



people and places: responsible volunteering



**"Truly accountable, ethical, responsible, sustainable volunteer travel"**

# Newsletter

**EDITOR NIGEL PEGLER**

Winter  
2008

Kate and Sallie join me in wishing everyone seasons greetings and all they would wish themselves for the New Year.

There are some great volunteer stories in this issue please keep them coming in,

E-mail your stories to [newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)

## FROM SALLIE AND KATE

**people and places out and about - come and visit us March 2009.**

We will be taking a VERY small stand at the onelifelive show again. The dates are 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> March.

Last year it was so great to be able to meet so many volunteers – both past and future. The show has probably the largest representation of volunteer organisations under any one roof anywhere in the UK. So you can take the opportunity to check out other organisations too.

The show is held at Olympia in London. Take a look at <http://www.onelifelive.co.uk/> for details.

We know there are many of you who will not be able to make it to London and we apologise again for not finding a venue outside London...we are trying.

We will be issued some free tickets, so if you want to come along, please let us know and we will post the ticket to you. If it is as last year a ticket will give 2 people entry.

And finally, we would love some help! If you would like to come along and help us for an hour or two or longer please email Sallie at [sallie@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](mailto:sallie@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk).



## Our very grand stand last year

If you could spare a few hours to help it would be appreciated and having helped last year I found it a very rewarding experience, with the chance to meet people and explain what ethical and responsible volunteering is all about. I think that it is so much more relevant for potential volunteers to speak to someone who has actually volunteered themselves instead of talking to someone who just wants' to sell you a holiday.

Nigel

**Bokamoso bicycle project at Mapoch**

Bokamoso is a Tswana word meaning "into the future" which is the ethos of the project, between myself, Kate of p&p and our South African partners we wanted to set up a cycle project to give the villagers cheap transport, but not only this we wanted it to be sustainable and to supply employment to the villagers.

I helped set up the project during August 2007 I bought some bicycles and tools and assembled some donated bikes and also built a prototype cycle trailer, Pastor Peter is running the project from his veggie shop which we converted to a cycle store. This project has been made possible by many people, but particular thanks should go to Re-cycle for donating the bikes and advising us and Hsieh family for their generous donation towards the cost of the container and shipping. The container is now being used as a store and workshop. Charles Addison went to Mapoch to teach the villagers how to assemble cycle trailers and Emma Finlay helped design and build a cycle track and also helped with a business plan for cycle tours.

**Friday 19th September 2008**



I travelled to Re-cycle`s warehouse at Colchester to help load the container we are sending to Mapoch, I arrived at 9.50am expecting the loading of the container to have started but the lorry was delayed and we didn`t start until past midday and finished at 6.10 pm. As I had woken at 5.30am and didn`t get home until 9pm I was slightly shattered!

To load the container each bike had to be lifted up on top of a stack of pallets and then into the back of the container, the bikes were stacked 13 across and 3 high and every available space filled with spares of which there were many.

We tried to load a good mixture of bikes from very small kids bikes up to old PO bikes which although heavy are very robust and straight forward to maintain. Although it was a hard job to load the bikes it will be even worse to unload as there was not an inch of space to spare when we had finished and after the bikes have settled on the sea voyage it will be fun to untangle them.

The container arrived on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> of October 2008 and we were all emailed the following from Marnie in South Africa

YIPPEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

17h40 - the truck has pulled up next to the shop - call Jeremy to hear Peter SPEACHLESS - " the single most important thing that has happened in my life aside from family" Quote Peter Mabasa



And then this email from Jeremy

After waiting on site for TWO days the container eventually arrived, due to various delays with the railways, depot and delivery truck!! These must have been the slowest 48 hours.

The container arrived at about 17:50 and the light was starting to fade. But we had a lot of the local community come and see the special delivery. Such a big truck and the technicalities of offloading of the container was worth the wait. We had hoped to put the container on the left hand side of the building and had levelled the ground and placed concrete blocks accordingly. But the best laid plans of mice and men.... The truck can only offload to the right-hand side and this messed up our plans a bit. If we offloaded where we wanted to then the door would be at the back of the building - not ideal. So you can imagine the scurrying to move the concrete slabs to the other side of the building!

Peter and the guys (Nathi, Aaron, John, Marcus, and Solly) were so excited. To such an extent that Marcus took one of the bicycles from the shop and rode out to meet the truck on the way. Needless to say that when the truck arrived it was carrying 353 not 352 bicycles.

A very BIG thank you to everyone involved in raising the funds to make this possible.



## The smile on Pastor Peters face says it all!



So Pastor Peter and the villagers have a cycle shop, the knowledge and means to build cycle trailers and bicycles, a cycle race track, a fledgling cycle tourism business and a container full of bikes and spares. So we are sorted; well not quite we still need volunteers to pass on business skills, bicycle and wheel building skills and a million other things and of course the village needs help in a lot of other areas. Please use the following links to see how you can help....

<http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/ProjectView.aspx?id=1>

<http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/ProjectView.aspx?id=114>



We have just received this story from Marnie

The school run

Mapoch style

## Mountain Bike Challenge – Jo'burg's Biggest Cycle Race 15 November 2008



It all started off on the Thursday evening when 5 enthusiastic cyclists and Peter, plus our new volunteer Julia arrived at our home in Midrand.

Peter knew what to expect, but the others had never been into Johannesburg before, yet alone spent time in our home – it might have been a bit daunting. Jeremy was in the UK at the time, so it was Ayrton, myself and our new house-mate Bryan who met them. Fortunately food is always a good settler, after a hearty dinner of stew and pap the team settled in for the night.

Friday broke with much excitement as well as trepidation – the 5 cyclists, Pastor Peter and Julia were going over to the Sandton Convention centre to get their race numbers! This was BIG, to be one of 3,500 mountain bikers and over 25,000 road cyclists was quite an eye opener. All parties "carbo-

loaded" very well on Friday evening, no, no beers were allowed, that was for after the race AND for adults only!

Saturday morning 04h30 the two youngest cyclists, Albert and Koketso, were already at Pastor Peter's door asking if it was OK to get up and get ready for the race – they were only starting at 08h00!

The older boys, Marcus, Lloyd and Aaron, were more cool about the whole process, but you could still see their excitement. On arrival at the start, the "cyclist" left us "walkers" way behind as they went to find their respective starting positions. Marcus, Aaron and Lloyd started in the same group at 07h30 – theirs was the 20km timed mountain bike route. I kept on hoping that they were well enough prepared and that the course would not be too tough for them – typical dotting mother-hen. Julia stayed with the two younger boys until they started and by 08h10 all "our boys" were on the tracks – there was nothing us spectators and support team could do but wait. It was hot, wet and MUDDY!

Albert was the first of our cyclists in - he did amazing time, coming within the top 35 + in his group, on the 10km. Koketso was next, basically within the top 50 cyclists in the 10km. Next we moved on over to the 20km finishers. Our wait was not in vain – Lloyd was within the top group of 20km finishers – by this time us supporters had no voice left and were exhausted – we had been running between the 10km finish and the 20km finish to see all "our boys". Marcus was next, closely followed by Aaron. Now the celebrations really started – our team was home and all the boys had completed their races in good time.



OFFICIAL RESULTS (for the 20km event only)

Lloyd:	Time 01:20:59	Group Position 20/278	Overall Position 77/1210	Age Group 5/33
Marcus:	Time 01:22:44	Group Position 26/278	Overall Position 104/1210	Age Group 12/124
Aaron:	Time 01:24:49	Group Position 34/278	Overall Position 135/1210	Age Group 9/33

Being part of this experience and knowing that all we (collectively) have been doing for the bicycle project, and the youth, plus how this has inspired the guys is an awesome and very humbling experience. One that I would never swap, and always grateful to experience. I LOVE my JOB!!!!

## Lessons that touch the heart.

Eileen, Larry and Sarah volunteers on the Port Elizabeth Education Programme 2008

"We keep thinking about the lessons we learned during our visit and how the people we met enriched our lives. In this township, there was much optimism for what can be accomplished under the "new South Africa." We were touched every day by what was and is possible. Among the lessons we learned:

□ **Persevere.** The teachers had grown up under apartheid yet had risen far beyond the limitations that system tried to impose. When Bella, a second-grade teacher, was asked how she learned to speak English so fluently, she said, "You must empower YOUR-SELF." Principal Thambo, a very impressive leader who was born in the township, emphatically stated, "When they imposed the yoke of apartheid upon us, they didn't know they were only making us stronger. We learned how to persevere against all obstacles

□ **Be open to new ideas.** Because every new idea was an opportunity for personal growth, the teachers were very open and willing to try new ways of doing things. They felt they were good teachers before, but also saw that new strategies could be a way of helping children from the townships be more successful. We saw no cynicism or "been there, done that." We were lucky enough to be in the country on Nelson Mandela's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, and his impact on South Africa and on the world cannot be overstated. He urged children to be "descriptive writers" of their own destiny, and these teachers are helping make that happen.

□ **Family, family, family.** There is nothing more important in the Xhosa culture than family. On the trip, we became "The Kugler Family," rather than 3 individuals. It made us appreciate traveling together even more. When the teachers gave us school t-shirts as gifts, they made sure to include a shirt for Sara's husband and for our son/brother and his girlfriend, even though they had never met them. They are family, after all.

□ **Don't frustrate easily.** The aging computers were a constant frustration to us, particularly Eileen who had to work with them daily. Yet the teachers were excited about every new thing they could learn, and simply didn't focus on the limitations. When one computer didn't work, they went to another. They didn't complain; they didn't get upset. They were just eager to gain new skills and didn't gripe about what they didn't have.



□ **Everyone should sing every day.** Singing and dancing were not reserved for concerts or special occasions at the school. Each day started with rousing singing from the students to get their blood flowing and there was no such thing as a wrong note! The teachers sang as they went off to class, as they drank their tea during break, as they went home. After our farewell party, there were delicious refreshments, but the teachers spent most of the time outside singing and dancing. Oh, how we will miss them!

□ **Friendship crosses all boundaries.** True friendships form across national boundaries, across races, across cultures. They form when there is mutual openness, respect and caring. We could not have imagined the friendships that formed over three short weeks. We smile every time we look at the pictures.

## **Reflections on Kathmandu**

### **A compilation of volunteers' thoughts and observations**

"Traffic is frenetic, and the existence of a Highway Code is nowhere evident. Traffic jams are a constant factor, with cars, buses, cycles and motor bikes all vying with pedestrians for a way through. Everywhere there is noise, dust, smells, and colour. Away from the main roads, street surfaces are rough and strewn with litter, but there is a buzz about the place, and religion is a way of life for the Nepalese."

"There is no shortage of good food available; restaurants abound, especially in the Thamel area, and a particular treat for me was finding a little roof-top restaurant where I could sit and watch the world go by while savouring a coffee and a piece of chocolate cake served with hot chocolate sauce!"

Education is neither compulsory nor free in Nepal, but for many of its people, represents the only way out of poverty. There seems to be no system of teacher training in Nepal so it is entirely understandable that most teachers will stick very closely to the book, and use a rote learning technique.

Uttam (the schools founder) is a graduate in film direction, educated in Bombay, but a Kathmandu man. He returned to Nepal and discovered that there were many families where both parents had to work to earn a living, and therefore the children were left to their own devices, many of them inevitably turning to petty crime, drugs, prostitution. He wanted to help, and decided that the only way was to offer education at a very low cost.

It has been said before that we must not go there expecting that we will find a school which is comparable in any way to a British school. This is a Nepalese school and should only be compared, if at all, with other Nepalese schools. The best attitude is one of flexibility, and a willingness to walk with them, trying to feel where their shoes pinch. The Nepalese people are lovely folk, very poor, but keen for their children to learn. The children are very welcoming and eager to try out their English. They are full of questions, and interested in all manner of things, and they deserve the best that we can offer."

"I am loving it out here in Kathmandu, the city is really vibrant, bustling with lots to explore and take in and complete contrast to life back home.

I have continued to stay in the same guest house in Thamel but come Sunday I am due to undertake a home stay for two weeks."



### **Carole at Naxal**



What

a wonderful, rewarding and humbling experience! For me it was great from beginning to end. I did go to Nepal with a very open mind and prepared for anything and I got back so much. I'm sure much more than I put in. I had of course been to Nepal before so did know the conditions of the country.

I got to know the children very well and really enjoyed working with them; feeling very rewarded that I could do a little something different with them that was not their usual routine. Bejaya told us that we 'lifted their lives' – she could tell by talking with them and the expressions on their faces."

Thanks to volunteers Evelyn, Roz, Carole, Melissa and Jean.

"Samata school, Kathmandu. Students in grades 9 & 10 have produced their first ever newsletters! With encouragement and technical assistance from volunteer Peter Unsworth, the students write about issues important to them - tourism; fashion; education; conservation; family; and much more besides, with maturity and all in English. Well done to them all! To see the full Samata newsletter go to <http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/news.aspx> "

## From Sallie and Kate

Two of our partners win recognition at the Virgin Responsible Tourism Awards.

"The Responsible Tourism Awards are the most competitive and prestigious awards of their kind in the world and are a collaboration between online travel directory responsibletravel.com, who founded and organize the Awards, UK media partners The Daily Telegraph, Geographical Magazine and BBC World News, and World Travel Market, who host the Awards ceremony"

We are so proud! A winner and a highly commended!

Adama Bah, our Gambian partner won the best poverty reduction initiative for the organisation GIG (Gambia is Good)

"For demonstrating that it is possible for local farmers, 1,000 growers, 90% of them women, to produce 20 tonnes of vegetables and fruit in the tourism season to supply the tourism hotels and make a real contribution to the reduction of poverty in The Gambia – this is a local project of international significance"



Our partners in Gauteng South Africa, Marnie and Jeremy, were highly commended for the volunteer programme and the work they do in Mapoch...the very community Nigel started the bike project in.



The judges said

"Voluntours shows what a small family run business can contribute to the development of a marginalised and economically poor community. By carefully harnessing the enthusiasm and skills of volunteers they have enabled the Ndebele community at Mapoch to develop their nursery and school and a bicycle project to improve their lives"

Take a look at to learn more about the community <http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/ProjectView.aspx?id=114>



And the small hotel where some of our volunteers stay in The Gambia and who cared for Sallie so well when she volunteered in The Gambia a few years ago were also highly commended in the Small hotel category. Well done Maurice and Geri and team

The judges said " An urban hotel in residential Fajara, The Safari Garden Hotel stays open all year to ensure continuous employment and trains its staff to become managers. The hotel enables visitors to engage with people from the local community, pioneered the development of hotel guides and demonstrates that it is possible to do well by doing good.

To learn more about the awards and the praise for our partners take a look at the following links

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/hubs/greentravel/3448029/Responsible-Tourism-Awards-Green-getaways-in-lean-times.html>

<http://www.responsibletourismawards.com/>

<http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/f567a979#/f567a979/1>

And a final PS. Thanks to all of you who nominated us for the award – we decided not to compete this year – but we will be back – eager to win - we are very excited that more and more volunteer organisations are embracing the ethics of responsible volunteering – so now we want to raise the bar!

### **Mr January brings us summer in September.**

The arrival of sunshine in September here in the UK was no mystery - it was brought all the way from Port Elizabeth South Africa by Mr January. He is the principal of Emafini School and recently retired chair of the schools cluster ( the group of schools we work with in Port Elizabeth).

He filled every moment of his 17 day trip....visiting previous volunteers, schools and some sightseeing.



### **Mr January chats with year 5 Hildenborough School.**

Amongst his highlights were visiting the schools, seeing Aida on DVD at a volunteer's home ( Kate and Sallie managed to find a copy which he has taken home with great joy), a visit to Canterbury Cathedral and a party held in his honour – he's a real party animal and a people person.



### **A day out at Wisley with volunteers Liz Lamorna and Barry**

He planned his trip because he wanted to come personally to thank volunteers and fundraisers alike for the support that they have given. He has asked us to thank you all – and you know who you are – he said he wasn't sure he'd ever be able to put into words the sense of friendship and welcome he had received from everyone.

Sadly he took the sunshine home with him! But he promises it's there - waiting for everyone in Port Elizabeth.

Some thoughts that might be useful to first time education volunteers from Brenda and Barry who are due to travel to Port Elizabeth for the fourth time early next year! The advice is for Port Elizabeth volunteers but so much is true for all volunteers, wherever they visit in the world.



Be prepared for a cultural shock. The contrast between the comfort of the hotel or home stay and the surroundings in Port Elizabeth and the poverty of the townships can be overwhelming, particularly if you have never visited a third world country before.

This is balanced by the warmth of welcome you will receive. Remember that many of the teachers were trained and then taught under the old Apartheid system. Their expectations of the children are not high and part of your job is to raise them for both teachers and children. Most black African teachers have no experience of teaching outside the townships and have limited career prospects. Many will feel nervous about taking on new ideas and this is where it is important to be careful about what you say and tactful in how you say it. But many are keen to learn of new approaches to learning and will be willing to try new things.

### **Brenda & Barry with the retiring head of schools cluster**

Try to earn the respect of your colleagues and always have a good educational reason for what you are suggesting. Always treat your colleagues as colleagues and try to become part of the team working together for the good of the children. We have found that most teachers have a great sense of humour and enjoying laughing and so humour can be a great ice breaker, especially with the children who are generally reserved and respectful to adults, particularly elderly adults, which works in our favour!!

The pace of life is slower and this can be frustrating but you cannot change it, you just have to go with it. Don't expect to achieve great things in just 4 weeks but be content with small successes.

The children are perhaps your greatest assets in being successful as they will be delighted to see you in school. Many will have had little contact with white people, as the townships are self-contained areas. The youngest children will not speak English fluently but this improves as they get older. The children love to help you in any way they can, such as , getting water in buckets, sweeping the floor, cleaning the board, collecting equipment at the end of the lesson, running errands etc. Do remember that many children will have lost a parent or family member to HIV or another illness so be careful of talking about families with the children and tread carefully. Many children live with their grandmothers. In many cases their smart appearance does not reflect the poverty of their homes.

Teaching methods differ fundamentally, in that we try to get to know each child as an individual and move around the classroom speaking to and encouraging individual children. It is easier to do this with a small group. The children will need encouraging to speak up and express their ideas, as their own teachers do not generally encourage this.

Don't think you can change the whole system in just a few weeks if you see things you do not like. Try to understand the problems in the school – total lack of resources, lack of any supply cover for absent teachers and be sympathetic to their situation. Be flexible and adaptable and innovative. Do not go with fixed ideas about what you are going to do or achieve as until you are in the situation you cannot be sure of what you will do. Just by being there and showing an interest in their lives will mean a lot both to teachers and to children, it shows you care and you will never forget the experience and you will not be forgotten by the children.

Most volunteers come home feeling they have received more than they have given.



We want to congratulate Mr Thambo the principal of AV Bukani School on his appointment as chair of the schools cluster in Port Elizabeth; we know that he will continue to lead the cluster with wisdom and dedication. And we would like to take this opportunity to thank the retiring chair Mr January for all his work and staunch support on the volunteer programme



### **Why you should go.**

I had enjoyed a number of holidays in Africa, featuring beautiful scenery , compelling wildlife and great weather. We had met some very welcoming friendly people too, but we knew that in spite of change, there was much need, particularly in South Africa. I was due to retire in about eight months and started finding out about coming to South Africa and working in the rural community. My wife and I had sponsored a boy's education for about four years through Calabash Trust and following links from their site I found People and Places. Initially I thought about working at Port Elizabeth, but decided that that at Mapoch I could live on site, in a rural setting and work there during the day too. After filling in the appropriate forms etc and discussing my skills ( which weren't many) it was agreed that I would go to Mapoch and put together a family tree of the Msiza tribe who are the main family in the village, together with the Budda's and Skosana's who are married on to them.

#### **Bruce discusses the family tree with Chris**



Now this doesn't seem to be much in support of these people who live a fairly basic existence ( although what they lack in money they make up in kindness and an openness we don't see at home) However they are proud of their family and their ancestors and what they have done, so putting together, not just a record of dates etc , but details of ceremonies, what they did as children, how they met their wives etc, so making a record of this for them, while finding out about them at close quarters was a wonderful experience. Of course when you first arrive there, it takes about a week before you really get settled in, ( in spite of Jeremy and/or Marnie giving you good orientation and staying with you the first night) and like others I have spoken to would admit that you think " What on earth am I doing here in the middle of nowhere", it's quite scary. Why I don't know, there are comfortable bedrooms, food cooked for you, electric light, hot and cold water, even TV. I think it's just that at home we are so mollycoddled that our

security blanket has gone when we step out of our comfort zone.

One of the things that soon helps you settle in is the friendliness. Everyone says good morning as you walk up the village to get breakfast and they are keen to teach you about things they do and their traditions and skills. Within a few days of arrival I attended the funeral of a lady who had died with diabetes and was asked to say prayers at the graveside. I was greatly honoured as this is something usually reserved for clergy and family, but because I was staying in the village I was asked.

Apart from the Family Tree I did some teaching of basic English to the grandmothers, who when young, had not been allowed to go to school as their fathers thought once they had education they would leave the village and then during the Apartheid years had to learn Afrikaans. Now the government give them classes once a week on a Saturday morning, which I was able to supplement with my teaching. Because of this several of them presented me with gifts of items made from Traditional Ndebele beads before I left. I also helped a couple of days at the Crèche and together with Pastor Peter and Bricks Budda fixed new seats on one of the pieces of equipment there. Peter runs the Bicycle project near the village which has recently received a container of second hand bikes and spares through the work of Jeremy and Marnie and several of the volunteers, and it is hoped to help the local people with transportation. Many of them have to walk many miles in the course of the average day.

Pastor Peter has a wonderful smile and is full of enthusiasm. He rises each day at 5.a.m prays, visits the sick and parishioners who have problems, conducts services and then goes to the shop, he also runs the local football competition to encourage young men to take part in football, as a way of keeping them out of crime and through which they are promoting sex education to prevent the spread of H.I.V./ Aids.

I did get some leisure time and visited Soweto ( not to be missed ), an Elephant Sanctuary at Haartsbeesport and Pilansberg National Park.

I was also able to meet up with my wife after the four weeks at the village and travel to Port Elizabeth where we met our sponsor child and his family which was a wonderful experience. My Church and some of it's members had given me some money to take out with me, and with it I was able to buy chairs for both of the local churches and some practical equipment for use in the Crèche.

If you are thinking of volunteering and have any concerns, cast them aside, talk to those who have been and talk to Kate at People and Places.

### **Pillion with Uttam...notes home from Melissa, volunteer aged 25**

There are 5 schools in the Kathmandu which provide education to the kids for 100 rupees (about 70p) a month to those kids who otherwise wouldn't be able to afford the expensive education fees to go to a government or private run school and would probably end up going to work instead or even worse on the street! Uttam, the man who set up the schools is a very philosophical and lives in his own world most of the time but is very inspiring to listen to, and hats off to him, his dedication to the project is just something!

On Friday I had the most amazing day and possibly the most best of my trip/life so far! The school has been on strike for three days, yes three days and basically because there was strike at my school, Uttam the principal decided to take me to some of their other schools to teach! So around mid-morning I jumped on the back of his motorcycle, yep you heard it back of his motorcycle and headed off on a 45 minute journey through Kathmandu city out towards the countryside! Riding on his motorbike was just awesome, taking in the city life and then the scenic views in the countryside and speeding along the bumpy roads! So first we went to Bhaktapur School where we had a tour of the school and I quickly popped into the one of the classes to say hello and tell them about my life.

The kids then demanded I sing a song so I proceeded to sing 'If your happy and you know it " Heads, shoulders, knees and toes" and I also taught them 'I know a song that will get on your nerves' He, He!

Then they proceeded to sing the Nepali national anthem to me and then I waved goodbye signing autographs on my way out! I wonder if they realise that I'm just a 'simple' girl from Coalville! Hilarious eh but very touching! So if this wasn't enough then I was taken to a further school in Borepani where I was greeted by the principal and about 300 children in the playground all staring at the random English girl! The kids were aged between 4 - 12 and some of the younger one's were just so cute! They all just gathered around me and bombarded me with questions! It was just great fun! Then along with Uttam and the school principal I was then served Dal Bhat for lunch in the very basic school kitchen! Then after lunch it was finally time to 'teach'!

I took two classes of the older children. The first class was delight, the politest kids I have met so far and we just talked about their favourite things practicing their sentences! Then the second class was a bit of nightmare, there were about 30 kids aged about 10 or 11 and I really struggled to control these kids and ended up having to get the principal to come in and control them! Apparently they couldn't understand my English! Not a surprise that, most people here have problem understanding me! But it was fine; it was nice to have the opportunity to actually take the classes! So after taking the classes the magic didn't stop there, I was then told the kids had taken part in a drawing competition and the winners would be announced in the school assembly and would I mind presenting the winners with their prizes! This was a lovely experience being stood up in front of all the kids in the school assembly and congratulating the kids and presenting them with a prize of an exercise book, yes an exercise book - not great eh, makes you realise how lucky or spoilt we are eh?! I then proceed to wave each every one of the kids as they went of the school gates in a line! It was then time to jump on the back of Uttam's motorbike for the journey home stopping off on the way to a restaurant to eat a strange Indian sweet, sandwiched between two pieces of white bread - sounds strange but surprisingly worked!

It was quite possibly the best day of my trip/life, not only because it was a true adventure but the way the kids and the people treated and welcomed me, it really did make me appreciate how lucky I am to be here and to have the opportunity to be exposed to such things!

Just having the opportunity to interact with the kids and see what an amazing thing the school provides for the local community has been fantastic but to be given a day like this is a memory I hope I'll treasure forever!

Sorry everyone, Melissa is still travelling and has tried very hard to download some photos to us but technology has let her down. Take a look at <http://www.travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk/ProjectView.aspx?id=144> to learn more about Samata.

**THANKS TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS - FOR ALL YOU HAVE DONE IN 2008 -  
HERE'S TO A GREAT 2009.**