

LAURINBURG EXCHANGE: *'experience of a lifetime'*

THE 15TH Oban High School group to visit Laurinburg, North Carolina returned to Oban with the same emotions and conclusions that groups before them have all shared.

'Experience of a lifetime' and 'I wish we could have stayed longer' are just some of the phrases proclaimed at every exchange trip homecoming from the USA.

But according to the teacher who travelled with them, the difference with the 2007 group, all 10 of them girls, was the teamwork it showed throughout.

The group's chaperone, and Oban High School teacher, Anne Stewart, who was on her third trip to Laurinburg, said this group was one of the closest ever and were model ambassadors for their school.

The girls agreed this was down to them all being friends before the trip even began and that their fundraising efforts for the trip had brought them even closer.

Another difference this year was the group being accompanied by PC Jeremy Moore who the girls said was great fun. 'We called him Papa Jaffa because he was hard on the outside but he's a big softie on the inside,' they said.

The group's wish to stay longer in North Carolina was granted when bad weather in Glasgow grounded their scheduled flight home, which meant an extra four days in Laurinburg.

When asked about their highlights the group will speak of

canoeing adventures, trips to the beach and a high school American football game against local rivals Richmond County, at which 10,000 attended.

But after losing a tug of war contest against their Laurinburg peers at the Oban High School sports day, the Oban girls were overjoyed by beating the Americans at the combat-style shoot-em-up, LaserTag.

Not forgetting their friends at home, the group did a Mexican Wave in New York Airport at the same time as their schoolmates, as part of the high school's fundraising efforts for the Romanian charity, Smiles Foundation.

So what differences did the Oban pupils notice between their group and the American students?

The Oban girls were impressed by the Americans' commitment to sport. One of the Laurinburg students, cross-country runner Victoria Morrow, could be seen pounding the streets of Oban every morning at 6am while she was over here.

But Oban High School pupil Lisa Dunn explained how the Oban group bonded a lot better than the Americans. She said: 'We were closer as a group than they were but we're from a smaller school and they are chosen over two year groups instead of one. Our group had to work hard to raise money for the trip so I think we had a great team spirit for those reasons.'

The Laurinburg Exchange Oban group for 2007 was: Lisa Dunn, Jennifer Pawson, Sophie Cathro, Shona Neil, Gillian Campbell, Catriona Macdonald, Lorna Macdonald, Rona Campbell, Ailsa Anderson and Amy MacAskill.

