

# **YOUNG EXPLORERS' TRUST**

*The Association of Youth Exploration Societies*

## **GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH EXPEDITIONS**

**Revised Edition  
2002**

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The aim of the Young Explorers' Trust is to give young people from all walks of life the opportunity to take part in exploration, discovery and challenging adventure through safe and responsible expeditioning

The Young Explorers' Trust encourages all those providing expeditions for young people to adopt, as the primary concern, safety measures which embody their duty of care.

To seek to eliminate the danger of fatalities, disabling injuries, emotional distress and serious illnesses;

and to reduce minor accidents, injuries and illnesses to a level no higher than might be expected in the everyday life of an active and adventurous young person.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Young Explorers' Trust has drawn up these Expedition Guidelines to assist expedition organisers and leaders in maintaining the highest standards of safety and welfare of the young people in their charge. This paper sets out the principles, the management requirements and the practical arrangements required in order that expeditions may be conducted responsibly and effectively. The responsibility for such expeditions is often widely shared; it follows from this that all those involved or concerned, whether supporters, organisers, parents or participants, should have as much relevant information about the expedition as is reasonably possible. The Guidelines are intended to apply to all expeditions, within the United Kingdom, into Europe, and further afield.

The Guidelines are mainly concerned to minimise the risk of the *consequences of* untoward or dangerous situations when they arise on expeditions. It is important therefore to recognise the fundamental distinction between hazard and risk. A hazard is a situation or set of circumstances which can cause harm to people. A risk is the chance, great or small, that someone will be harmed by the hazard. Risk assessment is the systematic process of identifying hazards and evaluating the risk; through this process, strategies may be developed to safeguard the expedition participants.

Each expedition is unique, with its own purpose and requiring its own safety framework. It is neither feasible nor desirable to attempt to legislate for all eventualities which may arise on an expedition, since an element of uncertainty is inherent in every such adventurous activity. Indeed, an over-prescriptive approach to safety may inhibit the flexibility of judgement which may be needed in difficult or changing circumstances. The best safety lies not so much in the avoidance of danger as in learning how to recognise hazardous situations and how to manage them competently as they arise. This principle applies both to leaders and to participants. The Guidelines must always be interpreted by supporters, organisers, parents and participants in the light of the particular location, fieldwork and activities intended and the circumstances and conditions prevailing at the time.

As important as any advice or detailed regulation is the need for the organisers of an expedition to be clear about the aims and objectives of the venture, and to ensure that the fieldwork and other activities undertaken are appropriate to those aims and objectives. Lack of clarity about aims and objectives may lead to confusion in practice and this may have serious implications for safety. In this connection, it is vitally important to be clear about the nature of the understanding entered into by organisers with expedition participants and their parents and other interested parties; this is essential in ventures which may involve hazard and risk.

Every expedition organiser should ensure that the authority and chain of responsibility for each expedition or expedition element is defined precisely and understood clearly, and that proper arrangements are made for reporting and accountability. Without such measures, responsibility for expedition activities easily becomes diffused and confusion may arise. The larger and more complex the expedition, the more important such

measures become. Such systems of reporting and accountability should underpin the planning.

Occasions may arise when these Guidelines cannot be observed in their entirety, because of an emergency, or a situation in which two or more of the principles of the Guidelines come into conflict. In such rare circumstances, the leader must use his or her best judgement to safeguard the expedition members as the first priority.

The principles outlined in these Guidelines are elaborated in the companion publication: Safe and Responsible Expeditions.

**" Give no-one cause to regret your visit."**

## **THE Y.E.T. GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH EXPEDITIONS**

### ***1. THE TRADITION OF EXPLORATION***

- 1.1 Expeditions should be undertaken in the spirit of enquiry and enjoyment, with proper respect for the places and peoples visited.
- 1.2 Behaviour and conduct should at all times show such sensitivity and care that future expeditions will be welcomed to the same area.
- 1.3 Expedition organisations should be able to describe and demonstrate an Ethic of Care and a Safety Policy, which together underpin the proposed expedition. [This is a requirement for expeditions seeking YET Approval.]

### ***2. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS***

- 2.1 Every expedition must have a clear purpose which can be stated in easily understood terms and is agreed by all those connected with the venture.
- 2.2 Specific 'task' and 'developmental' objectives should be established for each expedition, which may be measured or reported upon at the end of the expedition.
- 2.3 Expedition organisers are responsible for the selection of suitably experienced and competent expedition leaders.
- 2.4 Expedition leaders should understand their duty of care, and recognise that during an expedition they are acting 'in loco parentis', as a caring and prudent parent, with a continuing responsibility for the physical and emotional welfare of the participants.
- 2.5 Expedition organisers and leaders should appreciate the distinction between hazard and risk, , and should take all possible steps to keep foreseeable risk at a minimum. A systematic written Risk

Assessment should be made, the results checked by an appropriate independent expert, and a copy carried on the expedition.

- 2.6 Wherever possible all the expedition members should be involved in the Risk Assessment process, both before and during (for example at the evening meeting) the expedition. It is also recommended that all members (and the parents of under 18's) receive a copy of the pre-expedition Assessment.
- 2.7 Where significant, foreseeable levels of risk may occur, there should be a clear understanding or agreement with participants and parents as to the nature and degree of risk which is acceptable.
- 2.8 It should be recognised that during expeditions situations are frequently encountered which are complex and dynamic, changing constantly and quickly. It must be made clear to all that it may not always be possible to continue with an activity which has been planned or publicised in advance.
- 2.9 Leaders must be familiar with and conform to any guidelines or procedures detailed by their own or the participants' operating authority (eg LEA, school or youth organisation).

### ***3. SAFETY POLICY AND SAFETY CULTURE***

- 3.1 Every expedition organisation should have a clear and concise statement of Safety Policy, which should be widely circulated and easily understood; this sets the benchmark for safety, which may be elaborated in detail elsewhere as appropriate.
- 3.2 The Safety Policy should acknowledge the 'duty of care' of the organisers and leaders, and the requirements of Health and Safety legislation.
- 3.3 As important as a Safety Policy is the inculcation of a 'Safety Culture' throughout an organisation or an expedition. An ethic of care should permeate every activity. All participants should be encouraged to identify and report hazards and to care at all times for others' welfare and safety as well as their own.
- 3.4 It should be recognised that many accidents occur in informal, apparently non-hazardous situations; care must be exercised at all times throughout an expedition

### ***4. SAFETY MANAGEMENT***

- 4.1 The roles and responsibilities of all members of an expedition should be made as clear as possible, and each leader should understand to whom he/she is accountable at all stages of the expedition.
- 4.2 All leaders carry a high degree of responsibility for the general safety and welfare of expedition members, but specific responsibilities may also be established. Every expedition should consider the merits of appointing independent Safety Officers, reporting to the Expedition leader either for the expedition as a whole, or for specific areas of activity.
- 4.3 Expedition groups should be of an appropriate size for the task being undertaken. Group sizes should be related to the levels of maturity and capability of those involved. Groups working in remote locations should contain a minimum of four members. For adventurous activities, groups should not be too large;

a maximum number should be specified for each activity, with regard to the qualified leadership available.

- 4.4 Groups of widely ranging ability or maturity, or of mixed sex, or with behavioural difficulties, require especially intensive, careful and sensitive supervision.
- 4.5 When groups are allowed to work or travel unaccompanied by adult leaders, they should be aware of the agreed leadership structure, and given a comprehensive briefing which includes clear objectives, explicit deadlines and boundaries, and details of emergency procedures.
- 4.6 All expedition members should be kept well-informed about the current situation and any decisions which may have been taken. Meetings and communication systems, both internal and external should be appropriate to achieve this aim.
- 4.7 Careful attention should be paid to the pacing and level of intensity of an expedition. Leaders must be alert for signs of discomfort or distress. Time should be created at appropriate intervals for quiet recuperation, relaxation and reflection for members and leaders.
- 4.8 It is important to draw up and maintain local operating and safety procedures (including emergency procedures and contacts) appropriate to each location visited, related to local conditions and the level of activities or fieldwork proposed. Local operating procedures should also include necessary information about relationships with local communities.
- 4.9 There must be a system in place for recording illnesses, accidents, near-misses and significant incidents with safety implications at the time of occurrence. An overall report should be compiled at the end of the expedition (see Section 10). [In the case of YET approved expeditions, confidential reports in an agreed format should be sent to YET.
- 4.10 Careful attention must be paid to insurance matters as normal travel insurance may be unsuitable. Advice is available from the Y.E.T. and from the Expedition Advisory Centre of the RGS.
- 4.11 If any foreign nationals join the expedition they will probably not be covered by your insurance.
- 4.12 Make sure that insurance covers pre-expedition events such as training activities, meetings, fund-raising etc.
- 4.13 Plans should be in place, as appropriate, for evacuation in case of a serious accident, or an emergency such as civil unrest.

## **5. EXPEDITION LEADERSHIP**

- 5.1 Expeditions should have a sufficient number of leaders to supervise adequately all expedition activities and also allow for contingencies such as illness. There should be an overall Expedition Leader, and normally a nominated Deputy Leader who is able to take full control if necessary.
- 5.3 The leader should be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of his/her leader team, for instance through examination of their previous expedition experience and authenticated expedition log-books, through verifying any specialist qualifications held, and through appropriate checks on personal suitability. The

expedition organisers, providers and chief leader must be able to explain why they judge a particular leader to have the experience and/or qualifications to supervise a particular activity.

- 5.4 These checks should include a signed declaration that the prospective leader has no past record of offences against young persons, supported if necessary by a BASIC DISCLOSURE from the Criminal Records Bureau.
- 5.5 Mixed sex expeditions should have both male and female leaders.
- 5.6 All leaders require an appropriate balance of personal qualities, technical knowledge and skills, interpersonal and group-work skills and relevant expedition experience. Where specialised fieldwork or activities are to be included, suitable professional or technical qualifications, such as National Governing Body awards, may be required. Although not essential, it is helpful for some leaders to have a degree of proficiency in the language of any foreign country to be visited.
- 5.7 All leaders must have levels of competence appropriate to the tasks which they will be required to undertake. Where some leaders are inexperienced, appropriate systems of support, supervision or mentoring are required.
- 5.8 Leaders should have a sound knowledge of first aid, lifesaving and emergency evacuation techniques, appropriate to the expedition area. They should normally hold a recognised first aid qualification. It is advisable to appoint an expedition doctor, nurse or paramedic when visiting remote locations without local medical support, and leaders of such expeditions may need to obtain a "Wilderness Medicine" qualification in addition to their basic First Aid Certificate.
- 5.9 Leaders should keep in mind at all times their pastoral responsibilities for encouraging, counselling, and seeking to understand the young people for whom they carry responsibility.
- 5.10 Leaders should seek opportunities on expedition to strengthen their own skills and those of other leaders by sharing their expertise. Expedition members should be encouraged to take leadership opportunities whenever appropriate.
- 5.11 Leaders should be advised of their position with regard to liability, personal and third party insurance.

### ***PRELIMINARIES***

- 6.1 Appropriate criteria should be established for the selection of expedition members bearing in mind the overall purpose and likely demands of the expedition.
- 6.2 Expedition leaders or others with relevant experience should satisfy themselves by interview or practical assessment that they have a full picture of the knowledge, skill and special characteristics, aptitudes or needs of the expedition members. Such information should include cultural/ethnic/religious background, special health and dietary requirements, and any individual problems or weaknesses.
- 6.3 Every effort should be made to ensure that parents fully understand the nature of the expedition. A briefing session for parents, describing the nature of the expedition, the financial and insurance arrangements, the likely hazards and the level of foreseeable risk, is strongly recommended, so that



concerns may be addressed directly, and specific queries responded to. Failing this, a comprehensive information pack should be sent, with an invitation to contact for further details if needed.

- 6.4 Consent Forms including a full medical profile must be obtained before departure from parents or guardians. Before these are completed, detailed information about the expedition must be available for parents or guardians and any supporting organisations. Such information should include as a minimum:
- a. summary of the expedition plan,
  - b. staffing details,
  - c. insurance requirements,
  - d. financial arrangements and
  - e. details of the possible risks and the steps being taken to manage them [see also Section 6.3].

Medical information must be authentically updated prior to departure.

- 6.5 It is strongly recommended that at least one pre-expedition team training event should be organised for expedition members, emphasising team-building, individual and group responsibilities, safety, first aid, lifesaving and emergency procedures. Special warning should be given of local health hazards in the case of expeditions to remote areas. It is advisable that expedition members follow a pre-expedition training regime.
- 6.6 A 'home agent' must be appointed who is based in the home area of the expedition members and readily contactable throughout the period of the expedition. This person should ~~preferably~~ not be related to any of the expedition personnel. His/her role is to be the conduit for communications with the expedition and so to provide any necessary information to parents and others. Parents' addresses and e-mails and leader contact details should be reconfirmed immediately before the expedition leaves.
- 6.7 A clear procedure for the effective management of major emergencies, including dealing with the media locally and at home, must be established in writing in advance.

## ***7. PREPARATION AND PLANNING***

- 7.1 Preparation and planning are central to the safety and success of an expedition and should involve as many leaders and members of the team as possible.
- 7.2 It is preferable for the expedition leader or assistant leaders to have first-hand knowledge of the area to be visited, or experience in similar environments. If this is not the case, a reconnaissance is advisable. It is also helpful to have a local liaison contact.
- 7.3 Leaders should be conscious at all times of the need to plan for 'worst-case' scenarios, bearing in mind that an apparently benign situation can be transformed quickly into an emergency.
- 7.4 Where relevant, early communication should be established with the appropriate local authoritative bodies to check that all necessary permissions have been obtained and that local safety regulations and emergency procedures are understood.

- 7.5 All necessary arrangements for health measures (inoculations etc), currency and travel should be put in hand in good time. It is essential that fully adequate insurance arrangements are made. Any special health and care needs of expedition members must be identified and recorded. Detailed joining instructions should be prepared for participants.
- 7.6 Appropriate equipment should be obtained with the necessary quality and durability for expedition use. Such equipment will normally include personal equipment, camping and support equipment, activity equipment, fieldwork equipment, medical and emergency equipment and transport and communication facilities (if required). A clear policy must be established on the checking and use of both expedition and personal equipment.
- 7.7 All expedition vehicles taken from the UK must be checked to ensure that they meet the requirements of the law both in the UK and in the country to be visited. Drivers must have the appropriate qualifications and be made aware of local regulations and conditions. Leaders must assure themselves of the suitability and safety of any local transport used.
- 7.8 Where expeditions are dependent on vehicles, there must be adequate vehicle maintenance skill available.
- 7.9 Records of all plans, preparations, correspondence and details of participants should be maintained safely, and copies of relevant documents lodged with the 'home agent'.
- 7.10 Expedition members must be aware of any areas where local law differs from UK law (drinking, driving, drugs etc.).

## ***8. DURING THE EXPEDITION***

- 8.1 It is recommended, particularly when a long journey is involved in reaching the expedition area, that at least the first 24 hours are spent in a safe, non-stressful environment.
- 8.2 Every effort should be made to ensure that expedition participants are fully informed about plans, changes of plan, significant occurrences and modified objectives. Expedition or group meetings should be held on a regular basis.
- 8.3 Normally, activities will be progressive: that is, the tasks should be less demanding at first and only increase in complexity and difficulty as experience is gained.
- 8.4 Leaders should be on the look-out, especially early in the expedition, for signs of constitutional or psychological weakness, particularly in extreme climatic conditions or sustained periods of bad weather. Appropriate physical checks should be carried out (for instance, for blisters) after any especially demanding exercise.
- 8.5 Fieldwork tasks should be carried out in accordance with the standards of current good practice; artefacts and specimens must not be removed without proper permission from the relevant local authorities, nor sensitive habitats damaged under any circumstances. Local regulations must be adhered to rigorously (e.g. low-impact camping).

- 8.6 All adventurous activities should be conducted to the current generally accepted standards of safety, supervision and organisation, in accordance with standards laid down by the appropriate UK national governing bodies for sport, or other relevant authorities. When operating overseas, it will be necessary in addition to conform to standards laid down in the host nation.
- 8.7 Appropriate advice and training should be given during the expedition to enable participants to avoid endangering themselves; such advice and training should deal with both environmental and health hazards. Particular attention should be paid to arrangements for hygiene and cleanliness.
- 8.8 Each expedition member should carry some form of personal identification.
- 8.9 Each individual should carry a minimum personal first aid kit and know how to use it. Group first aid equipment should be carried which is appropriate to the nature of the activity and the distance from other assistance. Appropriate casualty, emergency and evacuation procedures must be known.
- 8.10 Opportunities should be sought to devolve responsibility and ownership for aspects of the expedition to expedition members, according to their capabilities.
- 8.11 Arrangements and limits for unsupervised activity by expedition members, at any stage of an expedition, must be clearly established.
- 8.12 Any vehicles used on an expedition should be inspected systematically at least once each day. All trailers, roof-racks and loading arrangements must be checked for proper security. This is particularly important when vehicles are used in rough terrain. It is advisable that one of the leader team is specifically delegated this responsibility throughout the expedition.

## ***9. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS***

- 9.1 Leaders at all times must assess the impact of their expedition, including its fieldwork activities and techniques, may be having upon local habitats and communities and take steps to minimise this in accordance with the principle of 'sustainable use'. The fragility of many remote habitats cannot be overstressed.
- 9.2 'Minimum impact' camping should be practised. All waste products and rubbish should be disposed of correctly in accordance with local practice, and/ or carried out from the expedition area.
- 9.3 Expeditions are encouraged to find and undertake an appropriate practical project which will assist the local community or help conserve and enhance the local environment. Such projects are best carried out in partnership with the host community.

## ***10. AT THE END OF THE EXPEDITION***

- 10.1 Leaders should ensure that those who have assisted the expedition in any way, both in the UK and in the expedition host country, are properly thanked.
- 10.2 Young people should be encouraged to assess and evaluate their own achievements, and should be assisted in this process by the expedition leaders.

- 10.3 It is desirable that a full review of the expedition should be conducted during the final phase and/ or within a month of return, in order that lessons can be learned for the future, particularly in regard to the safety and welfare of participants.
- 10.4 As a general rule, an Expedition Report should be prepared. This, as a minimum, should evaluate the success achieved against the task and developmental objectives, should give full details of illnesses, accidents, near- misses and incidents, and set out any recommendations for improving the safety and quality of future expeditions. Copies of the report should be sent to the YET and to the Expedition Advisory Centre of the RGS.

### ***HOW THESE GUIDELINES SHOULD BE USED***

- 1 These Guidelines may be used freely by expeditions as a guide to good practice and will apply to all expeditions whose plans are approved by the Young Explorers' Trust.
- 2 Expeditions should make available to parents, to expedition participants, and to any other individuals or organisations which may be involved, a comprehensive briefing document which should draw attention to these Guidelines
- 3 Suggestions for further improvements to or clarification of these Guidelines will be welcomed by the Young Explorers' Trust.

**Adherence to these Guidelines does not in any way remove the responsibility carried by expedition organisers for the careful and safe conduct of their expeditions. The Young Explorers' Trust can accept no responsibility for any accidents arising on expeditions, whether approved by the Trust or not.**

### ***RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING***

The Young Explorers' Trust also publishes a booklet "Safe and Responsible Youth Expeditions" which sets out in more detail the factors to be considered and the measures which may be taken to improve systems of safety on youth expeditions.

The booklet is available from the Young Explorers' Trust, at The Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR.

In addition The YET publishes "Environmental Responsibility for Expeditions" in association with the British Ecological Society; and a Leaders' Log Book (in association with the Expedition Advisory Centre of the R.G.S.). They are available from the same address.

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These guidelines were originally developed as a result of the Ambleside Conference held in September 1993, sponsored by World Challenge and Mountain Method. It has been circulated to over 50 organisations and individuals concerned with youth exploration and we are grateful for the many comments received.

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