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Huskies, snow angels in July, and a train wreck in the Alps

By **CASS LLOYD PERRIN**
The Tattoo

On a muggy day last summer, a rather odd-looking group gathered to check in at London's Heathrow airport. All in blue, wearing conspicuous red, white and blue neckties, we were a gaggle of 24 of the Senior Section of Girlguiding UK.

We were headed to a hostel in Switzerland. Weighed down heavily by large rucksacks and walking poles, we might have looked as if we were wannabe hijackers, just waiting for a chance to leap into the cockpit of the plane and demand to be taken to an alternate destination.

No wonder the other passengers on our British Airways flight to Zurich, Switzerland, regarded us with an air of slight suspicion.

On arrival, all stared in awe and wonder at our living accommodation for the next 10 days. It was magnificent! A blue barn, with a chess set as the courtyard centerpiece, and 'Mountain Hostel, Grindelwald' emblazoned on the side.

The slightly-mad members of the party (of which there were several) considered their novel new lodgings as a home-away-from-home, while others considered it to be an eyesore which would have to be tolerated. The rooms were pleasant but a little cramped, considering they slept six to a bunk bed, albeit that this bed was a rather wide example and held six mattresses.

My visions of plump, golden-haired children in traditional costume, yodeling against a background of mountains and fluffy marmots, were soon shattered when it became apparent that we had come to rest in a town mainly dominated by Japanese tourists. Their presence was so noticeable that they even had their own tourist information office, set in a lovely, geometrically-designed garden decorated with a handful of fountains. It was the only truly beautiful building within the town limits. However, the natural beauties all around us did not disappoint us. Considering the fact that we were staying in a valley surrounded by some of the highest mountains in Europe, and with lots of national pride imbued in everyday life, we were happy enough.

One of the most surreal moments came at a point when we realized how very odd it was to be playing crazy golf against a background of pine trees and treacherous mountain ridges stretching off into the distance behind as far as the eye could see.

The entire trip revealed several examples of how strange a group of usually proper young ladies can actually be when left to explore the mountain paths and the surrounding entertainments. While some left to enjoy the sights and sounds of the panoramic view — rich Marmot Valley — a small group of five intrepid and slightly suicidal individuals, myself included, decided it would be fun to hire scooters and ride them four and a half kilometers back down the mountainside to the nearest town.

The roads were some of the steepest we had ever seen, and at some points, it seemed as if the scooters were flying down a vertical drop, the back wheels almost lifting off the road in deference to gravity. But finally we delivered the bikes back to safety, undamaged. (Although the same could not be said for the toes belonging to those who had ridden them...)

The holiday itself was based on the premise of a hiker's paradise. We were given the choice of graded walks, which basically meant that one walk had a natural phenomenon at the other end, while the slightly 'less challenging' hike meant a stop at a world-famed café or two within a 10-kilometer stretch of mountain climb.

On one of these occasions, most of the party moved home after a stimulating morning climbing to one of the best views we would see of gaily-decorated alpine cows jangling their bells at passers-by who stopped to have their picture taken with these rather unimpressed-looking animals.

Those of us who relished a challenge (and the jelly-like feeling in our legs afterwards) decided to attempt climbing one of the smaller mountains in the region. (It was only the first full day, after all, and it was still 2,472 meters high!) After several hours climbing on hands and knees at several points, while the mountain stretched far above us, we reached the top. Our climb rewarded us with a view to rival those from the top of any tall building in any major city in the world. We who had never before seen the breathtaking

panorama Switzerland had to offer were struck dumb as we saw what seemed to be tiny ants crawling slowly along, far below us. The next day, we felt the effects of our strains.

Stretching took up a major part of the day, and we were seen contorting ourselves around lampposts and dangling from high walls, in feeble attempts to work the knots out from our screeching muscles. But it was not in vain, and despite the odd looks we received, no one regretted the extra effort expended. In fact, we had a great time mocking those who had been too 'sissy' to attempt the climb alongside us.

The highlight of our trip, however, has to be the visit to the Jungfrauoch mountains, though I doubt that if my legs had separate brains, they would agree.

A walk through the snow — at heights of more than 11,000 feet — was murder, but everyone managed the two-hour trek. To be able to eat lunch in short-sleeved T-shirts while lobbing snowballs back and forth was an adventure in itself. The cold did not penetrate our thin clothes. Most of us felt rather warm, even to the point of falling down to make snow angels and sliding on plastic bags through the snow, squealing in delight.

The huskies proved to be yet another bonus added to our extraordinary experience at 'The Top of Europe'. The yowling noise coming from their little houses excited us all, and the ride through the snow, with the dogs kicking back snow, making all in the carriage wet was as much fun as anyone can possibly have.

It felt like Christmas had come early, and several members of the party had fun singing carols at the tops of their voices, much to the amusement of the surrounding foreigners who saw our 'neckers' and agreed we were mad and part of some obscure organization which promoted this attribute.

One of the most memorable moments was also the low point of our stay. Luckily, this came after many days of happily frolicking in the mountains, scootering, sledging and having a go on the toboggan run, while spending the hours between dinner and lights out singing traditional campfire favorites outside the backpackers' kitchen at our hostel. On the last day, when all the fun had been had, and everyone was already thinking about their own beds and proper showers, our good time ended quite unexpectedly.

Traveling slowly by train, down the side of one of many mountains, most of us watched out the window, while some talked, and some, including myself, contented themselves with finishing holiday homework, and reading. The train on which we were traveling was old and rickety, but pleasantly spacious, and safe-feeling, so the sudden stop felt like nothing out of the ordinary.

The next few seconds felt, to me, like a surreal, out-of-body experience. I don't remember much except the screams of my friends, a pain in my shoulder and the sound of smashing glass in the next carriage. It didn't seem important that I lost my page, or that a few souvenirs went missing.

Watching my friends being immobilized on stretchers and carried to waiting air ambulances while reporters gathered over the bridge on the other side of the bright red cordon was strange.

The reality didn't hit me until a few hours later, after encounters with firemen who didn't speak a word of English, and therefore had to make do with my bad translation of our version of events, and eccentric old ladies who allowed us to use their toilets.

Coaches were hired to transport us, Good Samaritans talked at us, our luggage was rescued. But friends were in need of help, and a lot is blurred. One image that remains has the added sensation of a weight bearing down on my shoulders, as I help carry my 'buddy' to the triage tent, as she suffers from belated shock.

The flight home was awful. Of the 13 of us allowed to fly home, not a single one escaped the embarrassment of floods of tears. We were leaving friends behind whose experiences we would not learn until we all met again a few weeks later. Strangely enough, that awful journey down the mountain was something which became a positive event for most in the end, as everyone has kept in close contact since. The images of crumpled carriages teetering on the edge of the mountainside will probably remain with all of us forever, but at least no one had to go through the experience alone.

basically lived on the snacks and candy we had brought with us (Thank you, Cheez-Its.) Once, we were allowed to order pizza from Dominoes. At one lunch, I left my sneakers at the table and was scolded because I was barefoot while getting some of my food. It's a good thing, too because I was, after all, planning to stick my feet in the big food containers on the tables.

I was sweltering in the dorm room, which made it hard to fall asleep, but two fans on high directly in my face seemed to help. I slept on the tile floor the last two nights.

Nearly all of the sessions were spent on skills, scrimmaging, and doing the dreaded drills, which made me too sore to perform in the games that followed. I was so happy when the final days of camp came so we could finally start playing some actual games and I was free of drills.

My most graceful moment came when I was walking out of the cafeteria, looking backwards and talking to my friends. I forgot about a step stretching across three doors, and completely missed it. I sort of just dropped to the cement all of a sudden. Apparently that walking and talking at the same time thing is too complicated for me. It stung, but mostly it was funny. For the rest of the week, the other girls would call out to me, "Whoa, watch out — there's a step there!"

When the real game-playing started, our

Me, a camp counselor?

By **DANIELLE LETOURNEAU**
The Tattoo

If you think baby-sitting your booger-breath little brother is bad, then try being a camp counselor for a month at a blazing hot day camp.

Over the summer, I was a counselor in training (C.I.T.) at Camp Chase, located in Burlington, Connecticut. It was fun but it also had its ups and downs.

Every day I would wake up around 8, trudge up the steep hills to the nearest bus stop, and climb onto the crowded, blistering hot camp bus for a 30-minute ride with screaming and hyperactive kids.

Once we got to the camp, we'd all unload and find our groups for attendance, then scamper off for a day of fun.

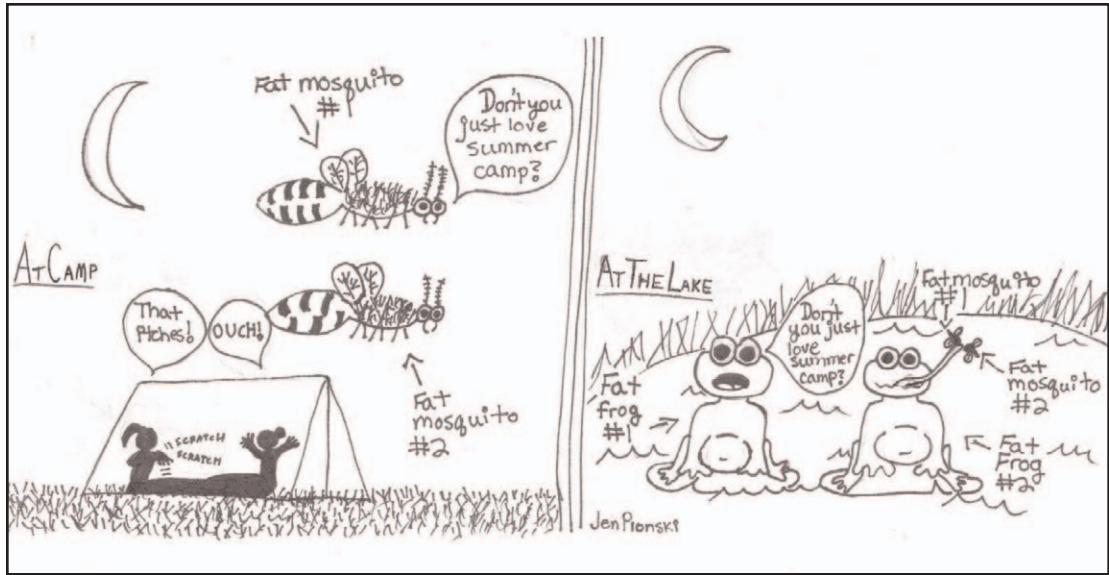
The kids had a pretty cool schedule. In the morning, after attendance, all the groups would circle around the flag pole for a morning flag assembly. We would raise the flag, say the Pledge of Allegiance, and then sing a camp song at the top of our lungs.

Then the kids would all head off to either their scheduled swim lesson or play their own games until lunchtime, when the kids would go to their lunch areas in the woods and chow down until noon assembly in the amphitheater.

Noon assembly was a tradition every day. We would sing a camp song to quiet the kids down, announce important stuff, and read the slips in the "mayonnaise jar" where kids would personally thank a friend in front of the camp for doing something special for them.

Then we would all head out to play some more games until the free swim time, where campers would get to go swim in the pool for half an hour. Then, in mid-afternoon, we would all meet up and go on our buses for home.

But not every day was like this.



Jen Plonski / The Tattoo

More than flirts in skirts

By **ERIN FOSTER**
The Tattoo

Every summer millions of kids go to camp. From sports to religion, there's pretty much a camp for anything you want — including cheerleading.

Many people think cheerleading doesn't take much effort. It's just a bunch of girls jumping around and screaming, right? Wrong! Cheerleading is one of the hardest sports known to man.

You need stamina, discipline, dedication, teamwork, strength and desire, not to mention a lot of money, because cheerleading can get pretty expensive.

In cheerleading you literally hold someone else's life in your hands. Cheerleaders can die from falling a wrong way. Also, we need to jump a few feet in the air while being stiff, pointing our toes and hitting motions.

You definitely need to be able to multi-task. Balance is a

key ingredient to being a cheerleader. Try standing on one foot, high in the air, while pulling a heel-stretch or scorpion.

The stereotype of cheerleaders couldn't be further from the truth. Cheerleaders are hardcore athletes — football players aren't the only ones who practice three hours a day.

Just like any other sports camp, you cheer all day. You wake up early, eat breakfast and go practice stunts and cheers. After a few rigorous hours of that, you go eat lunch and then cheer some more until dinner.

You're exhausted by then, and just crash until bed time. Then you get up the very next morning to do it all over again.

In cheerleading camp we learned new dances, cheers and stunts to use in the upcoming seasons.

It's a lot of fun, but also a lot

of work. You can break a sweat within the first five minutes.

Bristol Eastern High School cheerleaders attended BEST Cheerleading Camp at the University of Connecticut with cheerleaders from other schools around Connecticut and two girls from New York.

It was a fun four days.

"Stunting class was my favorite," said Kara Doolittle, a varsity cheerleader from Eastern. "I'd go back next year just to learn new and more advanced stunts."

Personally I loved the camp and I can't wait to go back next year. I learned a lot and can't wait to show it off at school.

Cheerleading camp is something every squad should experience and I highly recommend it to other teams. All in all, it is something I will never forget, and it was a great bonding experience for our team.

Chasing UConn women and other volleyball camp charades

By **JEN PLONSKI**
The Tattoo

For four full days after it ended, every time I walked up stairs or lifted my right arm, I was painfully reminded of my four days at volleyball camp at the University of Connecticut.

At this camp for middle and high school girls, participants could stay in the dorms or commute. At the start of the camp everyone signed in, got their food card, room key, and T-shirt and lanyard to keep (yippee!). After dropping the luggage in my dorm room, it was off to our first practice in Gayer Gymnasium.

There we performed a series of fairly easy volleyball tests, such as passing, serving, and spiking while coaches evaluated us and assigned us to teams based on our skill levels. Teams were numbered one to eight, with the best scoring girls in the eighth level. I, of course, was placed in level one. (Gimme a break, I'm new at this.)

Each full day there were three sessions held in either Gayer or Gampel Pavilion. At the first nighttime session, we met our own coach and all the coaches from the other teams. My team was called Kiss My Ace! An ace is a serve that hits the floor or a serve that the other team hits only once before it lands on the floor.

The food at UConn wasn't terrible, but we

coach got a lot more... umm ...competitive. Everyone on my low-ranked team seemed to play 10 times better than they had in practice. It was like a whole different team. We played eight games and won three. Kiss My Ace! played all the way up the third level.

A particularly humiliating consequence of losing was that the winning team got to choose a punishment for the losers. It was funny to watch but definitely not fun to do. We made one team crawl around the entire gym on their hands and knees either barking or meowing. In retaliation, when we lost to them, they made us all do the crabwalk all the way around while yelling "Cockroach!" as loud as we could. I'm pretty sure they were still a little mad about the barking.

One evening, we did skits for each other. In my group, four of the eight girls laid on their backs and the rest sat on their stomachs and facing forward, kneeling on the ground. The girls kneeling covered their legs with a towel, so it looked like they had the legs of the girl they were sitting on. I was one of the girls on the ground, and I couldn't really see the audience. Or breathe. We did an exercise skit, with one girl as the "instructor." We did lots of strange-looking stretches, and the leg movements matched the arm motions. At the end, we did a pretzel (which cracked every vertebrae in my back) and then

the can-can.

We thought some of the UConn women basketball players were going to be judging, but when we got to Gampel, the counselors were judging and the players were nowhere in sight.

Some of my friends and I were unsure about going to camp before signing up, until we heard that we would probably see some of the UConn women basketball players hanging around the campus. We were all desperately hoping to get an autograph or picture or just meet one of the players. We particularly hoped to see Diana Taurasi, one of their best. I saw Taurasi in the computer room and weight room near the gym, but, alas, every time, I had no paper, pen, or camera.

Once when she walked out of the computer room and past me down the hall, my curiosity got the better of me and I ran in to see the title of the paper she was typing. I got lost in the excitement because I don't remember what it said. The next day, when we saw her in the weight room, about 10 of us asked if we could wait until Taurasi came out. After about 15 minutes, practice was about to start and one of the mean coaches made us go into the gym. When we checked again after practice, Taurasi was gone. When camp ended, we left, our mission to meet the UConn players fruitless. There's always next year.

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