Vue (d')Ensemble
and
Somewhere Club®
present

- Baïkal Challenge -
AN EXPEDITION IN DUO
VISUALLY OR HEARING IMPAIRED
WITH NON IMPAIRED PERSONS
An incredible human experience

February/March 2017

Visually and hearing impaired people in duo with valid people will hike around the Baikal Lake, in complete autonomy for one week, in winter conditions, to show that nothing is impossible, even with a handicap.

«It’s impossible», said Pride
«It’s risky», said Experience
«It’s pointless», said Reason
«Give it a try»... wispered the Heart

William Arthur Ward
Gérard Muller
PROJECT MANAGER

67 years old, Alsatian, former pharmacist, often called «The Blind Adventurer». Suffering from a rare genetic disease called retinitis pigmentosa, Gerard Muller lost his sight at the age of fifty. Refusing settlement, he is known for its many sporting exploits as Beijing/London in tandem and the road on the Chemin de Saint Jacques de Compostelle, by foot and alone for 1700 km, with as only guide, a GPS prototype for visually impaired persons. He is also the creator of Bahia Tandem Tour in Brazil, uniting visually impaired and hearing impaired on the same bike, the Euro Tandem Tour and the «Star of Ouaga», the first race for people with disabilities in West Africa. Gerard Muller is a member of the Society of French Explorers. He is highly invested in the area of technological research for the autonomy of visually impaired. As the ambassador of the Institute of Vision in Paris, he is involved selflessly to support the insertion of anyone with disabilities through a coaching activity and conferences. It also trains visually impaired people to the use of an adapted GPS in various countries: France, Guiana, Brazil and Africa.

Pierre Muller
EXPEDITION LEADER

45 years old, emergency doctor, mountain guide, Pierre Muller is a member of the Society of French Explorers, Somewhere Club and the High Mountain Group. Guide for many expeditions in extreme environments, including active volcanoes in Kamchatka, on the ice of Greenland or in a world first: the crossing attempt of the Darwin Cordillera for which was realised a movie. He accompanied many people with medical problems in extreme environments and is often responsible for the medicalization of big sport events. In 2006, as an experimented rock climber, he was commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for trying to find missing climbers in Nepal. He is personally very concerned by the issue of visual impairment.

Vue (d’)Ensemble
ASSOCIATION

Vue (d’)Ensemble is an association created by young visually impaired persons, aiming to militate against their settlement. Their concept is to develop various projects associating visually impaired, blind and sighted of all ages, from all origins, individuals and families to share the diversity of views and hobbies. All its often innovative actions are designed first awareness and focus on three areas: hobbies, training and professional integration through a nearly created business club.

Somewhere Club
GROUP OF PERSONALITIES

Somewhere Club is a club that brings together top athletes, explorers, scientists, film directors, artists and starred chefs. All these personalities are pooling their talents to imagine extraordinary sharing experiences. These experiences often have in common the choice of unique sites and exploration demanding a taste for effort. The Club’s philosophy is a search for a privileged relationship with nature and with those who contribute to its preservation. In order to respect the latter, the approach remains sporty and environmentally friendly.
Olivier Weber

Writer, reporter, diplomat and former French war correspondent. Lecturer at the Institute of Political Studies of Paris, president of Joseph Kessel Price, he was appointed roving ambassador of France. Olivier Weber is a member of the Society of French Explorers and is part of the Somewhere Club team. This unparalleled globetrotter is accustomed to all types of land, since he has known during his career countries as diverse as Russia, most of war countries, various African countries, Afghanistan, Sahara, China, etc. His great experience in the service of the team will be perfect in complex situations we will encounter. Writer engaged, author of numerous books, translated into a dozen languages, he always tried to get closer to the reality of the most difficult situations. Among other distinctions, he earned the Albert Londres Prize and the Joseph-Kessel Prize.
The Expedition

The Baikal Challenge is a one week expedition in total autonomy, including food, ski touring, in the surrounds of the legendary Siberian Lake, 80 km wide, an area with particularly harsh climate. The concept is to go from camp to camp every night, whether tent camps or huts. The team, made up of two specialists from this region (Pierre Muller and Pascal Arpin), followed by 6 pairs of people on skis, will live in complete self-sufficiency in the heart of the icy winter...

The preparation of the expedition

7 hearing and/or visually impaired adventurers and their accompanying are preparing themselves physically and mentally to face the difficulties of group life in an extreme environment.

For this, the team meets regularly for weekends preparations in mountain environment. The expedition members regularly launch sport challenges, such as crossing the Vosges autonomously recently (225 kms) or many night trails.

Given the diversity of profiles, preparation is also based on learning how to communicate between visually and hearing impaired and to manage each type of disability in this extreme environment.

Father and son, together

You may not miss the similarity between the surnames of the Expedition Leader and the Solidarity Project Manager? It is not a coincidence! Pierre is none other than the son of Gérard... The father transmitted the taste for the adventure to his son! However, destiny had never gathered them around such a project, so it will be done now! An additional advantage for group cohesion and announcing great moments of emotion.
Facing these realities, Baikal Challenge has set itself very ambitious objectives ...

1. Break the pessimistic image of disabled persons

The expedition will partially take place in darkness and strong winds, putting visually and / or hearing impaired and accompanying on an equal foot. Immersed in a situation he does not know, the valid will inevitably ask the support of the said disabled person, more prepared. The expedition will prove that people with disabilities can achieve ambitious projects, just like a valid person, provided that their differences are taken into account.

2. Promote the employment of visually or hearing impaired people

The complementarity of the participants will bring out a collective intelligence essential to deal with extreme situations. They will need to develop their team spirit, their sense of organization and interpersonal skills, soft skills required in the workplace. Some members are looking for work, and their determination to complete a difficult project will serve as a guarantee to future recruiters. At more, participants with disabilities already occupying a job will share their knowledge of technical adjustments for workplaces with recruiters.

People with disabilities are too often excluded of the business world because of prejudice. Yet, they have three basic qualities recognized by employers who have overcome their a priori: disabled people have a great capacity for adaptation required in their daily lives; their difference is conducive to creativity and innovation; finally, their presence stimulates their colleagues who can then find the courage to overcome their own problems when they face others disadvantaged by life.

3. Develop technical aids, new technologies

The expedition offers a unique testing ground for technical aids that will facilitate future daily life of people with disabilities. Examples include increasing contrast glasses or an adapted GPS. Such vocal GPS was used by Gérard Muller, referring participant for solidarity of the expedition, in his solitary pilgrimage on the way to Saint Jacques de Compostelle. All these tools will find many other applications, whether for expeditions in extreme conditions, or any other industry.

4. Communicate on disability

This project will have a strong media coverage as a documentary will be shot before and during the expedition. We are in discussion with big French media groups, as TF1 for a TV report. Olivier Weber, project sponsor and reporter, will be the film director, supported by Thibault Graillot and his society, 2caps Production. Added to planned post-expedition conferences and the website, there will be so many efficient media supports to convey the medical research progress and to break the poor image of disabled people.

5. Speak of Usher syndrome

Two of the team members suffer from Usher syndrome. Born deaf, they are gradually losing sight. The team will use the expedition to raise funds with See and Hear (Voir et Entendre) Foundation and Act for Hearing (Agir pour l’Audition) Foundation to support research on Usher syndrome and to communicate on the research conducted by the Institute of Vision and upcoming Institute of Hearing centers.

6. Meet the Other

Serge Picaud, research director at Institute of Vision, specialist of retina diseases, will bring a scientific component to the project, by giving a conference in Irkutsk. This will allow to share with disabled local people about what is done there and to introduce some French specific products as artificial retina. Team members will stay there for 2 days to meet local associations for disabled people.
You want to defend the image of your company? The involvement of your company will demonstrate your willingness to integrate people with disabilities and prove internally and externally that it is not a fatality.

The expedition members associate partners with their communication (television, radio, press, internet) and commit themselves to participate in events organized by companies for their own communication. Gérard Muller will also give thematic conferences. Introduction and overview to handicap can be organized too.

THE SPONSORS

Besides the Grand Reporter Olivier Weber, the originality of this Challenge has already motivated prestigious institutions such as the Society of French Explorers and Travelers, as well as Grand Bivouac, the largest Adventure Film Festival in France that will broadcast the documentary made of it. Press conferences will be organized before and after the expedition.

CONTACT US!
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HOW TO PARTICIPATE?

CHALLENGE PARTNERS

Associations, fondations, instituts:
- Association Vue (d’)Ensemble
- Société des Explorateurs Français
- Agir pour l’Audition
- Institut de la Vision
- Centre de Russie pour la Science et la Culture

Companies:
- Crédit Mutuel
- Optic 2000
- Salomon
- Somewhere Club
- Pixium