

Living and Working at the Eagle's Nest 2016

Who we are: The Eagle's Nest is part of Discover Ltd, a company with sites in both France and Morocco. The Morocco site deals with both groups and individual travellers (see Kasbah du Toubkal on our web site). However, the Eagles Nest is purely a Field Study Centre that generally caters for English-speaking Geography, Biology and Environmental Science A-Level and GCSE students, with occasionally younger groups during the summer holidays. If you decide to work at The Nest what you need to keep uppermost in your mind is that it's not just a job, it's a way of life – and almost always a wonderful one!

Where are we? The Eagles Nest is situated in the Cévennes National Park on the south facing slopes of Mont Lozère and the area is one of outstanding beauty – a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a Natura 2000 site; we have 225 species of birds recorded, 89 mammals, 2250 different flowering plants... we think it is paradise. BUT, it is remote, mountainous and can be lonely. If you love the great outdoors, enjoy your outdoor pursuits, and/or love natural history, it is a perfect place!

Job Requirements: Although people are appointed to a particular position, we believe a flexible approach is essential for us to operate effectively. Whatever position you'll hold at the Nest, there are certain ways of approaching your duties that will help you to do your job more efficiently:

- ❖ Be enthusiastic - a smile can go a long way – some of the work is mundane and repetitive, but rest assured that every single job is very important to the smooth running of the centre, and no one is more important than anyone else!
- ❖ Be versatile
- ❖ Don't be afraid to ask for help and be prepared to help others who require it
- ❖ Always be ready to offer assistance/advice to the clients (teachers & students) even if it's not your direct responsibility to do so. Without the clients there would be no Centre thus a group that goes away happy is a group more likely to return in the future and recommend the Centre to others
- ❖ Remember your job is not of the "9 to 5" variety. The hours can be long and there will be times when you are tired – remember that it won't just be you! Support each other;
- ❖ There would undoubtedly be occasions when your presence is required when you did not expect to be working e.g. sunny day and windows are open, suddenly it starts to rain and all available staff dash madly around the Centre closing them!

Staff Morale: Possibly the biggest single aspect which will affect the success of your life out here is how you get along with your fellow workers. As well as *working* with the staff at the Nest you must be able to *live* with them, accepting both their good and bad characteristics. We aim to achieve a balanced "give and take" relationship with staff that promotes a relaxed and happy working environment. Avoid creating friction, as it's not simply a case of going home at the end of the day, and you benefit 100% more by enjoying each others company. Certain aspects of life at the Centre encourage staff morale:

- ❖ Working as a team, particularly when preparing the building in between groups;
- ❖ Staff-sittings at meal times when food and chat are in abundance;
- ❖ Days out: occasionally there's enough time in between groups to go out together for a picnic, swimming, canoeing trip etc;
- ❖ Congregating in the kitchen at meal times, with everyone getting stuck into the washing up and in-depth conversations;
- ❖ Staff meetings - see below.

Staff Meetings: These are generally held once a week and are used to inform staff of the future programme. They are also an opportunity to allow everyone to raise issues and comment on those raised

by others. If you have a problem, an idea or a point to make, then these meetings give you the chance to air your views.

Centre Pets: Apart from the staff you should also be able to get on with the cats (Big Puss and Little Puss), and the four dogs, Dylan, Dasher, Roxy and Bella. These characters act as mascots for the Nest and always appreciate a bit of love and attention, but please do not feed them any treats - their health will suffer if you do!

The Locals: Over the years the Centre has built up a trusting relationship with the locals in the area. It is important to maintain this relationship as the Nest uses many of the products and services provided by nearby businesses. When you are out and about you'll inevitably meet the locals and although the ability to speak French is an advantage, that good old smile is also effective in maintaining the existing friendship.

The weather: We love it! It is always exciting, changes quickly and we get proper seasons (often all of them on the same day!). I could bore you with some statistics, such as the minimum I have experienced (-40°C with wind chill) and the maximum I have experienced (38°C) since living here, but suffice to say, you can get pretty much anything at any time in the mountains! Yes, we are in the South of France, BUT... the Eagles Nest is at an altitude of 1312m – only just lower than Ben Nevis. Living on the side of a mountain means that the weather conditions can change fast. Be prepared to expect fog, rain, wind and snow at the beginning and end of the season with baking sunshine and soaring temperatures in the months between. Be equally prepared to expect the aforementioned factors in a totally muddled order that pays no regard for summer or winter. If you are in need of any warm clothing, please see one of the permanent staff as we usually have a good stock of spares to help us survive the long winters up here.

The physical nature of living and working at the Eagles Nest: The centre is very remote (the equivalent to the Scottish Highlands!) and the terrain is very rough. The area in which you will be living and working is on a mountainside with steep gradients and rough, rocky, uneven terrain underfoot. Whilst we do not stipulate particular requirements for peoples' physical fitness, anyone considering applying to work at the Nest should bear this in mind. In the past, where people have had previous injuries or medical conditions, these have often been exacerbated by the nature of the terrain. Much of the work is physical and even basic cleaning duties involve you moving around the site, the equivalent of a five storey building!! Also at times, all staff need to be involved in some physical tasks, such as clearing snow, moving gravel, mopping out flood water, etc. Please think carefully if you are physically capable of such work or if such work is compatible with your physical condition.

Living in a Caravan/The Lodge: Staff will have either a room in the lodge or a caravan. Possibly a caravan is not what the majority of people would consider to be ideal accommodation, especially when it's stuck on the side of a mountain and totally exposed to the raw elements e.g.: howling wind, torrential rain and blinding blizzards! However, the amount of time you actually spend in your caravan is minimal because facilities such as bathrooms, kitchen and socialising areas are based within the main building and the lodge. Generally, it is used for times when you want to sleep, relax or have some privacy and for these it is more than adequate. All caravans have mains-electricity, kettles and heating thus can be quite cosy and homelike. Most people are able to adapt the caravan to their particular requirements.

The Lodge: Part of the lodge is available for use as a common room and cooking area for our staff. This is open from 09-00 until 23-00, during the week. Please remember that it is also some staff's home so please respect this. If the place turns into a tip, then it will become one of the things on the daily cleaning list! Also if you are watching a DVD late at night and people need to go to bed at 23-00, then sorry, either take it to the kid's common room or save it for another time.

Free Time: Although initially you may feel you are stuck in the middle of nowhere, there are in fact plenty of things to do in your free time. During the day, some of the options are: mountain biking, walking, volleyball, table tennis, shopping in nearby towns and villages, swimming in the Tarn, sightseeing/exploring the area, watching videos, sunbathing (weather permitting), sledging (weather permitting), or a just take long siesta. Things to do in the evening include: socialising in 'Raymondos' (you will take your turn serving behind the bar each week), visiting local cafe's/bars, eating traditional French cuisine at a reasonable price in the area's restaurants or dancing the night away at a local venue.

Staff Car: You'll be pleased to know that whilst at the Nest you'll have access to a company staff car (currently a Peugeot Partner). This is primarily for collecting essential equipment, moving tutors up to the ski lodge, getting coach drivers around etc. They are also there to provide the staff with a bit of freedom for getting about locally. For non drivers (and anyone else) there are also a couple of mountain bikes available.

Health and safety: We try to provide a healthy and safe environment in which both you and visitors to the centre are not put at risk. Staff will undertake a period of induction and training at the start of their employment at the centre. Since you will be in contact with young people, it will be necessary for you to complete a Criminal Records form and undergo a Disclosure check with the Criminal Records Bureau. We aim to appoint staff on merit and will not discriminate against those with a criminal record other than where it is necessary for safety. Staff should ensure that they have a valid European Health Insurance Card to provide medical cover whilst working in France. Discover will also require you to have annual travel insurance, which will cover working abroad to cover any other risks. This will normally be arranged on your behalf on appointment.

Travelling to and from the centre: Discover will arrange and cover the cost of your travel between the UK to France at the start and end of the season. This will normally be on the low cost airline flight from the UK to a 'local' airport. Transport will be arranged from the airport to the Centre (can be 3 hrs by car). Anyone wishing to use alternative transport (rail, own car, etc) will need to arrange this themselves and will only receive the equivalent of the airfare. We are able to get discounted tickets on the Dover-Calais ferry. During time off, staff may also wish to make use of coaches bringing groups to and from the centre. This must be agreed in advance with the Course Director and is subject to the agreement of the schools involved.

Coaches and Coach Drivers: Most groups travel to and from the centre by coach. Since we use only two companies the regular drivers are an important part of the team. They also provide a means of obtaining those hard-to-get items (white sliced bread, marmite, brown sauce etc) as well as bringing supplies for the centre. We therefore ask that you try to maintain the good relationship that has built up over the years between drivers and our staff.

Permanent Staff: Some of our staff are permanent residents. These are Mike McHugo (Director), Gilly (his wife), one of their daughters, Danielle, and Dave (Director of Geography). If you want to know about the local area, or need any other advice about living in France then please do not hesitate to ask. We own property here so can offer impartial advice about this aspect if anyone is interested.

Visitors: During your time at the Nest you may wish to have people staying with you. Normally guests should visit when groups are not in residence (since young people will be resident on site). Visits at other times are normally not a problem as long as they do not interfere with work.

However, we do ask that a few simple rules are followed:

1. All guests intending to stay at the centre must be confirmed with the Centre Manager at least two weeks in advance.

2. All visitors should be aware of the centre rules and not break or encourage students to break these rules.
3. Visitors will be expected to pay for food and accommodation unless they are working to cover these costs.
4. Travel to and from the Nest is at the visitor's expense.
5. Centre rooms may be used only with the agreement of the Centre Manager.
6. You are responsible for the behaviour and any costs incurred by your guests.

General Points: You may not always be totally content at the Centre. By all means speak to someone about what is bothering you, but restrict the information to a member of staff who can do something positive to help. Avoid "badmouthing" which does not look good for yourself or the company e.g. moaning about an aspect of the centre to teachers and/or students. Our aim is to create a positive rather than a negative impression. Occasionally however, the odd problem will arise as with any business environment. If anyone approaches you with some form of complaint try to act responsibly for the Centre as a whole. Rather than passing the buck and saying "it wasn't me, it was so and so", accept that there is a problem and start off by apologising. Then go on to suggest how to rectify the problem or at least explain why it exists. Saying sorry can help to pacify the other person and sometimes halve the problems before you've attempted tackling it.

Meals: Whilst you are employed at the centre, normally all food is provided by the centre. We usually eat as a group after the students. When groups are not here we usually eat together with someone taking responsibility for cooking a meal. We also have a number of meals out in local restaurants during the season. Vegetarian meals are available.

Communications: Although the site is in a remote location you can still be in touch with the outside world. We have a wireless system covering much of the centre and computers available in the resource room. Bringing your own laptop gives greater flexibility. Post is delivered daily and mobile signal has become more reliable over the years.

Conclusion: If you work here it's because you want to be here, the job and the life and linked together. We offer the experience of working abroad in a spectacular, unspoilt and happy environment, with the opportunity to meet many new people and most importantly to work hard and have fun! We can't guarantee that everything will be perfect, but many of our former staff have contacted us at some point in the future, to say how enjoyable/rewarding the experience has been.

Gilly McHugo
March 2016