the same routines: training in the morning followed by our second Test in the afternoon. However, as we all knew, SA would come out fighting after their loss from the previous evening. The score was goal-for-goal all the way to the 3rd quarter when SA began to creep away from us. Unfortunately England were unable to counteract the moves of the South African team and we ended up losing the match by 25 points, having a huge effect on the squad mentally and physically.

That evening’s team talk was not so much about our performance but about our mental attitude and having to have the right mind set to pick ourselves up. This was particularly hard for the 8 who had already been in Cape Town for two-and-a-half weeks as they were still exhausted from their World University Netball Championship win.

The following day training continued again in the morning and with some moral lifting exercises which certainly had a positive effect on the squad. We then split out into our units (attack, centre court, and defence) to focus on how we can play against specific players in the SA squad. For example, while looking at defending, we focused on getting maximum turnover from all over the court as well as looking at how to stop the SA Goal Shooter receiving the ball in the back space close to the post.

As the match drew nearer it was obvious that England were ready and waiting for the South Africans. We came out fighting and our defensive efforts paid off. From Goal Shooter to Goal Keeper a huge display was put on and England won the game by 11 goals, taking the Test Series!!

Our coach, Colette Thomson, informed us that there would be no more training during the tour due to the lack of venues available - to some this was a huge relief. Our remaining matches were to be against 2 regional teams and a school. The regional teams also had some of the South African U21's players in them so we knew they were going to be tough games. England never gave up and took the court by storm each time, coming away with three comfortable wins. The games were a huge opportunity for young and less experiences players like myself to gain court time and this was hugely appreciated. For example, I experienced a different style of play from the South Africans, giving me an insight into the type of play the Australians and New Zealanders like. I hope this will help me in my preparations for my second tour to Australia at the end of the summer.

Of course, we couldn’t travel all the way to South Africa and not experience some of the wonders of the country. We had the day off on the Friday so we did some sightseeing. Unfortunately, as it was the winter in SA, the wind picked up and we couldn't go up a cable cart to the top of Table Mountain. Instead, we visited Cape Point (the most Southern point on the African continent) and Cape of Good Hope, as well as taking a boat ride to see the thousands of seals off the shores of Cape Town.

Eventually it was time to make the long journey home. I am looking forward to see what Australia brings and hope to continue England’s winning streak!

Tournament Scores:

Test 1 v SA- won 48-37

Test 2 v SA- lost 31-56

Test 3 v SA- won 58-44

Match 1 v Regional team- won 41-30

Match 2 v Regional team- won 46-40

Match 3 v School- won 91-10