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Epsom Scouts joined Swiss adventure

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More than 700 Scouts and volunteers from Surrey, including Scouts from 3rd Epsom & 8th/14th Epsom (Air Scouts), have returned from an unforgettable international adventure in Switzerland as part of **KIX 2026 (Kandersteg International eXpedition)**.

The expedition marked a significant milestone, celebrating **25 years of Surrey Scouts' modern-era expeditions to Kandersteg International Scout Centre (KISC)**, one of the world's premier Scout destinations. The 2026 contingent was the largest group of Scouts to leave the UK this year.

The first Surrey expedition to Kandersteg took place in 2001 under the name **SWaK (Scouts with Altitude – Kandersteg)**. Since then, Surrey Scouts have returned through a series of major international expeditions, including Expand 2004, K9 in 2009, and KIX events in 2014, 2018, 2023 and now 2026.

During their week in the Swiss Alps, Scouts from 3rd Epsom & 8th/14th Epsom (Air Scouts), joined fellow participants from across Surrey to experience a programme packed with adventure, challenge and international friendship. While at Kandersteg, they met Scouts from Canada, Portugal, Spain, Australia, Ireland, Switzerland, Germany and other parts of the United Kingdom, demonstrating the truly global nature of Scouting.

Participants travelled to Switzerland aboard twelve coaches provided by Baker Dolphin, departing from Cobham Services.

The expedition offered a wide range of activities, including hiking in the mountains led by trained and KISC-qualified mountain walkers, rafting on the river Aare from Thun to Bern, and high ropes adventures in Interlaken. Scouts also had opportunities to explore local towns and communities, gaining first-hand experience of Swiss culture and life.

Each troop selected a special activity day tailored to their interests. Activities included visiting the Schilthorn, famous for its appearance in a James Bond film; exploring the Jungfrau region; travelling to the Rothorn by steamship and mountain railway; relaxing in the thermal pools at Brigerbad; tobogganing at Lake Oeschinensee; visiting the St Beatus Caves; and climbing in Winteregg.

In addition, the Young Leader (YL) Squad helped KIX in helping to protect local biodiversity through a partnership with the Forestry Commission. KIX has partnered with Flora from the local Forestry team to contribute to the protection and preservation of biodiversity in the Kandertal area.

The Kandertal is one of the regions in the Canton of Bern with the highest concentration of reptiles. Eight of Switzerland's sixteen native reptile species can be found there, including the sand lizard, grass snake, and the rare smooth snake. Many of these species are under threat, and some are critically endangered, largely due to the loss of important habitats. These habitats include sun-exposed features such as rock piles, dry stone walls, wood piles, and brush piles, as well as natural riverbanks, forest edges, and rocky areas. As part of the Kandertal Reptile Conservation Project, valuable habitats have been surveyed and documented to support their long-term preservation. Working alongside Flora and Luke, the YL Squad helped to maintain and enhance these habitats by clearing brush, creating piles of branches and stones, and improving existing habitat structures. These practical conservation activities make an important contribution to protecting local biodiversity and supporting the survival of the area's native reptile species.

Mel Wedlock, Young Leader Development Team Lead for Surrey Scouts, said: "Supporting projects like this is a fantastic opportunity for the Surrey Young Leader Squad as part of their service project with KIX. The Squad are taking part in the expedition as members of the wider staff team, giving them valuable experience of supporting and delivering a large-scale international event for young people. Alongside developing their leadership skills, they have been able to make a meaningful contribution to an important local conservation project. It has been great to work with KIX, supporting the local community and helping to protect the natural environment in the Kandertal region."

A particularly memorable moment came thanks to local shop owner **Patrick Straubinger**, who gifted every Scout and volunteer a commemorative Swiss pin badge in recognition of Surrey Scouts' 25-year connection with Kandersteg. Patrick has welcomed generations of Surrey Scouts, alongside visitors from Scout groups across the world, throughout that time.

The expedition also attracted local media attention, with Surrey Scouts appearing on the front page of the **Frutigländer**, Kandersteg's local newspaper, as well as featuring in a detailed report inside.

Supporting an event of this scale required an enormous effort from volunteers. Over the course of the week, the catering team provided enough evening meals to feed one person for more than 13 years. The contingent consumed more than **1,322kg of fruit and vegetables**, **3,500 wraps**, **195kg of cheese**, **21,456 slices of salami**, **489kg of meat**, **1,548 schnitzels**, and **255kg of breakfast cereal**.

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Meanwhile, the high walks team supported participants in covering more than **19,000 kilometres** of mountain trails and climbing a combined elevation gain of nearly **650 kilometres**. The activities team also coordinated more than **500 cable car journeys** and **400 swimming pool visits** during the expedition.

As the Scouts returned home, they brought with them new friendships, increased confidence, valuable #skillsforlife and memories that will last a lifetime. Showing Scouting has a #placetobelong.

Ian MacQueen Expedition leader said “KIX 2026 took two years to plan with and aim to give 700 Scouts and leaders the opportunity to try new activities, make new friends and learn skills for life. I think it is safe to say we achieved our aim and more. My thanks to the staff and leaders who made the event a success. We will now start to plan KIX 2029”

Scouts were asked “What were you expecting from the trip before you came?”

A Scout from 3rd Epsom said “I was expecting to be tired from hikes and I was looking forward to the activities, thought it was always cold and there would be lots of always hiking. I also thought it was going to be like a school trip and was expecting to be fun but wet.”

A Scout from 8th/14th Epsom said “I was expecting adventures, and to meet other Scouts from other countries.”

Scouts were then asked “What’s been the highlight of the week?”

A Scout from 3rd Epsom said “I enjoyed the rafting and going to Brigerbad and it was nothing like a school trip it was much more fun (different to expectations), I got to know lots of Scouts and doing all the different activities including, high ropes. It was a really nice place in general and I want to come again as everything was really fun.”

A Scout from 8th/14th Epsom said “I liked swimming in the pool in the park in Bern after rafting and also the rafting from Thun to Bern.”

We then asked the Adult Volunteers “Why did you want to bring your Scouts on this trip?”

An adult volunteer from 3rd Epsom said “We have been many times before and they get a lot out of the trip and gain great experiences. It is also great to see true scouting in operation but there are long challenging days but full of fun and excitement.”

An adult volunteer from 8th/14th Epsom said “There is a program for our scouts which is organised by the County team with support & food provision.”

We finally asked the Adult volunteer, “What was there highlight of the week?”

An adult volunteer from 3rd Epsom said “The friendliness, organisation and true Scouting spirit is second to none. Activities are organised very well with tasks as necessary. The Scouts found the walks challenging but all survived and surprised they could walk so far and so high. The food was also very good.”

An adult volunteer from 8th/14th Epsom said “The location, amazing scenery, swimming in Spiez, getting to know other adult volunteers better and hiking way beyond what I would normally do.”

Neil Wibberley

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