



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
Honduras

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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 Honduras. It is intended to fulfil 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 are running a biodiversity and socio-economic research programme in the cloud forests of the Cusuco National Park and adjacent protected "Water Production Zone" (MPZ) in Honduras, as well as on the Caribbean islands of Cayo Menor and Utila. These surveys are led by university academics from a range of British and North American universities with additional help provided by university students who pay for the experience. The school groups are joining this established survey programme and providing an important part of the survey team by completing detailed forest structure and habitat surveys on each of the 145 sample sites across the whole forest study area. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the forest sites within the Cusuco National Park. At each of the camps transects have been installed and sample sites positioned with a minimum spacing of 200m (either 20m X 20m or 50m X 50m). Each camp has a management team and a series of scientists completing biodiversity surveys using light traps, flight intercept traps, pit fall traps for dung beetles, larger pitlines for herpetofauna, point counts and mist netting for birds, live trapping for small mammals, mist netting for bats and counts of Baird's Tapir from droppings and footprint indications.

The school groups spend the first week in the forest, completing six days of training and research. These are divided into half day sessions totalling: two days of jungle skills training; two days of forest measurements and two days of learning about biodiversity monitoring techniques and helping out in the field. Students will arrive in the forest on Wednesday by mid-morning and will attend introductory lectures on health and safety, camp orientation and the schedule for the week for each group. There are eight camps in total, and each group will stay in two of these camps during the week. There are four base camps (one in West Cusuco, one in East Cusuco, one in the village of Buenos Aries, and one in an eco-lodge in the village of Las Piñitas in the water production zone) which have lecture facilities. There are four "core zone" camps which are basic field research stations where students sleep in tents or hammocks in the forest.

For the second week the school groups have the option of either travelling to the islands of Utila or Cayo Menor to complete a dive training course, or if they are already dive qualified or don't wish to dive, to complete a Caribbean Reef Ecology Course. This latter course consists of two lectures each day and two in water practicals (either diving or snorkelling) and teaches them how to identify the fish, invertebrates and corals as well as marine biological survey techniques.

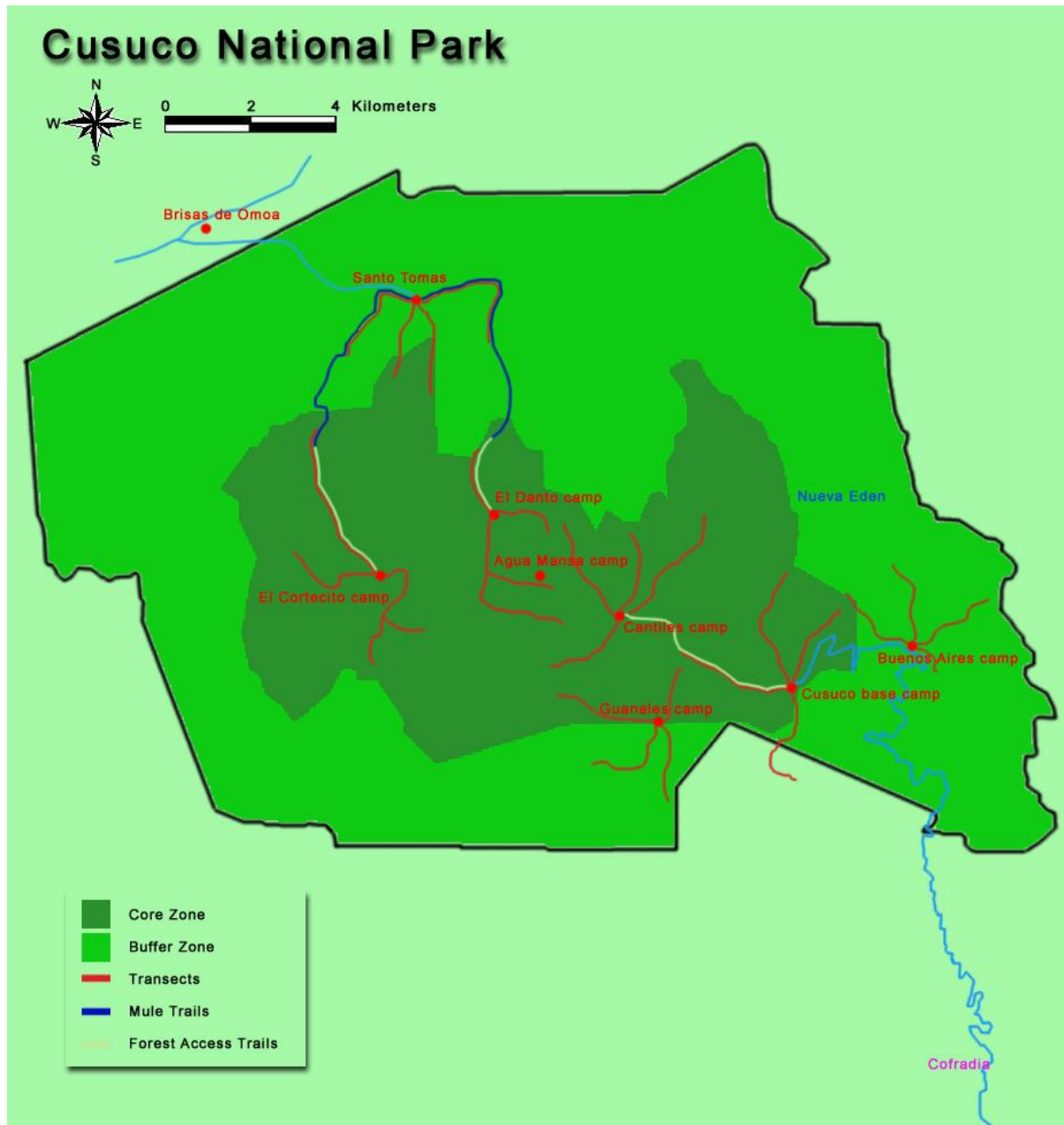


Figure 1 Location of forest camps



Figure 2 Location of the marine sites

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 (www.opwall.com) 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. A training session is arranged with each of the schools with the following aims:

Assessment of the level of fitness of the pupils

Fitness is measured according to the British standard bleep test. All pupils are required to reach at least level 4. The following camps have the required fitness levels:

- Base Camp/ Buenos Aires/ Las Piñitas – level 4
- East Cusuco satellite camps (Guanales/Cantiles) – level 6
- West Cusuco satellite camps (Cortecito/Danto) – level 8

Habitat survey methodologies

All the pupils are given a lecture on the aims of the surveys they will be participating in as well as the methodologies to be used. A written description of the survey methodology to be used is given to each school so they are aware of exactly what they will be doing in the field.

The OpWall website (www.opwall.com) has details of how the students prepare for their expedition and exactly what they will be doing on site. The Operation Wallacea staff are always available to talk to any student, parent, or teacher, who has any questions about any 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 Gran Hotel Sula on a Wednesday at 0700hrs. If the group arrives the night before the start of the expedition then they are advised to stay in the Hotel Sula, who will arrange for an airport pick up in a coach. Once the expedition start 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 delivered at San Pedro Sula airport by 12 noon on the Tuesday 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. For the 2011 field season Alex Tozer will be fulfilling this role. Alex has a Masters in Occupational Psychology and has 5 years experience planning and leading expeditions in Honduras, as well as several further years experience working in other South American, African, and Asian countries. He will have various staff assisting in different aspects of the project. 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. The project has a very high overall level of staffing (approximately 1 staff

member to every 2 volunteers onsite) with up to 200 staff at any one time running the surveys or providing logistical support for the expeditions.

Leadership during transfers from the hotel to the forest site

The groups arriving will be briefed by Alex Tozer (Opwall Honduras Country Manager) and Pippa Disney (Volunteer Liaison Manager). Pippa Disney has 7 years field experience of leading expeditions in both Honduras and Indonesia. If the group is going to the East of the Park (Base Camp, Buenos Aires, Guanales, or Cantiles) then they will travel by bus to Cofradia (approximately 1 hour) and from there will transfer into 4 wheel drive vehicles for the drive up the mountain to either Buenos Aires or Base Camp. An Opwall staff member will move with the groups from the hotel to their first camp.

If the group are going to the Las Piñitas site they will travel on 4 wheel drive vehicles from San Pedro Sula up the mountain to site (approximately 1 hour). They will be accompanied by an Opwall staff member during this transfer.

If the group are going to Santo Tomas they will travel by bus to Puerto Cortes and then along the Honduran coast towards Guatemala, to a town called Cortecito Pueblo. This journey takes approximately 3 hours. They will walk up the mountain along a wide trail to Santo Tomas (approximately 2 - 3 hours). An Opwall staff member will be travelling with the groups all the way to Santo Tomas and will be leading the trekking groups up this route.

Leadership at Base Camp, Buenos Aires, Las Piñitas or Santo Tomas

The Camp Manager at each of these sites is responsible for meeting the incoming group and completing all the training in the operating and safety procedures at the Camp. The Camp Managers at Base Camp and Santo Tomas have to have a minimum 2 years experience in running forest based expedition camps and have a good level of Spanish to co-ordinate with the guides.

Leadership for training in jungle skills and trekking

The Forest Training Manager is responsible for organising the skills training in trekking, dangerous plants and animals in the forest, safety procedures to use when living in the forest and how to respond to an emergency. The Forest Training Manager needs to have 3+ years experience in leading tropical forest surveys and establishing and running camps in remote forest areas.

Leadership for Canopy Access training

The Canopy Access team consist of Ollie Laker and Grant Harris. Ollie Laker is a level 3 rope technician which is the highest qualification granted by IRATA (Industrial Rope Access Trade Association). Grant Harris is a level 1 rope technician with IRATA and has an NPTC (National Proficiency Test Council) Diploma in Arboriculture and Tree Climbing.

Leadership for school groups

There is one Biodiversity Leader for every group of 8 students as well as a local guide. All Biodiversity Leaders are required to have either Masters or level (or higher) qualification in a

biological subject, or experience of working with youth groups on outdoor activities.

Leadership for Guanales, Cantiles, Cortecito and Danto camps

Camp Managers at these more remote forest camps need to have previous experience of group management and either Spanish Language skills or remote camp management experience.

Leadership for biodiversity surveys

When students join biodiversity surveys from a camp these are led by academics from British or North American universities and each group has a guide. Each of the biodiversity survey leaders must have relevant academic qualifications, previous research experience and publications in the area of research they are conducting. The Senior Forest Scientist is Dr Kathy Slater who has previously been a lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University and had 7 years experience of leading undergraduate and schools teams in the field on biodiversity surveys.

Leadership for forest to marine site transfers

The participants in the eastern camps (Buenos Aires, Base Camp, Guanales and Cantiles) travel down the mountain in 4 wheel drive vehicles to Cofradia and from there take a contracted bus to the San Pedro Sula airport where they join the groups from the western camps. Participants in the western camps (Santo Tomas, Danto or Cortecito) trek down to Cortecito Town and then travel by bus to the airport at San Pedro Sula. OpWall staff travel with their groups to the airport. At the airport those heading to the marine side meet the buses operated by Maya Temple Tours and the buses with OpWall staff on board drive to La Ceiba. Those going to Utila get off the bus at La Ceiba harbour and are met by the Coral View staff member who travels across by catamaran ferry with them to Utila Town (1.5 hours) and then by minibus or boat to the hotel. Those travelling to Cayo Menor continue on with the Maya Temple tour bus to Rio Esteban. The groups stay overnight in Rio Esteban and then cross by speed boat to Cayo Menor in the early morning. These groups are accompanied by an Operation Wallacea staff member throughout the transfer.

Leadership on Cayo Menor

The Cayo Menor Camp Manager is responsible for training all the participants in the safety and operating procedures for the site. Tara McLoughlin is the Cayo Menor Manager. Tara has lived and worked in Honduras for over 3 years in the Cayos Cochinos region, speaks fluent Spanish, and has 2 years experience leading Opwall and other survey teams in the area.

Leadership at Coral View

The Coral View Camp Manager is responsible for training all the participants in the safety and operating procedures for the site. Richard Astley is the Coral View Camp Manager. Richard is a PADI Open Water Scuba Instructor with over 6 years of dive experience, and has managed large groups of volunteers with Operation Wallacea in the past.

Leadership for diving activities

All dive training is led by PADI qualified Dive Instructors or Master Instructors. 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. Both the Utila and the Cayo Menor sites are registered PADI Dive Centres.

Leadership from marine sites to airport

The Utila Camp Manager and the Cayo Menor Camp Manager travel back to the mainland with their outgoing groups and they are then accompanied by the Marine Groups Travel Manager on the bus back to the airport in San Pedro Sula.

6. Use of Guides

Every group leaving a camp must be accompanied by a group leader (see above) and a local guide. No formal guide qualifications exist in Honduras, (particularly that are available to the local people in the remote communities in which we work) so the appointment of guides relies primarily on their levels of experience and their suitability gauged via personal references from senior village members. The Senior Forest Operations Manager has the responsibility of employing locals as guides. A number of skills are required by all guides including:

- Knowledge of the local area
- An awareness of dangerous species including venomous snakes

Each newly appointed guide would have training on how to respond to dangerous situations, basic first aid and how to lead a group. Their training follows a 3-stage induction period: shadowing a more experienced guide; then leading a group while supervised; and finally leading a group on their own.

7. 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. All volunteers are required to get their GP to sign the declaration on the reverse of the form if they have answered yes to any of the questions. These forms are required to be completed and returned to the Operation Wallacea Medical Coordinator at least 3 months in advance of the expedition. At a meeting in April each year, all the medical staff that will be working in Honduras that year, 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 retained at the last site. 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 seven 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

Operation Wallacea employ sufficient qualified medical staff including doctors, nurses and paramedics to provide the medical support at each of the field sites. In 2011 there are 10 medical staff contributing to the medical cover at various points over the season. All the medics are required to have at least 18 months postgraduate training with some experience in accident and emergency. In addition to these staff Operation Wallacea offer a medical elective training programme to 4th or 5th year medical students. These medical electives rotate around the sites and work alongside a range of medical staff over the course of the season and receive training in specific aspects of expedition medicine. The medical training and support provided by Operation Wallacea has to be of a sufficient quality to convince University Medical Schools to place their medical electives with the expeditions.

Medical facilities

A full medical kit is provided by Operation Wallacea 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. Note the First Aid supplies are provided for all the participants on the expedition and include items that might not be considered appropriate for school pupils (e.g. sexual health).

Research into medical facilities in country are completed prior to the start of the season by the in-country representative and are checked at the start by the Operation Wallacea medical coordinator or senior medical officer. Operation Wallacea has very close links with the hospitals in San Pedro Sula and La Ceiba, the recompression chambers on Utila and Roatan, the emergency services (including the Honduran Red Cross) and the military in San Pedro and Tegucigalpa (who provide emergency helicopter support in the event of an emergency evacuation).

8. 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 camps

At all camps there is a whiteboard system operating, 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 radio so they can communicate with the main base, a First Aid kit and ensure all group have appropriate attire (e.g. hats, boots) and have enough water for the trip. In addition a local guide has to accompany the group. No school group members (pupils or teachers) are allowed to leave any of the camps unless this procedure is followed. Navigation from each camp is fairly easy since there are marked transects and survey sites and maps available of the transect layout at each camp.

Trekking

The guide takes the front of the trek line with the slowest group member immediately behind and the fittest group member at the end of the line followed by the group leader. There are no deepwater river crossings on any of the trails since the watercourses are just streams at the altitudes in the cloud forest that Operation Wallacea work at.

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. If one or more of the group wish to undertake the Advanced Open Water dive training course they will need to do one dive to no deeper than 30m as part of the course. This dive would need to be completed as the first dive of the day and only one additional dive would be permitted that day. These restrictions mean that all divers are well within the limits allowed for no-decompression recreational diving by PADI.

Snorkelling and swimming

No snorkelling is allowed unless accompanied by a Dive Master and carrying an inflated SMB. The Dive Master will ensure the group stop every 2 minutes and look around them for boats. Swimming is only allowed in a roped off area in shallow waters in Cayo Menor or immediately in front of the hotel in Utila where there has to be a Dive Master in attendance.

Alcohol

Alcohol is available in Buenos Aires and at both Cayo Menor and Utila. Whilst the school group is under the care of Operation Wallacea no school group member under 18 (the legal age for drinking alcohol in Honduras) is permitted to consume alcohol.

9. 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 Honduras and are designed with the worst case scenario in mind and have worked well in previous years. All staff including medical electives 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, usually by air, from the various forest sites to the CEMESA hospital in San Pedro Sula for the forest sites or to the D'Antoni hospital in La Ceiba for the marine sites), **High Priority** (requiring the patient to be moved at the fastest speed possible by land and/or sea to hospital facilities in San Pedro Sula or La Ceiba or the recompression facilities on Utila) 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 (e.g. A Medical Elective). 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.

10. Insurance

Operation Wallacea has purchased medical and evacuation insurance cover that covers each participant for £1 million. Details of the medical and evacuation procedures are provided to the evacuation company appointed by the insurance company (CEGA) then make agreements with all the hospitals and helicopter evacuation routes in advance so that there are no delays if an evacuation needs to be implemented. In addition to this Operation Wallacea have comprehensive combined liability insurance with up to £10,000,000 for public/product liability.

11. 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 ratios apply:

- 1 to 8 ratio for Habitat Survey work (plus at least one guide)

- 1 to 6 ratio for participating in other biodiversity survey activities (plus at least one guide)
- 1 to 8 ratio for training dives (plus a Dive Master)
- 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 1 to 2 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 from the school or a teacher being present.

Criminal Records Bureau Checks

There are over 100 staff working on the survey expeditions as well as a further 150 university students. Up to 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. Whilst all full time OpWall staff have had enhanced CRB checks, even if all the UK based 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. 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 medical staff are also required to be checked and will have had enhanced checks completed by either their University or place of work. Operation Wallacea use a copy of these as part of the recruitment process of medics.

Codes of Practice

All Operation Wallacea 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. Operation Wallacea 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.

12. Communications

Forest communications

Base Camp is the main operations and communication centre for all the forest projects. There is an internet connection, and there are parts of the camp where handphone calls can be made. In addition there is a base station radio that can speak to each of the field camps operating as well as Cofradia. Each of the teams working on the transects around Base Camp have to take a hand held radio which communicates back to Base Camp. In the event of an emergency initial contact will be made via satellite phone or radio call but routine communications will be maintained by radio and cell phone.

On the western side the main camp is Santo Tomas. There is a radio at this camp, which is manned by ESAC staff and used to maintain contact with the Danto and Cortecito camps when they are operating. There are no direct comms between Santo Tomas and Base Camp by radio, so daily contacts are made at pre-arranged times by the ESAC Camp Manager walking to a ridge where cell phone contact can be made with Base Camp cell phones. In the event of an emergency there is a 24 hour telephone number at San Carlos (a village at the base of the mountain). The operator at this house also has a USB radio that can communicate directly with Santo Tomas.

Each of the field camps (Danto, Cortecito, Cantiles and Guanales) have base station radios set up so they can communicate either with Base Camp (eastern camps) or Santo Tomas (western camps) and there are pre-arranged daily comms times. All groups at each of these camps have to take a hand held radio when walking the transects to communicate back to the camp.

In Buenos Aires there is hand phone signal at most locations and a base station radio that can communicate with Base Camp. In Cofradia where the monkey team are based there is a base station radio for reporting back to Base Camp and cell phone coverage. When the monkey students are in the field they have cell phone coverage so they can make contact in an emergency and they also have hand held radios for talking between the groups.

Las Piñitas has good cell phone signal and keeps regular comms with Buenos Aires. The teams in the field communicate back to camp using hand-held radios.

Marine communications

Rio Esteban has cell phone coverage. The boats crossing to Cayos Cochinos from Rio Esteban all have cell phones or radios to talk back to the Rio Esteban centre.

Cayos Cochinos has a base station radio that can talk back to the HCRF office in La Ceiba where there are land lines and cell phone coverage. Each of the dive boats has a radio that communicates with the island operation centre. There is also cell phone coverage in most parts of the Cayos Cochinos islands.

Utila has a land line, cell phone coverage and email and internet connections. Each of the dive boats has a radio that communicates back to the Utila operations centre.

Transfers

All bus and vehicle transfers have cell phones with the drivers.

13. Transport

All transport arrangements conducted by Operation Wallacea in the field are subject to stringent protocols. Transport used to move pupils from various sites have been assessed by the Operations Manager and his team in Honduras and only reputable companies with a excellent safety record are used.

Buses

All buses used on arrival transfers and movements between the forest and marine sides are contracted by Maya Temple Tours with English speaking staff and cell phone communications. The transfers from Cofradia to the airport or to the western camps is run by a subcontractor in Cofradia. A pre-departure vehicle check is carried out which includes checking fluid levels on each of the buses before they are allowed to depart with volunteers. A senior member of Operation Wallacea staff is present on all transportations to ensure that drivers conform to safe procedures such as no speeding.

4x4 trucks

All vehicles are subject to pre-departure checks for each journey, which include checking the fluid levels and ensuring that tyres are adequate for the journey. All vehicles travel in convoy when making long journeys so if a vehicle breaks down there is support available. A senior member of Operation Wallacea staff will also accompany the convoy of vehicles to ensure a slow and steady pace. No scheduled movements are due to be conducted during the hours of darkness to maximise the safety of those being transported. All vehicles are subject to the health and safety standards of Honduras, which include the use of seatbelts for drivers and all passengers in the cab of a vehicle.

Boats to Cayos

All passengers are required to wear lifejackets on the boats. All drivers are trained and vetted by the transport manager in Rio Esteban. All boats depart as close as possible to dawn since this is the time the wind conditions are usually most favourable. The boats are also required to travel in convoy so there is help at hand if an engine fails.

Boats to Utila

The Utila Princess is the main transport for passengers from the Honduran mainland to Utila. The ferry carries lifejackets and life rafts sufficient for all passengers.

Dive and research boats on either Cayo Menor or Utila

There is a whiteboard system operating at both Cayo Menor and Utila, so that all boats leaving the centres have to sign out and complete various safety checks (presence of life

jackets, oxygen, First Aid kits, radio test etc). The whiteboard contains details of where each boat has gone and the estimated return time. The Cayo Menor and Utila centres are in radio contact with each of the boats.

14. Accommodation and Camp Security

Base Camp/Santo Tomas

Accommodation is in tents at these camps. Operation Wallacea policy is that only single sex accommodation is allowed for school pupils. The tents are situated in the heart of the camp with teacher accommodation located nearby. 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. Added security includes a barrier gate at the main entrance to the core zone and a number of guards that operate at both camps 24 hours a day.

Guanales/ Cantiles/ Danto/ Cortecito camps

Accommodation is a mixture of tents and hammocks. All tents are single sex tents and hammocks are located in single sex groups. All tents/ hammocks are located in the heart of the camp and in close proximity of both the teachers and medical staff in the event of emergency. As the camps are remote and within the core zone, it is extremely unlikely that unauthorised individuals will enter the camp. However guards operate at each of the camps 24 hours a day for added protection.

Las Piñitas

Accommodation is in one of 3 large rooms inside the eco-lodge, or on a mattress on the balcony under a mosquito net. The male and female sleeping areas are separated. The lodge is fenced and gated, and a guard is on duty 24 hours a day to ensure that no unauthorised individuals enter the camp.

Buenos Aires and Rio Esteban

Accommodation is in local houses with a minimum of 2 students of the same sex per house and groups of houses in the same locations are used. Operation Wallacea staff and the teachers have a map showing the location of each household where students have been placed. All students are made aware of where each staff member is located including medical staff in the event of an emergency during the night. Operation Wallacea has very close links with both these local communities, having worked there for a number of years. Operation Wallacea staff inspect all houses being used and obtain information on the reliability of the house-owners from the senior people in the communities. Both communities have organised overnight guards to patrol the areas where the students are sleeping.

Utila

Accommodation is in a hotel. Only Operation Wallacea staff, volunteers and school students have the use of the hotel and all rooms are lockable. We endeavour to ensure that a schoolteacher is located at each floor that is being occupied by pupils. The hotel owners, who ensure that facility is only used by Operation Wallacea, provide additional security.

Cayos Cochinos

Accommodation is in tents or dorms in single sex groups. All students are made aware of where each staff member is located including medical staff in the event of an emergency during the night. There are only HCRF and Operation Wallacea staff on the island with the volunteer groups and a guard dog patrols the island for the arrival of any unauthorised boats. The Honduran Navy are based on the next island (10 minutes boat ride) and patrol the whole of the Cayos Cochinos protected area on a 24 hour basis.

Gran Hotel Sula

This a hotel in San Pedro Sula that may be used for overnight accommodation by school groups either at the start or end of the expedition. The hotel has security guards on the door at all times.

15. Cultural aspects of the expedition and local issues.

The model of conservation used by Operation Wallacea is strongly rooted in principles of suitable economic growth in areas whose biodiversity is under threat. This means that huge efforts are made to ensure that conservation is tied with development of alternative income sources to, for example, logging and hunting.

Operation Wallacea has been working in Honduras for over 8 years now and has very strong links with each of the communities. Operation Wallacea has been involved in bringing financial assistance to the communities via accommodation for volunteers, provision of food, availability of season jobs to support the expeditions and has funded a scholarship scheme for bright children from the local communities to cover their university costs. There is strong local support for the projects in all the communities in which the school groups will be staying.

All pupils are encouraged to get involved with the community if they wish and several school groups have helped before by fundraising for local schools, tidying the local school area and getting involved in sporting events such as football matches.