

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO THE AGM**

**Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2010**

**Report for the year to 30<sup>th</sup> January 2010**

### **2009 AGM and Gathering**

The 2009 AGM took place on 31<sup>st</sup> January. Twenty-eight members of the Society attended. The Patron-in-Chief, HRH the Duke of York was unable to attend.

The Annual Gathering followed. Presentations were made by each of the 2008 expeditions, as ever to a very high standard and highly entertaining, and were enjoyed by an audience of nearly 700, including many parents and supporters of the Society. These were followed by the chance to socialise and view the displays prepared. The afternoon was followed by a fine dinner and dancing into the small hours at Jury's Great Russell Street Hotel.

### **2009 – A Challenging but Successful Year**

The year has brought many challenges as we strive to create a stable platform for growth and expansion of our activities in the years ahead. The demands of the global recession have certainly impacted on the fundraising climate, especially for the Young Explorers (YEs) raising funds to participate. Participant numbers have however increased to 204, the highest since 1995, and we have achieved a small financial surplus. This is a significant achievement in these testing times, and is the result of a sustained effort by all concerned, and especially from the Committees who guide the activities of the BSES office.

In 2009 expeditions took place to the Amazon, Ladakh, Greenland, Northern Norway and Svalbard. The Leadership Development Programme ran alongside the kayak expedition in Northern Norway, and the Gap Year expedition to Svalbard ran in the spring. These were well and safely run, and the prevailing themes of challenge and adventure with purpose were to the fore in the planning and implementation.

Our 2010 expeditions are now well into their recruiting periods, and we expect to be in excess of 200 Young Explorers into the field in 2010. Expeditions will be to the Amazon, Ladakh and Svalbard. We will also run a Gap Year expedition to Svalbard as in the last year.

Recruitment for 2010 is likely to be challenging once again, and we remain focused on this task above all others. The challenges of this year that face us in the year ahead must not be underestimated.

### **Science, Outreach, Recruitment Partnerships, Youth Development Model**

We continue to focus on relevant scientific issues for the wilderness environment in partnership with a range of educational institutions and academic organisations. We are pleased that the quality and relevance of the work done continues to improve, along with high levels of interest for the Young Explorers.

We have also developed our outreach activities in the year through the Next Generation programme, and have built a valuable partnership with the Army, including Junior Soldiers from the Army Foundation College and Bursars from the Further Education Colleges' bursary scheme.

We have further refined our youth development model, with focus on the development of skills and virtues that are highly valued by employers and virtues that are recognised as cornerstones of a successful life.

These areas remain the essential foundation of BSES's activities and continue to differentiate us from the many other organisations that operate in the field of youth adventure and travel.

### **Sales & Marketing**

Selling our expeditions is the major ongoing challenge. In an increasingly busy and competitive marketplace our YE recruitment seems to be holding steady. We have developed and expanded regional marketing teams, re-worked and re-launched the website, and now use web-based and social networking tools to a far greater extent than ever. We have also actively developed a number of recruitment partnerships.

## **Fundraising**

Our fundraising campaign goes from strength to strength. Our traditional priority of approaches to Trusts and Foundations is proving more and more successful. Improved corporate fundraising remains on our wish list, but has remained at the mercy of available time and resources. We have run a successful fundraising abseil event 'Everest in a Day', and will repeat this in 2010.

## **The BSES Office and Staff Team**

In the last 12 months we have been as busy as ever. We have seen some staff changes, and have had a great deal of expertise added by the members of the Committees who have been especially active. We continue to benefit from highly motivated and hard working staff. An ethos of 'can do' and work far beyond the call of duty permeates the office.

We have said goodbye to Expeditions Managers Nancy Pickup and Tim Moss, and also to Louisa Peaver (who has had a series of roles, most recently as Science Co-ordinator). Their enthusiasm and diligence has been an essential part of the success of the 2009 expeditions. The Executive Director, Will Taunton-Burnet will be leaving the Society in February 2010, and will be replaced by Lt Gen Peter Pearson CB CBE. During the year we have welcomed Andrew Stokes-Rees as Senior Expeditions Manager, and Jamie Abbey as Expeditions Co-ordinator.

Charlie Masding remains as Marketing Manager, Patrick O'Hara as Expeditions Manager, Dorothy Tomalin as Expeditions Co-ordinator, Les Mollison as Finance Officer and Jackie Kerr as Consultant Fundraiser. We have also added interns, temporary assistants and work experience students to our team in the past year. These have added a great deal of extra capacity, and have quickly become valuable members of the team. We offer our thanks to Josh Davis, Tim Ward-Wilson, Anouk Sallansonnet, Tor Harmer, Suzanna Jerrard, Lucy Bruzzone, Sam Williams, Thomas Pitt, Sam Bosanquet and Hugh Wilson for their great commitment and enthusiasm for BSES's work. I would also like to mention our hard working archivist, Justin Warwick. On behalf of the Society I would like to record my thanks to them for all that they have so willingly contributed during the year.

It is with great sadness that I have to report the tragic accidental death of Tim Ward-Wilson in the Atlas Mountains in December 2009. Tim was a greatly valued member of the team during his internship, as well as becoming a great friend of the Society and demonstrating himself to be an excellent expedition leader and inspirer of young people with great potential. Our thoughts and sincerest best wishes go to his family. Tim was a fine example of the very best of BSES's values and virtues.

## **Thank You**

I will end by thanking all those who so willingly give up their free time to help BSES bring its unique brand of youth development to our Young Explorers. They include members of Council, the Committees, the Chief Leaders and all the Expedition Leaders. Just as important, but rather less visible are our all those who assist with marketing, promotion, interviewing and mentoring. The collective BSES volunteer effort continues to be the envy of other organisations and is enormously appreciated. It is an essential part of our ongoing success, and it combines to make a real difference to the Young Explorers.

Above all, however, it is the expedition leader teams, led with extraordinary commitment and passion by the Chief Leaders who deserve the greatest thanks. These volunteers undertake to lead, inspire and manage the safety of the Young Explorers in some of the most remote and challenging expedition environments ever visited by groups of this age. That we have achieved another safe and successful year is tribute to them and their expertise, and they have our greatest respect and the thanks of all concerned.

Finally, I would like to add that it has been a great privilege to work for BSES for the last five years. The absolute commitment and passion of all involved is extremely special and I am honoured to have been a part of this fine organisation. I wish my successor well, and trust that BSES will continue to provide its rare and valuable service for many, many years to come.

We hope to see you at the AGM and Gathering. You are always welcome to visit the office here at the Royal Geographical Society if you have the opportunity, and above all, please do keep in touch with the Society.

**Will Taunton-Burnet**  
**Executive Director, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2010**