

THIS IS OUR HIGHLAND CHALLENGE!

After an entertaining yet tiring journey up to Inverness on the sleeper train, we were met by our challenge coordinator (Russell). Stopping briefly to buy sandwiches for the day, we were driven to the foot of Ben Nevis and we started our ascent at 11:04. The ascent was a challenging one but extremely rewarding. We reached the summit at 13:25. The weather at the summit did make the climb quite difficult. We were surrounded by clouds, mist, swirling winds and harsh rains. We did manage to take a photo of ourselves at the summit, but unfortunately this camera was somehow mislaid during the course of the day. On the way down we ran the final stretch and were able to return to our starting position by 15:03, completing the climb in less than 4 hours. Russell then drove us to Fort William, where we packed up our Canadian canoes with food supplies and our own kit, which we stored in waterproof barrels. We then met our canoeing instructor, Andy, who had many an entertaining story to tell us during the course of our journey. We paddled for a few hours before stopping to set up our camp for the night.

On day two we set off quite early under a clear blue sky. We were paddling along Loch Lochy and were able to stop for lunch on a beach near loch end. On the same day we finished paddling the small Loch Lochy as well as the next loch; Loch Oich. We set up camp and drifted off to sleep very soon after supper.

On day three, after a filling bowl of porridge for breakfast, we continued with our paddling. However, on that day we actually paddled a stretch of river which linked loch Oich with loch Ness. We went down a series of rapids which were quite tricky to navigate in our large canoes. We finished the stretch of river and found enough time to stop for a pub lunch at Fort Augustus before starting to paddle Loch Ness. We realised that because there was a consistent wind, we would be able to rig up a sail. We attached two of the canoes together, making a catamaran, and used Andy's waterproof poncho as a sail. We stopped to camp half way up Loch Ness and drifted into another easy sleep after toasting marshmallows on the campfire, even though there were still plenty of midges about!

The weather turned a bit rough on day 4 and we had some serious difficulties when we neared the end of the vast Loch Ness. In fact we were lucky to avoid a collision with a fish farm. After pausing for an hour in order to let some storm clouds pass over us, we continued on our way. We were able to finish paddling Loch Ness and camped right at the end Loch Ness that night. Due to the fact that our food supplies were dwindling, we dined on pasta and tomato sauce followed by rice with tomato sauce.

On our last day we were able to finish the challenge by paddling a stretch of river that led us into Inverness. This involved going over some rather more exciting rapids, but we were able to get through them in one piece. We finished our challenge by midday and were able to buy a very rewarding lunch and play some football before we were picked up by Russell and one of his colleagues, who took us back to the train station.

The Challenge was a very rewarding experience and it allowed four old school friends to enjoy a fantastic adventure. We are delighted to have been able to do all this whilst raising money for an extremely worthy cause; The Thames Valley Adventure Playground.

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