OUT OF AFRICA....

36 students, 6 members of staff, 27 months of planning, fund raising events including quiz nights, curry nights, race nights, £156,000 raised by students. Here are their stories.

TEAM 1

Sites visited: Kalahari Desert, Khama Rhino Sanctuary, Okavango Delta, Chobe Safari Park, Livingstone, Victoria Falls, Batoka Gorge, Shilobe/village school

Miles flown: 12,001

Most frustrating moment: Probably the wait at the Zambian border for our driver to pick us up to travel to Livingstone. That was in the middle of the blazing sun, full packs and little lunch to go on.

Most fulfilling moment: Seeing the looks on the children’s faces when they saw the improvements to the school building we had worked on for the past few days. The students spent a few hours playing games with them and singing songs. Duck-Duck-Goose was a hit, the Cha-Cha slide wasn’t so popular!

Most memorable moment: The end of the deciding football match was spectacular. Having played three tough games against the villagers Team 2 had finally gone ahead on aggregate and were looking to consolidate. A big goal kick from Owen was met by a towering header from one of their defenders and the ball exploded on his head. There was a huge bang and then the tattered remains of the ball just flopped on the floor. Everyone laughed all the way back to camp and were talking about it for days.

TEAM 2

Sites visited: Gabarone, Kalahari Desert, Okavango Delta, Lusaka, Victoria Falls, Batoka Gorge, Muchenje Village, Croc Valley (South Luangwa National Park)

Miles flown: 12,075km

Miles walked: 50km approximately on treks

Most frustrating moment: Trying to squeeze all of our bags into a trailer that was obviously far too small ahead of a 10 hour car journey to the Okavango Delta.

Most fulfilling moment: The successful climb out of Batoka Gorge (twice)! It was here where we saw the togetherness of the group and the bonds that had been built throughout the whole trip. It was a real moment of pride for the leadership group to see how the students supported one another.

Most memorable moments: It would have to be one of two. The first was the night in the village after the Batoka Gorge trek. The interactions between the team and the children was something that none of us will ever forget. Language proved to be no barrier to the students and children as they interacted through games, football, singing and dancing. Secondly, it is doubtful that any of us will ever witness a more spectacular sunrise than that which we saw in the Okavango Delta. The wildlife, setting and assault on all our senses is something that I don’t think any of our group will ever forget. Meeting Mabel, who walks 9km to school every day on her own and has to leave home at 4.00 am.

TEAM 3

Sites visited: Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mount Mulanje, Croc Valley, Lusaka, Livingstone, Victoria Falls, Batoka Gorge, South Luanga National Park

Miles travelled: 2129km

Miles walked: 75km approx on treks

Weight of rucksacks: 714 kg (assuming 17kg each) all teams

Most frustrating moment: When the second front tyre went flat around 150km into 650km drive from Mulanje in Malawi to Croc Valley Camp in Zambia - OR the same day when we had to fill out exit forms on the Malawi/Zambia border using just two pens in dusky light as the border staff would not turn on the lights!

Most fulfilling moment: Arriving at the summit of Namasile Peak in Mount Mulanje after a grueling day and sterling team effort.

Most memorable moment: Maybe reviewing the contents of Kingston’s bag in advance of the Batoka Gorge Trek or, the team sing-song late into the night on the final evening of the Mount Mulanje trek—such great knowledge of all the words to so many songs!
Greetings from Livingstone, the former capital of Zambia!

The team are enjoying their final days in Zambia, relaxing and recuperating from our trek down into, along, up and down and up from the Batoka Gorge! We left Chobe in the morning of Thursday, 1st August, taking with us our memories and many pictures of the wilderbeest, monkeys, giraffe and lion seen during the game drive.

No sooner had we left Thebe River Safari campsite, then we arrived on the criss-cross area of four countries, with sign posts from Botswana for Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Zambia. We chose the latter and headed to the Botswana departure immigration area for our Zambian visas to be checked, filling in immigration forms, getting another coveted stamp in our passports.

After unloading the bus, complete with cooking pots, kettle and provisions, we headed to the ferry crossing area, with Sidney (our bus driver) and his friend kindly carrying a rucksack each. Sidney ensured we made it on to the ferry (a flat ferry raft, not of the cross-channel ilk), amongst the lorries, for the short 400m crossing of the river to Zambia. Five Botswanan pulas paid per person to the ferry man, we walked to the Zambian immigration area for further stamps and passport checks.

A night on three hour wait at the border ensued involving a lot of patiently sitting in the sun, finally starting to settle to play Monopoly Deal to help prompt the arrival of our bus from Mambo tours.

Fortunately, the journey into Livingstone was rather short and we arrived at Jolly Boys’ campsite to pitch our tents for yet another night.

The sight of a pool, decent toilets and showers, TV and a cozy corner of cushions with a bar for snacks and smoothies lifted the boys’ spirits after a day of travelling and waiting.

The next day we departed for Taita Falcon Lodge; well, rather for Peregrine nest bush camp, the campsite part of the accommodation.

The team was greeted at the camp by Justin, the cheery bush camp manager, who ensured everything was on hand for the team at the bush camp - complete with showers (heating water pipes by using toilet tissue and meths with matches!), flushing toilets and firewood gathered for a super camp fire area on to which we soon stuck the kettle for a hot drink as one of the main priorities in setting up camp for the night, before the cooking team led by Liam began preparing supper in our big cooking pot.

The group is certainly enjoying the facilities here and has been busy playing in and out of the pool, which was really good as the temperatures were rather high. Some of the group had a little too much food, three consecutive nights in a tent.

On our return to Peregrine’s Nest camp, all of the group immediately hurried to the showers. We were rewarded for our efforts on the trek with a delicious buffet-style meal at the Lodge, enjoying spectacular views across and into where we had walked. Some of the group had a little too much food, three plates and two desserts! Needless to say that one particular gentleman wasn’t feeling the best for the rest of the day.

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Team 3 arrived back a day early into camp, which gave us a great opportunity to catch up and swap stories round the camp fire.

On Wednesday morning, we were picked up at 9am by Mambo and made our way back to Jolly Boys in Livingstone, where we will remain until our flight home on Sunday. The group was delighted to be sleeping in a bed after 24 consecutive nights in a tent.

The finance teams throughout the expedition have done a superb job in managing the budget to ensure we have enough money left in the group funds to splash out a bit in Livingstone.

The group is certainly enjoying the facilities here and has been busy playing in the pool with various inflatables purchased in the local supermarket.

Gravesend Grammar School

Respect, Friendship, Hard Work, Exploration

October 2019
Yesterday, we went to a zip wire activity funded by the money raised from our quiz night. It was definitely an experience zipping across the Zambezi from Zambia to Zimbabwe at a great height. Individuals can probably explain the experience better than we could.

Today we were taken to the local markets by Kyran. What an experience that was! Over 40 very small ‘shops’ all in a row and all of the owners competing for business. It was very intense and the group bartered their way to some very good deals. Expect some stone and wood products to find their way to your homes. Jamie actually managed to turn a profit by buying something for $5 and then selling it to someone further up the market for $10. Tom even paid for a necklace with a plastic bottle. Utterly bizarre!

Tomorrow is our last full day in Africa. I can’t really believe that, even after typing it. What a way to say goodbye though. In the morning, we are off to see one of the seven natural wonders of the world - Victoria Falls. After that, there is some time for last minute shopping before we head out as a group for our final evening meal at the Café Zambezi.

This will be our final update email from Zambia. We are due to arrive back to GGS at 9am on Monday 12th, but please keep an eye on the live flight information in case of any delays.

As a leadership team, we would like to say that it has been a pleasure and a privilege being a part of this group. Every single member has contributed really well, and all 12 Challengers have encouraged and supported each other along the way, bonding across year groups over their African experiences, with different ways and means, showing leadership, team work and above all, a sense of humour!

Thanks to Graham Boswell too, our World Challenge leader! We’ll see you very soon, but in case it’s not said in the excitement of returning home, have a lovely rest of summer!

TEAM 2 BLOG
Team Members: Abby Colclough, Alex Murray, Harry Davis-Coombes, Karam Dio, Nathan Oram, Owen Hinks, Patrick Norman, Sam Hiskett, Thanu Vithyakaran
Staff Members: Ms Chapman, Mr Pollard
Destinations: Zambia, Botswana

Saturday, 13th July 2019
We’ll try to send updates as often as we can but will be in some remote places without access to computers or WiFi for several days in a row. If you need to get a message out to us the World Challenge Ops Room is the best point of contact; they can get hold of us through the satellite phone we will carry. As ever, no news is good news but we will try to get as many messages and photos back as we can which will probably be when we are at the airports and in the major cities (Gaborone, Livingstone and Lusaka).

Monday, 15 July 2019
Hello! Greetings from Mokolodi Backpackers from Team 2. All students have arrived and are well and we’ve already got one night of camping under our belts! We are setting off for the Khalari imminently where we will be camping and meeting the local bushmen.

We will probably be away from signal for about 8-10 days from now so no news is good news. We shall be in contact again when we get a chance!

Friday, 18 July 2019
Hello again!
For the past four days we have bonded greatly as a group and have experienced a new culture with the bushmen: Miyami, Hero and Grinch. We learned about the huge variety of uses for many plants such as the Kalahari Apple-leaf which is used as a Bushmen rizla and other more medicinal purposes! We were amazed by how remote the bush seems even after warnings from Tich and Kennedy, our local guides. We were all tested at the end of the week around a bonfire Pat had made with the assistance of the entire group. We all passed! Nathan and Owen won the Bushmen’s competition and were rewarded with a traditional spear and a bow! The sunrises and sunsets were spectacular, despite the cold and nobody had seen the stars so clearly. Now we are staying in Gaborone for our final night before we head out in the morning to the Okovango Delta at 7am. We will probably be away from connection for the next three days but will send another update when possible.
Tuesday, 23 July 2019
Greetings from Zambia!
We've had a jam packed last few days full of amazing experiences. The canoe ride to the middle of the delta had some stunning views but was nothing compared to the sunrise or wildlife we saw. Baby elephants, zebra, wildebeest, warthogs, hippos galore, and a massive elephant! The last one forced an impromptu escape from camp as it appeared over the top of the tree forming the camp boundary. All good in the end but will be an excellent story for years to come.

The journey to Zambia was a long one (11 hours) including a ride on a ferry across the Zambezi River and we arrived at Jolly Boys' Backpackers. We will be based here for five days where we will visit Victoria Falls, zipline across the river and go white water rafting. The hostel is a brilliant base complete with swimming pool, table tennis and most importantly hot showers!

The team went into Livingstone this afternoon for their first experience of a busy African town which they all enjoyed. We should have the opportunity to update you again on our progress before heading off on our big trek on the 27th.

Saturday, 27 July 2019
Bwanji!
We have had a wonderful couple of days in Livingstone staying at Jolly Boys Hostel. The students all zipwired across the Zambezi River and explored the area around the impressive Victoria Falls, including walking all the way down to the 'boiling pot' and back up again!

We were also incredibly fortunate to see a herd of seven wild white rhino including a two-month old baby. The students were able to stand within 15 metres of the rhino!

Yesterday we were all very adventurous as we rafted down the Zambezi River. We all survived the course with no rafts flipping and lots of fun had by all. Today we are packing up to leave Livingstone to begin our Bakota Gorge Trek followed by our time on project.

We have all enjoyed having a relaxed time in Livingstone ahead of a more 'challenging' section of our trip.

31 July 2019
Bwanji from Livingstone again!
We have returned from our trek this morning for a day of rest before setting off for the ‘Butterfly Project’ tomorrow. Trekking down into the Bakota Gorge and then along the Zambezi River was scenic and a challenge which the students took in their stride. Our guides even commented that they were one of the quickest groups they have had!

Day 1 of our trek included our descent into the Gorge and then lots of scrambling over rocks as we walked downstream. We then camped next to Rapid 17 where we cooked on open fires and slept under the stars (and mosquito nets).

Day 2 we continued downstream before climbing out of the Gorge to avoid a difficult section of rocks. We enjoyed the flat walk along the top of the Gorge before descending back down to Rapid 21 and the beach which was our campsite. The descent down included a mixture of gentle slopes and ladders made from branches which gradually brought us down to the beach.

Day 3 we decided to end our trek a day early as some of our students tummies had disagreed with the water from the Zambezi River (all much better now and parents of those affected have been individually contacted) so we climbed back out of the Gorge and spent the night back at the lodge where they provided us with a delicious buffet -including dessert!

Hope you are all well back in England!

Tuesday, 6 August 2019
Good evening
We have all just arrived at Croc Valley and are looking forward to our game drives over the next couple of days. We will send a detailed account of everything we got up to on the project shortly.

Wednesday, 7 August 2019
Greetings from Croc Valley,
We're all rested from our long journey from Lusaka and are settling in for a relaxing day before our safari tomorrow. Students are currently all swimming in/sunbathing next to the croc-free pool! Tomorrow we will be going on two four-hour game drives, having saved enough money to cover the cost of the additional drive. These should be fantastic opportunities to see all the wildlife the park has to offer.

The project we completed in Muchenje village was an amazing experience. We got to live with the community for four days, learning as much as we could about local life and helping to support the Butterfly Tree School project. The school is a small single room building for the local infants and we spent some of our time cleaning the walls before repainting the school which hadn't been done in 11 years. As you can imagine this took a lot of effort and the students all worked hard to ensure that the improvements would benefit the local children. They were all impressed by how much cleaner and newer the room looked and were anticipating their first lessons in their ‘new’ school. Abby took the lead on producing a number line across the top of the board to help with lessons in the future.

On top of our work inside the school we also assisted with the construction of a toilet block for the school. Hours were spent collecting sand and gravel before mixing cement to provide the foundations and base block for 3 toilets. Assisting the local builders, the students ensured that the majority of the work was completed and that only the brick laying for the walls would be needed now we have left.

The experience working on these projects was brilliant and really gave an insight into the differences in life at home and in this community. The best bit though was the interaction with the locals. Our students played games with the children and even led singing and dancing as part of the school day ending with a huge game of Duck Duck Goose, which Patrick and Alex demonstrated through elaborate mime!

The big events of this section though turned out to be three epic football matches. Apparently the local tradition is to play for about two hours without a break which left all of us struggling! The first game ended 5-5 with two goals from Harry helping us draw level late on. The second was a narrow 6-5 defeat, despite Sam scoring twice late on to bring us back to within one goal having been 6-1 down early on. This left us needing to win the final match to end on a high. Heroics in goal from Owen, along with solid defending from Thanu and Nathan, meant that we made it through a tough 35 minutes at 0-
Dear all, a quick update from my phone whilst we are on project - battery life is at a premium here! Everyone is doing well and having a great time.

We flew to Malawi and made our way from the airport to the first camp in Lilongwe. Chris was leader on the first day and Lukey took over on the first day in Africa. We managed to get a cooked meal in the campsite on the first night which was a treat. Monday was an admin day in Lilongwe, we bought cooking equipment and food in the capital led by Lewis. It was an interesting experience and we soon found the locals were very keen to engage with us (and sell us things). Lunch and dinner were cooked by a highly capable cooking team led by Lewis and Sam and ably helped by Jamie. The evenings have been filled with merry chat and card games involving everyone. Mafia is the current favourite game, which has turned out to be a great way of involving everyone.

Tuesday we travelled from Lilongwe to Blantyre in preparation for the project phase, led by Will. It was a three hour journey but the transport was relatively comfortable. We arrived and were made to feel very welcome by our hosts at Fisherman’s Rest. We were shown to huts which would be our home for the next six nights - basic but they now feel like home. Mason has been heard screaming when he sees a spider (they are big!). We’ve been working hard: on the project - Wednesday (led by Mason), Thursday (led by Oscar) and today (led by Duncan K) - which is to continue work in building a school classroom and library. We’ve been interacting with the children, moving bricks, mixing cement, laying bricks, carrying 60 litres of water on our heads and more! We are treated like celebrities with big groups of children following us wherever we go. Our host here, Bannes, is a local legend. There’s so much to write I don’t feel as though I can do it justice here. Today we unexpectedly climbed a mountain to do some weeding, the team took it all in their stride. Our team of accountants, Tom, Liam and Mason are doing an excellent job of keeping track of funds for the whole team.

We’ve had time for many an in-depth discussion on politics, religion and everything in between - hotly debated by John and Kingston today on the topic of whether it is possible to ever be truly selfless. Tomorrow and Sunday are rest days (thank goodness). Some of us will be shopping back in Blantyre tomorrow with others taking rest in camp.

The team has been totally inclusive and everyone is very supportive of each other; it is truly turning out to be the experience of a lifetime. No-one is missing having their phone (I just asked them) - feel free to remind them of such when they get back home!

27/07/2019
Dear all, we have arrived this afternoon at the base of Mount Mulanje following our trek (there has not been signal throughout). We left the project on Tuesday following a more relaxing weekend and one final day of work on Monday.
Saturday was spent on a shopping trip into Blantyre from the project (Lewis, Chris, Mr P)- five people, including the people giving us a lift, with three days’ shopping for 18 people in a city car (not ideal as per photo)! The afternoon was spent making efficient wood burning stoves in the home of locals (the aim being to reduce local deforestation by installing stoves that are 70% more efficient). Sunday was a lay-in and a special breakfast of French toast (with beans!) cooked by

Our last meal here was spent sharing memories, jokes, challenges and ‘best moments’ from the trip as we reflected back on all of the adventures we have had over the past month. Due to saving money on our budget it looks very likely that the students are also going to be returning with some additional dollars having chosen to keep camping rather than splash out on a hotel.
For those who wish to track our flight home the flight number is SAF234.
We look forward to seeing you all on Monday morning.

Gravesend Grammar School
Respect, Friendship, Hard Work, Exploration
October 2019
On Friday we made the trek across the mountain range to another ers and another tasty meal. Quite a lot of conservation was taken up tough and we got back to Sombali hut in time for more bucket show-

The climb down was quicker but still mountain at the front of the line and frequently doing additional (and

Liam has become the mountain goat of the group leaping up the

2684 m. The trek was

and back to

packing up camp as

base camp for our trek. We picked up our two guides and porters to

to help carry all the equipment and food on the way. The road to the

base camp was VERY unmade, nevertheless they drove our bus all the

way along, it didn’t quite sound the same when we arrived. We ended up with lots of local children following the bus who then formed an audience of about 100 to watch us set up camp and cook dinner, the final children didn’t drift away until after dark! Mason seemed to think it was his personal fan club.
The trek began on Wednesday with a gruelling climb up to Sombali Hut at over 2000 m which although not very high is a significant ascent in one day from Fort Lister at 850m. We took lots of breaks and worked together to make the climb, it seemed very hot at times though I understand temperatures in the uk are scorching as well. We made it to the hut in time to have a well earned rest and to see an incredible sunset, the cooking team worked their usual magic (this is now Sam, Lewis, Niam, Duncan and Lukey) to keep us all sustained. We also had the luxury of bucket showers (except Mason who is STILL holding out without a shower this week).

Thursday saw a wonderful sunrise (watched by Niam, Tom, John, Lewis, Stan, Oscar, Lukey and Mason) and we had the luxury of not packing up camp as we were ascending to the peak and back to the same hut. We set off around 8am for the summit at Namsile 2684 m. The trek was technical and more challenging than we expected, but we were rewarded with incredible vistas along the way and at the summit (we weren’t sure why Mason was asking if we had reached the summit when we were still halfway up the hill). Liam has become the mountain goat of the group leaping up the mountain at the front of the line and frequently doing additional (and may I add unnecessary) climbs. The climb down was quicker but still tough and we got back to Sombali hut in time for more bucket showerers and another tasty meal. Quite a lot of conservation was taken up with discussion of bowel movements!

On Friday we made the trek across the mountain range to another

hut to set us up for the descent on Saturday. The walk was tougher than expected with much of it ups and downs and rocky - 27,000 steps came up on my Fitbit for the day. More incredible vistas were seen throughout the day. There was much chat amongst some of us about who might be in Boris’ new cabinet, we managed to get a moment of data on arrival to find out Britain’s ‘top team’ for the years to come. We arrived at the next hut around 3pm to a glorious view above the clouds. More showers and dinner were soon ready once camp was set and the team set about a few hours of singing together in front of the fire-I was very impressed by their knowledge of hits gone by, the most notable of which was Rik Astley’s Never Gonna Give You Up.

Today started at over 2000 m and ended back at around 800m with a trek which from some angles looked like walking off a cliff.

Kingston has been our leader today and had stepped up to the challenge really well, liaising with the team and guides. We arrived at the end of our trek today next to a wonderful natural pool that the team enjoyed washing in, this later turned into a game of ‘throw the pants’ for some reason... the finance team had a minor crisis thinking they had lost 1300US$, which was fortunately eventually resolved.

Tomorrow we are due up at 4 am to begin our drive to Zambia via Chipata and onto the safari stage of our trip. All are in high spirits, there is currently a game of pool and another of poker going on in the communal area as we eagerly await a cooked meal we have treated ourselves to at the base camp.

Until next time...
The drivers changed a back for a front and we hobbled on to a local market to get a new tyre. This took a couple of hours so we found ourselves a popular target for locals as usual, ‘Bob Malawi’ was the most notable. We set off again, a police stop requested to see all our documents, so the bus drivers decided the best option was to drive away as quickly as possible (apparently this is commonplace corruption and police try to issue on the spot fines without justification). We got to the border after dark, and crossed into Zambia and onto our next stop at South Luanga nature reserve via a supermarket. In the end it was around 16.5 hours of driving!

On arrival we setup our tents and headed to bed. It wasn’t until the next morning we realised quite how special a place we had arrived at. A lovely campsite with pool, giant chessboard set next to a river where we could look out over hippos and crocodiles going about their usual business. We planned to do two safari drives on Wednesday (the best value) giving us two days to relax around the pool, have hot showers and generally unwind after two weeks of hard toil. A wonderful time had by all. The local baboons were very confident and even stealing bananas from out of our hands when possible!

The safari day was Wednesday. We had a morning drive from 6-10 am and break then an evening drive from 4-8 pm. We saw a huge range of wildlife, very close up in some cases.
Elephants, giraffes, zebra, crocodiles, hyena, hippos (Mason did ask if hippos were waterproof!). I’m fairly sure he now regrets this comment), wild dogs, antelope and other things I have probably forgotten through good budgeting as well so we’ve enjoyed two good meals out during our two night stay. Each time we eat out every team member is given a maximum spend although this figure seems to get us enjoyment two nights in a hotel in Lusaka. We can eat an onion like a apple challenge’, Sam was victorious but neither completed.

We were then able to spend the afternoon in the wonderful lodge looking over the Gorge which was a great way to unwind after the trek. The lodge provided a delicious buffet for us at 6 pm, we stayed around the lodge into the evening before heading back to our camp.

Wednesday morning we got our transport back to Livingstone with Team 1 and to Jollyboy’s Backpackers which will serve as our accommodation until the end of the trip. It’s a great setup here with good facilities and communal space. We had the day and much increased budget for the last few days to do some personal shopping, spend some money on food (most ordered pizza) and go to the cinema (about half the group).

08/08/2019
Dear all, it’s down to the last few days in Zambia and it’s time for some final touristy time.

Since my previous update we have spent time in the Batoka Gorge. We got to start point at Tiata Falcon Lodge which is 45 minutes off the main road in Livingstone on Saturday afternoon. The camp ground has good facilities and we enjoyed an evening around the campfire having removed all the things in our bags that we didn’t need for the trek the following day. We found a new food staple of gnocchi to give some variation from the endless rice and pasta—there was much discussion as to the correct pronunciation.

Sunday morning came and we headed off down into the Gorge. It became immediately clear this trek was going to be hard, carrying big packs in the baking heat whilst clambering over rocks. The scenery in the Gorge was impressive, you’ll appreciate it from the photos in a few days. The first day saw us arrive at a sandy area for camping at around 2pm. Everyone was exhausted so it was time for resting. We cooked dinner using a natural rock fire pit and slept under the stars using mosquito nets. Day 2 of the trek (Monday) was character building. The walk took eight hours in the baking heat—it was a relief all round when the beach camp came into view and we could stop for the day. The setting was idyllic, and there was time for fun and games before singing around the campfire once again. Tuesday morning unfortunately saw our World Challenge Leader, Glenn, fall ill—this meant we needed to cut the trek short by a day and head back to camp (everyone was very keen to do this anyway, the heat and weight was close to unbearable!). We climbed out of the Gorge and arrive back in base camp for around midday. As we arrived a day early we met up with Team 1 who had just completed the same trek slightly ahead of us. It was great for everyone to swap stories and catch up. Sam and Niam decided to compete in the ‘who can eat an onion like a apple challenge’, Sam was victorious but neither completed.

We were then able to spend the afternoon in the wonderful lodge looking over the Gorge which was a great way to unwind after the trek. The lodge provided a delicious buffet for us at 6 pm, we stayed around the lodge into the evening before heading back to our camp.

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Some of the evening was spent in the dark as there are daily power cuts in Zambia due to the low water levels in the rivers (most of the power generation here is hydro).

It is now Thursday and it’s our final free day to relax, visit local markets (expect to see various wooden tat in your sons’ bags when they get home, despite my best advice!) - Jamie is trying to avoid mahogany to save the rhinos?! This afternoon will be another cinema trip for...
I don’t think any of us could really believe it when we arrived early in the morning on our build-up day that it was really time to go. It had seemed like ages ago since we had sat in the hall and received the offer of a lifetime – and after the many after-school meetings, fundraising events, and our training expedition we finally got to experience it.

Following the long 11 hour flight to Johannesburg and the day-long layover we had before taking an hour long flight to Botswana, we met Tich, our in-country agent, and camped our first night. Once we had organised our teams and bought all our food and supplies, we headed off to the Kalahari Desert. It was here where we learned about the native flora and fauna, and the Bushmen showed us their traditional ways of making huts, traps, and bows. We then headed off to Khamra Rhino Sanctuary - where we completed our project phase. Our main job was building the foundation of a campsite, which in the hot weather was far from relaxing, but we also cleared roads deep within the 8585 hectares of land and had the chance to see much of the wildlife on the two game drives our host, Alfred, gave us. We also had the chance to interact with some of the community, having a lesson on rhino poaching with a visiting school.

One month from July 13th to August 12th was just enough time to experience the incredible scenery and culture of Botswana and Zambia. Seeing the different environments from the Kalahari desert to the Okavango delta was better than what we could have expected. But it was not only the breathtaking views we were able to witness, it was also the experiences we took away from the trip as well.

In the Kalahari - the first part of the trip - we were greeted by two bushmen from the nearby bushman tribe, who taught us about a range of plants and bushes - most notably the “brandy bush.” They demonstrated their craft by making a shelter, starting a fire, and making a trap - all with the plants they had taught us about. They also made for us a spear, and a bow and arrow which we could shoot at a target board. The bushmen were incredibly skilled at these things and it was amazing to see their vast knowledge in action - as well as being able to see the bushmen’s village as well.

The work we did for the Khamra Rhino Sanctuary was one of the highlights of the trip, because of the skills we learnt. We had to work effectively as a group due to, the difficulty of the jobs, the heat during the day, and the amount we had to do. Our main task was to build the foundations of the abolition block - for toilets and showers - which involved making cement and bricklaying. The work was tiring, especially in the hot Botswana sun, but we successfully managed to complete it by the end of our stay. We also had to do some clearing up work on the roads, as well as quarrelling for stone for cement.

The scenery was something else in Africa - especially in the Okavango. Travelling across it in a dugout canoe was incredibly relaxing, with some of us struggling to stay awake! Being able to see elephants, hippo and giraffes so close in the wild was incredible, and makes you realise how small you are in comparison - with one elephant even walking right by our canoe.

Many of us also underwent what I like to call a physical and psychological ‘Enlightenment’. We climbed Mount Mulanje for four days; trekked the Batoka Gorge for three days (having to evacuate due to the ill health of our leader); and carried out strenuous manual labour for a week while building the school. Hungry and exhausted, what would keep us sane for the next month was us looking out for one another, and appreciating the raw reality of life. As a result, not only have I strengthened physically, but I have acquired the psychological will to never give up, regardless of how tough things may seem. Through-out the trip we had the opportunity to relax and explore African culture. The reward of resting in a hammock at South Luangwa National Park for three days, after trekking the tallest mountain in central Africa, was truly rewarding and peaceful. Our time in Livingstone (where we saw the Victoria Falls, participated in whitewater rafting, and even ate crocodile!) was a fantastic way to finish the trip. But it must be said that, like any adventure, it would not have been the comical and exciting journey that it was if it wasn’t for the people involved. Mr Pallant and Mr Gill were true troopers throughout, always making one laugh and even at the most challenging times helping each other out when needed. I think everyone did a good job at making the right decisions and we managed to get through the whole trip without any major problems.

The Batoka Gorge Trek, I think for all of us, was the hardest part of the trip. Walking up and out of the gorge twice was a massive task for us and incredibly exhausting. But despite two members of our group being ill, we were the only group to make it to the village, and actually complete the trek - which was a great achievement considering the difficulty of it. It was incredibly frustrating at times due to the pace we were going at when walking, but it taught us to work as a team - and brought us closer as a result.

The experience gained from this trip is something that can’t be underrated. The leadership and accountant roles that everyone undertook will be extremely important in the future for us, especially when we go into a job and have to make key decisions whilst being under pressure. I think everyone did a good job at making the right decision, and we managed to get through the whole trip without any major problems.

Imagine this: One whole month in the heart of Africa; isolated from the unnecessary and superficial stress of a westernised society; embracing the simplicity of life. Spending the summer in Malawi and Zambia was quite a unique experience. Our group of eight comprised Year 11s, 12s and 13s, to unify and consolidate our team over the last month. Not only have they learned new skills but also realised the resilience and strength they already had. I have no doubt the spirit of adventure has been awakened inside them.

A final update for the airport on Sunday - we expect to be back at GG5 on Monday at 9am. Please keep an eye on the live flight details.

**Student Reflections**

**Mason Rickard**

**Gravesend Grammar School**

**Respect, Friendship, Hard Work, Exploration**

October 2019