

2nd Renfrew (Trinity) Scout Group

Scout Network

Memoirs of a Scout Network Member

My first experience of Network was in Edinburgh at a now defunct group called Blackford District Scout Network (BDSN). I was studying at Edinburgh University at the time and had found a group with other leaders at which I could help out once a week. This led me on to Network events in that area including ones organised by the Student Scout and Guide Organisation SSAGO as well as other more local weekly events with the Blackford Group.

I recall well the first major event that I attended as a Networker, the 'Network Gathering' event at Great Tower Scout Camp in the Lake District over the Easter break in 2010. Having already come back to Renfrew for the Easter break it was arranged that I'd travel down with another group more known in the area, Bishopton Rovers, who had a minibus and were passing Renfrew on the way down as well as picking up others in the Borders.

The event was a 'relatively orderly' affair but it kindled my interest in keeping going with scouting events and activities. A definite step change in culture from Explorers.

After I moved back to the west coast I inevitably lost touch with the Edinburgh group. While I remained a leader at 2nd Renfrew I was essentially inactive as a Network member, so it was by luck again that I discovered another district Scout Network group some time later in Paisley, (PDSN). It was a chance encounter with another member at a Scout first aid course in Bishopton that I was invited along. In many ways this is where my Network experience really kicked off.

The group met on Thursdays in Paisley, a place much more accessible to me as a youth without a car than the Bishopton Rovers Group. The group was growing rapidly at the time and I discovered the wider Scottish Network was awash with events, camps and other associated gatherings.

The group and the people I met in that period became almost my entire social circle. For years, as I completed my postgraduate studies in Glasgow and started my early career also in Paisley, I remained a weekly attendee and organiser of events. The archive where I keep my digital photos is littered with references to Scout events and camps.

The number of national and local events gave rise to friendships with others across the country in the scouting community, many of which I keep to this day - friends who I might meet for a walk in the hills or paddle across a loch.

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The biggest event I attended in my time at Network was the 2017 International Scout Moot in Iceland. I was alone from the 2nd Renfrew group but with perhaps 60 others from Scotland, and 5,000 from over 100 countries of the world. I knew perhaps 30 or so of the Scottish cohort before the event (many for years) but there was also an opportunity to meet the whole UK contingent at two 'preparation' camps in England before the main event.



For years I had heard stories of others who had been staff at other major world jamborees. When the time for my first international camp as a Networker came, the anticipation and build up was incredible. And the event did not disappoint.

I flew over to Keflavik with the Glasgow contingent flight and I remember being blessed with a window seat on the right side of the Iceland Air jet. It was a clear day right across Scotland and I had a fantastic view of everything from Glasgow to the Hebrides. The excitement only grew as we headed out over the North Atlantic. As the plane skirted the south coast of the Iceland I was treated to the game of picking out the peaks of the vast Vatnajokull ice sheet that I would soon be camping at the base of. Despite living logistically closer to Iceland than perhaps any participants other than the Icelanders, I'm sure to the others, as well as myself, the place still felt a world away.

There was a first night of exploring Reykjavik with, if I recall correctly, the contingent staying in the classrooms of local schools, complete with a trip out to the main public baths at the cities sports complex. The planning and logistics of the whole event are something that still continues to amaze me.

Iceland is an island geared towards tourism, but even so, with a native population of some 360,000, our event contributed a temporary population boost to the country of some 1.4%.

The reason behind the trip to the swimming pool was that it represented one of the few places with enough showers to facilitate such an influx of people! We found out the next day at the official opening ceremony that the event had booked every coach in the country to move us all to our respective activity centres.

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My activity centre Skaftafell was one of the furthest away, tucked at the southern edge of the island's biggest ice sheet at the national park and glacier of the same name. If memory serves me correctly, there were around 500 participants at the site, split into patrols of about 40 for cooking and organisational and language purposes. This first half of the Moot saw Scouts engage in various pre-chosen activities based around adventure, history, cultural awareness and other key themes. Skaftafell was the prime adventure location with rock climbing, glacier walks, mountain climbs and other sporting activities to engage with.



Aside from the adventures, the social aspect of meeting hundreds of other Scouts from around the world was constantly engaging. I remember frequently having to 'translate' the accents of the three other Scottish companions I was with into a version of English our Italian, Quebecois, Australian, Danish, Austrian, Polish, Mexican and other nationals could understand!

The second part of the camp was one which gathered all the participants together for activities at the Ulfljotsvatn National Scout Centre in the West of the country. I remember having to swiftly pack in the morning as the coach times were moved forward through the day. Why was this? Apparently a volcano under the ice sheet was waking up and there was concern that the resultant meltwater might wash away the road that led back to the Capital.

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Outside the capital region the island only really has one road looping near the coast all the way round. A diversion would have seen us turning a 3 and a half hour journey into a near 1000km loop taking 12 hours without any account of stopping. Fortunately, the river, which had turned black and ashy, was not impassable on the floodproof Icelandic bridges.

This latter portion of the camp was more laid back and had more of a party/festival atmosphere; there was no shortage of activities and parties ran late into the night for those who could keep themselves going. The days provided for short excursions to the local hydro station and other nearby sites in the national park of geological or cultural interest.

I recall being peacefully awoken one morning by some Swiss Scouts who had brought some alp horns and climbed to the nearby prominent point where the site had its ceremonial flagpole. Not to be outdone, and presumably to make sure everyone else was awake too, my friend quickly joined them at the summit with his bagpipes for a second verse as it were!

The end of the camp saw us all returned to Reykjavik. Having some three more days to enjoy the country before our return flights, I chose to exploit my relative age and rent a car with another 3 friends to tour some other sites we hadn't yet seen. My first time driving a manual car on the wrong side of the road was a challenge at first - I promptly punched the driver's door handle when what I actually wanted was a quick gear change, but other than that I think we got on ok.

This independence let us loop back along the south coast and cover some extra ground including the geysers at Geysir, some of the major waterfalls and other points of interest including an old cold war era crashed plane that had become an attraction in its own right.

Alas, all good things must end, not without style though. My friends and I made good on our last night's celebrations, and why not. There was little point in going to bed when your flight

home needed you to be at the airport for 5 in the morning. I do remember having to negotiate with some drunk friends on the airport bus explaining that there literally was no time for chips!



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While there were a great many friends of mine who put themselves through the trials and tribulations of the higher level awards, the Queen's Scout Awards and as such, my main dedication through the course of my early twenties was always to completing my studies as an architect, which I did manage at the age of 24. No small undertaking by any measure, but it swallowed the same years I would have spent working on the awards.

I had motioned to start the Queen's Scout Award a few times but unfortunately never gathered the time or focus away from my main architectural goals to complete the required tasks. However, despite the fact that I was in many instances already a great percentage of the way through the required tasks without any additional work, I always found time to support the group as a leader in some capacity.

I regret, to a point, never completing these higher awards but I know that one opportunity comes at the cost of another. While these awards and the pursuit thereof are of great value, the value of the friends I have made along the way are in many respects just as valuable. For me, the lifelong friendships are what my time in Scout Network was really about.

I continue to play a part in the PDSN group today and, as I am now some 4 years too old to be a participant, I have transitioned to leader, much in the way I did from Explorer to Beaver leader so many years before.

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2nd Renfrew (Trinity) Scout Group

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