

Law

OF THE CAMPSITE

Gillian Law finds camping can be a dangerous activity



met friends for dinner last night in a funky new pizza place in town. Once our food and beer arrived, talk came round to one friend's recent cycle camping adventure in Iceland.

"So, how was it?"

In response she just smiled. A big, gap-toothed smile, with one of her teeth half gone, leaving a jagged spike.

"Oh my goodness! What happened?!"

Well. As anyone who's ever taken down – or struggled to put up – a tent will know, those tent poles are under a lot of pressure once they're in place. And as my friend was taking her tent down one fine morning, the pole sprang out of its holder – and smashed her in the face!

Holy mackerel. Wild camping in Iceland, on her own, miles from anywhere, and she's suddenly got a gob full of broken tooth. Luckily she says it's not sore at all, and so she just carried on with the rest of her trip. That's pretty hardcore! Though she's avoiding giving too many big grins to people until she can get her dentist to fix her poor tooth up a bit. There's a touch of the vampire about that smile at the moment.

It would have been worse, I suppose, if it had hit an eye or cut her face, as poles can spring out with a lot of force. Watch out, out there – learn from my pal and pay

attention to those springy poles. Or go for one of the fancy new blow-up tents!

Mind you, the last time this friend went to Iceland – she likes Iceland a lot – she was taking down her tent on a very windy morning, and before she knew what was happening it was dragged out of her hands by a gust of wind and blown away. This time she held on to the pole okay – but then stood and watched in dismay as the fabric was swept up and out of reach by the wind and carried off over a cliff edge. Wild camping in Iceland, miles from anywhere... and a handful of nothing.

Boy oh boy. That was £300 of high-technology, super-lightweight, lovely and much loved tent, gone in a split second. And no doubt now just a sad and ragged bit of nylon wrapped around a tree trunk at the bottom of an Icelandic cliff somewhere. If they have trees in Iceland.

It can be a dangerous business, camping. Or maybe it's Iceland that's the common denominator here. Or my friend! None of these things have happened to me in a nice civilised British campsite. The worse that's happened to me is getting verrucas in the shower.

Mind you, anyone that's had veruccas will sympathise. Not only does it feel gross to think you have this thing growing into the sole of your foot, but they're blooming

hard to get rid of. I developed a whole array of the nasty wee things across my heel, and my chiropodist seemed to take a great delight in watching me writhe as he tried to 'burn' them off with ... some black magic, I've no idea what he was doing down there, except that it hurt.

Wear flip flops, people, that's my advice. So that you don't either catch them, or pass them on to me, thanks very much.

The only other real danger I'm aware of in a tent is my penknife, because I'm pretty clumsy and the knife on it is both super sharp and quite hard to unfold. I think the very first time I used it I sank it into the palm of my hand while trying to hold and cut a tomato for my sandwich. I now have a travelling chopping board and I'm super careful.

I suppose mallets can hit thumbs or toes, and guy ropes are the very devil for tripping you up in the middle of the night. And then there's hot stoves and lighters and matches, and midges and mosquitos and who knows what out there. Do carry a first aid kit!

On the other hand, I suppose we just have to accept that the outdoors world can be a bit of a dangerous place. And be extra careful with those springy tent poles next time you're out there.