

Border Exploration Group Austria Expedition Report

30 June - 14 July 2015

Contents

Section	Written by	Page
Introduction to the expedition	Jim McPherson	2
Group members and buddies	Geraldine Bouglas	4
Research / destination profile	Ron Sutherland	6
Fundraising	Chloe Purves	10
Training	Cheryl Brydon	12
Medical (before the trip)	Pat Sutherland	18
Emergency Response Group	Geraldine Bouglas	20
Travel	Giuliana Di Lorenzo	21
Accommodation	Jo Arres	24
Environmental Phase	Francis Brosnan	26
Social and Cultural Phase (Innsbruck)	Charoltte Chorlton	29
Adventure Phase (cycling)	Lia Graham	31
Adventure Phase (canyoning)	Stuart Briggs	33
Adventure Phase (cable car)	Pat Sutherland	36
Social and Cultural Phase (Neuschwanstein and Oberammergau)	Chloe Purves	37
Adventure Phase (rafting)	Bethany Thomson	39
Social and Cultural Phase (Munich)	Geraldine Bouglas	40
Social and Cultural Phase (Dachau)	Marisa Cove	41
Medical (during the trip)	Pat Sutherland	43
Finances / treasurer	Nicola Stillie	44
Catering	Pat Sutherland	45
Group diary	All	49
Acknowledgements	All	66

Report collated and produced by Geraldine Bouglas

Introduction to the expedition

After the selection of Austria as a venue for an expedition a number of people asked why we had chosen Austria, as it did not seem to be a place that needed help!

It seems that Borders Exploration Group has placed into the minds of people in the Scottish Borders that we, as an organisation go to places to do some kind of project, which works with the local people to leave a legacy that benefits them in some way. I am really pleased that this is an image that people have of the organisation as it is a very positive one. However, although one of the phases of our expeditions almost always includes a community project, this need not always be the case. The main reason for the existence of BEG is as an educational organisation, which is attempting to improve the education of young people in the Scottish Borders, as laid out in the aims below:

- **To assist in the physical, mental and spiritual development of young people through the challenges of expeditions – both overseas and at home**
- **To raise awareness of environmental concerns in young people, through recreational activities of an enterprising and explorative nature**
- **To help young people develop a sense of identity and self-worth, while offering the chance to encounter and begin to understand other cultures and people**
- **To develop communication skills and to learn the value and enjoyment of working as a team**

So, we are trying first and foremost to help young people here in the Borders through the expeditions that we undertake. Helping the communities that we visit is of secondary importance to us, although we always try to incorporate that element if possible.

The “personal development” aspect of the Austria 2015 expedition was always going to be the dominant feature, though we still carried out research into finding some kind of Community or Environmental project we could get involved in.

The biggest single advantage in selecting Austria as a likely destination was the ease of travel (a direct flight from Edinburgh to Munich) good contacts for Adventure Activities (a near neighbour working as a raft guide in the Tyrol) and the safety factor of travel to a European country with a stable political regime.



Leaders researched the options of overland travel to Austria, though this turned out to be significantly more expensive than a direct return flight. On the Community phase, we found a group (Community Service International) who put us in touch with a Community at Thaur Alm where we managed to get involved with a suitable environmental project - with the added benefit of included accommodation.

By now, it was clear that intercity and local travel were to be significant features of the expedition, so as well as the flights, we made bookings in advance for the major internal journey (Munich to Innsbruck). Local travel we decided to leave until arrival.

Also significant was what accommodation would be available to us. We had the use of a Hut at our Community phase, agreed to use BEG tents for the Adventure phase, leaving us to arrange accommodation in hostels for our time in Munich and Innsbruck

For Adventure activities, a former pupil, arranged both camping and some activities. Others were arranged on-line before we left with the "finishing touches" to our adventure programme being left to arrange on site when we would have a clearer idea of available funds as well as direct contact with the different providers in Haiming

This meant that by the time of our departure, the main travel plans were in place, all the accommodation had been arranged, a Community activity had been sourced and we had some of the adventure activities sorted. We were left with the logistics of local travel and food purchasing to carry out in our travels. We had activities arranged for 3 days of 5 in Haiming, our base for adventure activities leaving us to decide on activities for the other 2 days once "on site". For our time in Munich and Innsbruck we were also able to plan visits and other plans for our cultural phase once there.

Jim McPherson – Chief Leader, Austria 2015



Expedition logo – by Nicola Stillie

Group members and buddies (↔)

Jo Arres



Venturer - Selkirk

Marisa Cove



Venturer – Selkirk

Geraldine Bouglas



Leader - Selkirk

Chloe Purves



Leader - Jedburgh

Stuart Briggs



Venturer - Kelso



Francis Brosnan

Venturer - Melrose

Charlotte Chorlton



Venturer - Kelso



Bethany Thompson

Venturer - Innerleithen



Research and destination profile by Ron Sutherland

Finding Contacts, Accommodation and Activities

An expedition has a number of phases for which there has to be a contact made within the receiving country so that the expedition can carry out its activities there. Sometimes one contact is made and through that one contact we can set up all of the phases, if the contact is willing and able to do this for us. However, in the case of Austria, although we had Douglas Rae as a very helpful contact in Haiming for the adventure phase, the other elements of the expedition had to be organised by personal research through the internet.

Environmental Phase

This was our main contact with the local people in our expedition, as well as being an environmental project. It is very difficult to imagine having a project where we could work with the local community to improve their amenities, as Austria is so well developed. The environment however can always require help in some way and so it was in this area that we found a project. This was achieved through an organisation called International Voluntary Service Great Britain. A contact was made with their Edinburgh Office. They got in touch with the Karwendel Naturpark. They have a link with the university in Innsbruck. The university runs projects in the Thaurer Alm above the village of Thaur which lies to the north east of Innsbruck. So eventually after a long list of emails we secured a project with them to clear the alpine pastures of invading dwarf pines to allow their cattle to get to the otherwise inaccessible grass.

Adventure Phase

As previously alluded to Douglas Rae was our very helpful contact for the adventure phase. He is a former pupil of Selkirk High School so was known to Jim McPherson our Chief Leader. Douglas was contacted and although he has moved jobs to Italy he provided the very valuable link to Haiming where we based our Adventure Phase. A meeting was held with Douglas when he was home on a visit before he returned to work in Italy and this really cemented the location of our adventure block. He outlined all the activities that would be available in the area and they fitted with the type of things that the group had settled on tackling in Austria. His girlfriend was still in Haiming and through Douglas we booked our mountain biking and lake swimming with her company. Douglas also suggested that we base our camping at the Rafting Alm which happened to be right next to the river where the rafting companies finish the rafting journeys on the River Inn. This was done with the Rafting Alm hotel which is owned and run by a couple of British men. They turned out to be very helpful to us when we stayed there. There were other activities such as canyoning, via ferrata and glacier walks suggested as being available, but due to economic constraints and weather to be considered we decided to leave firming them up until we got to the destination. We also were keen to break up the adventurous activities with something cultural. The suggestion for this was a visit to Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria, just over the border. Research was done into using local buses for this but the journeys were just too long to allow us to complete the trip in one day. Douglas had suggested that we could contact a local bus/taxi company when there which would perhaps work out cheaper and more feasible.

When we were still in the UK we tried to contact companies about glacier hiking, but it seems that they use sub-contracting for this and so when they were asked about it they were a bit evasive and would not commit to providing it through their company. On reaching Haiming it proved very hard to contact someone to conduct a glacier walk for us and in the end they turned us down because it was too late to make the arrangement.

Douglas also tried to provide contacts to lead walks in the area for us but that again proved to have barriers as the people contacted pleaded lack of qualifications or insurance difficulties. This eventually led to us having to lead the walk ourselves.

The white water rafting proved to be easy to arrange with the company based at the Rafting Alm campsite and was booked before leaving the UK.

The area around Haiming is very much geared up to water based activities and trying to arrange alternatives in advance proved very difficult indeed.

Accommodation

Our accommodation was very varied on the expedition. It consisted of hostels in Munich and Innsbruck, a mountain hut at Thaurer Alm and tents at the Rafting Alm. When we flew out to Munich we had booked a hostel, Haus International for the night and this was easy to arrange. Our next sleeping quarters was the mountain hut. We managed to get this arranged through the Innsbruck University contact. We had offered to camp there but the Thaurer Alm Hutte/Restaurant had accommodation in an adjoining building that we were offered free of charge. Originally we were asked to pay £500 for all of the arrangement at the environmental project, but that was dropped at a later point. The contact to make this arrangement was IVSGB and we felt that at times translation was causing difficulties in understanding what we were actually being asked to agree to. However all turned out to be very satisfactory in the end.

The Innsbruck hostel was more difficult to secure. As we were now into July the cost had risen dramatically and this proved to be our most expensive night on the trip. We stayed in the only hostel that the internet could come up with which was Hostel Marmota. Some negotiation through Hostel Bookers had to be made before they would accept us however and so the costly booking fee to them was grudgingly accepted.

Camping was for the remainder of our time in Austria at Haiming and once the difference between the Rafting company and the Rafting Alm hotel was established we were able to book the camping with the hotel. This was at a very much more reasonable rate, including breakfast, than the alternative campsite in the village.

Back in Munich for the last three nights we could not get the first hostel and so another, Smart Hostel was acquired instead. Again this was probably as we were moving into the busier holiday period. We were also in more mixed accommodation rather than getting exclusive use of a room for our group.

Austria – Country Profile

Austria, officially the Republic of Austria, is a landlocked country in East Central Europe which borders the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Switzerland.

With an area of 83,871 km², Austria is somewhat smaller than Portugal (92,090 km²), or slightly smaller than the U.S. state of Maine.



The country is mostly dominated in the west and south by mountains (the Alps). Austria's highest point is Grossglockner mountain, with a height of 3,798 m (12,460 ft.). The major rivers north of the watershed of the Austrian Alps are the Inn, the Salzach, and the Enns, they are tributaries of the Danube. The rivers south of the watershed are the Gail and Drau rivers in Carinthia and the Mürz and Mur rivers.

Austria has a population of nearly 8.6 million people (in 2015), capital and largest city is Vienna, with a population of 1.8 million people. Spoken language is Austrian German (official), spoken regional languages are Croatian, Hungarian, and Slovene.

The Climate



A climate graph for Graz in central Austria - as can be seen the rainfall and temperatures are both highest in summer. The maximum average temperature is around 18 degrees Celcius and rainfall of 120 mm for the month of July. These have to be read with care however as they are averages and this hides a lot of the detail of what actually happens. In the daytime temperatures in July can go well beyond 20 degrees. The rainfall although it can be frontal and last throughout a day is often delivered as very heavy rain from thunderstorms that are generated by the hot summer sunshine causing convectional movement of hot humid air.

Historical context

It was once the centre of power for the large Austro-Hungarian Empire. Austria was reduced to a small republic after its defeat in World War I. Following annexation by Nazi Germany in 1938 and subsequent occupation by the Allies, Austria's 1955 State Treaty declared the country "permanently neutral" as a condition of Soviet military withdrawal.

Neutrality, once ingrained as part of the Austrian cultural identity, has been called into question since the Soviet collapse of 1991 and Austria's increasingly prominent role in European affairs. Austria joined the European Union in 1995 and the euro monetary system in 1999.

The above statistics and information is the basic make up of Austria but most people do not really have this picture of the country. On the page below is a collage of some of the more common ideas of what we associate with Austria:

Mozart



Innsbruck



Strauss



Beautiful mountain scenery

The Sound of Music

Although we have a picture in our minds of what Austria is like - mountains and fast flowing rivers, winter sports and a deep rooted classical music heritage. It is also a modern industrialised country with cities and industries akin to other countries in the western world. This has developed a country that is not cheap to run and so for the visitor can be expensive. The impact of the high cost of living in Austria is one of the main factors that had to be considered in the planning of the expedition.

Fundraising by Chloe Purves

The group for the Austria expedition was later than normal in being established which meant that the individual fundraising target, in which a total of £600 was required for the trip, was quite tight. After the selection weekend on the 7-8th February we only had 15 weeks to raise the funds. Monthly targets were set by Nicola (treasurer) with all money to be paid by the end of May and no one had a problem meeting these targets. There were a number of innovative fundraising ideas - Lia sourced scrap wood from a local company which she chopped into kindling size before bagging into sacks which she mainly sold to stove owners. Some of the leaders (Nicola, Chloe, Emma and Geraldine) rented a pop up shop in Galashiels where they held a brick n' brack and sold homemade cakes and chutney.

A bake sale was undoubtedly the most popular activity. I think almost everyone did some sort of baking. In Stuart's case his gran made loads and loads of tablet which he sold at Kelso High School. The Kelso girls (Charlotte, Lia and Giuliana) also held a bake sale at school, as did the Selkirk girls (Marisa and Jo) which went really well. But Bethany was queen of the bakes sales; she held three in total - two at school (Peebles High) and one at the old folks home which she combined with a raffle.

There were two coffee mornings held – one by Giuliana in Morebattle, Kelso, which provided the majority of her funds (the remainder was raised from a sponsored walk around Kelso) and the other by Chloe in Jedburgh where she also sold handmade crafts and jewellery. Her Scottie Dogs proved very popular and after fulfilling all orders (with help from her mum) she made a total of 50 dogs which secured almost all her funds, some of which she donated to group funds.

Other activities included a crossword competition, doing jobs for family and sponsorship from work.



The group supported a number of local events too. Emma, Nicola, Geraldine and Stuart directed runners at the Kelso marathon and Nicola and Francis did one in Melrose as well. Ron, Pat, Jim, Chloe and Geraldine supported the mountain biking marathon in Selkirk by either marshalling or working the food stand.

During the second training weekend the group raised money for group funds doing the annual BEG clean up at the cricket club after Selkirk Common Riding Sports Day.

Initially there was no plan to have a group fundraiser for Austria due to the short timeframe and absence of a community project. After the success of the leaders (Chloe, Emma and

Nicola) quiz night in Selkirk and having discussed the activity options against the budget it was proposed that a group fundraiser would assist the resources and provide a good opportunity for us to work together as a group. Therefore a quiz night was organised at the Abbey Row in Kelso, given that majority of the group were from or near there. Thirteen teams entered and Ron and Emma's questions provided a good laugh all round.

The winning group was none other than our amazing 'Austria training team', *The Doodles*.:



The quiz raised an astonishing amount, just short of £650 which allowed us to do a number of the 'extras' in Austria.

Training - The Austria 2015 Training Team Members were:

Christine Anderson - Previous involvement with BEG as a venturer on the 2003 expedition to Peru, and co-chief leader on the expedition to Cuba in 2012. I was a committee member during 2010-12 and 2014-15 and was keen to use the experience I'd gained in my previous expedition roles, to provide the Austria team with a fun, adventurous and challenging training program.

Cheryl Brydon - Previously involved with BEG as a leader on the 2014 expedition to Malawi. My specific role was the community phase coordinator. I was keen to continue to be involved with BEG as an organisation so I was excited when I was asked to join the training team for Austria.

Ross Purves - I first got involved with BEG in 2011 when applying to be a leader for the 2012 expedition to Cuba. After being selected, I travelled with the group completing a successful expedition whilst fulfilling my role as environmental phase coordinator. Upon my return, I joined the BEG committee and have remained an active member of the organisation since.

Each expedition team undertakes a series of training weekends in the months preceding departure and these are considered as important a part of the expedition as time spent away. The aims of the training are to equip the team with a set of hard skills that will allow them to carry out their expedition activities, the ability to cope with the daily stresses of an expedition and the knowledge to act safely and in the best interests of the team should any unexpected situations arise.

The weekends are planned and overseen by the training team who meet with the chief leader after selection to discuss specific skills needed for the proposed destination. Although the Austria expedition itinerary had not been finalised at the planning stage, we allowed for the activities most likely to take place; trekking (map reading, navigation & compass skills), community work and use of the German language.

Initially the training team takes a big role in the organisation and running of the weekends, gradually reducing to observation and guidance as the expedition team ready for departure.

Austria Expedition: Training Agenda

Team health & welfare	Practical Skills	Other Team Organisation
Health & Hygiene	Personal Organization	Entertaining/cultural activities.
Fitness	Navigation/Map reading	Environmental Awareness
First Aid	Base Camp Planning	Logo – Team Clothing (publicity)
Emergency procedures	Expedition equipment	Fundraising
Safety and Risk Management	Community Work	
Team working, dynamics and relationships	German lessons – every training weekend	
Buddy system	Catering	
Golden Rules	Rucksack packing	

Borders Exploration Group takes expedition training very seriously to ensure the safety of the team during their expedition. Commitment to the training is key to ensure that all individuals are equally able members of the team that have the knowledge and skills required to undertake the expedition.

Austria Expedition training programme:

The training programme for a 2 week European expedition is generally based around 3 training weekends. The timetable for training weekends should be set by the training team and chief leader at the outset.

The challenge that the training team has, is to manage the amount of information to be given to the team during the course of a weekend, with activities that both teach and test the group. Often the weekends are arduous, both physically and mentally challenging, but enjoyable.

The Austria Selection Weekend was Sat 7th Feb (leaders) Sun 8th Feb (Venturers). This was followed by:

First Training Day – Sunday 22nd Feb

The main aim of the first training day was to engage the whole team with the planning of the expedition and begin to learn a little about the country that they are to visit. Preparation had been done by the leaders in advance on individual expedition components; cultural and social activities + associated travel; travel: 1.flights, 2.bus & ferry; trekking & accommodation; environmental activities; adventure activities.

The presentation of information was clear and the team split into smaller groups to begin discussing the options. BEG always aims to have full team participation in the organization of the expedition by venturers and leaders and this was an effective way to begin the planning process which would be carried on at leader meetings and further training weekends.

Blindfolded rope maze

This activity which involved the whole team walking through the woods blindfolded following a roped trail worked very well allowing the team to work on communication. The trail leader was changed at regular points allowing each member of the team to lead the group.

Information Sessions:

Equipment

A brief introduction to kit and how to pack your rucksack with a demonstration and Q+A. Given early in the training allowing time to fundraise and source equipment. A more engaging way to deliver this might be to allow the team to write a list of what they think is essential to the expedition before revealing the contents of the rucksack.

Expedition Health

This is a necessary information session, which was given by one of the leaders. It is important that the team understand how to minimize the risks to their own health and how to keep the team healthy.

The information sessions were mixed with a couple of more physical activities to keep the group engaged - Blindfolded team tent race, again a team building activity but with the added challenge of learning to pitch a tent and a German language game.

Training Weekend 1 – Fri 20th- Sun 22nd March

An important part of the first training weekend was to see how the team would bond and work together for a full weekend away from home. Although the group had met and spent time together at the selection days and the first training day, this was the first time they would spend a full weekend as a team. This was also our first opportunity to pack in a lot of practical skills training.

It was decided that since the Austria expedition was likely to involve a lot of walking, a 2 day walking weekend was an essential part of the training. On Friday night we slept in a hall at Broadmeadows, then on Saturday morning hiked to Yair, via Minch Moor and the Three Brethren. We camped at Yair, then on Sunday morning walked back to Broadmeadows, along a shorter route, but carrying full packs.

Responsibilities

Our first full weekend allowed us the chance to give the team shared responsibilities such as cooking breakfast, cleaning dishes and allocating duty leaders. This is important because these roles will continue throughout training and during the Austria expedition. We also began to give more responsibility to the leader team, who planned various activities throughout the weekend, including ice breakers and an observational task. The leaders also had the responsibility of presenting their Austria plans so far, to the venturers.

Map Skills

Since the expedition as likely to include long walks, we included some key map reading skills in the training. The team were asked to plot the two walking routes on a map and complete route cards, to be used during the walks.

Base Camp

As the team were likely to be camping in Austria, it was important to learn how to set up a base camp. The team completed an activity which allowed them to discuss where particular parts of the camp might go, and discuss the reasons for their choices. We then decided on the best options, as a team, and designed a base camp plan. When we arrived at Yair we were able to see the team execute their base camp plan in a real life situation.

Walking

Including walking in the training is important because it allows the team to see what level of fitness is expected for the expedition. This means that, if necessary, they can increase their personal exercise and improve fitness before they go. It is also a good opportunity for us to test out the kit that the team are considering taking with them. It was essential to include a hike with full packs because this was a possible activity in Austria, walking with packs can be very difficult without a well-fitting bag and comfortable boots. The team were able to decide whether or not their equipment was right for them, before it was too late.

Egg Babies

Egg babies is a fun, extra activity where the team are asked to carry an egg for a period of time, without it breaking. The team were also asked to name their eggs, give them a back story and decorate them according to their egg's personality. This was included in the training because we identified a need for the team to break down some barriers and bond as a team. Egg babies is a great way to get people talking.

Trangias

It was likely that the team would be using trangias for cooking while they were in Austria, for that reason we included some training on using trangias. We also used trangias for the evening meal.

First Aid

We did some light first aid training during this expedition. We gave the team various first aid scenarios and asked them to decide, in small groups, what they would do in each situation. On the Sunday we arranged a staged emergency scenario on route, where the team discovered two injured walkers and needed to administer first aid. The focus for the injuries was cuts and bruises, which was considered one of the most likely situation that the group might face in Austria.

Training Weekend 2 – Fri 12th – Sun 14th June

By the time training weekend 2 came along it was much clearer what kind of project the team would be undertaking whilst in Austria; they would be doing forestry work clearing and cutting back young trees. In light of this, some relevant training was planned and a full weekend of work in Philiphaugh estate was deemed appropriate. It was reasoned that on the Saturday a hard day of labour should be planned to prepare the group for any eventuality when they travelled to Austria and also to give the group a chance to bond in a challenging and disciplined environment. A full day of cutting off and sorting plastic sheaths from young trees in the forest offered exactly the type of training required, especially given the testing terrain provided by the brambles. The venturers and group as a whole were not perturbed and showed an excellent attitude in completing more work than expected.

For this training weekend, the responsibility of planning and organising was handed over, almost completely, to the Austria leader team. This is a very important part of training because the training team do not go on the expedition. It is therefore vital that they have

experience of planning, organising and leading a weekend independently of the training team. The training team's role this weekend was to observe how the team worked together and identify anything that needed to be discussed or any further training that might be needed.

Emergency Evacuation

Emergency evacuations are part of standard BEG training, we have three possible types of evacuation alert:

Red alert – which calls for an immediate response, everybody must stop what they are doing and go straight to the evacuation point. Only essential items such as shoes and a head torch should be taken.

Amber alert – which means that danger is nearby but you have time to quickly pack your kit into your survival and go to the evacuation point.

Green alert – which means that we have time to pack our bags and pack up camp quickly, before we need to evacuate.

We practised a red alert on Saturday night, this went very well. The whole team made it to the evacuation point in under a minute.

Sunday – clean up Selkirk

As is BEG tradition, we helped with the Selkirk Common Riding clear up on the Sunday. This was a good chance for the team to practise working together to help others, it is also a good fundraising opportunity for group funds.

First Aid

After the clean up, we arranged for Vicky Moyes, a Paramedic and former Chief Leader, to come and do some first aid training with the team. She covered the most likely types of illness and injury that the team might face in Austria, e.g. cuts and bruises, sprains, sunburn, sickness and diarrhoea. She also used the opportunity to give us training on how to use a defibrillator. The training was very helpful and we were very grateful to Vicky.

The final preparation was a Packing Evening which was on Monday 22 June. It has always been the case that once the rucksacks are packed (on the packing night) they should not be opened again until the team reaches their destination...

Feedback from the Austria Team

A feedback form was sent out to all of the leaders and venturers in the Austria team. It is really useful for the training team to get feedback to that we can continue to improve and make sure that the training is relevant.

The feedback suggested that the selection days had gone well. The ice breaker games were considered a good way to get to know everyone and learn names. It was good that these continued throughout training because it helped the group to bond. The rescue mission was considered very good and the team building tasks on the Sunday were a good way to get people to work together. It was suggested that more of these types of task could have been included in the training.

The days that the team were working (i.e. clearing up after Selkirk Common Riding / Philiphaugh etc.) were enjoyed by those who completed the feedback. It was noticed that they helped to get everyone working as a team.

It was said that the camping weekend was good because we had some 'down time', we built a fire, played charades and chatted. This helped the team to bond in a more natural way.

It was suggested that even though this was a short expedition, the amount of training days / weekends was not enough to sufficiently bond as a team before the expedition. Maybe some more training days or social events would have meant the team were a stronger unit before they left.

One of the leaders suggested that they would have liked some more training on leadership skills. It would be useful to have gone over some skills on how best to handle different situations that could arise within the group, how to deal with different personalities and how to bring the team together. It was also noted that the role of 'duty leader' was not always clear.

As a whole, those who gave feedback enjoyed the training and found it very useful. The training team agree with all of the suggestions raised from the feedback and will pass these onto the BEG committee for future training.

Medical (before the expedition) by Pat Sutherland

When planning an Expedition, it is essential that we know what our starting base is. Every participant is required to fill in a Medical questionnaire. It is particularly important to be able to identify anyone who has Asthma, Diabetes or a specific allergy causing anaphylactic shock. We must also know if anyone takes essential medication so that we can ensure that sufficient medication is taken to last the duration of the trip.

We must then look at the country we are visiting to establish any specific health issues associated with the area. The website www.travax.nhs.uk gives details of all the necessary and desirable vaccinations.

Austria has an excellent medical service, so we were confident of receiving appropriate medical care should it be required. However we sought from NHS Borders Public Health department; as we were to be working in the trees and meadows, it was advisable to be vaccinated against Tick Borne Encephalitis. In the event, we were fortunate in that no one suffered any tick bites.

Prevention is always much better than cure. Early in our training, we had a talk regarding preventative measures, and an information sheet was issued in advance of the expedition on the following:

	What it looks like	How to prevent it / treat it
Sunburn	Red, hot, blistered skin	Plenty sun cream, appropriate clothing – sunhat, plenty fluids
Sun stroke	Headache / nausea / dehydration	Stay in the shade at hottest times of the day, covered head, tops of shoulders and backs of legs
Insect bites	Itch and swelling	Use a repellent Use antihistamine cream or an antihistamine tablet if very itchy, but can cause drowsiness
Tummy upset	Nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Can become dehydrated	Good hand hygiene, use hand gel before food prep or eating Not sharing cutlery or plates/mugs Take Dairolyte if dehydrated
Blisters and chaffing	Red, hot, blistered skin	Wear appropriate / good fitting footwear and appropriate socks with walking boots (once footwear has been decided. Go for walks in your boots to get your feet used to them, and make sure there are no bits rubbing to form blisters) Rucksack must fit properly. Body belt and shoulder straps tightened otherwise they may rub and also cause blisters
Posture and Lifting	Short term discomfort, aches and pains	At our last Training weekend, we had an excellent talk and hands on first aid practice session with Vicki Moyes who is a paramedic and previous BEG Leader
Sprains and strains	Injuries could restrict the ability to participate in arranged activities	

In addition to the above, specific advice was given about tick bites and the risk of **Tick Borne Encephalitis**. In this country (UK), a Tick bite can cause Lyme's Disease which is treated with antibiotic. In some European countries, the Ticks can cause Encephalitis.

On checking the NHS Travel website, it does state that Ticks can be a problem in Austria. We asked advice from the group who will be running our Environmental Phase, as we will be in pastures. They suggested that we take the precaution of being vaccinated against Tick Bourne Encephalitis. The vaccine is obtained by private prescription from a GP. Two injections are required with a booster at a later date.

Each person has a 'Buddy'. The buddy must know where any essential medication is. It is also wise to carry essential medication in hand luggage in case your main bag gets lost.

A STANDARD (personal) FIRST AID KIT SHOULD INCLUDE:

- Personal/Essential Medication – your Buddy **MUST** know where this is
- Pain relief e.g. paracetamol
- Blister plasters/Compeed
- Bonjela
- Antiseptic Cream
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Antihistamine cream for possible insect bites
- Sun tan lotion/after sun (you shouldn't need this)
- Hand sanitiser
- Safety Pins
- 1 Pr Disposable Gloves

Remember..! If you are Asthmatic, you **MUST BRING YOUR INHALER**, and

YOU MUST TELL US ABOUT ANY ALLERGIES

A group First Aid Kit with a larger content is always advised during an expedition.

In addition to the above, the group were advised that Wet Wipes are a good idea, particularly on training weekends when we are wild camping.

Emergency Response Group (ERG) by Geraldine Bouglas

Every BEG expedition is supported from home by an Emergency Response Group. In Austria's case, this was made up of two experienced BEG Leaders, Rosie Stewart and Bronwen Irving, both of which had been to Malawi the year before, and Jim Fraser was our contact at Scottish Borders Council. The ERG members were provided with comprehensive information about every element of the expedition. This included:

- Contact details for each ERG member remaining in the UK
- Contact details for every expedition member's next of kin
- Contact details for every expedition members GP practice and a summary of any existing medical issues
- A final itinerary for the expedition so that the ERG knew where the group was at any given time
- A list of who were buddies and what leader joined the venturers cooking groups
- The Golden Rules for the expedition (agreed in advance by the whole group)
- A profile of each expedition member, included: Name, DoB, photo, two emergency contact details and info re their availability and/or restrictions, passport details, scanned photo of the passport, flight seat numbers
- Details for emergency contacts in Austria, including: all accommodation, project co-ordinator contact details, adventure activity provider contact details, British Embassy in Austria contact details, Austrian emergency services contact details
- An Emergency Response Plan detailing standard red, amber and green actions
- An Accident Procedure Card (to be followed by the group if required)
- A Camp Evacuation Procedure
- A remote Camp Evacuation Procedure
- A Code Red Call Procedure
- Copies of all bookings for pre booked accommodation / transport and activities
- Insurance Certificate

It was not known what access there would be to the internet, emails or even mobile phone coverage. To ensure that all essential information was available to the expedition at all times, Jim and Geraldine also took hard copies of all of the above in a folder. These had to be carried with the Group(s) (the group did split up for some activities) at all times – just in case... The hard copy folders also included the following:

- Risk assessment forms – for completion in advance of each activity undertaken by the group
- Info about suggested visitor attractions for Innsbruck and Munich

As it happened, we were able to send regular updates back to the ERG who forwarded the information on to emergency contacts.

Travel by Giuliana Di Lorenzo

On Tuesday 30/6/15 the group met at Edinburgh Airport at 2:15pm. Our flight to Munich was at 6:05pm but we had to ensure that we were all there in plenty of time in case anyone had forgotten anything and also because we had to put our rucksacks into rice bags and tape them up. Once through check-in we were all able to do our own thing while waiting for boarding to begin. We began to board the plane at 5:45pm to be ready to leave Edinburgh at 6:05pm. The plane departed from Edinburgh at 6:15pm and we arrived safely in Munich at 10:15pm (German time).



After leaving the airport we all walked down to the train station where we had to buy our train tickets and wait for our train that would take us to our hostel for the night. When the train arrived it was a quick scuttle to get all 15 of us on the train with our big rucksacks but we all managed to get on and seated for our 45 minute journey to our hostel. It was about 11:40pm when we got off of the train and walked up to the main street. From here it was only a 10 minute walk to our first hostel.

The next day we were heading to Innsbruck. When departing the hostel we walked to the bus station with all of our luggage to get the Flixbus to Innsbruck. The bus station took a little longer to find than we had thought however we got there in plenty of time and our bus was about 15 minutes late on arriving so we had even more time. When the bus arrived we all got on and seated and ready to head off into Austria. The bus was really comfortable and was a bargain at only eight euros each (worth bearing in mind for the future..).

The journey took roughly 2hrs 30 minutes which meant time to sleep for the majority of us who were tired from walking in the heat with our big rucksacks. When we arrived in



Innsbruck we walked to the bus station where we would then get a bus to Thaur to go and look at the work that we would be doing for the next two days. Not speaking the language definitely made it difficult to work out ticket machines and how to get the best deals. The bus to Thaur took about 30 minutes from Innsbruck which was fine. When we got to Thaur a woman called Marina, who worked up at the huts, came down and gave us a lift up the mountain to the place that we would be spending the next two days working up in the meadows.

After completing our environmental phase we left the huts at 9:00am and started to walk back down the mountain to Thaur where we would get a bus back to Innsbruck. It took us about 1hr 15 minutes to walk down the mountain into Thaur. We only had to walk about 10 minutes for the service bus to come to take us back in to Innsbruck. Once back in Innsbruck we got on a tram to get to the hostel that we were staying in for the night so that we could drop off all of our big rucksacks. After doing this we got on another tram to Amaral where we then walked about 10 minutes into Innsbruck where we were spending the day sightseeing. Later on in the afternoon we all headed back to the hostel for the night by getting the same tram that got us into Innsbruck.

On Sunday 5/7/15 we were heading into Haiming to start our six day adventure phase. We started the day off by getting a tram into the centre of Innsbruck where we walked to the train station. Our train to Haiming was due at 9:57am. The train was on time and the journey only took about 35 minutes from Innsbruck to Haiming. Once we were out of the train station we walked to the campsite which took us 30 minutes with all of our luggage but when we got to the campsite we realised that it wasn't actually that far and it would only take about 10/15 minutes if we were to walk without all of our luggage. We spent the next six days in Haiming doing various different activities such as white water rafting, cycling, canyoning etc.

After completing our six day adventure phase we were heading back to Munich to complete our cultural phase before heading home. On Saturday 11/7/15 we left the campsite in the morning to walk to the train station to get our train at 10:22am back into Innsbruck. The walk back to the train station didn't seem as long and tiring as it did the first time which was a plus. We waited at the train station for about 10 minutes and then our train arrived on time to take us back to Innsbruck. The journey took around 35 minutes which gave us time for a seat on the train before having to put our rucksacks back on. When we arrived back in Innsbruck we walked across to the bus station where we were getting the Flix bus once more back into Munich where we were spending our last few days before departing back home on the 14th. The Flix bus departed Innsbruck at 1:30pm and arrived safely in Munich at 4:00pm. Everyone enjoyed the Flix bus because it was one of the very few journeys that was long enough for you to actually have a sleep on. When we arrived in Munich we walked down to the underground and got the underground to near our hostel. When we got off of the underground we had to walk to the hostel which took just over 10 minutes which was good. This was the last stop before heading back to the airport to head home.

We spent three days in Munich, one of the days we went to Dachau and the other two were spent doing some sightseeing.

We did quite a lot of travelling and waiting for public transport:



On the 14th we left our hostel in the afternoon after being out for the day sightseeing. We walked to the train station which was only down the road and waited for the next train that would take us right to Munich Airport. The train journey was only about 25 minutes so most of us just perched on the end of a seat with our rucksacks still on. We arrived in the airport at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, our flight wasn't until 9:50pm so we had a bit of waiting to do. Most of us just slept, went for food or just sat and listened to music. Some of us played cards as well.

When the check-in desk opened we all queued and checked in our rucksacks and headed off to wait at the gate before being allowed to board the plane. We didn't have to wait long before being allowed to board the plane which was good because a lot of us were tired by this point and just ready to go home. When boarding began we all got onto the plane and found our seats with no problems and got ready to go home. The plane departed Munich at about 10:10pm and the flight was 2 hrs 15 minutes. We arrived back in Edinburgh at about 11:25pm where we claimed our bags and headed out of the airport to meet all of our families. Once reunited with our family we all said goodbye to one another and thank you to all of the leaders and then headed off home after a fantastic two weeks in Austria.

The Leaders room in our first hostel

Accommodation by Jo Arres

Once we arrived in Munich we made our way across town to the first youth hostel we stayed in. It was late when we arrived and we couldn't wait to go to bed. The group was split into three rooms: boys, venturer girls and leader girls. The rooms were nice and the beds comfy and we quickly fell asleep. In the morning, much to our delight, we discovered that breakfast was included so we all tucked in. After breakfast we got ready and set off to explore the city.



For our next two night we stayed in a hut up on the mountain we were working on. Half of us slept upstairs and half downstairs. The room was cosy, homely and the beds very comfy! The views of Innsbruck and the valley below were stunning and next to our hut was a traditional cafe from which we tried various dishes, these took some getting used to but on the whole were very yummy!



The facilities at the hut were pretty good, although having to shower right next to the food shopping and the freezer was a little strange..!

Our next night was spent on the outskirts of Innsbruck in a hostel called Marmota. This was the nicest hostel we stayed in and was just a short tram ride away from the city centre.

Our very own 'rat pack' at Marmota →



Accommodation for the next six nights was the tents that we had carried with us. The place where we camped was really good with toilets, showers and even a restaurant. We also had a Disney like castle as a backdrop – we discovered that it had been intended as a climbing wall but had never been completed so was not in use..!



The first night was peaceful and quiet and I think we all had a pretty good night sleep, depending on the thickness of your sleeping mat..!

Unfortunate on the second day a group of sixty school children arrived and there was not a moments silence from then on, they were as loud in the middle of the night as they were in the middle of the afternoon. The campsite went from being pristine to being a mess.

Much to our delight they left a day before we did but to our dismay an equally loud and even more so nocturnal bachelor party arrived that same day. I think for one the highlights of the campsite was the "pool" which provided relief from the heat wave which roasted us.

The final two nights were spent in a hostel in Munich. Our room of six was spacious and comfortable, the only downsides were that it was on the fifth floor and that you had to be reasonably tall to use the shower, a real problem for a few of the girls! The hostel was just walking distance from the city centre and we spent each day in town.

Environmental Phase by Francis Brosnan

The objective of the environmental work which we undertook was to protect the upland meadows and pastures near Innsbruck. Dwarf pines were encroaching on the meadows taking up space where grass for pasture would grow and blocking sunlight which prevents the grass from growing. The meadows are used as pastureland for cattle but are also a natural habitat for wild flowers such as arnica and orchids.



At first the task of removing trees to create pastureland seemed counterintuitive for an environmental project, however, the grazing which the cattle provides significantly improves the biodiversity of the meadows as it stops one species from dominating the others.

We were tasked with removing and cutting back these pine trees. Working in groups of five, we cut the trees down to the stump where possible and chopped off the lower branches of the bigger trees to increase the sunlight at ground level.

We were given large pruning shears, which were capable of cutting through branches of about 100 mm diameter. It was hard work particularly because of the weather, the temperature exceeded 30°C whilst we were working, although it was mitigated to some extent by the cooling breeze prevalent at that altitude.

We had to keep well-covered up, not just because of the sun, but also because of the ticks – a hazard of walking and working in the alpine meadows. We disposed of the foliage we'd cut within the adjacent woodland. Apart from the beautiful scenery, there was also a constant chiming of cow bells from the grazing alpine cattle.



We had planned to work for two full days but on the afternoon of the second day – as we were about to move further up the mountain to shade at the hottest part of the day - lots of large black clouds gathered above us and it started to thunder. Marina and Thomas, the two locals who were instructing us, said we needed to get off the mountain quickly. It was about a mile down the mountain to our hut and it thundered and there were lightning flashes throughout our rapid trip down the mountain – it was a bit of a rush and poor Bethany fell and broke her phone. We got down as the rain started. It then proceeded to rain solidly for the next two and half hours.

Although our environmental phase was unfortunately cut short, we all had a great time up the mountain and felt that we had made a useful contribution to the conservation efforts of the local community. No-one got a tick, but there were plenty of other insect bites. Jo was especially badly bitten despite being covered up the whole time in the blazing sun.



Some additional information about Agriculture in the Alps can be found at:

http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/where_we_work/alps/problems/agriculture/

More information about the park we worked in can be found at:

www.karwendal.org/

The organisation that helped find the project was IVS GB:

<http://ivsgb.org/info/>

Social and Cultural Phase (Innsbruck) by Charlotte Chorlton

On the 4th of July the whole group got ready to leave our hut, we were staying in the Karwendal nature reserve for the environmental phase. As we set off walking to the village Thaur it took us about a hour and half but luckily we didn't have to take our huge rucksacks as the kind people at the restaurant who owned the hut as well kindly drove them down for us so we only had to carry our small day rucksacks.

When we finally got to the bus stop we needed to get to in Thaur we didn't have any time to rest from our long walk down as the bus came straight away which we were grateful for as it was blistering hot. So everyone piled onto the bus, it took us about 20mins to get into Innsbruck and arrive at the main bus station. We all waited for Jim, Ron and Chloe to work out which mode of transportation to get so we arrive at our new hostel called Marmota. When they finally worked out which transport we should get Chloe asked Charlotte and Lia to come help her and Jim to get the tram tickets. When the tickets were all purchased we all waited for the tram to come it didn't take too long to arrive which we were all relieved by. The tram only took about 5 minutes to arrive at the hostel which wasn't too bad but as we arrived before 1:00pm we couldn't check in. The workers at the hostel let us put our heavy rucksacks in the storage room so we didn't have to carry them around until 1:00pm which was very helpful. We put all the bags away which only left us with the essentials we needed. The leaders had decided that what we were going into Innsbruck for the rest of day and we were going to eat our lunch and tea in Innsbruck which was a pleasant surprise.

We all made our way to the tram again and got off at the main bus station again. It was just after lunch time by this time so we all decided we were ready for lunch. We separated into two groups to go and find some lunch. After we had our lunch we all worked our way to the city centre to meet up with the rest of the group. On our way we saw the Triumphal Arch which Empress Maria Theresa ordered built in 1765 to honour her son, the Duke of Tuscany, getting married to Maria Ludovica of Spain.



It was also to honour her deceased husband, Francis I Stephan of Lothringen, who died during the celebrations of the wedding. As we were looking at the Triumphal we met up with the others just by accident.



When we got to the city centre the chief leader, Jim, told us that we could separate once we had gone and had a look at all the tourist attractions so we all headed to this building with the golden roof that Ron and Pat told us about during the training days. The golden roof was built in the early 15th century to honour Maximillian's second marriage to Bianca Maria Sforza of Milan.

Then we went to the city tower which is 51 meters tall and was built between 1442 - 1450, the construction of the city tower was symbolic of the citizens' growing confidence towards their human rights and freedom. After we did all of our sightseeing we were allowed to go exploring in our groups of three, it was nice to go around at our own pace to go and see what Innsbruck had to offer. When we had finished exploring and doing a bit of shopping we all met up again and got ready to find a restaurant to eat at which attended to Jo's gluten free diet. We finally found a Spanish restaurant which was very pleasant but unbelievably hot, the food was lovely and the portion sizes could feed an army.



When we finished at the restaurant we headed back for the tram and got it back to the hostel and retrieved our big rucksacks. We all got settled into the hostel and went back for a group meeting to discuss our lows and highs of the day we just had. After our meeting we were left to do what we wanted to do until we went to bed.

Adventure Phase (cycling) by Lia Graham

On the 6th of July, we all headed into Haiming to collect our bikes that we were hiring for the day at about 9:30.

When we got to the bike rental place we got a general safety talk from the bike owner. We were then suited with the bike most appropriate to each person, the sizes went from extra small to large. Within the group there were many variable sizes. (However, a lot of extra small bikes were given out). When we were all ready and happy with the safety of the bikes we headed off in the direction of Piburger-See. Soon after leaving the bike place everyone realised



how uncomfortable the bike seats were.

There was no padding and the seats were at a flat angle making it quite an unpleasant ride.

We all soldiered on in the searing sunlight towards Piburg. It was a very difficult ride on the way as it was a constant ascending hill. Even when we thought it wasn't uphill, we found we were still going up a gentle slope. The lack of detail on the leaflet/map we were using did not help as we took the wrong turning and had to double back a couple of times. Also, two people in the group had a tumble on the way to the lake but luckily they were able to carry on.



Just before we got to the lake, the final hill we were faced with was hugely steep so everybody in the group ended up dismounting and pushing their bikes up the final part. For those who weren't coping as well with the heat and demand of the bike ride, they were motivated by a snack of small chocolate bars. This was the motivation everyone was after, resulting in everybody soon arriving at the lake. It was such a relief to make it there after over three hours on uncomfortable seats, constantly biking uphill and no escape from the sun.

Even before the slower bikers of the group had made it to the lake, half of the group had already dived in and were sunbathing on the island/pontoon in the middle of the lake..!



The lake was beautiful, surrounded by huge mountains and forestry. Two of the girls in the group had recently earned their life guarding certificates so this was all put to good use when one of the venturers got into a spot of swimming bother. However, we all had a great time at the lake, especially as the water was swimming pool temperature, which surprised us all.

As a treat the leaders had brought food for our picnic lunch in their day rucksacks. It was a great treat for us after all the biking and swimming. It was a kind of buffet picnic, to which no complaints were made. One of the venturer was eager to get back in the water so ate her lunch at lightening speed and dived straight back into the lake whilst everyone else was watching in amazement as she happily continued to swim around the island.

The dreaded time to bike home came around too soon. The biggest fear in everyone's mind was getting back onto the seats. As the bikes had been sitting in the sun the seats were absolutely burning hot just to add salt to the wound! The bike home however was super and took less than half the time to get back than it did to get there. All the ride home was downhill so we barely had to pedal. Three people on the way back took a tumble and only one of which was more serious than the others. Again, those who fell didn't let that bother them so soldiered homewards. On the way back the group split into the faster bikers and the slower bikers. It was amusing how both groups had stopped at different areas waiting for the other group to catch up, with no avail obviously. This just spurred everyone to pedal home faster.

The whole day was very straining and did push everyone to their physical limit, and mental for that matter after the amount of motivation we needed to carry on. It was a good experience and the weather did lift everyone's spirits. Although there were a few tumbles everybody made it back safely with the tales to tell. All in all, it was an achievement to make it to the lake because the hills we were faced with were so strenuous.

Adventure Phase (canyoning) by Stuart Briggs

On the 8th of July the group had originally planned to go on a glacier walk but for a number of reasons (including the phenomenal heat - averaging at around 35 degrees, and the thunderstorm). Instead, after a group vote, we decided a good compromise would be to book a canyoning tour in the Alpenrosenklamm canyon. So what is canyoning? Over millions of years water has created amazing Austrian canyons. Canyoning is to follow the natural course of a stream down these canyons, overcoming obstacles as you meet them. These obstacles are overcome by jumping into deep plunge pools, sliding down polished rock gullies and abseiling over amazing waterfalls.

We started the day by getting up at 7am and having breakfast at the Rafting Alm restaurant on the camp site. We then headed by minibus to Ötztal where the canyoning base was, this is where we met our tour guide – a seven foot Austrian named Jörg; he looked even taller standing next to Lia (sorry Lia..!). The group then geared up in wetsuits, helmets and harnesses as we prepared for what was going to be a very wet morning! Although the wetsuits weren't the comfiest and for some they were a little too big or tight they were ultimately very effective as we were about to find out. Upon getting all our kit on we once again set off on a minibus journey but this time the destination was the Alpenrosenklamm canyon. The journey took about 20 minutes up the mountain road which was steep and meandering. Although the scenery was enough to keep you occupied some of the group were still tired from the early start so opted to catch up on some sleep.

Upon arrival at the canyon Jörg checked all of our harnesses and gave us a talk on what we might encounter on the tour. Jörg also demonstrated to us how to clip on and clip off the steel ropes that were permanently placed along the canyon sides for safety whilst scaling rock faces. It was also necessary to be shown the correct stance and where to put your hands whilst doing so. Supposedly holding on to the steel ropes with your hands could result in serious cuts if you suddenly slipped. After Jörg had finished his briefing we were made to wait anxiously as the group before us were halfway through abseiling off the bridge into the canyon. However this wait gave us a perfect opportunity to get a nervous group photo before we began the activity, it has to be said that there were some pretty worried looking faces!



Our first challenge was to abseil down 17 metres off the bridge and into the water at the bottom of the canyon. Jim eagerly volunteered first followed by the rest of the group as we all descended into the canyon making large splashes. After lowering us all down, Jörg then disappeared for a short time before resurfacing and quickly climbing down the canyon side with ease. We then made our way down the canyon climbing over rocks and fallen trees.



We eventually came to our first section of wire which we had to attach ourselves onto using our harnesses. Clipping on and off the wire the group started to move along the canyon while hooked on to the rock face. Soon after this section we had our second abseil. This time we had to be more cautious with our feet as we were lowered down as the rock face was very slippy. Once we had all abseiled down we continued down the canyon. There were some small rock slides at this section of the canyon and a waterfall which everyone enjoyed. It wasn't long until we arrived at our next abseil next to a waterfall. All of the group successfully managed to lower themselves down except for Marisa who somehow managed to get her harness stuck onto the abseiling rope. Nevertheless Jim came to the rescue and all was fine. Then after a short distance down the canyon we came to yet another abseil – however this seemed to be the biggest and most challenging. At around 20m high, there was a straight down slippery rock surface next to a thundering waterfall which made many of the group very nervous.

The next obstacle we encountered was our first big rock slide. Placed next to another waterfall, the slide had formed gradually over time but had a small bump which projected you into the plunge pool. For this reason Jörg showed us the technique for sliding down which include folding your arms over your chest to avoid bumping them. Shortly after the group encountered yet another waterfall but this time with no rock slide available. This meant we had to therefore jump off the waterfall into the plunge pool. One by one we all jumped in and some even managed to touch the bottom. The group had to encourage and support some members to jump as they were nervous. After the group completed the jump we yet again set off down the fascinating canyon where it seemed the water was getting deeper and deeper.

The group eventually arrived at a sloping waterfall where you couldn't see the end of the slope which seemed to bend around the rock face. This is when Jörg informed us that we would be using this waterfall as a slide to continue onto the last stage of the tour. Jim was yet again the first to eagerly volunteer followed by everyone else. You also had to be careful towards the end of the long slide as the movement of the water could easily bash you into the side of the canyon at speed; luckily Jim was there to catch everyone. By this stage the whole group were absolutely soaked and had come to the final stages of the tour as the canyon filtered out. Finally we had to overcome some slippery logs as we exited the river and made our way onto the sloping meadows at the side. Jim then embarrassingly tried to skip through the meadow to the melody of the sound of music but accidentally ended up falling face first. Surprisingly that was the only fall we had on the tour.

After a short walk the group entered a patch of forest to get shelter from the rain. Here Jörg started a fire beside some onlooking cows and cooked us some Austrian food which the group truly enjoyed. After a small meal beside a warm fire the group tidied up and headed off back towards the minivan that was now waiting for us at the bottom of the canyon. After a short journey we arrived back at the activity centre where we struggled to get out of soaked wetsuits and thanked Jörg. I think it's definitely safe to say that the whole group who participated in the canyoning truly enjoyed it and are glad they completed it. Although some of the obstacles were challenging for some members it was good to see everyone encouraging and supporting those who struggled. For these reasons I would definitely recommend canyoning to any future BEG expeditions especially in the Alpenrosenklamm canyon.



Adventure Phase (cable car – the alternative to canyoning) by Pat Sutherland

Wednesday 8th of July had been earmarked as the day for a Glacier Walk, but we could not get a booking. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise as we awoke to a soggy wet morning with low cloud and mist. The Glacier Walk would have been cancelled in such conditions in any case. After some discussion with the group it had been arranged to go Canyoning, but for three leaders and two Venturers, that was way too far outside their comfort zone, so an alternative day was planned.

It was decided to visit Oetz and take the cable car up to the top of the mountain. The party set off first of all to visit the Tourist Information office in Haiming. The sign said 100m, but it was not to be found. On enquiring at the Post Office, it was learned that the nearest Tourist Information was in Oetz. On checking the bus timetable, buses to Oetz were few and far between, so it was decided to try the train. After getting directions from a man working on a building site whose command of English was as poor as the groups command of German (which proves that you can communicate despite little common language and using a lot of hand gestures), the group walked out past the swimming pool to Oetztal Banhof. On arriving at the train station, the ticket machine was no more user friendly than any of the others which had been encountered. Thankfully the kiosk was manned and tickets were purchased for Oetz. While trying to locate the correct platform, a helpful local lady announced that there WAS NOT a train to Oetz, you had to go by bus!!!

The bus stop was located just outside the railway station. Thankfully there was a shelter because at this point there was some torrential rain. The bus arrived and it was a scenic journey up to Oetz. This was a larger town than Haiming, with a Tourist Information Centre and many more shops and Cafes. The group disembarked right at the cable car - the Acherkogelbahn. It was closed for lunch, but after a short wait it began running again. It was a long ride and fortunately the weather had cleared to give spectacular views of the mountains both near and far. The cable car took just 8 minutes to get you to a height of over 2000 metres. Its base in the valley bottom is at 820 metres, and it rises to its destination at 2020 metres.

This group scored with food as they had a nice lunch in the restaurant at the top of the cable car. Wiener schnitzel (a kind of sausage) with chips and salad. Just as the group had sat down at the table, the rain turned to hailstones. One of the venturers was sure that the group would be stuck at the top of the mountain as it would not be safe to get back into the cable car. They were reassured that if there was any risk of danger, the cable car stopped running.

Having enjoyed lunch and after the rain/hail had stopped the group made the return journey down in the cable car, once again enjoying the spectacular views. On safely reaching the bottom they spent about 20 minutes window shopping and some again enjoying ice creams, before catching the bus back to Oetztal Banhof. The group strolled back to the campsite to hear how the Canyoners had enjoyed their day.



Social and Cultural Phase (Neuschwanstein and Oberammergau) by Chloe Purves

Today was an early start as Gary, one of the gentleman who owns the 'Rafting Alm' (place where we are staying) had organised a bus to take us to Neuschwanstein Castle. We met for breakfast at 7.15 am and were on the bus at 8 am to start our day trip.

Gary, who used to be a tour guide in Munich, gave us lots of very detailed information about the region that we travelled through. We made a stop at Zugspitzblick and took in the amazing surroundings before making our onwards journey.

Neuschwanstein Castle is a 19th Century palace on a rugged hill located above the village of Hohenschwangau. The palace was commissioned by Ludwig II who became King of Bavaria at only 18 yrs old, as a retreat and in homage to his friend Richard Wagner.

The palace has appeared in several movies [including Chitty Chitty Bang Bang] and was the inspiration for Disney and Sleeping Beauty castle.

We arrived at Neuschwanstein and made the short but steep walk to the top. Our tour was due to start at 12.35 pm. In the summer as many as 6,000 people visit the castle per day so Gary was tasked with making sure we made our slot. We walked up to Marienbrücke (suspension footbridge behind the castle). The bridge was covered with engraved padlocks put there by visitors from all over the world. On the way up we saw spectacular views of the lake and neighbouring castle of Hohenschwangau, the residence of Ludwig's parents and the home in which he grew up.

We headed back to the front of the castle for lunch on the grass; we had tuna salad wraps or ham/cheese wraps – they were yum!

In the courtyard we were taking pictures of the castle when Ron gathered us together and then told me, just me, to take off my bag and hand over my camera – I had no idea what I had done wrong and Ron's 'teacher eyes' scared the *!* out of me so I just did as he said.

The next thing I knew I was being dressed in a bin bag coat and fitted with a square cap. The group had organised a graduation ceremony for me seeing as I was missing my actual one by being on the expedition. I honestly couldn't have asked for a better way to celebrate. Ron had even made a certificate. I got a wee bit emotional as I couldn't believe the effort that had been put into it. I wore the 'outfit' for the rest of the tour and time at the castle.

On the way back down the hill many people stopped to get souvenirs, a lot of people got a hot drink and cake as you got to keep the mug afterwards.

We returned to the bus and headed for Oberammergau; best known for the Passion Play which depicts the life and death of Jesus. The play is performed over the course of five months during every year ending in zero. The performance involves over 2,000 people, musicians and stage technicians.



When we arrived at the village we were given time to explore. Many headed to the famous Christmas shop, while others enjoyed a variety of ice cream at only one Euro per scoop – Bargain..! Ice cream was amazing everywhere we went.

Adventure Phase (rafting) by Bethany Thomson

Today was another adventurous day at Rafting Alm! We woke up, had breakfast then headed over to the rafting office on the campsite. We were introduced to our guides, Danny and Will ten were given wet suits, helmets, shoes and life jackets; it was entertaining just watching everyone getting into their kit...!

We all boarded into three vans and headed to our starting point. There were two rafts, a calmer raft for the more nervous people, and a more exciting raft for the people looking for a challenge. In the first raft were Jim, Pat, Ron, Lia, Jo, Nicola and Geraldine. The second raft was myself, Marisa, Charlotte, Stewart, Francis, Chloe and poor unsuspecting Dutch couple.

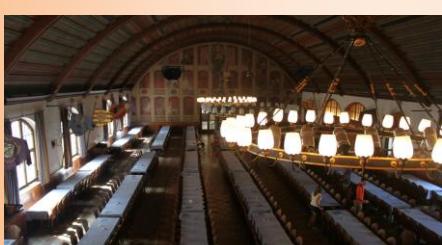


The water was quite calm to start with, and then a lot of waves started to pick up. Our instructor, Danny, was very funny and had us doing some challenges; one of them was to stand on the side of the raft, facing in the way and balance with our paddles in the raft, most of us fell in! We also had to get into the river to practice getting back into the raft by pulling people up by their life jackets (or whatever else you get hold of). Watching Lia trying to pull Jim in was entertaining. We went through some pretty big rapids with the instructors shouting out instructions – everyone got wet one way or another and it was great fun; although not everyone enjoyed it with one of the group having motion sickness and throwing up over the side.

Once the rafting came to an end, we headed back to the rafting office to get changed out of our wet suits. Apparently it was a tradition that everyone had a shot of peach schnapps (how could we refuse? after all it is tradition). This experience was something that most of us will probably never do again, I'm so glad I was given the opportunity to try it out!

Emma wasn't feeling up to it so decided not to take part, she took some great photos from the bridge instead! We got into the water to get a feel of the temperature... unlike the lake that we swam in a few days earlier, the river was freezing! We sat in the raft on the shore and practiced rowing. Once we got into the water with the raft and got going down the river.





Social and Cultural Phase (Munich) by Geraldine Bouglas

It was Saturday evening when we arrived in Munich. We got checked in and sorted at the Hostel then decided to walk up to the main square, Marionplatz, to get our bearings and help us work out from there what we might do the following day. It was about a half hour walk and was quite a contrast to the rural area we had come from. We could hear loud music and lots of buzz as we approached the square; as we rounded the corner to the square it became apparent that we were in the midst of a Gay Pride Rally. It was the final night of the week long event and everyone was in a party mood; there was live entertainment on a main stage and a real mixed bag of spectators. It was certainly very ‘sociable’ and ‘cultural’ and I’m pretty sure it was another first for BEG...

We got the underground back up to the city centre on the Sunday morning. Some of the leaders had researched what we might do as ‘tourists’ and Chloe had very helpfully printed information about some options. We went to Frauenkirche where you can apparently see the devils footprint in a flagstone on the floor. Chloe was a very good ‘tour guide’ and told us the story behind it. From there we headed back to Marionplatz (which had been totally cleared up from the night before) in time to join the crowds to watch the famous Glockenspiel doing its thing at 11:00am. It was good to see and there was lots of ooh-ing and ahh-ing from the crowds.

It was getting quite hot so the group decided to head towards the English Garden. Munich is a beautiful city and we passed lots of impressive buildings that housed theatres and museums on the way. The English Garden is the size of Monaco so we only had time to explore a small part of it. The park offered some shade from the sun and very interesting sights – traditional Bavarian musicians, dancers and nudist sunbathers to mention but a few... A few of the venturers could not resist the temptation to get into the river for a swim.

On the way back from the park we went to the Festival Hall in the Hofbräuhaus. It has huge vaulted ceilings and has Bavarian coats of arms all around the walls. It can seat hundreds of people at the long wooden tables – where they indulge in the German tradition of beer drinking; not for us on this occasion though...

Social and Cultural Phase (Dachau Concentration Camp) by Marisa Cove

We were all up sharp as usual and fought for the showers. It had been decided the night before that we were going to have breakfast in our room; that is Geraldine, Chloe, Giuliana, Bethany, Jo and I. Pat brought in a variety of breakfast foods including granola, yoghurts and fruit which we all enjoyed and munched quickly. We all headed out to get the train at 9 o'clock with our long trousers and daysacks on, except for Francis whose choice of an army patterned day sack meant he was unable to bring it. The train took us to Dachau where we were saddened to know we still had to get a bus. We were all gasping for oxygen in the cramped bus and were relieved when we finally could get off.

After a quick apple break, we entered the camp. Some of us chose an audio guide to learn about the horrific history of Dachau while others read about it on the signs around the camp. It was interesting to know how much the structure of the camp had changed since the liberation of the camp by U.S forces in April 1945 so we had to use our imagination a bit to visualise its original layout. The camp was opened in 1933 with a purpose of inducing forced labour, imprisoning Jews and criminals. We were all shocked to hear that there were nearly 100 other sub-camps situated around southern Germany and Austria which were all mostly work camps.

At 12.30 a lot of us went into the cinema area to view a short video about the opening and purpose of Dachau and the horrific experiences the prisoners would have had inside the terrifying place. Prisoners were forced to stand to attention for long periods of time in huge queues with their heads facing down. In addition, there were floggings and hangings every day. There has been a recorded number of over 32,000 deaths that occurred inside the Dachau concentration camp and large numbers of unrecorded deaths.

Next we ventured into the sheds where these prisoners had to live for years. There was only one remaining shed however it was clear just how many there had been originally due to the markings on the ground. Each room showed the transformation of the accommodation over the years and how more and more bunk beds were squeezed in and made smaller as the number of prisoners increased. We found out that 2000 prisoners were forced to perish in a room which was suitable for only 200 people. Only the very ill were allowed to use the bed while the others had to stand up for hours. The disease levels increased dramatically and more prisoners tragically died because of the barbaric and harsh living conditions. In 1944 a typhus fever epidemic broke out which took thousands of lives.

There were three crematoriums that had been preserved from the war. Only one had originally been built but due to the number of deaths growing as the years went by, they had to build two more to get rid of bodies faster.

This gave us a clear idea of just how many bodies there must have been and how many innocents died.



Another thing that shocked us was the gas chamber that had been built but apparently never used. Prisoners were tricked into thinking they were taking showers however were cruelly tortured to death. Just close to the crematoriums there was a burial site where various trees and flowers had been planted- this was the site for thousands of unrecorded deaths in the camp.

The long building of the prison took up the whole width of the main site. The huge corridor stretched so far that the end was out of sight. The thousands of rooms were empty stone wall chambers with one window and an occasional toilet. We all thought this must have been luxury compared to the crammed sheds until we read that the prisoner each day move up a room until they reach the end of the corridor where they will be killed. These prisoners suffered every day knowing they were going to endure a horrific death. The prisoners were forced to stand up constantly in their cells for up to 72 hours at a time. Along with the diseases, bare minimum rations and the torture they went through they didn't stand a chance.



Our visit to Dachau Concentration Camp made us appreciate everything we have in our lives even more. We remember those innocent people who tragically died during the war and fully understand the pain, torture and suffering they endured. The 30,000 people who managed to escape with their lives in 1945 were returned home by US troops but were scarred for life due to the long excruciating years trapped in Dachau.

Medical (during the expedition) by Pat Sutherland

Insect Bites

As we were working in wooded areas in Thaur, then camping at Haiming, insect bites were inevitable.

We had one member who was very susceptible to insect bites, and reacted badly to the bites. If they received a dirty bite, it would quickly become infected, and they required to be hospitalised to receive IV antibiotics. The person concerned did an excellent job of always covering up with long sleeves and trousers and lashings of insect repellent. We had also brought a letter from their doctor explaining the need for IV antibiotics should this be necessary. Thankfully, although the person did get bitten, there was no sign of infection, and all was well.

Sunburn

We had a few cases of very minor sunburn, due to folks being over enthusiastic about getting a tan. Apart from mild discomfort, there were no worrying symptoms.

Dehydration

Despite it being unusually hot, we did not have any real problems with dehydration, apart from an occasional headache which quickly resolved. Fortunately, the tap water in Austria is safe to drink, and we always had access to clean water to fill our water bottles. In keeping hydrated, the mistake that many make is to drink a large quantity of fluid at a time. This fluid will pass straight through them. The group were advised to constantly sip small quantities to give the body time to process it.

Bumps and Scrapes

Due to the nature of our activities, there were a few bumps, bruises and scrapes. These were always cleaned with antiseptic wipes and covered as necessary. They presented no further problems.

So our mantra of “Prevention is better than cure” stood us in good stead as there were no major medical issues to deal with and everyone returned home safe and well, if a little tired.

Finances by Nicola Stillie

Each venturer and leader had to raise £600 to go on the expedition giving us £9,000 in individual fundraising. We also received some very kind donations from various people and organisations for our group funds. Later on in our planning our budget wasn't adding up as we would have liked as some of the accommodation and activities were more expensive than we had expected.

The group were also keen to do a few more activities such as a glacier walk but the price to do this was quite high and above our current budget so we decided to have a group fundraiser in order to boost funds. We ran a quiz night which was a great success and we raised £649 giving us a total of £1,608 in group funds and a total income of £10,610.

While away on the trip travel and food cost us more than we had anticipated. Our funds were helped greatly when we found out at the environmental stage that the £500 we had put aside to be at Thaur was actually not due, only the £225 membership that we had already paid. This covered the higher costs for food and travel.

As we had not booked the glacier walk before leaving for the expedition as we had wanted to assess the budget at the half way point to make sure we had enough money, the glacier walk was not available so we were not able to do this. Although not what we planned, this turned out okay as the glacier walk would likely have been cancelled because of the weather anyway. We did however go canyoning, which was a really good activity to bring the group together.

The most expensive part of our trip was the flights to and from Munich at £3,402 although this was still the cheapest way to travel after we had researched travelling overland and flying into different countries etc. Accommodation was the second most expensive part coming in at £2,299, some of the prices to stay in city hostels were quite expensive but we balance this out by camping for 6 nights at Haiming which was very cheap and they also provided breakfast.

Income
Individual Fund Raising
15 x £600 = £9000
Group Fund Raising
£1608
Available Funds
£10608

Expenditure	Budget £	Actual Cost £
Flights	3400.00	3402.00
Internal travel in Austria	400.00	646.00
Accommodation	2200.00	2299.00
Food	1260.00	1533.00
Adventure Phase	1000.00	1685.00
Environmental stage	725.00	225.00
Insurance	190.00	193.00
Others - Bank charges etc.	0.00	177.00
Contingency	450.00	
Totals	£9625.00	£10160.00

Catering by Pat Sutherland

The catering for an expedition begins with the training weekends. Participants provide their own packed lunches, but need to make two breakfasts and one main meal. Deciding on the main meal depends on whether it will be cooked in the kitchen of a Community hall, or on Trangia stoves out in the open.

Doing the shopping for 15 for the weekend always brings you a few odd glances in the supermarket. Using quantities provided by the master caterer, the late Nan Lyle, sufficient supplies are bought. Good breakfasts are required if it is to be a hard physical day and the BEG porridge pot is always pressed into use.

Feeding 15 people of varying likes/dislikes and cooking abilities can be a challenge, and a questionnaire (tried and tested with the Malawi group) was issued prior to our departure.

Austria 2015 – food questionnaire

At training weekends and when we are in Austria we will all have to take turns helping to keep everyone fed and hydrated. The following questions will help us organise the kitchen rota so that we have acceptable food for everyone each mealtime.

Name:

Is there anything you don't eat or drink (for medical, personal or cultural reasons): yes / no?

If yes, please specify:

Are there any particular foods you are allergic to: yes / no?

If yes, is there a substitute food that can be used:

What is your favourite meal? :

What is your favourite vegetable? :

Which of the following best describes your ability in the kitchen?

- I will happily rustle up a family meal from the fridge/food cupboard
- I can prepare veg and stir pots but I'm not great at creating a meal from Scratch.
- Kitchen..? Is that where my meals come from..?

Please give your completed form to Pat Sutherland.

Thanks... see you in the kitchen..!

The results of the questionnaire showed that we had three not keen on fish, one unable to eat baked beans, one not tolerating blue cheese or tomato soup, another unable to have grapefruit. The most significant was one person who required a Gluten free diet. We

therefore took a small stock of gluten free (GF), pasta, crackers and biscuits with us, until we could ascertain their availability in Austria/Munich. The supermarkets in the main had a reasonable stock of GF produce. The restaurants did not make much of an allowance for GF diet and did not use GF flour for pizza or GF pasta. There were always some things on the menu, but a limited choice.

Fifteen people involved with much physical activity are going to be hungry. The cry of "What's for tea" or "I'm starving" would often be heard.

The catering was a mixture of making our own using the facilities in the hostel or mountain hut or eating at a restaurant/café.

When food was to be purchased for us to do our own catering, a rota was set up for Venturers and leaders all to take a turn at doing the shopping. The same group would set out everything if we were having breakfast, or all making our own packed lunch. While camping, we cooked our main meal in groups of three on Trangia stoves which are powered by gas canisters which we acquired when we arrived at the campsite.

At our time spent in the mountain hut at Thaur, breakfast was included as part of the accommodation provided while we did the project, and was taken in the adjoining mountain café. While camping at the Rafting Alm in Haiming, we were very well looked after. Breakfast was included in our tariff for camping. On both occasions it was a continental buffet of muesli, cereal, eggs, breads, cheese and ham. Coffee, tea, hot chocolate and fruit juices were available to drink. We were given Quark to taste, and a variety of different breads.

When we ate out in a restaurant, every member was given an allocation of money. People could choose what they wanted from the menu, and if their choice exceeded the money allocated, then they supplemented the cost themselves.

We provided our own breakfast on three occasions. We bought cereals and muesli. Bread/rolls with Nutella or Philadelphia cheese; we had fresh fruit juices to drink and yogurts.

While at the mountain hut above Thaur, there were very adequate cooking facilities provided. They consisted however of an old fashioned wood burning stove which would have to be stoked up before we could cook. As the temperatures outside were in the 30's, we opted for salads, as we would also have to sleep in the hut and felt that to put on the stove would have made it unbearably hot.

While at the rafting Alm in Haiming, we barbecued one evening, cooked on our Trangia stoves on three evenings, and used the restaurant on our last evening.



Lunch was almost always a picnic. Everyone made their own and were provided with a choice of some of the following on each occasion. Rolls, bread, crackers. Ham, salami, cheese, egg mayo, tuna, Nutella, peanut butter. Fresh fruit. Muesli bar or chocolate snack. Crisps.

Water was not a problem as in Austria, it is safe to drink tap water, so water bottles were always able to be filled safely.

It was instilled into everyone to either wash their hands or use their hand sanitiser, before preparing or eating food. As far as we are aware, there were no cases of people being unwell due to poor hygiene.

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Tea
Wed 1st	Continental provided in Munich by Haus International Hostel	Austrian Fayre at the Café above Thaur at Environmental Project	Made ourselves a sandwich and fresh fruit in the "hut".
Thu 2nd	Continental in Café above Thaur	Sandwich and fresh fruit	Austrian tea in the Café paid for by the local community
Fri 3rd	Continental in Café above Thaur	Sandwich and fresh fruit	Salad in the "hut". Tried Kolrabi a local vegetable
Sat 4th	Continental in Café above Thaur	Given allocation to purchase lunch in Innsbruck	All together in a "Spanish" Café in Innsbruck
Sun 5th	Cereal, bread, crackers, Nutella, yogurt, juice.	Chose from menu at the Rafting Alm in Haiming	Snack from Rafting Alm
Mon 6th	Continental in Rafting Alm	Picnic at Pisburger Lake Wraps, cherries, strawberries, grapes.	Barbecue at Campsite. Salad and Yogurts
Tue 7th	Continental at Rating Alm	Packed lunch	Trangias – Pasta bolognaise, yogurt and fruit
Wed 8th	Continental at Rafting Alm	Lunch provided by the company who took the Canyoning.	Trangias - Pasta, Philadelphia cheese and sausage. Salad. Yogurt
Thu 9th	Continental at Rafting Alm	Picnic taken at Neuschwanstein castle	Triangas – Rice, chicken with variety of sauces
Fri 10th	Continental at Rafting Alm	Picnic at campsite	Meal in the Rafting Alm
Sat 11th	Continental at Rafting Alm	Packed lunch provided by Rafting Alm	McDonalds in Munich
Sun 12th	Continental in Smart Stay Hostel Munich	Snack in the English Garden Park in Munich	Italian Pizza restaurant in Munich
Mon 13th	Muesli, yogurt, juice and a biscuit in room 502	Packed lunch	Italian restaurant next to hostel. Massive pizza's which defeated some. Good choice on menu
Tue 14th	Muesli, yogurt, juice and a biscuit in room 502	Made packed lunch	Made packed tea for the airport

Many members of the group supplemented their meals by consuming a considerable amount of ice cream, which was delicious. Various local sweets were also tried out and Jim tried out the banana splits on several occasions.



Overall, participants were provided with an adequate and nourishing diet for the two week trip. As you might expect when catering for 15 different people it was not possible to please everyone on every occasion.

Austria 2015

Group Diary

Tuesday 30th June 2015

Jo Arres

We all arrived at Edinburgh Airport for 2.30pm sharp. Once all the group had met up, the leaders taped up our rucksacks, which were already squeezed into rice sacks. We then weighed and checked in our big rucksacks, some of us struggled to even get them on the scales! Next we proceeded through security. Here the first problem of the trip occurred when many of us forgot to remove simple things such as hand sanitizer from our bags, or in Jim's case tent pegs!!! After this we headed to the waiting room where many of us had a final munch before getting on the plane. Finally after a long wait our flight was called and we went to line up to board the plane. This was both Charlotte and my first time on a plane so we were both excited although a little nervous.

The flight all together was smooth and noneventful, most of us fell asleep. When we came back down to land, the views were very beautiful; the farmland looked like a patchwork quilt from above. The first thing we noticed as we left the aeroplane was the sudden jump in heat.

Next we went through passport control where much to the amusement of the officer, we all insisted on our passports being stamped.

Finally we collected our bags and got ready to leave the airport. It took us about an hour to make it to the hostel, by a rather complicated mix of train, tram and bus. When we finally made it to the hostel we were pleasantly surprised by how comfortable and clean it was. We were particularly impressed by the pizza vending machine. The only disappointment of the night was the lack of tea. It took us a while to get to sleep and we ended up dropping off around 2am.

Wednesday 1st July 2015

Geraldine Bouglas

Our first night away! The Hostel rooms are comfortable, albeit really hot and stuffy. We woke to clear blue skies outside and the prospect of a bit of a hike with our full packs on.

Everyone was encouraged to have a good breakfast as we did not know what might be available for lunch. We departed from the Hostel at 8.30 am, we had a couple of blocks walk to the underground where Chloe, Ron and Jim sorted out our tickets. Four stops on the underground later, we surfaced in the middle of Munich where we had another bit of a walk to the Bus station to get the "Flixbus" (the equivalent to our Megabus) to Innsbruck.

The bus was really busy so we were all split up – most managed to get seats on the upper level though which meant good views. The temperature on the bus was showing as 28 degrees. It was a lovely journey through the Bavarian countryside and the mountains. We also went through a very long tunnel – it must have been a couple of miles long.

We had our first stop about midday at Garmisch Partenkirchen. Some passengers got off there; Jo and I glanced at each other across the aisle, we obviously had the same idea, we jumped up and grabbed the front window seat – sorted..!

Two more stops then Innsbruck. It was very hot but there was no time for lunch/drinks, there was another bus to catch. We arrived in Thaur about 2.30pm where we were met by 'Marina', one of our hosts for the environmental project. She had a small minibus, but could only take six of our group. The others, myself included, waited ten minutes or so until another minibus arrived.

The drive up to Thaur Alm – our home for the next few days, was quite an experience. Our [grumpy] driver was obviously very familiar with the very narrow, steep, winding main road. There were a few white knuckle moments. The views were spectacular but we were mainly keeping our eyes on the road as it wound its way up to a fair old height. The minibus I was in was struggling with the load and kept overheating – the driver ended up kicking us all out to walk the last wee bit; thankfully he took our big rucksacks up for us though.

We were all starving by the time we got to our destination and enjoyed a variety of traditional Austrian dishes in the restaurant at the 'hut' – these involved lots of dumplings and sausages of various descriptions.

We then had a briefing with Marina, the project organiser, about the work we would be doing over the next couple of days.

Three of the group then headed off back to Thaur with Marina to stock up on food/snacks to keep us going for the next few days. The others sorted out sleeping arrangements and then chilled in the sun for a while or tried to make friends with the locals (goats and grazing cows). It was difficult to stop just looking at the views; we were so lucky to be spending time in such an amazing and beautiful spot.

2nd July 2015

Stuart Briggs

Today was a reasonably slower morning when put into comparison with yesterday's rush to find the bus to Innsbruck with full rucksacks on. This gave us more of an opportunity to take in the beautiful scenery in the early hours of the morning. Next followed breakfast at the desolate but popular café up the road from our hut. There was a sense of disappointment for some when we discovered there wasn't any dumplings on the table but other Austrian foods were provided, such as Quark, which Lia and Emma seemed to enjoy.

Next we met up with our Austrian assistant for our Environmental project, Marina and her colleague Thomas. We were provided with tools such as saws and cutters which greatly helped us with our project. Our project was to clear rogue trees, branches and rocks to allow more grassland to be available for the cows kept on the side of the mountain. I think it's fair to say the cows were very grateful as they soon explored their new grassland looking for a bite to eat.

I don't know if anyone else saw but I'm sure I watched Ron trying to feed a cow for a good ten minutes with no success. However I have to give credit to Ron for pointing out a great hanging valley (Geographical landscape term) en route to our project. Thank you.

Today we also discovered a lot more about Marina, our Austrian assistant who was very helpful. Marina lives in Innsbruck and works in the summer for the sort of Austrian National Park equivalent, the region in which we are currently staying in. Marina is currently in her last year of studying Geography at Innsbruck University and loves winter sports. Anyway, back to our environmental project. I think it is accurate to say it was hard labour, very hot and there was also a variety of insects who came out to play. The more significant of which would be a rather large ants nest which I think some of us nearly literally stumbled across.

However, there is yet to be a discovery of a tick, which can be a good thing or a bad thing if people have them but haven't yet discovered them. Lunch time was 12 o'clock and we enjoyed our own cuisine in the comfort of our kitchen. This was the time when a particular venturer tried to steal Jo's gluten free food (sorry but it looked good). We set off back to our environmental project at 2 o'clock and it felt like it was a little cooler which was good, but around 30 degrees is still hard to work in!

By around 4 o'clock we had virtually finished up for the day and we rounded it off with an exhausted group photo on the mountainside.

Upon arrival back at the hut, there was an expected long queue for the shower and unfortunately those near the end of the queue had to prepare themselves for a cold shower. However when we had been working in the heat all day, this necessarily wasn't a bad thing.

Next we met Thomas and Marina at the café up the road for dinner at around 6.30 pm. An Austrian plate of food was again provided and was very much delicious. The platefuls were also rather large and very filling so admittedly it was hard to finish your food. After dinner was generally just a cool down time for the whole group. Some read, some slept and some attempted to play card games such as Scabby Queen and 7's. Lights went out around half 10 and everyone tried to get some sleep. However the noisy cow bells didn't help!

Friday 3rd July 2015

Francis Brosnan

First group task off the day was to talk about lunch, (a subject I am very interested in) as we were going so far from the hut that it wouldn't be worth returning for lunch. We had a selection of breads (sweet, plain and white). There were also rice crackers. To put in the sandwiches there was cheese, chorizo sausage and tuna. Other items included berry, apple and chocolate cereal bars and a variety of fruit were also available. After Pat had given us the lecture of not to be greedy (I was sure she was looking at me). We went off for breakfast. A fine selection of bread and UNLIMITED COFFEE!!!! There was also ham, cheese, Nutella and weird cheese dip call quark, which I am informed, is very nice.

After breakfast we packed our lunch and were off. A nice walk up the mountain in 28 degrees, an improvement on the low 30's that plagued us the day before. Then we set to work splitting into two groups. The people who wanted to stay near the bottom on the comparatively gradual incline and the other group went further up to the steeper top. (I made sure I was in the former group.) The morning passed that way with Nicola making sure water stops were regular to stop dehydration from occurring. However disaster struck, as we were finishing up at the first place, storm clouds approached (we had been experiencing

hot weather even for Austria) so a storm was inevitable. Anyhow Marina and Thomas both immediately said we had to go. We rushed back to avoid the rain and lightning. Charlotte showed the best survival instinct getting back well before the rest.

The rest of the day after that was a bit of an anti-climax. We had lunch and played cards. Once the rain had stopped we went on a pleasant stroll. Once we were back we did much the same stuff. After tea we were told to pack ourselves as we are moving tomorrow.

Saturday 4th July 2015

Charlotte Chorlton

We all woke up about 7am to get ready to leave the hut as we had a long day of travelling and organising which transport we needed to get. So we all got ready and had breakfast at 8am which is very lovely but I think everyone was getting a bit sick of bread as we had it three times in a row every day. So as we finished breakfast we all go ready to start our very steep walk from the hut to Thaur and I think everyone was very relieved that it was all downhill. When we all arrived at Thaur all safe but with fairly sore feet we all waited for the next bus from Thaur to Innsbruck, which came very quickly so we all had to recover quickly and get on the bus to Innsbruck. When we all arrived in Innsbruck we all waited to have a rest and a toilet break and to organise the next bus journey to the Marmotta Hostel so after a while the leaders decided we needed to get the number 3 tram. So Chloe asked me and Lia and Nicola who had the money to come and get the tickets. So once all that was sorted we got onto tram number 3 and we all arrived at the Hostel which we couldn't yet check into until 2pm. So the decision was made that we leave our bags at the hostel and to go out into Innsbruck and have our lunch and tea in Innsbruck. So we got the tram 3 back into the city and separated into two groups to have some lunch. After that we all met each other on sheer consequence and all went into the city centre and went to see the golden roof and some of us went up this tower and the view from the top was amazing. After our exploring we all went for tea and we decided to have it in this Spanish restaurant which was extremely hot but the food was lovely. So after our meal we all headed back to the hostel on the number 3 tram and got settled into the hostel.

Sunday 5th July 2015

Marisa Cove

Our adventure phase of the expedition kicked off as we travelled from Innsbruck to Haiming where we are to be camping for 6 days. We took the tram into Innsbruck and caught the 10 O'clock train to Haiming. Nicola led the way as we attempted to find our campsite. We were all terribly hot and were relieved to reach camp after a short walk. As for the sleeping arrangements, we paired with our buddies and once again Ron was stuck with Jim.

Despite the beaming sun we quickly set up camp and headed for lunch at the restaurant close by, which was friendly and we were drawn by the yummy food. Some of us had mixed grill while others had a huge burger. (The burgers seemed to be far bigger than those in Scotland). For desert there was a variety of ice cream sundaes which were quickly but surely scoffed down.

After lunch we all took a walk into town to find the local supermarket and a couple of us munched on ice creams and bought juices on the way back. It was so hot we all put our feet in the water tub at the campsite and some of us sat in it too. Chloe's T-shirt of shame was passed around to those of us who were more pink than others.

Tea was very tasty in the café once again, followed by ice cream again. In order to explore the town even more, it was suggested that we go for another walk which helped us to digest all the food we had eaten in the day! A few of the leaders finished off the day in the bar while some of the Venturers, plus Geraldine, played ping pong outside. Everyone is now in their tents nearly sleeping but raring to go tomorrow for mountain biking and swimming. A relaxing but exciting day in Austria.

Monday 6th July 2015

Lia Graham

Today the 6th of July is NOT Nicola's birthday! We Venturers were woken at about 7.30 am to sign a birthday card for Nicola. At breakfast at 8-ish Pat announced Nicola's 'special' day. Once the Happy Birthday singing was over, Nicola announced her birthday is in fact in September!

At about 9.15 am the group walked to the bike renting place which was just a short walk away. Once everyone was kitted with a helmet and an appropriate fitting bike we headed off to Piburg lake.

On the way we had two people falling off their bikes, Emma and Charlotte. None were badly hurt. The final climb to the lake was extremely hard so everyone ended up pushing the bikes to the top, with a gentle slope down.

As soon as we arrived at the lake Charlotte had already dived in and was swimming around. Some of us were more reluctant to get in as the water was quite cold, but to be honest not completely freezing.

Giuliana and Lia were the two Venturers to get in the lake last. Giuliana dived in and swam to the middle island but Lia managed to get herself in such a worry, she had a panic attack. Jim came to the rescue and pulled Lia to the middle.

Ron, Pat and Geraldine didn't come in. Neither did Emma because of her cut. Nicola struggled to swim to the middle too, so lifeguard Charlotte jumped in to save her. After about 5 minutes in the middle Charlotte put her 'under arm tow' into action.

Pat and Ron had a nice picnic lunch set out for us after our swim. After lunch we set off for home. To get to the lake it took over 3 hours, to get back it was almost half the time – all downhill!

Emma took another tumble right over the handle bars but mother hen Pat was there to stitch her back together. Lia also took a tumble and scratched her thigh.

Along the way home the faster people in front got lost from the more moderate paced bikers. Apparently both groups were waiting for the other group but at different places. Ooops.

The faster group got home first and the bikes were returned nicely except for Emma's which had a broken reflector on the front. All in all a lovely day in Haiming despite the rough and tumble.

Tuesday 7th July 2015

Giuliana Di Lorenzo

Today it was arranged that Ron would lead us all off on a walk up to another lake and then we would walk back down and go to a swimming pool. The group set off at 10 am with Ron leading us and Jim at the back.

I must admit I wasn't too thrilled when I heard that we were going on a walk, purely because my calves and my bottom were (and still are) in agony from our bike trek yesterday. However like the troopers that we all are, everyone carried on probably because it was the only option.

We had to walk in the direct sun on the road side for about 15 minutes before we started to head up a hill that seemed to replicate Narnia because it kept going and seemed to never end. The heat was bad enough but the amount of cleggs made it so much worse, thankfully I managed to avoid getting bitten. However you would hear a yelp from Charlotte as she was being bitten.

When we finally reached the top of the hill we stopped for lunch and after noticing that we were all dropping like flies Ron decided we would head back down and to go the pool but of course we had to choose a different route. Instead of following the road back down we went along a track that we though came out at a different part of the road. After a while we came to a waterfall/stream so Geraldine stood in the middle and got us all over it but despite that Charlotte managed to nearly fall down it so she grabbed Francis and left him with a scratched shoulder. After following the path we realised it was a dead end so we had to turn around and find a new path which we did and it eventually lead us back to the road.

The walk down was much better but my feet are a bit sore because you can't help but thump all the way down. Once at the bottom we sat down and those who still wanted to go to the pool after 5 hours went so that left Jim Geraldine and myself to walk back to the campsite. So to sum up today we got rather lost, Charlotte nearly died, Bethany got stung several times by nettles and I nearly collapsed up the hill. Just a normal day at BEG.

Just when you think the day is over Ron comes strolling out of his tent looking rather confused after discovering that his trainers somehow melted [the upper and sole separated] while being in his tent.

We are currently watching a very good thunder storm that has been going on for at least 45 minutes. One of the men in the restaurant informed us that today has been the hottest day recorded of 38 degrees C since the 1800's. Ideal weather for a walk!

Wednesday 8th July 2015 (chapter one)

Jim McPherson

Awake at 5.30am. It's raining – a bit different from our neighbours wakening us – maybe it'll stop – it did, then started again. Ah well, can't always be sunny. Up a bit later so that the canyoning group can be organised and ready to leave for 8.40am. Ten of us are canyoning, the other 5 are looking for an alternative activity.

Breakfast done – plenty space without the German school there. We begin to assemble for the journey to Oetz.

We get counted on to the bus and set off in the rain for Feel Free's centre at Oetz. It is rush hour traffic – or as near as it gets – in Haiming and I can watch the traffic – just as well since the driver has as much English as I have Austrian, so that wasn't too chatty a journey.

We arrive at Feel Free's place in Oetz and met Jörg our guide for the canyoning. We get our wet suits, socks, boots, helmet, harnesses for the day. He explains we will have to do some abseiling as well as some via ferrata. This is a bonus. I'm just not sure if it is a very welcome one for some of the group. Once we have levered, squeezed and compressed ourselves into the wet suits we get on the bus for the Alpenrosenklamm. The road climbs and climbs, we pass a ski lift – we're high!! We stop eventually at a bridge, this is the start at an elevation of 1700 meters Jörg tells us. There is a group already there. They start by abseiling off the bridge – a free fall. Oh joy – this will test the nerves out. Ah well, only one way to convince the others it's safe – I go first. This becomes a feature of the journey. So feet braced on the bridge, Jörg lowers away, step down a bit, then I run out of bridge to brace against. I'm in mid air, I really should have delegated the task. I reach the bottom, water goes down the back of the wet suit, I can't get a foothold and end up tumbling. Steady myself eventually and unclip the karabiner for the next guinea pig to trust their life to Jörg .

As each arrives I help unclip each in turn and get ready for the next. Some enjoy it more than others!! Talk about 'facing up to your fears' some of the group excelled at this. We carry on downstream, walking, scrambling, and sliding depending on the terrain. Now we are at a difficult bit so clip onto a cable for a bit of via ferrata. Two activities for the price of

one. On we go, more scrambling, more via ferrata, then we get our first slide. Jörg grabs each of us by the shoulders, bend the legs, cross the arms and off we go. I still manage to hit the bottom – momentum I suppose. Not so many freaked out by this as the abseil a bit more ‘facing up’. More via ferrata, then another abseil – this one is big but we are all getting to master the technique – and trust Jörg . Finally we run out of river and move up to the path and walk out.

We recover our stash of food left behind on the way up. Jörg builds a nice wee pile of wood and uses a blow torch to start it – or would have if it hadn’t run out of gas. Resort to traditional methods, serviettes, cardboard and matches. Eventually he gets the fire started and fries ‘cheesy spätzle’ a kind of bread mix macaroni cheese. We eat this in between rain showers then back on the bus to Oetz. We get out of all the rubber stuff, rinse it out, quickly, as a farmer is spraying slurry in an adjacent field, say our thank yous and goodbyes to Jörg and it’s on the bus back to Haiming.

We try to contact the walkers – no luck – so resort to 10 pokes of chips to keep body and soul together until the others get back.

A shopping expedition is mounted for tonight and tomorrow as we will be off almost as soon as the Supermarket opens.

Wednesday 8th July 2015 (chapter two)

Emma Stewart

This morning as most of the group headed off to throw themselves off cliffs, Pat, Ron, Jo Francis and myself had a relaxed breakfast (in peace and quiet!). After I’d added shoes to my pyjama ensemble (as I seem to have an uncanny ability to rip my trousers as well as my skin) we headed out to find Haiming Tourist Information. After the local signage had us walking in circles we decided to ask a builder the way to Oetz. Despite our limited German, we found our way to the station. When the builder was describing the way, it sounded like it was only down the road. However we ended walking to the next village – around a 20 minute walk.

Once we reached the station and Jo and Pat had tested out the futuristic, self-cleaning toilets, I went to track down some tickets. The direction I was pointed in wasn’t manned so me and Pat tackled THE TICKET MACHINE. We didn’t do too great. Thankfully, before we spent any money, a man appeared at the booth and Ron swiftly purchased us some tickets. Tickets that we assumed (since we were at the train station) were for the train. Oh how wrong we were! On the hunt for our platform, a helpful lady told us that a train to Oetz didn’t exist and that a bus was required. The ticket man had neglected to inform us of that. Once we had that information, the journey was simple enough. We realised that Jo falls asleep on a 10 minute bus trip (and that if she was rich enough she would make a bed that moves so she would always sleep well).

We got off the bus right outside the cable car but had to wait until their lunch break was over. Francis spent the ride “convinced that the rain would develop into a lightning storm and that we would be struck and we would all die”. Jo on the other hand, handled her first ride on a cable car (and her fear of heights) like a trooper.

At the top we saw a horse, and had lunch. It was agreed that lunch was pretty tasty, but the ice cream that we had at the bottom was the bees-knees. Although the bus back home came too soon, and we had to sneak on the back of the bus with our ice-cream whilst Ron distracted the driver.

We finished our day as a small group by a casual walk back to all the exhausted people at the campsite.

Thursday 9th July 2015

Chloe Purves

Today was an early start as Gary, one of the gentleman who owns the ‘Rafting Alm’ (place where we are staying) had organised a bus for us to go to Neuschwanstein Castle. We met for breakfast at 7.15 am and were on the bus at 8 am to start our day trip. We travelled north following the river Inst, which actually starts in Switzerland. The mountains surrounded us on both sides – limestone on the right which creates the peak and jaggy skyline and granite on the other which allows grasses to grow for the grazing cows. In the autumn time the shepherds bring several herds of cattle together – around 200 cows – and they dress them up with head pieces and bells, and march them through town. The cow that had produced the most milk during the season gets to lead the procession and the last cow has to carry the heaviest bell in shame of their poor milk produce. Gary pointed out how farmers are returning to the old method of farming where they dry the grass rather than use silage as it produced better milk.

We travelled the road over Holzleitnersattel. This mountain is unique as the trees are all the same. The trees were larch which is a deciduous conifer. It is good for the farmers as it provided great grazing for the cows in the winter.

Our amazing tour guide (Gary, who used to be a tour guide in Munich) enlightened us about the history of the area. In particular the building of the Roman road by the Emperor’s stepson. The road is called Via Claudia Augusta and it took a total of 60 years to be built during both before and after Christ.

We made a stop at Zugspitzblick and took in the amazing surroundings before making our onwards journey through the old passport control into Germany. Bavaria makes up 20% of Germany and covers 30.000 square miles, same size as Scotland. By this time many of us couldn’t keep our eyes open and a look up the bus revealed a few droollers.

Neuschwanstein Castle is a 19th Century palace on a rugged hill located above the village of Hohenschwangau. The palace was commissioned by Ludwig II who became King of Bavaria at only 18yrs old, as a retreat and as a homage to his friend Richard Wagner. The palace has appeared in several movies [including Chitty Chitty Bang Bang] and was the inspiration for Disney and Sleeping Beauty castle.

The palace was opened to the paying public immediately after his death in 1886. The story goes that the Government persuaded doctors to sign to say Ludwig was mentally ill and unable to rule the state. As a result he was taken away to a sanatorium. Both himself and

his psychiatrist were found dead a few days later having drowned in shallow water. So in the end Ludwig only lived in the palace for a total of 172 days and only completed 14 rooms.

We arrived at Neuschwanstein and made the short but steep walk to the top. Our tour was due to start at 12.35 pm. In the summer as many as 6.000 people visit the castle per day so it is important to make your slot. We walked up to Marienbrucke (suspension footbridge behind the castle). On the way up we saw spectacular views of the lake and neighbouring castle of Hohenschwangau, the residence of Ludwig's parents and the home in which he grew up.

We headed back to the front of the castle for lunch; we had tuna salad wraps or ham/cheese wraps – they were yum! Before heading to the courtyard for 12.15 pm.

In the courtyard we were taking pictures of the castle when Ron gathered us together and then told me, just me, to take off my bag and hand over my camera – I had no idea what I had done wrong and Ron's 'teacher eyes' scared the ... out of me so I just did as he said.

Next thing I know I am being dressed in a bin bag coat and fitted with a square cap. The group had organised a graduation ceremony for me seeing as I was missing my actual one by being on the expedition. I honestly couldn't have asked for a better way to celebrate. Ron had even made a certificate. I got a wee bit emotional as I couldn't believe the effort that had been put into it. I wore the 'outfit' for the rest of the tour and time at the castle.

On the way back down the hill many people stopped to get souvenirs, a lot of people got a hot drink and cake as you got to keep the mug afterwards.

We returned to the bus and headed for Oberammergau. Oberammergau is best known for the Passion Play which was started in 1633 when residents vowed that if God spared them from the bubonic plague ravaging the region they would produce a play thereafter for all time depicting the life and death of Jesus. The play is now performed over the course of five months during every year ending in zero. The performance involves over 2,000 people, musicians and stage technicians.

When we arrived at the village we were left to explore. Many headed to the famous Christmas shop, while others enjoyed a variety of ice cream at only one Euro per scoop – Bargain!. Ice cream was amazing everywhere we went.

We returned to camp at 6 pm after a full on day of sightseeing. The next thing on everyone's mind was food – a common occurrence on the expedition. A group headed to the supermarket, which is only a short walk away, over the bridge, to pick up some food. They returned with chicken and rice and two sauce options – sweet and sour or pesto, yes pesto. The combination one group had (rice with pesto, Philadelphia, tomato puree, peanuts and salt) had Charlotte up in arms – "What are they doing?" However everyone ate up and enjoyed. The night ended with a few card games and the girls taught me how to play a card game called 'Spit'. I didn't do too bad although I injured Jo (just a wee cut on her finger).

Note to self: Spit is a highly competitive game.

Friday 10th July 2015

Jim McPherson (chapter one)

We have to be at Rafting Alm for 9.00 am to get ready for our rafting adventure. Eager beavers all, we're there for 5 to 9.

We meet with Will and Danny, our guides for the morning and we are joined by an unsuspecting Dutch couple who had also signed up for the day. It is similar to the canyoning, we get wet suits, boots, helmets (Ron takes a climbing one) and this time we get buoyancy aids too. We get into the wet suits, again there isn't one my size and a shoe horn is required to help me in and I end up walking around like an extra in a 2nd rate horror film.

We wait, we wait longer. Will eventually explains "we have lost a bus". OK, this doesn't exactly inspire confidence...but it's not their fault. The bus arrives; we load up and head off on a 20 minute drive on the back roads to the rafting start. There are dozens of rafts here – the Tweed Commissioners would have apoplexy. Sam Ritchie (a raft guide, from Selkirk) is there too with 10+ Feel Free rafts. They're waiting for a bus load of 18-30 tourists. This was said a wee bit on the dismissive tone.

We had asked to split into two groups of 8 – a 'fast' raft and a 'slow' raft. To get the balance Geraldine and I end up on the slow raft. The rafts get carried down to the river and we're encouraged to go and test the water temperature. There are different levels of enthusiasm for this. Will sets us up for Group photos, link arms – fall backwards. Now we've all tested the water.

No hanging about, we're straight into the raft and off we go. I think we're trying to beat the rush. Geraldine and I are at the front, Lia and Jo – both nervous behind us. Nicola, Ron, Pat and Giuliana complete our merry crew. The nutters are in the 'fast' raft. We get a 'taster' set of rapids quite early on and we paddle through these. Much screaming and shrieking from behind me – not sure if it is delight or terror. By this time Ron has told Will that I'm a canoeist so when he is looking for a volunteer to demonstrate getting back into the raft there is a distinct lack of elevated hands so Will says to me "OK you will do". Thanks Ron. Over I go, and Will has me back in the raft in very short order.

We carry on down some bigger rapids, the shrieks behind me get louder, matched by screams from the other raft, they're having a great time too. We have splashing tournaments. I manage to hook one off the other raft and pull him in. Sod's law strikes again – I got the poor innocent Dutch man who found himself sharing a raft with half a dozen likeable Scottish nutters Oops!

We get more swimming action and Lia and Nicola do a superb job of pulling me back into the raft – frequently. Rafts bump together and a wee sprint across and poor unsuspecting Charlotte, who thought she was safe ends up in the water too. Too soon we are at the finish, beach the rafts, haul them out and up to the base. Get changed, clean the gear, we get a celebratory shot of Schnapps (I got 2) to round off a great morning's activity for some, and another 'face up to your fears' activity for others.

Friday 10th July 2015

Emma Stewart (chapter two)

After everyone had showered and dried off, it was time to head to the shop to collect supplies for lunch. We had wraps with ham and cheese, with dips and breadsticks and melon (yummy). It was one of the hottest lunches I've ever had, the cheese was melting in the bag on the table. Chloe was too frazzled and had to retreat to eat under the table. Pat told her "she should be setting an example". Since we got a discount at the local pool after 4pm, we spent a couple of hours cooling off in the small wooden tub before heading to the pool. Since we were heading off early in the morning, we thought it would be best to have a quick detour past the train station on the way to the pool – just to make sure we didn't get lost with our big rucksacks on!

Once we had found our bearings, it was off to the pool with a couple of us posting some postcards home. We didn't get quite as cheap a deal as we did last time, but it was still a bargain. Everyone had a good time in the pool with only one emergency water rescue having to be performed by Charlotte (only after asking to see her new lifeguard skills)

On the way back home, some of us stopped to stock up on juice and chocolate for the evening (and journey ahead) Since it was our last night in Haiming, we decided to have a meal at the campsite restaurant. Afterwards Gary and John (the two very generous owners) came out with some freebie desserts for us to enjoy. These kept us happy whilst we shared our highs and lows from the past few days. There were some interesting ones! But perhaps everyone agreed that it had been just a little too hot!

Everyone had a relaxing evening finishing packing and writing their journals before an early start the next morning.

Saturday 11th July 2015

Nicola Stillie

We got up slightly earlier than usual to dismantle camp. We packed our bags and tried to dry out the tents before packing them away. After spending 6 nights camping the grass was very marked from where our tents were. We had our last breakfast at the Rafting Alm then squashed our tents into our bags. We were so organised that we were ready nearly an hour before we needed to leave. Time to get photos with our lovely hosts Gary and John and we presented them with our BEG badge, they were really pleased with them. They then offered to take our big rucksacks to the station. A lot of the group were really glad about the offer as it is another really warm day. So we all packed our bags into the back of John's car and Emma went with him to stay with the bags.

The rest of us set off along the road towards the train station. It wasn't long before we had an injury – this time it wasn't Emma. Ron slipped off the pavement along the bridge and scraped along his arm and leg. We make it to the train station and nurse Pat cleans up Ron, but he doesn't have to wear the Pat hat. We get the 10.22 am train to Innsbruck and arrive at 10.58 am, plenty time to spare before our bus at 1.30 pm so we split into groups for a wander around Innsbruck before our long bus journey to Munich. Most of us had a sleep

on our 2hr 20mins bus journey. The heat and fun filled week of activities has really tired us out.

Once we arrived in Munich we retrieved our bags from the bus and headed to the train station. Two trains, two stops and a short walk later we made it to the Smart Stay Hostel.

We split into 3 rooms. Ron, Jim, Stuart and Francis were in a room with an Australian, two Spanish people and a German. Emma, Nicola, Pat, Charlotte and Lia are in a room with a mystery woman. The rest of the girls have a private room to themselves, Chloe, Geraldine, Bethany, Giuliana, Marisa and Jo.

It didn't take long for people to mention it was dinner time so we headed out to find somewhere to eat and came across MacDonalds. After eating our burgers and chips it was time for a walk to burn off some of the calories. We headed into the centre of town and came across the Christopher Street Day Festival which was for Gay Pride. There were lots of stalls with food and drinks and a main stage where artists sang. There was some really good music, Chloe and Nicola had a good bop to the tunes. It was great to see different cultures. After we had walked around and had an idea of where to go for our sightseeing tomorrow we headed back to the hostel to settle in for the night.

Sunday 12th July 2015

Ron Sutherland

The group had booked breakfast last night so we assembled in the foyer at 8.30 am to go downstairs for breakfast. It was the usual continental style buffet, with cheese, ham, rolls and jam but with cereals and yoghurt and some interesting hard boiled eggs very colourful they were, to distinguish them from unboiled eggs.

Once we were ready we all set off to walk to the Marienplatz to have a better view of the area and to visit the cathedral of the DOM to view 'the devil's footprint'. Geraldine is leader today and after reaching the centre of the city we walked up a road to get to the cathedral but I think we missed the turn off.

On the way back we stopped outside the museum to hunting and fishing and we took lots of photos of the bronzes of wild boar and a giant wells catfish. At this point it was also decided to go and see/hear the performance at the Marienplatz of the moving figures and the glockenspiel. I videoed the entire performance I think! Apart from the last part of the cock crowing.

We then decided to move to the Cathedral where we all saw the devil's footprint and looked at the stunning scale of the building, especially the pillars that hold up the ceiling.

Onwards we went then to the 'English Gardens', a park the size of Monaco on the eastern side of the city centre. We walked along the main path and our first 'sight' was the nudist area. Of course we all averted our eyes and marched stoically past.

We arrived at a nice shady area by one of the artificial channels of the river that runs through the city and Pat dished out some chocolate bars and some raisins. People were swimming in the river, and enjoying being swept along by the rapid current.

Next we headed on to the Chinese Pagoda. As we approached we could hear music and it transpired that there was a traditional Bavarian group playing accordion accompanied by a group of men with whips that were being cracked with gusto in time to the music. We all watched as this performance gave way to a dance group doing of course some thigh slapping and high kicking Bavarian dances.

Now we sloped off into the shade of the Pagoda and both Venturers and leaders had something to eat or drink with left over cash from the tea yesterday. We needed to be in the shade as the temperature was in the 30's.

Around us were lots of food stalls and beer sellers, obviously aimed at the Sunday outing mostly for local people, but also for the tourists. At about 2.30 pm it was decided to let people split up into their groups and reassemble at the entrance to the park at 3.30 pm.

Pat, Jim and myself went round to listen to more music when we picked up some familiar tones in the voices behind us. It was a stag party from NE Scotland so we had a good blether to them all. We strolled through the park via the ice cream stall. On reaching the entrance with plenty of time to spare we set off to find a toilet that Jim said was at the end of a big building. It was not there! But we did chance upon the place where people surf the waves on the river where it exits from under the road. Some quite good entertainment with the surfers.

As we got back to the entrance again the gang was assembled, paddling their feet in the stream, watching Stuart and Francis gliding down the fast flowing river past them. Shortly, Geraldine announced our departure, and that we were headed back via the Hofbrauhaus. We did this through the Hofgarten, past the Max Planck Institute University buildings and through the narrow streets of the Altestadt to the Hofbrauhaus. Inside there is a huge hall that must seat over 1,000 people. Here is one of the places that Hitler made one of his important speeches. It is a very old impressive building.

We then wriggled through some more of the old town streets, past the market and a stop at a bank for Jim, to eventually come out to familiar territory of the Sendlinger Tor. At this point we decided to have tea at the Alla Scala pizza house. I think it was enjoyed by all, although we came away with doggy bags as Lia and Giuliana were unable to finish their meals.

The last leg was covered quickly walking back to the hostel and we all got settled back into our rooms and had teas, coffees and cool drinks to replace the lost moisture of the hot day we had experienced. The last of the day was passed in the communal area and just before bed Jim, Nicola, Stuart and Francis checked out the nearest station that we will use tomorrow to get to Dachau.

Monday 13th July 2015

Pat Sutherland

Some of the group were up and ready for the supermarket opening at 8 am. Yogurt, Milk, Juice, Muesli was purchased for breakfast along with a sweet biscuit. Rolls, wraps, Salami, Philadelphia cheese, peanut butter, bananas and apples were purchased for a packed lunch.

Breakfast was in room 502 which was exclusively a BEG room. We made packed lunches and set off on our journey to Dachau. We took the tube two stops, and then got onto a train. When the train stopped at Dachau, we had to get onto a very crowded bus to get out to the concentration camp.

The Camp itself was very well sign posted and very informative, but a few folk still opted for the audio commentary as well, as this gave even more information.

Dachau was very sobering if relatively sanitised. We read the stories and saw the pictures. We saw the Crematorium and the Showers used as a gas chamber. But I don't think that all of those things conveyed the real horror of what had really happened there. People were murdered for simply being imperfect, long before the POW's arrived.

There were also some fitting memorials to all those who had lost their lives. We wandered around for 2 – 3 hours taking in the scenes, reading or listening to the information. People were subdued by it. All will have their own thoughts and views.

We than returned to central Munich but stayed on the tram/underground for a few more stops until we came to the Olympic Stadium. Some went on a pedalo on the lake where the rowing had taken place, others went for a walk around the various venues, and some went to the BMW Museum which was next door. It was raining at this point, but it was cool in contrast with the heat we had been experiencing, so no one really minded.

We returned to the hostel and completed some more of our packing. At 7 pm we went to the restaurant next door to the hostel for a meal. The Pizzas were enormous, but most people managed to get through them then have dessert!!

At the end of the day Jim and a few others went to check out our route back to the airport for the next day.

Tuesday 14th July 2015

Bethany Thomson

Home time!

Today we were joined by everyone for breakfast in mine's, Jo's, Marisa's, Chloe's, Giuliana's and Geraldine's room. After breakfast we all went back to our rooms to finish our packing. We checked out at 10 am and left our bags behind the bar.

We got the underground to Marienplatz and split off into groups. Some people went to the market and others did some last minute souvenir shopping. We were given until 2 o'clock to do our own thing. Marisa, Jo and I did some clothes shopping. We all met back up at the Glockenspiel tower and got the underground back to the hostel. We collected our bags and split into three groups of five for the journey. We got back on the train to Marienplatz once again. We arrived after two stops then waited 15 minutes for the train to the Airport.

The train lasted about 30 minutes and it was very crowded. We arrived at the airport at 4 O'clock. For some reason, we were about three hours early. Our rucksacks had to be bagged and cable tied. Some people went for a wander around the airport and got some ice cream. Eventually, the bag drop off opened and we all checked our heavy bags in. We then proceeded through passport control and security. Apart from Emma's Swiss army knife, everyone's bags were safe.

Once we were all through we sat at our gate BO1 for about another hour. Most people went for another wander and I finished off our card game with Chloe, Nicola and Emma.

Our game was interrupted by the opening gate. At about 9.25 pm we boarded the plane. The flight left on time and the journey was smooth. We arrived at Edinburgh all safe and well at about 11.30pm (ish). We were all so tired and glad to be going home to our own warm beds.

This expedition had been an amazing opportunity; we have all experienced new cultures, tried new foods and spent two weeks with amazing people. This is certainly a chapter of my life I never want to forget.



Acknowledgements

Every BEG Expedition depends on a large number of folk who help us in so many different ways through the planning, training and preparation. The Austria 2015 Expedition was no different, and we would like to thank all the folk below for their help in getting us to Austria. Without their help, the expedition could not have been the success it was.

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Hall Keeper, Lindean Hall
Donation
Selection Volunteer
Training, Language Skills
Emergency Response Group
Selection
Selkirk Rugby Club Steward
Use of Fairnilee Farm for Training
Fund Raising Opportunity
First Aid Tutor
Owners, West Morriston
Fund Raising Opportunity
Argus Centre Hall Keeper
Training Team, Selection
Advice and help for Adventure Phase
Austria Advice
Fund Raising Opportunity
Fund Raising Assistance
Fund Raising Assistance
Fund Raising Assistance
Selection Volunteer
Austria Adventure Activities Arranging
Fund Raising Opportunity
Emergency Response Group
Use of Philiphaugh for Training
Safety Session and Training
Hall Keeper, Broadmeadows Hall Contact
Selkirk Rugby Club
Selection Advice and Land Use
Fund Raising Opportunity, Selkirk