

## BGIFC Commissioner Report November 2014/15

The past year has been very busy and very productive. Helped by My Deputy, Diane Thomas, who is also CC for Europe, we have been able to continue our efforts to ensure all our members receive a visit and or training at least once every four years.

In April I finally managed to get to Baku in Azerbaijan, although it was a wee bit tight! Two days before my flight, the Post Office managed to 'Mislal' my Passport containing the challengingly obtained visa! However, it was worth the hassle as the Leaders turned out in force(100%) for trainings over two days and I had the opportunity to meet all the girls in their unit meetings. I also talked with the Leaders and with their agreement made Baku a district and appointed a commissioner. I also presented Chelsea Ayala with a BGIFC Brooch and had dinner with the Chief Scout for Azerbaijan who was preparing to bid against Malaysia for the 2017 World Conference and subsequently won! How exciting that could be for our members! They have just opened their second Guide unit!

Chelsea was moving to Angola in June and was looking forward to taking a step back from Guiding after six years and sending her daughter to the Girl Scouts USA. As she was packing two ladies from Aberdeen, who live in Angola, wrote to me asking if BGIFC could take over from Girl Scouts USA as the American Leaders were leaving! I'm delighted to say that Chelsea is now the unit Administrator and Mentor in Angola! They now also have all three sections running!

In June, whilst on holiday, I had the pleasure of joining Lynne Armitage and the Fuengirola Rainbows, Brownies and Guides as they celebrated the Big Brownie Birthday. It was a lovely evening and I was in charge of the chocolate coated fruit kebabs!

The BGIFC Big Brownie Birthday Virtual Wave has been a huge success. The pictures on the website were delightful and the competition to find the winners in each of the three categories was challenging for the judges. It has been wonderful to see everyone's bunting on display as I have visited events. Well done to our Brownie Adviser Diane Card for such a successful event and well done everyone who took part! Thanks to the generosity of 'Friends' every girl taking part received a lovely badge to celebrate their achievement.

At the end of June I flew out to Kuala Lumpur for the Commonwealth Chief Commissioners' Conference, for which I had the privilege of being the Lead Volunteer on behalf of Girlguiding. I stopped over in Dubai to meet with the Middle East Commissioners and discuss future support for them. It was a good meeting and the group agreed to meet once a year and that they would take it in turn to be the group leader and represent their County at our Executive Meeting. I also had the pleasure of joining Dubai Senior Section and BP Award girls at a Ladies only night at the Wild Wadi Water-park followed by a sleepover!

After arriving late in KL, Fiona Howells, Division Commissioner for Malaysia, picked me up at 7am the next morning to join the Guides for breakfast following their sleepover! I was very grateful to Fiona who represented BGIFC really well by acting as our conference Gofer! Fiona attended for the five days and was indispensable. Her hard work was recognised by the Chief Guide who presented her with an Association Thanks Badge. The conference was excellent, and thankfully went really well. It was a tremendous experience to run such a prodigious event and to meet Commissioners from all over the world.

In the Summer I visited the excellent BGIFC Sub-Camp Team, led by our OAA, Kathy Hobbs, at Midlands Region Brownie Birthday Cosmic Camp. It was great to see BGIFC contributing so well to this event. I was told more than once that they were a brilliant team! It was lovely to spend time in the UK with the 7 Leaders and 6 girls from BGIFC.

After Cosmic I went to visit Caroline Coleman, two YLs, one from Ethiopia and one from Dubai plus one Guide from Benelux and France at WINGS 2014 in Windsor Great Park. The girls and Caroline were having a great time. I hope to develop the idea of a BGIFC contingent attending a UK based large scale camp in the years between our own Foxlease camps.

In October I undertook a two week visit to our units in the Middle East. This was planned around the very exciting visit to Dubai by The Chief Guide.

I arrived early in order to visit Mandy in Sharjah where I enjoyed a wonderful evening with all the Rainbows, Brownies and Guides. The numbers have grown so much that it was agreed they become a District under Mandy Bray.

Following Gill's arrival we enjoyed a fantastic picnic at the British Embassy in Dubai with the Brownies to celebrate the end of the Big Brownie Birthday. It was good to welcome girls and leaders from Sharjah plus an UAE Leader and the local Group Scout Leader. The event was hosted by the Vice- Consul and his wife and the Consul popped in to say hello after his son's victorious rugby match!

Gill then enjoyed a relaxing BBQ at Caroline Coleman's house with the Division Team and their husbands where Gill presented the long suffering John Coleman with a Thanks Badge.

The next day we attended a lovely Afternoon Tea for leaders in the grounds of the hotel. Gill was able to tell leaders about everything that is happening in Girlguiding and afterwards circulated ensuring she spoke to everyone. Gill also presented Nicola Dolan, June Grayston and Claire Godfrey with a BGIFC Brooch.

The final day of Gill's visit saw us off to join Adele and her District in Abu Dhabi where the whole district turned out to meet Gill. She had the chance to watch the Rainbows and Brownies enjoying activities and sample the delicious food prepared by the Guides. The Senior Section escorted Gill around the event and the British Ambassador popped in to meet Gill and I on his way to an engagement in Dubai. The support BGIFC get from our Embassies is very much appreciated.

Gill's visit was a huge success, enjoyed by all our members and of course Gill. She came away with a much better understanding of the excellent Guiding going on in BGIFC and of the challenges faced by our volunteers.

After Gill left I went on to visit leaders in Bahrain, Doha and Kuwait and am delighted to report that Bahrain and Doha are now both Districts and hopefully Kuwait will put together a District team to run their District following the departure of both Amanda and then Helen. This means that every country in the Middle East, with the exception of Saudi who cannot be visited, are now Districts with their own DC. While in Kuwait I did some training but mainly the purpose of my visit was to offer support and create these districts.

I have been privileged to represent BGIFC at the Thanks and Recognition Service at Westminster Abbey and a service at Salisbury Cathedral as well as the Association Council Meeting. I also attended a Chief Commissioners' Weekend in Scotland as well as the regular Chief Commissioner meetings throughout the year. I have also met regularly with my opposite number in Scouting to discuss concerns and challenges we have in common. We are working closely on certain issues affecting our members.

The new year saw us moving into first gear with our preparations for "Discovery '15". The camp leaders, Kathy Hobbs and Amanda Weldon were working hard to change the running of the camp into three zones where all girls would go each day with their sub camps. This would enable leaders to have more free time and consider attending trainings in the house. The Brownie houses were over subscribed and an extra Guide sub camp was needed too. We also invited Branches to join us and were looking forward to welcoming The Falkland Islands and The British Virgin Islands.

March saw an historic moment for BGIFC when I attended the last County of Cyprus AGM and formally welcomed our newest Division, Cyprus. This decision had been made, with the full consultation of the members of Cyprus County, because of the fall in membership, due mainly to the drop in the Forces families being posted there. It was a lovely meeting with a celebratory lunch held in the Dakalia Officers' Mess.

The counties of Germany and Benelux and France held very successful Training weekends as did Dubai. Our mission to 'Grow our own Trainers' is gaining momentum and we have new prospectives in both the Far East and Europe. Discovery '15 will give us the opportunity to offer training to our trainers and prospectives as well as opportunities for them to gain training experience.

Friends of BGIFC continue to be a great support to us and this year among the support we have received they have helped Prospective Trainers to travel to train, leaders in Benelux and France without district support to access the County Weekend, badges to be purchased for the Big Brownie Virtual Wave. We continue to be grateful for their support.

At the Autumn Executive Meeting we agreed to re structure our system of Governance in order to ensure that our growth areas, The Middle East and Africa, were fully represented. It was also decided that the Advisers would become a separate Guiding Development Committee. We also agreed to explore and hold 'virtual' meetings in the Spring and a face to face meeting in the summer at Foxlease, followed by a joint AGM with the Guiding Development Committee. After some initial challenges the Skype meeting went very well and the representatives from Asia and The Middle East appreciated being involved. This new system is on a trial basis for a year and then it will be reviewed.

All in all 2014/15 has been a successful, happy year. Our membership has risen slightly, we have a new, fairer system of Governance, our own Trainers and Prospective Trainers, happy girls and confident young women and fantastic, enthusiastic and committed volunteers whom it is a privilege and pleasure to lead.

Lesley Knighton  
March 2015

