

Network Russia Winter Expedition 2002

3 Day Skiing Expedition at Losevo

Preface

As part of our trip to the Losevo campsite, six Venture Scouts and two leaders took part in a 2-day hike into the forest. As we had hoped, there was still enough snow to use skis. We organised ourselves the previous day with some of the large amount of equipment available at the site.

Cross-country skiing is widely recognised as one of the healthiest activities you can do. The motion of cross-country skiing is non-jarring and easy on the joints. Because cross-country skiing uses every major muscle group, it tones the whole body and is an excellent way to burn fat and work the cardiovascular system

The skis are highly flexible (so as to cope with uneven terrain) and use a binding that holds in the front of your foot, allowing you to raise your heel to get forward movement.

Day 1

With rucksacks packed and skis on, it wasn't until 1pm that we left the site and it took us another two hours just to get off the site grounds! What we hadn't anticipated was that although cross-country skiing isn't easy for the amateur, it's even harder when you have a heavy rucksack. Eventually, after a lot of picking people up (and getting one of the Russian female ventures to carry a heavy rucksack!) we started to make some progress.

For some reason we went pretty much through the rather dense forest; I think it was because the path we intended to use was too watery and icy, not good for our wooden skis. It was intended we would travel about 7-8km, but after an exhausting five hours that pitched camp about 2.5km from where we had started.

We split into teams to cook, put up tents and chop some trees up for firewood. One of the tents we took was bell type, made out of a parachute, with a convenient hole for the chimney of a flat-packed oven. It's used for really cold weather (which it wasn't but we wanted the experience). By the time we had sorted everything out and had some dinner we sat around the campfire for singing and chatting. It wasn't too cold, but it was definitely hat and thermal weather.

We were with four very competent leaders who were excellent company as well as three female Ventures who joined us for the first night. We shared games and songs till gone midnight when the eight of us squeezed into the bell tent which was, predictably, a little too warm. Still, we all got some sleep, having taken turns to watch over the oven and keep it fuelled up.

Day 2

After a satisfying breakfast, we used the orienteering map to locate our exact position then set off for some much needed skiing practice.

The area we were in had changed hands several times over previous centuries so we tried to find some of the old Finnish houses marked on the map. In the end, we only found a giant bolder; the remnants of the ancient glacier that covered Northern Europe. As we moved away from the lake the paths had more snow and we found it much easier to ski on these.

It was late in the afternoon by the time we returned owing to a diversion so we had a brief discussion about survival techniques and how to move an injured person (making a sledge using skis and poles). We had another evening around the campfire with some particularly nice fried chicken. Some of us moved to the dome tent to sleep, and with temperatures below the line, needed liners and thermals to keep warm.

Day 3

We had breakfast late the next day (the Russians have a good system where the morning begins when you get up) and were packed and heading back by midday, along the more snow covered paths. It took only 90 minutes to get back and that was without going at any real speed.

Epilogue

By the time we returned we were getting used to using the skis and though tired out, had thoroughly enjoyed the experience, though next time the skiing practice will come first and rucksacks will be a little lighter!