



## Decentralized cooperation in the Balkans



Macedonia

8<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Assessment & analysis of the assignment in the Hautes-Alpes

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## Participants

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# Itinerary and programme

## Sunday 8 June

Evening arrival in Briançon

## Monday 9 June

Morning – we take the Macedonians to try the Croix de Toulouse via ferrata, above Briançon old town. This type of structure can not yet be found in Macedonia. Very precise safety standards have to be respected, and for the comfort of participants, the cable is completely covered in non-rigid plastic.

Afternoon – we are shown around the CRET by Pierre Hellion, manager of mountain training courses. The CRET represents 30 years of professional training in mountain tourism with a total of 1306 students on 79 courses in 2007. There are 12 full-time employees and 70 consultant trainers; 10 class rooms and accommodation sleeping up to 96 people.

Several courses were running, including training for the mountain leader and aspirant guide entrance exams; for the "rope access" qualification, and a course on safety for the staff of "Espaces Naturels France".

Finalizing the 11-day programme

Late afternoon - Meeting with Jean-Luc Hellion at the Briançon branch of the "Club Alpin Français". He is in charge of the 12 mountain refuges in the Briançon area, with 34 000 bed-nights and a turnover of 400 000 euros. ([www.assoc.pagespro-orange.fr/caf.briancon/](http://www.assoc.pagespro-orange.fr/caf.briancon/))

As well as the figures, Mr Hellion explained how the refuges are run, from construction to contracting the manager.



*View of Briançon, Unesco World Heritage site, from the Croix de Toulouse via ferrata*

## Tuesday 10 June

Morning - visit of the old town, the Briançon tourist office and a bookshop. We found an amazing selection of different books about the mountains from novels and accounts of how people lived long ago, to guides on fauna and flora.

Afternoon - Pick up the hire car - a Renault Kangoo.

Meeting with Benoit Lemaire, mountain leader and planning manager for the Serre Chevalier Mountain guide Office. There are three offices, employing 70 professionals, in the Guisane Valley in Serre Chevalier.



*Mountain Guide Office, Serre Chevalier*

The Guide Office manages Club Mediterranee's summer mountain activity programme, offering mountaineering, hiking, via ferrata, rock climbing, mountain biking and canyoning.

Meeting with Pierre-Yves Marc, president of the Mountain Bike Schools Association, at Monetier les Bains. These MTB schools are run in a similar way to ski schools, and work for the Velonature Company with a stock of 70 mountain bikes. The mountain bike school has published a booklet grading levels of local trails, (no official recognition nationwide as yet). Apparently there is more demand for easy level trails locally, which is not the case on trips abroad!

## Wednesday 11 June

Morning - Getting ready to leave for Savoie and Haute Savoie.

Visit Serre Chevalier Tourist Office, where we were - everyone was very friendly and helpful although we didn't have an appointment and just turned up! Serre Chevalier is the biggest ski resort in the Hautes Alpes and southern Alps ([www.serre-chevalier.com](http://www.serre-chevalier.com)) .

Visit of the resort to see how town planning and the architectural style of building and accommodation has changed since the resort was created in 1950.

Followed by a visit to "Aventure Parc", the first of its kind in Europe, to study the technical equipment installed high up in the trees.

Lunch with students on the CRET rope access training course. They are training for the professional

qualification of rope access worker Level 1. On the programme today – how to work on a pylon.

Afternoon - Trip to Grenoble with a stop at the Ecrins National Park headquarters at Bourg d'Oisans to meet Stephanie Thizy, assistant editor of the magazine Roadbook ([www.roadbookmedia.com](http://www.roadbookmedia.com)). She took part in the Cret's first trip to Macedonia in 2006, publishing an article on Macedonia in Trekmag magazine ([www.trekmag.com](http://www.trekmag.com)) on her return.

## Thursday 12 June

Morning - meeting at the hotel with Bruno Pellicier, president of the Union of International High Mountain Guide Associations (UIAGM [www.ivbv.info/fr](http://www.ivbv.info/fr) ) He explained how a country can join the UIAGM. The best solution for prospective mountain guides from sparsely populated countries with no high mountains is to train in a country like Slovenia where training is not too expensive but is officially recognized by the UIAGM.

Late morning - meeting in Chambéry with Jean-Marc Hermes, the French representative of the Union of International Mountain Leader Associations (UIMLA, [www.uimla.org](http://www.uimla.org) ) whose head office is in Chambéry; M Hermes is also the president of the union for mountain leaders, the SNAM National Mountain Leaders Union. ([www.lesaem.org](http://www.lesaem.org) )



*With Jean-Marc Hermes in Chambéry*

Late afternoon - at the TSL premises (Thones Sports Loisirs - [www.tslsport.com](http://www.tslsport.com) ) in Annecy . This company is the market leader in manufacturing snowshoes with 1.5 million pairs sold worldwide. They donated 15 pairs of snow shoes to the assignment in March. Visit of the show room where the whole range of their equipment is displayed, and the workshop where snow shoes are assembled - 100% made in France!

Overnight at the youth hostel in Chamonix

## Friday 13 June

Long half-day on the Mer de Glace with Cret students who are training for the aspirant guide entrance exam. Yvan Estienne, the guide in charge of training, set up different workshops for instruction on moving on the glacier and different techniques of crampon use. Return to Briançon in the afternoon

and transfer to Ceillac, in the Queyras Regional National Park (PNR).

Overnight at the Baladins "gite d'étape " or stopover gite, built and run by the owners. This type of accommodation with rooms sleeping 4 to 10 people, is mainly aimed at trekkers for one night stopovers and is located in a village as opposed to a mountain refuge or hut which is always in an isolated situation. Present day standards recommend limiting numbers to 6 per room. To meet demand, many gites now offer some double rooms. Passing trade is still given first priority, but it is possible to stay for several nights, especially during the winter.

## **Saturday 14 June**

Half way Point – leisurely morning and feedback session.

Lunch and visit of the bedrooms at the Hotel de la Cascade, a friendly 2 star mountain hotel, at Ceillac. Each room is equipped with locally handcrafted furniture carved with the traditional “rosette” design. When you wake up in the morning, you certainly know which area you are in!

Hike to Sainte Anne Lake at 2415 m. This is the most popular walk in the area and one of the most well known in the Hautes Alpes. In less than an hour and half you reach a big mountain lake at the foot of the highest point in the Queyras National Regional Park, the Font Sancte peak at a height of 3385m. The path passes close to the Ceillac ski lifts giving us the chance to see the facilities, and what alpine ski slopes look like in summer.

Late afternoon visit to the Cime du Melezet refuge, a mountain pasture chalet that used to be the cheese dairy in the hamlet, now renovated and transformed into accommodation. It is accessible by car in summer but not in winter.



*The Cime du Melezet refuge, Ceillac*

## **Sunday 15 June**

Visit of the Saint Veran valley, the highest commune in Europe at 2020m. Morning hike to the Caramantran peak at a height of 3025 m. This summit forms the border with the Italian Val Varaita valley, which was part of the kingdom of France until 1713. Crossborder relationships have remained strong naturally, but also formally, thanks to European Interreg programmes. Although the same language, provençal-piemontais, was spoken on both sides of the border, French remains commonly used today.

As the weather was unsettled we walked down to picnic at the Blanche Refuge at 2499m. Finished in 2006, this refuge has been built to high modern standards.

On our way back we visited the village of Saint Véran with its traditional architecture, and the Gabelous “gite étape”. To finish off our busy day we met up with Eric Debrune, director of ski patrol for the Queyras resorts, to discuss safety matters for ski lifts and slopes in resorts in Macedonia and in France.

## Monday 16 June



Bad weather disrupted our scheduled plans for the day, "encounters at the Pass" with mountain leaders, the Ecrins National Park and the Queyras Regional National Park (PNRQ).

We still managed to meet Agnes Montesinos and Christophe Gerrer from the Queyras Regional National Park as well as Jose Margaillan, a mountain leader from Embrun.

We hiked up to the refuge at Furfande, the only alpine pasture in the Queyras not accessible by road.

We cut the hike short and returned to Ceillac in the beginning of the afternoon to meet Christian Perron, the perfect example of multi-activity in the mountains. He is a mountain leader, a cross country and downhill ski instructor; he rents out furnished accommodation, and is a cabinet maker and wood sculptor.

## Tuesday 17 June

Day at Gap, main town of the "departement."

Meeting with Jean Capella, of the Tourism department at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry ([www.hautesalpes.cci.fr](http://www.hautesalpes.cci.fr)). His role is to ensure the high quality of tourist facilities. What he tells us extremely interesting as it shows that there is still a lot to be done to improve the quality on offer for visitors to the department.

Meeting with Anne Lauzon, from the Departmental Committee of the French Federation for Hiking (FFRP) ([www.ffrandonee.fr](http://www.ffrandonee.fr)) to learn about the infrastructure of paths, sign posting and marking put in place by the General Council.

Meeting with Rene Borel, director of the departmental Committee for Tourism in the Hautes Alpes ([www.hautes-alpes.net](http://www.hautes-alpes.net))

He explained precisely the role each person plays in the organization of tourism in the Hautes Alpes with interesting figures about all the amenities on offer for the tourist. (see appendix)

## Wednesday 18 June

### Morning

We were invited to meet the "Peloton de Gendarmerie de Haute Montagne" (PGHM), the high mountain police unit, which specializes in mountain rescue alternately with the Compagnies Republicaines de Securite (CRS). After a presentation in the police station about the organization of rescues, and a visit by the Commander, we went to the DZ where the helicopters are kept and the mountain rescue team on call are stationed. This is very busy as Briançon is the national police training centre for mountain rescue and several pilots are on duty. As the police on call were not out on assignment, they had time to show us all the equipment including the helicopters.



After a last lunch together we had a feedback session and parted at the end of the afternoon.

## Assessment and Analysis

### Mountain Professionals

During their visit, Antonio Dodevski and Kostatin Ciriviri observed the diversity of mountain leaders' working lives, as well as their close involvement in the organization of tourism in the region. Most of the people in the trade that they met have managed to exploit the many different aspects of their profession. Multi-job holding is very common. For economic reasons or by choice they do different jobs, changing with the seasons or even during one same season. After a lot of correspondance, the meeting with Jean-Marc Hermes (SNAM, UIMLA) proved very worthwhile. Macedonian mountain leaders who had already contacted UIMLA are considered as potential candidates. Mr Hermes explained the procedure to follow to join the UIMLA and a meeting was arranged for the General Meeting in Chambéry in November. He was impressed by their motivation and enthusiasm. They are striving towards the recognition of their profession at the highest level, and are the driving force behind the development of mountain tourism in Macedonia.

### Accommodation

All types of accommodation for tourists were visited from hotels, "gites d'étapes" to mountain refuges. They saw how the type of accommodation varied depending on geographical location, the means of access, the type of client targeted not forgetting the individual owner or manager, a fundamental factor in the Alps as elsewhere.

## Conclusion

Although the previous points are the main ones, it is also important to sum up the Macedonians' trip to the Hautes Alpes.

First of all, the visits were varied both geographically and thematically.

The meetings involved many different sectors regarding tourism economy as well as associations and institutional networks. Some promising prospects, such as safety on the slopes, arose from informal meetings that had not been scheduled.

The depth of the exchanges should also be taken into consideration. Going far beyond a mere social visit, we managed to put people from the same field in touch with each other, people who are professional but unaffected, who speak and understand the same language even if it is not their mother tongue! English as it happens.

Finally, we would like to highlight the fact that all the issues examined share an underlying structure. They are connected in a way which shows how the Hautes Alpes has been striving for more than half a century now to build a homogenous mountain economy out of extremely diverse activities.

They realised that each person met was actively involved in the life of their town or village, not just economically, but in different fields such as environmental problems, recycling, or environmental education.

To sum up, we have to stress the motivation and involvement of our two guests. They were certainly kept busy. It is obvious that they are really keen to see the profession of mountain leader granted official recognition in Macedonia, and that the organization of mountain tourism in general is of fundamental importance.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all organizations and individuals contacted for their help and warm welcome.

We feel that this mission met its main objective namely to let our Macedonian colleagues see with their own eyes that mountain tourism is an economic activity in its own right, a source of employment and income for the local inhabitants of our region.

Given the extent of their commitment to mountain tourism in Macedonia, we are sure that they will succeed in adapting and innovating all they have seen and experienced in France to the local context in Macedonia, thereby leading to a true exchange.

# APPENDICES

## Hautes Alpes Departement

### Details

- Surface area: ( 5 632 km<sup>2</sup>)
- Number of inhabitants: 133 000 (estimated in 2005)
- Population density : 22 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>

Number of communes : 177

- Prefecture : Gap: 37 200 inhabitants
- Sub-prefecture - Briançon : 12 100 inhabitants
- 1/3 of the Department lies above 2 000 m

Two Natural Parks:

- The Ecrins Natural Park (91800 ha or 226842.7 acres protected area ,of which 57 900 ha or 143 074 acres lies within the Hautes Alpes Department)
- the Queyras Regional Natural Park (65 000ha or 160 618.5 acres)

Population by age group:

- under 20: 24.1%
- 20 to 59: 52.4%
- 60 and over: 23.4%

In 2003, the working population was 48 455 employees, with

- 926 employed in agriculture
- 2 664 in industry
- 3 335 in construction
- 41 530 in the service industries

Climate

The average number of hours of sunshine per year is 2 505 ; an average of 905mm rainfall and an average temperature throughout the year of 10.9 °C

Tourism

2006/2007 - 20.3million bed-nights spent by tourists (7.2 million during the winter and 12.3 during the summer season)

- 212 hotels
- 143 guest houses (chambres d'hotes)
- 21 holiday villages
- 44 mountain refuges
- 175 gîtes d'étape (stopover accommodation)
- 25 tourist apartment hotels
- 121 camp sites

Tourism is the main activity, with a total of 338 245 beds for tourists. This can be broken down into 165 823 beds in letting accommodation (hotels, apartments etc), 172 422 beds in holiday homes, and 208 524 beds for tourists in ski resorts.

In 2004, the Department recorded nearly 22.5 million bed-nights spent by tourists which can be broken down to 8.4 million during the winter from December to April, and 14.1 million the rest of the year.

Several different sources estimate turnover from tourism at a billion Euros.

## **Sporting Activities**

- 2 000km of rivers , 500km navigable rivers
- Serre-Ponçon : the largest earthen dam in Europe with a volume of 14 000 000 m3 and a surface area of 3 600m2
- 6 800 km of hiking trails
- 31 ski resorts and 21 Nordic skiing areas , 46% of the Provence Alpes Cote d'Azur region
- 29 sites for hangliding and paragliding
- 4 airfields - 1st European Parachuting Centre

## **Cultural Activities**

- 158 historic monuments (72 listed and 86 classified) including 89 religious monuments
- 37 museums (including 1 listed and the "Hautes-Alpes" museum)
- 5 themed routes: Route des Grandes Alpes, Route Napoleon, Lavender Route, Fruit and Wine Route and Sundial Route

## **Economic Indicators**

- 1863 agricultural farms
- 340 industries
- 599 construction companies
- 1080 shops and businesses
- 2 777 service industries

## **Total amount of tax paid, in million Euros**

- Income tax : 82.37
- Business tax : 48.27
- Local taxes and accessory taxes : 167.69
  - Rates (taxe fonciere) on buildings : 78.86
  - Rates (taxe fonciere) on land : 3.39
  - Community tax (Taxe d'habitation) : 32.18
  - Professional tax : 53.16
- VAT : 170.44

## **Price of real estate**

Average price per m2 for old apartments (over 5 years)	2 420 €
Average price per m2 for new -build apartments	3 660 €
Average price for an old house (over 5 years)	213 800 €
Average price for constructible land	90 000 €

*Info from the General Council website ([www.cg05.fr](http://www.cg05.fr))*