

EXTREME WELLBEING FOCUS

It's not often that we get a chance to see ourselves more clearly. Guy Browning heads to Spain for a kind of emotional colonic irrigation



I left Heathrow with a lot of baggage; business, personal and Samsonite. I was headed for the Spanish mountains on a new kind of holiday, half physical challenge, half mental challenge. The Big Stretch promised expanded inner and outer horizons, and weighty problems solved.

Our Spanish guide, Don Diego, was waiting for the group in Arrivals at Bilbao. He had a cool, chestnut gaze and a tough gorse beard that said, "When you are trapped by snow in the mountains, I will hunt and cook the goat of your choice."

Warned about snaking mountain roads, the group's first real challenge was securing the front seats in the minibus. The alpha types asserted themselves and order was soon established. We then realised the driver was still on the pavement, so we had to do our first major rethink. We hadn't even left the car park.

We were greeted at a beautiful hotel high in the mountains by Lee Chalmers, one of Britain's foremost personal development coaches and possessor of more charisma per inch than any woman in northern Europe. She told us that the Big Stretch was a chance "to hear yourself think, to see yourself more clearly, and to feel what is real". I thought we would then smoke a peace pipe, but instead we were handed over to Rosie Walford, another top coach dripping with personal energy. After a little gentle questioning, she proceeded to lay out the guts of our problems like a Roman priestess reading the entrails of a goose, yet in such a charming way that entrails suddenly seemed an attractive catering proposition.

A high point of the Big Stretch is the hike along Cares Gorge, an even path cut from cliff walls following a fast-flowing canal. We spent a day

following this canal and cleansing our minds. I looked at it as a kind of external colonic irrigation. We were recommended to spend time walking quietly alone — not easy when you've just met a bunch of interesting people. Silence allowed some cool introspection. It also helped you avoid falling to your death, which would inevitably have taken the shine off further group interaction.

All week we climbed and worked and thought hard. Generally, the greater the personal shift, the bigger the business breakthrough. I worked out that one woman's small personal enlightenment added about half a million to the value of her business. Since I'd helped her with this, I thought a 15% share was reasonable. I asked a high-powered contract lawyer in the group if he could draw up some kind of agreement, but sadly he'd just made his own personal shift into more pro bono work.

As the days stretched out, the mental noise we'd brought with us fell silent in the high clear space of the mountains. The coaching had the same clarifying quality. "Coach" is too thin a word to describe the two leaders of our group. They were more like mountain guides, letting us think and dream high and wide, and then bringing us back down shepherd paths to valleys of real possibilities.

The Big Stretch is not the Big Shrink: it's not counselling for the dysfunctional, it's supercharging for the fully functional. The group were all highly articulate, successful people (and me) who were stepping back slightly so they could jump higher. I roughly calculated their professional rates, and worked out that 14 minutes' input from the group was alone worth the price of the trip. A week would have covered my mortgage. In fact, what we all did was pay off some heavy mental and emotional mortgages. Imagine how good that feels.

The Big Stretch, approx £2,150, including coaching, all meals, single en-suite room, mountain guide, all transfers. Contact 0845 430 8621. (thebigstretch.com). Guy Browning flew with British Airways to Bilbao.



Weekend