

Kempson Rosedale Enterprise Trust Report

My original gap year plan was to spend 9 months volunteering abroad, all with the company Projects Abroad. This involved 3 months doing conservation work in the Annapurna Mountains, Nepal, followed by 3 months teaching English in the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu and finishing with 3 months sports teaching in Sri Lanka. During my time I slightly changed my plan, as you will find out.



In Early September, I arrived in a small mountain village, called Ghandruk. Located deep within the Annapurna Conservation Area and 2000m above sea level, I was spoilt for views and excited to see what work I would be doing. The tasks set included setting up and checking the camera traps, bird surveys, butterfly surveys, amphibian surveys and data entry. The daily routine included a 2-3 hour morning activity followed by another hours 2-3 in the afternoon. The timings varied depending on the activity and weather; sometimes we would start bird surveys at 0600 because we would see

more diverse and rare birds. Before leaving England, I wasn't hugely interested in bird or butterfly watching. However, trekking through the Himalayas, spotting bright colourful birds or butterflies and being able to identify them became slightly addictive. Having been there longer than most other volunteers, I was often chosen to be in charge of presentations for new volunteers and leading the butterfly and bird surveys. My favourite task involved setting up camera traps deep within the forest. We would choose a location to set up a camera and then camouflage it so poachers couldn't see it. The aim was to catch what types of mammals live in the area, as well as catching any poachers. One time, we spotted 2 common leopards across a landslide on the way back from a morning trek. Unfortunately, none of us had our cameras with us but they were beautiful to watch and we were the first volunteers to ever see live leopards in Ghandruk. Luckily, we caught one of the leopards on our camera traps a week later. The data that we collected and input was sent to Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP). This was then used to show if populations of species were increasing or decreasing and in which areas. On weekends we didn't have to work and I often chose to go on treks around Ghandruk. During my time, I travelled to Poon Hill (3210 metres high), relaxed in natural hot springs with monkeys and trekked up to Annapurna Base Camp, 4310 metres above sea level. Although this was tough on my legs and breathing, I loved every day in the mountains and Ghandruk became a second home to me.



When I first arrived in Nepal, I spent a couple of days in Kathmandu and I experienced how areas were still badly affected by the earthquake. I was also aware of the Disaster Relief Project and so I switched from teaching English to the Disaster Relief project. I started this project early December and I knew I had made a good choice. I felt I could contribute more to the kids and schools by helping build new classrooms. This was needed because teachers and children are prohibited from teaching in high-rise buildings. They are therefore limited to being taught on classrooms at ground level so have limited

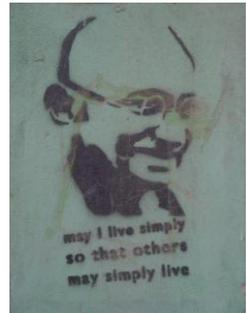




teaching space. The resources and equipment used were basic and the work was mostly manual labour. This only enhanced my passion to help build a friendly and useful environment for the children and teachers. I was fortunate enough to oversee 2 projects being constructed. The tasks included digging trenches, building foundations, mixing cement and concrete, bricklaying for the walls, painting and setting up the steel frames for the roof and walls. The daily routine involved starting work at 0930, lunch from 1200-1300, then working again until 1500. Each day was tough work but it was satisfying to see improvements and progress. My favourite part of the construction was bricklaying, especially for the walls. I found this therapeutic and I enjoyed being able to see my own contribution and improvements over time. The brick walls were set to 3 feet so there was no risk of children getting damaged if another earthquake hit. The concrete mixing was extremely hard work because we had to do it by hand but this helped us volunteers bond even more and help

each other out. We would have discussions on how to make the work more efficient and if we any issues or suggestions for the worksite. I enjoyed volunteering on the Disaster Relief project and I enjoyed living in Nepal, so much so I didn't want to leave! Instead of going to Sri Lanka, I decided to stay on the disaster relief project for another 6 weeks, and finish my time back at the conservation project. I chose this because I felt I could help out more with my improved knowledge and love for the country.

After finishing my 4 and half months on the DR project, I travelled back to Ghandruk to spend my last 6 weeks in my 2nd home. Having already spent time here, I was well known to the coordinators and host family. I was also in charge of managing new volunteers, helping out with any concerns and taking control of small groups for the surveys.



How did it benefit me?

I am grateful for all my experiences in Nepal. I am extremely fortunate to have met many friendly and inspiring people. The volunteers I met have all become friends that I have shared great memories with. With each person I met, I tried to take the positives from their personality and incorporate it into my life.

Having spent almost 9 months in a developing country, I started to feel like a local. I manage to learn the language well enough to speak to locals and I became accustomed to their simple way of life. Nepali people are extremely friendly so I made new connections and friends around Kathmandu and Ghandruk area. I also realised just how lucky we are in a developed country and how I take things for granted back home. Hot water, Wi-Fi, electricity, central heating and furniture are just some examples of what I had limited or no access to. Whilst exploring the Kathmandu streets, I saw some street art that read a Ghandi quote: "May I live simply so that others may simply live". This has become one of my favourite quotes and something I hope to always keep in mind.

I have also learnt a wide range of skills such as teamwork, communication skills, time and money management. This will be useful when I am studying at university and in any job. I have also become more motivated to help others and achieving my goals. I am doing industrial design at university next year, which isn't related to my gap year projects I chose. However, I intend to be able to design products that could benefit others less fortunate than myself.

Travelling and volunteering abroad has improved my independence and love for exploring new places. Volunteering has opened my eyes to how there are so many amazing places out there, but most importantly, the unfortunate situations that others are in.



How it benefited others

At first I felt I wasn't contributing enough in the conservation project because I wasn't able to see visual progress. This changed when I learnt that ACAP uses all our data to see how successful the area is being conserved. This information is showed at ACAP headquarters and sent to the other conservation areas in Nepal. The use of camera traps means poachers have an increased risk of getting caught. This has therefore reduced poaching numbers and helped conserve species such as kalij pheasant, hill partridge and barking deer.

The Disaster Relief project showed me how happy the kids were at school and they wanted to learn. The children were always interested to know what we were doing and seeing their smile when hearing we were building them new classrooms was a special moment. They were also keen to help us so we gave them shovels to dig in the trenches or let them transport cement with us. In return, we enjoyed spending our drink breaks or lunch break playing sport with the school children and teaching them any English. Their English was far better than my Nepali, but I still loved learning.

Tourism and volunteering also brings employment to the locals. An example of this is our host family who provided us with a home and food. My host family also provided me with a friendly atmosphere, happy memories. Onsite engineers were used on the Disaster Relief project, as well as masons and local supervisors.



Why should others take a gap year?

In my experience, I wanted a break from education before going to university and felt I wasn't completely ready for uni life. A gap year can prepare you mentally and physically by helping you improve life skills such as time management, communication and meeting new people. The volunteers you meet are always friendly and easy to get to know. The memories and adventures you share together help you create life-long friendships and stories you can tell others in years to come. Some unforgettable experiences I shared are Everest Base Camp, visiting the Birthplace of The Buddha and Chitwan national park, climbing Annapurna Base Camp, bathing in natural hot springs, rock climbing and mountain biking around Kathmandu valley. I also got to experience traditional festivals such as Holi, Nepali New Year and Diwali, which were all fantastic.

A gap year can help you realise what you want to achieve in life or go on to study. An Egyptian friend once said 'I'm not looking for a job, I'm looking for a purpose'.

There is also less pressure from society when volunteering abroad. You can express yourself more freely and get to know yourself more. You realise what you excel at by helping others and get to learn from others. I managed to learn Nepali language, the ukulele, bricklaying, cooking traditional Nepali food and a few Nepali dance moves.



When speaking to older volunteers, they would often say how they wished they did something like this when they were younger. So don't make the same mistake they did. Go and explore this beautiful world.

I documented my gap year on my online blog at:
harrykp.wordpress.com



