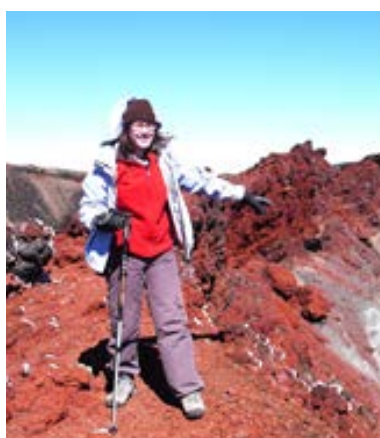


Learning & Leading Gap Year Scholars

● Annabelle Wilson

Dates	March - May 2009
Locations	New Zealand and Japan
Activities	Independent study into natural hazard management



Why did you do a gap experience?

I wanted to go on gap experience due to my interest in natural (geomorphological) hazards, and to aid my studies when I commenced a Natural Hazard Management course at university.

What did you do on your gap experience?

On my gap experience I went to New Zealand and Japan. I decided to go to New Zealand as it sits on the plate boundary of the Pacific and Indo-Australian Plates, in a 'geologically unstable zone' and so the chance to discover more about the geomorphological hazards of past and present was an opportunity I couldn't miss. In school I studied the 1995 earthquake disaster in Kobe (Japan) in great detail and had read much about the city. Therefore, I already had some background knowledge on what forces are at work there and what happened and of the natural disasters that have occurred there.



What did you find easy and challenging?

In New Zealand I was mainly travelling solo by using various tourist bus companies (e.g. Magic Travellers Bus Network), which I found was a great way to meet other people travelling to the same places, as well discovering more about the country. However in Japan, due to the language barrier I found some things challenging, however the people of this beautiful and modern country were very kind and often tried their very best to help me.

What impact has your gap experience had?

I gained the confidence to speak to a range of professional and academic people from the field I'm interested in and that I wouldn't have had the chance to meet in any other context. I developed initiative and confidence and found that you also learn a lot about yourself by doing this. The experience also increased my understanding of geographical processes linked to the sites of volcanoes and earthquakes.



What were the highlights of your gap experience?

In New Zealand being able to see three different geothermal



reserves with mud volcanoes, bubbling hot pools, steaming cliffs, and the boat ride into the stunning Marlborough Sounds region which is covered in a series of fault lines.

In Japan, going sightseeing in Kyoto seeing some spectacular palaces, temples and shrines and going to the Earthquake Memorial Park on Awaji Island where a strip of the fault had been preserved.

Were there any unexpected outcomes?

I met a lot of people through contacts or by chance and through them I obtained a vast amount of information including the chance to visit the National Crisis Management Centre in Wellington.



How did this experience help you?

The study I carried out gave me a clear focus and increased my interest in this topic so I could pursue it successfully at University.

What will you do next?

A Natural Hazard Management course at Chester University. I hope to travel more and especially visit a developing country, as I have found from this gap trip that studying does not really come to life until you have experienced it for yourself!

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

1. Don't be afraid to push yourself out of your comfort zone and try something new, for example travelling around a country on your own is not as scary as it sounds! If opportunities you were not expecting arise, do go for them!
2. Only pack half of what you think you need - clothes especially; you will use less than you think! I found this out the hard way! Unless you are going to the back of beyond most things can be purchased in the country you visit.
3. Try and sometimes get away from the tourist haunts, and talk to locals, it gives you a much deeper flavour of the country you are visiting!