

Irish Girl Guides press release

26 July 2019

Twelve plucky Girl Guide Leaders take on Guiding's ultimate challenge

- 180-kilometre hike carrying camping and cooking gear and living on €3.25 a day -

Twelve Irish Girl Guides' Leaders are all set to take part in Guiding's toughest challenge.

The 12 women, ranging in age from 18 to early 50s, will hike 180 kilometres over 10 days while carrying all their camping and cooking equipment, clothes, food and water and surviving on just €3.25 a day. They will take part in teams of two.

In order to complete the Explorer Belt challenge, each team will also have to keep a log book and carry out a number of projects along the way ... all without the use of a smartphone!

It is impossible for them to research the projects before the event because the location of the challenge is kept top secret until they meet the organisers at Dublin Airport this Sunday morning 28th July at 9am. All they know is it will take place somewhere in Europe!

The survival adventure is being organised by two experienced Irish Girl Guides (IGG) Leaders, Katherine Ryan and Jemma Lee, who themselves completed Explorer Belt four years ago when it took place in Germany.

"Taking part may sound like a daunting experience and it is certainly not something taken on lightly," says Katherine. "Guiding, however, has given the participants the tenacity to take on the challenge, the skills to participate in it and the confidence to believe in their abilities to complete it. Not knowing where it is going to take place adds greatly to the excitement and anticipation."

Jemma says the three compulsory projects each team has to complete will determine the route taken by each pair. "The projects can investigate the recent past of the country, areas of geographical interest or unusual, quirky places," she says. "The remaining projects involve learning more about the area the participants find themselves in. They are designed to bring the teams in close contact with the local people and help to immerse them in their Explorer Belt location."

The participants come from all corners of Ireland with the youngest being Ruby Loughlin, age 18, who is a Leader with Cealla Guides in Kells, Co Meath, and has just completed her Leaving Certificate exams. Ruby says she is feeling nervous but is also excited and looking forward to the experience. She has some idea of what to expect, having successfully completed IGG's Chief Commissioner's Award last summer. This involved hiking 60 kilometres over five days in Co Waterford while also keeping a log, doing projects and carrying camping and cooking gear etc.

“I enjoyed completing Chief’s and I was really intrigued when I heard about Explorer Belt,” she says. “I like camping and hiking so I wanted to challenge and push myself even further. I hope I will enjoy the experience as much as I enjoyed Chief’s!”

Ruby, like all this year’s participants, has been training for Explorer Belt by going on regular hikes and increasing the distance of the walks and the weight of the rucksack each time. Ruby reckons the most difficult aspect of the challenge will be asking people for help, almost certainly in another language. “We will literally be relying on strangers to give us places to pitch our tent and camp,” she says. “Carrying the weight and walking the long distances will be very tough too.”

Ruby believes the skills she has gained from Guiding since she joined IGG at the age of five will help her tackle the Explorer Belt challenge. “I have got so much out of Guiding, like confidence in myself,” she says. “I have also improved my teamwork and leadership skills through Guiding. I have travelled to different places, gained many friends and a Guiding family! I have gained valuable life-skills, like planning and first aid, and taking part in international camps has taught me about new cultures.”

Ruby’s team-mate, Shauna Flynn (27), a fellow Cealla Guides Leader and an English teacher in Coláiste Pobail Setanta in Clonee, says she is “terrified but also very excited” about the challenge that lies ahead. “I’m the type of person who would normally have every detail of a trip like this planned – from how we’re going to get from place to place to any apps downloaded that will help with the language,” she says, “So it will be interesting to not have those usual details planned. Not having a phone will definitely be the most difficult aspect!”

Shauna, who has represented IGG at an international Girl Guide seminar and volunteered at the Guiding World Centre, Our Chalet, in Switzerland also believes the experiences and skills she has gained from Guiding will help her complete the Explorer Belt challenge. “I’ve gained the confidence in myself and the belief that I can achieve anything if I put my mind to it,” she says. “Above all else, being in IGG has given me a taste for adventure and finding different challenges to push me out of my comfort zone.”

Irish Girl Guides welcomes new members from age 5+ and adult volunteer leaders from age 18+. See www.irishgirlguides.ie for further information or tel: 01 6683898.

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Notes for editors:

Irish Girl Guides has over 11,000 members. 1,800 young and adult leaders are involved. Guiding started in Ireland in 1911 and operates throughout the 26 counties with the volunteer leaders providing an informal educational programme of fun and challenging

activities that foster confidence and leadership skills in girls and young women, enabling them to become responsible citizens. Girls from age 5+ can choose to earn a wide range of badges, including Community Action, Climate Action, Cultural Diversity, Disability Awareness, Drug Awareness, Online Surfer, Science Investigator, Engineering, Aviation and Global Traveller.