



Girlguiding Cold Ash - Still going strong in 2021

A report by Abi Layton (leader at 1st Cold Ash Brownies & 1st Cold Ash Rangers)

Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK. It has been inspiring and empowering girls and young women for more than 100 years.

In Cold Ash, there are five Girlguiding groups (also known as units) in Cold Ash; a Rainbows group for girls age 5-7 years, two Brownies units (age 7-10 years), a Guide unit (age 10-14 years) and a small Ranger unit (age 14-18 years). These groups are run by a team of volunteer leaders and unit helpers and provide weekly sessions (term-time only) for more than 100 girls and young women. All the groups, except Rangers, are full and operate waiting lists.

2020 got off to a great start for Girlguiding Cold Ash, with a 2-night indoor residential weekend for the Guides and a sleepover at West Berkshire Museum for 1st Cold Ash Brownies to name just two of the activities. However, the emergence of Covid-19 and Boris' announcement to 'Avoid unnecessary social contact' meant that Girlguiding groups across the country had to cease in person meetings with immediate effect. By the end of the week, schools had also closed to all but key worker children. The Girlguiding groups in the village faced an unprecedented challenge - what were we going to do?

The leaders tentatively set a few challenges for our members via email and unit Facebook groups. These were rapidly taken up by the girls and their parents and we realised there might be a need for Girlguiding during lockdown. Some groups started running Zoom sessions and by May half-term most of the Girlguiding groups in the village were doing the same as it became apparent that this situation was going to go on longer than we anticipated.

And so followed a full-on virtual programme for Girlguiding Cold Ash, with many groups meeting weekly throughout 2020 and the first term of 2021. We had many highlights including over 60 members taking part in a camp at home event in April 2020, cooking on Zoom (lemonade scones, armpit fudge, rocky road), crafts, more scavenger hunts than we can count, virtual 'visits' from charities/companies offering animal experiences, and badge work (hundreds of badges earned across the groups). The guides individually took part in a litter pick in their local area and 2nd Cold Ash Brownies recently created a virtual choir with the help of Voxfresh, a local children's choir group (they will be on BBC Radio Berkshire tonight - 22nd April). The leaders also organised and delivered activity packs to our members.

As we look back on the past year, it is amazing what we achieved. We not only survived a year of being unable to meet in person, but we positively thrived. We had fantastic feedback from parents as we were continuing to provide creative and fun activities in incredibly strange times, and we continued to welcome new members into our groups, even though it was all virtual meetings.

This week outdoor face-to-face meetings are resuming for all the Girlguiding Cold Ash groups. They are socially distanced and we're having to remain creative with adapting activities and coming up with solutions such as individual resource packs for each girl, but we are back. In person. All units remain full and still have waiting lists. We're also incredibly fortunate to have the wonderful Thirtover Place facility in the village, which means that we have a safe and expansive space for our outdoor meetings. Finally, a number of the units have camps and residential events booked for later in the year and we're keeping our fingers crossed that those can go ahead.

This report provides a brief summary of the past year for Girlguiding Cold Ash. I hope you enjoyed it and thank you for your time.

If our report has inspired you to get involved with Girlguiding Cold Ash, then please visit the Girlguiding website <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/get-involved/> to register your interest and one of our local volunteers will contact you.