

Remote Area Expedition Planning

Paul Hosie
CEGSA



PETER ROGERS

The Olwolgin cave diving expedition

IT HAS been my privilege to run some thoroughly enjoyable and rewarding caving and cave diving expeditions to remote parts of Australia over recent years. It hasn't all been smooth sailing for this sub-surface explorer and I have also been involved in and run some trips that were a little disappointing.

Both the successes and the not-so-successes have valuable lessons for future trips. This short article aims to help you capitalise on some successful strategies as well as avoiding some of the main pitfalls associated with organising or participating in an expedition to a remote area.

What does it take to 'pull off' a great expedition?

In two words, Planning and Communication.

PLANNING

By heading off on a caving trip without properly planning you are choosing to leave the outcome of the trip to chance. It might go like clockwork, but when it doesn't, are you prepared to deal with the problems? In remote areas, a cave diving trip that you have booked leave for and spent considerable sums of money and time to get to, might be jeopardised because a \$5 spare

spark plug for the compressor wasn't packed and is simply unobtainable! Most risks can be foreseen and mitigation strategies put in place before the trip commences—it just takes a level of planning commensurate with the type of trip you're running.

The amount of planning you do for a trip or expedition should be weighed up against the overall risk and complexity of the trip. An expedition to a shallow, fully mapped, walk in a cave near a population centre will be very different to a deep, remote, unexplored cave requiring helicopter access and mix gas diving. The checklist on page 29 is not exhaustive, but covers the main points of consideration for an effectively planned and executed trip or expedition.

COMMUNICATION

The unspoken expectations of trip participants can be the greatest obstacle to achieving a satisfactory outcome from

a trip—early, effective and regular communication with all the team members is paramount. Open, honest and effective communication skills are the greatest asset an expedition or trip leader can have.

To understand what each person expects to personally achieve from the trip and what you expect them to contribute should be the first step you take as a leader in selecting your team. Being 5 km into a cave in a remote, isolated area is no place to find out that there are personality conflicts between team members—too late! The onus is also on you as a team member, to ensure that your expectations or concerns are clearly understood by the leader/organiser before the trip!

For those interested in a deeper and wider analysis of running expeditions, the 2004 edition of the Royal Geographical Society's *Expedition Handbook* edited by Shane Winser is highly recommended. The book has a brief chapter specifically on caving, but all other aspects of leading, planning, executing an expedition, as well as follow-up activities, are covered in detail.

Expedition Planning Checklist

OBJECTIVES

- Realistic Achievable Agreed Prioritised Fun!

RESEARCH

- Area Maps Journals Books Karst Records Cavers Locals Land Owners

TEAM MEMBERS

- Trust Skills Experience Fitness Conflicts Objectives and Expectations

PLANNING

- Duration Dates Funding Sponsors Refine And Prioritise Objectives Roles

PERMITS

- Phone Land Manager Traditional Owners Insurance - ASF/Other Indemnities Letters Response

EQUIPMENT

- Caving Diving Camping Photo/Video Scientific Surveying Communications Redundancy Vehicle

LOGISTICS

- Transport Accommodation Air Oxygen Spares Food Fuel Water Quarantine Alternate Sources

EMERGENCY PLAN

- Members Details Next of Kin Casualty Management Evacuation Recompression and Medical Facilities Transport Rescue Services

CONDUCT TRIP

- Safety Communication Rest Days Objectives Priorities Diary Flexibility Conflicts

END TRIP

- Inform Next of Kin Emergency Points Of Contact Land Managers And Local Authorities Data/Photo Co-Ordination Between Trip Members

QUICK REPORT

- Trip Summary Email or Newsletter Club ASF-CDG Land Manager Supporting Organisations Mailing Lists - Ozcavers DiveOz CDAA Etc

TRIP REPORTS

- Peer Review Recognition Photo Credits Sponsors Club & ASF Journals ASF-CDG CDAA Diving/Outdoor/Geographic Magazines

THANK YOU LETTERS

- Land Managers and Traditional Owners Assistance Organisations Sponsors

DATA MANAGEMENT

- Survey Data Maps Video Photos Samples and Kid Updates

LESSONS LEARNT

- Post Trip Review Diary Field Notes Members Feedback Equipment Logistics and Communications Problems

AND ANOTHER THING...

- Objectives for next trip!



The Mullamullang expedition team



The Kija Blue expedition team

PAUL HOSIE COLLECTION

PAUL HOSIE COLLECTION