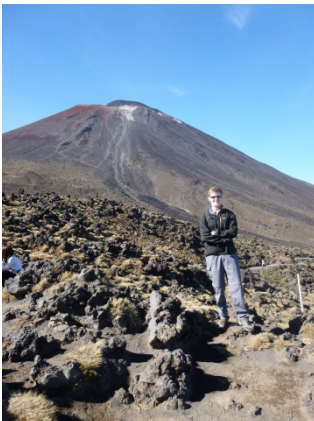


# Learning and Leading Gap Scholars

## ● Andrew Robinson

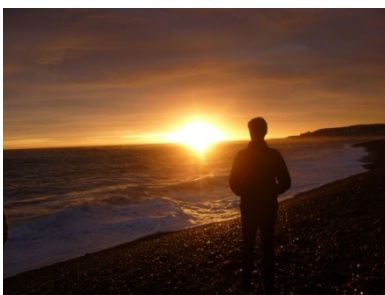
Dates	1 <sup>st</sup> November 2013-8 <sup>th</sup> June 2014
Locations	Hong Kong, New Zealand, USA, Canada, Bolivia and Chile
Activities	Independent travel, internship at USGS, fieldwork and working volunteering

### ***Why did you want to do a gap experience?***



I wanted to do a gap year to gain experience in an area I was really interested in - natural hazards – in order to help me decide whether I should pursue a career in this area in the future. I also saw travelling as an incredibly attractive prospect which would allow me to become more confident and independent – traits which would prepare me for university life. Furthermore, this opportunity provided a break from formal studies before I began a degree. I wanted to go and experience places I had seen on television and in books, and the RGS-IBG Learning and Leading Gap Year Scholarship was the ideal pathway to do this.

### ***What did you do on your gap experience?***



Over a period of eight months I travelled extensively, visiting Hong Kong, New Zealand, the USA, Bolivia, Chile and Canada. In Hong Kong, New Zealand and Canada I was travelling independently, did a few weeks of volunteering with the local council whilst staying with family in New Zealand, worked (for accommodation) in a hostel for three weeks and did a lot of sightseeing.

Whilst I was in the USA, I completed an internship at the USGS Earthquake Science Centre in San Francisco. This involved travelling to Chile (through Bolivia) to carry out a damage assessment following the Iquique earthquake. Based on this, I wrote an article for a science magazine and completed a field assessment. Over the course of the trip I had plenty of time to explore the countries I travelled to, make loads of new friends and take part in various tours and excursions.

### ***What did you find easy and challenging?***



I found navigating around the places I visited the easiest aspect of my gap year experience, as I always made sure I had maps, guide books and emergency numbers with me. One of the hardest aspects was making new friends. However, as my trip progressed I became much more open and relaxed, allowing me to talk to and meet new people.



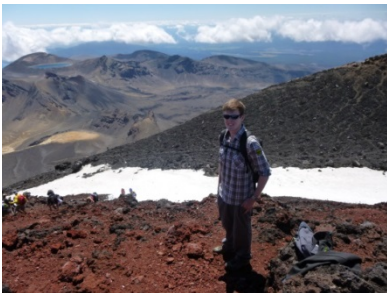
***What impact has your gap experience had?***

I have become much more ambitious. Being around such successful and talented individuals whilst working at USGS has inspired me to develop my own knowledge of technology, the geosciences and languages. Furthermore, through this experience I have become more determined to get a job that will make a real difference in the area of natural hazards.



Working at the USGS and going to lectures at Stanford and Berkeley Universities also greatly broadened my knowledge of the seismic situation of North America. Being given the chance to carry out professional fieldwork in South America on my own as well was a very rewarding experience and also gave me a boost of confidence because it showed how I could make my own way through a completely foreign and alien country and organise and conduct my own field assessment.

Finally, through travelling, I have become much more relaxed and open about different cultures and ideas.



***Were there any unexpected outcomes?***

Travelling to South America to complete fieldwork was unexpected, and it contributed greatly to my gap year experience. It was an incredibly rewarding and informing experience, and has really increased my confidence. Having the experience of travelling by myself, and the knowledge I have gained through this, will be very useful for visiting new places in the future. Meeting family that I'd never been in contact with before was a brilliant experience too!



***What do you plan to do next?***

I plan to build on my interests in the area of natural hazards by starting a BSc sandwich course in Geography and Natural Hazards at Coventry University. I plan to travel either with university or independently during the summer months. After my degree I want to work for a year or two before travelling again around Europe and Asia. I would also like to find a job that I'm passionate about.

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

- 1). Be as relaxed and open to meeting new people as possible.
- 2). Record your experiences in a journal and a blog to share with your family and friends and to look back on. Record the small details that might otherwise be forgotten, such as your meals, emotions, smells and tastes. You'll find it fascinating to read back on and see how you've changed as a person.
- 3). Don't worry too much about where you will be going; there are amazing people and beautiful places all over the world and you'll be happy, wherever you go.
- 4). Keep in contact with home through Skype and Facebook whilst you are away – it can help with homesickness.

