

Trip to Scotland

The four of us, my best friend Ruth, my parents and me, were walking over a piece of damp moorland in Scotland. It was cold, in spite of the spring sunshine, and rather bleak. I have to say, I'd been quite anxious about Ruth when we set out. I wasn't sure how a New Yorker would react to all this empty scenery. Although she's lived in London for years, this was the first time she'd ever been to Scotland, which was surprising. It was also the first time she'd been on a trip with my family, which was not so surprising. My parents almost never go away.

My family runs a travel agency, so a holiday's just like work for them – or so they say. Just occasionally, though, something gets them moving. This time it was a small advert in the newspaper. My father saw it in the travel section, which normally he only reads for research purposes. It was a special offer – a long weekend in a farmhouse at a really good price. What was crucial, though, was that it ended with the magic words 'excellent bird-watching country'. Suddenly, we were in the car heading north for Scotland.

'I think I've just seen a sparrow-harrier,' said Ruth, 'but now all I'm getting is sky.'

'Binoculars can be very tricky if you're not used to them,' said my mother.

'So can bird names,' I said. 'You've just invented the sparrow-harrier. It must've been either a sparrowhawk or a hen harrier.'

My father was struggling with one foot deep in a wet patch of mud. He heaved it free; it gave out a loud squelch. 'In actual fact,' he said, 'it was a buzzard.' (line 18)

I think Dad likes bird-watching the way some people like fishing. It gives him an excuse to go somewhere lonely and stare into space. To be fair, though, he can get quite animated; when he thought he'd spotted a firecrest up an oak tree, he brought the binoculars up so fast he blacked both his eyes. I remember trying not to laugh. Somehow, though, I hadn't expected Ruth to find it appealing. Here she was staring at a disappearing dot in the sky and saying, 'Okay. So can I claim to have seen a buzzard? Even though I didn't know what it was?' My father bent down and pointed to a small, boring plant, half-hidden in the grass. 'What's that?' he said.

Ruth examined it carefully. 'I have absolutely no idea,' she said.

'Neither have I,' said my father, 'but whatever it is, we've definitely both seen it.'

'I think that was a "yes" to your buzzard question,' said my mother.

We only had one more day away. Then it was back to reality for all of us. Ruth and I are both taking a 'year out' between school and college. I have to admit things weren't turning out exactly as we expected – though bits have been really good. The idea was to work and save, then travel and party. I got a job at once, as an assistant at the agency. I would like to point out, here, that this only sounds like an easy option to people who have never worked for my parents. It's been hard for Ruth to find jobs though, so she never has much money. It's a pity because, wherever you want to travel, you have to pay – unless you're my parents, of course. It was on the walk back to the farm that they began to discuss all the free holidays they'd had over the years. Which I have to say I thought was very tactless of them.

- 1 What worried the narrator about the trip before they left?
 - A whether Ruth would get on with her parents
 - B whether her parents would enjoy themselves
 - C whether Ruth would appreciate the landscape
 - D whether low temperatures would spoil their fun
- 2 According to the narrator, what had attracted her father to the trip?
 - A the place where he saw it advertised
 - B the relatively low cost it involved
 - C the chance to practise his hobby
 - D the opportunities for research
- 3 The word 'squelch' in line 18 describes
 - A the noise something made.
 - B the way something looked.
 - C a way of moving something.
 - D a way of talking about something.
- 4 The narrator mentions the incident with the firecrest to show
 - A how unlucky her father tended to be.
 - B how keen on bird-watching her father was.
 - C how amusing her father could be at times.
 - D how knowledgeable about birds her father was.
- 5 How does the narrator feel about her 'year out' so far?
 - A Most of it has been enjoyable.
 - B She is thoroughly disappointed by it.
 - C It has not been going according to plan.
 - D This holiday is the best part of it to date.
- 6 What does the narrator suggest about her job?
 - A It isn't very well paid.
 - B It doesn't really interest her.
 - C It's fun working with her parents.
 - D It's much harder than people imagine.