



Education Authority Document
Everglades 2021

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to delineate some of the key procedures in place for Operation Wallacea field courses in the Everglades, USA. When creating the document, reference has been made to the National Guidance produced by the OEAP (Outdoor Education Advisory Panel – see <http://oeapng.info>) in the United Kingdom in addition to guidelines from the Expedition Provider's Association and BS8848 (the British Standard for organising and managing visits, fieldwork, expeditions and adventurous activities outside the UK). Additional guidance has been sought from bodies including but not limited to the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) DfE (Department for Education), AALA, and numerous Acts of Parliament.

This document may be useful for a number of parties interested in the expeditions & courses, in particular but not limited to: The Educational Visits Coordinator (or equivalent) appointed by the school or college; the senior teacher(s) accompanying the trip (the group leader); parents or guardians of the students on the trip; students or other participants on the trip.

Operation Wallacea are members of the Expedition Providers Association (EPA) and hold a Learning Outside the Classroom quality badge (LOtC).

Objectives and structure of the expedition

Objectives

The US field ecology and data analysis course will be based at Green Glades West, an incredible 8000 acre property in the Greater Everglades Region, adjacent to Big Cypress National Preserve. This ecosystem is renowned for its wildlife and diversity of unique habitats, which are not found anywhere else on the planet. For this reason, it has been recognized by both UNESCO and the Ramsar Convention as a Wetland Area of Global Importance.

The course consists of three main parts:

1. *Learning ecology survey techniques* – half of the time will be spent in the field working with experienced field naturalists learning the following techniques:
 - Habitat surveys for analysing and comparing vegetation community structure
 - Sweep net, pitfall, flight intercept and light traps for invertebrates
 - Transect searches, pitfall trap lines and cover board surveys for reptile, amphibian and small mammal surveys
 - Sound and spotlight surveys for amphibians
 - Area surveys, quadrat surveys, soundscape analysis for birds
 - Camera trapping and distance sampling for large mammals
 - Sound analysis and mist net trapping for bats
 - Pond and wetland surveys for alligators and otters
2. *Learning how to analyse in R and write up a large data set as a scientific paper for publication* – the other half of the time will be spent working on their laptops with online tuition from a group of specialist scientists.
Students will work together in small groups (2-3 students) on one of the following data sets: reef fish communities, coral reef structure, cloud forest bird communities, spider monkey behaviour

or large mammal distribution in a South African reserve. Over the week the objective will be for the group to write up a paper answering a research question they have devised based on the data sets.

3. Learning about how to develop a career in conservation biology or wildlife film making

In the evenings there will be presentations from different academics and professional field ecologists explaining how they developed their careers.

Structure

Green Glades West includes excellent examples of sawgrass marshes, ponds, tropical hardwood hammocks, pinelands, and cypress domes, which collectively support animals including the critically endangered Florida panther, black bears, and alligators.

Upon arrival there will be an introduction to the camp hosts, site orientation and a health and safety briefing; including bathroom and workplace facilities. The students will be busy throughout the day and by the Friday night should have participated in surveys using the identified techniques and written up a science paper in a small group.

Start and finish of the expeditions

The course attendees will meet at 2pm on the Sunday start date in Miami International Airport, for an 2:30pm departure, and be transferred by coach to the site (approx. 1.5hrs). The groups will be transferred to back to Miami airport on the Saturday morning and return flights can be booked from 2pm.

Booking Process

School and college students have the option to either book as a group, where there is a contract between the school and Operation Wallacea, or as individuals, where the contract is between Operation Wallacea and the participant (and their parent or guardian, if the participant is under the age of 18 at the time of booking the expedition). Operation Wallacea's terms and conditions are made available prior to booking, and acceptance of those terms and conditions is necessary before the booking can be confirmed.

Inclusion

In line with the Equality Act (2010) Operation Wallacea's policy is to make all reasonable adjustments to enable students of all physical and mental ability levels to participate in the programme. Likewise, participants will not be discriminated against on the basis of any protected characteristic (e.g. gender, race or religion). Any specific needs (such as requirements due to religious customs, or those arising from a physical disability) are discussed with the school shortly after the booking has been made. If it is not possible to make suitable adjustments without substantially jeopardising the quality or safety of the programme for the remainder of the participants, then those students unable to participate would be offered a full refund of any monies paid.

Risk Management

Prior to the field course

A thorough assessment of all research sites and activities are completed before the start of each course and reviewed throughout via in-house audits. Risk assessment and management instructions are put in place for general activities, for specific activities and specific sites. The risk assessments are published on the Operation Wallacea website and hard copies are available on request, free of charge.

During the expedition

The risk management policies are dynamic and can be amended by the senior Opwall or Green Glades West staff on-site should new or unforeseen risks present themselves. All incidents and near misses are recorded throughout the courses, in addition to the completion of in-house audits. Any major incident (e.g. requiring emergency evacuation or significant deviation from the planned expedition activities) results in an incident report being written by the senior staff member on-site and statements being taken from parties involved as appropriate. Additionally, the Operation Wallacea and Green Glades West Senior Management Teams are informed of any major incidents immediately, in case the on site team should require any further support.

Training Before the Course

Operation Wallacea and Green Glades West staff work closely with teachers to ensure that pupils are ready and prepared for the field course. Information is sent to each of the schools including information such as gear lists and course details ahead of the field course.

Other information

Operation Wallacea and Green Glades West also make available a student course booklet (downloaded from the Opwall website) containing full details of the facilities at each site, the learning outcomes for the course, and the planned itinerary.

Additionally, participants are given a gear list which is also available on the Opwall website. The Operation Wallacea and Green Glades West staff are always available to talk to any student, parent, or teacher, who has any questions about any aspects of the courses, and the preparation required.

Roles and competencies of designated leaders

Qualifications, licensing and technical competency

Operation Wallacea is not eligible for a license through AALA (Adventurous Activities Licensing Authority) as we do not conduct licensable activities and because we operate outside of the UK. Many of the activities organised by Operation Wallacea are research focused and so no formal qualifications exist. Wherever possible though, the procedures for ensuring technical competency of key staff are in line with AALA recommendations. Where new staff are recruited (i.e. those who have not worked for us before) the selection process includes a review of the CV or resume, a telephone interview, and obtaining at least two positive relevant references from previous employers. The qualifications or experience levels necessary for the various activities are described below, in addition to the roles and responsibilities of the key staff.

Role of the teachers

The teachers accompanying the students are responsible for ensuring the safety of the group during their travel from their school location to the field course site.

Once the groups are met in Miami by Operation Wallacea or Green Glades West staff, the teachers will be travelling with the group and are responsible for pastoral care issues, and for helping to organise their group. At the end of the course the teachers and the group are returned to the airport and the teachers are responsible for accompanying the group back to their school location. During the course the responsibility for the safe provision of activities, and organising the full itinerary, rests with Operation Wallacea and Green Glades West rather than the teachers accompanying a group, as the teachers are not expected to have specific technical expertise in activities. However, the teachers should, prior to the trip, have familiarised

themselves with the activities to be carried out. They should also have ensured that the Educational Visits Coordinator (or equivalent in their area) is aware of the trip and has been sent the relevant Operation Wallacea/Green Glades West documents (e.g. risk assessments and this document) and that the trip has the approval of the senior management team at the school.

Role of Operation Wallacea staff

Venture Leader

The Venture Leader is responsible for the overall running of the project. The Venture Leader for this project is Scott Sveiven and has been involved in multiple Operation Wallacea expeditions as the manager of their site in Guyana since 2015. The venture leader is responsible for ensuring the correct level of leadership is provided for each of the different projects and sites, and to check that the designated leaders have the requisite qualifications and/or experience.

He will ensure that in each of the locations the correct level of leadership is provided for each of the survey groups and that the various risk amelioration measures are being adhered to, in addition to ensuring that the overall objectives of the course are being met.

Scott will also ensure that the agreed protocols for the different activities are being adhered to and that volunteers and staff alike are properly briefed with regard to suitable conduct within their role whilst on the field course.

Site manager

The field course site will have its own camp manager appointed by the venture leader prior to the field season. The camp manager has relevant previous experience in running field camps.

Survey leaders – surveys

All surveys will be led by a survey leader at a maximum ratio of 1 staff member to 8 students. The survey leader will have, as a minimum, an undergraduate degree in a relevant discipline and experience in leading young people or students in an outdoor education setting. All survey leaders have received training in protocols for leading groups in the field.

Leadership during vehicle transfers

An Opwall/Green Glades West staff member will meet the group at Miami airport and accompany participants on the bus to the field camp site.

Bus transfers

The bus transfers will be organised by Green Glades West through a commercial bus hire company. Green Glades West will ensure that bus hire company vehicles comply with American regulations and are driven in a safe and careful manner, and that their drivers have a minimum of 3 years' experience driving. Seatbelts are available on every seat in the coaches and passengers will be required to wear them.

Transfers to and from surveys

Participants will walk between the main camp area and survey sites. Once on site, participants will not be transported via vehicle except in case of injury or illness.

Medical Procedures

This section summarises the medical and evacuation procedures report which has a much more detailed description of the staffing, First Aid facilities and procedures to be followed.

Information and records

All participants will be required to enter their medical details onto the Operation Wallacea data portal. Details of how to log on are sent out upon receiving the booking from the participant. The data is stored securely and is initially only available to certain Operation Wallacea and Green Glades West staff members, and, for groups of school students, the teacher leading the group. The venture leader may seek to contact the participant to gather further information, which they would then enter on to the portal.

All medical problems, illnesses, injuries and near misses are recorded at each of the sites. At the end of the course, these data are collated and a health and safety report is completed and published on the website. This report classifies incidents into 7 categories and allows comparison between the expeditions, courses and other activities. The policy of publication of the accidents and illnesses recorded on the expedition is a unique aspect of the Operation Wallacea expeditions and helps ensure the procedures on site are followed fully.

Medical facilities

A first aid medical kit is provided, the content of which is agreed prior to the course. These kits are designed to deal with as many non-emergency medical eventualities as reasonably possible onsite with first aid trained staff, and also to support emergency incidents and stabilise a casualty for transfer to more extensive medical facilities where needed.

Emergency Procedures

A document describing the medical and evacuation procedures in full is available on the health and safety pages of the Operation Wallacea website.

Carefully planned evacuation protocols are in place for the site in the Everglades. All staff will have training on the evacuation procedures and protocols.

Because of the high variability of influential factors such as weather conditions and nature of potential injuries, a number of different evacuation scenarios must be prepared for prior to the course. All staff are fully briefed in these scenarios.

Once a major incident or emergency is identified the Venture Leader will advise Operation Wallacea and Green Glades West. The Venture Leader will take overall control as Incident Coordinator in conjunction with other senior staff if they are in a position to assist. Operation Wallacea's medical and evacuation plans are designed so that, in a serious incident, Green Glades West are able to be self-sufficient (and not reliant on a third party such as an insurer or medical assistance company) in terms of getting prompt and effective care to a patient, or moving that patient to care.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

We endeavour to ensure that all school students participating in our activities are safe in accordance with the Protection of Children Act (1989 and 2004). This is done a number of ways as outlined below. Green

Glades West and Operation Wallacea staff have valid background checks which assess whether a person could pose a risk to the safety of children, based on their criminal history and child protection information. Code of Conduct commits each staff member to not entering into relationships with school volunteers as well as conformity to restrictions on alcohol use and a complete ban on drug abuse. Operation Wallacea will dismiss any staff that do not follow the code of conduct.

Supervision and accompanying adults

Operation Wallacea offer a free teacher place with every 8 students thus giving an automatic ratio of at least 1 to 8. For each activity provided by Operation Wallacea in the field a ratio of 1 staff member to 8 students applies. Teachers are asked to accompany students on as many activities as possible.

Sleeping and accommodation arrangements

Accommodation will be in tents, with either one or two people per tent. The student tent area is close to the staff member sleeping area. Bathroom facilities are shared, but toilets and showers are private and lockable from the inside. The details of the accommodation are sent out to participants prior to the course so that the school has plenty of time to consider any pastoral issues that may arise as a result of the sleeping arrangements.

Minimum number of students

No activities are planned which will involve a single pupil being accompanied or supervised by a single staff member or adult, without another pupil or adult being present. There may be occasions where a one-on-one situation is unavoidable (e.g. a student is struggling with one of the skills required and the instructor spends some extra time with them working on that skill). These occasions though are rare and all staff members are fully briefed on how to conduct themselves when in these situations.

Staff background checks

Staff who work for Operation Wallacea in the US and then lead the various expeditions around the World, are subject to background checks and reference vetting. The teachers accompanying school groups will, at the responsibility of their employer, have Working with Children Checks, and whilst on expedition will stay with the students overnight at each location. Additionally, all Operation Wallacea staff in the field are required to sign a code of conduct before they are employed.

Codes of Practice

All Operation Wallacea and Green Glades West staff in the field are required to sign a code of conduct before they are employed. The Code of Conduct commits each staff member to not entering into relationships with school volunteers as well as conformity to restrictions on alcohol use and a complete ban on drug abuse. Staff that do not follow the code of conduct will be dismissed.

Complaints procedure

Any complaint by a school pupil about inappropriate behaviour from any staff member or other student will be treated as a formal complaint and documented. The accompanying teacher will be informed immediately and together with the senior Green Glades West staff member on site will investigate the complaint. If the complaint is upheld then any individuals involved will be dismissed from the expedition and a police file created if a criminal offence has occurred.

Communications

The field course site has excellent mobile phone signal and connectivity so Green Glade West and Operation Wallacea are able to communicate with site at all times.

Transport

All transport arrangements conducted by Green Glades West in the field are subject to stringent protocols. Generally, participants will walk from the main camp area to survey sites; vehicle transport will only be used in case of illness or injury. Any vehicles used to transport pupils have been assessed by the Venture Leader and are checked for road worthiness including condition of the tyres and visibility through the windshield. As per section 7, the drivers are subject to a code of conduct whilst on the road.

Accommodation and Camp Security

Accommodation will be in tents, with either one or two people of the same gender per tent. The student tent area is close to the staff member sleeping area.

The safety and hygiene levels at the camp sites are the responsibility of the Venture Leader. Upon arriving volunteers will receive a full briefing detailing safety precautions to take with this in mind. There will be Opwall/Green Glades West staff members in the camp sites at all times so that if there are any problems the students will know who to talk to. The site has a lockable facility in which to store valuables if needed, although participants are encouraged not to bring unnecessary valuable items. The participants are given a full health and safety briefing upon arrival in each camp and will only be able to leave the camp area if in a group for a scheduled activity as per the above operations protocols.

Integrity and Cultural Aspects of the Expedition

In addition to the drive to collect data for purposes of biodiversity monitoring and specific research projects, Operation Wallacea also attempts to ensure that local organisations and individuals are empowered and supported by the projects.