

Learning & Leading Gap Year Scholars

● Peter Holland

Dates	May to August 2009
Locations	South Africa
Activities	Volunteer on an endangered species monitoring programme using GIS



What did you do on your gap experience?

I went to South Africa to volunteer in a game reserve for three months. My main objective whilst joining in the day to day monitoring of the reserve was to be able to produce useful maps of the reserve and to gain an understanding of the mapping software I would be using during my Geomatics degree. I was given a number of GIS tutorials by one of the Wildlife Act team who was finishing a PhD on Black Rhino movements. I was involved in a number of captures and translocation of Cheetah, Black Rhino, Leopard and Hyena. The Black Rhino capture was part of a large expansion project to increase Black Rhino numbers in the country.



What impact has your gap experience had?

Regaining confidence after a year of illness and becoming excited to take on my mapping course at Newcastle University. I have gained a lot of motivation from this experience. I have become more aware of wide range of applications in geography. Overall a positive experience that has led me to realise that if one tries hard enough the impossible becomes possible.



What were the highlights of your gap experience?

Game capture, meeting new volunteers, having socials around camp fires learning about people's experiences and knowledge.

What did you do next?

A mapping (GIS) course at Newcastle University. My goals for the future are to finish my studies, to find a job in the mapping sector and to be able to show others the benefits of GIS.



What do you wish you had known before your gap experience?

That in the end I would catch the expedition bug as it was just too good not to do something like it again.



What is your advice for anyone thinking of taking a gap experience?

1. If somebody offers you the opportunity to go somewhere different be it a day trip or more, take it! It is an opportunity to learn new things and meet new people who will also have lots to share with you.
2. In a new place show the locals that you are not just a tourist and that you have something to offer them
3. Also show interest in the locals. This will open up more avenues, in my case I was invited to leopard captures etc.