

Chasing runaway tents

by Rosie Hoggmascall,

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Life as a seventeen year old is brilliant. There are so many opportunities out there. I live some of my time in Brunei, some of my time in Windermere, and so going on an expedition to Arctic Norway was one of those bold steps that had to be taken. At my age we are all supposed to be doing things that are fulfilling, adventurous, educational and essential to our UCAS statements so that we stand out from the crowd and everyone wants to accept us onto their degree course. This was not the reason I wanted to go – I just thought it was cool and I really like rocks.

During the expedition to the Nuvsvag peninsula we explored the natural environment through scientific data collection and cross-country trekking. We set up various camera traps, took hydrology readings every hour of the 24 hour sunlit day, measured the strike and dip of the underlying geology, and finally we identified and logged over 60 species of alpine flora and fauna. For adventure we trekked up mountains, went fishing in the fjords, climbed almost 1000m to the top of a glacier and on a few occasions had to dodge rock falls.

The most entertaining experience, however, was unplanned and very unexpected. The icecap and its outlet glaciers cause a microclimate in and around the base-camp valley that resulted in very strong winds one evening. Gusts were so strong that they blew away tents and snapped guy ropes. We had to work as a team to pin down tents that were on the edge of being blown away, and secure down the safe tents with heavy rocks and ice pegs. One moment you would be hammering pegs into the earth, the next you would be flying across the rocky ground in pursuit of a runaway tent. It was tense but exhilarating.

The expedition experienced challenges during the first week. A heatwave meant that the glacier was melting rapidly and becoming increasingly unstable. In the end the leaders made the right decision that it was too dangerous to attempt to climb up onto the icecap. We were all very disappointed because it was what we all were looking forward to after a significant amount of training towards the ice climb. It was this and the fact that the expedition was more socially orientated that made it different to how I had imagined it. Having to live with unfamiliar people, to work with the team, support them and also be supported by them for three weeks was a large part of the expedition. It was a big part of the BES's aims to develop your character, so we completed

a personality test and found out what type of person we are. It was useful to see how people interact and to learn about their personalities as well as your own. The best thing was that we had the chance to write a small note to each of our fire members to tell them what we liked about them. Some were funny, some deep and others just really touching, and they gave me confidence about my personality. One person said that I am 'the happiest girl they ever met'. Moreover, an individual meeting with the team leaders described me in three words as 'positive', 'helpful' and 'motivating', which is reassuring.

For me, the big learning curve was taking chances and raising funds. Fundraising was daunting but incredibly valuable. When signing up I concentrated on the gain from being in the arctic, and I did not think about how my appreciation for things at home would grow: I can now appreciate simple, daily things that are invaluable such as a shower and a flush toilet. I still look forward to gaining a full experience of cold conditions, in future still to be planned expeditions to cold places. I hope to pursue a career in geology, and thus the fieldwork experience and knowledge gained were invaluable and beneficial for applying to university. What I did not expect was meeting a huge number of trainee leaders studying geology at university who gave me valuable advice on universities for geology and the courses. The expedition was expensive, and raising the money to cover costs was a new challenge, but there is no doubt that it was a unique experience I will savour for many years.

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