

Sun, Sweat and Science *The Gambia 2018*

People often say that a smile and laughter are the most infectious characteristics of a human being. This couldn't have been so close to the truth in The Gambia. Looking back at the fantastic trip I had, I often wonder why we can go by in England and not be met by joyous, happy people like those in The Gambia.

Writing this report now is truly the hardest thing I can do. There are so many memories and experiences I would love to share with everyone about this unforgettable trip, but putting them into words is more difficult than I could have ever imagined.

The whole experience started around a year ago, where we had our first team discussion about the trip and the fundraising activities we would need to organise. Luckily we were aided by Steve Atyeo, a veteran at travelling to The Gambia, who shared his experiences with us and acted as the link to our school and the Gambian locals. Additionally we went through a company called Venture Force, which further aided us due to their success in previous years and their organisation of the trip. With the logistical side covered, the fundraising was down to the students. The group initially started off with small cake sales at parent evenings or other events at the school, until we signed up to a 26-mile walk (The Neolithic Marathon) in May. Furthermore a couple of us decided to do a car wash, where we encouraged teachers to sign up and we would wash their cars throughout a 2 week period. I would love to say a huge thank you to the support of family, friends and the KRET trust for the sponsors they had made as this helped cover the majority of the cost of the trip.

Before even arriving in The Gambia, planning was a huge part in the process. Throughout the year, before we were even due to arrive in The Gambia, we had weekly meetings with the team and Steve. In the meetings it was key that we designed the science experiments we would carry out while we were there and ensured everyone knew what they were doing. The many experiments we did, including centripetal force of a cup on a board; deflecting jets of different liquid to demonstrate static electricity; electrolysis of copper solution to show how to test for different gases such as oxygen and hydrogen and diluting a battery acid to show rates of reaction with different concentrations, had many of their challenges in the preparation stages. Without the careful planning we undertook over the year, we wouldn't have been prepared for the equipment they had out there as well as the equipment we would need to provide and take with us, which would of not made it the success it turned out to be.

Leading up to the departure I was nervous and a bit apprehensive about travelling to The Gambia. I had no idea what to expect and how we would get treated. But within the first couple of days my nerves had past and the locals made us all feel at home. It is strange when returning back to the UK not to greet people 'Hello' or 'Salaam Aleikum' which means "peace be upon you" and they would reply 'Maleekum salaam' which means 'and peace be upon you'.

The first couple of days included cultural visits. We visited a village called Kartong. The friendliness of the people really shocked me at first. Children under the age of five years old would walk with you throughout your visit of the village holding your hand. This one little girl will always stay close to my heart. Her smile while Amy and I lifted her above the ground with one hand each and occasionally waved her hands in the air while she laughed so hard.

On one of the days we spent the morning at Gunjur Upper Basic School. At the start we had a quick assembly in front of the school. This included prayers and recent success in their exams, which to my joy girls did better than the boys overall. After this, in pairs we sat down in their

lessons. I started off with maths and chemistry then finished with English after their break time. The classic blackboards and wooden benches are very different to our classrooms back at home and the teaching style was also very different. Instead of just taking notes and the occasional person asking a question, each individual student took turns to go to the front and do a step in a maths problem before handing over to the next student. They were doing stuff in their lessons that I was only just learning in A-level!

The main part of the trip was the science teaching in the Sifoe Senior Secondary School. This ran very smoothly and I was amazed about the knowledge of some of the students. Some even taught me some science! The students were keen to learn so much during the days we were teaching them and this made the experience so much more enjoyable. The graphs, tables and conclusion they made were to a very high standard and the best I have seen in a very long time. With the experiments going so well and the students fully engaged with what we were saying, I believe all parties had an amazing time. Our leaders even spoke to me after to say they were very impressed with how well I came out of my shell and became a confident teacher.

After students had gone, Sam our leader decided to test me on some chemistry while everyone had their lunch and waited for the lecture about Gambian politics. This put me on the spot and with my chemistry teaching looking on I felt more pressure in that moment than when I was teaching the enthusiastic students. To my pleasure I knew more than I thought.

Dancing is very popular in The Gambia by all the tribes. To our surprise the dancing was more interactive than we originally expected. Our legs hurt so much by the end of the trip! There were so many different forms of dancing by the different tribes and groups. The dancing was accompanied by drumming and clapping.

With the last day looming on me, I was keen to learn some Mandika. With help from Fada and Isatou I learnt the numbers 1-10.

- 1.kilin
- 2.fula
- 3.saba
- 4.naani
- 5.luulu
- 6.wooro
- 7.worowula
- 8.sey
- 9.kononto
- 10.tan

There are many more activities I could talk about, but I hope that the pictures can convey them all. Otherwise this report could get very long.

Overall this was a trip of a lifetime. Emotional goodbyes and speeches at the end made it even harder to leave such a beautiful country. Thank you to all the sponsors and the other students, leaders and teachers that made this trip the very best it could be, and one that I will remember for the rest of my life.