

Explorer Belt

Organising a group expedition

Factsheet 3 of 6 in the Explorer Belt Series



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Introduction

These notes are provided for those tasked with leading a District or Area/County/Regional expedition and should be read in conjunction with the other fact sheets in this series. Although group expeditions can cater for both Explorer Scouts and Scout Network members, it is likely that Explorer Scouts will benefit more from this approach.

The purpose of a District or Area/County Explorer Belt expedition might be:

- To make the Explorer Belt experience available to more Explorer Scouts and Scout Network members
- To provide a programme opportunity for Explorer Scout Units and Scout Networks
- To provide an opportunity for both the Explorer Scout and Scout Network Section to work together, in particular, on the 'moving on' process.
- To encourage the international dimension of the programme
- To provide a more economical package than individual expeditions
- To ensure appropriate support for expeditions in 'mysterious' or 'exotic' locations where lack of knowledge raises concerns about safety and wellbeing
- To give Explorer Scout Units and Scout Networks the expertise to run their own smaller expeditions in the future

Getting Started

Whatever the reason for a group expedition, there are a number of tasks that need to be done that differ slightly from the process of organising a smaller Unit or Network based visit abroad. There is no set formula to organising a group expedition. This fact sheet will cover the following topics that are usually of interest to those organising an expedition:

- Timescales
- Choosing a Location
- Recruiting a Core Team
- Getting Started
- Advance Visit
- Briefing Weekend
- Projects
- Programme
- Girlguiding UK
- Special Needs
- Evaluating the Expedition

Timescales

Organising an expedition for a number of teams of Explorer Scouts and/or Scout Network members requires good planning. A variety of factors can influence the duration of the preparatory phase, but as a general guide, allow 12 to 18 months to turn the expedition from idea to reality. Several months should be allowed following the end of the expedition for presentations and reunions.

Choosing a Location

The expedition area may be chosen for a number of reasons, such as existing contacts and experience, but should also reflect the interest of those that are likely to register to participate.

Other issues to consider include:

- The likely appeal of the destination country amongst potential participants
- The appropriateness of the country for Explorer Belt
- Infrastructure, stability and security of the country
- The impact of a large group expedition on local resources, particularly in developing countries
- Whether pre and post-expedition activities add to the appeal of Explorer Belt
- Time of year and whether this fits with holidays

Recruiting a Core Team

The Expedition Co-ordinator should appoint a small Core Team to assist with specific responsibilities.

Depending on the scale and nature of the expedition, the following responsibilities could be delegated:

- Finance
- Projects Preparation
- Programme and Itinerary
- Travel and Logistics
- Risk Assessment
- Media Relations
- Fundraising

The Core Team should be familiar with the relevant sections of Policy, Organisation and Rules, particularly in regard to home contacts, travel insurance, activity rules and visits abroad.

Knowledge of the current requirements for Explorer Belt as detailed in Unit and Network Essentials is also essential.

Getting Started

Once the Core Team is in place, a budget and programme should be prepared. Consideration should also be given to the specific dates for the trip. It is essential that you seek support and approval for your plans from colleagues in your District or Area/County.

Publicity material should be prepared and circulated to potential participants. This should cover an overview of the Explorer Belt challenge, where you are going and when, as well as how much it will cost.

It is a good idea to include an application form with this information. Such a form might ask potential participants about past international and expedition experience. All of this information is helpful to the Core Team, allowing them to better understand the needs of the participants. Encouraging individuals to complete forms and return with other potential team partners is also very helpful. A deadline date for applications should be set and a request for deposit payments made.

Once all applications have been received and the deadline has passed it is important to begin communicating with all of the participants. It should be explained at an early stage how this will be done. Traditional newsletters sent by post, in the run up to the expedition may be appropriate or if access to the Internet and email is good, then much of this could be done electronically.

In addition to keeping the expedition participants fully informed, you should also communicate with any contacts that have been established in the country that you are travelling too. Other colleagues in your District or Area/County will be interested in your progress, so use available opportunities to inform them of progress.

Advance Visit

The value of an advance visit should not be underestimated. They allow links to be made with local Scouts and/or Guides that might be able to help with everything from advising on the suitability of the area for Explorer Belt through to examples of good pre and post-expedition activities. If no

contacts exist in the expedition area, links can be established by contacting the AAC/ACC International.

The cost of an advance visit is often included in the overall budget for the expedition.

Briefing Weekend

Large group expeditions benefit from opportunities that will bring all participants together beforehand. One way of doing this is by organising one or more briefing weekends.

A briefing weekend allows the Expedition Co-ordinator and the Core Team to get to know the participants. Although the participants will be in their teams for the majority of the time that they are away on the actual expedition, there will be other times when the whole group needs to work together. A briefing weekend provides an early opportunity to see how this will work.

Interesting and useful topics can be covered during a briefing weekend. A programme might include:

- Explorer Belt Requirements
- Major Project Ideas
- Equipment Preparation (What to consider)
- Physical Preparation (What to consider)
- Recording your Experiences
- Fun challenges
- Confidence building activities
- Food, Language and Culture

Projects

The Core Team needs to be aware of the participants' assessment teams prior to departure. In most situations, this will be straightforward. The assessment team needs to approve the choice of major project prior to departure, and this in turn, needs to be shared with the Core Team.

Similarly, the list of minor projects needs to be supplied to the Core Team so that they can give them to the participants just before they commence their challenge. It is common that the

surprise minor projects (usually five) are chosen by the participants' Explorer Scout Unit or local Scout Network. The participants themselves should choose the remaining five minor projects. In addition, these projects can be shared with contacts in the country being visited for guidance on their appropriateness.

Examples of major and minor projects are supplied in fact sheet 4 of this series, while the criteria can be found in Unit and Network Essentials.

Programme

The programme could be considered as everything that is done from the moment of arrival in the country until the moment of departure. It is useful to consider pre and post-expedition phases around the actual duration of the Explorer Belt challenge and the time that the teams will be alone.

Depending on the distance travelled, the means of travel, weather and cultural differences, time for acclimatisation will benefit everyone. If visiting a country with distinctly different cultural aspects, shared experiences in the context of a larger group can ease people into the environment and ensure that they are prepared for the actual Explorer Belt.

Time and budget constraints will influence what can be done. However, expedition participants may be keen to visit particular places of interest and this may prove to be the best time to accommodate such requests.

The pre-expedition phase can also be used for some useful last minute briefings and workshops.

Teams will need to devise their routes and maps of the expedition area should be supplied in good time to allow participants to familiarise themselves with them. They may be very different to Ordnance Survey maps. The Core Team can review routes for suitability (for projects) and feasibility (for travel and distance). Routes are normally planned once in the country that you'll be travelling to, although it is feasible that they could be planned before departure.

It can be helpful to ask teams to complete three route cards; one for themselves, one for the Core Team and one for any support vehicle that the Core Team may have at its disposal. Participants should be reminded that their routes can be altered and that the route cards are only there for use in emergencies – particularly if the Core Team is called upon to visit a team in need of support.

Local knowledge with route planning can be helpful – for example, if a team decides to use a train for travel on a particular day, it can be useful to encourage them to think of alternatives. The train line on the map may only be for freight. Similarly, areas that are strictly off limits should be noted to teams. In some countries, this might include reservations for indigenous populations or military installations where accidental trespass might have serious consequences.

The area should allow teams to plan varied routes from several possible starting and finishing points. It should also be easy for the Core Team to travel through, quickly, in order to provide assistance to teams that have difficulties.

Participants should be reminded that the Scout scarf or neckerchief is a symbol that is understood across much of the world, and wearing it when travelling can be very helpful when meeting local people.

As in other activities, it is important for teams to consider possible risk involved in undertaking their expedition and time should be given solely to this purpose.

Involving participants in this process will allow the Core Team to be satisfied that the teams are confident about minimising or avoiding risk. For example, drawing attention to the fact that hitchhiking is not permitted is important.

Although teams will be expected to camp at night, chance offers of home-hospitality may be accepted. This is one of the most exciting and rewarding aspects of Explorer Belt, yet participants will be unsure about approaching local people and determining if their interest is genuine. It is wise to spend time discussing how

best to approach local people and how best to get out of situations that are potentially unsafe.

The level of guidance and support given immediately before the teams set off will depend very much on the needs of the participants and prior experience.

With the routes planned and all briefings completed, teams will soon be ready to start. A hire coach might be used to drop teams off at their start points. This is an exciting and nervous time for the teams. They know that they will be on their own for the next ten days or so.

At each start point, the Core Team should wish the participants well on their travels, and provide them with an envelope that contains details of the minor projects. Another envelope that contains details of how to contact the Core Team in the event of an emergency could also be supplied.

Once all of the teams have been dropped off, the Core Team should return to the base, which has been set up for the duration that teams are on their hikes. In most cases, this will be about ten days.

Ideally, the Core Team should select a base camp for the period of the actual expeditions, where they can be contacted in an emergency. This venue may differ from the pre and post expedition venues.

The Core Team should be contactable at all times, ready to provide support to participants that get in to difficulty. Problems that can arise include everything from medical conditions, contact with the authorities through to potentially unsafe chance home-hospitality situations.

Setting aside specific times for teams to contact the base can be very useful. It allows the teams to advise of any alterations to their route and to give a brief report on how they are feeling and what they have been doing. For a ten day expedition, this could be done on day three and day seven.

On day ten, when the teams reach their end points, it will be necessary to celebrate achievement. This can be done by having a special meal, and asking each team to recount a

story from their ten days on the road. This is a very special day. As stories begin to be exchanged, it becomes easy to understand why Explorer Belt is such a rewarding experience.

After a day of rest, it is useful to undertake the informal debriefing sessions with teams. The debriefing is not an assessment, and no judgement should be made. Judgements are made following the assessment presentation.

Other post-expedition activities may then be undertaken. A feature of past expeditions has been a formal expedition dinner for all participants. This can provide a memorable occasion on which to draw the expedition to a close and to celebrate what has been done.

Explorer Belt and Girlguiding UK

Members of the Senior Section of Girlguiding UK can be invited to join a large Explorer Belt expedition. A mixed Scouting and Guiding expedition can provide participants with a greater understanding of each other's organisation, perhaps leading to more joint activity at a local level before and after the expedition itself.

The Core Team should be aware of differing practices that should be accommodated. These can be reviewed in The Guiding Manual (4th Edition) on page 200.

Early co-operation between Scout and Guide counterparts is essential if considering an expedition with Guide involvement.

Explorer Belt and Special Needs

Explorer Belt is open to all Explorer Scouts and Scout Network members aged 16 to 25 years. It can be adapted to suit members with special needs. The methods of travel, distance, duration and types of projects may be altered to suit.

Evaluating the Expedition

Taking time to evaluate the expedition will ensure that future participants learn from your experiences. The participants should be part of this process and you can do this using a variety of methods from group discussion through to evaluation forms. It is often helpful to do this on the way home.

Conclusion

The international dimension of the programme provides opportunities to increase awareness and understanding of their local and national identities as well as appreciation and understanding of global issues.

Explorer Belt provides for this in a real and meaningful way. The satisfaction in helping to organise and run a group expedition is substantial, and by following some of the advice and guidance given here, it should be possible to do this.

Factsheets

The factsheets in the Explorer Belt series are:

1. Explorer Belt – Introduction
2. Explorer Belt – Going your own way
3. Explorer Belt – Organising a group expedition
4. Explorer Belt – Project suggestions
5. Explorer Belt – Useful contacts
6. Explorer Belt – The end game