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16 January, 2013

Everyday Adventurer Mark Waring – Wilderness Kids

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The blessing of children can provide a major obstacle to enthusiastic outdoors people. The arrival of my baby daughter almost a decade ago saw my wife and I put on hold many of our walking and camping trips; my son added to that happy burden a few years later. Moving around with the paraphernalia deemed 'necessary' to support an infant is challenging at the best of times. Translating that to outdoor activities never quite worked for us at the baby stage.

I've been keen to get them backpacking though and in the last few years, as the children have got older and more mobile, we have had some very successful trips in genuine northern wilderness. Our Anglo/Swedish family spends our annual summer holidays in Scandinavia, providing some very 'family friendly' backpacks in Sweden's stunning sub-arctic mountains. Parts of these mountains are as raw as anywhere on earth, other parts are supported by marked trails and a system of huts that provide a solution to a safe and fun venue for family wilderness walking and camping.



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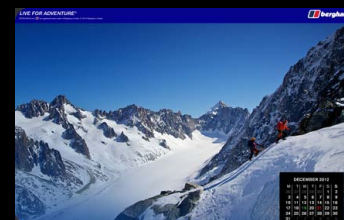
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Our first trip was in the classic hiking area of Jamtland, a few hundred miles south of the Arctic Circle. Affectionately nicknamed the 'Triangle', there's the well walked route between the three mountain or 'fjall' stations of Storulvan, Blahammaren and Sylarna. It's a much loved hike taking the backpacker through birch forests, rugged moorland, quiet tarns, and past grazing reindeer in a landscape dominated by the two mountain massifs of Helags and Sylarna. Wild camping and an unfettered right of access are of course protected in law. With fully serviced huts set in genuine wilderness it's the perfect solution for either novice backpackers, families or those who want a sauna and beer at the end of their trail day.

We plumped for the 'top third' of the triangle and then a two day walk out to the village of Storlien to catch the sleeper back to Stockholm. I read somewhere that half a mile for every year of age per day was about right and with that in mind we managed a four night/five day trip from Storulvan to Storlien. It was a gentle meander through stunning wild land in kind weather and we were there to experience an adventure as a family.

I'll admit I was nervous setting off, despite the easy route and warm sunshine. I was inviting my family into my wilderness world and I was desperate for it to work. Starting off at Storulvan my wife and I shouldered heavy packs. The children's rucksacks less heavy, important colouring-in-books and pencils carefully packed inside. As we moved off though I started to relax, simply enjoying the landscape and quietly delighting in the children's joy at running ahead or stopping to play in small streams.



Our first night saw a wild camp by a gentle tarn (the Swedish word is 'tjarn' showing the Nordic route of our English word). The children played in a small birch forest as the family Hilleberg tent went up. The roar of my 'Pocket Rocket' stove ensured I had an enthusiastic audience as I prepared cheesy pasta. After supper, the two young explorers jumped into the bracing tarn and then enjoyed hot chocolate before turning in. That night we watched quietly as a family of reindeer grazed outside our tent.

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Our expedition pushed on, away from the wide plateau, and towards higher ground. Our second camp afforded wide views to the Sylarna massif, crowned in several 1800 metre peaks. This range is split by the Norwegian border and provides a real cross Scandinavian experience with an opportunity to circumnavigate the massif and enjoy Norwegian hut life.



We had our own hut experience the next day. Our third night was a treat, full board at the summit hut at Blahammaren saw us all enjoy good food (and some wine!). Freshly stocked up with provisions and we then made a gradual descent back into the forests and our last wild camp. The children, now old hands at wilderness travel, helped in camp chores on our fourth night. Before bed we had a moment of excitement as we spotted two small brown bears in distant birch, quite a thrill!



Still in bright sunshine our last day saw spruce and pine forests as we headed to the end of the trail. Small groups, out to pick berries in the forest, waved cheerful hellos. All was well with the world as we talked about, with some excitement, what

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'end-of-trail-treat' we would enjoy in Storlien. For me a beer, for the children some chocolate ice-cream. My wife just wanted a hot shower and clean clothes.

It was a fine adventure, my initial nervousness had quickly disappeared as it was evident that my two young hikers revelled in the freedom of the hills. An adventure for all; mine was overcoming the perception that children can put a brake on backpacking. They revelled in walking and camp life, their enthusiasm was simply infectious. My four year old son turned to me as we put our packs down for the last time and said 'Daddy, can we come here again?' Job done!



I'll thank Berghaus for the quality children's outdoor clothing in their range of products. It can be difficult to find decent gear with an equivalent specification to the adult garment, Berghaus' children's range solves this! Both my two love their Berghaus fleeces and base layers. We have got our eye on some of their waterproofs as well!



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