

Learning & leading

For four years now, the Society's Learning & Leading programme has been using geographical fieldwork to help raise the aspirations, motivation and achievements of young people. The programme has already awarded more than 150 places to young people who, due to challenging circumstances, wouldn't otherwise have had such opportunities.

The experiences provided through Learning & Leading include gap-year scholarships and fieldwork summer school places for A-level students, and apprenticeships for undergraduate fieldwork. These offer opportunities for personal development, such as increasing confidence and maturity, as well as organisational and financial skills. The experiences also help to inform the choices participants make about their studies and careers: experiencing first-hand what they might have only previously learnt about in the classroom has a positive impact on their academic achievement, interest and understanding of geography.

Lynn Munro, 20, from Scotland, was awarded a gap-year scholarship in 2009 to spend three months volunteering at a game reserve and predator sanctuary in South Africa, allowing her to fulfill her dream of working with elephants. Following her short spell volunteering, she travelled independently around New Zealand.

'I feel the impacts of Learning & Leading every day,' she says. 'A year was instantly transformed. I experienced new places travelling overseas, worked with new people on a daily basis and discovered the potential there is after school. I regularly use words and phrases such as determination, ambition, positive thinking and fulfilling dreams to describe the effect of that memorable year.'

Lynn is now in her third year of a course in environmental science and outdoor education at the University of Stirling, and has plans to return to South Africa soon to spend more time assisting an elephant-research project, which she says inspired her to study at university.

The experiences that young people have on the Learning & Leading programme help to give them a broader perspective of the world and to raise their aspirations. Of the 94 participants who've taken part in the pre-university section of the scheme, 88 have gone



LEFT: Lynn Munro at Lake Wanaka in New Zealand; **RIGHT:** Lynn with an elephant in South Africa; **BELOW RIGHT:** Oliver Clark in the badlands of Valle de la Luna near La Paz, Bolivia



on to university; and more than 80 per cent of those are studying geography or a related degree.

Of those who've completed degrees, many have left university with firsts, or other highly graded degrees, often going on to postgraduate research or the start of a geographical career. Others have initiated their own field-research expeditions and a number have had their academic work published.

'Being awarded a place on the programme allows "ordinary" young people to undertake field projects, research and informed travel in a way beyond their original expectations,' says Amber Sorrell, the programme's coordinator. 'Feedback from participants highlights the programme's positive impact on their confidence, academic motivation and desire to travel and see the world first-hand to further enhance their geographical knowledge and understanding.'

Earlier this year, Oliver Clark was awarded a fieldwork apprenticeship with the Society, collaborating with Peruvian students on a project in the wetland forest of the Pastaza-Marañón basin in northwestern Amazonia. The team looked at the environmental history of abandoned river channels in the Peruvian Amazon.

'I wanted to widen my experience in geographical research techniques and saw it as a good opportunity to further my geographical knowledge,' says Oliver. 'I learnt a lot about the culture and education system in Peru, and the experience has not only helped to shape my degree, but given me more of an idea of what I am interested in and areas I would like to pursue in the future, which is priceless.'

Twice each academic year, Learning & Leading also offers free places for teachers to go on residential weekend masterclasses. So far, 71 teachers have taken part in the masterclasses, which aim to support teachers from maintained schools facing challenges and enhance the quality of their school fieldwork programmes.

About 400 young people and teachers will directly benefit through Learning & Leading placements over the course of its seven-year duration, in the process, gaining a wealth of fantastic opportunities for learning and personal development. As Amber says: 'The added confidence that experiences on the programme bring makes young people more open to taking, and making more of, the opportunities that life can provide, which is wonderfully rewarding.'

■ For more information about the programme, please visit www.rgs.org/learning&leading



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ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY (WITH IBG)
SELECTION OF EVENTS FOR JANUARY

14 January, 2.30pm
Lost ship of polar exploration
(Be Inspired, London)



Ryan Harris will discuss the recent discovery and study of the wreck of HMS *Investigator*, which sheds light on the lives of the ship's company and commander, who abandoned the ship when trapped by pack ice in Mercy Bay.
📍 Tickets: RGS-IBG members free, non-members £5; pre-booking required. Call 020 7591 3044 or email showcase@rgs.org

14 January, 7.30pm
Shale gas: fracking, groundwater and earthquakes
(Lecture, Lancaster)

Shale gas is seen by some as a low-carbon bridge to renewables and by others as a menace. This talk by Professor Mike Stephenson, head of science (energy) at the British Geological Survey, will examine the resource size and impacts of extraction. Joint event with Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University.
📍 For further information, visit www.rgs.org/northwest

17 January, 7.30pm
Close encounters down under
(Lecture, Chester)

Award-winning photographer, author and naturalist Margaret Sixsmith presents a photographic portrayal of Australia's diverse and unusual wildlife. Joint meeting with the Chester Lecture Society. Venue: The Grosvenor Museum, Grosvenor Street, Chester, CH1 2DD.
📍 Tickets: RGS-IBG members free, non-members £5; donation requested. For further information, call 01260 271 596

24 January, 6.30pm
British Antarctic Survey: aircraft operations
(Lecture, Filton)

Rod Arnold, head of the British Antarctic Survey's air unit, discusses the difficulties involved in conducting research in the Antarctic and, more recently, the Arctic from an operational and engineering perspective. Venue: Concorde Room, BAWA Leisure Centre, 589 Southmead Road, Filton, Bristol, BS34 7RG.
📍 Tickets are free. Please register attendance only at www.raesbristol.org.uk or by calling 07515 297 787

26-27 January 2013
The Telegraph Adventure Travel Show, Olympia, London

Packed with inspirational travel advice from experts, explorers, tour leaders and writers to help you plan your perfect trip, as well as seminars on travel photography and travel writing seminars. The show will also feature the Society's Expedition Planning Zone.
📍 Tickets: Members can quote 'RGS' for special advance tickets at £4. Book at www.adventureshow.com or call 0871 230 7159

31 January, 7pm
Wines of the world
(Younger Members' event, London)

A chance to sample wines from around the world guided by an expert. Informal social evening, all welcome!
📍 Tickets: RGS-IBG members £15, non-members £19 (including cold buffet). Limited places, please book early. Visit www.rgs.org/whatson or call 020 7591 3100



The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is a leading world centre for geographers and geographical learning. One of our aims is to stimulate the awareness and enjoyment of the subject to a diverse range of people.

Geography is about the understanding of the people, places and environments of our world, the processes by which they are changing, and the interconnections between them - both locally and globally.

The Society carries out a wide range of activities to support its aims. We support research groups; promote geography within the national curriculum; produce scholarly publications; provide training in scientific field techniques and expeditions; offer information through our large map collection, library and picture library; and engage the wider public through our popular national lecture series.

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