

THE SPEKBOOM

The Shackleton's trip to Canada

AUGUST 2012

ISSUE 15



Sheona and Charlie recently attended a mid-project workshop in Alberta, Canada, as part of the IDRC-funded project on livelihoods, climate change and HIV/AIDS. The meeting had to be split into two to accommodate the presence of Bruce Campbell (Director: CCAFS), who is on the advisory committee of the project. The first two days were spent at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, where several presentations were made regarding the progress of the project so far. At the end, Bruce Campbell summed up by reporting that he felt the project was undertaking some cutting edge work, and that the depth of data collection and conception was a significant strong point which would provide the basis for some sound policy recommendations and scientific contributions in the next year. The second half of the meeting was held ten days later, at an environmental education centre in Jasper National Park in the Canadian Rockies. This was a continuation of the mid-term reviews, as well as to identify emerging opportunities from the work so far. Nick Hamer joined the discussions.

In between the two halves of the meeting Sheona and Charlie had a rare opportunity for a break together and spent it relaxing at various points along the Rocky Mountain Range.

The first few days were spent at Banff National Park, which must be home to some of the most awesome scenery in the world. Snowed-speckled mountains (> 3,000 m) towering

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above glacier-fed turquoise lakes; pumping waterfalls; sparkling glaciers; braided streams with extensive wetlands; mountains trails; hot springs and lots more. The stupendous scenery more than compensated for the relatively low biodiversity. Indeed, we remarked more than once on the absence of birds and bird song although it was spring. We did lots and lots of walking through coniferous forests, which at times got monotonous, to be greeted by alpine meadow flowers bursting into bloom only days after the snowmelt. We enjoyed several glimpses of black bears (one of which had four cubs), big-horn sheep, elk, white-tailed deer and, in the distance, two wolf pups. It was a great opportunity to snatch a few days ~~relaxation~~ by walking, sight-seeing and reading a few novels, interspersed with some white water rafting on the Kicking Horse River just to keep the adrenaline up. The late sunsets (about 23h30) set the scene for several long picnic evenings in some spot away from the crowds. Being relatively chilled out allowed us to cope amiably with driving on the right-hand side of the road and in an automatic car, as well as not to choke too frequently on the prices of food, drinks and accommodation. Fortunately Marty Luckert had lent us

Trip to Canada cont....

some camping gear, so we had a few real budget nights. The camping grounds were ~~novel~~ novel in that they are not staffed. One simply drives in, find a spot and then go to deposit the camping fee into a large iron strong box in the middle of the camp ground - all working on an honesty system. In the more remote camping grounds, one is not allowed to keep food in one's tent or vehicle because bears will break in and wreak havoc. All food has to be locked into major lockers in the centre of the camp ground. We were also told about some even remoter camps where food is placed in bags and then hoisted high up flagpoles which the bears cannot access. All in all a wonderful place, which is more than worth a visit if once can survive the cost factor, and the time to travel there. .



*even seen gophers - St. Paul
Down your point gopher*

New Technical Officer: Monde Ntshudu

The DES welcomes Monde Ntshudu to his new part-time position. Monde has had experience in a variety of places and has been involved in a number of projects in many different working situations. He is a born linguist and has been gifted with the skill of using this to his advantage. He started off in Cape Town where he taught isiXhosa to people to whom this was not their mother tongue. This included working with large businesses, companies and other significant establishments like the Cape Argus. He also translated policy documents for the Cape Town Parliament.

After returning to his hometown of Grahamstown, where his family roots are deeply embedded, he was a translator and facilitator at Rhodes University, working between departments such as Pharmacy and Geography, to name a few. He took up the job of research assistant with Charlie many years ago and has worked with over twenty post-graduate students. Monde has been involved in many community-based projects around the Eastern Cape too. He is a family man, having been married for six years and after recently resigning from Oricon, an engineering firm in Grahamstown, has now joined us in the department.

We hope that Monde feels at home here and we are thrilled to have someone around that has such a myriad of skills to add to the department's pot of variety as he does.



Tarcille Mballa-Ngamougou

When did the experience of post-student life start?

I left South Africa at the end of my Honours year to join my family in Mali for what I thought were Christmas holidays before a move to East Africa but ended up being a full move to West Africa.

Did you manage to find a job quite soon after moving to West Africa?

I was soon offered a job by the Director of the U.S. National Institute of Health's Research Office in Mali to be his Executive Assistant and having no immediate plans at the time and I took it.

Could you elaborate on what this position involved?

The NIH and the University of Mali's faculty of medicine have an ongoing research partnership focusing on malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/Aids and other infectious diseases. The post included a lot of administrative coordination between the NIH in Washington and their Malian research partners (preparation of research policies, upgrading and maintenance contract negotiation for high performance lab equipment, organization of regional workshops and project-related communication between the English speaking US researchers and their French speaking Malian counterparts).

Is there anything else that you would like to share with us about your work experience?

In February of this year, I left the NIH Research Office to join the Aga Khan Development Network here in Mali, as senior Programme and Management Assistant, which gave me a foot into the development sector I originally planned to join after my studies.
(contd on next pg...)



The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of development agencies whose mandates in Mali include the environment, health, education, microfinance, rural development, promotion of private-sector enterprise and the revitalisation of historic cities.

I am attached to three of the five Aga Khan agencies present in the country which focus on health, education, rural development (Aga Khan Foundation), the environment and the revitalisation of historic sites (Aga Khan Trust for Culture) and the third, AKDN which coordinates all the agencies' programmes and is the Aga Khan's diplomatic representation in Mali. Main tasks include: Diplomatic relations research, Logistics Coordination, Procurement Focal Point for World Bank funded projects and Petty Cash Manager for all three agencies.

How is the political situation currently in the country?

The year in Mali so far has been disrupted by a coup d'état in March, followed by a failed counter-coup in April and significant uprising by the population in the capital Bamako in May. The coup also gave the opportunity for separatist and Islamist rebel groups to take control of the northern parts of the country, something they had been attempting for decades. My family had to be evacuated to Dakar, Senegal following the coup and I had to leave the country for a few days in May for safety. At that time a 9pm curfew was in order and on some occasions we witnessed disturbing behaviour by mutinous soldiers at road blocks. Having the airport closed for days also proved to be a challenge as it had huge economic implications and made evacuations more complex for the foreign communities.

Has this unfortunate turbulence affected your professional life at all?

During each of these events we had to close our offices for 3-4 days at a time, work from home and coordinate the temporary evacuation of staff based close to and in the northern areas. Some international development agencies had to scale down and/or suspend their projects and we witnessed an exodus of development workers out of the country while the humanitarian aid and crisis workers have been flowing in. Work-wise, all projects in

the occupied region -which were mostly related to the revitalisation of historic sites such as the Great Mosque of Timbuktu- had to be closed. Recent news of the Islamist groups destroying part of the site was a huge blow to the teams that had worked on the site for the last few years. International donors suspended their financial support to many projects and some of our health programs took a hit. We have however been able to keep our rural education programs going; moving some of them further south of the occupied region and pushing ahead with providing material support for these. The situation in Mali is getting more complex by the day; the Sahelian country which was entering a serious drought phase at the time of the coup, is facing the imminent threat of a locust invasion in already low yielding farming areas and a recent outbreak of cholera in the northern region. It is still difficult to wrap one's mind around all of this.

What implications does this have for your personal decisions?

Due to the unstable socio-political environment in the country that promises to be an issue for years to come and has made long-term planning somewhat difficult for all, I've decided to move up my plans for postgraduate studies and will be starting a Master in Development Studies (Agrarian and Environmental) in September at Erasmus University Rotterdam's International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. I am quite excited about this new phase but sad to be leaving Mali which until the recent events had been good to me. Given the opportunity, I would not hesitate to return after my studies.

Writing workshop in Durban

Caroline Evans was selected as one of the 15 SANPAD students in the country to attend two workshops on writing for publication for her MSc research. The workshops entail two four day work sessions in Durban, with top environmental consultants and writing experts from around the country, during which one is trained to produce a polished, concise and relevant paper(s) on a new and exciting set of research.

Caroline's MSc research focuses on the impacts of alien fish species on local livelihoods in the rural Eastern Cape. The main themes of her research include the history of cultural avoidance of fishing by the Xhosa people of the Eastern Cape; the knowledge, attitudes and practices surrounding the alien fish which have been introduced into river systems; and the skills, equipment and laws which restrict or enhance the success of those who do fish.

This research is extremely relevant to government decision making parties as there are currently no laws and policies in place which consider the economic and social benefits of these alien species in our dams and rivers. The inclusion of these results in future law and policy decisions could help to alleviate poverty and address the lack of a cheap sustainable source of protein to rural people



Masters Student Profile

Megan Kelly

Where it all began

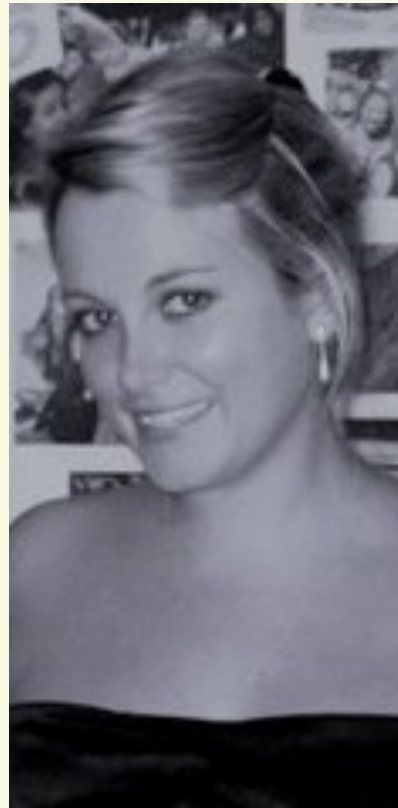
I grew up in a very small place called Creighton on a dairy farm in KZN. I was so fortunate to spend days outside among the cows and open spaces and this is where my love for the environment started. I went to school in Pietermaritzburg and spent 4 years at Stellenbosch University where I did my honours in Environmental Studies and Geography. I utterly adored my time as a Matie, but I decided to move to Rhodes for some different experiences last year, so everything had to change from maroon to purple and the jols moved from Terrace to the Rat. I started off doing my P.G.C.E, but found that teaching was not for me decided that sticking with enviros was what put a smile on my face and so I was excited to come back to it properly this year, starting my MSc.

My project

Initially I was working with Dr. James Gambiza in the field of alternative energy, more specifically biofuels and in particular, biogas, but decided to change to a topic involving artificial wetlands and now my supervisor is Prof. Fred Ellery. Fred and I were destined for each other, both being diabetics, so we don't just have wetlands and a thesis in common. I find the way in which wetlands work as natural systems quite fascinating and my project incorporates the design of an artificial wetland for small scale use for domestic water purification purposes. It will use a GIS model for analysis purposes. Although it is still in its very early stages and there is a lot of work to be done, I feel that I am going to come away from the experience having learnt more than I could ever imagine.

And looking towards the horizon...

As for the future I do not have any exact set plans (no body really wants to hear this answer when they ask this question), but believe that with the right frame of mind you are more than likely to meet people and come across opportunities that will add to your life's adventure. I fell in love with the Western Cape and will hopefully end up back there after I have seen a bit of the world first. Right



now I would love to travel all over, starting with South America, but everything happens in due time, so I will have to be patient. Luckily being in the environmental field, often jobs can take you places. Until then I will continue to enjoy my running and my baking while feeling at home in the DES as well as making the most epic memories with all the lovely friends I have made here at Rhodes. Everyone has accommodated me so kindly and I appreciate it so very much.

○ Sarah Kaschula & family ○

Sarah Kaschula completed her PhD in the Environmental Science dept in 2008, looking at wild edible resources and food security in HIV/AIDS households. Sarah & family are celebrating a new addition to their family and are now the proud parents of a very active little 5-month old baby. Her husband Dean has procured a job at UCT in the Philosophy dept and they have moved back home from America.. Sarah has just finished her Columbia Postdoc a few weeks ago! Currently she is applying for funding at the UCT Institute for Monitoring and Evaluation to continue her research on assessing impacts of complex development projects in rural African contexts. Good luck Sarah, we hope to hear from you in the near future as to how the research and the baby are doing.



Honours fieldtrip to Riversdale

From the 7 to 11 May the Environmental Science honours students embarked on a journey to Riversdale accompanied by Professor Fred Ellery and masters students, Debbie Bekker and Nancy Job. The purpose of the trip was to give the honours class an opportunity to bond due to the unfortunate events that led to the annual honours field trip being cancelled earlier on in the year. The tasks given to the honours class on arrival in Riversdale included assisting Debbie and Nancy with their field work that aims to determine the origin of the Goukou Wetlands and the reasons for its collapse over the past decade.

This field work involved that of land surveying and coring, two of the techniques used in wetland ecology to understand valley morphology along trunk and tributary streams, and examine interactions between the two. We also had the privilege of being lectured by Professor Ab Grootjans of the University of Groningen in The Netherlands and Mr Japie Buckle, the provincial co-ordinator of Working for Wetlands. Their presentations allowed us not only to apply the techniques of our fieldwork and get a more comprehensive understanding of how these techniques can be applied, but we also gained an understanding of the benefits and importance that wetlands and mires can provide for both humans and ecosystems, and specifically the role of palmiet within these areas. Furthermore, a few members of the class had the opportunity to assist with coring to bedrock through what is believed to be the deepest (>12 m) and oldest peatland in Southern Africa. Meanwhile other members of the class got the opportunity to spend the day exploring the town of Stilbaai visiting the museums and centres. The fieldtrip was not only an insightful experience but certainly provided a great opportunity for the class to get to bond and spend some quality time together. It was a memorable experience that has definitely enabled the honours class to get to know each other better.



HONOURS FIELDTRIP

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Photography & Text: Charlie Shackleton, Sheona Shackleton, Megan Kelly, Claudette Muller, Sam Munro

