

Gap year Report:

I would first like to start by thanking the Kempson Rosedale Enterprise Trust for the generous grant which contributed greatly to my volunteering and traveling experience. I would also like to thank and recommend the company that organised my trip, Gap Guru, which is a volunteer based company located in Newbury town hall.

My name is Callum Riley-Pitt, I have possibly just spent the most rewarding and enjoyable nine weeks of my life living in Tanzania, East Africa. During these nine weeks I spent six of these as a volunteer teacher in an English medium primary school called Englang'et, which is based in the rapidly developing town of Arusha, northern Tanzania. Unfortunately in the Tanzanian schooling system, children with disabilities do not attend school because the normal state schools cannot provide the care or facilities to accommodate them.

Englang'et primary school is a unique school which was founded by an amazing nurse called Ann. Ann has spent most of her nursing career caring for sick and disabled children. It has been Ann's life ambition to change the narrow minded education system and to provide a school which allows families with disabled children to send their children to a place where they can gain an education and hopefully make a better life for themselves and their families. Englang'et accomplishes this goal and takes pride in providing education, care and facilities for not only disabled children but for all children whether that child has a disability or not. This is depicted through their motto 'education is the light'.

Every teacher at the school is dedicated to changing the lives of the children they teach and to provide them with the knowledge and the skills to better themselves, regardless of how much they get paid, which is very little indeed.

For me, the teaching aspect of my trip was the most rewarding and yet at the same time the most daunting because I had no previous teaching experience of any kind, unlike my traveling companion David Cope who worked part time at Marlborough leisure centre teaching children gymnastics and swimming. At the start of my teaching placement I was given a crash course in Swahili, the local language spoken, and different teaching exercises and techniques which I could incorporate into my lesson plans. This gave me some reassurance despite my feelings of inadequacy in my teaching ability and whether I would provide the quality of teaching required by the headmaster and that of the school's reputation.

During my placement at Englang'et I conducted lessons in Mathematics, English, Reading and Sports (predominantly football) to children aged from four years old (class year 1) up to ten years old (class year 5). The classrooms were basic but had everything I needed to teach. The class sizes were manageable, around 22 pupils per class with the exception of year 5 which consisted of 11. These are considerably smaller in comparison to other state schools in Tanzania. As Englang'et is an English medium school it is required that all lessons apart from Swahili are taught in English which was why I was placed in that school. All pupils begin to learn the basics of the English language at nursery stage so by the time the pupils are in year 1 they are able to understand most basic instructions given to them by the teacher. However some instructions would have to be given in Swahili to save time and confusion.

My typical day as a teacher would start at about 6:30am by having breakfast and leaving the volunteer house by 7:30am. I would have a 30 min walk to school with lessons starting at 8:00am. I would then have break at 10:00am for half an hour before continuing my lessons at 10:30am. Lunch was from 12:30 to 1:30 and I had choice of either eating at the school or going to the local shop to

buy some lunch. I chose to stay at the school and enjoy the food which the school provided. These meals consisted mostly of beans and rice with meat being served two days a week. Friday was a half day at the school which finished at noon. Lessons ran from 8:00am until 10:30am after which the students and teachers would participate in a couple of hours of sporting activities - football for the boys and netball for the girls. This was the only day of the week where the pupils were allowed to wear non-school uniform but this had to consist of sports cloths, i.e. shorts/tracksuit and a T-shirt/tracksuit top. Following this, the other volunteers and I would normally go to the local hotel to use the swimming facilities for a small fee before preparing the following weeks lessons.

During my free periods in the week I would start to plan my next lessons for each class using the specific curricular specification required for that class's end of year exam, for which the pupils would have to pass in order to continue onto the next year. I am pleased to report that all the pupils in the classes that I was teaching passed their end of year exams and are now continuing their education in the next year.

On top of my classroom teaching schedule I chose to take 3 lessons a week teaching pupils in classes 4 and 5 Vocational Skills. This subject involves practical skills such as drawing, basket weaving and farming. I'm a very practical and creative individual who is used to manual labour such as gardening and woodwork. I felt I brought a particular set of skills to these sessions and knew a lot about the areas within the curriculum specifically vegetable growing which came under the category 'farming'.

When I first arrived I noticed that the school had a plot of land which they were using to grow vegetables for use in school meals. Unfortunately the gardener the school hired had been ignoring his duty and had left the patch in a horrific condition and neglected to take care of the already planted vegetables. I took it upon myself to see that this plot of land be restored to its former glory, so over my six week placement I took classes 4 and 5 down to the patch and conducted practical teaching lessons on how to grow vegetables. A useful skill which the pupils could use later on in life when they have a plot of land of their own. My lessons included information on sustainable farming and the use and benefits of composting and how they could develop their own compost. Personally I felt composting was important as in Tanzania like many other countries has a lot of organic waste, unfortunately in Tanzania they tend to burn all the waste, which not only pollutes the environment but is also a waste of natural nutrients that could otherwise be used to increase the production and the quality of vegetables in small scale vegetable plots like the schools. I am pleased to report that the vegetable plot started to thrive with the care and attention the children gave it.

After completing my six week teaching placement my traveling companion, David Cope and I tackled and thankfully completed the hardest and most challenging climb of our lives...climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro, the tallest freestanding mountain in the world. At 5895m amsl this is also the highest mountain in Africa.

The route was called the Machame route or otherwise known as the 'whisky route'. Our trek began in the south-west area of the mountain at Machame Gate. The route took us six days to complete, although seven days is recommended as it offers climbers an extra day to acclimatise due to the quick ascent and altitude. We summited the mountain at Uhuru Peak in four days and descended in two days. Our descent took us down a different route called Mweka, on the south-east side of the mountain. David and I chose to embark on this particular route because it offered the greatest vistas of Kilimanjaro, due to the ascent in the west and descent down the northern side. Additionally, the Machame route also allowed us to visit stunning places such as Shira Plateau, Barranco, and Lava Tower. The Machame route was one of the more difficult routes, but it offered us a wider range of scenery and a more challenging climb.

At first I found the idea of a six day climb unsettling, as this was the first time I had undertaken such a challenge. As I climbed into the car taking us to the base of the mountain it suddenly dawned on me what I had set myself to try and accomplish. I realised that the next six days were to be the most gruelling, physically and mentally challenging days of my life. For it was not just a matter of physical fitness, but strength of the mind. In the days leading up to the climb I read reports from climbers about their experiences and what they thought about it. I found that a constant factor to whether or not that individual summited or not was down to their will power, and whether they could push their body that little bit further, one foot in front of the next despite the physical factors.

When I look back on my time on that mountain there are many moments which stand out in my mind, for example the splitting headache that felt like you were being repeatedly kicked in the head. This of course was the early signs of altitude sickness, which I am pleased to say I overcame. Of all the moments there was one which really meant something to me and I think allowed me to successfully finish the climb. It occurred on summit day during the early hours of the morning, we had been walking for hours in conditions below -15 degrees without the wind chill, and I had foolishly allowed my hands to sweat in my thermal gloves causing them to become wet, then they began to freeze causing my fingers to become unbearably cold, to the point that I thought they were going to fall off and I would be forced to turn back. At this moment I turned and looked at David and he too was just as wet and cold. In that moment he said, "come on Callum, suck it up, we're almost there and we've come too far to turn back now!" So I found that little bit of strength I needed to block out the cold and continue. As it turns out we were just twenty minutes from summiting the tallest freestanding mountain in the world. Thanks to my friend and my determination to struggle on, I was able to finish the challenging climb I had been so looking forward to.

Towards the end of my time in Tanzania I spent the last week on safari in some of the greatest and most astonishing nature reserves in the world. My five day safari included day visits to Lake Manyara National Park, Tarangire National Park, Ngorongoro Crater (one of the seven natural wonders of Africa) and two days in the most spectacular national park in Africa; the Serengeti National Park. I enjoyed every moment of the safari and the different environments which every national park presented, be it the tree climbing lions of Lake Manyara to the notorious black Rhinos of the Ngorongoro Crater. However my personal preference had to be the great plains of the Serengeti. The vast grassland plains and the sheer number of species and quantity of game could not be matched by the other park. It had always been an ambition of mine to go on safari, especially to the Serengeti. I cannot put into words what it feels like to see the natural beauty of Africa, thousands upon thousands of Zebra and Wilder beast as far as the eye could see migrating in the search of water. It is such an incredible experience and one that you can only experience in person.

For example there are very few places in the world where you can camp under the beautiful starry sky where the Milky Way looks down upon you with its glistening eyes. This experiences is further enhanced by the fact you are camping 'in the bush' where wild animals move freely around your campsite.

The night I camped in the Serengeti was both the most amazing yet nerve racking experience I've had. During the early hours of the morning I was awoken by the deep roar of the lions which were moving silently around our campsite, then again by the well-known high pitch laugh of a Hyena which made the hairs stand up on the back of my neck. If that wasn't enough, a few moments later I heard the sound of branches snapping. At this point I unzipped my tent and peered out through the tiny opening to see what it was, I was greeted by the unmistakable black silhouette and two white tusks of a big bull elephant staring straight at me, no more than twenty meters away. It was safe to say I didn't feel like going to sleep at this point, as I couldn't shake the feeling that the biggest living

land mammal was meters away with only a few millimetres of fabric keeping him from me. Luckily I didn't have to stay up long as we had planned to be in the cars and on the move by 6:00am to see the sun rise over the Serengeti. At about 6:20 the sun's rays began to burst through the tree line, the warmth of the rays hitting my face took the chill of the early morning away and gave way to a new dawn. As I looked over the Serengeti, it possessed a sense of tranquillity. The presence of the new dawn's sun brought life back to the plains, all around us different species of animals began to emerge and show themselves through the brush.

Now that my adventure is over, reflecting back on my experiences from my travels and placement as a teacher, I feel I have gained most of the goals and ideals I set myself...when I decided to take a gap year instead of choosing to go straight to university I wanted to do something worthwhile with my time which benefited others as well as myself. I feel I have accomplished this in a number of ways and for that I am grateful. It's been an amazing experience and one I will never forget.

Callum Riley-Pitt