

## **Olivia Hayward joined a 10 week expedition to India in 2008.**

I arrived in Mysore, India with 32 other venturers and about 20 staff members known as volunteer managers. We all had a great induction at fieldbase for a few days before being deployed.

### **Community phase - Hosekerasunda**

My first project was the community phase, so I was taken with my small group of 12 and 3 staff members to the remote village of Hosekerasunda to build ten composting toilets (one for each family). I hate being a tourist, and this definitely wasn't for tourists. The villagers welcomed us with open arms; they really wanted these toilets 'like the other village' a few fields away, their closest neighbours. We built the brick structures with help from each family. It was a wonderful introduction into Indian culture; we lived in their school, ate the food they cooked for us, swam in the reservoir every day, learned some Kannada (the local language) and had a fantastic time. I had only met a couple of my fellow venturers at an induction weekend arranged by Raleigh before we arrived, but within a day we were all lying out on a tarpaulin every night discussing everything from food to friends under the stars. We formed great relationships, especially with the children who were madly keen on cricket and 'duck, duck, goose', which we taught them and played endlessly thereafter. Leaving after three weeks was heart-wrenching; they presented us with flower necklaces and there were many tears on both sides.

### **Adventure phase – trekking through Kerala**

My next project was the adventure phase, which I was particularly looking forward to. We had a ten day trek through beautiful Kerala, two days' mountain biking and three days' kayaking in the peaceful back waters. One of the best things about Raleigh is the lessons it teaches you, such as the importance of team work. At one point, one girl collapsed in tears half way up a mountain we were trekking up, proclaiming that she couldn't go on, couldn't do it. The team emptied her bag, divided her things so she wasn't carrying anything except a toilet roll, fed her sweets (precious treasures out there) and sang made-up songs about our team to motivate her. She was the first one on the summit that day. That's team work. That's Raleigh.

We went to remote places – where whole villages would turn out to watch us have lunch, everyone honked and waved madly when the drove past us on the road, something that made me smile even at the end of the day.

### **Environmental phase – Nagarhol National Park**

The last project was the environmental phase, which was brilliant. To say that we laughed a lot would be an understatement. We stayed in Nagarhole National Park repairing elephant trenches, which stopped marauding elephants from raiding the sugarcane fields just outside, which often resulted in them being shot by the angry villagers. The work was hard, but so satisfying. I remember sitting at night listening to a herd of elephants calling to each other; one half was stuck on the outside of the park, the

**Raleigh**

other side was inside; the trench we had repaired that day had split them up, showing us the effect of our work instantly. They were reunited later that night, but we had made a lasting impact.

We had fun afternoons with trips out to visit waterfalls, sampling local foods, playing volleyball with the rangers, we had 'bungalow Olympics', salsa lessons and yoga, amongst other things. I got to know my group so well we became the 'Nagarhole Family'. One of the highlights was the safari in the forest, where we got to see some wildlife close-up, including wild elephants.

**Raleigh**