

CHAPTER 2: Roots in East Anglia, Poland and Peru

**Cambridge, Lowestoft, the Suffolk
Broads, Tambopata and Bieszczady
– fertile ground for the seed to find
purchase**

Allison not only provided the eureka moment, but also came up with the name "Biosphere Expeditions" on a motorway drive in her Morris Metro one day. The logo was easy. It had to be something with zebra stripes so that the 4x4s could be zebra-striped, realising another childhood dream.

But there were restless nights in Cambridge too, wondering whether the idea would fly. Worries about business acumen, start-up funding and more, somewhat alleviated by a mildly successful small student venture that provided some business environment and website-building experience.

Then out of nowhere came philanthropist Gerard Arnhold with an offer to provide startup funding. Born in Dresden into a Jewish family in 1918, WWII breaks out whilst he is a student in Cambridge and he is interned. Two years later he's convinced the British that, given his background, he is unlikely to want to fight for Nazi Germany, and joins the British Army. After the war, he emigrates to Brazil and makes his fortune there. Not one for holding a grudge, he generously funds schools and the arts in Dresden, amongst many other ventures. On a Boat Club reunion event, he hears about the plans for Biosphere Expeditions and simply says "you will need money then – how much?" The answer (£ 30,000) does not faze him. "I'll give it to you – you can pay me back without interest whenever you can". No bank loan required. No interest. Thank you, Gerard. Biosphere Expeditions may never have spread its wings without you. RIP, my friend.

Next stop, the Suffolk Broads in the late 1990s. A house at the edge of the Broads Authority / national park area. A business course in nearby Lowestoft, the voice of a business adviser on the phone who becomes a business



Previous page:

Felbrigg in the Broads wetland area in the UK
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Opposite page:

Silly, but true. The logo had to have zebra stripes, so that the cars could too, harking back to Grzimek's Oscar-winning "The Serengeti shall not die" movie of 1959, which fascinated the author.

This page:

Gerard Arnhold on a Cam punt ride with the author, circa 1997.

The house in the Broads where Biosphere Expeditions learnt to fly, circa 1999.



partner, co-director and so much more: linchpin, wife, mother, expedition leader, strategist, fundraiser (thank you, Rosie). Gerard nursed the fledgling, Kathy teaches it to fly.

Meanwhile, the child, now in his early 30s, travels in Europe and South America to look for projects to collaborate with. Citizen science was not a word in common usage then, but this was the direction: finding projects where laypeople can make an effective contribution to wildlife conservation and research. The stamp collecting principle: very often effective conservation is based on a large amount of data points. Collecting those data points is by and large both laborious and relatively simple. Yet no technology exists to perform the tasks - no satellites, KI (yet) to scan the Himalayas for snow leopards. No robots for changing batteries and SD cards in the camera traps now involved in a vast number of surveys. Citizen scientist stamp collectors are needed for this. People who enjoy learning new, simple data collection skills within a day or two. People who want to do something meaningful during their holiday time, through helping hands-on and

This page:

Kathy Gill with her daughter Liesl in the back and a citizen scientist on expedition in the Ukraine, 2002.

Opposite page:

Stuck on a sandbank on the tree-lined Tambopata river, Peru 1999.

Research station in Peru, around the turn of the millennium. The flag shows the first logo for Biosphere Expeditions, as it was then.

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by providing funding. Then out they go gathering useful data: camera trap pictures, tracks, scats, animal and plant inventories, whale fluke pictures, behavioural profiles, local community interview data... The possibilities are almost endless and everyone wins. If you know what you are doing.

The other component is projects and their scientists who benefit from citizen science. A spectacled bear project in the Bolivian Yungas does not happen, but terms & conditions are drawn up on an altitude sickness bed in La Paz over three days of misery. Much lower down on the same continent, in the Madre de Dios jungles of Peru, the child's dreams come to fruition as tree after tree slips by on a boat ride up the Tambopata river, the tuk tuk engine roaring like the sound of angels, the muddy brown waters a fluffy, white cloud nine. Sielmann, Grzimek, Theroux, Maas, Humboldt, Kipling all rolled into one in a heart full of joy and excitement. First steps in the rainforest for both, the person and the organisation. The sound of a million raindrops on thousands of leaves.



25 YEARS OF BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS

Sleeping in a hammock on a wooden platform deep in the woods and swimming in oxbow lakes. Parrots nearby eating the clay from the muddy banks. Heaven on earth, a place to die for, but this is not an end. This is the beginning.

Then a road trip, not in the Serengeti, but across the continent of Europe, in a zebra car, to the edge of the EU - Bieszczady National Park in Poland to set up a wolf project. Snow instead of rain, Europe instead of South America, forested mountains instead of Amazon tributaries. At the end of the road, in the foothills of the mountains, Wojtek - who else - awaits in his remote cottage, smoke curling from its lonely chimney as the zebra draws close in the fading light, with snow lying thick on the ground and trees. The national park sign a gateway between dream and reality, driving past into a future that showed itself in that bathroom in Cambridge.

In December 1999, the turn of the millennium, the name and dream become official. Biosphere Expeditions is founded in England as a non-profit organisation. The first expeditions run in 2001 to Poland and Peru.



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This page:

Red-and-green macaws (*Ara chloropterus*) eating clay in the Peruvian rainforest. They do this to ingest essential mineral salts, not available elsewhere in their diet.

Opposite page:

Reconnaissance visit to Bieszczady National Park, Poland. This location ended up as the first ever expedition, early in 2001.

