



Two years into a graduate programme at a business and technical consultancy firm, Alastair Parry decided to take a structured sabbatical in which he joined Raleigh's expedition in Borneo. He enjoyed it so much; he decided to stay on as Volunteer Manager in a Trek Leader role.

Since graduating two years ago from Durham university, I've been on a graduate programme with a business and technical consultancy firm (Cap Gemini). Cap Gemini have an existing programme with Raleigh where they run regeneration projects but this is the first time the company has run a structured sabbatical programme with Raleigh. I first took part on expedition as a venturer and then continued into the Spring 2010 expedition as a Volunteer Manager (Trek Leader).

From my time out, I wanted to see the world and to travel and I wanted to experience Malaysia as a participant rather than just a traveller. I also needed to get away as I was becoming a bit blinded by life in London.

What attracted me to Raleigh was its team's diversity. As a venturer you are thrown in with people from all over the UK as well as the rest of the world. As a Volunteer Manager you have to manage that diversity, and the conflicts that arise which is good experience.

My key responsibilities were as follows:

- 1.) Getting up to 13 venturers through a trekking phase without injuring themselves.
- 2.) Getting up to 13 venturers through a trekking phase having enjoyed it!

In my role as Trek Leader I had a variety of responsibilities including looking after rationing and making sure the group were hydrated enough. I also had to provide support and facilitate group activity, maintaining all contact with field base. During the first part of the expedition phase, I had to lead and facilitate group bonding, as well as ensuring that personal development and one-to-ones took place. I was constantly enforcing health and safety, and was a key point of contact with guides and supporting organisations such as the Sabah Forestry Park.

This role has been brilliant for my self-development. Motivating a group of 18-24 year olds to get up and trek at 6am is challenging. You have to be constantly motivated and upbeat. You also have to learn how to delegate. I was always the day-leader's back up.

I have learnt new hard and soft skills to fulfil my role. Hard skills I've learned have included trekking, paranging, building bashers & camps. Open fire cooking and diving.

Soft skills I've learned have included management, motivation, delegation, facilitation, how to do one-to-ones and conflict management. The last three skills have been completely new to me and developing these has been a process of trial and error and learning on the go. Learning this way has been much more fun than studying the theory and then implementing it.

One of my best moments on expedition was hearing a clouded leopard moving in the background which was a real highlight after a hard day's trekking. One of the most challenging moments on expedition was trekking along the ridge at Crocker Range National Park knowing there was a distinct lack of water and trying to keep both myself and the group calm. Aside from keeping the group calm I also had to keep field base informed with our progress and liaise with the guides to make educated decisions on what steps to take next.

I've taken part in two treks on routes which have been new to Raleigh and I have worked with guides who've never worked with Raleigh before. I think this 'newness' has meant that I've been more fully involved with the decision making process which has been great.

I've learnt about the difference in cultures and how to talk to people from different backgrounds. I've learnt that sometimes a group will go a certain way and I can't control everything, sometimes I can only mitigate the outcomes of certain situations. The training I've had with Raleigh means I feel more able to talk to people I don't know on a more personal level building my hard and soft skills. Raleigh has tested my level-headedness and calmness in extreme, and life threatening situations.

To sum up my Raleigh experience: "Wholesome". You see a side of the country you'd never normally see unless you were working there. You attain a sense of achievement you wouldn't get unless you pushed yourself to your emotional, physical and mental capabilities

