

I arrived back in England late last night, and it is very strange being home after experiencing so many things in Denmark, Sweden and Germany over the last three weeks.

Training Camps

Our first camp was a selection camp for the Guides. This was great because we got to know each other before being introduced to the Scouts we would be going with. When we arrived at the first big meeting in January 2010, we were bewildered by how many Scouts there were. I remember thinking- "what on Earth have I got myself in for?" But during the training camps we made friends with them all, and understood more about the Jamboree. We had eight training camps, where we did activities such as making clothes from bags, visiting all the sites on the Monopoly boards in one day, playing games, and having daft races. By the time July came around, we were all really good friends.

Fundraising

The trip to the Jamboree cost £2250, which meant a lot of fundraising had to be done. We did table top and car boot sales, a quiz night, an Ironing Extravaganza, odd jobs and sponsored events. It was tiring but definitely worthwhile.

Pre-Event: Copenhagen, Denmark

24th - 26th July 2011

On Sunday 24th July 2011, forty Scouts and Guides from my Unit- the Inflatables- flew from Heathrow airport to Copenhagen. As soon as we arrived we were piled onto a coach and driven down to the beach. It was raining and windy and the water was freezing, but that didn't stop me jumping straight in! We swam out as far as we could against the current, joined in with an impromptu rendition of Singin' In The Rain, laughed, shivered and splashed each other. The awful weather made it even more memorable!

Every Jamboree participant from the UK was staying in Copenhagen, so our hostel was full of Scouts and Guides from all over- Northern Ireland (we learnt that the Northern is very important!), Bedford, Cornwall, Hertfordshire and Scotland. It was great to meet other UK participants, compare experiences of the Jamboree build-up, and discuss our hopes and fears for the Jamboree. It was also good practice for when we got to the Jamboree and would have to speak to people from other countries.

The next morning went power-boating in the sea, which was fast, exciting and very bumpy! Getting off the powerboat was the moment I said to myself, "This is going to be amazing," I had thought it before, but that was the moment I *knew*.

Also that day we went to Sportsrama, a sports academy. I did capoeira, a Brazilian martial art, and bowling. In the evening we went to Tivoli Gardens, a theme park in the middle of the city. This surprised me as you would never get Alton Towers in the middle of London. Queuing for the rides in Tivoli was a brilliant opportunity to meet Scouts and Guides from the UK, and some from other countries who were joining in the fun in Copenhagen. We made friends with some Australian Scouts, who couldn't believe we weren't experts on fine bone china!

Shopping the next day was very surreal, because it felt like I was just in the small group of my patrol, but then some Welsh Scouts or someone would appear and start talking to you, or you would go past a group all holding their hands out for hi-fives, or somebody would yell "Ogi! Ogi! Ogi!" and you would hear hundreds of voices shout "Oi! Oi! Oi!" back.

That evening the entire UK contingent had a giant party. Lots of street entertainers were outside a big warehouse, and inside bands were on- a Kings of Leon tribute band, drummers, Alphabeat and a rock tribute band. It was crazy, being in a raging mosh pit of 4,000 hot, sweaty, dancing teenagers, most of whom hadn't washed for a couple of days. I think I'll remember that for a while!

22nd World Scout Jamboree: Rinkaby, Sweden

27th July- 7th August 2011

We had to get up very early the next morning to get to the Jamboree. We drove over the bridge which links Denmark and Sweden, which was exciting. When we arrived at the site in Rinkaby, we set up our camp before going off to find out who we were camping near. On one side we Swiss people, on the other Taiwanese, across the road Croatian and behind us people from the Czech Republic.

The next day was very wet, but that didn't dampen our spirits at the opening ceremony. We all thought it was a bit like Eurovision- all the flags being paraded in and everyone whooping and cheering for their country's flag. The Union flag got a very loud cheer as there were so many UK Scouts and Guides. There was lots of entertainment, dancing, music and silliness, and Bear Grylls, the UK chief Scouts abseiled in! However, the one moment I think I'll remember forever was when somebody on stage asked for a minute's silence for those killed in the tragedy in Norway. The whole field was completely silent, and gradually people began to stand up, and put their hands up in the Scout sign. It was the most moving thing I've ever witnessed.

The next day was when the fun began. The activity we did was Earth, a series of challenges designed to get us thinking about the environment. We had to filter turmeric out of water using soil as a filter, make a town out of sand and see how well it reacted to a flood and make a windmill and calculate how many watts it created. Although I did learn from the activity, the main thing I got out of it was the Austrian Scouts who we became very good friends with over the course of the Jamboree.

That evening we had a very tough challenge- patrols swapped around to different countries who would cook for them. We stayed at our camp and our visitors were from Finland, Germany and Thailand. It was a great way to meet new people, but cooking for ten and trying to have a conversation with them, especially when the boys from Thailand had limited English, was not easy!

The next day's activity was Global Development, an opportunity to learn about global issues- we made a bridge using people; we played games about world issues and did quizzes about what we had learnt. We also met some Scouts from Portugal.

That evening a game of French Cricket (which I learnt to play at Brownies!), began, with players from the UK, Italy, Croatia, Austria and South Africa. Although it was only a small impromptu game played by a bunch of grubby kids, that was the moment I realised how big Scouting and Guiding really is, and how amazing it is to be part of a movement which stands for unity and peace. That's the other moment I won't ever forget.

The next day we split into our patrols and were taken to a location for Camp in Camp. This was two days spent in a typical Swedish campsite, camping in the traditional Swedish style. The first thing we noticed on arrival was how many small children were carrying knives and axes! The leader in charge of the children assured us that they had to be over eleven, and have passed a test, but I'm sure some of these kids couldn't have been older than nine!

The anti-health and safety continued as we did a forest assault course which saw us climbing twelve feet high styles, climbing over rivers of ropes and crossing log beams- all with no safety helmets or ropes. This gave it an extra thrill.

After tea, which was cooked on an ingenious off-the-ground fire, we had a campfire, in which most of the songs were in Swedish. We tried to join in with the actions as best we could though. That night the seven girls in my patrol all slept in a huge bell-tent which was a change from the modern ones we used back at the Jamboree!

The next day we made woggles and went canoeing on the beautiful big lake at the campsite. It was really tranquil and serene. At the end we were allowed to go swimming in it. I hadn't bought my swimming costume, so I jumped in fully clothed. The water was dirty and cold but I didn't care because I knew I'd never get the opportunity to do it again.

We arrived back at the Jamboree in the afternoon, and that night we did Dream. This activity saw us walking around the beautiful forest in the middle of the night, living our lives backwards. We started with old age, where we used catarax

goggles, arthritis gloves and deaf earphones. This made us understand how difficult it is for older people to do simple activities. In adulthood we had to create a person and plan out their life. Although other patrols ended up having deep meaningful conversations about their characters, ours was a silly one. In childhood everything- chairs, toys, objects- were really big, like when you're a child. It was an interesting activity which got me thinking about the world in a way I wouldn't normally. But the best bit was looking up, because the sky in the forest was so clear, and I could see every single star.

The next day was free day, so I visited all of the tents with information about Scouting and Guiding in different countries, did a climbing wall and got a lot of swapping done. I also did a special award called the Friendship Award. This encouraged us to meet people from other countries, and visit other sites.

The following day's activity was Quest, in which we did a very exhilarating and adrenalin fuelled assault course in the woods, Viking activities such as throwing horseshoes and being lowered to the ground standing on an A-frame. Another challenge was moving a series of pipes to the level that a ball could pass through, and moving a castle onto a different base using ropes and pulleys. We also did a maze.

Thursday 4th August was Culture Day, or was we unofficially re-Christened it, Eating Day. Every group had to set up a stall about their country. We did making sandcastles, key rings, coconut ice and serving fish and chips (actually, the fish were just sweets in the shape of fish, but we only mentioned that once we had got people in the queue). When we went around to other country's stalls, we ate their food and learnt about their cultures. It was really interesting to find out first-hand how the other Guides and Scouts lived.

The Jamboree site was very busy that day, as everyone who had been at the campsites had come to visit. That evening there was a special show for them, involving BMX bikers, people parachuting in and loud music. We all played volleyball with our giant inflatable turtles in the middle of everyone dancing, which was funny.

Friday saw us participating in the People activity. We did games in which looked at how hard it was to come into a culture, and went in the Storytelling Tent, which was very therapeutic. We also tried Qi Yon, a slow martial art similar to Tai Chi. We did activities and told stories around the themes of respect, knowledge, compromise, etc. Because it was getting towards the end of the Jamboree, the swapping had gone up a gear. A Brazilian girl talked me into swapping my UK jacket for a Brazil one, which, after I'd swapped, I realised I didn't like! I spent most of the afternoon trying to swap it on, and finally swapped it with an Australian girl for an Australia fleece. One of the boys in our Unit swapped 2 scarves for a pair of skis! They had to be taken back to the UK in a minibus and I don't know when he'll get them back.

The next day was the final full day at the Jamboree. It was a hot day, so we took all our tents down and planned to sleep in the dining shelter. We were sad to be leaving, but we were determined to make the most of our last day. If the swapping was crazy yesterday, today it was absolutely insane. The Swapping Market was packed, you could barely move. My friend Lizzie and I finally found a place to sit down, and I was literally bombarded with offers to swap my UK trousers. Eventually I swapped them for 2 Hong Kong Scout shirts- I was more impressed with the fact the girl had ironed them than the shirts! I also got an Egyptian Contingent t-shirt, a Boy Scouts of America rucksack, a Japanese raincoat and loads of badges. We found all the friends we'd made over the last 12 days, swapped details and promised to Facebook each other, and said our goodbyes. There were a few tears, but the excitement of the Closing Ceremony cheered everyone up. It was amazing! There were live singers, including the composer of the Jamboree Song, which everybody by now knew the words and the dance routine to, and speeches and montages. Then, just when things couldn't get any more bizarre, the King of Sweden appeared! He was very natural and informal, and it was obvious how proud he was to be there. By this time it was raining hard, and although no one had bought any wet weather gear, nobody cared because we were all having such a brilliant time. The grand finale was when he introduced the rock band Europe. Everyone went ballistic and 40,000 people were singing along to the riff of The Final Countdown, it was incredible- it was also funny when he got to the verse and everybody realised that they didn't actually know the words. The show ended with the biggest firework display I've ever seen, and then a final rendition of the Jamboree song. We were all belting it out with our arms around each other. It was unforgettable.

When we returned to camp we realised that all 36 of us were going to have to sleep in the dining shelter, and by this time the rain had developed into a fully-fledged thunderstorm! It was freezing cold and nobody could find a torch so the only light we had was when the lightening flashed. At the time it wasn't very pleasant, but looking back, it was an experience!

Hostel Hospitality: Augsburg, Germany

7th- 11th August

We left the Jamboree early the next morning and drove to Copenhagen, flew to Stuttgart and drove to Augsburg. This took nearly all day and it was a tired, dirty and hungry group of teenagers who arrived at the hostel in Augsburg that evening.

The next day was a public holiday in Augsburg, so we caught the tram to the nearby town of Friedensburg. There, we visited a castle, and an Oktoberfest. This is a traditional German beer festival which was probably a great opportunity to experience German culture, but we were more interested in going around the fairground outside. We went on the dodgems, twister and the ghost train, and ate huge German pretzels. We walked back through the town (which has a very interesting history) to a lake, where we all went swimming. It was lovely and sunny and we were all in the water swimming and laughing and trying to dunk each other. We returned to the hotel for a birthday party for Kingsley, one of our Unit who had turned 16 that day. We had Mexican fajitas and lots of cake, before going to bed after a very tiring day.

The next day we visited Augsburg zoo. The best part was when we saw the seals being fed. Afterwards we went to an indoor beach, which was a big warehouse filled with sand. We relaxed on the deckchairs, ate pizza and played beach volleyball.

On Wednesday 10th August, our last full day, we went around all the shops in Augsburg. We found a shop which sold Lederhosen, which we'd all been desperate to try on since our Austrian friends Emil and Mathias had worn it to the Jamboree Opening Ceremony. The dresses were nice, but the leather shorts were quite stiff and difficult to move in. In the evening, we were surprised to find ourselves in one of the poshest restaurants in Augsburg. The restaurant served traditional Bavarian food which was interesting and another experience of German culture. It felt *very* strange to be in such a civilised environment, and we were relieved that we didn't have to cook or wash up!

On our final morning we went to a really cool swimming pool with rapids, slides, Jacuzzis and fountains. It was a lovely last activity to do as a group. We went back to the hostel where we packed, cleared up and finally got on the coach back to Stuttgart. On the aeroplane, we managed to get an announcement from the pilot, thanking our amazing leaders. It was really cool and everyone else on the plane clapped as we gave them their presents and cards. The coach journey from Heathrow to Maidstone was very strange- we were all looking forward to seeing our families but we didn't want to leave each other, and we knew that when we met again it would be only as friends- we'd never again be family like we were then. We stepped off the coach and *everyone* was in tears and hugging each other. It was so emotional. Finally, we all said our last goodbyes and got in our cars, and it was over.

In Conclusion

Going to the 22nd World Scout Jamboree has been an immense adventure. I know I'll be friends with the Inflatables for life- even today people are emailing about meeting up again in the Autumn. I've also met some fantastic people from all over the world, who I hope to stay in touch with.

Through this experience I have learnt more about different counties and cultures. I have learnt to be less judgemental and more accommodating to other's differences. I also appreciate how big the Scout and Guide movements are, and how important they are in encouraging friendship, co-operation and peace. I fell very proud to be a Guide, as well as proud to have been part of this incredible, life-changing adventure.

Miriam Gibson, London, August 2011