



The expedition was to fly from Heathrow to St Petersburg on 18th July. Jenny Ramwell and Dan Cousins had left a week earlier to prepare for the arrival of the main party in Kandalaksha. Eventually, and despite a problem with getting our VHF radio transmitters/receivers through customs, we made it to our first night's destination, the Agricultural College at Pushkin, a town a few miles out of St Petersburg. After a day touring the city we embarked on our train journey north to Kandalaksha. On arrival (in the rain), we were met by Jenny, Dan and our Russian friends and we were soon ensconced in the gymnasium of a local school.



The expedition begins

The first hurdle for the expedition was to access the container which sat tantalizingly outside the port, locked until cleared by customs.

Unfortunately the Kandalaksha customs officer was totally impotent without his rubber stamp which he was patiently waiting to be sent from Murmansk. No container meant no food, kayaks, medical and science equipment and consequently no expedition. Eventually we negotiated the container's release and the fires rapidly set to preparing kayaks, rucksacks, food and camping equipment, eager for the off.

The expedition plan was slightly different from the traditional BSES format of training, science, then adventure phases. The science and adventure phases were integrated, samples being collected for analysis whilst trekking, kayaking or diving. The fires, distinguished by numbers, would rotate around the different activities (kayaking, trekking and diving).

For the first ten days, three fires went off in kayaks, one fire set off in a boat to dive camp for diving, whilst the remaining fire scrambled into the back of an ex military lorry to be taken up into the hills for their trekking phase.

With the fires away, those of us left behind established our base camp on an island some miles down the bay.

The following short accounts give a flavour of what each phase was like for the participants.

Phase 1 22nd-30th July

Young Explorers: Fire 3 - Kayaking by Paul Booker, Matthew Butler, Sarah Chittenden, Alex Crossland, Robert Exon, Michael Hendry, Iain Hutchinson, Fiona Irwin, Andrey Kirkin, Alexey Simanov, Philip Stokes, Kate Wright.

The rest of the fire left Kandalaksha on the morning of 22nd and paddled along the south coast of the bay. I met up with the fire on the evening of 23rd at base camp island after arriving from St Petersburg that morning.

The next day we paddled to Divers Island and met up with Fire 5 before continuing along the south coast until we found a good water supply and made camp. On 25th we kayaked a further 8 miles against wind and tide.

We made camp but found we had 30 minutes' walk to find water. Paul and I were paddling with local wooden blades, one set being those we found on base camp island, the other being a copy we made from drift wood and paracord.

The two Russians, Andrey and Alexey, were demonstrating skills and knowledge of basic survival in the outdoors. Andrey was quite an accomplished fisherman and both showed their ability to light fires in most conditions. The following day we paddled further around the coast into a large bay where we had collected water the previous day. After another full day's kayaking we eventually made camp in a bay on

the headland just around from Kovda. The campsite was well used and littered with rubbish which we did our best to tidy up.

On 27th we paddled out to an island off the headland in the hope of crossing to the Kola Peninsula. However, the wind was force 3-4 from the northeast and we thought it too strong to attempt a crossing at this early stage in the expedition. We waited the rest of the day and night for the wind to drop but, sadly, it did not. At around 1.30am we had a visit from three poachers and it certainly helped having the two Russians with us as they were able to explain our reasons for being on the island.

On the morning of 28th the wind had still not relented so we decided to paddle to Kovda instead, then travelled back around the headland in the direction of base camp. The next day we set off out into the middle of the bay and paddled towards Divers Island. It was the most testing day of the expedition to date, force 5 with a following sea. Sarah had to be T rescued and Fiona came out of her boat. The whole fire coped very well and this helped build confidence in personal skills and as a team. Due to mist, navigation was by compass most of the way and we could not see Divers Island until 5 miles off. We arrived back at Base Camp on the 30th July.

Young Explorers: Fire 4 - Trekking by Patrick Allen, Phillip Hurley, Dimitry Jalin, Sergey Karpov, Keith Maslen, Catherine Mead, Vadim Gouida, Rgbn Nott, Philipp Ritter, Sophie Spread, Lyn Stewart, Simon Wyldes.

Our first day's trekking consisted of what seemed like a near vertical ascent of a rather large hill, led by Vadim Gouida, our crazy Russian leader. Not only was this hill extremely steep, it was also of very rough terrain, making walking or scrambling, to which we generally resorted, quite difficult. To increase our enjoyment it was, of course, raining.

We made our first campsite on a 60 degree slope in the pouring rain. Spirits, however, were kept high as we worked on the assumption that things could not get much worse.

We were right: the next morning dawned warm and sunny and our route that day was predominantly flat! As we were now above the trees we were able to enjoy some spectacular views. From our vantage point on top of the hills we could see across to the White Sea, where we would eventually kayak. We could also see the small islands that are dotted over much of the Kandalaksha Bay region of the White Sea, where our studies were to be carried out. We continued walking till late in the evening to find what was a superb campsite by a small lake, as planned by Vadim.

After the twelve hour walk of the day before we felt we deserved some time off the next morning and we didn't strike camp until after lunch.

We were aiming for another lake named Nizhnee Luvengovskoe, which turned out to be another glorious campsite.

The next couple of days were spent walking to Koalvitser, a small village where we would be receiving our rations for the second half of the phase. The first afternoon involved six hours walking through thick, smelly bog.

Fortunately, the next day our route was along good paths used by the local fisherman, which made life a great deal easier, and we followed a large attractive river into Koalvitser.

Having picked up supplies for the next five days we spent the rest of the next morning walking to a lake situated in the hills, about 6km outside Koalvitser. We made camp here at lunchtime as we all felt the need for a good wash and sort out. Unfortunately, Sophie cut her foot badly while washing in the river and had to be taken to hospital in Kandalaksha for stitches.

The last few days of the trekking phase involved a lot of ascent once again.

The plan was to climb our largest hill so far, a 636m peak named Kruglaya, and then to stay high, following the range across, parallel to the shores of the White Sea, before dropping down to camp on the shore opposite base camp.

Despite the difficulty of the first climb we were all glad we chose this route as the views were tremendous.

Having reached the top, the weather on the following day changed for the worse. Torrential rain was soon followed by thick mist as the clouds came down. While trying to find shelter, the group was temporarily divided and we lost Keith and Vadim. We were soon reunited but decided it would be safer to start descending rather than continue along the tops as planned. An hour took us to the foot of the hills and by evening we reached the shore of the White Sea.

The following day we returned by boat across the bay to base camp, where we met up with Sophie, complete with stitches and walking stick, and the other four fires.