



# Operation Wallacea

Conservation research through academic partnerships

Information for Local Education Authorities on the  
Health & Safety measures taken to safeguard the  
Operation Wallacea expeditions to  
Egypt

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## **1. Introduction**

The aim of this document is to highlight the procedures and protocols in place for school groups who are involved with Operation Wallacea research expeditions in Egypt. It is intended to fulfill the criteria set by the local education authorities with regard to overseas expeditions and is based on the information requirements set out in *Guidelines for Educational Visits and Outdoor Education Activities 2004*, produced by Surrey County Council. The Surrey CC document in turn is based on the Department for Education and Employment *Health & Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits (1998)* and on the August 2002 document produced by the Department for Education and Skills entitled *Standards for LEA's in Overseeing Educational Visits*. As with all these documents the aim is to ensure that there are adequate preparations and safety systems in position to ensure that best practice with regard to Health & Safety issues is being used in the planning and implementation of the expeditions.

## **2. Structure of the expeditions**

The structure of the expeditions is a little different to that with many other expeditions or educational trips that are run by schools. Operation Wallacea is working with the Nature and Science Foundation (NSF), an Egyptian NGO running biodiversity atlas surveys the southern Sinai. NSF lead these surveys with additional help provided by UK, US and Canadian university students, who pay for the experience. In addition Conservation Egypt, an Egyptian NGO recruits Egyptian university students to also help with the surveys. The school groups are joining this survey programme and provide additional manpower to the survey areas establishing the distribution of target higher plant, reptiles, birds and mammals across the region. The school groups will, after an initial training period spent at the Fox Camp on the edge of St Katherine village, be joining a survey team trekking through the mountains and wadis of the region, for 3 days (2 nights). During these 3 days they will have Bedouin guides as support staff and will be helping complete quadrat surveys of plants and grazing pressure, undertaking standard search times for reptiles, helping with transect counts for birds and mist netting for bats. After completing the surveys the group will move to a camp-site on the beach in Nuweiba where they will spend 2 nights (one day) summarising the results of the surveys and participating in some further lectures and debates on conservation issues in Egypt.

For the second week the school groups will be transferred to the Dolphin Camp at Dahab. Here they will have the option of completing either a PADI Open Water dive training course or undertaking a reef ecology course. The latter consists of a series of lectures designed to equip the students with the knowledge of the different types of fish, corals and invertebrates they may see during dives. This course can be taken by qualified divers or those not wishing to dive but preferring to snorkel.

Details of the travel between the various sites is provided in the transport section of this document.

### **3. Risk assessments**

A thorough assessment of all camps and activities are completed before the start of the season and reviewed throughout. Risk assessments are completed for each site as well as generic risk assessments for each activity. These risk assessments are published on the website and are available by hard copy if requested.

### **4. Training before the expedition**

Operation Wallacea staff work closely with teachers to ensure that pupils are ready and prepared for the expedition abroad. Various joint meetings take place with our schools team and the teachers regarding facilities on site and skills required. A training session is arranged with each of the schools to explain in detail what the students will be doing on the expeditions and how to prepare for their expedition.

Operation Wallacea have a detailed website containing full details of the facilities at each site, the equipment that students will require, and information that teachers or students may find useful in preparing for travel to Egypt. The Operation Wallacea staff are always available to talk to any student, parent, or teacher, who have questions about aspects of the expeditions and the preparation required.

Whilst Operation Wallacea aims to ensure that the pupils are well prepared for the expedition, the teachers are responsible for the dynamics and teamwork abilities of the group.

### **5. Designated leaders and competencies**

#### *Role of the teachers*

The teachers accompanying the students are responsible for ensuring the pupils' travel arrangements from the school until the expedition start time at the town of St Katherine at 12:00 on a Sunday. Operation Wallacea's partners in Egypt, the Nature and Science Foundation, can organise an airport pickup and transport the group to the start point. They can also drop them off at the end of the expedition. Once the expedition starts the teachers will be travelling with the group and responsible for pastoral care issues and checking that the safety procedures run by Operation Wallacea are working in full. At the end of the expeditions the teachers and the group are transferred to Sharm el Sheikh airport (or just to the town of Dahab if they would like to make their own way back) and they are responsible for accompanying the group back to the UK.

## *Role of Operation Wallacea staff*

### *Senior Operations Manager*

The Senior Operations Manager is responsible for the overall running of the expeditions and for the safety of the volunteers and staff working on the project. He has various staff assisting in different aspects of the project. For the 2011 field season Dr Samy Zalut, Head of NSF, will be fulfilling this role. Dr Zalut has managed the Operation Wallacea expeditions in Egypt since they began in 2005, and has 15 years experience of supervising research groups in the Egyptian National Parks and running training courses for British Universities. Dr Zalut speaks excellent English.

It is the responsibility of the Senior Operations Manager to ensure that the correct level of leadership is provided for each of the groups and to check that the designated leaders have the requisite qualifications and/or experience.

### *Leadership during transfers*

The school groups will be met by Haitham or Karim Zalut from the Nature and Science Foundation and given a briefing at the airport, if the group have opted for a transfer with NSF. Both Haitham and Karim have worked on the Operation Wallacea Egyptian expeditions for the last 5 years and speak excellent English.

### *Leadership at St Katherine Protectorate*

The Project Manager at Fox Camp is responsible for meeting the incoming group and completing all the training in the operating and safety procedures at the Camp. Haitham Zalut from the Nature and Science Foundation will be fulfilling this role. Haitham Zalut has been working on Operation Wallacea surveys at St Katherine for the last 5 years and has supervised the logistics for up to 100 students each year to complete the survey work. He will be assisted by Dr Samy Zalut and Dr Francis Gilbert from Nottingham University. Dr Gilbert has supervised students on field trips to Egypt and elsewhere for 15+ years.

### *Leadership on the desert trek surveys*

Farag Fox, a Bedouin guide organises all the permits and logistics for the trek surveys. Farag Fox has lived for 30+ years in the St Katherine Protectorate and is widely regarded as the most experienced trek leader working in the St Katherine Protectorate. He has led dozens of trek groups on remote treks across the Protectorate. Leadership on the trek will be provided by Haitham Zalut.

### *Leadership for diving activities*

All dive training is led by PADI qualified Dive Instructors and the Dive masters. Dive training is done at a ratio of 1 Dive Instructor per 8 students plus 1 Dive Master. For qualified divers the ratio is 6 divers per 1 Dive Master. The Dolphin Camp at Dahab is managed by Ahmed Gheith, who has 5 years experience of organising desert and marine expeditions in Egypt.

## **6. Medical procedures**

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

### *Information and records*

All school staff and pupils are required to complete an Operation Wallacea medical questionnaire prior to their departure and those participants who are diving during the expedition will be required to also complete a PADI medical questionnaire according to the rules and regulations set out by PADI. These forms are required to be completed and returned to the Operation Wallacea Medical Coordinator at least 2 months in advance of the expedition. The medical staff will review the medical forms received and identify any potential medical issues that could restrict sites or activities for individual pupils or staff, or aspects which require additional information before the start of the expedition. All medical information is held securely under the guidelines provided by the data protection act.

On site medical information about each pupil and teacher is provided to the Medical officer at the first camp at which they arrive and a file is created for each person. There are additional forms for treatment provided and the individual files follow the pupils and the teachers to other sites to which they travel. The records are returned to the Fox Camp. All medical problems, illnesses, injuries and near misses are recorded at each of the sites. At the end of the season, 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 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 staffing*

An Egyptian English speaking accident and emergency nurse will provide medical support on the desert treks. At the Fox Camp, Nuweiba and Dolphin Camps the students are within 15 minutes of English speaking doctors at the St Katherine Hospital, the Nuweiba Hospital, and the Dahab Medical Centre respectively.

### *Medical facilities*

A full medical kit is available on site on the treks which includes the equipment and medications needed to be able to deal with the minor conditions that may be encountered in the field. This reduces the need to rely on general medical care and enable us to continue working in the field. Research into medical facilities in country are completed prior to the start of the season by Operation Wallacea and NSF staff.

## 7. Operating procedures

There are detailed operating procedures for all aspects of expedition management. The main measures used to minimise risk are included in the risk assessments which are published on the web site but are summarised below if they are not included in other sections of this report:

### *Groups leaving Fox, Nuweiba or Dolphin Camps*

There is a whiteboard system operating at the desert camps, where all groups leaving camp have to sign out, with details of the group leader, the group members, the intended location, departure time and estimated time of return. The group leader has to take a mobile phone so they can communicate with the main base, a First Aid kit and ensure all of the group have appropriate attire (eg hats, boots) and have enough water for the trip. If students are wanting to walk into St Katherine town (about 800m from Fox Camp) they need permission from the camp manager, go with at least one other person and sign out on the whiteboard with the estimated return time. Volunteers can only leave the Dolphin Camp by vehicle although they can walk up the beach for 500m in either direction. Anybody leaving the camp can only do so after notifying the camp manager of their estimated return time, and they must have at least one other person with them.

### *Groups on the trek surveys*

All students work in groups with a science leader and a Bedouin guide. The groups are spread out along a wadi with the maximum distance being 4km. A vehicle with satellite phone and a medical officer is positioned in the middle of the working groups so medical help is always within 2km of any student. The group leader is responsible for ensuring their group have appropriate attire (eg hats, boots) and have enough water for the trip.

### *Diving*

All diving follows protocols that are more conservative than PADI procedures. All training dives are completed with a ratio of 1 Dive Instructor plus 1 Dive Master to a group of no more than 8 students. All qualified divers are accompanied by a Dive Master at a ratio of 1:6. Maximum diving depth is 18m, maximum dive time is 50 minutes and all divers have to perform a 5 minute safety stop at 5m on the way up. Minimum surface interval time is 3 hours. No night diving is allowed for school group members unless they are already a qualified Advanced Open Water diver. These restrictions mean that all divers are well within the limits allowed for no-decompression recreational diving by PADI.

### *Snorkelling and swimming*

No snorkelling or swimming is allowed unless there is shore-cover (or in-water cover) from a Dive Master or suitably qualified person and the group are carrying an inflated SMB.

### *Alcohol*

Alcohol is not available in either the Fox Camp or the Nuweiba camp, however it is available at the Dolphin camp. Whilst the school group is under the care of Operation Wallacea no school group member under 18 (the legal age for drinking alcohol in Egypt) is permitted to consume alcohol.

## **8. Emergency procedures**

This section summarises the emergency procedures report which is a much more detailed description of the procedures used at each of the sites.

### *Training of staff*

Carefully planned evacuation protocols are in place in all of the sites in Egypt and are designed with the worst case scenario in mind. All staff will have training on evacuation procedures, and protocols are rehearsed prior to the expeditions starting.

### *Emergency levels*

Operation Wallacea has 3 levels of evacuation as follows: **Emergency** (requiring the fastest possible transfer to the hospital or recompression facilities in Sharm el Sheikh, St Katherine, Nuweiba, Tur or Dahab depending on location and severity of the incident), **High Priority** (requiring the patient to be moved at the fastest speed possible by land to hospital facilities) or **Medium Priority** (requiring the patient to be moved as quickly as possible without the need to hire special vehicles or boats to the nearest appropriate medical facilities).

In all Emergency or High Priority case where a patient is being transferred to medical facilities they are accompanied by the relevant Medical Officer or someone appointed by the medical officer as fit to accompany the patients. The absence of the Medical Officer from the site whilst the patient is accompanied to the hospital will require the suspension of all activities at the site until the Medical Officer is back on site. In the case of a Medium Priority evacuation (e.g. transfer to a hospital for a confirmatory X-ray) another suitable staff member other than the Medical Officer may be nominated to accompany the patient.

## **9. Insurance**

Operation Wallacea has bought medical and evacuation insurance for all participants to a value of £1 million from Bluefin. Bluefin use CEGA as their emergency assistance company, who have been provided with maps of all the sites at which the students will be working, details of the evacuation routes and air ambulance and the hospitals that the patients would be taken to from different sites. This is so that the insurers can make prior agreements with the air ambulance and hospital so that in the unlikely event that they will be needed that the evacuation can proceed promptly with no delay.

In addition to this Operation Wallacea have comprehensive combined liability insurance with up to £10,000,000 for public/product liability.

## **10. Child protection procedures**

We endeavour to ensure that all school students participating in our activities are safe in accordance with the Protection of Children's act 1999. This is done a number of ways:

### *Supervision and accompanying adults.*

Operation Wallacea offer a free teacher place with every 10 students thus giving an automatic ratio of at least 1 to 10 (in line with the DfES). For each activity provided by Operation Wallacea in the field the following staff ratios apply:

- 1 to 6 staff to student ratio for all desert survey work
- 1 to 8 ratio for training dives (plus a Divemaster)
- 1 to 6 ratio for dives with qualified divers

These ratios do not include other supervisory staff such as guides, medics or the schoolteachers. Overall there is at least a 1 to 3 ratio of adult staff to students on site providing a very high level of supervision. Teachers are asked to accompany students on as many activities as possible.

### *Minimum number of students*

No school pupil is allowed to participate in any activity without at least one other pupil or a teacher being present.

### *Criminal Records Bureau Checks*

There are over 800 staff working on the Operation Wallacea survey projects as well as a further 500 university students. Over 50% of these staff and some of the students are from countries where no CRB check facilities exist or spend a significant part of each year outside the UK, so CRB checks are incomplete. Completing blanket coverage of CRB checks on all these staff and students is not possible since a number could not be checked through the UK system. If all university students were checked then it would still only provide partial coverage and would add significantly to the costs of the expedition for the participants. All UK based full time staff have had enhanced CRB checks. The strategy used by Operation Wallacea therefore is to ensure that at all locations where pupils are sleeping that there is a CRB staff member in attendance. The accompanying teachers are already CRB checked and there will always be an accompanying teacher at any overnight location. All Egyptian academic staff have had their backgrounds checked by the NSF and no staff with any criminal records are employed.

### *Codes of Practice*

All 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. The NSF will dismiss staff that do not follow the code of conduct.

### *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 Operation Wallacea 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 the incident was serious enough.

## **11. Communications**

There is mobile phone coverage at the Fox, Nuweiba, and Dolphin Camps as well as on the routes used in transporting the students between the camps and Sharm. There is internet at the Fox Camp as well. The desert survey teams have a satellite phone with them on all treks.

There are 24-hour emergency officers based in the Canadian and UK offices (tel 01790 763194) in the event of an emergency message needing to be passed on to the field. The direct numbers for the key staff in Egypt during the expeditions are published on the web site shortly before the start of the expeditions. There is an English speaking contact in Sharm who meets all groups or students arriving before the start of the expedition and can be contacted at any point by mobile phone.

## **12. Transport**

All transport arrangements conducted by Operation Wallacea in the field are organised and reviewed by NSF and are subject to stringent protocols. Transport used to move pupils from various sites have been assessed by the Senior Operations Manager and his team in Egypt and only reputable companies with a excellent safety record are used. A member of staff is present on all transportations to ensure that drivers conform to safe procedures such as no speeding.

## **13. Accommodation and Camp Security**

### *Fox Camp and Nuweiba Camp*

Volunteers sleep in cabins with 2 or 3 beds in each. The cabins are strictly single sex and are located in groups with teacher accommodation in the nearby vicinity. All students are made aware of where each staff member is located including medical

staff in case of the event of an emergency during the night. Both Nuweiba and St Catherine have army and police checkpoints as you enter the area, and both camps are guarded at night by the local staff.

#### *Desert Camps*

The students sleep out in the desert in single sex groups and within sight of the teachers. The Bedouin staff guard the camps at night.

#### *Dolphin Camp*

Accommodation is in single sex rooms of up to 5 people in a secure hotel which is located approximately 5 minutes walk from the camp. There is an army/police checkpoint immediately outside the gates to the camp.