

CMAT trip to The Cairngorms, Scotland 2022

Its Friday 29th July, and Scouts, Explorers plus adult leaders are making their way to either Bramford, Bury St Edmunds or Eye ready for the adventure of a life time. As the minibuses leave and begin their journey north scarcely a moment has passed before they are parking up, in choreographed precision at a Scout Hut in Preston (just off the M6) with optimistic delusions of a quiet night in darkest Lancashire.

8 hours later, with every square inch of the HQ being used by 76 participants it was time to leave for the next part of the journey – to be confounded by rain, yes rain, that natural phenomenon which those of us in Suffolk had long given up as a fable worthy of Aesop's invention. It wasn't long before precipitation gave way to more clement conditions on the A74 then A9, and before we knew it we were booking into a sunny Rothiemurchus Lodge in the Highlands of Scotland where George, the warden and local realist was assuring us "its not always like this, you know." We believed him!

CMAT had landed in Scotland, and what a fantastic venue is proved to be! Originally built for training military units in the 1970s the small rooms with 2 to 4 bunks, the lounges with TV and the spectacular kitchens it was obvious this was going to be a great week of adventure and fun!

By 9am next morning (give or take a little poetic licence) all 9 teams were at the start point for a climb up to Cairngorm, one of the most spectacular mountains in the area. OK, OK, let admit it, we did all start in the car park at 600m above sea level, but it was good shake out for the old cobwebs, and an air temperature of 25C added to the feeling this was a truly epic mountain day, as it proved to be.

However, this was just the warm-up by Sunday afternoon all those mountain explorers were back at the lodge and then spent the afternoon either fishing (the trout was delicious, they said), paddle boarding, rock climbing or canoeing on the famous River Spey. "You are not here for a holiday" an enthusiastic Scout Leader was overheard to say as youngsters trudged back into camp worn out, yet still excited!

Monday morning was expedition day. The older Scouts, Explorers and macho Leaders set out to tackle not just Ben MacDui, but also the Cairngorm, with a wild camp overnight high in the mountains. Unfortunately the overnight storm claimed at least two of the Vango tents, and a bleary-eyed team surveyed the overnight damage next morning.

Meanwhile, the younger Scouts and weather-savvy leaders had selected a lowland oasis for their wild camp overnight experience. Following an afternoon of playing in the brook, and redesigning the dam Scouts and leaders enjoyed a lovely sunny evening in which to rinse their Trangia saucepans in the river and organise their tents for the anticipated overnight storm. In the valley a full and glorious night of fresh air and exercised muscles meant that most arose next morning at a very respectable time of 7.30am to discover the evidence of just a light shower overnight.

High level or low level overnight, it wasn't long before both Scouts and Explorers were back in canoes, on paddle boards, climbing rocks or canoeing white water as they spent an afternoon developing their skills for more adventurous aspects of a Suffolk CMAT trip to the Highlands!

All change for Wednesday then as the whole team headed north to Inverness in a convoy of white minibuses. Our destination was the Ice Centre who had organised a whole day of activities for us. We were taught the basics of curling, sending Stones down the ice to get them "in the hoouse". After lunch it was back on the ice, this time for a 2 hour skating session. Some people were already quite good on the ice, others improved during the session, just leaving those of us with severely

challenged balance to wave our arms around and gingerly make our way around the rink, trying all the time not to fall over! As well as the Scouts and Explorers a number of penguins and polar bears joined in the fun. Just when we thought it was time to pack up and go home the Ice Centre chef and her team served up yet another freshly prepared meal for everybody. We can't thank enough all the people of Inverness who made us feel very welcome and looked after us very well indeed.

Thursday and Friday were mirror images of each other. The group was split into two, with one team heading off to the Darnaway Forest where hidden amongst the trees was ACE Adventures HQ. Ordinary clothes were swapped for thick neoprene wetsuits and before long we were launching inflatable rafts onto the River Findhorn. Although water levels were quite low there was still enough flow for some jaw-dropping and bumpy white water rapids as we journeyed down the steep ravine. Lunch en-route provided the opportunity to jump from great heights into the deep pool below - Tom Daley, you have competition!

Those not on the Findhorn stayed closer to home – with a combination of exploring the forest track on mountain bikes and a canoe mini-expedition on Loch Morlich. Canoeing almost didn't happen when an essential key to the trailer padlock was mislaid fortunately a passing Forest Ranger just happened to have an angle grinder in the back of her truck – don't mess with the Rangers, they mean business!

Its a summer Saturday in northern Scotland, which can only mean one thing. Somewhere or other there would be a Highland Games meeting. We found a well organised event at Newtonmore, just 20 minutes from the lodge. This was our opportunity to really mix with the locals and for those brave enough to ask what a Scotsman wears under his kilt. Once again, Scouts and Explorers from "doon south" were welcomed and encouraged to participate in the sports and other activities. In many of the races there was at least one Scout on the podium – and in the Under 15 Boys 100m race first, second and third places were all from Suffolk! Charlie did very well - collecting in excess of £100 from the cash prizes on offer.

So once again it was time for the big clear-up and packing. Trailers were loaded. The BBQ went down well as sun went down on the Lodge for the last time. At 7.15 then next morning all that was left at camp was our thanks, a couple of washing up bowls, and Wally's favourite top – which still hasn't turned up.

The CMAT team is a diverse group of people with an equally diverse set of skills – from canoeing to mountain back-packing, managing money and doing all the necessary admin. However, the two stand-out individuals new to the team were Tony and Louis who between them managed the kitchen and all the demands that 76 people create. Brilliant breakfasts, lovely lunches and delicious dinners – all served up on time, beautifully cooked, and even seconds for those who were quick.

Our thanks to everybody who helped to make the trip such a success, especially the Scouts & Explorers who threw themselves into every activity on offer, who washed up and cleaned. What is important is that these youngsters continue to have an opportunity to gain and practice the skills necessary to run adventurous activities. We need to see younger members and young adults getting involved with the CMAT training programmes to ensure a bright future for Suffolk Scouts. If this report has made you think "I would like to do that" then get in touch with our chairman – Simon Dennis simon.dennis@suffolkscouts.org.uk.

Malcolm Bell – August 2022

Suffolk Scouts County Mountain Activities Team Scotland 2022



All photos by Ella Clark