



Caledonia 2022:- we're back

by Suse Coon

Photography: Jennifer Scott. [#taichicaledonia2022](https://twitter.com/taichicaledonia2022)

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The history of Tai Chi Caledonia is well documented in a booklet written by Bob Lowey, joint founder along with the late Ronnie Robinson, but the legacy Ronnie left is very much alive and well. Losing a good friend as well as such an inspiring 'man of taiji' has been painful for everyone who knew Ronnie, but for Aileen Mandic and Al Scott it has been particularly so, as they are the ones who stepped into Ronnie's shoes and kept Cally going. As treasurer of the TCQUGB and one of Ronnie's senior students, Aileen was known to be a superbly efficient organiser. Al, a long-time enthusiast of the event, had been a student of Bob and was a close friend of Ronnie, accompanying him to many events in Europe.

For many punters, Tai Chi Caledonia, better known as 'Cally', is their annual fix – an opportunity to meet and mingle with like-minded people, sharing skills and finding teachers to broaden and deepen their knowledge of our art.

“Our ethos,” Al says, “is that we want people to enjoy themselves, to learn, to get enthused, even if they were before, it gives you a boost.”

“The weekend is a good introduction for beginners or first-timers,” Aileen says. “The week is for studying something you want to take away. We try to keep it open to all styles.”

The format consists of a weekend of 24 taster sessions on Saturday and 24 on Sunday. Trying to choose feels like being a child in a sweetie shop. The teachers give demonstrations in the road between classes and dinner on Saturday and Sunday and this also gives students a chance to see something different. Students then choose two

teachers to work with more intensively during the week. In addition there are extra early morning options. This year there was a choice of Barry's Boot Camp or qigong before breakfast and in the evening the casual push hands sessions begin with some formal tuition. In the past, one night was spent going out to a Chinese restaurant but this has been replaced by an optional buffet and a ceilidh.

Cally has its home in the Sports Centre at Stirling University. Classes used to be taken in the sports halls – but this often resulted in disruption of one kind or another. Nowadays, one large and two small marquees are hired for use in bad weather, with most teachers and students preferring to work outside. Accommodation is in single room chalets with a communal kitchen. Breakfast is provided in the chalets (cereal, fruit juice, bread, jam and marmalade) and fruit and teas and coffees are available in the large marquee. Midday and evening meals are taken in the student union at the university, itself a bustling place with summer camps and sports training. The campus is beautifully located beside a large lake on the edge of the innovation centre.

Finding teachers was never a problem for Ronnie, who travelled widely for his own interest as well as for the TCU, of which he was secretary. This is the challenge for Al and Aileen who are now going to other tai chi events in search of teachers who can offer something different. Not that they will have any problem – other than pinning all the popular teachers down to that one special week in the middle of July. The event's reputation is such that any teacher who is available will jump at the chance if invited, despite the lack of a 'proper' fee.

New teachers are usually invited to teach some weekend sessions in exchange for food and accommodation – for the rest of the week if they wish. Should the event suit them and they suit the event, they will be invited back to teach a half day workshop each day for the four-day week, Monday – Thursday, for which they receive expenses. Teachers can only attend for a maximum of two consecutive years to keep things fresh.

Before the 2022 event was over, Al and Aileen had already begun booking marquees, chalets and meals for 2023. “We also check before we leave that our helpers are willing to come back.” Helpers include several of Ronnie's former students as well as Al's and Aileen's daughters. “They just pick up the jobs they like and somehow everything gets done.”

Jobs include, collecting teachers from train stations and airports, registration and giving out keys, shopping for supplies and distributing them to the chalets, dealing with missing or broken equipment, manning the shop and making a photo and video record of proceedings and uploading it to Facebook every day. As well as tee-shirts, mugs and pens, the shop contains second hand books and new books, DVDs and items of equipment brought by teachers. They would never consider investing in and selling kit, as storage would be a problem.

“Our ethos is just to keep Ronnie's memory alive, not to make a million. If I made a lot of money from Cally I'd feel guilty,” Aileen says. “We agreed that when we took it on.”

But every year, there seems to be some refinement, be it a buffet, a ceilidh, electronic purchasing apps in today's cashless world or the purchase of weapons to enable students not to have to bring their own. Not that there has ever been a problem with weapons as the police know the event and aren't concerned, though on one occasion Ken Van Sickle brought swords from the U.S. and customs wouldn't allow him to take them. They had to be delivered



Aileen Mandic (top) Al Scott (below)



directly to Cally.

Every time something or someone new has to be considered, the mantra ‘Would Ronnie approve?’ is used. It hasn't been easy taking over but Aileen says: “It's nice that Ronnie's legacy is still here, though I don't feel his energy here any more.”

“In a practical sense, Ronnie gave us a standard to maintain,” says Al. He always tried to improve things and was interested in feedback. That's what we try to do.”

“We didn't know how we would do it,” Aileen says. “But when Ronnie was in hospital and he knew he wasn't going to make it to the one he had booked and prepared for, he said, ‘Cally is bigger than any one person,’ so we just had to.”

And thank goodness they did. As well as offering inspiring sessions in real life, during the two Covid years, teachers gave their time freely in zoom sessions which kept us all sane. Nonetheless, this year many people spoke emotionally of how great it has been to come 'home'.

Thank you to everyone (too many to name) involved. 🙏

Around the workshops

Neigong solo and partner internal work Gianfranco Pace

It was a great feeling to be back at Caledonia after a two year enforced break. My first class was on a sweltering hot day with master Pace. We were extremely fortunate to have the services of senior instructor Margarita Padalino to act as translator and assistant teacher.

The first day consisted of learning specific exercises designed to isolate the hips and to allow the student to turn using the lower dantien. master Pace then introduced a form that he described as 'functional' and not particularly aesthetically pleasing. (A few of the students were in disagreement with this given the teacher's cat-like grace.) He described it as a form that students at his school in Sicily



learn in preparation for learning the lao jia yi lu form.

Master Pace also advised against simply learning the choreography of a form without considering internal aspects of the practice.



The beginners' form involved aspects of opening and closing the kua incorporating energy in both horizontal and vertical figures of eight. This aspect of practice helps avoid any abrupt changes when weight is being transferred.

On the final day we studied four silk reeling exercises (also known as chan si gong). Emphasis was placed on directing movements from the lower dantien and on developing elasticity in the body.

I had expected Gianfranco Pace to be a formidable and demanding teacher as he has wonderful fajing skills. However, he proved to be an enthusiastic, patient and surprisingly gentle individual. I would therefore have no hesitation in recommending him to anyone should Tai Chi Caledonia be hosting him in the future.

William Webster

Nine steps tai chi chuan Tina Faulkner Elders

This year we travelled to Tai Chi Caledonia for the first time. Tina Faulkner Elder's workshop on the Wudang nine step tai chi form was one of our choices because the topic interested us and Tina's reputation precedes her.

The form is lovely, but challenging. But in her exact, entertaining and very friendly way Tina managed to introduce the group to the basic Wudang movement principles, observe and deal with individual difficulties and also adapt the course structure to external challenges like heat, construction noise and wind. In this she was ably assisted by her student Matthew Knight who himself started teaching IMA about six years ago.



Master Chen, Tina's longtime teacher in Wudangshan, has said that heroes have 'stinky' feet and at the end of the workshop we not only had learned a lovely new form that integrates elements of bagua and xingyi but our feet were also good for *two* Chinese operas.

We thank Tina and Matthew (again, and certainly not for the last time) for their time, effort, exactitude and humour and are looking forward to seeing them (and the Cally team) again.

Klaus Beck-Ewerhardy and Tanja Ewerhardy

Taking the push out of pushing Hands Emma Lee

This year I had the privilege of being invited to teach from Saturday to Thursday at Tai Chi Caledonia. I taught taster sessions on pushing hands for beginners, the ten tai chi principles and an introduction to fa jin exercises.



During the week I taught *Taking the push out of pushing hands*. The participants in my group were so generous with both their physical and emotional contributions to the sessions. There were tearful moments as we explored ways of connecting with our training partners from a place of respectful gentleness within a safe and supportive space.

After the last two years of isolation this was precious practice. Aside from feeling massive love and respect for those participating in my group I came away from the sessions with the view that partner work has a great capacity to heal us from a psychological perspective.

Thank you to all who contributed to this year's Tai Chi Caledonia, and to Bob Lowey and the late Ronnie Robinson for creating Tai Chi Caledonia.

Emma Lee



Around the workshops

Tai chi 13 power sword

Yanira Jigetsu Rodriguez

Yanira brought both vitality and generosity to her teaching and perfectly paced her delivery to match the ability of the students.

The workshop combined the structures of the bagua and the five elements as a framework which emphasised the need for both precision and flow. In addition to the intricate teaching of the sword movements, a detailed handout brought clarity to the underpinning principles.



Yanira layered her teaching of the square gates of the bagua and then the diagonal gates before introducing the five elements. Utilising a combination of set pieces as a guide, Yanira enabled students to discover potential movement through each of the energies. In this manner, students were encouraged to explore a

dynamic partner sword exercise in the warm Stirling sunshine. 🌞

Carolanne Mainland

Interpreting the tai chi classics through sensing hands Ben Morris

I enjoyed the sessions with Ben as usual, and it is nice working with people from far and wide.

Ben is a very good teacher and speaks clearly and with sufficient volume which is good for me as I have problems with my ears. He is very knowledgeable on a wide range of martial arts. His explanations of what he wants us to do are clear. Ben always puts some humour into his classes which I appreciate as it creates a nice environment to practise in.



I like the way he links the sensing hands to real life situations though I confess that I do not always understand everything he says but I get most of it so that's ok for me.

Ben always has our welfare in mind and reminds us to have some water during the hot days and mentions other health and safety issues. 🌞

Kevin Wilson

The early bird Barry McGinlay

Woke up around 5:30 again and thought about how the day would go then off to Barry's Boot Camp. I had already heard about this at the push hands meeting in Hanover a few years ago. Now I found my way to Barry McGinley's



morning training that is a voluntary addition to the workshop programme of the Cally, just like the beginners' push hand training in the evening. And it is great.

In a very nicely balanced mixture of cardio, stretching and all the other things Kungfu-people need in the morning, Barry prepared us for the day – especially in the last half hour in which he did a lot of partner and group work that prepared us for the topics of our workshops. I almost suspect a plan behind this.

Except for on one morning, when Barry asked me to play in the background. We got the music to the training from Barry's playlists, and they also worked very well. Not only in the boot camp, but also in the evenings as background to our free push hands, our conversations and as main motivator for our dancing. In the training, as in his presentations, Barry is a talented and experienced martial artist and trainer. He is always helpful, creates a positive atmosphere around himself and if the Cally could be said to have a heart Barry is one valve in it. Looking forward to seeing him again. 🌞

Klaus Beck-Ewerhardy

Baguazhang fan – Sonja Schillo

We had four days to learn how to use a Chinese fan in a bagua stepping form. The heat was on both in terms of temperature and learning. The skill set was hot. The teaching style was quietly determined with a friendly smile. The teacher, Sonja from Berlin, and her able assistant Anna, were both brilliant and engaging. How could we fail? Well, we didn't, we smashed it, we made it happen. We learnt the mud slide step, walking in steps of eight around a circle. We learnt the application of the kobu step, spiralling into the ground and twisting. We learnt to crack open the fan and be beautiful.

Despite record Scottish temperatures, after four days we were becoming bagua fans in more ways than one. I will hold in my mind Sonja's oft repeated mantra "And again".

I had begun my journey to become a bagua master. Hurrah.

A celebration Tanka

Feeling the soft breeze.

Under the trees our fans flash

Stepping in circles

Mind, Hands, Earth and breath are 'One'

Embrace, above eaves rustle.

Clive Whittaker

Margret Stürz teaching a class of students at Tai Chi Caledonia on the two aspects of quietness: the external inactive state of the body and the inner mental quietness.

The term 'movement' refers to external movement as well as to the inner movement of the qi. Quietness and movement are always to be looked at in terms of their relationship. There is no change without movement – and movement finds only complete expression on condition of inner ease/quietness. The inner ease is the basis of each qigong and tai chi practice. Each qigong exercise regulates the system of meridians and recovers the flow of blood.

