

Some Highlights of a visit to Belarus to celebrate Hampshire North link of 20yrs.

- Pat Lloyd, Jenny Cole and I joined the County group at camp on 2<sup>nd</sup> August: Approx. 94 participants (Guides, Leaders, children and parents) at the only appropriate site in Belarus - by Lake Salevya. We slept in a cabin complete with toilet, shower, fridge and a kettle. Lots of electric sockets on the site.



- FOOD AND DRINK:** Electric kettles on the site meant hot drinks available any time, (black tea with lemon) or you could have a cup of smoky tea from the water in the bucket by the fire being kept going all day. Russian champagne on arrival as a welcome (served in a plastic camp cup!), a few bottles on Sunday afternoon at the Dacha and at the celebration party. Lusya and Lena cooked for the camp participants on an Army Field kitchen, hired from the site. Breakfast outside our cabin, with Katya and Elena (her mum) and Dima (Dad) on Sat of courgette in batter and pizza, Sunday fish soup (caught by Dima the day before and made on the bbq equipment). Mealtimes were flexible - when it was ready you queued up for it. Sat lunch was soup, a fat sausage and rice; evening meal lots of veg soup with very small pieces of chicken.



Later in the evening the children had a disco party and adults had a buffet of different goodies, including the inevitable tomato and cucumber.

- Joined camp on the Sat morning for 10am notices to include taking a paper with name of your Secret Friend for the day. All took it in turns to be in the centre of the circle and shout their name. Good turns to be done, without your "friend" knowing during the day. I received a friendship bracelet, some nut bars, water lily flowers, a cup of tea, all from different people to put me off the scent of whose friend I was. At the evening ceremony I was delighted to receive a bracelet made with the paracord Trefoils had bought among other craft items to be taken out. We were told how much they had appreciated all the craft items we had sent in parcels before the camp and to the camp as the children loved doing Craft - and the adults said it went very quiet(!) while they were making things.



Closing ceremony at about 5pm included a Promise Ceremony for many of the girls from different Units. Promise ceremonies only take place twice a year - at camp and at their Thinking Day event. The flags are solemnly paraded around the circle before the enrolments and the girls make their Promise in front of the flags.

- Sunday morning driven back to flat, Then Katya drove us to their over the years. In the garden was trees, flowers, vegetables. All foods and meat dishes, plus Russian Champagne was served. Dima had collected Olga's mum, Natasha, and we spent a really enjoyable sunny afternoon, lots of laughter. I even had a phone conversation with Olga's granny!!!! Then back to Zhodino for Jenny and me to go to Lusya's home and Pat to stay with Katya and Elena - Dima headed back to the Dacha with her brother, Sacha, to sleep.

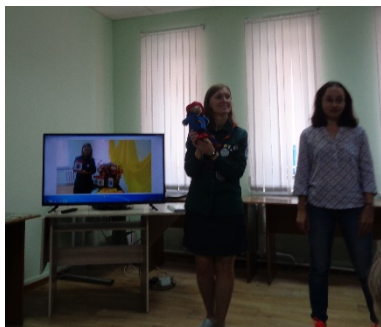


Zhodino in Dima's car to their Dacha - built by Dima gradually a grape vine, solar shower, fruit fruit is bottled. A selection of home-produced



Early night as Lusya was obviously tired after being at camp cooking for 9 days. Offered the inevitable Vodka as a welcome drink, I took a sip of the dark brown liquid to be sociable, it was too strong for me, Jenny had just a little more and by the expression on her face it was strong!!

- After blinis and smetana Monday morning to Zhodino Library to meet up with the girls, some of Anya's BIRDS and their parents, and see a presentation of what Guides do in Belarus and to hear from Anya about the Paddington Bear Club which she runs every Saturday afternoon. About 70 children attend, 30 of them BIRDS, some go for the activities but haven't joined BIRDS and the others go to learn English - something their parents had requested. I was interviewed for the local paper!



- Then into Minsk, met all the group who had been unable to be in the library, lunched on a 4 cheese pancake then given a lift nearer to the City Centre (girls walked) to pick up the Tour bus. Unfortunately, ours wasn't one with headphones or English translation, Katya did her best for the girls, we were pleased to see again much of the sights we had seen on previous visits from a different angle. Into the Government store for the girls to change their money – ok for Euros but they didn't change sterling, so more time taken up going to another exchange place leaving very little time to shop ...then down the Metro to the Belarussian National Library, and in the lift to the top. Minsk looked so clean and lots of green... then home to host families and boiled stuffed peppers and a chocolate!



- Tuesday morning, porridge and a sweets called marmalade. picked us up to go to a park where there demonstrating and selling different crafts, sheds showing fairy tale characters with a looking out for the Wishing Well I saw this tried to convince me it was the Wishing out to be a waste bin! The most the upside-down house. When inside, and the most peculiar sensation of being lightheaded.... Enjoyed a very full picnic with Katya's work colleague and family who we met there. Both her boys aged 4 and 7 speak perfect English from being taught and watching American/English cartoons. They aren't allowed to watch Belarussian TV.



chocolate and Dima with Katya were cabins small wooden button to press to hear the story. On bucket and Katya well – but it turned fascinating item was “upstairs” you had



- Back to the flat for more eats and tea, then onto the meeting place, a large open space with a shelter, for a celebration get-together with all County group, local Guides and Leaders and host families and someone from local TV. I was interviewed and it appeared soon after on their local TV, and can be found on Youtube <https://youtu.be/nFM1jJHtQbU> about 3.45 mins in. Champagne (as well as soft drinks) laid out when Olga arrived with Lena and the most amazing celebration cake: Lots of speeches to celebrate our friendship and thank yous for consistent communication, we sang “I am One Voice” which sounded very moving in the shelter. Everyone in the County group was given a gift with a handwritten card. So much hard work went into organising the camp and home hospitality for the girls and us, the most hospitable people you will ever meet sharing what they have. As one girl said in her summing up of the trip “May the friendship continue for another 20 years.”



Selection of foods and more Russian

Robbie Hill: August 2019

