



The Kandersteg Chronicles

Millennium ago, tectonic plates converged, crashing together to overlap, fold and crumple to form high mountains and jagged terrain. Glaciers formed and carved huge glacial valleys as they slipped over the centuries towards lower ground. This landscape today is both inhospitable and captivating. The terrors of thin air at high altitude with the almost impregnable sheer mountains dressed in glaciers and decorated by avalanches, give way to thick pine forest and lush pastures, where log cabins pose with red geraniums at their windows welcoming their bell ringing cow herds home for milking. This is the place chosen by Cramond Scouts for their summer adventure. This is the start of the Kandersteg Chronicles.

Day 1 of the Kandersteg Chronicles (said in Mike's accent)

Our intrepid party of adventurers to this land of extremes is comprised of 29 scouts, 6 Young Leaders, 7 leaders. All meet at Edinburgh airport and take on the challenge of checkin with calm and resolve. With rucksacks, tents and communal luggage conveyed from view, the security challenge sees sporrans, flashes, belts and boots all coming off – to pass through the scanner. All done – lunch bought and we take our seats on our almost private plane – there is a degree of pity for any additional passengers on our 49 seater to Zurich.

Undaunted by the delays of a left passport on the plane, (you've done what?!?) and a lost communal bag, our adventurers coach towards the Alps, leaving Zurich behind. Climbing higher in altitude, by means of hairpin bends, we pass valleys dotted with picturesque wooden cabins, amazed at how 'picture postcard' this landscape is. A warm welcome greets us at Kandersteg International Scout Centre, with a twangy accented American 'Pinkie' (Pinkie = Kandersteg leader) guiding us round the rudiments of the campsite. The Young Leaders take charge of hand drawn wooden carts to transport our communal kit to our site, while our kilted scouts feast on BBQ food together with other international scouts.

After dinner – with tents and marquee pitched, our adventurers are free to explore the site and the meet other campers. Most gravitate to the football pitch, and waiting in turn, match their skills to a Pinkie team. To finish the day we mark our arrival on site with a rousing campfire – the Scots have arrived!

Day 2 of the Kandersteg Chronicles

Up sharp, all need to breakfast and prepare their lunch for our first active day of adventure. We start with flagup with other international campers, we're then off to Oeschinenen Lake at 5177ft high, and the largest in the region. We walk to Kandersteg, then along to the gondola where we wait in turn to board our ariel transport. At the top, our group of adventurers are eager to try the challenge of the rodelbahn – a summer toboggan ride. The worst behaved is infact one of the leaders, as he generates a logpile of eager rodelbahners at the start of the course, then releases his toboggan with the taunt 'keep up if you can!' barely touching the brakes an adrenaline fuelled snake of leaders and young leaders career down the track in pursuit!

A hike through the woods then a sharp decent, the lake opens before us. Electric blue alpine waters crowded round by steep valley sides with impossibly positioned cabins at altitude are our vista. A short stop for lunch, before we walk further round the lake in search of a beach as all our adventurers must swim in an alpine lake as part of their Hi Adventure Challenge. Some intrepid adventures take the plunge with ease and are swimming and splashing, encouraging others to go for it "ball deep is not good enough!"

All clean and dry, we pick our way down, sharply descending to the valley of Kandersteg below. A stop for icecream and some breakfast essentials we return to our campsite. After a mediocre dining experience at the Chalet, we return to prepare for the

international evening. We have all things Scottish – haggis, oatcakes & cheese, neckers for trading, and our saltire scout badges to impress our international neighbours. Most impressive however is our national dress worn proudly topped with scout uniforms. A happy evening of introductions, swapping of neckers, badges and woggles, was had. Our tartan neckers prove to be very popular. We conclude our first day with a campfire and hot chocolate, and hardly a MacKenzie necker in sight!

Day 3 of the Kandersteg Chronicles

This is the start of our expedition days – first up is the highly (over 10,000ft high) challenging 2 day hike by our Young Leaders, and one nervous leader to the Hockenhorn. The challenge ahead and above them now shows on their faces as they head out of camp to walk up the Gastern valley with iceaxes on their packs! A short stop at Selden for lunch and a chance to relax before taking on 4-5 hours of sharp ascent to reach the Lotschenpasshutte where they will spend the night. This energy sapping route takes our adventurers into amazingly beautiful alpine terrain, and across glaciers. There's an opportunity to try the Bear Grylls method of controlling your descent on a glacier – an ice axe arrest! The recent good weather sees the glacier bare of snow, and traction, so our adventurers have to steel their nerves to traverse. The Lotschenpasshutte which is so remote all supplies are 'coptered in, is found on arrival to be modern and well equipped, with a hearty meal waiting on our exhausted hikers at 8608ft!

Meanwhile at lower altitude back at camp, our Eiger patrol are on shopping duty in Kandersteg whilst our two younger patrols Jungfrau (have we really called a patrol 'young women'?) and Matterhorn take on a day of challenges – crate stacking and zip wiring. The youngest patrol after initial poor attempts, find their courage and technique and are scaling double digit crates – the crate climber award goes to Fergus Davidson for his super impressive scale of 23 crates – and only stopped there as there were no more crates! Jungfrau learn the discipline of safety harnessing and using carabineers before ascending to disappear through the trees to land at the back of our campsite!

After lunch our Eiger patrol are prepped and ready to take on their Ueschinenhutte hike. Walking towards Kandersteg, they take the Allmenalp cable car which barely skirts the rock face in parts to start their hike. Initially steep, the path skirts round the mountain and into woodland terrain. Our campsite is just visible from this vantage point. Out of the woods, the path descends then begins to snake up the valley. The sounds of bells which hang from the necks of cows, clang in various tones which bounce round this lush glacial valley. Ahead and up the valley our adventurers hut is visible amongst pockets of snow, and seems to be the cow mecca of the valley! Just in time, our hikers reach the hut before being entertained by an alpine thunderstorm which is almost at their level but further down the valley. After the show the cows inquisitive of the scout activity and cooking, remain close to the hut, and do so throughout the night. Our adventurers are either lulled to sleep by the rhythmic tones of the cows bells, or are annoyed by the noise and robbed of sleep!

Back at camp, the Jungfrau patrol is gunning for the Camp Cook badge and enthusiastically begin the prep for our meal. A delicious meal is served to all, and washed up, before we head out to a presentation about Glaciers, Alps and Avalanches, which gives us another tick in the box for the Hi Adventure Challenge. The younger patrols free from the presence of the older scouts, light and lead an enthusiastic and accomplished campfire. If there was campfire leading badge, there would be some serious contenders amongst our numbers.

Day 4 of the Kandersteg Chronicles

At altitude, our young leaders set out to accomplish their goal – the summit of Hockenhorn. An early breakfast and muscle weary from the pursuits of yesterday, our adventurers set out. Surrounded by snow capped peaks, the path rises forward skirting the ridge until their goal is reach, at the heady height of 3293m or 10,500ft, or 3.5 munros! With stunning views and a huge sense of achievement, it's a return to the Lotschenpasshutte for lunch, before 'beasting' down in record time to achieve a bus and train timetable, and catch the Lotschberg train which is tunnelled through the mountains back into the Gastern valley and Kandersteg, and camp. Showered and fed, with muscles objecting to the assault of the last two days, our high altitude team elect a quiet drink in a local bar in preference to the KISC disco!

At lesser altitude, the Eiger patrol breakfast amongst the cows in the Ueschinenhutte. After a good clean of the hut our adventurers start their hike back to camp leaving the cows and their bell noise behind! The descent soon takes them into the woods and a rougher route of twists and turns, where focus on your feet is an absolute necessity. Loose terrain and tree roots pepper the track until it breaks and lush meadow opens upon them. An easy final stage and our team are happily back at camp

for lunch. The fun of zip wiring awaits the Eigers, and then well deserved free time, with some electing for showers and some taking a walk into Kandersteg to shop. After tea, all decline the offer of the disco, in preference to a free evening on site, roaming around looking for others to take them on at football!

The Jungfrau and Matterhorn patrols take on team building and jacob's ladder challenges before preparing for their hike to Uschinenhütte in the afternoon. Walking in separate groups and grateful for some cloud coverage which shields them from the sun, they ascend to the hut. Towards the final stage, Jungfrau see Three Billy goats gruff come trip-trapping over the wooden bridge to gently butt and barge in search of food from our snacking scouts. With slim pickings, the goats, bells aringing accompany the scouts almost to their destination, where the bell ringing is taken over by the cows. Again the Jungfrau patrol prepare, serve and wash up a terrific meal, in the basic hut, taking care to keep their food preparations from the inquisitive cows. We have another rousing campfire by our younger scouts with our refrains floating through valley with shouts of 'rab dab dooby' surprising the cows. Perhaps as a result, the cows leave the hut and a sound night's sleep is had by all.

Day 5 of the Kandersteg Chronicles

At camp it's a leisurely breakfast, in fact so leisurely, our Young Leaders forego it in preference to sleep and the Eigers are again on shopping duty as we're back to full numbers for lunch!

The Matterhorn and Jungfrau wake to a glorious morning in the Alps, and welcome the returning cows after a terrific night's sleep in the hut. It should be said here, that however idyllic staying in a hut nestled on an alpine hillside at just over 6000ft is, the humdrum reality is that the toilet effuses a pungent smell which permeates most of the hut! That together with no lighting in the toilets or the corridor requires users to muster a degree of courage and conviction to achieve their task! A hearty breakfast, then a good clean of the hut, and they're ready to descend the valley, to pick their way down the rough track through the woods, across the meadow, and return to the camp to reunite our Kandersteg Crew!

After a ravenous lunch with almost double the amount of food consumed compared to previous lunches – we're all off swimming. This terrific open air pool has slides, diving boards, whirlpool and is skirted by a grassy area with sun loungers, and the most impressive view imaginable – across the Kandersteg valley and up to Oeschinenasee and beyond to the snow covered peaks. Our adventurers in their excitement and little life guard supervision clock up a bloody nose, and clash of heads, but all have a brilliant afternoon splashing, jumping and getting a good clean to boot!

After tea, it's the Kanderchallenge, which is a series of tasks and activities around the campsite undertaken by international teams. We arrive slightly late, and miss the division into multinational teams, but undertake the challenge with our usual enthusiasm. The Young Leaders pursue international relations by other means, and one of the leaders having caught the bug of trading neckers, goes all the way and even trades the shirt off his back (Scotland rugby shirt!).

Another loud campfire sees a singing challenge from another group, but they're soon dispatched to silence by strength of voice! In fact, you can apparently hear our group singing at the entrance of the campsite – all other groups must have none of very timid campfires!!

Day 6 of the Kandersteg Chronicles

Up sharp we breakfast and prepare our lunches for our trip to the Eiger. A coach to Grindelwald where we catch a train up to Kleinne Scheidig is accomplished by means of super Swiss efficiency. We start our climb to Eigergletscher, and the history and accomplishment of early climbers and engineers who tunnelling through the mountain decide to punch a hole in the North Face which is then subsequently used for mountain rescues, is unfolded at stops by one of our leaders. Our adventurers take time at the museum and memorial to discover the various routes undertaken by climbers, and to learn about the stories of those who have attempted to climb the Eiger.

A posse of eager scouts collectively termed 'the mountain goats' test their high altitude response, and run up the path. All are seen with heaving chests sooking in air which does not satisfy whilst the rest of the group plod solidly up to meet them! At Eigergletscher our height is 7612 feet, our adventurers are treated to the remarkable sight and sound of an avalanche. Prompted by the sharp deep sound across the valley, our eyes turn to see a small part of the snow covered mountainside detach and slip downwards before cascading in a snowy waterfall to the glacier below. After lunch we have the honour of investing two new leaders and presenting a Gold Chief Scout award to one of our scouts.

A much quicker descent, gives time for our adventurers to refresh their feet in the jacuzzi type foot spa pool with relining benches half way down, before returning to Kleinne Scheidig where they are refreshed by super expensive drinks from tourist vendors!

Our return train trip to Grindlewald is animated by the conversation with a Mountain Guide from Bristol who has just climbed the Eiger that day! Another short shopping opportunity at Grindlewald before we board our coach which stops at Interlaken for tea – the gastronomic highlight of the week for some (but not others) we descend on McDonalds. It is perhaps the most expensive McDonalds eaten by anyone of our adventurers, but it hits the spot, and refreshed and re-carbohydrated, there is limited shopping time before our coach returns to take us back to camp.

A thunderstorm delays our attendance at the international campfire, however, we arrive impressively in kilts and take our wet seats at the amphitheatre. Each group has a sketch or a song to perform. Effort is applauded rather than entertainment merit, as we are treated to bizarre sketches and dour songs in foreign language. An Irish group do perform a clever song ‘mashup’ but it is a proud moment, as the heavens open that our lads take to the stage, with Young Leaders rabble rousing, our Scottish song is performed with vigour whilst Nairns oatcakes are passed out to the crowd. At the applause, our Young Leaders lob small Scottish rugby balls into the crowd – ‘are you not entertained?’ ...yes... I definitely think we are!

Day 7 of the Kandersteg Chronicles

A special breakfast of Swiss (and expensive!) croissants is followed by instructions to pack and get tidied as there’s an inspection. Only the second of the week the scouts have much to improve on. All have made terrific improvements especially the Jungfrau who have worked particularly well together throughout the week.

Our Young Leader led sports morning is dampened by rain, – but after lunch it brightens, and all have the choice – pool or mini golf and a final chance for shopping Kandersteg. Most choose the pool again, and find that they have the place to themselves and do not notice the afternoon showers! The mini golfers are delighted that 8 holes are in a barn, as they shelter from the rain showers. Most catch the free bus back to the campsite, and after tea, we all assemble in our marquee to be treated to our camp review, comedy awards and our high adventure challenge awards with Kandersteg woggle. Finally before campfire there is an early birthday celebration for two of our scouts who have birthdays the next day. A hedgehog cake with candle, light up balloons, a card signed by all at the camp, and birthday badges hopefully make up for their delay in receiving presents tomorrow as we make our way homewards!

Day 8 of the Kandersteg Chronicles

A drizzly morning sees a brief breakfast followed by striking camp. All work well to get the 5 large tents and event shelters down. The Young Leaders return our hired equipment, and we impress the Pinkie with our orderly litterpick. With bus packed we say goodbye to Kandersteg with our lifelong memories collected here.

With a more chaotic checkin at Zurich, together with our usual security disrobing of boots, buckles and sporrans we have almost an hour before departure. Our adventurers scatter to spend the last of their money, and some without money find a rich source of ‘change’ from leaders to help purchase a snack or two before we depart.

Our 49 seater plane returns our adventurers but not however all our luggage to Edinburgh, where we’re met by a band of eager parents.

All have had an amazing adventure, they have experienced, been challenged and have grown in confidence, stature and outlook as a result of this week. A rich reservoir of memories is held by each and every adventurer from this experience, which will last a lifetime. This land of extremes has not failed to deliver an experience of lifetime. This then was the right place chosen by Cramond Scouts for their summer adventure and this then is the end of the Kandersteg Chronicles.