

Going West: An Immigration Story

Contributed by wildcountryian

Sitting around the dining room table on a cold winter's eve in December 2000 the family McInnes, Ian his wife June and nine children, pondered the issue before them. They had moved to the Isle of Mull four years beforehand. Although the island was beautiful, the heavy annual rainfall (in excess of 90 inches) and a growing disillusionment with life in Britain were getting them down. There had been another destination in mind when they moved to Scotland, Canada. However, the pressure exerted by the needs of elderly relatives had swayed them to move to Mull instead. Now, once again, the possibility of a move to Canada was on the agenda.

{kl_thumbimage img="land/boat.jpg"}

Moving to Canada

Ian had selected the self-employed programme being a freelance writer and journalist and the fully filled immigration forms lay on the table. The family's decision was swift and unanimous, go for it. Canada had been researched extensively, as far as possible, that is without visiting, Alberta had been picked out as a most likely province to settle and buy what the Canadians referred to as a hobby farm (about 320 acres). The next day the forms were in the post to the Canadian Immigration office in London and the waiting began.

Bearing in mind how long it took to sell a property on Mull in those days Ian and June made improvements to the house in order for it to sell more readily in a slow market. In case of a failure on the immigration front, the family had a back up plan to return to the West Country, where at least it didn't rain so much. In early January, the first communication from the immigration office arrived confirming the application. Followed in April by a card that an interview would be required sometime in the next 12 months. So far, so good, however, it was hard for the family to make plans with their lives effectively being on hold pending someone else's decision. It was particularly difficult for the teenagers in the family. As the October gales lashed Mull the long-awaited letter dropped through the post box, the immigration interview was set for November in London. As all the adults over eighteen were required to attend it meant the whole family had to make the trip, all 11 of them. Taking into account fuel, hotels and meals for the 1,200 mile round trip meant a hefty dent to the family savings of around £2,000. Canada's immigration interview process

As it turned out the business immigration interview that Ian had meticulously planned for did not turn out as expected. The immigration officer had little business experience and Ian spent a great deal of the time explaining to her how to read a set of accounts. However, the decision was a yes, with one proviso. Because the family was so large, they had to land in Canada with at least \$100,000. This was potentially a problem as Ian and June had estimated on \$70-\$80,000; a disappointed family headed back to Mull. Ian and June did consider scrapping the immigration process altogether at that point now that the hurdles had been set too high. However, after careful consideration they decided to let it run and see what happened. The next phase, the medical wouldn't be for six months or so and a decision could be taken then. In the meantime, the house on Mull marketed and the family resigned themselves to moving back south instead. As it turned out the house didn't take too long to sell, accepted an offer just under the asking price in December. This created a problem however, due to the Scottish house buying system; Ian scoured the Internet for an appropriately large and affordable property that was available for completion the first week of February. There were three properties available, all in North Devon, Ian and his oldest son went to see them. Then, unexpectedly, another letter from the immigration office arrived, requesting medicals. The family had 90 days to arrange this. Once again, cancellation loomed over the immigration process. In fact, Ian totally forgot about it in the rush to find a property before completion day in Scotland.

An offer on a no-chain property in Combe Martin, North Devon was accepted and the family moved on a wet cold day in February 2002. The trip south was a nightmare, the ferry broke down and the family minibus developed a problem which meant a top speed of 40 miles an hour. Including stops, the journey took 18 hours and the family arrived at the new house just ten minutes before the removal van. Medical requirements for Canadian immigration

Soon after settling in Devon, June discovered that she was pregnant. As the immigration medical involved a chest x-ray, pregnant women had to wait until the baby was born. Ian wrote to the immigration office and requested to postpone medical for the whole family until after the baby was born, they agreed. At this time, fate in the shape of a booming housing market took a hand. House prices, especially in Devon, rocketed to such an extent that the house that Ian and June had paid £129,000 for was soon worth £170,000 plus. The \$100,000 barrier no longer existed. The move to Canada was back on, subject to a medical. Ian and June decided to move house one more time and buy a fixer upper in Devon to boost the immigration funds further. The house in Combe Martin sold quickly and the couple bought another, a Victorian farmhouse in need of some TLC about two miles from the Cornwall border. In the meantime baby number ten, the sixth bouncing baby boy was born in August 2002; the family moved again in September and set about renovating enduring contractors and mess for five months.

On the immigration track there was a bit of a mix up over addresses with the immigration office and it wasn't until the last day of July 2003 that a nervous family McInnes, all 12 of them went for immigration medicals in Tavistock. The adults

had already obtained chest x-rays from the local hospital to speed up the process, even so, the examinations took most of the day. At the end of it all, a smiling doctor informed them that everything was fine and he could foresee no problems with the immigration office. Canadian immigration law strikes again Under Canadian immigration law new immigrants had to land in Canada within 12 months of the date of the medical. With the renovations completed in November, the house went up for sale. Furthermore, the same month, the immigration office requested the family's passports and more photographs for the preparation of the visas. These were speedily processed and documents, a weighty pile, dropped through the letterbox. The plan was to wait for two of the older children to finish their exams, have a final holiday in Mull, and fly from Glasgow airport in Mid-July. However, the house sale did not go through and the chain collapsed. Nevertheless, drawing down has much equity as possible the rest of the plan went on regardless, the pet shipping, international movers, flights, and accommodation. The international movers chosen because it was a very large, reputable company, proved to be less than satisfactory. After a series of tearful goodbyes to relatives, the family left for Mull in the second week of July. Ian will be continuing his story for Downsizer.net - in the meantime do visit the Forums to discuss the costs of a place in the country...whichever country you're thinking about!