

Remote Supervision

What is remote supervision?

Remote supervision is when the safety and well-being of a group is monitored from a distance, with limited direct contact with the group.

Our remote supervision takes place in open countryside and mountainous terrain, but as a parent it is probably something you already do with your children in urban settings. Think back to the first time you took your child to the local shopping mall. Perhaps the first time you went you walked round with them. Following that you may have gone and had a coffee, told them where you were but let them shop on their own making a pre-arranged meeting time. You would have been happy to do this as you knew them well and had confidence in their independence in that environment, and had a good knowledge of the area. Conversely there are probably areas you will not let them go on their own as you may be aware of potential hazards. The principles don't change much in the mountains.

Giving groups this independence can result in an increase of perceived risk but the level of actual risk should not change when remote supervision is carried out effectively.

Why do we need remote supervision on a DofE Expedition?

In order to complete your DofE expedition you need to have met the 20 Expeditions conditions laid down by The Award. The first of these is that the expedition is unaccompanied and self sufficient without outside assistance. For this objective to be met groups cannot be "led" by their instructor, rather be under their own steam making decisions themselves along the way. But of course we are still responsible for the safety of the group, so they must be monitored throughout, and we do this by remote supervision.

Alison Culshaw and her team work hard to achieve the correct balance of safety and supervision, so that the group "feel" like they are on their own rather than knowing they are being closely shadowed.

How do we "remotely supervise" DofE groups?

- 1.** We train the groups appropriately in all of the skills they will need to be self sufficient in their chosen environment. We gain a good knowledge of their ability, so that we are able to predict their reactions when we are on the hill. We have confidence in what they know and what they don't know, and develop faith and trust in their ability. This is why all of our expeditions, and any of our tailor-made programmes, involve an element of training before embarking on an expedition that involves remote supervision.
- 2.** We will have direct and current, personal knowledge of the expedition area. We have carried out a full location specific risk assessment and are aware of any potential hazards. Where appropriate we will pass this knowledge onto the group.
- 3.** Using a combination of experience in the field, extensive prior knowledge from working with these groups, and constant review of our procedures we are able to make sound judgements, and position ourselves appropriately throughout the expedition in order to maintain safety and risk management. We will then use a level of supervision appropriate to the group and the conditions.

4. We make a full assessment of their route and continually make dynamic risk assessments once on expedition taking into consideration prevailing conditions.
5. We have the ability to move fast and efficiently on the hill, something we believe is essential to remote supervision, in order to get to the group quickly should they need us. Where terrain allows we will use bikes to aid this process.
6. Where appropriate we will make use of modern communication systems (Radios, Mobile Phones, GPS), both between instructors, and the instructor and the group. But we are firm believers that nothing can replace competence and technology will only assist, and will pass this message on to our DofE groups.

“It cannot be stressed enough that the whole process of allowing groups to travel independently through open country in a safe and efficient manner is dependent upon a thoughtful and thorough training programme that shows careful progression and emphasises the need for effective communication both within the group and between group members and instructors.” MLTE Guidelines

For Further Reading and Guidance on Remote Supervision

MLTE Remote Supervision Guidance Notes, Tel 01690 720314. Available on their website for £5

Hill Walking – The Official Handbook of The Mountain Leader and Walking Group Leader Schemes.
ISBN 0-9541511-0-0 £14.99