

AFP and ACT Policing take part in a *Journey of Harmony*

On April 23, a China Airways Airbus touched down at Fairbairn Air Base Canberra, officially marking the start of the Australian leg of the Beijing Olympic Torch Relay. Constable Helena Cox of ACT Policing provides an insight into this significant event and the AFP's role in ensuring a safe and harmonious event for the community, visitors and torchbearers.

The Torch Relay commenced in February in the Olympic host city of Beijing. In April, it travelled through Canberra during its 137,000km and 130 day trip around the globe, before making its return journey to light the cauldron for the start of the Summer Olympic Games on August 8.

The Canberra relay was the only Australian leg and one of only 21 Torch Relay destinations selected worldwide for the themed *Journey of Harmony*.

The event was attended by a host of dignitaries including ACT Chief Minister Jon Stanhope, Federal Sports Minister Kate Ellis and Australian Olympic Committee Chairman John Coates. The flame was welcomed to Ngunnawal country by Aboriginal elder 'Aunty' Agnes and 60 invited media representatives covered this significant event.

Planning for a major event due to world-wide incidents

Previous legs of the Torch Relay, held in London, Paris and San Francisco, had been hampered by protest action which in some instances, was violent in nature. In Paris and San Francisco, the relay route

had been significantly shortened due to protest action, and the closing ceremony for the relay in San Francisco was cancelled. Locations that were yet to receive the torch therefore had significant concerns for the safety and security of the torch, torch runners, officials, and the general public.

In light of the international incidents, ACT Policing's response was upgraded to major event planning. Police numbers were increased to more than 550. Members came from the AFP's National head office, International Deployment Group and Aviation. In addition, twenty highly trained demonstration response members from the AFP Sydney office helped secure the delivery of the Torch Relay through Canberra.

In recognition of the special nature of the Olympic Torch Relay and protest actions overseas, the ACT Government implemented the *Major Events Security Act 2000* to aid police in securing the event. This was the third time this legislation was enacted in the ACT; the first being for the Sydney Olympic Soccer games in 2000, and the second, the World Cup Rugby in 2003.

Declared security areas were nominated around the 16km route, including the Central Basin of Lake Burley Griffin. This allowed police to search people within those areas and seize prohibited items such as eggs, balloons filled with water or paint, and fire extinguishers.

More than 500 media representatives were issued accreditation by the Australian Olympic Committee for the

relay, ensuring every move made on the day would receive worldwide coverage.

By 7am on the day about 40,000 people had already lined the streets of Canberra to celebrate the Torch Relay. The skies brightened to a glorious Canberra day and hot air balloons lifted off to join the festivities.

The Torch Relay began at Reconciliation Place on Lake Burley Griffin foreshores with a smoking ceremony performed by the Ngunnawal people. The first torchbearer, 2007 Young Australian of the Year Tania Major, had the honour of taking the flame on its opening leg to the water's edge, where a women's rowing eight were waiting to carry the torch across the lake.

Once the flame arrived at Gallipoli Point, the running relay took shape and a convoy of 18 vehicles escorted the torch along major thoroughfares of Canberra including Parkes Way, ANZAC Parade, and Limestone, Northbourne, Commonwealth and Kings Avenues.

Throughout the relay, the torchbearers were accompanied by unarmed members of ACT Policing's elite Specialist Response and Security team who provided a loose security cordon around the torch bearers.

The relay proceeded smoothly along the 16km route after some initial communication difficulties between the AFP security escort and the Olympic Flame attendants were overcome. All 80 torchbearers were able to complete their duty and enjoy a moment which, for many, will last a lifetime. Olympic



swimmer Libby Lenton (Trickett), five-times Olympic gold medal ski champion Michael Milton, Olympian Nova Peris, Sports Commentator Mark Beretta and swimming sprint champion Jodie Henry were just a few of these extraordinary people who carried the torch through Canberra.

As the relay approached Commonwealth Park and Stage 88, a crowd of about 20,000 had congregated and the area was a sea of waving flags and banners. Olympian Ian Thorpe accepted the torch from the legendary Olympian Ron Clarke and lit the cauldron, ending the Torch's journey in Canberra. Celebrations continued with a concert featuring Australian singers Brian Cadd, Russell

Morris and Shannon Noll.

Despite the high emotion, only seven people were arrested and charged during the relay. All were charged under Section 15 of the Major Events Security Act. The trouble-free progress of the Olympic Torch Relay through Canberra, together with the efficiency and professionalism of the AFP and ACT Policing security operation, drew praise internationally.

Phone calls and emails were received from members of the public from across Australia expressing thanks for the AFP's great job in making the torch relay a safe and spectacular event.

ACT Chief Minister Jon Stanhope described ACT Policing as a 'world class

police force' for its ability to 'clearly do what no other police force across the world has been able to do . . . and that is to ensure this world-class event can be carried off with dignity . . .'

Commissioner Mick Keelty also congratulated members who were involved in the event.

"... the operation headed by Chief Police Officer Mike Phelan and Commander Shane Connelly was an outstanding success. Many elements of the AFP teamed up with ACT Policing to make this a professional policing response that has been showcased around the world," Commissioner Keelty said.

A niche role in the new age of security

The AFP's expertise in providing niche security for major public events is gaining international recognition, with the organisation increasingly being called upon to assist with everything from sporting events to papal visits.

After showcasing its leading edge security technologies at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in 2006 and at APEC in Sydney last year, the AFP is now providing assistance to World Youth Day in Sydney in July 2008, which includes Pope Benedict XVI's first visit to Australia.

In April, the AFP received praise internationally after ACT Policing managed security for the Australian leg of the Olympic Torch Relay in Canberra. The event was widely credited as the

most trouble-free leg of the torch's 21-country journey.

Coordinator for Special Events, Federal Agent Michael Casey, said the AFP's unique capabilities and culture were among the big attractions for organisers of major events.

"Our security and bomb data technologies, intelligence capabilities, dignitary protection and international experience allow us to provide critical support to agencies that host these events," Federal Agent Casey said. "Ensuring security at events in today's world involves much more than crowd control and the AFP is uniquely placed to deliver the specialist capabilities that are required."

About 40 AFP members will also be deployed to assist NSW Police with security for World Youth Day events,

which kick off in Sydney on July 15.

As many as 400,000 pilgrims – including 125,000 international visitors – are expected to attend the many activities planned for World Youth Day, which organisers hope will be the largest event ever held in Australia.

Federal Agent Casey said the AFP would deploy its specialist intruder detection equipment, Gryphon, to the event.

"We will also provide intelligence capabilities, aviation, protection, canine and bomb technician capabilities," Federal Agent Casey said "as well as close personal protection."

The AFP Sydney office will also be on stand-by to assist NSW Police with investigations and counter-terrorism operations if the need arises.

