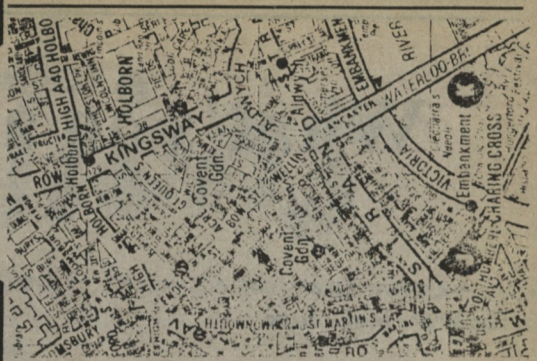




SWAP



by KIRBY FERGUSON

I participated in the Student Work Abroad Program this summer, spending two months in London, England. In this article I will specifically discuss my experience with SWAP Britain, though SWAP offers exchanges to many different countries. The details of other exchanges and the specifics of SWAP Britain may be found in the SWAP booklet available at the Student Union office at the Barn.

First I will get the cons out of the way: myself and the friend I went with had severe headaches with Travel Cuts Halifax (the office UPEI students must go through); no one I knew in London, besides myself, got their job through SWAP; and the person I went with has said she found SWAP useless. However, the trip was the greatest experience of my life, and I recommend SWAP as an excellent way for beginners to start travelling.

Costs

Registration will cost you \$185 (UPEI students get a discount from this), the return plane ticket will run around \$700, and you are required to have access to at least \$1000. The one thing that SWAP will never tell you is YOUR MONEY WILL BE CUT IN HALF. The exchange rate is roundabout two dollars to one pound, but the prices are basically the same in England, thus you're paying double. You'll make around 120 pounds a week. Rent will cost you anywhere from 30 to 50 pounds a week, plus a deposit of possibly two weeks rent (though I and many others paid none). A tube (subway) pass will cost 10 pounds. I spent every cent I had, including both wages and the \$1200 I took, and ran up about a \$700 credit tab, but I was pretty extravagant. Nonetheless, you will lose money, and possibly plenty of it. But remember: money buys a good time.

Jobs and Housing

I worked at a pub, as did almost everyone I knew, for a short time, and later worked at the Science Museum. I found being a foreigner (especially Canadian) an advantage, if only as a novelty. It's been said that 90% of SWAPPERS get jobs. I only met a few people who were unable to get employment and they

were, um, *unemployable* (okay, they were incredible nerds). It'll take you around three days to land a job. One contradiction between the SWAP manual and the BUNAC manual (the U.S. version) is that the SWAP one states that you should get a job first then a place to live, while BUNAC says the opposite. GET A JOB FIRST! There's plenty of places to live, don't get a flat in Camden Town then get a job in Bayswater (those are really far apart places).

Social Life

You'll make friends probably on your first day there -- that North American accent forms an immediate bond. I made the best friends I've ever had in my life in London (sigh). SWAP holds bi-weekly pub meets and occasional trips to Paris or Amsterdam (which I went on -- amazing!), both of which are great ways to meet people.

Culture Shock

There aren't that many differences between Britain and Canada, but they do exist. The standard of living isn't quite what it is here -- showers are a luxury, the housing isn't quite so modern, convenience isn't quite at our level (the banking system should have you pulling your hair out in no time). Going from Charlottetown to London seems like a big leap, but it really isn't. The city is unfathomably huge, but you'll quickly get the hang of Central London. London is a very safe city, certainly not the monster I thought it might be. And the arts and entertainment scene is unparalleled. There is a down side -- it ain't exactly clean (referred to as "the city of black snot" by a friend), the crowds and noise can be suffocating to a country boy, and you should be as pale as a ghost by the time you leave.

Well, there's a very brief scan through a trip I could certainly write a book about. Like I've said, others weren't so complimentary of SWAP (though they definitely were of the trip). I recommend SWAP wholeheartedly. The choice is yours -- to travel through SWAP or go on your own, just remember: DEATH IS STAYING IN ONE PLACE TOO LONG! ■

