

Marianne Butler (Archaeology & Anthropology) - Canada 7th July 2011- 11 March 2012

After graduation I wanted to take some time to travel and explore before starting as a secondary school History teacher in Yorkshire, where I have been placed through the Teach First training scheme.

I arrived in Canada with vague plans of working on a ranch in the summer and a ski resort in the winter before returning to the UK in the spring. After arriving in Calgary and watching the opening ceremony of the Calgary Stampede I started looking for ranch work. I was offered a position as a "RE-X" (Ranch Experience) hand on the Rafter Six Ranch Resort. I thought I would be working in shifts alternating between the kitchen, dining room and barn, but unfortunately I spent more time washing dishes than anything else. So, at the end of September I left and travelled west, meeting some amazing people in Vancouver and Vancouver Island.

As winter was drawing closer I then began to look for ski hill jobs, but I was only offered one position, which did not pay very well and I was worried I would not be able to cover my rent and food expenses in the long term. Taking a chance, I decided to take up the offer of working at a Buddhist meditation centre in the East Kootenays called Clear Sky. They were looking for volunteers to work on their building project.

I stayed there for 6 months, learning about meditation and how to build a house. I have no experience in either, so it was in turns frustrating, exhilarating, enjoyable and boring. I think I have learnt a lot, especially what life-long learning actually entails. Studying at Pembroke was amazing, but there are so many skills I would like to master where my academic training is of no immediately obvious value. When learning to wait tables at the ranch, or how to use a screw driver whilst suspended from a ladder, I realised how frustrating I find it when I am not good at something immediately.

In November I went to the American Anthropological Association's Annual conference in Montreal. For this I travelled on the Greyhound bus for 3 days across Canada, an experience that I would rather not repeat. Having said that I met some amazing people and had some very interesting conversations, both on the way there and back from the conference. Being at the conference has given me a greater insight as to what I would be interested in taking further in a potential academic field- the anthropology of public policy, with a particular focus on education.

Throughout my time at Clear Sky I attended meditation classes, which I found to be very beneficial in calming the mind and allowing me to develop a focus that I hope will serve me well in future challenges when I have to balance multiple responsibilities as a school teacher. For my last month there, I was able to participate in a silent retreat. During the retreat the meditation classes were led by Doug Duncan, a teacher of meditation who knows how to explain things clearly to an audience with a largely different cultural background to traditional Tibetan Buddhism.

Returning to the UK, I realised how much I have gained from going to Canada, meeting people who have led different lives and have different attitudes. I now feel more confident when facing the next set of big challenges in my life. Finally I would like to say that I really appreciate all the support that Pembroke College has given me during my time as an undergraduate.