

That first Folk Camp....

It wasn't me that wanted to go... My wife had read the brochure and that was that:

"Just a try-out," she said.

"There's bound to be something for you to do," she said
"If you really don't like it, we'll pack up Saturday morning and come home," she said. It was the Spring Bank Holiday weekend.

We travelled to the far north (Dalton in Yorkshire) on the Friday after work. It was almost dark when we arrived and all these nice people switched their car headlights on for us to put up the tent. We had supper and went in to the Hall to see what was happening. Our son was instantly dragged into the band to play his flute and we enjoyed the dancing, and the singaround, and some more dancing, and the weekend took off.

We went to the pub with the camp to play, we learnt some rapper, some morris, had some dance workshops, laughed a lot, found that there were lots of people we got on with really well, and our 15 year old son asked why we hadn't done this years ago!

Then we had to go home, but we'd already booked for a week at a catered camp in Devon in the summer, and we've been Folk Camping ever since.

It's a way of life.

Pete Hendy

Pugh! Pugh! Barney McGrew!

It was around 2 o'clock in the morning. I'd put on another jumper and was wearing my anorak to fend off the damp chill. A generous measure of whisky assisted in warming me as I reclined on a rather uncomfortable wooden stacking chair, the scene illuminated only by gas lamps. In one corner of the marquee someone playing a melodeon struck up the children's TV programme theme from Trumpton. Immediately three grown men and one woman turned their chairs round and, straddling aside them, started to jump around the floor in close formation. "Pugh! Pugh! Barney McGrew! Cuthbert! Dibble! Grubb!" we all chanted. The Trumpton fire brigade then proceeded to rescue a cat from an imaginary tree before dispersing in a suitably orderly fashion.

That incident was probably one of the funniest and the most memorable of my holiday. It took place during the wettest week of the summer, much of which I spent paddling through mud in Wellington boots. It was hardly the best location for having a good time you might think. But, on the contrary, it was the best of times.

I've often pondered upon the fact that when people tell you about their holidays, while they might recount the wonderful scenery or praise the weather, yet it's the tales of what happened or who they met that invoke their fondest memories. I've been spending holidays with people I like and having enormous fun for forty years.

When I was a teenager my parents, who were already heavily involved in the folk music and dance scene, heard about these really cheap folk holidays. Run along the lines of scout camp, but for people of all ages, the weeks were arranged by folk enthusiasts who wished to spend time together. They took place on agricultural land, usually in the west country, with a large marquee for communal shelter. All the adults took a turn in the kitchen

Things children teach adults

- There is no such thing as child-proofing your house.
- A 4 years-old's voice is louder than 200 adults in a crowded restaurant.
- If you hook a dog leash over a ceiling fan the motor is not strong enough to rotate a 42 pound boy wearing pound puppy underwear and a superman cape.
- It is strong enough however to spread paint on all four walls of a 20 by 20 foot room.
- When you hear the toilet flush and the words "Uh-oh;" it's already too late.
- A six year old can start a fire with a flint rock even though a 36 year old man says they can only do it in the movies.
- A magnifying glass can start a fire even on an overcast day.
- Legos will pass through the digestive tract of a four year old.
- Duplos will not.
- Play Dough and Microwave should never be used in the same sentence.
- Super glue is forever.
- No matter how much jelly you put in a swimming pool you still can't walk on water.
- Black bags do not make good parachutes.
- Marbles in petrol tanks make lots of noise when driving.
- You probably do not want to know what that odour is.
- Always look in the oven before you turn it on.
- Plastic toys do not like ovens.
- The spin cycle on the washing machine does not make earth worms dizzy.
- It will however make cats dizzy.
- Cats throw up twice their body weight when dizzy.
- A good sense of humour will get you through most problems in life (unfortunately, mostly in retrospect).

and entertainment was entirely home-grown.

Up until that time all family holidays for me had been based at my grandparents' home in east Anglia where I was bored, lonely and fairly miserable. So when we arrived at my first folk camp and I found it was full of people around my own age, I couldn't help but rejoice. Some of them were already amazingly talented and went onto to become stars in the field of folk - and beyond. Many have remained friends all these years and we still meet each year.

I learnt loads of dances and songs at that first camp - and plenty more in the years that followed. Our teenage gang stayed up until the early hours - long after the parents had gone to sleep - singing and playing music. Kitchen raids for bread and jam were great fun although it was an activity much frowned upon by our parents when they found that there was no bread left for breakfast. Folk camping was such fun and the amazing thing is that it still is, for young and old alike. Babies only weeks old have come to folk camps and a couple of years ago an octegarian distinguished himself on the final night of camp by appearing in a superb St Trinians' outfit made entirely from black plastic bags.

For Friday night is the big night at folk camps - the last night. That's when people do their 'party pieces' which are often satirical comments on the activities of the week. There's usually a theme chosen by the leader and the most innovative of customs and props appear that night.

Although over forty years have passed since the first group of folk friends decided to spend their holiday together, the magic hasn't been lost. It's still basically the same recipe, although the infrastructure is a little more sophisticated. Flush toilets have replaced the smelly old

chemical ones of my childhood and the locations of camps may be anywhere in the UK and abroad. Sometimes we have the luxury of plumbed showers, sometimes we use the pump up spray variety. For life on a folk camp is still hard when compared with the accommodation provided with the average package holiday. But what you get on a folk camp is something special. Where else could you expect to be with people who become Trumpton firemen at 2 am.

"Pugh! Pugh! Barney McGrew! Cuthbert! Dibble! Grubb!"

Sue Malleson

Beci Brown

Daughter of the infamous Doug Brown (sorry Mum!), I'm a motor insurance claims advisor for one of the nation's largest motoring organisations, having just escaped the licensed trade after 5 years.

I've been known to sing a bit but I also play the piano, recorder and for a while I played the bass guitar with my parents' barn dance band.

While my involvement in the folk scene as a whole has dwindled somewhat over the past few years, my commitment to the society remains strong and I have a healthy interest in the evolving tradition and its development from the turn of the 20th century.

I've been folk camping now for nearly 20 years and was elected to Council in November 2002, just after I took over the editorship of Extent. I have also lead several weekend camps and this year I will be taking a step into the world of the logistical team (I'm catering for the first time) - and I shall be disappointed if the demand for custard isn't high.

I'm also part of the staffing committee and am constantly open to ideas and suggestions about the society, please feel free to contact me.

Council Profiles

The council are very aware that often members of the society don't know much about the council as individuals, so each issue, I'm going to attempt to introduce you to a couple of members of council.

Pete Hendy

I'm an ex-teacher who's still teaching, though nowadays I teach where and who I want.

I still run the Downfielders - a teenage band formed from students at the Downfield schools in Stroud. There are about twenty of them playing every weekend on a rota at ceilidhs all over the place. I also call at local dance clubs and I'm chairman of our own: my wife is much more versatile than I am - she calls, plays and writes dances (but not all at the same time!).

I have a few other hobbies - walking, having new joints, brass band (BBb tuba) and a great English tradition so often ignored by heritage specialists - change ringing on church bells. I've given up the rugby, marathon running, sailing and cricket these days - not much time, and age, you know.

I was re-elected to Council at the last AGM (I did my previous stint 1995 - 2001) and found myself elected as Chairman at the subsequent Council meeting - I had no time to prepare a defence, you see. I hope I'm reasonably approachable, once I see you below my normal range of vision, and that any of you want to talk to me about FCS (good things as well as bad, please) will get in touch with me.

From Loxwood to Beijing

Most of you will have heard of Phil Harnett, long long time Folk Camper, a pretty mean base player, erstwhile camp warden and Council Member. Well, he is now based in China and keeps his mates at home up to date with local 'going ons' with his monthly Chinagrammes. With Phil's permission we include an extract of one here to give you a "taste" of his experiences.

"Brrrrrrr. This month has seen the temperatures plummet, the wind speeds increase and the days draw in to those ones where you go to work and come back in the dark. There have been the first falls of snow, and our gas bill is soaring by the day. I fear it may not get above zero now for several months.

One should not complain. There have been, for several weeks now, those telltale signs that winter is coming that one only gets in China. For instance - all shops from the Pizza place to the Pharmacy, big and small, become stockists of a large variety of very thick down coats. They range from the stylish pink shades for the ladies to the traditional green army style "great coats". These are seen all over Chinese cities, as they are worn by security men, policemen, and the army everywhere. I have never tried one, but they must be pretty good, as guys have to stand on street corners for hours in them.

Other indicators include the slow encroachment of large green triangles and squares around the city. No really, we do have them. They come in various sizes and proportions, but are generally constructed of a wooden frame surrounded by green plastic sheeting. Why - to protect the trees ... that's right, it is so bleak here, that to maintain the stock of plants that might once again

Contact the Council

produce leaves or flowers next year, they have to dress them up to shade them from the icy winds. This practice is not only for those trees lucky enough to be in the city, for most of the trees between Tianjin and Beijing (100 miles) have been protected - quite a feat. This all begs the question of what happens to all of the tents in the spring, but I will wait to see, I guess a similar miraculous uncovering will take place, and nature will once again be on view.

I am just looking at this weeks offerings from my employee restaurant. Well that is pushing it a bit - canteen would be a fairer description, but I have to try and maintain some standards. Today saw a well balanced diet of "Instant boiled mutton, Mushrooms with pork, Cabbage with bean curd, and Agaric with fingered" Alas the translations are not so hot, and I have to say that today I paid a visit to the little ex-pat bar for a steak sandwich, as the smell was not too appealing downstairs. This Agaric stuff appears quite a bit on the menu - I think it is some kind of black long thing akin to a mushroom. Tomorrow is even more enticing with "Left eyed flounder - (wonder what happened to the right eyed ones, and then there are all of the jokes about fish in bowls that go round and round ... endless opportunities but I will leave you to go there yourselves...) Rape with garlic sauce, Braised white gourd with dried shrimp, and Mutton in ziran" I am going to have to go along just to see the one eyed fish and the Ziran, my mind boggles. Generally, if I ignore the menu totally, as they often change the selection anyway, and wander down, I can usually find something that resembles something I recognise. If not, there is a bowl of rice and some sauce from the least scary dish."

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