

Simanjiro Round Square trip

A group of 15 students from Years 7-9, an ex-Bridgehouse student, Ayubu a guide in training, Mr. Marandu and Mr. Schwartzje took a three hour bus ride south of St. Constantine's to Simanjiro, a rural Maasai community. Our aim was meant to work alongside local community members to build keyhole gardens and plant seeds for local families.

Testigo (<http://www.testigoafrica.org>), an Australian NGO whose aim is teaching rural communities about permaculture and water conservation, coordinated the project.

Upon arrival in Simanjiro, we first stopped to visit the gardens already planted and ready for harvest. A group of females from the community were each given a plot of land to grow a variety of vegetables. In all, over 100 females and one male (who travels by foot two hours each way) have joined together with the common goal of producing vegetables for both personal consumption and to sell their produce at the local markets. This has allowed the Maasai families to save money from having to purchase produce in the market and also provides them with a much-needed income.



After having visited the gardens, we went to a local boma where we were invited to sleep. The group was warmly welcomed and very quickly adapted to our surroundings and our extremely hospitable hosts. We quickly pitched our tents and had a little down time while having the opportunity to interact with the family and their neighbours and learn more about the Maasai way of life. Shortly after our dinner arrived (a live goat) on the back of a boda and many of the students were in for a real surprise. They witnessed first hand the process of slaughtering, preparing and cooking our meal.

It didn't take much encouragement but several students immediately got involved in all steps of the process.

In Maasai culture, no part of the goat goes to waste. Needless to say, we ensured that nothing was wasted. Students had the choice of tasting some of the goat's blood and eating the kidneys. This really took them out of their comfort zone and surprisingly quite a few took the opportunity. The fire was lit and the meat was getting cooked and in due time dinner was served. Unfortunately one goat was not sufficient and we were going to purchase another goat as more and more locals began showing up. We asked our host if we could buy another animal and he very graciously gave us a sheep at no charge. Finally, there was more than sufficient food for all including ugali and some rice.

After the meat was done cooking, our hosts continued to make goat and sheep head soup. Mixed with some local medicines (bark from the black acacia tree and some other ingredients) the men sat around the fire to drink their soup. This was repeated the following morning with almost all the students at least trying the soup.



Eventually, Tracey (a private donor for the project) and her daughter arrived and we all had breakfast. We returned to the local gardens to introduce Tracey to the local females she has been donating funds to and we said our thank yous and farewell before heading back to work on preparing our hosts keyhole garden and planting seeds. Time was quickly running out and we had to rush off but all students had the opportunity to get their hands a little dirty while working on the garden.

We would like to thank Tracey and her organization, Testigo, for allowing St. Constantine's to join the project. It proved to be very enjoyable for all those who participated as well as the locals. It was truly a unique learning experience for all involved and provided a great cultural exchange. Being a Round Square school, it touched on all of the IDEALS. We had a range of people involved - local Maasai, Tanzanians, Australians, a South African and a Canadian. Decisions had to be made in a democratic way. The project is geared towards environmental sustainability. A walking safari and overnight camping provided us with adventure. Many students assumed various leadership roles throughout the trip and of course we provided Service.



It was an early start to our Sunday as we had planned a morning walking safari. It was decided that we would take a little drive to where we could see more wildlife. We were treated to seeing quite a few animals including zebra, wildebeest and antelope amongst a few other species. After we finished our safari we made our way back to our hosts, where we began to take down our tents while we waited for breakfast to finish being prepared.

We are looking to forge a long-term sustainable relationship with Testigo to provide students with more regular service opportunities in the years to come. When all is said and done everyone had a fantastic time and the students involved were all more than ready to participate in the next project.

Written by: Mr. Jeff Schwartzje