

Speiding i Midnattsol – Speider landsleir I Bodø 2017

Report on the Nord2017 camp at Bodo; Norway

In the summer of 2017, I attended NORD2017 as part of the International Service Team (IST) and de-construction staff. This is the national jamboree of the Norwegian Guide and Scout Association (Norges Speiderforbund / NSF) and there were about 9000 participants, from all over the world, although primarily from Norway at the site. The service team was very international with members from across the world including New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Croatia and, Switzerland. This team spent varied amounts of time setting up the camp, helping with activities and dismantling the camp afterwards. Here is my camp report.

After an early morning start from Aylesbury and negotiating a Scout and guide filled Oslo Airport, I arrived in Bodø to be met with sunshine, a van to take the luggage to the camp, and helpful signs to show the way. I was welcomed to the camp by some “Pinkies” from Kandersteg who I had known from a visit there in 2015. That evening, making the most of the lovely weather, I climbed Junkerfjellet, the hill behind the campsite. The view of the camp and surrounding area was fantastic. It was certainly a spectacular place for the event.



The following day was the official opening of the camp. I had been allocated to the Scout (not Rover) hike team and in the morning set about trying to work out what this actually involved. It transpired the first scheduled meeting was to organise the actual meeting. At the actual meeting we were put into teams and given a time for another meeting which wasn't a meeting but in fact a short walk to see our base for the next few days. More about this later.

That evening, with new found friends, and my sister, who had been involved with setting up the camp, we trooped down to the main stage in uniform to watch the opening ceremony. In England, different groups can be identified by the scarfs. In Norway, all the groups within YWCA-YMCA Guides and Scouts have the same scarf and all the groups within the NSF wear the same scarf. To make identification easier, each group has its own distinctive camp blanket, and some groups have matching hats too. The opening



ceremony started with a fantastic video of the camp mascot, an eagle, making his way to camp from a nearby island. Following this was our first view of the local sea king helicopter delivering the eagle to the camp. Unfortunately for unknown reasons, this activity took place behind the stage, out of view of the majority of the audience. Only the helicopter remained visible above the stage, hovering impressively. The entire opening ceremony was in Norwegian other than five words of the camp song “Helt Vilt”, which were bizarrely “for life” and “husband and wife”. The post camp information I can find about the song explains the song is about the Northern Norwegian nature, togetherness and friendship as well as the joy of spending time with real people and making friends rather than just communicating over the internet. Luckily for us, several bilingual

Norwegians were on hand and happy to provide a summary of what was happening in more the wordy sections. The camp song is available on the NORD2017 website: <http://nord2017.no/en/camp-song/> or on the NORD YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYvSDaX4dUk> and is annoyingly catchy. With the sun shining, and the camp atmosphere buzzing, we left the opening ceremony feeling impressed.

It is probably worth noting at this point is that Bodø is located just north of the Arctic Circle. The sun, when it could be seen, did not set for the duration of the Jamboree. Activities took place all day and more activities, for example making and firing giant catapults, took place at midnight on the activity field. Meals were not obvious clues to the time of day as breakfast, lunch and supper all consisted of copious quantities of bread accompanied by cheese, the content of a tin with a child on the front, fish, salami and jam. Only the replacement of the early morning chocolate spread with salad gave a clue as to the time of day. Although strange for all of the international staff, the Norwegians assured us that eating so much bread is normal in Norway and certainly expected at camp.



On the Sunday, after spending most of the day exploring the camp and admiring the many portals (gateways) that were beginning to take shape on the sub camps, we turned up at the hike office at 4pm to be shown our camping areas. Our “short walk” turned into a delightful 20km trip in the woods and hills to the east of the camp. During this walk, we discussed the difference between the Norwegian scouting culture of trusting the patrols to look after themselves and be out-and-about in fairly remote woods and mountains compared to UK scouting requirements and permits.



Norwegian Scouts appear to have a much more relaxed policy compared to UK Scout in terms of their regulations and permits. In a way, this seems to link to the freedom of Norwegians in being able to camp anywhere that isn't private land for up to two nights and in some months of the year being allowed to have small fires suitable for making coffee when out walking. Overall, from my understanding, I would describe Norwegian scouting as having a more reactive approach to problems, solving them if they occur, as opposed to the much more pro-active approach to reduce risk seen in UK scouting.



Our hike started on Monday along with the rain. Our first challenge was to find food to take with us. Thankfully, the enterprising Scout Hike Leader harangued the food distribution centre until an assortment of food, including two loaves of frozen bread and a large amount of butter was made available to take with us. Heavily laden with all our camping stuff, food, a portable toilet, toilet tent, and the list of the Scouts we might expect on the first night, we set off into the rain for our 4km hike to our base.

Later that day we were unexpectedly joined by Christian, a friendly Scout Leader from Drøbak (south of Oslo) who had been sent as the radio operator for our hike area and the neighbouring hike area. It transpired there was no radio signal at the site so he left the next day. He was however excellent company, a good source of knowledge and kept in touch back at camp to let us know what was going on. In return, we did the washing up for his troop later in the week.



Our hiking base was great. We varied our camp diet of bread and cheese by making cheese on toast. The Scout patrols were amazingly well organised and we were impressed at their competency in putting up their tarps and cooking. I learnt several new games and our fire was well used by many of the Scouts, including one small Icelandic Scout who when asked to bring some wood disappeared with an axe as long as his arm and re-appeared with a dead tree.

However much fun the hike was, it was overshadowed by a worrying lack of communication from the NORD team, combined with messages received by the Scouts as to whether they were ok. News had been published by the Scout camp that 55 camp participants had been picked up by sea-king helicopter as they were hypothermic. We were told later these were Rovers not Scouts and that only a small number had actually needed to be collected. However when given the option to be airlifted out, most had opted for it.



On our last day of camping, the rain stopped and we received an unexpected phone call from the Scout Hike Leader telling us we were no longer required at the hike base and would be collected at some time later in the day. Now more used to NORD communication style, we decided to make the best of the time (and do some more exploring), so climbed the fantastically named Pundlihumpen. Again the views were spectacular. Following a second phone call requiring us to “guard some Scouts” at the collection point, we hurried down to discover there were no Scouts at the collection point and no Scouts turned up in the four hours we waited for them. Exceedingly cold, and wondering what was happening, we negotiated a lift back to the camp site from a bus dropping off Scouts for their hike. Back at base we checked in with the seemingly unconcerned hike-office.



With an unexpected free day at camp we embarked on the leader challenge programme in the rain and continued to admire the portals. Pioneering is a big part of Norwegian Scout camps and the portals for each group were made by the Scouts and rovers at the site. The patrol system also appears to be more rigid than in most UK groups that I have met. The patrol leader and his or her assistant have a level of responsibility for the group and are invited to special events as a reward.

I spent my last official day of camp enjoying the sunshine and swimming in a chilly Norwegian lake. In the afternoon, as part of the camp’s treat for staff, we were taken on a trip to Saltstraumen. This is a small strait between Saltfjorden fjord and Skjerstad Fjord with one of the strongest tidal currents in the world. As the water travels through the strait, very impressive maelstroms (tidal vortexes) are formed.

The closing ceremony featured several Norwegian bands and also the camp song. This time, some English subtitles were provided. Whilst we certainly expected communication to be in Norwegian, with such an International service team we hoped the same level of information would be available in English. Certainly, this was the expectation of most of the non-Norwegian and non-English staff. As a German staff member helpfully put it - whilst they did not expect information to be in their own language, they did expect information, and the same level of information to be available in English. Unfortunately, this was not always the case.



Following the main camp, I stayed to help with the de-construction. When I signed up to do this, I expected I would be cleaning toilets and litter picking. In this I was not disappointed. The whole de-construction camp however highlighted the incomparable organisation of NORD – someone, somewhere, knew exactly what was meant to happen, but they weren't going to make it easy and *tell!* It rapidly transpired the person allocating the jobs was not the same person who knew exactly what need to be done, and they did not appear to talk to one another.



Typically a team would start a task as allocated by the head of de-construction, for example filling in the holes on the field where the flag poles had been placed, or dismantling the escape room activity. When the task was roughly 75% completed, they would be told it did not need doing - for example as the field was due to be ploughed or the rooms were wanted for storage. At this point, the team would return to the head of de-construction for clarification and would be allocated something else. A no point, despite suggests from various teams, did the person who knew what was going on appear to sit down with the person allocating jobs and go through exactly what was needed.

A more awful example poor communication is that the camp's plumber unplumbed the toilets without locking them, before they had been cleaned, and with a number of participants still on site. The toilets then sat on the field for up to two days before there were cleaned and removed. The particularly unpleasant task in cleaning them could have been made so much easier with some simple thought and people talking to each other.

Despite my moaning, the constant rain and the unique communication style, in many ways, the de-construction camp was fun. It was made so by the people rather than the tasks. Moral was boosted by better food, waffles, an evening off to go swimming at the local pool and several film nights. Would I do another de-construction camp? – Only if I could guarantee better communication and organisation.

Would I recommend going to the next Norwegian Jamboree? - Yes, I've not been put off. However, before you sign up, you'll need to accept there are several cultural differences between scouting in the UK and scouting in Norway. In order to get information about what is happening you might need to ask several different people several different questions, and consider which response might be the most appropriate!