

Abbie Greaves Travel Report – Ethiopia, Summer 2012

This summer I travelled to Gondar, Northern Ethiopia, with a group of four other Pembroke students. We spent three weeks teaching at a local school on a programme devised by Link Ethiopia, a wonderful charity supporting education in the country at grass roots level.

Initially we were thrown in at the deep end; the teaching materials we were given were those available to local teachers and they were sparse to say the least. As part of a pair of teachers, I worked with grades 5 and 6 who were on a free summer school designed to improve their English communication skills. Having observed normal lessons in the mornings, we were aware of what techniques worked and which fell flat. Our overall aim was to encourage the enthusiasm of the children for learning to ensure they carried on with school no matter how difficult it may be to balance their studies and an often-troubled home life. Instead of getting the children to copy down tables in silence, we devised activities which got them speaking and interacting with each other. Over the three weeks I noticed a marked improvement in their pronunciation as well as their fluency, and importantly – their confidence.

When we were free from our teaching commitments, we spent time visiting Link's sister charity, the Kindu Trust. This remarkable child sponsorship scheme works with the families of its beneficiaries, providing healthcare, employment opportunities and support for the most needy families across the north of the country. We met some inspirational charity leaders and workers going above and beyond what was required of them and exhibiting a real belief in the work they do, regardless of the conditions and constraints facing them.

Towards the end of the trip we managed to fit in some time for travelling. We spent a weekend (sadly much too short) in the Simien Mountains, marvelling at the breath-taking views and getting up close to the Gelada baboons. The rock-hewn churches of Lailbela provided a suitably memorable backdrop to the last few days of an equally memorable trip and reminded us why we will be pushing Ethiopia as an amazing and life-changing destination.

I am extremely grateful for the college's support in making this trip possible. I have come home with a real love for the country and a desire to return when possible. In the mean time, I have been inspired by the charities we worked alongside and hope to continue raising funds for these organisations and the projects I have seen first hand. Next year, we are hoping to recruit a new group of students to carry on with the project and as time goes on we hope to be able to see the improvements continue.