

# DISCOVER

## Multi-Centre Fieldwork Tours



## Voices of Experience

### Why schools and universities keep travelling with Discover Ltd

Discover Ltd. has almost forty years experience running educational fieldtrips to Morocco, and since 1986, to The Eagle's Nest, its permanent fieldwork base in the Cévennes in central southern France.

This document has been written to introduce you to the voices of some of our regular clients who have been using Discover Ltd repeatedly to organize their trips over the years. We hope this will give you an insight into the substantial benefits that these travel experiences give to students.

For further information about our operation, links to various websites can be found at the end of this document.

We look forward to arranging an exceptional travel experience for you.

### Mike McHugo and All at Discover Ltd





**One of the greatest strengths of Discover Ltd.**

is that many of their clients are long-term, repeat business, built on a working relationship whereby when a teacher contacts the Discover office they will know that they will be speaking to the same person they spoke to last time and the time before that, and quite possibly for every expedition they've arranged since their first visit to the Eagle's Nest or Morocco.

**Scott Garrity, Associate Head, Queen Elizabeth 's Grammar School, Ashbourne, Derbyshire**

I took the first trip to Morocco in 2003 with Discover. I'd seen their advert in one of the geographical magazines and I was looking for a more challenging trip than the Wales field trips that the students were used to. Discover offered locations and accommodation that they could book but is still had the feel of a more challenging trip than just a package trip. We chose Morocco because none of the students had been there and it was also a new challenge for me. I saw Morocco as culturally different, certainly for students who live in the Peak District of Derbyshire. I suppose the lives they live here, they're not particularly familiar with a diverse cultural mix. Morocco offered that. It was close but also far enough away to be exotic and different.

The sample itineraries we were shown offered

a balance, so we would have some days in the mountains, some days in the desert then some days in the city. What I wanted to do was to introduce the students to a new country, a range of environments, a range of people as well because the Berbers of the mountains are quite different from the people in Zagora and the people of Marrakech. It gave us a good mix.

We went with a bit of a hybrid approach; we were going for cultural experience, but we did have some field work set up in the mountains and the desert on sand encroachment and things like that. Quite quickly we realised when we were there the enrichment side, learning through experience, was more important than the field work. For us, even as a geography team that were teaching A-level at the time, we didn't want it to have that field work focus, we wanted it to be more about the subtlety of development dilemmas, the disparity between rich and poor, rural and urban, we wanted it to be about the changing environment, and we wanted to do that through their experience and observations.

We found from the first trip that the confidence in the engagement and learning of all the students increased in all of their subjects. It wasn't just in geography. When they came back to school we

found that they came back with a clearer sense of what they wanted to achieve and how they would engage in examinations and the learning process and their next step beyond school.

The only reason we've gone back to Morocco is because of the students; their awe and wonder was the overwhelming factor that has driven this whole interest in Morocco and the schools' focus on developing that side of students' education. We've taken them to other locations since 2003, but Morocco has been the place we return to most.

We always do an overnight camp in a mountain village, seeing how the people live purely through agriculture, subsistence living. When we're walking through the villages and the kids come out to high-five the students, for many of them on both sides I suppose that's the first engagement they've had with a different culture. With the group we took in Spring 2015 we talked about the dilemma of the girls from Education For All, going from a remote valley to one of the boarding houses and will they go back to their valley once their education is finished? That's what engaged the students. They wanted to talk about it each night when we were having meals because what we teach them in the A-level specification at school is about how some development approaches work in different ways, have unexpected outcomes, and you can't always predict what the outcome will be.

The students are more worldly-wise and politically aware these days than they probably ever have been because the news and social media makes them more aware. The group who went this year (Spring 2015) were really surprised and pleased to see that some of the news stories that they had been seeing weren't that evident in Morocco, particularly in the mountains and desert. I think they expected some type of tension and maybe a presence that would make it a heightened state of alert, but that wasn't noticeable at all. With the students we saw increased confidence, confidence in their own clarity, the clarity for instance of their whole perspective of North Africa or development dilemmas. They may have lacked that insight and contact with that type of cultural experiences, so therefore they become a lot more balanced in their views.



I think Discover stand apart compared to other companies we use. The other companies provide good tours and good expeditions but I don't think I can find any other company that's got the knowledge and the insight and also the adaptability that Discover have. If I want to adapt the schedule or I've got a particular preference I know I can phone them up, whereas with the other companies they're



not as flexible and sometimes inflexible. They tend to have a package that comes off the shelf and some have tried to capture too wide a market so there'll be times when you are basically at the mercy of the guide and the people on location who are unfamiliar with a lot of the logistics. Sometimes that hasn't been as smooth or as well planned as I would have liked. I have a good relationship with Discover, and I know I can phone them with concerns or problems and I always get a personal and bespoke service.

Another important aspect of Discover is that their staff go to the places you go to. They've gone there and actually seen it and are able to talk to you on the phone about it. It's that local knowledge. Mike McHugo is a very amenable, down-to-earth guy, and he's very willing to come and talk to the students. I think it's the staff at Discover, that make it a re-bookable experience.

I introduce the idea of a trip to Morocco to a new sixth-form group by appealing to their spirit of adventure. I say to them, "Come with us to a place you've never been before, experience things you've never experienced before in ways that you've never experienced before; travel with peers and we'll help you experience that in a supportive way but equally it will be quite challenging. It's important that you put yourself in situations that you aren't used to and challenge yourself."

I think if they miss out on that they miss out on a key thing. It's like a rite of passage in the sixth form now. The group of twenty that we took away this year are now the tightest group of twenty you will ever see in the sixth form centre. They have a familiarity with each other that's completely different to their friends because they've bonded and enjoyed things they've never done before.



**Andrew Dimberline Assistant Head,  
Bristol Grammar School**

My first contact with Discover was when I took a school group from Wolvey High School in the Midlands to Morocco in 1995. We were after adventure, and it was certainly adventurous. It was a very different world than we were used to, particularly back then. There was one phone in Imlil and the road from Asni up to Imlil was still a dirt track; no electricity in the Kasbah and most of what you see now wasn't there, it was just the dining room and the dormitory rooms off it. It was a pretty adventurous thing to be doing back then. We spent the first night at the Hotel Foucauld in Marrakech, and I remember the first morning, waking up and hearing the call to prayer and seeing the donkey carts going past the windows. It was quite amazing really.

One of the great things about Morocco, is that getting there is so straightforward and easy. I say





to our parents it's about the biggest change in lots of things, climate, culture, scenery, you can get in the shortest time. It's phenomenal, really, such a dramatic change, so you can pack a lot in in a short trip. We've done expeditions to Mongolia, Peru and Bolivia, and you feel as if you've travelled a lot by the time you get there, whereas Morocco, you can leave Bristol at lunchtime and be in Marrakech in the evening.

We used to use the Eagle's Nest for geography field work for a while so I kept going there, in-between doing big overseas, month-long expeditions all over the world. The Cevennes is very much field work focused, looking at river processes, eco systems in an area of bog-land, comparing vegetation in limestone areas to granite areas, etc. I'd say the Eagle's Nest is connected to things like schemes of work, syllabus, things you might like to develop in A-level geography or biology fieldwork and it's content that the students would then go on to be assessed in, through course work or an examination. I think that's largely how a lot of schools and the universities

would view France, whereas Morocco is more about adventure; it's always about learning but it's more about the idea of the challenge, the environmental challenge, learning through discovery. It's a lot deeper than trying to get a higher grade in your A-level. It's that idea that it challenges your own world a little and the effects of those things can be a lot longer lived in people.

It's when you get out into the villages that you really notice the difference. The students begin to realise that the pictures they've seen on TV are actually real, and so is the genuine hardship that these mountain people have to live with, especially as we go at the gentle times of the year. We go at Easter, Autumn and Summer for our expedition, we never go mid-winter, and you forget just how cold it is in the winter and how hard it must be for those people who live in that environment. You can't avoid all the agriculture and see the connection that the people in these remote mountain areas still have with the land, something I think the students begin to understand that we've lost.

A lot of the changes are drip feed. You don't come back a different person but they will have been challenged, more confident with the idea of travelling independently. It's one of the things we hear parents say, they do come back more independent, they grow up.

I've made around twenty expeditions with Discover, six to the Eagle's Nest and the rest to Morocco, sometimes two a year there. I think their real strength is that they've got the balance right. On the one hand they have all the safety procedures in place; the back-up, the risk assessment, the quality badges, everything that would reassure parents, governors and school management. Everything they need to have is in place as good as, if not better than, many of the very big companies. Added to this is the knowledge that when you phone or email the company you're going to get a reply from people you know, so they've got that personal side of it well covered. I think that's the magic of Discover because I've not come across a company to do both of those.

When we use a new provider we always ask if they can put us in touch with some of the schools that have been using their services. Discover have no problem with that because most of their business is based on repeat clients, many of whom have been using them long-term. That also extends to their network, particularly in Morocco where they have been working for almost forty years. I think that's something that's almost unique to Discover.

**Dr Andrew Lack, Senior Lecturer in Environmental Biology, Oxford Brookes University**

We were the first university to visit the Eagle's Nest, and we've returned every year bar one since 1999. I think we were the only university for the first four or five years. I was looking for a change of venue from the usual field trip to Snowdonia when a colleague mentioned that his daughter had just returned from an interesting place in France. I called Julian Hodgson, the then Director of Eagle's Nest, who visited us and I immediately booked a fieldtrip even before I had made a recce trip. I suppose the statistics for returning show that it measured up to expectations.





We take the students on the trip at the end of their first year. Some of lectures are quite big, and it can be difficult to get to know like-minded people. The smallest class they have is about 60-70 and the biggest one is about 260, which actually isn't big by university first-year standards, so it can be difficult to find friends. The great thing about going on a field course with just forty-odd of them is that the way they actually find people that are interested in the same things.

Firstly, I love the place. It's very rich in wildlife, geologically varied and altitudinally very varied because you are right up a mountain. As far as the flora is concerned it's actually quite like Britain but richer. The great advantage of that is that I can use British floras and insect faunas so that's a help. I love the isolation of it. Obviously to experience something different is one of the reasons we go, but I think the richness of the natural environment is very important for the students. It's actually almost impossible to find a place in Britain as rich as the area around the centre. They do a lot of identification of the plants and insects; I get them to make a plant collection and they have tests on invertebrate identification at the end of the week.

The other thing is— and I have to say it's a very strong reason – that we've established such a strong relationship with the centre itself and all the staff, it's one we love, we nurture it. It's such a pleasure to be

out with people I certainly regard as good friends. They are quite extraordinarily good. It relieves the burden of a lot of the actual administration of both the organisation of the trip and actually being there.

I look forward to going hugely every year. Obviously there are aspects of it that I know pretty well but I keep finding new things, there are always plants coming up that I don't know. Lately we've been getting keen on all the butterflies that are wonderfully diverse in that area and we keep seeing new ones. I find a new butterfly every trip even though we've been going for so many years. A lesser purple emperor settled on my forehead recently, which is a good way of finding a new butterfly, one that settles first on your forehead. There's always the element of not knowing what you are going to find.

One of the most important things that almost all the students have commented on is that the study trip takes them to a very isolated place where they get to know each other and get to know the staff, and is an exercise in finding like-minded people and creating new friendships. Many, many students have come up to me at the end of the three years and said the best thing about the whole course was that France field trip. It reminds me very strongly of the field course I did at the end of my first year all those years ago because I'm still in touch with them forty years later.

# In praise of fieldwork

HMI reports, *Education for sustainable development: Improving schools – improving lives* (Dec 2009), and *Geography: learning to make a world of difference* (Feb 2011) both highlighted the importance of learning outside the classroom and how engaging in such activities makes not only a significant contribution to students' learning about specific environments and the inter-connectedness of people and places, but also to their respective spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Specific recommendations were for schools to:

- maximise opportunities for fieldwork to enhance learning and improve motivation, and
- ensure that all pupils have access to out-of-classroom learning to support their understanding of the need to care for their environment and to promote their physical and mental well-being.

Research shows that not only does the practical activity of undertaking fieldwork outside the classroom have a profound impact on students motivation and engagement, it also has an indirect benefit in terms of increasing the number of students who go on to study geography at a higher level, be it GCSE, AS/A2 or at University.

The 2011 report states that:

'The secondary schools that had successful fieldwork programmes recognised that its benefits outweighed any difficulties. A new emphasis on fieldwork in some of them had been a turning point, revitalising teaching and making geography more relevant and exciting. The schools ..... that had a vibrant fieldwork programme frequently said that increasing numbers of students were choosing geography at examination level at a time when numbers were declining nationally. This was often because fieldwork experiences added detail and depth to students' learning and they understood the relevance of what they were studying.'

For almost forty years Discover Ltd have been providing fieldwork opportunities to many thousands of school pupils and university students, not only through the location and facilities of their superb field centres in France (Eagle's Nest) and Morocco (Kasbah du Toubkal) but also their well-deserved reputation for high quality tuition and guidance. Many of the school and university groups that visit either of these centres are invariably repeat clients, a testament to the quality of the experience that they and their students receive.

Having taken both students and teachers to the Eagle's Nest and Kasbah du Toubkal over many years I would strongly advise any teaching staff considering a tour to either France or Morocco to speak to one of the knowledgeable staff at Discover Ltd and attend one of their regular inspection tours to see for themselves the wonderful opportunities that are available to support their students' academic and personal development.

**Andy Phillips, Geography Advisor / Education Consultant & Ofsted Inspector**

June 2015

# Other Testimonials

## **Carl Halliday, Northumberland College**

It was the first time that any of the students had been to Morocco (or any Muslim country for that matter) and I was really impressed by how they immersed themselves in local life in Imlil. They came away with a more open mind and realistic understanding of Moroccan and Muslim life. During our training treks, we went through a few remote villages and it's good for the students to see how happy these communities are, despite their limited resources, finances and possessions. There were various conversations by the students about how much they take for granted back home and how the many material possessions they have in the UK don't necessarily make them any more happy than the people they met in the High Atlas who don't have them, but have a good sense of family and community.

## **Richard Allaway and Ellena Mart, International School of Geneva - Campus des Nations**

Our trips to Morocco with our DP1 students are constantly one of the high points of the two year course. For us, a key advantage of the trip is to place students in situations where they are encouraged to engage with people from different cultures and backgrounds which helps to develop their sense of international mindedness. The students ultimately develop as geographers.

## **Robert Sanderson, Kings School Canterbury**

I have been leading school trips to Morocco for the past 14 years and have loved every single one of them. Not only have they been superbly organised and safe, but they have often been life changing experiences for our pupils. We travel under the auspices of a Geography field trip and needless to say we see and learn geography at every opportunity, be it the formation of desert landscape features; orogenic processes and agricultural techniques in the High Atlas; or urban land use patterns in the cities. However, in addition to these more classically recognised hard education benefits, the additional soft benefits are more often those that change the lives of our pupils. Witnessing a totally different culture is so important for the education of pupils today; being immersed in a different way of life is paramount to the understanding of others and the integration of people groups worldwide. I strongly believe that these trips to Morocco have given our pupils a greater understanding of the world they live in and a greater potential for making a positive difference to their lives, and others, in the future.

# Memberships and Certificates



ABTA: The UK's largest travel association, representing travel agents and tour operators, with a Code of Conduct that applies to all ABTA Members.



ATOL: The UK Government backed Air Travel Organiser's Licence protects travelers who book a holiday with a UK travel company. It ensures clients do not lose money or become stranded abroad if the travel company collapses.

## Further Information

If you have any queries, wish to discuss your trip in more detail or would like to make a provisional booking, please contact Kate Crofts at [kate@discover.ltd.uk](mailto:kate@discover.ltd.uk) Tel: 01883 744 392 Fax: 01883 744 913

For further information, please visit the following websites:

[www.discover.ltd.uk](http://www.discover.ltd.uk) Educational trips to France and Morocco

[www.kasbahdutoubkal.com](http://www.kasbahdutoubkal.com) Our Kasbah in Morocco

[www.mountain-voyage.com](http://www.mountain-voyage.com) Our Travel Agency in Marrakech

[www.efamorocco.org](http://www.efamorocco.org) Helping provide education for girls in Morocco

[www.marrakech-atlas-etape.com](http://www.marrakech-atlas-etape.com) Charity bike event in Marrakech in aid of Education For All

