



Inquest into the death of Andrew Lucas on the 2009 Brathay Exploration Group expedition to the Picos de Europa, Spain

On 30 July last year, Andrew Lucas, aged 17, from Louth in Lincolnshire, fell to his death while on a BEG expedition to the Picos mountains in northern Spain. The group were undertaking a high level trekking expedition along established mountain routes followed by many people each year. At the time of the death they were camping, with other groups, at a high level Refugio largely surrounded by cliffs.

The inquest into Andrew's death was held in Skegness on 11 May 2010. The coroner considered various written statements and heard witnesses, who were all subject to careful questioning by the coroner and interested parties. Witnesses included all the expedition leaders; members of the expedition; representatives from the Young Explorers Trust which had independently assessed and approved the expedition; and an independent expert commissioned to investigate the incident.

The coroner recorded that the death was accidental. In his summing up he made a number of comments critical of the safety aspects of expedition planning and execution.

The Brathay Exploration Group comments:

Andrew was a young man of outstanding potential, and his death leaves a loss which those close to him will never get over.

Adventure expeditions of the type BEG and others organise in challenging environments cannot be without their dangers. The Brathay Exploration Group has been operating for over 60 year, with over 25,000 young people involved all over the world. This is the first time we have experienced a fatality on an expedition. We are studying the coroner's comments most carefully. All appropriate action will be taken in response. We have already acted on the recommendations received following an earlier investigation of the incident.

We are disappointed at the severity of some comment made by the Coroner given that the evidence heard by him from the expedition team and members who were present at the inquest highlighted the steps that were taken and the fact that there was a safety culture throughout. One expeditioner described the leaders as constantly "nagging" and "mothering" the group regarding safety.

The evidence that the Coroner heard from the leaders and those on the expedition also confirmed that the leaders had completed a dynamic risk assessment of the area surrounding the Refuge; that this included the location where the group were to toilet and specified a safe area; and that all of the group, including Andrew, were present when the safety briefing was given which clearly told them not to stray from the safe area.