

Flight Scare on Charity Lapland Trip



For the past few months, The Edinburgh Reporter has highlighted the activities of many incredible people who have given their time and effort to raise money for worthy causes. People such as [Andrew Dickson](#), who cycled across Australia on behalf of the Craig Gowans Memorial Fund and Radio Lollipop, Gordon Smith who cycled from Land's End to John O'Groats for the Marie Curie Centre and Shona Pryde who climbed Mount Kilimanjaro for FACE (Fighting Against Cancer Edinburgh), to name but a few.

On Sunday I had the privilege to see at first-hand how some of the money raised by all these efforts was spent, when I was invited to accompany volunteers from FACE along with children, teenagers and adults who have been touched by cancer, in one way or another, to visit Santa Claus in his home in Lapland. This year, sadly, a number of the youngsters had experienced the death of a parent within the last three months, and this trip meant that, at least for one day, they could turn their minds to some happier thoughts.

The trip is an annual event, paid for by the efforts of many fundraisers, and I was delighted to take up their generous offer.

Throughout the year FACE Convenor, John Macaulay MBE, who is also involved with Radio Lollipop at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, meets with medical staff who identify suitable patients from both hospitals.

Our group included 18 children, teenagers and adults aged from two to forty six who have experienced illness or grief. The party also included many volunteers, who act as helpers for

the children throughout the day.

Arriving at Edinburgh Airport at 5.45am, there were a few bleary eyes among the adults as we boarded the three hour flight to Kittila Airport in the North of Finland.

☒ Alarmingly, the plane was too heavy to take off, and the Captain asked us to all flap our arms up and down, which eventually did the trick. The time passed quickly as volunteers Liam and Martin organised a sing-a-long of Christmas carols, including 'Jingle Bells', 'Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer,' 'Away in a Manger' and 'When Santa got stuck up the Chimney.'

After running out of volunteers, Martin suggested a singing contest between the left side and the right side of the plane, and whilst the right side were louder, without being biased, we on the left were more in tune. When the songs eventually dried up, a number of young budding Christmas Cracker joke writers kept us entertained with a steady supply of jokes and riddles such as 'What is an Ig?' and 'Why does a golfer wear two pairs of trousers?'

With about half an hour left on the flight there was a scare when the worsening weather conditions meant that the captain could not see through the thick fog, so an emergency call was put through to Lapland Air Traffic Control. Santa immediately scrambled Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen to locate our plane and guide us through the fog. Thankfully Rudolph was available to lead the reindeers and they quickly tracked us down before hooking onto the aircraft and guiding us to the airport, as Lapland Aviation rules forbid flights landing at the village as it disturbs the elves who are busy making toys. Santa unhooked the sleigh just as we were descending and waved us off with a cheery goodbye.

When we touched down, the snow had just started and the

temperature was minus 11 degrees, although it eventually warmed up to a balmy minus 10.

Thankfully, we were taken to a warehouse and given warm clothes, including fur lined boots with extra thick socks, a padded one piece suit, padded gloves and a balaclava. Outside we were given a crash helmet and directed to a 'Skidoo' and eight-seater sledge.

Each compartment of the sledge contained a blanket which came in handy during the 35 minute sleigh ride through the forest to Santa's Village where we were greeted by some of his Special Elves, including Tricky Dicky who (mistakenly) thought it would be funny to pelt us with snowballs.

In an effort to thaw out, I headed straight to a log cabin advertising hot drinks, and an Elf named Asta (or Pasta without the P as she explained) supplied mugs of berry juice. I had three before discovering that there was no alcohol in it, and then decided to explore the village along with the children.

☒ First stop was another sledge ride, but this time we were pulled by a team of enthusiastic huskies instead of the skidoo. Next was a visit to the souvenir shop and a wander round the reindeer enclosure. Dozens of everyone's favourite Christmas songs, (and also Cliff's 'Saviour's Day') continually blared out from a cabin in the village, and some more of Santa's Special Elves, namely Noisy Nod and Steely Sam were on hand to entertain the adults and kids.

After some more hot berry juice and a peaceful 10 minutes in a wigwam with a roaring fire, it was back on the sledge, but this time we were pulled by Dasher, Dancer, Prancer and the rest of the gang who had thankfully arrived back safely.

☒ The highlight of the day for everybody was without doubt meeting Santa, and his personal assistant 'Snowy Bowy.' Unbeknown to me, Santa is a big supporter of FACE, and even

attended their Christmas Ball last month. When he was there, he happened to mention that in his spare time, after a hard day making toys, he liked to put his feet up and read about Detective Inspector Rebus's latest adventures. When Ian Rankin, who is also a great supporter of the charity, found out, he handed over a copy of his latest book 'Standing on another man's Grave' with a personalised message inside, so the guests witnessed the unusual sight of Santa receiving a present from John Macaulay.

All too quickly, time was up and we all headed back to the Airport, although, to my relief, instead of the skidoo and sledge, a warm bus was waiting. There were a few tired faces on the flight back, and I suspect that one or two schools would be missing the odd pupil on Monday morning, although John Macaulay was in Foresters High School at 7.20am.

All in all it was a fantastic day I would like to pay a personal tribute to everyone involved, including the volunteers, Liam, Martin, Fiona, Anne. Jim B, Jim P, Kat and Rachel. the medical team, Doctor Trevor, June, Fiona B and Barbara, and Alex the photographer. One volunteer who deserves a special mention on her first Lapland trip was sixteen year old Lizzie Arnot. This was the culmination of an unforgettable year for the Corstorphine teenager who made her debut for Hibs Ladies in a 19-1 victory over Kilmarnock, became the Edinburgh Sports Academy 'Athlete of the Year,' and carried the Olympic Torch in Bread Street.

Every single one of them has my utmost respect and admiration, and it was a tremendous honour and thrill to witness their efforts during a long and tiring day.

✘ The bravery of the children, teenagers and adults was humbling, and there was many a tear shed. Several times my own thoughts turned to my beautiful niece Dawn who lost her brave fight with leukaemia over 25 years ago. Such trips were not available at that time, but I know she would have loved

every minute of the day, and when I closed my eyes, I could picture her happy smiling face amongst the revellers.

FACE was founded in 1990 and originally stood for Fighting Against Cancer in Edinburgh but has now come to represent the activities of a group of people working throughout the South East of Scotland.

The charity is based in the Western General Hospital and raises money to improve the facilities for the benefit of patients there and the peripheral clinics in Fife, Edinburgh and the Lothians, the Borders and Dumfries. It differs from other cancer charities such as Cancer Research UK, which provides money for major enhancements in cancer care in the form of new Buildings and Research.

Throughout the year FACE undertakes many projects at both the Western and also at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Edinburgh, where they continue to provide Aromatherapy sessions for patients within the wards of the hospitals.

✖ The highlight of the year for many is the Lapland trip, but the costs increase every year, and such days are only possible with the generosity of the public, and the hard work of dedicated fundraisers. The trip costs in the region of £20,000, and fundraising is an on-going necessity. Last month, the first charity ball at the Balmoral Hotel, sponsored by Tickets Scotland, raised nearly £8000 and the Christmas Fair held at the Western General raised another £11,000.

Back in the relative warmth of Edinburgh, John Macaulay MBE thanked the many volunteers who helped make the day an unforgettable experience for everyone involved. He told the Edinburgh Reporter: "I am indebted to volunteers who are associated with the charity, who give up their time in travelling to make simple journey more magical. We have friends who have experienced cancer to nurses and doctors who are involved at both hospitals and are keen to help the

travellers. Our aims are to make and support friends and families affected by cancer in a positive way.

“We have received many e mails of thanks to the FACE team ranging from comments like “Thank you John and the team for making the Impossible Trip Possible “to a mother of two young children who comments what a fantastic experience our little girl had a wonderful time and I would love to help in your fundraising thank you.

“This is my 19th year in taking that journey north to see our special Santa in his Arctic Home in Kittila in Lapland high up in the Arctic Circle in Finland. We have had some wonderful memories and at times some sad stories but seeing the smiles on everyone’s face as they arrive home to their families, this is truly SPECIAL and I suppose that why I do it.”

Anyone wishing to make a donation can do so at the website www.facescotland.org.uk or to the Edinburgh Cancer Centre at the Western General Hospital.

PS An ‘Ig’ is an eskimo’s house without a toilet, and a golfer wears two pairs of trousers in case he gets a hole in one!