

# I.F.R.A. trip to Bosnia

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In August of 2010 I went to Bosnia as part of the IFRA team.

## **A long drive down.**

Having flown to Gatwick (then scrounged a lift with my sister to the docks cheers Emma) I met Brian, June and Steven at Dover, they had driven the I.F.R.A. transit van from Scotland. We managed to get onto an earlier boat to Calais then set off on the very long drive to Bosnia. This was a good chance for us to get to know each other. I must admit to feeling apprehensive prior to meeting them but soon felt part of the team. We drove from Calais, through France, Belgium, The Netherlands and stayed overnight in Germany. The next day we drove on through Austria Slovenia then Croatia and arrived in Bosnia. The sat nav ran out of info at the Bosnian border. We found a cheep apartment above a restaurant in the town of Velika just across the boarder. The people were friendly and spoke enough English.

## **Top Tips and highlights of on the drive.**

“Lights and Left”, in some of the countries it’s the law to have your lights on.

Boarders can be tricky. Remove shades. Smile. Think positive (Brian) and have all paperwork/passports at hand.

Do not get out of the vehicle unless told to.

Do not move past anyone unless waved on.

I think we had an easy time through the boarders this time compared to previous trips.

The longest we spent stuck was about 1hr mainly because you have to get insurance to drive in Bosnia at the boarder. Seems odd but you cannot get it till you are there.

Remember that “corpses have feelings to and are not just for Christmas” me with a hangover in the back.

Take an I pod with decent music on! Still have flashbacks, Bagpipes & bad 80s music.

Motorway in Austria took about 4hrs to get 1 mile due to a closed tunnel

We arrived at the station on Saturday evening and had Sunday to prepare for training on Monday. The first problem to overcome was the language barrier and a lack of translators.

The station also had no training facilities. Also due to the fact they have no radio system off station exercises would be difficult. We looked at some derelict places but none were safe.

We came up a plan to use some open sheds at the rear of the station. By parking vehicles using large wooden doors salvage sheets to simulate a six roomed building.

### **Monday B.A.**

Training was due to start at 09-00 however the Firefighters most are retained from other stations arrived in dribs and drabs up to 10-00ish. Many had no fire kit and it took a lot of time issuing the donated fire kit well done Steve. Also we discovered the station compressor was broken and they only have 5 cylinders. The 4 BA sets we had with us were not compatible. However later on they were swapped with another station that also had two types.

The group of 20 was split in two, Half doing trauma the rest for B.A. with me and Steve. With a swap over after lunch.

By about 11-00 we started the first BA training. The temperature was getting into the 30's so we ensured everyone had a drink of water.

For some of the firefighters this was the first time they had worn B.A. They have no tally system, no search procedures, no radio's, no training.

I had a good translator within the group who had been a Firefighter before the war. He was a station commander from another area. Steve and myself demonstrated The B.A. shuffle, search pattern, Door entry procedure (slight lack of a door), I also talked about fire behavior, Branch techniques and casualty handling.

So with demand valves out so not to use air, and flash hoods on backwards (I don't think any had ever been blacked out before). They set off to search one team left and the other right. We used two live casualties who had put on the funniest looking paper suits I have ever seen.



The teams did a good job it was difficult to get any points across due to the time delay of explaining to

the translator and him passing it on. I had to make the team stop if a point needed to be explained. I also saved some points for the debrief.

The second group was a bit trickier as my translator had no fire service knowledge.

### **Tuesday B.A.**

We used the same format as the day before. Things went much smoother. Some of the duty crew started teaching as we went along and the good translator stayed with us for the day.

### **Wednesday R.T.C.**

The car had arrived the day before. It had no wheels, no axel, no engine, but it did have glass and one seat (not bolted in).

About 25 firefighters turn up by 10-00.

I had learnt from the first day not to assume that anything would work so had got the duty watch to run all the cutting gear and did a dry run of the drill the evening before.

The RTC training was good we rolled the car on its roof and demonstrated how to stabilize making access from the back.

Then we put the car on its side and stabilized using a short ex ladder and talked about access by folding the roof down.

Finally back on its wheels a full roof removal, dash roll one side and dash lift the other with stay and play trauma care delivered by paramedic Brian with June as a casualty.

### **Thursday Water safety**

This was a day off for me as two of the Bosnian Firefighters run white water rafting trips for a living. We had an incredible day on the river Una. Only a bit of input about throwing lines and we ran through a river/water safety PowerPoint.

### **Friday Bosnian TV**

The Chief and some of the local politicians had invited the media on the last day. I decided to do a chip pan demo.

Also the chief set fire to the RTC car for the Firefighters to extinguish. Once the film crew had filmed the demonstrations they asked me and Brian to give an interview.

This was an odd experience to be asked a question in Bosnian then listen to the translator in English, reply then listen to the translator reply in Bosnian. A long process I hope the message was not lost in translation.

I and one of the watches had made a Doll's house to burn. It demonstrates branch techniques and fire behavior.

When the TV crew had left we did some knots and lines, ladder rescues and finished with a drill. The oldest in one crew and the youngest in the other. This was great fun with the old and experienced completing there drill before the young and viral.

### **Saturday**

We repeated the old and the young drill the station in Krupa on Saturday evening. Again lot's of fun while learning the Bosnians have a wicked sense of humor.

For me this trip has been a fantastic.

To meet and train some of the Firefighters in Bosnia has been my privilege.

The hospitality through the week was incredible.

Thanks to all for an experience I will never forget. It will be hard not to go back next year. I may even let Brian come again.