

Luke Argall was awarded the Raleigh Graduate Bursary Award for Volunteering Overseas and joined a Raleigh expedition to India in Autumn 2009

I went straight to University when I was 18 and started a course that I was unsure about doing and without any financial support from my parents. I made the decision to leave this course and restart the following year doing a degree in Music Production. I had four fabulous years of doing something that I thoroughly enjoyed and moved home with the hope and intention to get work in the music industry. Unfortunately and especially in the current climate, this was harder than I imagined. I had three part time jobs which just got me by from week to week, but I could feel myself losing track of my ambitions and getting stuck in the rut that so many other people in my community have done, and this is something that I promised myself I would never do.

I gained a degree in music production in the summer of 08 and was planning on pursuing a career in the music industry. I was offered a job in my old secondary school as a teaching assistant which I accepted but meant I stayed at home and after six months I could feel myself getting stuck in a rut. I therefore decided to quit my job and look into going travelling. I heard about Raleigh through a university email and it just seemed like perfect timing and an opportunity I couldn't miss out on.

I basically wanted to go and explore, learn new things and just start living life. There's so much to see and do in the world and being 25, and not having done much travelling before, I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it.

I had never really heard of Raleigh or any other company which did volunteer work, but after learning about Raleigh I looked into the different organisations, but there was never any doubt in my mind that it was Raleigh I wanted to travel with. Reading all the past blogs of people who had travelled and watching the videos made me see that Raleigh was a very good charity and they did things properly and didn't just want to take you on a free ride, they wanted you to earn it, enjoy it and then give something back – and this was the deciding factor for me. I want to be able to do something amazing with my life and then show others that they can do the same.

For my community project on expedition I was building a school and toilets in a village called Muttimoola which is a tribal village being developed with the aid of CTRD (Centre for Tribal and Rural Development). Work consisted of shifting numerous amounts of material, including bricks, rubble and sand as well as helping the masons with the construction of the school/toilet blocks, we also dug out a few cess pits next to the toilets we built. Towards the end of the phase we also helped plaster the side of the school. We actually stayed in the village amongst the community which was amazing. We became very good friends with the villagers and had a great relationship with the kids, playing games and sports with them every day. The group I was in worked very hard on both the work we were given to do and interacting with the villagers which created a really nice atmosphere to work and live in.

Trekking on the adventure phase was definitely full of highlights and as it was my last phase, truly felt like a reward for all my previous hard work. The main highlight was climbing the second highest peak in India outside the Himalayas. It was such an immense achievement and the view from the top was amazing. There are so many more from the whole expedition but over the three phases this sticks out as a rewarding sense of achievement.

As well as the highs, trekking also had bad moments which pushed you both physically and mentally. There was one day when we had to walk 28km in the hot sun and with a heavy rucksack. Luckily my feet were in good condition and I was in good health, but the last few km seemed to take so long and it was just a case of telling myself that every step was that step closer to the campsite and the finish. Again though, once I'd reached it, I felt such a sense of achievement and it was all worth it.

I have learnt not to take things for granted. I've realised I'm a very lucky person and to remember how some people live in this world. Also, to look at the bigger picture, what I'm actually working towards with things, so that when times are tough, just to remember what I'm doing and why.

I think Raleigh's a great thing to have on my CV and will show potential employers that I am an outgoing person who is willing to take on and tackle new challenges within different environments. I have been able to use my experiences on Raleigh to help me answer questions and give examples in recent interviews. When asked about leadership qualities and how I would deal with colleagues regarding their behaviour, I was able to refer to my time in the jungle during my environmental phase. I discovered a better way of dealing with people and when a situation arose during my community phase, I was then able to speak to the individual calmly and chat to them about how we could work things out. This led to a great sense of team spirit and unity within in the group.

My Raleigh experience really encouraged me to want to give something back to my community and take on Raleigh's 4th challenge. I have done this by going back to the school I used to attend, and later work at, and giving twenty minute talks to different year groups about my experiences in India. I put together a slideshow full of pictures which highlighted my greatest moments and achievements whilst on expedition. I didn't really have a script as the pictures prompted the memories I cherish so much. The feedback I have received from teachers and students about my expedition has been fantastic and quite emotional at times.

It has been a pleasure to come back home and share my experiences with so many people and to take pleasure from their reactions. Hopefully I have inspired some people to follow in my footsteps and 'Get Out There'.

Raleigh has definitely been one of the highlights of my life and I truly believe that was also because I was in India. Raleigh came along at the right time and I was presented with an opportunity/challenge that I could not turn down. It was an amazing experience, meeting new people, making new friends and quite literally, living in another world.

Take a look at our Raleigh Fundraising Blog to see how Luke raised the funds for his expedition <http://raleighfundraising.blogspot.com/>