

Girlguiding North East England Loch Ken wild camping and canoeing expedition - May 2014



A bank holiday in May provided a perfect opportunity for a three day trip canoeing down the River Dee and through Loch Ken. Throw in a bit of wild camping; a visit to a pub and some good company from fellow Leaders and the result was a unique and brilliant experience.

An early start for some and an even earlier start for others meant we were all picked up from various locations in the region, comparing size of bags and the amount of kit people had packed. Nervous excitement filled the cars and Simon, the lead instructor, no doubt tired of our questioning – How far is...? What happens if...? Do we....?

The boats were two man open canoes, in which we had our own kit packed into a provided dry bag and either a large bag of tents, or a large bag of food which turned out to be like a Mary Poppins bag! More of that later.



We paired up and got paddling straight away. We tried out a few strokes, got used to turning, found a rhythm and headed off down the river.

After a few hours canoeing we found a beautiful spot for the first night's camp. Under the trees and amongst the bluebells, we pitched our two man tents and worked in groups of four to cook our evening meal. It really is amazing what can be produced by the side of a loch from very little. At first glance I think a few of us thought we would be



going hungry but that certainly wasn't the case and more importantly no rabbits needed to be caught and cooked! Just when you thought you had reached the bottom of the 'food bag' you would delve deeper and find more, can openers, measuring jugs, spatulas, rice, rice and more rice, even the odd toilet roll should anyone have forgotten theirs. The first night was....wet! But the sound of rain on your tent when you are all wrapped up in your sleeping bag is what wild camping is all about!

Day two was a little damp, the wind changed in strength and as a result some stronger paddling was needed. A full day paddling down Loch Ken, a visit from the Loch Ranger and we reached our second night's camping spot. Once again a pretty area, under the cover of trees and not an electric socket, internet connection or other people to be found. Stoves out, hot drinks made, tents pitched and we settled in



for night two.....after a short walk to the pub and back for a drink or two. One group of Guiders had a slightly longer walk back after they got lost on the way back. Simon did go back to look for them, but by that point they had decided to 'lie low' in the hope that no-one would have noticed that they were not back on camp and that they could creep back in with no-one the wiser. Eventually they found their way back and there were one or two stories to share the following morning and a few red faces.



The wind on the final day proved a challenge. As did remaining stationary. Some parts of the loch were paddled twice as you were blown back waiting to re-group or when spotting Osprey's nesting. And that wasn't the only wildlife....a deer swimming through the river, woodpeckers acting as an alarm clock, a line of swans taking off ahead of us and a frog making home in one leader's shoe.

It was wild camping, by the side of the loch with Trangias and gas to cook on, washing in the loch and finding your own toilet behind a tree but the days and nights flew by. The photos don't do justice to the wonderful landscape, the bank of trees that displayed every single shade of green imaginable and the sun trying its best to peek through and provide us with lovely photo opportunities.

A fantastic opportunity to explore a bit of Scotland, learn some new skills, experience wild camping again and take part in a Guiding activity – just for leaders!

