

Self-organised Camping Trip - Lofoten

Our first actual camping trip was organised by ourselves and took us to Svolvær in the Lofoten. We started Monday morning by taking the bus from Tromsø. When we arrived in Svolvær we walked a bit outside the city center to find a good camping spot for the night. It was actually more difficult than expected to find a good spot that was at least 150 meters away from any private property. But because it was already dark and it was our first night outside on our own we did not want to go all the way into the forest. So we finally found a spot next to a soccer field. The snow was knee deep so before we set up the tent we tried to make the snow around us as flat as possible. It took us pretty long to set up the tent in the dark and unfortunately we just had one working headtorch with us. So the first learning was to always make sure to have new batteries with you when going on a camping trip! Once the tent was ready we just made dinner and then went to bed.

We woke up at around 8 am the next morning. The first night we all slept pretty o.k. We quickly packed our equipment together and heated up some snow to make breakfast and to take hot water with us for the day. At 10 am we were ready to start our little hiking adventure. The first kilometer from our planned hiking route was quite easy to walk, even though we did not have snow boots. Later that day we realised that was a huge mistake... but first things first. So we hiked through that really beautiful landscape, the weather could have been better but at least it was not snowing or raining so far. Every few minutes we checked our map and compared it with our surroundings to make sure we were still on our route. At one point we arrived at a lake, but apparently we missed the bridge that we wanted to cross. That was the first time we left our planned route and just walked straight across the frozen lake. But that was actually just a shortcut because after the lake we were back on our route. Then all of a sudden the hip belt from one of our backpacks broke. So we just walked a bit further till we found a nice spot and then just took a break to have lunch and to fix that backpack. But since we did not have a needle and thread with us we could not fix it properly. So next learning: always have that in your tool kit! After the lunch break we kept walking into the direction of our final destination for that day, a DNT hut called Nøkksetra. We had to cross between two mountains to reach that hut but because of all the snow we were not able to see the actual hiking path. So we were just following our maps and hoping to be on the right way. After a few meters walking up that mountain the snow got deeper and deeper and sometimes we were in hip deep snow. So next learning: take snow boots or skis when hiking in the snow!!! We still tried our best to make it up that mountain for another hour but at one point we were very exhausted. So we decided to have another break and discuss our plan again because it was about one hour before sunset and we still had more than half of the way to go. Eventually we decided it would be the best to walk back down the mountain and to camp next to the lake where we just had lunch break. The way back down just took us 15 minutes. It was way easier to walk back in our own tracks. When we reached the lake we looked for a nice camping spot between a few trees. Setting up the tent that day was so much easier because it was still daylight and we had a

little bit more routine already. After the tent was set up nice and tight we cooked our dinner. We expected some rain for that night so we tried to pull the strings of the tent as tight as possible so it would not catch much water. But still it was not tight enough...

When we woke up the next morning our sleeping bags and mats were pretty wet. It was pouring down a lot that night so the tent was just soaked. One of our team members felt a little bit sick after that night and the weather was just all rainy. So we decided to walk back to the city of Svolvær to get dry and warm again. So we packed the tent and all the other equipment which was all wet and even heavier than before. For the way back we just had to walk along the lake for about 2.5 kilometers. Because we already had plus degrees we decided not to walk on the frozen lake again. So we started walking one after another so the two ones behind just had to walk in the tracks of the first one. It was very exhausting with our even heavier backpacks, the sleet pouring down and the knee to hip deep wet snow we were walking in. So according to that our mood was not the happiest. But we were still able to listen to each other because we all definitely had the same goal: to get ourselves back to the city into a nice and warm cozy cafe. So we kept going very slowly but still without long breaks. Even though we were wearing our raincoats, hardshell pants and gaiters we were all soaked after the first hour of walking. After a while we reached the bridge that we missed on the first day, so we were back on our original route and we knew we had less than one kilometer back to the city. We reached Svolvær city center after 5 hours of walking. We went to a cafe, got a coffee there and booked an apartment for that night. So our camping trip was officially ended by then!

Planning and function of the trip

The planning of the trip was quite difficult in the beginning. Since we were already up north in Tromsø before the camping trip we decided to take the bus down to the Lofoten. We chose to go to Svolvær because it is one of the bigger towns down there. After that decision was made we created a three days hiking route around the area so that we would end up in the same spot again. We looked up two spots where we wanted to camp, one of them was the Nøkksetra DNT hut and the other one was on the bottom of a mountain with a viewpoint. Then we looked up some possible ways to get from one spot to the other. First we planned the route how we would like to hike. The next step was to plan the emergency/escape routes. We mostly just checked how to get to the next big road because there were not many other hiking routes that we could have chosen. And the general emergency plan was to just walk back the same way. In the end we did not really stick to the plan that we made beforehand because of the weather and snow conditions that made the hike to the first overnight spot very hard. So we had to walk back after about two thirds of the way.

Learning outcome

Besides the specific learnings of that Lofoten Trip (e.g. take snow boots when hiking in deep snow...) I learned how important it is to check the weather beforehand. The conditions, like the rain and the wet snow made it really hard to hike around the area. And also the equipment got very wet and heavy, especially the tent. So it is important to have a look at the weather forecast and also about snow conditions and also the avalanche risk. Another thing that we have learned was to make yourself as familiar as possible with the area you are hiking in. We did not really know much about the area beforehand, so we checked the hiking routes and the DNT huts online. The problem was just, that many of these routes are just walkable in the summer months. In the winter you mostly need skis to get around there. So we called the Tourist Information in Svolvær to gather some more information about hiking in that area during winter, but unfortunately they could not give us the information we needed.

Group dynamics

We were a small group of just three girls which made the decision making easier. We all created a plan together in the beginning but also decided together that it would be the best to walk back on the first day. We all had different things to contribute to the team, e.g. walking in the front most of the time or carrying the heavier equipment. Even though the conditions were not as easy for the first camping trip we managed to always decide things together and listen to each other. So I would say smaller groups work a bit better when the conditions are not that easy and when decisions have to be made very quick. For these few days it worked out pretty well but I am not sure if it would have stayed like that if we would have had to camp for more than just two night. We probably would have needed more preparation time and also even more communication beforehand about the different tasks in the group.