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The Picos de Europa, Northern Spain, an inspiration to non-specialist ecology students to study the Cultural Landscapes of Mountains. 

Dykes, N.T, Prince, H.E., Lemmey, R.P., & Bunce, R.G.H.

Every year since 1990 BSc. Outdoor Studies students from St. Martin’s College, UK have been surveying components of the lands in the Picos de Europa, Northern Spain. The aims are to:

- introduce students to cultural landscapes;
- encourage students to engage with disciplined recording at the landscape level;
- to contribute to the knowledge of the Picos de Europa.

The course has two distinct phases; a group project, where a cohort of fifty work on one large scale landscape project, and individual projects, where the students choose a specific aspect of the landscape.

Group Project

The group study employs land classification techniques using environmental data. Students are involved in the process.

Students map parcels (plate 1) according to General Habitat Categories (GHC), BioHab.

Key species are identified and their percentage cover is estimated for each parcel.

Plate 1 – Example of habitat map.

Students are taught ecology and combine this knowledge with their outdoor skills to study the mountain area. They use stratified random sampling to collect the data.

Plate 2 – Mapping Habitats using the GHC.

Plate 3 – Meadow Parcels in the landscape.

Plate 4 – General Habitat Category, LHC/GHC herb rich grassland.

Plate 5 – Erythronium dens-canis

Individual Projects

- Students choose a diversity of projects according to their personal interests.
- These are often generated by a specific aspect of the group project.
- Individual projects cover a variety of scales:
  - Cultural landscapes e.g. village structures
  - Landscape features e.g. Candelabra trees
  - Habitats e.g. Quercus ilex forest
  - Autecology e.g. Butterfly Orchids

Conclusion

- These courses are a peak experience for hundreds of undergraduates from St. Martin’s college (Prince, 2005).
- Students learn the discipline of group and individual projects.
- Students do collect meaningful data.
- Students will take the inspiration and pass on to the next generation.
- We have contributed to the knowledge of the region.

Reference

