



PRIZE-WINNING REPORT 2013

Sorting Santa's Mail in Finland

by *Caitlin Ripley*,
traveller 2012

Last July six intrepid Scouts met in Helsinki to start what would become an unforgettable adventure. Their names were Susan, JJ, Duncan, Faith, Ella and their patrol leader: Caitlin. Their quest: Roverway 2012, a Scout and Guide camp for members aged 16-22.

It would be lying to say every-thing went swimmingly; even in the first day alarms were slept through, boats were missed and being on time was a thing of fantasy. But this did not douse the team's spirits in the slightest: mishaps are all part of an adventure.

After the initial pre-camp in Finland's capital with the rest of the UK contingent, the lucky intrepid six were sent up on a fourteen hour overnight train to Lapland's biggest city: Rovaniemi. Now, the idea of an overnight train is that one can sleep during the journey to make the most of the next day, but why do that when the train is packed to the gunnels with other excitable Scouts and Guides? The group enjoyed an evening of fun and games with young people from all over Europe and beyond, before catching a few hours' kip to be just about fresh in the morning.

Santa Park in Rovaniemi, was where the smallest of Roverway's three opening ceremonies would be taking place, and over the course of the morning the six showed no sign of fatigue as they cheered, sang and attended elf training classes (no, really!).

In the afternoon, buses arrived to take 'Tribes' off to their paths. N05 was the one for the UK patrol along with patrols from France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Ireland, Wales and of course Finland. They took a rather too small bus (a few small people were sitting on laps) a few miles away to Santa Village.

Every tribe had to complete a service project on their path to prepare the patrols for their own projects, which they would be planning and completing on the return to their home country. For N05 this was the thrilling task of sorting mail sent to Father Christmas. The Scouts and Guides learnt that every year Santa's Post Office would receive thousands of letters, some with little more than 'Santa Claus' written on the envelope, and if they had a legible real return address, the sender would receive a reply in one of twelve languages.

That evening the tribe arrived, rather tired, at their campsite to find the luxury of ready pitched tents, dinner and a sauna. It was time to get into the theme: Finnish traditional celebrations. Over the next few days the group celebrated everything from Shrove Tuesday to New Year with a midsummer multinational picnic thrown in the middle along with a Belgian national day. All the groups were keen to not only learn about other cultures but share their own games, songs and customs. Between all this they caught up on their sleep, which gave them the energy not only for walking, a luge run and making rafts, but also to stay up on the final Lapland night to see the midnight dusk: a beautiful amazing experience for everyone.

Then at 4 am the next day, the bus arrived and headed back to Rovaniemi train station, where a ten hour train took all the northern tribes down to the South of Finland towards Evo Camp. This time the train really was for sleep, as the endless night before had tired many of the group out. Soon enough everyone was reuniting at the main camp: all four thousand Scouts and Guides.

The camp was made up in many sections which were to be done as patrols, but mixing it up with other nationalities was greatly encouraged, so many new friendships flourished over water activities, woodland crafts, theatre and creative performances, and developing a 'Rover Momentum' service project to take home.

The middle day however, was dedicated to be 'Loverday', an international festival where every contingent showed off the best of their country. From cream teas to a pretend bull run, the main road in the site was packed with people in all sorts

of national dress, whether it was their own or swapped.
The atmosphere was truly spectacular.

At the closing ceremony, there were tears all round. Hugs and email addresses were exchanged and promises to come visit each and every country or have people to stay.

Everyone was sad to see the end, but they had to look forward: there would be many many more opportunities in Scouting to do similar things again. As for the intrepid six: they still had to finish their Rover Momentum project: spreading the word about international relations and opportunities abroad for young people in Scouting through media and meetings, so they'd have to meet again at least.

Opportunities like this are unique, but they aren't rare.
Don't just hear about it, be there.

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