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Mountain Wilderness International

Adventure Project “BY FAIR MEANS” 2012

The present situation makes it clear that wilderness is under a two-fold threat, the first being the ever less-controlled physical aggression of natural resources “just for fun”, often in the mountains, which Mountain Wilderness attempts to stop with its various initiatives. The second threat is more subtle and concerns the behaviour of people who enjoy nature and the mountains, even enthusiasts who are potentially respectful. In this case a personal relationship with the wilderness is fading, and is being replaced by an increasing relationship with technology. Not man and nature, but a bionic being who mostly reacts to technological instructions and information. The ancient ability hidden in man and the even more ancient reactions of nature – revealed when both meet “honestly” – are disappearing. When a sincere relationship with the wilderness is missing, the knowledge of its value also fades. Therefore, today it is the task of Mountain Wilderness International to stimulate this relationship with nature, to base it on practical experiences made “by fair means”, to give evidence of nature's value and to involve other peoples in this research.

The Project

I submit to the Guarantors and members of MWI a project based on my personal experience in this field, reassured by the knowledge that many similar adventures have always been successful in the past. I propose to organize a walking experience in the wilderness for a group of international members of MWI. The number of participants could be 10-15 persons (possibly 2-3 from each country). It should be a crossing on foot of a mostly wild mountain area. There would be no impressive goals, such as a well-known peak or a famous wall, because we would concentrate only on style, on the behaviour of the group and on the response of nature. A profound experience is the objective.

The Style

Here is what I consider “by fair means”: the group moves in complete self-sufficiency (with the exception, if necessary, of a single stop at a small village to buy food) and isolation, relying only on the experience, culture and instinct of the participants to find a path and cross the area. The group will carry tents, sleeping bags, cooking stove, appropriate clothing, food, some mountaineering tools, but no technological devices to replace human sensitivity or to avoid having to understand the territory. Therefore, we shall have no maps, nor compass, altimeters, watches and of course no telephones, radio, GPS. The only electronic gadgets allowed will be photo and video cameras (clocks or GPS, if any, should be switched off). Thus, the group will travel day after day guided by the sun, the wind, the position of mountains

or particular valleys, the direction of water flows, by lakes and the shape of watersheds. Before departure, each member will imagine in his or her mind a simple “mental map” of the region, which is not memorizing a printed map, but rather studying the “logic” of the territory, understanding the geology or the geometry of the area, which gives it shape by repetition or variation. With this “logic” in mind, we will enter the wilderness and it will point the way to our adventure. We can refine this “mental map” in our own minds partly before departure, partly together the day before the crossing begins. This means that we could get lost, and therefore we will have to find our way again: thus we will establish a deep relationship with nature.

Timing

I suggest the trip should last 15-16 days at the most, including the train trip, or flight, and return. So the actual walk should last about 14 days, sufficient time for the creation of an intense experience, but within a reasonable amount of everybody’s leave, avoiding problems for some of us.

The Area

As this will be the first time a group of MWI undertakes such an adventure, and we want to keep expenses low, I suggest that for 2012 we stay in Europe (at a later stage we could go further away). For this kind of experience in Europe the most suitable area is in the North, where we can find open space, freedom of movement, wilderness and beauty. After a consultation with MWI delegates, I suggest this area:

– Northern Scandinavia

This would be a demanding, significant and fascinating trip. I consider the best area for our purpose to be the one just South of the 68th parallel (therefore within the Arctic Circle) between Sweden and Norway. It offers a fabulous, uninhabited mountain landscape, both on the Swedish and the Norwegian side. Should we be able to adhere to the route from the eastern lakes to the wild fjords of the West, we would cross only one trekking track in Sweden, and one bitumen road in Norway, so the idea of “wilderness” would be respected. In theory, we could start from the small village of Kvikkjokk, cross the great Sarek National Park (devoid of signs and built up areas), then cross the Kungsleden path and proceed North of the great Virihaure and Vastenjaure lakes in the Padjelanta National Park. Would enter Norway in the maze of mountains, lakes and streams of the Nordland, cross the E-6 road in the Sørfjordmo area. Finally, we would reach the articulated peninsula of Sørfold, up to the peaks and fjords from which you can see the ocean (again: provided we can maintain the route, otherwise we could end up elsewhere and it would be an interesting new experience). As the crow flies the distance would be about 160 km, but surely more than 200 km on very rough terrain. This area has many glaciers and rock walls. We could avoid most of them, but it would be advisable to have ropes, ice axes and crampons with us. Access: a flight to Gällivare or Piteå or Luleå, and then by train and/or bus to Kvikkjokk (or a flight to a Southern Swedish town and then by train and bus, according to costs). On the way back, it may be convenient to take a plane in Norway from Bodø or Narvik, or return to Sweden from these places and

then fly home.

The Difficulty

The crossing suggested should not be considered a simple trekking, it's definitely more demanding. You have to adapt to isolation, to the uncertainty of your position and the direction where you are going. The foreseeable weight of your pack is at least 20-25 kg (the weight diminishes as food is used). Within a group sharing a tent, it would be advisable to distribute the weight, so that not-so-strong people could carry a lighter pack and still be able to participate. Anybody with some training and strong motivation can make it if we help each other. It should also be kept in mind that owing to the conditions of the terrain, we are bound to have feet, socks and boots almost always wet. Because of snow, swamps and the crossing of large streams, it is impossible to keep your boots dry. A change of boots is useless, because they are immediately soaked too. Apart from all that, we would face the difficulty of moving mainly without paths, therefore walking on tundra, stones, glaciated rocks, snow fields, very steep grass slopes, thick and low vegetation (dwarf birches, dwarf willows, ferns) and of course the fords, which can be demanding. (It could become necessary to move up river to reach a point of lower water flow, or to reach an area on low land where the river splits into several branches). We shouldn't need to climb frequently, except if we decide to climb a peak or a high pass to enrich the adventure. Furthermore, everybody will be very hungry, but food will be rationed to limit within reason the weight to be carried. There will be no way of seeking rescue operations, as in previous adventures, which means heightening the level of prudence and discarding the illusion of absolute security, so fashionable nowadays.

The Equipment

You simply need strong trekking garments, solid but lightweight boots with good treads, a rucksack of at least 65 litres (better if 70), a good sleeping bag and mattress, a two-layer, wind and rain resistant tent, anorak and water-proof trousers, stove, canteen, sticks, essential medicines, mosquito spray, camera, basic mountaineering equipment, if the choice of itinerary requires it. A detailed list will be made available later.

When ?

For various reasons, the month of June appears to be the best choice. In fact, more people go to these areas in July and August, lowering the sense of wilderness. In Scandinavia the number of mosquitos is just incredible, until mid-August really unbearable. Furthermore, many of our members have engagements with their families or their work in the mountains. June can offer more difficult environmental conditions (snow and melting water are plentiful, but there is midnight sun without a single hour of dark). However, I believe that such conditions belong to the spirit of adventure which MW is seeking. I suggest to consider the following terms: from about June 10th to June 25th.

In order to organize the trip, first of all we have to know if members interested in the

initiative are available during the period mentioned. So we look forward to your reaction and reply!

The Cost

As no special items are required, I take it for granted that all interested members already have the necessary clothes and equipment for this trip. The first and the last night will be spent in lodgings (perhaps in a campground or a bungalow), all the other nights will be spent in our tents, free of cost. We shall have to go to a supermarket to shop for nutritious and lightweight food for 15 days and cooking fuel (we can do it all the first day, or otherwise partially the first day and again half way, when we reach a built-up area). There is no possibility of buying anything during the crossing. So the substantial cost is travel at the beginning and at the end. The sooner we choose our destination, the easier it will be to find low cost tickets. In any case, the total cost per person should be well below 1.000 Euro (personally, I have always spent considerably less for this kind of trip).

The Objectives

In my opinion this initiative has two meaningful aims:

1) The experience would contribute to the creation of an international group of MW members with an increased awareness and experience in the realm of approaching the mountain “by fair means”. An experience of this kind would be an example and a stimulus. Each participant could develop the idea in his own fashion and develop different kinds of mountaineering or exploratory initiatives, always stressing the value and importance of a loyal relationship with nature. Should this first experiment be a success, it would be useful if, in the future, the initiative be adapted to local conditions by organizing tours in each country, thus increasing the awareness of this different approach to mountains.

2) Furthermore, it is necessary to use this experience to spread the news of this approach “by fair means” to the mountains by publishing reports in the specialized press, on the web and by photo exhibitions, conferences and possibly video-documentation. Therefore, each group should arrange a preliminary agreement with the specialized press and interested associations for the presentation of the trip after our return. Furthermore, the material collected during the adventure should be used by MW during their various events. Every participant should therefore be encouraged to take beautiful photos and to take notes. An important goal would be to produce a professional video stressing the significance and importance of this new approach. This would require a first-class professional to focus only on the video, not having other tasks to accomplish during the trip. His pack should be lighter to allow him to move around with ease. Please let me know if you know of a qualified operator interested in joining MWI as a volunteer.

Suggestions

In order to start organizing the trip, we now wait for the comments and suggestions

by the delegates from the various MWI countries, so we can adapt the project to the common requirements. I am convinced that if we will be able to leave, we will experience a great adventure to the benefit of future MW activities!