

PREPARE FOR ACTION



Field skills expert Dominic Hall provides down-to-earth, hands-on practical training for all types of expeditions. His advice helps to create a safer environment for adventure travellers, including archaeologists. Below he shares some tips for a successful trip.

Archaeologists certainly get about, exploring the modern world every bit as much as they explore the past. Whilst Raiders of the Lost Ark has perhaps gone somewhat too far in creating an image of the wild, adventurous archaeologist, there is no doubt that archaeology as a subject can take you to wild and pretty inhospitable parts of the world. As providers of expedition support and training we are constantly approached by companies, universities and individuals requiring our help to get out into remote and challenging places, and archaeology is often the reason why.

Of course this is one of the attractions of the discipline, the lure of the fabulous location and the discovery. As a non archaeologist an experience I will treasure forever happened on my first taste of expedition travel back in 1999. I was taken to the Mayan site of Caracol, Belize, by the father of the family I was staying with. Myself and two friends were led around small caves and burials sites that very few people ever get to see, and it filled me with a sense of wonder and privilege at being given access to these special places.

Taking a leap from the romantic back to the practical, travelling in remote regions is not without its dangers. The jungle contains poisonous snakes and deadly malaria whilst desert conditions produce searing heat and disorientation. Mountain altitude and cold can cause many problems if proper precautions are not taken and good training is invaluable to counteract these issues. After all an adventure is only worthwhile when you come back safely and get to recount your story.

In April 2007 BSI British Standards published its specification for the provision of visits, fieldwork, expeditions and adventurous activities outside the United Kingdom. Developed in response to increasing calls to make overseas adventure activities safer, it outlines requirements that should be met by organisers of such trips. This can range from a school day trip to France to the scaling of mountain peaks. With such a broad range to cover this has had inevitable difficulties in the preparation, but nonetheless there are now some very clear guidelines for safer travel. The aim is to enjoy the adventure but to ensure that the participants do not come to harm.

DOMINIC'S EXPEDITION TIPS:

1. Pre-planning

So much of expedition and fieldwork safety is driven by advance planning which can feel like a waste of time when you have other things to arrange. More often than not everything runs to plan and you might resent the time you feel that you have spent on it, but on those rare occasions that something does go wrong pre-planning is worth its weight in gold.

2. Assess the risks

Most people take a sharp intake of breath at the thought of risk assessment. It is not just about filling out a form; risk assessment is a process of thought and discussion concerning potential dangers and coming up with mitigation strategies. This process should continue even when out in the field as it is the dynamic assessment of risk that keeps people safe.



Students crossing a jungle river in the Crocker National Park, Borneo.

BE PREPARED

Fieldskills Ltd. is a UK-based expedition training company providing a wide range of courses for adventure travellers, researchers, students and expedition leaders.



For more details on the selection of courses available go to:

<http://www.fieldskills.com>

3. Prepare for a crisis before you are in it

Take a few hours to research where the local hospital is and what it is like. Read over the particulars of what your insurance company will cover and prepare a list of useful numbers to contact in an emergency. Do not assume that if something goes wrong things will be dealt with in the same way as back home. Always have a backup strategy and a backup for that backup!

4. Enjoy it

The whole reason to carry out pre-planning is to ensure you have a great time. It should not stop you from doing the things you want to do but is there to enable you to participate with confidence and safety.