

AUSTRIA 2015

The Chief Leader's Potted Diary!



Tuesday 30th June: Half the group met in Kelso to go to the airport, where the rest were ready and waiting. We carried out the BEG tradition of entertaining our fellow passengers by packing rucksacks, tents and other bits of kit into rice sacks for the journey. Easyjet's new self-service baggage check-in and labelling caused a wee bit of confusion, but we were soon sorted, checked in and onwards to departure for our flight. Security was entertaining, as I had tried to keep main luggage weight down by putting heavier items in my day sack. Including tent pegs!! I got

what can only be described as a hard time from the others for this. Fortunately, we met a security man on a good day and I got off with it and we kept the pegs. After this, the flight itself was quite uneventful, so we arrived in Munich on time, collected our luggage and then tried to find our way out of the airport. We needed to find the S8 train, that was easy, but getting tickets from the multitude of options available from the ticket machine was a real challenge. However some helpful staff sorted us out for tickets, a woman at the information stall took a group photo, and we got the train to central Munich where we got off, onto the Underground and then surfaced in a street not mentioned in any map. OK then, ask a local.... "Take the tram, 2 stops and you can't miss it". Bets? Anyway, we took the tram, after 2 stops we got off, no sign of the hostel. Then the tram moved away and we saw this building with flags and a very large sign. Yep, no chance of missing it.

We checked in, paid the balance and then settled down – or tried to as there was a fairly boisterous school group in the same corridor, but they soon settled down. Quite a "transport day" then, cars and planes and trains (2 varieties) and trams. There's got to be a film title in there somewhere.

Wednesday 1st July: Next morning, we have to be at the bus station for 10am, so we have an early breakfast. Now having a marginally better idea of the Munich Geography and Transport system, we walk back to the U-Bahn station rather than taking the tram, take an underground train to the Central station or Hauptbahnhof where we then try to find the Bus stop for Innsbruck. This involved quite a walk, but we got there in plenty time for the "flixbus" to Innsbruck. This was crowded and we managed to find enough seats, though we were scattered all over the top deck. But it was a great journey, superb views of the changing scenery from the flat ground round Munich, all the way to the Alps and a really steep descent down to Innsbruck. Another bus now and we finally reach Thaur where we are met by Marina, one of our IVS supervisors for the work we will be doing. She heads off with half the group, the rest of us wait for a mini bus which will "soon arrive". It does and we get quite a treat. The driver has no English, but does like driving with his "foot to the boards". This works for a while, but the engine soon overheats on the steep climb to Thaur Alm. His solution is to put the heater on to full and rev the engine up. I'm not too convinced this will work. We carry on, stop again where we have another unconventional attempt at

cooling the engine. His next attempt gets us a little further, but then a slap on my leg and pointing at the door and the road indicates we have to walk the rest of the way. Who needs language with these communication skills! We get out and start walking. Fortunately it's not far and soon we're all settling into the Thaur Alm Mountain Hut.

We had missed the email which said pick up supplies in the village before climbing the hill, so we decide to have a meal at the Café. There is a party in full swing with a traditional group playing, so we get a great start to Austrian Culture. Room allocation sorted, we unpack and settle down for the evening.



Thursday 2nd July: We get up, go for breakfast and get ready to meet Marina and Thomas (another volunteer) for our day's work. We're not going too far away, so decide to return to the hut for lunch rather than take packed lunches. The walk up the hill to our work site isn't too far, but it is very warm - we have a heat wave in Austria (well most of Europe actually). The task consists of creating "Channels" and "Islands" for the cattle roaming the hills so they can get access to more and more pasture. We're given a selection of heavy duty loppers and brashing saws, working gloves too and off we go on the walk uphill. There are a

lot of electric fences around here to keep the cattle off the roads and on the hills, it is also hot, very hot, so the ascent is slow and steady. At the chosen spot, Marina points us in the right direction and we start cutting down lots of bushes and small trees then throwing the cuttings into the remaining trees. It is hard work, as might be expected, we have regular water stops, but you can soon see the difference. We also have an appreciative audience as quite a few cows and accompanying staff are soon investigating the newly accessible areas of grass, so we certainly are doing work which is of benefit. For lunch we go back to the hut and also get out of the heat of the midday sun. The afternoon's work follows a similar pattern; more clearing and more appreciative cattle. After another lengthy session, it's back to the hut via a very welcome water trough where some "head dunking" brought much needed cooling relief.

Then it's back down to the hut for a quiet night. Marina points out the next day's destination, much higher up the hill, where there's a monument and the promise of some great views. Since we're already high enough up the hill that we're looking down on planes on their approach to Innsbruck Airport, this promise is quite easy to believe.

Friday 3rd July: We get ready for our more adventurous trek and sort out sun screen, plenty of water and packed lunches for the day. Marina and Thomas arrive and we head off for the morning shift slightly higher up than the day before, planning to walk up to the monument for lunch and to get ready for the afternoon session. As the morning wears on, however, we hear more and more thunder rolling around the hills. Marina and Thomas keep on phoning weather centres and reluctantly decide we need to get off the hill as the bad weather is coming our way. This makes for a much quicker descent than the day before, the water trough is ignored. We get back to the hut in time to avoid the rain, and then stand at doors and windows watching quite an impressive lightning display. Thomas and Marina leave us as even when it stops, the slopes would be too slippery, so our plans of lunch near the monument go too. We have lunch in the hut, and when the rain stops, decide to go for a walk up another of the many marked trails there are around the hut. This takes us to the top of a hill with views over Innsbruck and a guest book to sign!!

Back at the hut, card games are order of the evening as well as packing as much as we can for our departure the next morning.

Saturday 4th July: The plan is to get back to Innsbruck and find our hostel for the evening. Rather than go for transport down the hill, we arrange for the café staff to take the rucksacks down, while we will walk. Several different times are mentioned and we're not sure which one will be the actual one. Anyway, we leave the rucksacks and head off down the hill. This is much easier than going uphill and there is also

plenty shade so it is quite a pleasant walk. Some distance from the bottom we get overtaken by our rucksacks, so Ron gets the job of going with the vehicle to stand guard over our kit until we arrive – which we do about half an hour later. On to the bus and we're back at the main bus station. More research on a variety of ticket prices and options and then we're on a tram to the hostel. Getting off the tram, we stand in the middle of the road, looking very lost, so lost that a passing cyclist points up a nearby road. We follow his directions and there indeed is our hostel. Rooms sorted, partially unpacked, it's back onto the tram to the centre for a cultural "wander" around the historic centre of Innsbruck.



Sunday 5th July: The morning finds us back on the tram to the railway station and another set of tickets for local transport. The man on the ticket desk could not have been more helpful. We couldn't find any deals on ticket prices on the Internet. The official spent well over 20 minutes entering and re-entering information, asking more questions and eventually managed to get us group tickets for 70 Euros less than we could find on line. We find our train and head off for Haiming and our adventure activities. We reach Haiming and get off at the strangest station I have ever seen, there's no town in sight. We're surrounded by

fields and embankments, though there is a subway to get us off the platform. We emerge from the subway to find the town. This is a relief! Now find Camping Alm. So it's a wander along the road, through the town, over the river, along a road and we reach our base for the next week. Our first encounter with John, one of the proprietors, was a bit worrying, he doesn't have a booking for us. When he realises it's for camping rather than using their chalets, that's ok then – yes, he remembers now, so we get the tents set up in record time beside a strange looking mock castle building. A group heads off for the supermarket for the night's supplies. It's closed, as is every other supermarket in Austria on a Sunday. That's a bit of research we missed! Ah well, another café meal!



Monday 6th July: Off to the bike hire place to get kit for the day. It's still hot, so we make sure there's plenty water. We get the bikes fitted, the technician seems concerned that we don't have a guide but we manage to borrow a multi tool from him – just in case. No spare inner tubes though, but we have the tool!! Off we go, follow the arrows we were told, and it works well too. Out into the countryside and we find that the arrows take us into Area 47, a really impressive water park and climbing centre, though the prices are a bit more than we would have liked. Back on the

tracks heading for the Piburg See. Mostly flat so far, then we hit the hill. Ouch! It's no worse than some in the Borders, but the ones back home we don't do in 35° heat. The pace slows and slows. The cyclists in the group manage to keep peddling. Most others get off and walk. We eventually reach the Piburg See and most go in for a swim. The water is such a relief after the hill, so quite some time is spent there before a picnic lunch we had brought with us. Then it's on to the bikes for the return journey. The hill is so different, now that gravity is on our side!! Mind you, we did have some spills on the way down and one leader's clothing and skin were in a wee bit worse condition by the bottom. All safely at the bottom of the hill, it was a relatively leisurely return to Haiming.

After the return, we try to see if any of the Activities folk can provide a glacier walk, as well as arranging a tour to Neuschwanstein with Gary and John. The glacier walk isn't looking too hopeful though due to the warmth. Tonight's meal is a barbecue

Tuesday 7th July: One of our "filler days" - we don't have any activity booked, we will just fend for ourselves. There's a nice wee lake in the hills just above Haiming, so that will be our target for today. We set off. For the first couple of miles until we reach the hill there's no shade and it's hot. We carry on up the hill at a steady, if slow, pace - if anything it's getting hotter. When we're maybe half way to our target it's getting obvious that the heat is proving too much for a group of Scots not quite used to walking in the heat. Snow, rain, hail, yes, but heat, no! We invade a wee café on the hill for shelter and refreshment, then opt to take a different route down the hill, arriving at the other end of Haiming where there's an outside swimming pool. Decision made, we head down the path shown on the map. The path disappears!! We follow tracks in the approximate direction we want and, after a few dead ends, we make it back out on to the road, slightly downhill of the café we left over an hour before. Ah well, we're putting the "Exploration" into B.E.G. We reach Haiming where most of the group head for the pool while a "sub group" goes back to the camp site to see about arranging activities for the next couple of days. Option 1, a bus for Neuschwanstein on Wednesday, isn't possible - we can only get the bus on Thursday. OK, that will have to do, so now let's see about arranging something for Wednesday. Our rafting folk can't do anything for us, but Feelfree next door can manage something. A Glacier walk still isn't a possibility, but via ferrata is, as is canyoning. When the others get back, we have a group discussion. 10 folk want to go canyoning, 5 don't. So we have Wednesday and Thursday sorted.



Wednesday 8th July: 2/3 of the team head off canyoning with Jorge. This turns out better (much better) than expected. Yes, we're walking / wading / scrambling down an alpine stream. What we didn't know was it started with a 17m abseil. No one had mentioned that, and some of our team have a fear of heights. Oops! Team support kicks in big style, and with lots of encouragement we are all safely at the bottom of this first abseil after a few minutes. We set off downstream where we have a series of slides, jumps, climbs and even some short stretches of via ferrata as well thrown in free of charge. It's a really challenging

activity on all levels, though the kit and especially all the climbing fixings all the way down make for a very safe experience. All too soon we reach the bottom, where Jorge sets a fire going to cook up some Cheese Spatzl (an Austrian favourite) for us. When the others get back to the site, we hear of their adventures. Then off to the train station to buy tickets for Oetz, only to find out that there isn't a train, but the tickets bought at the train station are for the bus!! Next, a cable car to the top of the hill and a wander about in the area we could have done the glacier walk, with much of the time spent sheltering from a passing thunderstorm. So, the general conclusion for the day was that, although sad that we didn't get the glacier walk, it wouldn't have been too pleasant that day, and the canyoning was a very acceptable alternative.



Thursday 9th July: We're off to Neuschwanstein Castle in the company of Gary, acting as our arranger and tour guide. It's back in Germany, so we have another tour of the countryside. We stop at a viewpoint with an impressive view of Germany's highest mountain, the Zugspitze, then on to the Castle. Gary gets us a tour booked for 12:40, so we have time to wander around, and down to the bridge over the Marien Brücke for the classic photo opportunity with the castle as a backdrop. We go back up to the Castle, have a picnic lunch, then up to the top courtyard.

Here, some rather bemused tourists get an unexpected bonus of witnessing Chloe's graduation. Her class mates are having their graduation ceremonies back in Scotland. Chloe missed out on that to come to Austria, so we managed a wee ceremony with mortar board (baseball cap, cardboard, black plastic and some tinsel) and a cape (two bin liners). Maybe not the standard materials, but it looked fine from a distance and in the photos. Then it's back down to the entrance in time for our tour where we got all the information about King Ludwig, the history of Neuschwanstein and other castles and descriptions of the

various rooms. One room had over 130 swans in it - we were challenged to find them but decided just to take the guides word for it. Other rooms had everything you would expect to find in a castle, elaborate furniture and materials, huge chandeliers, impressive paintings and swans everywhere!! Back on to the bus and we head for Haiming via Oberammergau where we could view the world famous theatre, the Christmas shop (in July!!) and enjoy ice creams.

Friday 10th July: White water rafting day, our other activity booked in advance. We team up with an unsuspecting Dutch couple for this, get kitted up in wet suits, boots and set off for Rafting on the Inn. Again, we have a mix of folk who like this sport and others of a more nervous disposition. At the start, there are some 20 rafts. One of the guides for another company, Magnus Ritchie from Selkirk, is in charge of 8 rafts with folk on and doesn't sound like he's really looking forward to his day. We decide to set off early, and avoid them. The rafting is the usual mix of big bouncy waves, flat stretches in between where we have "fights" between rafts pushing each other in, splashing each other, swimming beside the raft. Folk who like water sports are in their element while some others are less enthusiastic. In fact, one venture is so nervous she is actually physically sick, fortunately in the river rather than the raft. Talk about "facing up to your fears"! The embarrassing moment for me came when I pulled in one of the other rafters who was facing away. As he fell in, I noticed he wasn't "one of ours", but the poor Dutchman. Oops! He didn't seem too upset by the experience. Back at the camp site, we have a celebratory Schnapps. With a fair amount of the day left we return to the swimming pool and then spend the evening preparing for the return journey.

Saturday 11th July: We begin the long journey home via Munich. Up early to catch a train back to Innsbruck, we are grateful for Gary who helps out by driving our rucksacks to the station, so we just have to walk with day sacks. On this easy walk we have our most spectacular injury of the tour when Ron stumbles on a pavement, removing quite a lot of skin from arm, shin and knee. The train is on time (Austrian efficiency) and we're soon back in Innsbruck and over to the bus stop for Flixbus to Munich. This time we do manage to get seats with each other and we bid farewell to Austria. We have another scenic journey back to Munich, and, with a better idea of how the ticketing system works, we're soon at our hostel. As it's fairly close to the Marienplatz, one of Munich's tourist attractions, we decide to walk there to see what's happening and arrive to find we have hit the grand finale of Munich's gay pride week. There is a free concert in full swing in the square, lots of rainbow flags and a fair few folk who've had a drink or two too many, but all in all quite an atmosphere.



Sunday 12th July: We go for a "wander" round central Munich and generally head past many of the tourist sights towards the English Gardens. Much bigger than Hyde Park, bigger even than NY's Central Park we are told. We find a stage area and watch a variety of entertainment with Bavarian dancers, a troupe in lederhosen cracking whips in time to music, Alpen Horns, amongst others, so we certainly see quite a lot of culture. Munich supermarkets are also closed on Sunday, so again we end up in a restaurant, eating pizzas this time.



Monday 13th July: Today we travel to the former concentration camp at Dachau. The S train from the Hauptbahnhof is busy and when we get off the train for the bus, it is jam packed. There are far more folk at the site than expected and the queue for the audio guides is going to take a while. We agree a time to meet up and folk go their own ways to view the exhibits, the preserved buildings and learn about the horrors that took place here. The exhibits, information boards and pictures give a very real impression of what took place in Dachau, but

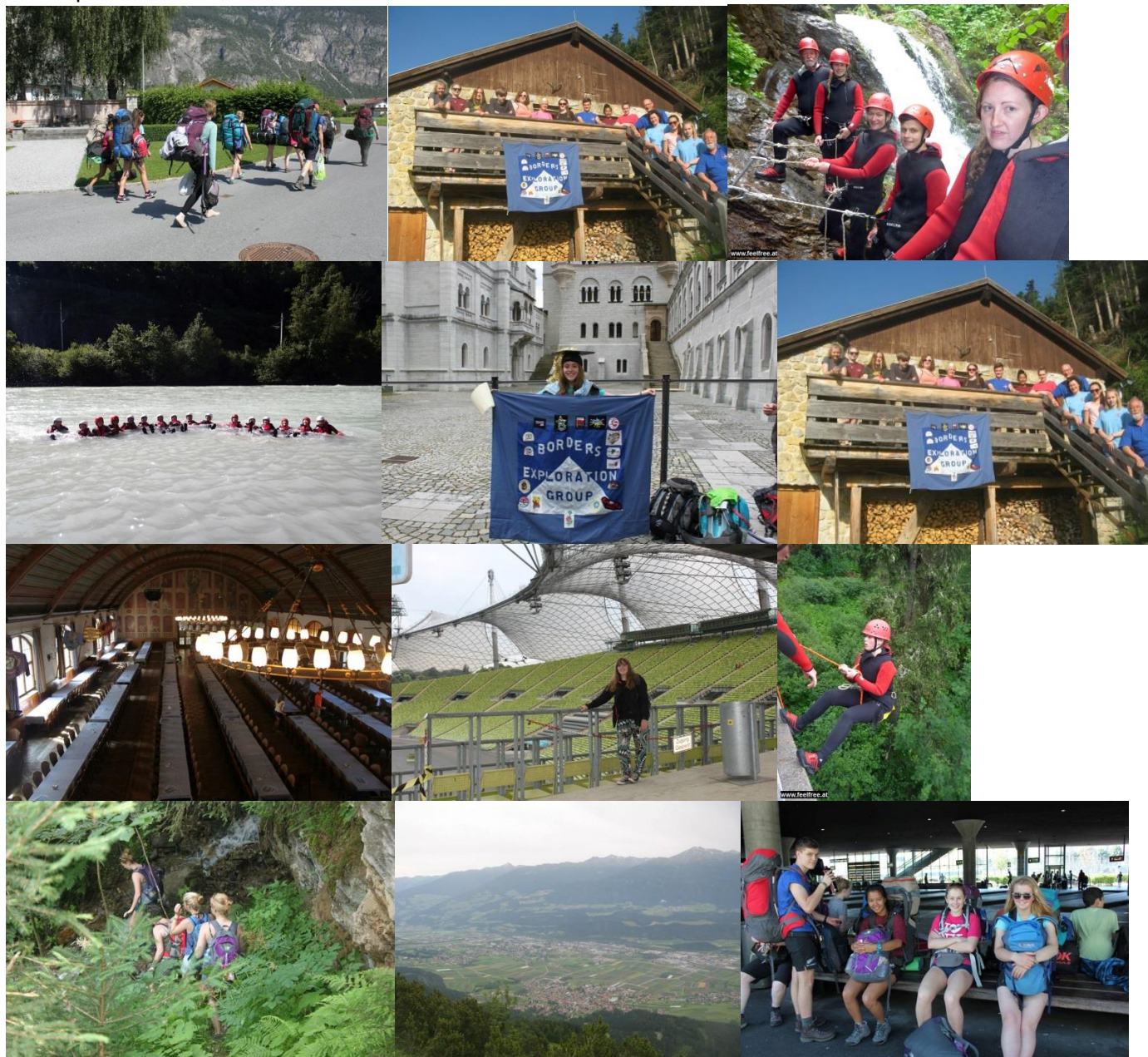
somehow for me, the sheer number of folk milling around makes it seem more like a tourist attraction than

a memorial site. It is still the size of the Dachau Camp that makes you appreciate the numbers who died here, and then the board that shows how many other camps there were adds to the enormity of the crimes committed.

After Dachau, we head back to the centre of town and then out to the Olympic park, site of the 1972 Olympic games, and finally back to the hostel for the last night on our Expedition.

Tuesday 14th July: We finally have the Munich transport ticketing system cracked and it takes less than a couple of minutes to get our tickets for the journey to the airport. We have quite a late flight, so leave our rucksacks behind the bar and head off back to the Marienplatz where we arrange a meeting point and let folk head off in their wee groups for the last day in Munich. Regrouping early afternoon, we collect rucksacks from the hostel, use the U-bahn from Goetheplatz to Marienplatz for the last time, transfer to the S-Bahn for the journey to the airport and arrive there in plenty time. The German travellers are much more polite than in Edinburgh and basically ignore us as we stuff rucksacks etc. back into the rice sacks for the return journey. Check-in is quite painless, security too (no tent pegs this time) and we're soon on the Easyjet flight home to waiting relatives, friends and the conclusions of BEG's 18th expedition.

Jim Mcpherson



BRAZIL 2017

Do you consider yourself a leader?
We want to hear you roar!

BRAZIL SUMMER 2017



Borders Exploration Group

Contact us: brazil@borders-exploration-group.org.uk
More information on dates and venues at:
borders-exploration-group.org.uk/brazil
David: 07885781875 Nancy: 07792221449

8th October 7.30 pm
Scottish Borders Campus
Room 1005
Nether Road
Galashiels TD1 3HE

Leader selection weekend: 6th – 8th November 2015

For all prospective venturers – more information will be forthcoming, but keep the following date free! It could change your life!

Venturer selection day: Sunday 14th February 2016

Email: brazil@borders-exploration-group.org.uk

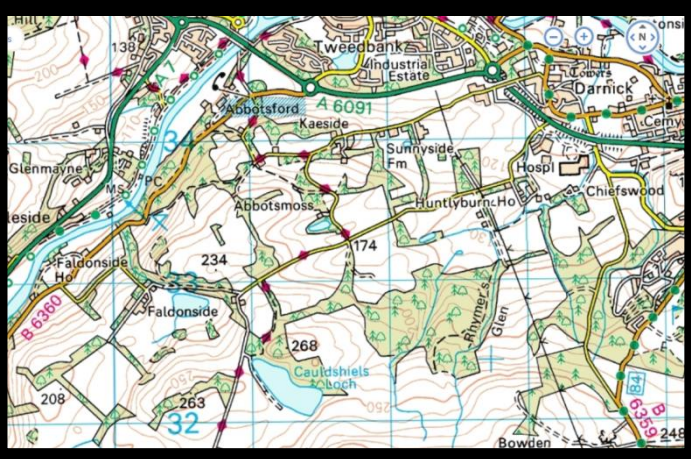
David: [07885781875](tel:07885781875)

Nancy: [07792221449](tel:07792221449)

BEG MEMBERS EVENTS

Walk by Abbotsford, 24th June 2015

Geraldine organised this evening walk. It was to stroll around the area to the south of Abbotsford House, taking in Cauldshiels and Faldonside Lochs and the River Tweed.



There was a total of three people on the walk, which was a bit disappointing, maybe because the weather was so dreich and unpromising. So Geraldine, Ron and Shirley (Ron's sister in law), set off up the hill towards Cauldshiels Loch. Although the weather was not very pleasant we were to enjoy an excellent walk filled with wildlife and incident. As can be seen on this page there are illustrations showing the wildlife and not so wild life we bumped into. The first animal to appear for us was a roe deer in the field to the

west of the minor road we were climbing. It was very close and lingered for some time so we got a very good look at the hind before it bounced away into the woods. Our next encounter was with a cow that had got out of the field it was supposed to be in. It was on the farm track we were negotiating and of course it just ran in front of us for a distance before jumping the fence with some ease and running back behind us in the big field we had entered. At this point we



were in a field of long grass which I saw moving around in front of us. Suddenly a badger broke cover and rushed for the woods across our path. Geraldine wanted to know what it was doing out and about at such an early hour and in



broad daylight. As the day had been so wet earlier, the paths were strewn with many sizes and colours of slimy slugs; maybe not so exciting wildlife? Our next stage of the walk took us through a field of cows with calves which we crossed with care, sticking to the sides of the field. Geraldine at this point explained that this was not a recognised route, but one that she had just found through exploring the area. The route was blocked at points with locked gates which had to be negotiated and to her embarrassment Shirley sort of fell off one while climbing over. However she was unhurt apart from pride and carried on. A short distance after this we had to negotiate a field of cows but Geraldine assured us that her Grandad had taught her how

to deal with them and brandished a big stick...just in case!

The walk then descended to Cauldshiels Loch, which we skirted the north side of through the woods, spotting fish rising in the loch, swans and also some birds like a thrush flitting through the branches. There was a bit of litter scattered around a campfire that had not been disposed of so Geraldine carried it to a bin near where the path comes into the wood.

Now it was really downhill more steeply, passing Faldonside Loch which is much less accessible, thence into a steep field that leads down to the C class road that passes Abbotsford further east. We crossed this and made our way to the Tweed where we spotted more birdlife such as gulls, heron, and ducks. No salmon jumping but a few trout showing interest in the evening fly hatch. This is a very pleasant stroll on well munched grass courtesy of the horses there. Then up through the woods to Abbotsford House and Visitor Centre where the car was parked.



The three of us agreed a very nice walk had been enjoyed and would recommend it to any BEG member who wanted to spot the wildlife that we had encountered... if they are lucky!

Ron Sutherland



Coldingham Beach Day, 15th August 2015

A great day was had on Coldingham beach with the BEG crew. The sun was out, picnics were enjoyed, with a fun game of rounders (destroying 2 of my bats!), followed by a dip in the sea. Attempting some surfing and bodyboarding on the waves, great fun was had by all! And a day on the beach just wouldn't be right without fish and chips to finish off. Thanks to everyone who made the effort to come along!

Julie Smith



Future events:

September: Weekend of 25th-27th - Hike up Scafell Pike, England's highest peak, on the Saturday, starting at 10 a.m. in Langdale near Ambleside. Come and go as you like over the weekend – for further details see your emails or the BEG website.

October: 24th, the North Ettrick Ridge walk near the Grey Mare's Tail.

November: Ice Skating with Julie, date to be confirmed.

December: 4th, Christmas night out. Venue to be confirmed.

Jan/Feb: 30th, Banff Mountain Film Festival, Saturday matinee and/or evening selections of films. <http://www.banff-uk.com/> More details nearer the time.

You will receive invitations by email to each event as and when it approaches – but, mark them in your diaries! Please feel free to invite any friends who are unaffiliated with BEG to come along. We do, however, encourage anyone who has attended 3 or more events to become a Member of BEG. Check e-mails and the BEG website www.borders-exploration-group.org.uk for more details.