

Learning & Leading Gap Year Scholars

● Edward Pethick

Dates	February to April 2009
Locations	The Cook Islands and New Zealand
Activities	Conservation project and independent travel



What did you do on your gap experience?

I went to the Cook Islands with my girlfriend. Once there we managed to see all the marine wildlife and try native food, including spear fishing, climbed the volcano and quad biking. In New Zealand, we climbed more volcanoes, and then travelled to a place called Tuatewa Valley where there is a rainforest conservation project where we stayed for 5 weeks. We lived mainly off the land which was a very hard experience. After that for two weeks I embarked on recreational activities including white water rafting.



What did you find easy and challenging?

Of the many challenges I encountered the hardest I found to overcome was the nervousness to approach people I'd never met and sort of interact – be it asking for directions, camping spot or petrol, bartering for food or offering a jumpstart to people who won't ask. This took me possibly 3 weeks to get the hang of.



What impact has your gap experience had?

Greatly increased skills in data collection and understanding of how projects do impact on the environment. My cooking is 20 times better than it used to be, I find I wake up and go to sleep several hours earlier. I can no longer sit and digest information – I'd much rather learn it in the field. The single biggest impact is that I now also vastly prefer to be independent, whereas before I was content to do as I was told with little questioning. This has made me a much happier person all round. Much more willing to try new things.

What were the highlights of your gap experience?

We climbed up to the main volcano of the Cook Islands which was an exhausting climb but a spectacular view and near to the base of Needle Rock, a huge monolith near the centre. We got taken to do spearfishing in a lagoon.



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

1. Don't plan too much – look at what there is to do, work out a budget, but then do whatever you feel like when you get there, the worst things we did were the ones we knew about before we got there, the best were the ones we stumbled across.
2. Go with a friend, or if it's not possible do a group volunteering thing where you can meet up with people you can later go travelling with
3. Try everything