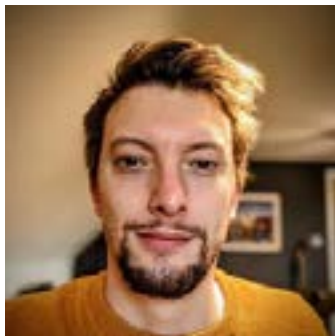




Studying the International Diploma in Expedition and Wilderness Medicine: A PARTICIPANT'S VIEW

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Over the course of 2017-2018, I joined delegates from the UK, Australia and the USA to study [the International Diploma in Expedition and Wilderness Medicine](#) at the [Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow](#). Led by an experienced and enthusiastic faculty, this was a highlight of my career so far.



*The warm glow of a campfire near Glenmore Lodge, Scotland
(photo credit: Dr Ruairaidh Ellison)*

I chose to study the diploma for several reasons. I had attended a short expedition medicine course previously, and wanted to learn more about how I could combine medicine with my love of the great outdoors. I was particularly interested in learning more about altitude and cold-related injuries, and I wanted to be able to put this knowledge into context, and understand the process of planning and preparing for an expedition.



Teaching from Mountain Rescue doctors Mike and Karen Greene (photo credit: Dr Ruairaidh Ellison)



Learning winter skills in the corries of the Cairngorms, Scotland (photo credit: Dr Ruairaidh Ellison)

In the rapidly developing field of expedition and wilderness medicine, I also felt that it was important to have an academic qualification. Whilst, historically no expedition doctor has been subject to legal action following an expedition, unfortunately medicine as a whole is progressing in this direction. The GMC states that doctors must recognise and work within the limits of their competence. I work predominantly within General Practice, and whilst many medical issues on expedition are often related to primary care, I felt that I should obtain a reputable qualification if I wanted to further develop my career working as an expedition medic.

The diploma combined practical experiences with a series of fascinating lectures from worldwide experts. These included Professor David Warrell: one of the world's leading figures in tropical medicine, Dr Lucy Hawkes: an expert on Physiological Ecology and of course the authors of the [Oxford Handbook of Expedition and Wilderness Medicine](#), and course co-founders, Dr Jon Dallimore and Mr James Moore.

We had sessions learning about mountain medicine with Dr Mike Greene, the National Medical Officer for Mountain Rescue England and Wales, dentistry and facial trauma workshops run by Mr Burj Langdana (www.wildernessdentistry.com) and



The DDRC hyperbaric chamber, Plymouth (photo credit: Dr Daniel Grace)

were able to fine tune our navigation skills with Nigel Williams, the former head of training at Glenmore Lodge in Scotland. The course had some great residential components. We learnt swift-water rescue techniques, visited the hyperbaric dive chamber at the DDRC in Plymouth, learnt

winter ice-axe skills in the Cairngorms and also had the chance to go caving.

The diploma also had a strong academic influence, to give us a grounding in the theories and research that under-pinned these practical



Simulated casualty extraction from a vehicle (photo credit: Dr Ruairaidh Ellison)

sessions. There were modules covering infectious and tropical diseases, cold injury, altitude, thermal injury and emporiatrics. Throughout the diploma, there was an emphasis upon developing the skills needed to assess acutely unwell patients in adverse environments. Getting comfortable at operating in resource limited locations and also

understanding the wider logistical issues and human factors involved in these scenarios was really valuable.

The course culminated in an expedition to Morocco, which we had been looking forward to since starting. Here we trekked in the foothills



The foothills of the Atlas Mountains, Morroco (photo credit: Dr Ruaraidh Ellison)



Ropework in the Atlas Mountains (photo credit: Dr Ruaraidh Ellison)



Sunset in the Agafay Desert, Morocco (photo credit: Dr Ruaraidh Ellison)



Scorpion spotting in the Agafay Desert Morocco (photo credit: Dr Ruaraidh Ellison)

of the Atlas Mountains, encountering simulated medical scenarios and being tested on the rope and navigation skills that we had learnt over the course of the diploma. This was followed by time spent in the dessert, where we set up water stills,

went night time scorpion watching and slept out under the stars. This was a great end to the trip. We all developed a healthy addiction to mint tea and left with new friends, great memories and a highly regarded academic qualification.

Since completing the diploma, I have been lucky enough to work with the British Exploring Society as their lead medic in the Canadian Yukon. I have also worked on various ultra-marathon events and the Deloitte Ride Across Britain Cycle event in the UK. I am due to work on a trip to Sri Lanka later this year and am currently studying for

the DTM&H up in Liverpool, fuelled by a desire to discover more about tropical medicine from Professor David Warrell! Fellow participants have worked as medics on expeditions in India, the Amazon and the Antarctic and many more have exciting plans in the pipe-line.



Making morning coffee on expedition in the Yukon, Canada (photo credit: Dr Daniel Grace)

“
ONE THING WE ALL HAVE IN COMMON IS THAT
WE WISH WE COULD DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN!
”

Daniel writes a blog at www.thewildernessmedic.com and is also the host of **The Wilderness Medic Podcast**, which is available on all podcast platforms.