

Learning & Leading Gap Year Scholars

● Ruth Van Tongeren

Dates	March to July 2010
Locations	USA
Activities	Volunteering on national parks, hiking and sight seeing



What did you do on your gap experience?

I volunteered in south west USA on a variety of conservation projects, removed invasive Tamarisk trees, building trails, seed collection. I then spent some time in LA doing the tourist activities before departing on a 3 week Trek America tour from LA to Seattle. I finished up my experience with friends in Longview, Washington when I did some independent travel around Washington State and Oregon.



What did you learn?

I collected information at all the National Parks to further my understanding of the physical environment. What I learnt at A Level could be seen in the field e.g. Grand Tetons and glaciology.

What did you find easy and challenging?

The easier moments for the gap year were sightseeing and relaxing whilst exploring all the places I visited. There were more challenges overall such as: hiking hard trails, working very hard, feeling homesick a couple of times, camping in difficult weather (snow, rain, heat, strong winds), no showers and saying goodbye to so many people.

What impact has your gap experience had?

Being fortunate enough to see all the amazing places in the western USA that I could. I realise how lucky I am to have seen some of the most talked about places in the world and I felt so connected with the environment simply because of its diversity and beauty. Meeting some amazing friends would have to be a close second!



What were the highlights of your gap experience?

Meeting some fantastic people, road trips, the Navajo experience at Monument Valley, sunrise over the Grand Canyon and Monument Valley, staying at the ranch in Montana and seeing the picturesque scenery of all the places I visited especially Yellowstone and Glacier National Park.



How do you think this experience will help you?

I gained confidence and independence before starting university. Collecting all the information from the National Parks and other places I visited could be used in future case studies for my course. I am looking forward to sharing my experiences with others and getting the opportunity to do some more travelling in the future.

What do you wish you had known before your gap experience?

I would have liked to know more about the places I would be visiting beforehand so I could reflect on knowledge I already had when there. Also, it would have been beneficial to have more 'going out' clothes packed instead of purely work gear.

Three pieces of advice for anyone thinking of taking a gap experience

1. If you are camping or hiking, head torches are invaluable.
2. Don't be scared to ask for help abroad. It's good to make general conversation with strangers – you meet some quirky, wonderful people!
3. Be vigilant – keep your personal belongings with you always such as money, card, phone, travel documents and be aware of the people around you.

