

Bowral high student tours Gallipoli with NSW Premier

Tom Westley shares his thoughts with us on his return to school.

I was lucky enough to be accepted as one of the participants of the Inaugural 'Premiers ANZAC Scholarship' a trip designed to teach young Australians about the legacy of the ANZACs at Gallipoli and the enormity of their sacrifice. We were to visit the war sites, accompanied by the Premier of NSW, Nathan Rees.



We landed in Istanbul after a gruelling 20 hour flight and launched straight into the tour. In the hands of our guide, Levent, we visited the Islamic Art Museum, the site of the Byzantine Hippodrome. Our second day took us to the Aya Sophia, one of the largest religious monuments in the world, its dome standing 55 metres above the ground. We went to the Topkapi palace, home of the Ottoman Sultans, and the Blue Mosque, an Islamic centre of worship.

Then we were on the way to Cannakale, beginning our battlefield tour. It was one of the most emotional experiences of my life. We visited a cemetery on the beach that was ANZAC Cove; row after row of graves, headstones of the brave men who had fallen on the first day of fighting. On that first day the ANZAC casualties numbered in the thousands, those on the Turkish side reached 250,000 men and children, the youngest of whom was 13.

We paid our respects at Lone Pine and went further along the ridge. At one point, the Australian and Turkish trenches were separated by less than 10 metres. We visited a Turkish Memorial before ending the tour at Chunnuk Bair, the site of a bloody New Zealand offensive that left countless dead on both sides.

It was hard to understand the enormity of the campaign and loss of life until I was standing before the graves – people's lives reduced to inscriptions on stones, names, ages and farewells from their families. Lives lost for Australia.

In Cannakale we were invited to the cultural department of the university. I was one of the people who made the speech to the students on the legacy of the ANZACs for both sides. This was before we viewed the under 16's Australia vs Turkey football match, which Turkey won 1-0 in a hard-won match.

Then it was a drive to ANZAC Cove, where we would be staying overnight in preparation for the dawn service. It was freezing (though it had nothing on



Bowral weather) and we saw the sun rise over ANZAC Cove, before watching the Dawn Service and walking along the beach in the early morning light. We walked from the cove to Lone Pine, a distance of nearly 5 kilometres uphill, to watch the Australian service, held among the graves of the fallen. Then I was one of 5 to walk a further 4 kilometres to the New Zealand service at the top of Chunnuk Bair, to witness an emotional ceremony overlooking ANZAC Cove. It was one of the most moving experiences of my life, something I will never forget.

To finish the trip, we visited the historic sites of Pergamum and Troy - both sites thousands of years old. We saw a modern day depiction of the Trojan Horse and stood at the gates of Troy, looking out to location of the Greek camp.

And then it was over, far too soon, and we began the long trip back to Australia, saying goodbye to the spiritual home of the fallen ANZACs and their honoured resting place, the site that gave birth to the ANZAC legend that is such a strong part of our history.

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