

Girlguiding Buckinghamshire trip to Icelandic Centenary Jamboree 20-30 July 2012

I was privileged to be asked to lead the County trip to Iceland in July 2012. Together with Alison Leah and Amy Leon, we took a group of 8 Guides from across the county, all aged either 13 or 14. I would like to thank you for the grant you gave me towards this trip and thought you might be interested to hear some of my highlights from the trip.

We began our adventure by spending two days together as a group in Reykjavik before the Jamboree. This was a good opportunity for us to get to know each other better and become accustomed to some of the strange (to us!) aspects of life in Iceland. The first was that it did not get dark at night - so I did question why I took 2 torches with me! It was difficult to remember to send the girls to bed when it was still light and we did a second take when a glance at our watches showed it was nearly midnight! Actually the Icelandics have the same issues getting their own children to bed in the summer so simply adjust the day so that they get up later - getting up at 8am at camp - an unheard of luxury!! Second, Iceland is literally alive with boiling hot water coming up from the ground and with it a pervading smell of sulphur - but you get used to it over time!

While in Reykjavik we ate in an amazing hamburger restaurant where they ring a bell every time a new Icelandic baby is born - with a population of only 300,000 I suppose this is feasible! We also did the 'Golden Circle' tour to visit key geological natural wonders - we walked in the rift valley between the American and Eurasian tectonic plates, which was where their early parliament met in June each year. This was the earliest parliament in the world. We also visited the huge Gullfoss waterfall and (my favourite) the geysers. The geysers fascinated me as one moment there was just some steam from a hole in a ground, then a huge bubble would quickly rise and immediately burst with a tall tower of boiling water.



In the first photo you can see a line of what looks like steam across the left hand side middle of the photo - this is actually a stream where the water is boiling from natural springs so walkers have to be careful not to fall in! The second photo is Gullfoss waterfall.



The three photos above show the geyser 'at rest', 'about to spout' (see the blue bubble rising) and then the hot water blasting into the air.

We then spent a week at the Jamboree with 800-1000 Guides and Scouts - mainly from Iceland but also from Canada, Scotland, Wales, USA, South Korea, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and some other countries I have forgotten. For me one of the highlights was watching the girls become friendly with other Icelandic scouts - especially those on our subcamp. They fully embraced the Icelandic culture, quickly learning a few words to speak to them in Icelandic - of course as one level this was not necessary as the Icelandics all spoke excellent English but it helped the girls bond with their groups. Our girls were amazed at the amazing 'gates' each Icelandic group made for the entrance to their site, so it was fun to teach them simple pioneering and see their pride in our simple but effective gateway!

Each day the girls experienced new activities. Their favourites were the first day when they went on a hike with a group of Icelandic scouts and learned so much about the local area, local berries and the limited amount of flora in the area, and then the day they visited the on-site Viking village where they made jewellery by working with metal, felt from Icelandic wool, and whittling wood.



Photos above - making felt, our gateway, metal work.

One day we went on a visit to the Blue Lagoon - a natural thermally heated outdoor spa pool where the water is opaque milky colour and full of minerals to enhance our beauty! It was a very different experience to anything else on our trip!

On the final day of the jamboree it was international day when there were hundreds of visitors on site. We served cups of tea all afternoon and offered traditional English rhubarb and custard sweets! We also had a chance to visit other groups where amongst other things we experienced an earthquake simulator, tasted local ice cream and saw a demonstration of highland dancing. The day finished with a large campfire followed by a disco long into the night! It was lovely to see the girls having such fun with their new friends.

Sadly the following day was time to strike camp - in the rain as it had been when we arrived, and return for one last night together in a Bed and Breakfast in Keflavik near to the airport. When we arrived back in Gatwick the parents were so pleased to see their daughters, but the girls were reluctant to separate - it was left to one Dad to say that his car park ticket was about to go into the next price band for the girls to go with their parents. We are now all looking forward to our reunion at the end of October!

Bev Botting