



Katie Lang

After graduating from university, trainee solicitor Katie Lang was still unsure about what direction to move her career into and embarked on an expedition with Raleigh to help her decide. Katie joined the charity's ten week expedition to Costa Rica & Nicaragua in autumn 2005 and worked on sustainable community and environmental projects.

When I finished university I was at a loss with what to do with myself! I couldn't believe that after three years of studying I *still* didn't know what sort of career I wanted. I remembered hearing about Raleigh before I started university, as several of my friends had taken gap years. I went along to a Motive8 meeting and quickly realised this was the sort of life changing adventure I needed to help me make up my mind

When I first started researching about Raleigh, I was drawn to the combination of the personal challenge as well as giving back to the local community that the charity offers. The balance of the two made me feel that I could not only be learning about myself, but also about another culture and environment. Although I looked at several other Gap organisations, Raleigh seemed by far the most organised. It offered the structure I needed to feel confident about travelling to a foreign country all alone.

Raleigh also provided me with the ideas and tools to fundraise before setting off on the adventure; people often forget about raising the money which is actually the beginning of the whole experience. Although I had some money saved from previous summer jobs there was still a great deal to raise before my adventure could start. The first thing I did was a simple bake sale; from here my ideas varied from book sales to a sponsored silence! I was amazed at the number of people not only willing to give but to also help me raise the money.

Although the Raleigh head office were always at the other end of the phone with a list of ideas on how to raise the money they encouraged me to use my personal strengths to develop ideas of my own.

My favourite expedition phase was my environmental project. We were sent to an island called San Lucas which is a former prison island just off the coast of Costa Rica. The aims of the project were to help restore the island so that it could be opened as a nature reserve and a historical attraction. We built a path the whole way through the island connecting the various prison buildings and beaches. Along the way we saw birds, the occasional tortoise and heard stories from the local helpers about former notorious prisoners.

The best moment of the whole trip was finishing the trek in Nicaragua. As part of the adventure expedition phase, we had trekked for 14 days over 3 volcanoes. Our group was made up of a variety of volunteers from all different backgrounds and fitness levels; we had to work together to get through the trek in one piece and keep spirits high. This was by far the hardest physical challenge I had ever completed and without the team I am not sure I would have made it to the end.

When I first arrived home from the expedition and people asked what I had learnt I talked mostly about the cultural highlights of Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The people were so

humble and welcoming. Every time we showed up in a new village they were so grateful for our help and treated us as though we were one of their family. We all learnt from each other and were able to walk away feeling as though everyone had benefited from the experience.

Over time I realised I had actually learnt a great deal about myself that I hadn't expected. Living with a team for such a long time requires a huge amount of patience and cooperation. Before I went away with Raleigh I considered myself to be quite a well rounded individual but when I returned I instantly saw aspects of my life that needed more tolerance and understanding. I suppose you could say I matured during my time with Raleigh. I truly believe that an experience that takes you so far away from your everyday life and comfort zone makes you appreciate what you have, and prepares you for life's challenges ahead.

I am currently working in a law firm called Berrymans Lace Mawer as a trainee solicitor. When I finished Raleigh I decided to go back and do a conversion course into law. After two years and several exams I am now working full time and developing all the skills to hopefully have a successful career as a lawyer.

Although Raleigh didn't lead me directly to study law it gave me the confidence to go back into education with a new perspective. I think so often young people struggle with the pressure of making early career decisions and this opportunity allows you to grow and not worry about those pressures.

Raleigh also gave me the skills to be able to work in a team and speak well during job interviews. The job I hold now required me to give a 10 minute presentation and mine was on my time with Raleigh. The partner who interviewed me was full of questions at the end and I felt proud discussing my achievement.

The Raleigh experience humbled me. Although it has now been a few years since I went away with Raleigh I still talk about it as one of the best experiences of my life. I made such amazing friends during my expedition and learnt an array of skills that will stay with me forever. Although some of these skills, such as safely swinging a machete, may never be used again, the majority have set me on a good course for my future.