

My Raleigh experience , Amy Robertson
Borneo 10 week expedition January – April 2009

Before joining my expedition with Raleigh I had dropped out of university and was working in a restaurant. At 24 I had experienced periods of depression, was frustrated with my lack of skills, didn't particularly like my job and knew I wasn't reaching my full potential.

I had always wanted to volunteer abroad with a charity but all the volunteer agencies I found seemed to require a degree or professional qualification, or were profit making companies. When I found Raleigh I rang them up immediately to sign up to an expedition! **Raleigh attracted me primarily because of the focus on personal development skills such as leadership, teamwork and increased confidence that could be gained from such an experience, combined with the worthwhile work in developing countries.**

When I rang the staff at Raleigh with my questions about the expedition my main worry was my age. I would be 24 at the time of leaving for expedition and would celebrate my 25th birthday whilst in Borneo. The person I spoke to assured me that although I would be one of the oldest venturers that there would be a broad mix of people from different backgrounds and that my age and maturity would add to mine and everyone else's experience on expedition.

I celebrated my 25th birthday on the day I found out where I was going for my first phase. It was truly the best birthday I have ever had. Everyone on the expedition wished me happy birthday and I felt so lucky to be with such an amazing group of people and knew on that day that **deciding to go away with Raleigh was the best thing I had ever done.**

My first phase was the environmental project which was amazing. The project site was in a conservation area in the middle of the jungle and our home was a camp that the BBC built to film the series 'Expedition Borneo'. We were working and living alongside a group of rangers building a staircase to enable scientists easier access to study this precious area and keep it protected from destruction. The work was tiring and very hot and sweaty but the group had lots of fun while doing it, and we were lucky enough to have a shower under a beautiful waterfall at the end of a hard days work! Without television or even electricity we made our own entertainment, playing games, looking at the wildlife, learning Malaysian and the rangers taught us how to play their favourite card games.

The first phase showed me that being a little bit older than the other venturers didn't matter whilst on expedition. Everyone who is taking part in a Raleigh expedition has come to meet new people that they wouldn't normally meet and take part in new activities that they wouldn't normally do. My age and life experience added to the group dynamic and I have made friendships with lots of younger people that otherwise I wouldn't have met and I have also made good friends with some of the volunteer managers and Malaysian venturers who were around my age.

One of the best moments on expedition was completing a gravity water feed system on the community project and seeing the water flow for the first time when we turned on the tap. The community we were working with were so happy to see water returned to their village and **it was a great feeling knowing that this project would not have been completed had it not been for Raleigh's presence in Borneo.**

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The most challenging time on expedition was during the first week of the trek when it rained everyday and we were always wet! There were moments when everyone felt like they didn't want to be in the jungle anymore and it was hard to keep smiling when we were cold and exhausted. We were all in the same boat and helped each other through the rain, and learning to live and trek in these harsh conditions whilst still enjoying myself has showed me that anything is possible.

Going away with Raleigh has taught me that I am a very caring, empathetic, hardworking and strong person and I discovered that I have very good communication skills and can form friendships with pretty much anyone. One of the most surprising things that I learnt was that I was a really good team leader which I would never have said was one of my skills. **Being with a variety of people also taught me that different groups of individuals can live and work together happily as a team.** Showing that age, nationality or personal circumstances really don't affect this. If anything it is much better to have a diverse group as we all have different skills and strengths to share with each other.

My future plans have definitely been shaped by my experience with Raleigh. Before my expedition I was working in a job that I didn't enjoy but didn't really know what I wanted to do and didn't know how I could progress. **After discovering where my skills lie I am looking forward to a future working in the charity sector with other young people to help them progress and achieve their full potential.** I am also planning to return to Borneo again next year with Raleigh as a volunteer manager.

Overall my expedition with Raleigh has definitely been the best thing I have ever done. **My experience has and will affect my life positively for years to come.** I have gained confidence, seen and done amazing things, formed lasting friendships and great memories that I will keep for life.

We all have an expedition within us. Find yours at raleighinternational.org



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