

Outward Bound Monaco April 2008 Course report

Judy's diary.....

Day TWO 18 April 2008:

It was an early start with Steve preparing the group with some map reading exercises and explanations prior to the day's hike from Peille up to the Cime de Baudon. It would be each person's responsibility to lead the group for part of the hike and so map reading skills would be essential.

We set off from Cap d'Ail for Peille around 9.15 am. Steve drove the Outward Bounders up in the mini bus while Diane, Alice and I took the car, stopping off at La Turbie to purchase extra water (it was a warm and sunny day so adequate hydration would be important) and some emergency chocolate bars (always useful if you get delayed and the food supply runs out).

On our arrival in Peille, Steve warned me that I would have a long day as the group had asked if I would return that evening and conduct another Emotional Intelligence session. I was delighted that what had begun as an experiment had been so well received and willingly agreed hoping that they would not be too exhausted at the end of the hike to sustain an evening classroom session, especially as Tuesday evening was also disco evening at the centre and I knew they wanted to save some energy for that!

So equipped with rucksacks, packed lunches and walking boots we all set off just before 10 am for the Cime de Baudon. Some of the group had never hiked before and so were challenged as this would be quite a climb for the novices. Diane was also stepping out of her comfort zone this being her first mountain hike.

Steve and I had already climbed to the Cime de Baudon back in September on our fact finding mission. We had however undertaken a longer version (the Via Alpina route) of what we would do today, which was already demanding and had been mapped out by the local authorities in their mountain guide brochure : Rando-Oxygène.

We climbed the first steep path to reach the first sign post where Steve chose his first candidate for map reading, from then on, each would take a turn at guiding the group. The atmosphere was buzzing with enthusiasm and credit must go to Ines who had started the morning feeling very under the weather having woken up with a bad cold and yet braved her way up the mountain armed with aspirins, a smile and not at complaint to be heard. In fact although most were tested to their limits and found the ascent to the summit testing and tiring, there were no moaners and the team spirit was such that the group stayed together, smiling and laughing and

encouraging each other. Steve made sure that the leader and map reader checked on his troops regularly so that no-one got left behind.

At one point during the ascent Steve stopped the group to teach them some safety skills. He showed us how to use ropes to create a harness that would allow a climber to transport another injured climber either on their back (solo) or as a "chair" assisted by another climber. Steve is a rope "magician" and made it look easy.

When we reached the plateau where we stopped for lunch, Donovan had a go at making the harness himself but then got more than he bargained for when assisted by Guillaume, he had to lift me! Another great plateau moment was when Philippine and Ines whipped their glossy magazine out of their rucksack for a quick fashion update, they invited my opinion on a couple of items as Steve stood wide eyed at the scene unfolding before his eyes. He couldn't resist a peak at the magazine himself (see day two photos) and admitted that carrying that magazine up the mountain was a challenge in itself.

There were some tricky bits to negotiate on the final ascent and one map reading error which meant we went about 5 minutes out of our way, but Steve let the map reader make the mistake and then rectify it. The views were amazing during the whole hike but as we neared the top they became more and more dramatic. We were dazzled by a 360° view of the coast the Italian and French Alps.

There were smiles all round and photo sessions (we commandeered a lone climber who had reached the summit prior to our arrival) and the remains of sandwiches were consumed as everyone stood with their mouths open at the view and marveled their achievement. The orientation table at the summit (a donation from the Alpine club of Monaco) was a fitting place to sit and contemplate the vastness that lay before us and contemplate how satisfying life really can feel when you accept a challenge and succeed in going beyond your normal limits. Everyone without exception was proud of what he or she had achieved and justifiably so;

And then it was the long trek down by a different route and so map reading skills were required again. Steve reminded those who were trotting down at the speed of mountain goats that caution was the name of the game as hiking accidents nearly always happen on the way down where people slip or lose their concentration and consequently their footing.

We stopped for a rest on the way down and the photo speaks for itself(see day two photo –group sitting by the trees) , conversation had decreased to a gentle lull and many lay back in the grass grateful for a couple of minutes snooze.

Back at the mini van at around 4pm, a weary but proud group were already looking forward to refreshments during the debriefing session they would have back at the centre.

Steve and Alice conducted some more team building exercises before dinner and after we met back in the classroom for the final EQ session where we worked on assertiveness. The group members were very rewarding to work with, willing to share experiences and talk about the own shortcomings and difficulties in being assertive. They willingly agreed to some role play situations which allowed us to take corrective measure on issues that were bothering them and offered suggestions to help each other find solutions to different challenges.

Following my session they still found the energy to go down to the disco evening!

At the end of our second day Steve and Alice commented that in terms of the work achieved it already felt as if we were half way through an Outward Bound Classic course (3 weeks in total duration). He said the quality of the work surpassed expectations and that the young people themselves would probably be amazed at what they would be taking away with them in terms of personal development.

Anyone who was in any doubt as to what we could achieve on a four day course forever hold your peace!