

Going for Gold in Bavaria: Report from the ACF Gold D of E Expedition 2009

What have eighteen, 16-23 year olds from the ACF, ATC and CCF got in common? All of them recently returned from completing their final Gold DofE expedition in the Bavarian Alps, Germany.

The 18 young people, accompanied by 13 members of staff from the ACF and ATC set off on Friday 28th of August for a very long coach journey bound for the Haus am Brunnenbach Lodge in Ortwang, Allgäu. Cadets and staff joined the trip from all over the U.K. including Northern Ireland, Scotland and for the first time in the 20 years that the expedition has been running, Middlesex & NW London.

The first day of the trip started with an acclimatisation day where everyone walked up the Grunton, which, although not one of the highest peaks in the Alps at a height of only 1738m, is higher than any peak in the U.K! Although the cadets did at least start from a height of 900m! When at the top the cadets got to see a war memorial for the German Mountain Troops who gave their lives in the Second World War. Then those brave enough got to visit Bergburgerhorn, a rocky spur overlooking the main Iller valley reached by traversing a narrow ridge, helped by some fixed line – a head for heights was certainly needed!

The second day saw the cadets having to plan their four day route in the morning as well as their purpose for the expedition. The group of four I was overlooking included a cadet from Durham, two Cadet Sergeants from Essex and Cadet Sergeant Major Peter Lazell from 203 Brentford chose to examine the effect of water features on the landscape. As a reward for all this planning the cadets then got to visit the local water park – which did not form part of the group's study!

Day three saw my group set off on their four day expedition. Each group had to be independent of each other and outside help. Although they were allowed to collect water throughout the expedition and stayed at campsites on route they were not allowed to buy anything from shops and so had to carry all the food, fuel, clothing and other items needed for their expedition. The supervisors met the cadets at different points during the four days to check all was well but the cadets were never quite sure of just when and where they would pop up!

All navigating was down to the group but this was not a problem after having had the chance to hone their skills on the practice expedition in the Pennines two months previously. My group had to do eight hours of planned activity every day which including walking and work on their water features project. Their route was a total distance of 71.5km (44.5 miles).

Their perseverance, determination and teamwork was really pushed to the limits when two of the group were struck down by a mystery 24 hr virus which affected about a third of the people on the trip during the week and at least one person in all of the four expedition groups. The weather was also sent to test the teams with heavy downpours interrupting the periods of sun each day, but then that's Alpine weather for you! I am pleased to say that by supporting each other all of the teams completed their expeditions.

Once back at the lodge on the final day the cadets were allowed to relax and even waited on by the staff at the 20th anniversary celebratory meal. This was followed by a debrief for each of the groups on the high and low points of their experience. The overwhelming response from the my group was that the trip was definitely something they would recommend as providing you with a real sense of achievement, a real opportunity to see breath taking scenery and to experience a different culture.

For more info on the Gold DofE Bavaria trip visit: www.armycadetsandthedofe.org.uk

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