



YFA TRAVEL DOCUMENT

Seeing the world with the YFC Discovery Programme

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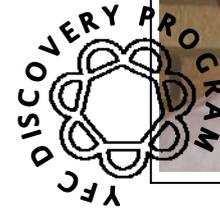
CLUB: Eccleshall YFC

DESTINATION: Norway

TYPE OF TRIP: European Rally

DURATION: 1 week

DATES OF TRAVEL: August 2003



DESCRIPTION OF TRIP:

The superb 2003 European Rally, which brought teams of five from 17 different countries to the spectacular fjords in Western Norway, has recently been held. The English and Welsh teams flew from Stanstead and met up with Scotland and Ulster the night before the rally started, in the ancient and charming coastal city of Bergen.

A four-hour journey north to the rally site in Flekke at a college, took us over the longest ford in the world stretching 200km inland! An opening ceremony with all teams in national costume began proceedings. Icebreaking games and team building tasks such as canoeing, local food tasting and tent erecting helped everyone integrate from the start with other countries.

At the annual International Buffet, each team then provided plentiful food and drink typical to their nation. This included Danish pickled eggs, Irish seaweed, Swiss chocolate, Lithuanian cake and rather a lot of mind blowing continental liqueurs, particularly from Malta! The night was sealed with some traditional Norwegian folk dancing.

Excursions and visits included trips to an oil refinery, knife factory, salmon farm and a 12-cow dairy farm! This is a typical size in Norway as geographical conditions are so harsh, but yields are comparable to ours despite the incredible gradient on some mountain farms. There is considerable government support as keeping agriculture viable is the only way to maintain the thinly scattered settlements existing in the abundant remote areas. Interestingly rural communities generally felt that if Norway joined the EU, many more areas would become uninhabited.

Pairs of rally participants from different teams spent two nights midweek with a host family enabling us to gain a real feel for the rural Norwegian way of life, which was dominated by community spirit, the trees (over 90% of Norway is forest and everything is made of wood!) and the fjords. Quality of life was superb - my host family owned three boats and took myself and fellow guest, Claus from Denmark, speed boating, fishing, jumping off rocks into the water, to a ski factory, a 2nd World War army bunker and hiking. Hospitality was unstinting with the opportunity to sample some predominantly delicious local delicacies, which of course included a lot of fish. Conversation was convivial and thought provoking as we each compared cultures and social values.

Back at the rally site each nation had to provide their own piece of national entertainment. England re-enacted 'Last Night of the Proms', the Scottish 'Stripped the Willow', while the Austrians played a rude game with chocolate.

Throughout the week there was plenty of evening entertainment helped along by a drink or three, where rural young people from all the cultures of Europe mingled enthusiastically. There was even some international romance! Late nights tended to end with an optional swimming ritual in the fjord, spurred on by the Swedish - although it never really got dark at all!

Ulster host the rally next year and I recommend it to all of you as the combination this year of breathtaking scenery and meeting interesting new people and cultures made the experience for us as exhilarating and memorable as we could have hoped for.

Ben Palmer