

## Diverse Dragon, North Devon 2008

On the first day of Ex Diverse Dragon our group kick started the week with a bout of kayaking, taking place mainly in the estuary, with a quick foray into the local sewer network. The day began quite serenely, paddling upstream, with the tide doing most of the hard work, giving everyone a chance to get used to the kayaks. We then had a somewhat wet picnic, with more time...

Mon 07/07/08 ... spent in the water than eating on dry land. This was followed by a series of games including British Bulldog a la kayak and a boys v girls polo match, the score of which is still in dispute due to the farcical nature of the match! The group then went back down stream for a spot of impromptu spa treatment, which soon descended into mud wrestling and general debauchery, ending in many of our group being unrecognisable. The day was rounded off by a series of raft building exercises and relay races across the estuary. Other groups took part in a day of rock climbing and zip slide. Some found it more challenging than others. The zip slide didn't exactly inspire confidence while it creaked and swayed precariously in the wind. Poor positioning of a ladder at the end of the slide meant that stopping was problematic and many a collision ensued. Despite these setbacks the first day ended with smiles all around and everyone looking forward to a relaxing evening and the events of tomorrow.

Tue 08/07/08 The second day of the exercise greeted us with some better weather. This was good news for all three groups, with Mountain Biking, Coasteering and Clay Pigeon Shooting, and Surfing being the order of the day. The morning session was especially good for surfing with the waves being gentle enough for the beginners, whilst still providing a challenge for the more experienced amongst us. After a safety brief and some concise instruction we hit the waves and everyone was soon standing up. Some of us started to feel the effects of being battered around by the waves for 2 hours and so a brief break for lunch helped recharge our batteries and we returned to the surf with more confidence all round, waves being caught left, right and centre and the day again ending on a high.

The Clay Pigeon session was again enjoyed by the participants, despite the strong winds adding another challenge to the day. Accuracy was less than high for most of the group, Craig Miles high scoring with a 50% hit rate and many failing to hit a single clay. However Coasteering was by far the favourite of the two activities with points for 'salmon impression' jumps being awarded for effort and commitment to the pose as impact loomed. The mountain biking group returned today after having a challenging yet enjoyable two days across Exmoor. A couple of leaking tents added to the fun and will have been character building to say the least.

Overall day two was another great day, highlighted by the number of people asleep in bed as soon as the activities were over. This evening's social is to be a trip to the cinema, which is no doubt being looked forward to by many as a chance to relax out for a few hours to help prepare for another good day tomorrow.

Wed 09/07/08 Today we were greeted with the worst weather out of the three days, this however did not stop the activities and all continued as planned. Climbing took place inside and despite the lack of height on the indoor walls, offered other challenges to our group. The day started with a warm up which involved us having to complete a full circuit of the bouldering wall, this however, proved too much for the majority of us and defeated all but one. Fun and games were held in the bouldering room whilst others concurrently tried their hand on the higher walls. Despite a fair few tight harness situations, success was achieved by all, eventually! Lunch was followed by a move outdoors, braving the wind and the rain to reach the top of the tower from where 'abseiling' or forced falling and the zip slide took place. The other groups were mountain biking and kayaking respectively. Again the weather put a dampener on things with the kayaking ending slightly earlier than planned. The high tide also meant a lucky escape from the enforced mud fighting! The group on the mountain bikes rallied in the face of inclement weather. The bikers headed off to the nearest pub for food, drink and general merriment. But by eleven it was time to head back to our dry/wet tents to sleep and dream of dry roads. Hopefully tomorrow will prove to be somewhat drier for all groups to ensure that each activity is experienced to the full!

Thurs 10/07/08 The fourth day of Exercise Diverse Dragon started a good deal brighter than the two previous days, with the rain having subsided over night and the sun making a rare appearance in the morning sky. By this point the groups had started to move on to ground already covered by previous groups, and so all were waiting with baited breath for the days events, with perhaps exception to the cyclists after yesterdays downpours. It was our group's turn to have a go at. The general feeling throughout the group was that this was the best day, although it was not suited to all, due to the range of cliffs and heights scaled during the day. Preferences aside it was seen as the most challenging and adrenaline inducing, and certainly required everyone to overcome their fear and step out of their comfort zones. We started off with some low scale belly flopping contests. We then moved onto bigger and better jumps, exploring different parts of the cliffs in doing so. We then moved onto the biggest cliff of the day, which proved to be a leap of faith for all those who completed it. Some were braver than others, but everybody eventually summoned enough courage to avoid a humiliating descent back down the rocks. The increasing waves started to sap the strength of some of our members, but the day ended very much on a high. Good weather and Clay pigeon shooting followed with our group having considerably more success, with a new set up following previous groups low scores, with only one member failing to hit a clay.

Poor winds meant that power kiting had to give way to surfing, however it proved to be as awesome as experienced by the previous group. Even the beginners of the group achieved success by the end of the day. The cyclists returned having a much better days riding than that of yesterday. All the activities of the day have worked up keen appetites for tonight's bbq for the last social of the trip, and with the trip coming to an end; we are all keen to

give the remaining activities our best efforts and to enjoy them to the full! The weather held again and the group woke, some easier than others. The CO accompanied on our night out in Barnstaple and despite not knowing all the words to our generations favourite songs, got stuck in on the chorus.

Friday 11/06/08 Again we woke up to y  
uninviting weather, perhaps the worst yet; and an extremely wet, 50 km bike ride wasn't at the top today's  
'to do list' for our group. However this wouldn't be adventure training if it was easy! The ride started with a steep hill, and those who had opted to go for the 'hardcore' approach of not wearing waterproofs started to regret their decisions as they quickly started to resemble drowned rats. As the morning went on, and the terrain flattened out we came round to the idea that cycling could actually be quite enjoyable. As the day went on and the sun made an appearance, morale increased, and a trip to a local village shop where we stocked up on sugary treats meant that the day was starting to pan out quite well. After an extremely hard days cycling in a county that only seems to have 'up hills', the warm showers of the campsite and the local pub were welcomed with open arms.

Saturday 12/06/08 Finally, after a well needed lie in till 8.30 am, we wake up to some sun! Before setting off we all sat down to a gluttonous breakfast comprising of freshly baked scones, Devonshire clotted cream and an array of jams. Both the sun, our delicious breakfast and the prospect of just a 15 km ride, put smiles on many a face. With many more 'downhill's' and flat areas than the day before, there seemed to be a more positive attitude towards mountain biking. The surfers made the most of the half day we had to perfect the skill of standing up, and they all seemed to enjoy the challenge but I think yet again there was more time spent in the water than on the actual boards.

Summary In conclusion, the overall weeks adventure training was thought to have gone very well by all. Even though on record there was more rain in just one day of the week than the whole month of July from the previous year! We would all like to thank Sergeant Major Painter, PSI Aberystwyth Company, for organising such a fun filled and successful trip.