



BEG NEWSLETTER

A bit of an “Emergency Style “ Newsletter this time!

Put it down to computer problems at this end—this is despite my computer being in for repair.

Ah well, I will soldier on regardless.

Apologies for the poor layout.

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Photo Competition

Nancy has suggested a photo competition leading to the Calendar Idea. She is looking for photographs from past expeditions or other BEG events.

There will be prizes in 3 categories

1. Landscape
2. People
3. The Picture which best depicts the ethos of BEG

Go on, get these photographs looked out! You never know—they might just inspire you to think of leading the next International Expedition!!

On Sunday 8th June there is going to be a **TENT DAY**

In other words the tents require to be checked and some need to be discarded so HELP is needed.

Come along from 10am and bring own lunch but drinks will be provided

If enough people come to help this job can be done in one day. The tents to be discarded will be offered to BEG members first of all for a small donation. After the 8th I will have a better idea of what will be available and will send a list by e-mail to everyone.

Another job to be done on 8th will be to 'weed' the paths and tidy up generally.

Look forward to seeing you all on the day

Thanks

Nan

View from the Chair

To you all,

As the weather has been improving it takes my thoughts away from coal fires, warm woolly jumpers and endless hours of darkness to a world outside my front door. At this point I would just like to say a personal thank you to everyone who took the time to sponsor me for my race-for-life, Mum, Sarah and I successfully completed the 5 km event two weeks ago, and raised a healthy amount for Cancer Research UK. This year BEG has planned a number of its own events for the summer period and it would be a delight to see many of you and perhaps some new faces again.

First up is the X-plore Adventure Challenge on Sunday 22nd of June. A new event, based loosely on a familiar theme, teams of four young people (between 14 and 18 years old) from any club, organisation, business or school will take part in a series of fun (and not forgetting wet & dirty) mini challenges to compete for the winning prizes. Do you know of a team who may be interested or can you help out on the day? Enter on line via the website –

www.borders-exploration-group.org.uk or drop me an email.

The training for the Poland expedition team is now well underway and it's always a great pleasure to see not only the new venturers but also some new faces in our leader teams. Their plans for their two-week expedition are a perfect mix of adventurous, social and cultural experiences. I'm sure I'm not alone in wishing them all a great expedition and look forward to hearing and seeing all about in when they return in August.

At the end of the summer - Saturday 20th September, as a sister event of the X-plore Adventure Challenge, we will be running a similar event for teams of Adults. This year Borders Exploration Group as an organisation are focusing on attracting, recruiting and retaining (the difficult bit) new adult leaders into the organisation. It is hoped this taster event and function in the evening will be an ideal opportunity to promote some of good things that we all know BEG can do. This event will be followed by a member's weekend in October (25th & 26th), which will be open to everyone.

Looking into the future we will continue to look for people who are interested in leading the next (2010) expedition. The format of the chief leader role has been reviewed and although it is important that it is retained, there will be an emphasis on ownership of the expedition by Borders Exploration Group existing in the future. This will mean more areas of responsibility will be dispersed across a wider selection of people; including venturers, leader team, training team, BEG committee and BEG members. A destination selection evening will be held again later in the year, so if you have any thoughts, ideas or suggestions please drop me an email or give me a call.

Have a great summer and hope to see you all at one of our forthcoming events.

Vicki



Poland Update

Poland Quiz Night

Friday the 16th of May saw the Poland Expedition team host a very successful quiz night at Selkirk High School. Much to our delight, the event was very well attended, with 29 teams attending in all. The quizmaster was our very own Ron Sutherland, who tested our knowledge on a variety of topics, ranging from cheese and wine through nature and famous nicknames to arrive at the end with a picture tour of the Borders (those of you in the Poland team had no excuses for not having got the Three Brethren clue!). There was, much to the appreciation of a number of teams, no dreaded sports round! It was a close run contest however Vicki Moyes and her victorious team walked away with the much coveted Borders Exploration Group paper-weight (and some liquid refreshments of the alcoholic variety!) The event was a great success, and the total amount raised was £513 which is a real boost to the funds for the Poland Expedition. Many thanks go out to those who helped to make the evening run so smoothly and to those who came along on the night to support the event (took part.....bought raffle tickets.....and helped to keep the bar staff busy!)

Poland Expedition

The plans for the Poland expedition are now taking shape and becoming more exciting by the day! Travel arrangements have been made and we sail from Newcastle on the evening of Sunday the 20th of July, arriving in Amsterdam the following morning. From Amsterdam we are then taking the train to Berlin, where we will stay overnight and take in a tour of the city. From Berlin it's onwards by train to our first Polish destination of Warsaw. After a good night's kip we plan to travel up to the North East of Poland and take in some of the sights on a canoe tour of the area, possibly visiting some of the nature reserves in what is the oldest remaining natural woodland in the whole of Europe.

After this it's back down to Warsaw for a few days and from there on to Krakow, where we will take some time to visit Auschwitz, and the salt mines at Wieliczka, before heading on to the mountains in the South. After a few days trekking in the mountains, we return to Krakow on the 3rd of August to fly home to Edinburgh.

Meanwhile, the team have all been studying hard to learn the essential Polish phrases we will need for the trip – hello, thank you, I'm lost and biscuits, and we are looking forward to our next training weekend on the 6th and 7th of June.

Imogen Riddell kindly offered to share her experiences when she visited the Battlefields from 2 World Wars.

For those of you out there who don't know Imogen, I asked her to introduce herself. So—that's the first paragraph!

Thank you Imogen for a thought provoking article

It's now three years since I returned from Vietnam, an expedition which completely changed the way I view the world. Growing up in Selkirk I never really had any great ambitions to go travelling, since returning from my BEG adventure however I've constantly been plotting to get away... Unfortunately the time commitment and money restraints of being a student have meant my travelling has been restricted to Europe.

On returning from Vietnam I went back to Uni in Glasgow for a couple of years before spending 3 months in Switzerland, where by week I worked as a chemist with pharmaceutical company, Novartis and at the weekend travelled all over the country. Currently I'm on an Industrial Placement in Sandwich, Kent working for Pfizer, saving my wages wisely and plotting a big adventure for when I hopefully graduate from Strathclyde next year- then who knows what the world holds!

In Flanders Fields.....

OK, so France is hardly the far flung, exotic destination normally featuring in the BEG newsletter and my bus trip with the grey haired brigade was hardly a big adventure but my recent trip to the WWI and II battlefields in France was an amazing experience.....

From the moment we booked this trip me and my housemate, Fiona, were very excited about our wee 'holiday', but in hindsight holiday is the last word I would use to describe the experience we had. I don't know what I expected from this trip - a trip to the site of death of millions of young men and women and a country which had been forever scarred by what went on there.

As we arrived at our pick-up point on Friday morning our main concerns were the weather and our travelling companions, a bus load of OAPs who before we even made it on the bus had started pointing and whispering about us! Once aboard the bus we were immediately questioned. Why were we there? Were we going on a school trip? Our response: we were interested in history, had spent time studying both World Wars at school and we thought it would be interesting and fun to visit the places we had learnt about. This seemed to be the correct answer though we were still viewed with some suspicion!

On the first day we travelled down to the area near Lille where we would be staying. We visited Notre Dame de Lorette one of the many French memorials, where we came face to face with rows upon rows of graves for the first time. This was a bit grim but was what I expected. It reminded me of what you might see on a TV programme; it was a product of the war, something you could not get past but it did not immediately strike me as being horrific and unnecessary. We then travelled on to see a Polish war memorial and Czech cemetery. The Poles and Czechs remembered here were members of the French Expeditionary Force and although the French Army has a clause that ensured members did not have to fight against their own country, many people chose to do so. This, I suppose, was when I started to understand what the war really was.



War is often glorified these days, people go off to win, it is like a game. But in real life no-one would chose to go to war, would chose to give up their life, to leave behind everyone they love and fight for a cause they didn't believe in. The people who signed up in the Great War (WWI) initially believed that the war would only last for four months and they would be home for Christmas. Yes there were some foolish youngsters who went along for the ride but the majority of those who chose to go and fight did so because they believed what they were doing was right. The Czechs and Poles buried in this cemetery and remembered on the memorial certainly believed that France was fighting for a just cause and they believed it so strongly they were prepared to give their lives for it.

After lunch we travelled to the Canadian National Vimy memorial, one of Canada's most important overseas war memorials. The memorial commemorates the battle of Vimy Ridge; the first time all four Canadian army divisions had fought together. The memorial itself was built in 1936 and was one of the most poignant memorials I saw on my trip. It is a tribute to the 66,000 Canadian war dead from the First World War and inscribed on the base of the memorial are the names of the 11,285 soldiers who were presumed dead but their bodies were never found.



Vimy Memorial

The site of Vimy Ridge has a well run visitors centre, with fantastic Canadian guides. We spent time here walking through the preserved trenches and underground tunnels. The trenches themselves were much as you might expect, one important point to note that I don't think I was made aware of at school is that trenches were built in zig-zags not straight lines. The main reason for this was that if your enemy did manage to make it into your trench, they could not just set up camp and shoot down the line of the trench; the corners gave you some shelter and a reasonable chance of being able to attack them. The battle of Vimy Ridge relied heavily on tunnelling as a method of attack, with the main aims being to tunnel close enough to your enemy, to set a mine that would kill as many people as possible, destroy their tunnels and also create a crater which you could then hopefully capture to gain some ground. Grange Tunnel one of the longest tunnels at over 1.2km long is open to the public. Like many of the tunnels in northern France, they are hollowed out of chalk and fairly impressive. An important fact I learned while here was that Adolf Hitler was a runner here in the First World War. Runners were used to carry messages as pigeons and telephones were unreliable and prone to interception. Runners wore a coloured armband to make them recognisable to other soldiers who would allow them to make their way easily through the trenches. Runners had a very short lifespan, 5-7 days, however, as the armband made them a prime target for the opposition. Just days before the main battle of Vimy Ridge, Adolf Hitler was wounded and his surrender was accepted by a British soldier. This poses a very big 'What if ...?'

The second day of our trip was the most difficult; we travelled to Ypres which is widely known as being a massive massacre. Ypres itself was a Salient, an area of land which projects out into enemy territory, making it very vulnerable as is surrounded on three sides by the opposition. The third battle of Ypres at Passchendaele saw *35 men being killed for every yard* of land taken by the British, French, Canadian and Belgium offensive. In this area we visited Essex Farm Cemetery where John McCrae, working as a doctor wrote "In Flanders Fields" after the loss of his friend. We saw the bunkers here, where wounded were taken to be treated and got a real picture of just how close at points the British and German front lines were - here they were only separated by a canal, a canal that was so narrow even I could throw a grenade from one side to the other! Also in this cemetery we visited the *grave of a 15 year old boy*.



*The Grave of 15 year old
V.J. Strudwick*

Next we went on to Langemark Cemetery, a German cemetery. Despite being our enemies I think it is important to remember that the Germans also believed that what they were fighting for was worth giving their lives for. The mass grave contained within this cemetery has a copper wreath and a lovely inscription "I call you by your name therefore you are mine".

We then visited Tyne Cot Cemetery, the largest British military cemetery. By the time I reached here, I was ready to break down in tears. That morning I had seen so many graves and what now faced me was unimaginable to my mind. The vast graveyard was bad enough, but at the very back there were lists of names of people whose bodies had never been found. Thousands and thousands of names, and those are only the names for which there was not space on the Menin Gate. When you study war at school, or read about it in textbooks you hear numbers of people who died but these figures are far too big to imagine. To stand in a graveyard and see even a portion of these really hits home hard. The thing I think which is possibly least appreciated is the number of afternoon we spent time in Ypres and in the evening we watched the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate, a very moving experience.

The third day focused on the Battle of the Somme, widely reknown as the worst day ever in British Military history. The Somme offensive was largely a distraction to draw troops away from Verdun, however the cost of life was horrific. Led by Major Haig, a week long bombardment of the German frontline began. This was suppose to destroy German guns, kill the soldiers and break up the barbed wire. British soldiers were then expected to *walk* out over no-mans land and claim the German trenches. Famously this didn't happen and instead the advancing British troops were just mown down. At the Somme we visited Newfoundland Park where we were able to walk through the route of a battle and experience life in the trenches. We also visited graveyards and a war memorial to Scottish soldiers. In the afternoon we visited Lochnager Crater, a massive mine crater, where as recently as 1998 the body of a soldier was removed.



Memorial to Scottish soldiers killed in WWI

The final day of our trip concentrated on the Second World War. We visited the site of production and a launch site of Hitlers V2 weapons. These were incredible structures, built from concrete much stronger than any suspension bridge. The rockets themselves used cutting edge technology and were built by some of the brightest minds of the twentieth century- the technology used in the V2 rockets was in fact the same technology that sent America into space! The German liquid oxygen production site was a concrete monstrosity which was repeatedly bombed but built to be so robust that nothing would ever be able to do it any damage. These were incredible to see though again were the site of thousands of deaths as they were built by slave labour under the hand of Nazi Germany. Finally we visited the Todt battery one of the seven biggest bunkers built to house a 380mm gun which was part of the Atlantic defence built by Germany.

The whole experience was incredible, though in truth very upsetting. It has raised a lot of questions in mind, many to do with the way we as a species behave.

We are capable of incredible things yet more often than not these are used against our fellow man. I think the trip highlighted the difference between the First and Second World Wars, the First World War saw thousands of men killed in hand to hand combat whereas by the time the Second World War came around killing had become faceless, it was a war of technology. But *the* most important thing I have taken from this is need for people to really understand what went on. Both World Wars saw millions of men give their lives for what they believed in - the ultimate sacrifice. Yet in my mind our generation sees it almost as fable, it's something which we cannot comprehend and as time goes on this disconnection will only get greater. So I would encourage everyone to visit the cemeteries and memorials, and to walk over the battlefields.



The copper wreath at the German mass grave

Most of you will remember reading about Aidan and Iona's attempts to reach Amsterdam—without spending ANY money! No they were not being mean. This was a Charity event! Read on to discover what happens.....

Tuesday 29th January 08

We woke early-ish but we felt a lot fresher and more hopeful. We tried holding up the banner (we were starting to realise this was more of a burden than an asset, as it had a total success rate of 0 lifts so far. Why did we keep it?) but we gave up and just started asking people for lifts. That is when we found...

8. Pete Burns, middle aged charity worker in a nice red car. People often joke about his name being identical to the singer from band "Dead or Alive", but he is in fact a very normal person. His main charity is Geordie Aid and supports the Thai Education system. He was originally going to Leeds but dropped us in Ferrybridge so we could try lorries. We tried UK lorries, Dutch lorries and other lorries for hours, they all came out with the same reply "I'm goin norf" (which was strange because most of them were there at the next service station we got to. Oh well must have changed their minds!). We then tried asking car drivers as they came out of the building to go to their vehicles. After asking many people a man came back after having a think and offering us a broken up journey to Toddington services. For me, this was the turning point in the journey.

9. Torsten Oquist, a Swedish engineer who travels up and down the country fixing and updating Access card systems. It took us a while to work out, but he was slightly deaf and I thought he was ignoring me for a while until Iona worked it out. He took us, via a quick job at B&Q in Doncaster, to Toddington services, but not before a hot chocolate and biscuits in Costa! Torsten, if you are reading this, thank you so much!

Toddington was like every other service station we had been at, but the people seemed to be in more of a hurry. It must have been getting close to dinner time.

10. After a short time Iona found three Mormons going anti-clockwise round the M25. This was the opposite direction to the way we wanted, but we hoped to find suitable services en-route to get dropped off at. However they got lost and fate found us going clockwise round the M25 towards Thurrock services, exactly where we were aiming for! They were really nice people, but I think they sort of blamed us for adding two hours to their journey.

At Thurrock services we had a last lap of the lorries before asking at the petrol station. The second car we asked was full of cheery Belgians...

11. Kunn, Patrick and Mark. They were going to Dover! After going against their GPS system and doing a U-turn, we were on our way to the Chunnel. They were Christians from Brugge, Belgium. They had just been to a Christian Conference in Bradford and it had been a great success. They had lots of very hard Christian Rock music blaring out of the speakers all the way to the Chunnel! Once they learnt both Iona and I were also Christian, they had lots of advice and prayers for us to use as we travelled, which was very comforting at the time. Once in France we asked them to drop us off in Belgium, but they said we would be better in Calais. We were very apprehensive as Calais was where most folk got stuck. However, Mario needed a coffee...

12. Mario, a Belgian living in London. Owns a nice BMW with sat-nav and smokes every second breath. He consented to take us to Belgium as he disliked the French and had kids of his own. We had my Mum researching hotels on the internet at this point (about 2am) It was either the park bench or the metro station without you so thanks again Mum! You are a star. Iona slept in the car most of the way. By this point we had developed sleeping patterns so that one person is always awake when travelling for safety reasons. We arrived at Hotel Maribeu at 3:30am on Wednesday morning.

Wednesday 30th January 08

We got up at 8am after another motorway filled night sleep, to a light breakfast (we also stole food for lunch. He he he!) and headed out into Brussels, in very wet conditions. To cut a long story short, we walked about 7km out of the city to the edge of the Ring road (in the rain) without anyone giving us a lift. We found a bus shelter, cried, and threw in the towel there. We cursed the very people of Brussels and their dry, empty, Holland-bound cars. Then we walked back to the centre, ate a comfortable lunch (still a staple diet of cheerios, but now mixed with continental breakfast) under an arch of the Basilic (kings palace), then got a cheap train to Amsterdam.

That is the end of our journey, but just so you know: We had a great time in Amsterdam and we still think we achieved a lot. We arrived at the hostel at 57 hours from the start time (only 3 hours to spare before we were out of the race). It has probably been one of the harder things we have done in life, but we are still doing it again next year! There are rumours of Barcelona...

