

From aspiration to life-changing achievement

THE SOCIETY'S Learning & Leading programme, launched last year, uses geographical fieldwork to help further the confidence and achievements of young people and students who have faced challenging circumstances. The aim is to bridge the gulf between aspiration and financial reality for those striving, against the odds, to gain first-hand experience of the world's peoples and places.

Two of last year's Learning & Leading gap scholars, 18-year-old Peter Holland and 19-year-old Annabelle Wilson, returned from their travels earlier this summer, having built on their self-assurance and skills in preparation for the next exciting chapter in their lives: studying geography at university.

'I left for South Africa in May, where I volunteered on a number of game reserves for a new, hands-on conservation organisation called Wildlife ACT,' says Peter, who spent three months taking part in an endangered species monitoring programme, developing his existing skills in GIS (geographical information systems).

'My main aim was to produce digital maps that would be beneficial to the reserves and their conservation efforts,' he says. 'On the first day, I teamed up with a group of rangers who were trying to relocate two black rhinos as part of an

attempt to increase the population. It was a successful operation, and it didn't stop there.

'I also took part in the capture of cheetahs and leopards, and was involved in the daily monitoring and tracking of elephants,' he continues. 'And I helped university students from the UK to collate data for their dissertations, calculating animals' movement patterns and home ranges and the distances to landscape features.'

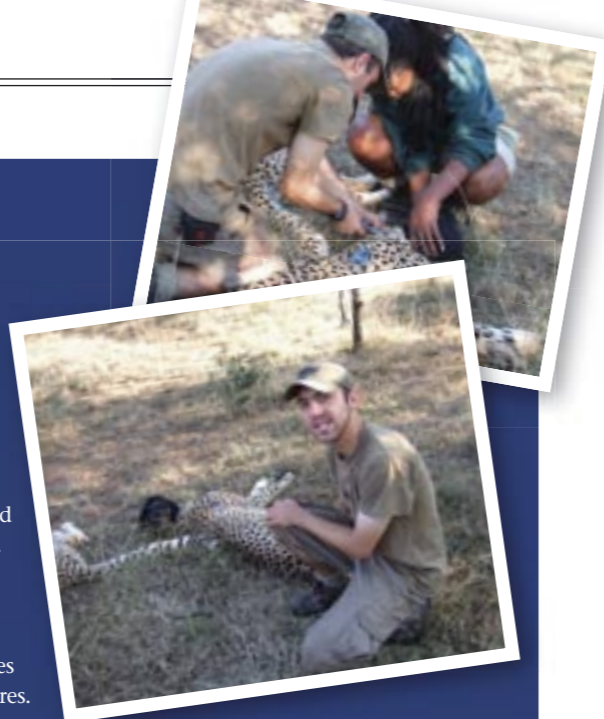
'The time I spent in South Africa was incredible,' he says. 'It was an opportunity to make friends, meet people with similar interests and develop my knowledge. It was the best preparation I could have had for starting my degree at Newcastle University.'

With some help from her mentor at the RGS-IBG, Annabelle planned a journey around New Zealand and to the Japanese city of Kobe to learn more about how these countries deal with the threats posed by active volcanoes and earthquakes. The trip was the first time that she had travelled alone, and she says the experience profoundly affected her confidence.

'I gained so much, from a cultural, geographical and personal perspective, that I find it difficult to say what the highlights were,' she says. However, when pressed, she nominates exploring White Island, an active marine volcano, and three geothermal reserves in New Zealand as being truly memorable experiences.

Now studying for a BSc in natural hazard management and international development studies at the University of Chester, Annabelle says that the advice and information she received from professionals working in her field of interest is proving to be a rich resource. 'Discovering these countries first-hand, the challenges they have faced in the past and how prepared they are for the future has not only brought my A-level studies to life, but also helped me to lay what feel like strong foundations for my degree.'

This year, the RGS-IBG is offering 12 gap scholarships to young geographers who would not normally have the opportunity to gain a meaningful gap experience. The recipients will be supported by advice, mentoring and training from the Society. **i** For more information, and how to apply, visit www.rgs.org/Learning&Leading. The deadline for applications is 16 October



THIS IMAGE: Learning & Leading gap scholar Annabelle Wilson on White Island, New Zealand; INSET: gap scholar Peter Holland in Mkhuze Game Reserve, South Africa

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ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY (WITH IBG)

SELECTION OF EVENTS



OCTOBER 2009

6 OCTOBER, 7PM
JOURNEY TO THE SINKING LANDS
(City Lecture, London)
 Dan Box, this year's Journey of a Lifetime Award recipient, travelled with people from the Carteret Islands of Papua New Guinea in the first evacuation of a population as a result of climate change.
 Venue: The Clothworkers' Hall, London EC3R 7AH.
i This lecture will be repeated on 14 December at the Society. For further details, please contact the Events Office on events@rgs.org or 020 7591 3100

8 OCTOBER
AN AUDIENCE WITH BEN FOGLE
2.30pm, 8pm (Regional lecture, Stamford)
 TV presenter Ben Fogle will be visiting Stamford Arts Centre and six other regional theatres in October. From Taransay to racing to the South Pole with James Cracknell, Ben will tell tales of his many adventures around the globe. Venue: Stamford Arts Centre, 27 St Mary's Street, Stamford, Lincs, PE9 2DL.
i Tickets: RGS-IBG members and one guest £15 (quote membership number). Box Office: 01780 763 203. For details of other venues, please visit www.rgs.org

15 OCTOBER – 10 DECEMBER
HIDDEN HISTORIES OF EXPLORATION
(Exhibition, London)
 Discover more about the remarkable contribution made by local inhabitants and indigenous peoples to the history of exploration through a Society and Royal Holloway University of London project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.
i Free, open to the public, Monday to Friday, 10am–5pm. Visit www.rgs.org/hiddenhistories for further details

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8 OCTOBER, 7.30PM
THE SAHARA: A Fragile Beauty
(Regional lecture, York)
 Impressions of the world's largest desert from Sam Watson, an experienced desert guide. Far from an empty wasteland, the Sahara hosts a complex, fragile ecosystem and this talk will touch on many aspects of this fascinating landscape. Joint event with the Forest of Galtres Society. Venue: Parish Rooms, Easingwold, York.
i Tickets: £3. For further details, please contact the Events Office on events@rgs.org or 020 7591 3100

14 OCTOBER, 7PM
21ST CENTURY CHALLENGES: Importing goods, exporting drought
(Discussion series, London)
 The goods that we consume often having hidden environmental costs thanks to the water that is consumed during their production. Join our expert panel as they discuss this important issue and then put your own questions to them.
i Tickets: RGS-IBG members £7, non-members £10. To book, please contact the Events Office on events@rgs.org or 020 7591 3100. For further details, visit www.21stcenturychallenges.org

17 OCTOBER, 10.30AM
HIDDEN... OUTBACK
(Travel event, London)
 A day of talks, workshops and seminars led by key speakers including Simon Calder, Sandy Gall and Charlie Boorman, presenting high-quality, informative and inspiring sessions for the discerning independent traveller to Australia's Northern Territory. Supported by the Northern Territory, Australia.
i Tickets: RGS-IBG members £5; non-members £10 (including an evening lecture). For further details, please contact the Events Office on events@rgs.org or 020 7591 3100



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Geography is about the understanding of the people, places and environments of our world, the processes by which they are changing, and the interconnections between them – both locally and globally.

The Society carries out a wide range of activities to support these aims. We support research groups; promote geography within the national curriculum; produce scholarly publications; provide training in scientific field techniques and expeditions; offer information through our large map collection, library and picture library, and engage the wider public through our popular national lecture series.

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