



INTERNATIONAL TRIP REPORT

CZECH REPUBLIC

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My visit to the International Youth Camp in the Czech Republic was by far one of the most amazing experiences of my life! The run up to actually going on the trip was filled with panic as I tried to get everything organised in time, and what a relief it was to finally get there! We spent five days at the camp in Herlikovice and then three days sightseeing in Prague. Most of the people there were Czech, but as well as myself and John representing Scotland, there were two girls from Poland and a couple from America.

My personal intention on this trip was to simply make new friends, but I was also there to represent the Church of Scotland in another country – a slightly daunting experience! The camp itself took place up a mountain about 100 miles from Prague and invited a broad age range of 14 – 25 year-olds, which I think enriched the whole experience. I loved seeing people much younger than me getting really involved in the programme and I was inspired by the older members of the group and their abilities to lead us all in worship.

The week itself included a huge range of activities. On our very first day at the camp we went on a very, very long walk up in the mountains! Exhausting, but absolutely fantastic! Throughout the week, we drew inspiration for the day's activities from favourite bible stories. I think my favourite day was when we did David and Goliath. We looked at the story itself throughout the morning and had a lot of discussion about how this could be applied to our everyday lives, and then in the afternoon we played a game where we had to balance on a log while trying to knock our opponent off! We also learned about some of the history of the Czech Republic through a day spent studying communism. The leaders found very creative ways to teach us about communism with games throughout the day. I was proud that my team won nearly all of the games, but was then bitterly disappointed when everyone got the same prize at the end – I should have realised quicker that's how communism works!

After dinner each night, we would have evening devotion. We took turns to lead worship which could range from reading a favourite bible passage, to a piece of music, to a poem. John and I even led worship one evening after everyone had returned from a day in the mountains (I had unfortunately missed out on this through ill health). Afterwards we handed out some Edinburgh Rock that we had brought as a gift. It was very much appreciated! I think a moment from the trip which really stuck in my head was the final evening we spent at the camp in Herlikovice. Instead of evening devotion, Jan, one of the camp leaders, took us to a little church just down the road from the camp. He led us in prayer and song and then we all took it in turns to light candles and give thanks for the wonderful time we had. I think this experience has really stuck in my head because I really felt like God had done something wonderful by leading me to this amazing opportunity to go out and see the world!

We returned to spend time in Prague with some people from the camp (others chose to go home early). On the day we arrived in Prague we went for an evening tour during which we saw all the sights, including Charles Bridges and St. Vitus Cathedral - something I had been looking forward to the whole trip after my minister told me about it!

On the Sunday morning, we attended the service at the church we were staying in. It was in Czech, so I understood very little, (only whenever he said “prosim” which I knew meant please!) but the minister had very kindly arranged for his sermon to be printed out in English for us to follow. I enjoyed joining in with the singing where I could, but my Czech really wasn't up to scratch!! One of the Czech girls, Anča, who was a member of the church, then got up to speak. She told the congregation about the camp and how it was making links with other churches around the world. It was really wonderful to be a part of that! After the service most people went home, leaving myself and John and the girls from Poland. A couple of the Czechs who stayed locally took us into the centre of Prague for a day of sightseeing. It was a great day and I think I wore out my camera with the number of pictures I took! We were in Prague until late at night before returning to the church, exhausted, for our final night.

Although I was sad to leave, I left excited at all the new opportunities I had before me. I had jokingly suggested one day that I host the camp here in Scotland next year – something which they were all very excited about! However in my return I found out that I was indeed going to be involved in running an international camp which my minister established a number of years ago but which has since stopped due to other priorities taking over. Although the project is still in its early days, I would love to be able to run a camp next year similar to the one I went to, and I would love to be able to invite some of the people I met this year to join in.