

# RSIS UPDATE

Issue 2 | September 2011



## Project News

Well what a fantastic season of RSIS Projects! There have been some stunning highlights from this July's trips, and leaders have reported that the teams have not only been the best ever, but have worked beyond all expectations to complete some valuable work, at the same time as truly having the time of their lives!

Well done to each and every student who went on the trips – you worked hard, you wore a smile each day, and you represented your schools very well. Well done to all my leaders – without you these trips wouldn't have been so successful, and it was always great to know that the teams were in safe hands. And a final well done to all our in-country managers and tour

operators without whom we wouldn't have had such slick transport, such safe and fun activities and such wonderful community Projects for the teams to work on.

THANK YOU!

*Liz Gray*

RSIS Projects Co-ordinator

## JULY / AUGUST UPDATE

### South Africa

Stunning success all round this year, and the team were able to finish the community centre walls and floor, and now another group has completed the roof. This building will make a huge difference to the community of Philippolis! The group also re-surfaced the scooter track that the 2010 team laid, and did numerous teaching and sports activities with the great local children.

There were 23 students plus 3 adults on the trip this year from 15 different schools. They were Regents Pattaya, Athenian School, Daly College, Gordonstoun, St Clements School, Mayo College, Doon School, Bishop's College School, Salem, Landheim Schondorf, Herlufsholm, Cobham Hall,

Hotchkiss School, Bayview Glen and Wellington College. The two leaders were Damien Vassallo (Landheim Schondorf) and Toby Brown (Bayview Glen School) and Michael Thomas from Regents Pattaya was an adult participant.

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*"It was an amazing experience and I got so much from this trip. I really felt proud of what we have done for the community as well as what they give back to me. It may not have been the easiest and most comfortable trip, but that's the best part of it"*

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### Ladakh

The team this year had a wonderful time in the beautiful mountain kingdom of Ladakh. They worked alongside the people of Thiksey to build a dormitory for the Lamdom School, which will enable many more students to stay and attend the school from the more distant, mountain communities.



The team worked tremendously well together, and also completed a 5-day high altitude trek before heading off down to Delhi, where the international team said goodbye to their Indian team-mates and spent a day at the Taj Mahal.

There were 28 students from 17 schools in the team this year. The team was led by Tony Hyde (Beau Soleil) and Claudia Lutes (Rothsay Netherwood). Cathrin Kluj (Landheim Schondorf) and Dhirendra Sharma (Scindia) attended as adult participants. The group were also lucky enough to have Dr Akhilesh Bharadwar with them from Mayo College as the team's medic. The students came from Mayo College, Doon School, Indian School Oman, Dhirubhai International School, Punjab Public School, Scindia, Athenian School, Gordonstoun, Landheim Schondorf, Salem, Regents Pattaya, Hotchkiss School, Markham College, Glenlyon Norfolk School and Bishops College School.



# JULY / AUGUST UPDATES CONT'D...

## Peru

Another stunningly successful trip in Peru this year, which saw the team go up to the Quechua Andean community of Pampa Corral and work alongside ECOAN (a local Peruvian conservation organisation) to build two rustic greenhouses, in which they planted numerous vegetables to help the local community eat a more sustainable and healthy diet. The team also took part in a day at a cultural centre (learning to play the pan-pipes and learn about ancient Inca art); spent a day climbing a 300m via ferrata in the cliffs next to the Urubamba River; toured Machu Picchu and spent time in Cusco soaking up the markets and local sites.

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“This group was simply outstanding. The kids bonded so well, such a solid team, such solidarity, so many tear-filled farewells, such impressive plans to keep the magic intact. I'm astounded” (*Project Manager, Peru*)

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There were 20 students plus 5 adults on the trip this year, from 17 different schools! They were: Vivek High School, Cobham Hall, Deerfield Academy, Mayo College, Doon School, Regents Pattaya, Athenian School, L'Ermitage, Salem, Herlufsholm, Strathcona Tweedsmuir, Bermuda High School, Hotchkiss School, Chadwick School, Gordonstoun, Markham College and Lakefield College School.



## RSIS Projects – expensive, or not?

**We're often asked why Projects cost what they do, and sometimes told that our trips are expensive. So we thought we'd offer a breakdown of the general costs.**

Projects are run solely on the fees that participants pay and none comes from Round Square itself, so budgeting is an extremely time-consuming and delicate process – obviously it's really important that we get this right, although trying to do this a year in advance, and not knowing how many we're going to get in the team makes this a challenge! Here's what the fees cover:

- All accommodation during the trip
- All food and drinks during the trip including local cook teams
- All transport in country (departure taxes, planes, trains and automobiles!)
- All cultural phase site entrance fees, guides and tips
- All other activities such as climbing, rafting, hiking etc. including guides, equipment, tips.
- Cost of a medic (fees, travel and other expenses) and medical kit appropriate to the terrain the team are in.
- Local agent fees in some destinations
- Flights, expenses and all in-country costs for two leaders per Project
- In-country costs for local Project Managers
- Communications (satellite phone hire, calls and internet costs)
- Emergency Contingency Fund (to pay for medical treatment for example)
- Site visit by in-country team in some destinations

All team members are automatically covered by the full Round Square comprehensive travel and medical insurance policy.

The only reason why students need to take money on a trip is to buy souvenirs and extra drinks and snacks between meals if they really want to. Absolutely everything else is covered! We do not build in any profit margin, and if Projects make a profit it is usually for the following reasons:

- The budgets are prepared a year in advance so some costs or currencies go up and down in that time. Sometimes we're hit with unexpected costs that we hadn't anticipated!
- When we prepare budgets, quite often we do not know who will lead it, who will be the medic and where in the world they are all coming from, so have to “guesstimate” their expenses.
- We prepare them on the basis of getting a “just under full” team because if we do not fill a team then the organisation is losing money. If we get more team members than budgeted for, then a profit accrues.
- We have to rely on our in-country managers and tour operators to give us accurate quotes a year in advance, which is some countries is very difficult. That's why it's really important for us to be able to trust our managers and agents to give us the most accurate information possible, in a timely manner.

We also did a comparison against other organisations that offer similar kinds of trips and found the universally, RSIS Projects were cheaper than nearly all we compared against, probably because we're not a “corporate” entity and do not charge for office or personnel overheads, or pay our leaders. We compared on a like-for like basis, and also found that most if not all do not contain as much service work in their itineraries, or engage in long-term, sustainable Projects.



# DECEMBER UPDATE

December 2011 is turning into a bumper harvest! We have Projects running in Cambodia, India, Kenya and Honduras; along with the parent and younger student trip in Thailand and the Leader Training Project in Cambodia. That's six in all. That's two more than in 2010! All the information is on the [RS website](#) Here is a summary of each to get the mouth watering:

## **Thailand:** one place remaining for an Australasia family; two places remaining for Indian families; one place remaining for a European family

Our Thailand Project returns to work alongside the Pakanyor Foundation to bring clean drinking water to a rural Karen hill-tribe, but this time we're offering the places to younger students (aged 14 to 15) and one of their parents! There's been some great interest in this trip and we have a great team forming now. We had some truly inspirational applications from students (who even at the age of 14 have surprised us with their passion, social conscience and desire to help others) and also from their parents who are offering all kinds of really useful skills that we can share with the hill-tribe community.

We've run Projects in Thailand for years, and know the Pakanyor Foundation well. The work that the team will be doing will offer participants (young, and not so young!) all kinds of challenges, but they will be able to complete the whole water system in the 10 days they are spending in the village and the great by-product of the Project is the opportunity for real parent/student bonding in a unique setting. Each family will stay with a local Karen family in their stilt house, and have a truly unique chance to live

amongst people they wouldn't even meet as tourists. The cultural exchange will be totally authentic, and really powerful for student and parent alike.

After the work is finished, the group will have a chance to go crazy in the night market in Chiang Mai and will also be spending a day at an elephant conservation project.

If you have any students and parents interested, and are from any of the RS Regions noted above, please contact Liz as soon as possible to get your place.



## **Cambodia:** two places remaining

The community in Trapeang Thum commune have already worked hard to level the land for the new school, and are busy building a new toilet block ready for our team's arrival! Our great team of Khmer local managers are making all the bookings and I know that our team is already putting work into fundraising to be able to buy bicycles for the local community to use for work and school.



## **Fantastic fund-raising effort from Ivanhoe Grammar School to raise money for bicycles on the Cambodia RSIS Project!**

At Ivanhoe Grammar School Plenty Campus they have begun a fund-raising effort to help purchase bicycles for Cambodian kids who live very isolated from schools and hence an education. They are working with a local coffee shop owner who belongs to a group already very committed to supporting a rural village in Sumatra.

The group buys coffee beans direct from the village, ensuring that the farmers receive a fair price for their coffee beans. Further financial support from the coffee shop owners has ensured improved sanitary conditions in the village, improved education for the kids and agricultural training which has led to improved coffee beans.

The school community has been invited to buy these freshly roasted coffee beans at a competitive price which gives them some room to raise some funds to help buy some bicycles so that the Cambodian kids can actually get to school. Think about that – it is not rocket science and everyone wins!

They are aiming to raise enough funds to buy ten bicycles and right now they are about half way there.

## India: four places remaining for international students

The Project is being co-ordinated by the energetic and passionate RS Rep from Doon School – Mr Ambikesh Shukla. Having taken his own school teams to Katapathar in the past, he is well experienced in the area, and knows what the community there really needs help with. The needs of the community show how good it is to invest in long-term work as they need all the things we at home usually take for granted. Imagine not being able to drive anywhere because there are few good roads between you and the shops, work or school? Imagine not having a playground at school or proper desks and chairs to sit at! Imagine living in daily fear that the river will flood in a massive monsoon and wash the existing roads, your land, your house or even your family away! That is the reality for this community so it is great to bring an RSIS team there to continue on with the work that the Doon School teams have already started.

The group will be staying in a beautiful estate during the Project, originally owned by a British Army Officer as his forest lodge. It sits on the banks of the Yamuna River, in the foothills of the Himalayas and will offer the team a great base from which to travel each day to Katapathar. They will have a yoga instructor with them who will torture their bones and muscles in daily sessions designed to keep them fit, limbered up and also spiritually calm. During the mid-Project break the team will be doing some hiking to Bhadrak Peak (4,500m) and doing some rafting at Rishikesh on the Ganges. They will visit local temples and really experience the colour, energy and wonder of Indian life.



**Contact Liz now for those last remaining places!**



## Honduras: only a one place remaining for a student and one place for accompanying adult

Nestled in the mountains only 2 hours from Tegucigalpa is the small village of Nuevo Paraiso. This village of only 60 homes is a safe haven for children who are victims of extreme poverty, neglect and abuse and SAN offer them skills and an education and effectively give them a future that they would otherwise have been denied. Teams in the last few years have built a big water storage tank for the community, and last year built the first room for their new carpentry centre so that they can teach the boys carpentry skills. This year, the team will be building a much-needed food storage room for the community. At the moment, their food is stored in a room which isn't properly weatherproof, and obviously these are very unhygienic conditions to store it in. By building them a new store, they'll be able to keep food for longer, and provide a higher quality and quantity of meals for the children.

While on the Project, the team gets involved in planning a fiesta for the children, along with people from the community which always involves a crazy local live band, lots of party games and some traditional South American dancing! After all the work is finished, the team will set off to the coast, and by foot and by boat, will visit some of the incredible jungles, national parks and gorgeous beaches seeing the array of flora and fauna and learning more about Honduras' incredible diversity.

You snooze, you lose so contact Liz now for those last few remaining places!

## Kenya: two places remaining

The team returns to Riandira Primary School in 2011, to build a new Year 7 classroom. They will also be refurbishing some of the other classrooms and trying to make the learning environment in the school a much more pleasant place. The international team will again be joined by a group of boys from Starehe Boys Centre and School in Nairobi, and Mr Peter Ndungu, the RS Rep from Starehe is co-ordinating all the arrangements.

The group will be staying in a local campsite, and during the Project they will do some rafting; complete a survey of local life while visiting families in their homes and also attend a traditional Kenyan church service! After the Project is finished, the group will go to the Masai Mara for a 4-day safari over Christmas!





# New Projects in 2012!

## Canada and South Africa



**During this year, when we haven't only been managing and planning our 2011 Projects, we've also been looking forwards to 2012 and beyond**

### Canada

At the end of May, Liz travelled to British Columbia in Western Canada to meet with a couple of potential Project partners looking to set up an more environmental Project for RSIS teams from July 2012 onwards. We had very interesting meetings with Thom Henley, and also with Parks Canada in Jasper National Park and have had to make some difficult decisions between two very fine Projects.

In the end, we have decided to work with Thom Henley's Soaring Spirits Camp in northern BC doing trail work in the Seven Sisters Provincial Park, where they will be developing a trail through the Boulder Creek Canyon to the base of the glaciers. The team will be working alongside local First Nations youth from the Gitksan communities of Kitwanga, Kitwankool and Kispiox on this Project, and for 4-5 days in the second week, our team will be going to their communities to help with some basic work such as constructing a smokehouse for youth to cure salmon, and building a playground for younger children. As the local First Nations people run the Soaring Spirits camp, the team would also be doing art and drum-making with their cultural teachers; will go on a 3-day canoe adventure on the Skeena and Kispiox Rivers; go fishing for their own supper, watch the grizzly bears at a salmon-leap on the Alaska border, see some of the glaciers and see many, many totem poles!

This will be a truly amazing new Project. Thom Henley not only fully appreciates what Round Square does, but also has such close and rare connections with the communities here that students are promised an experience that they would never receive as a tourist. The communities are very excited already about the possibilities of international youth coming to their area and we really hope that we get a team not only from overseas, but also students from Canada too.



### South Africa

At the beginning of September, Liz returned from a 10-day trip to South Africa to look at new potential Projects for teams going there in July 2012. Liz and Brian (Dawson) travelled together down to White River, a town which borders the southern end of Kruger National Park, and after a bit of essential weekend R&R viewing the wildlife, Liz and Brian then went to look at a number of potential Projects with our Project Manager - Liz Mackintosh. The potential Projects were all extremely interesting and worthy, but in the end we decided to help the Masoyi Special Care Centre. This is a one-room centre for disabled children to come to every day. Having a disabled child is a huge stigma in this area, and often they are abandoned, abused or locked away their entire lives. A local lady has taken it on herself to help them, and break down the stigma and our team in 2012 will be building a classroom so that the children can have lessons, learn music and have more stimulation during their day. Their needs



could not be greater, so it'll be a real privilege to help them. Brian and Liz also went to see a few wildlife rehabilitation and conservation projects, and we are hoping that the group can spend time at the end of the trip doing a small safari, then go off to learn animal identification and tracking techniques, sleep out in the wilderness and learn more about the conservation issues affecting the wildlife there. A really great trip, and we now have plenty of ideas to keep us going!

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**"What really made my experience so unique was playing with the local kids, teaching them, loving them, changing their lives but knowing they change yours as well. I have a completely different way of thinking now and I can value certain things better than before. The balance between labour, free time and cultural experience was perfect!"**

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*(Student who went to South Africa)*



# Leader Training Project - Cambodia

So – we've already told you about our first Leader Training Workshop in the last newsletter but things have moved on apace since then! We currently have 15 teachers confirmed on the trip:



- One from the Europe Region (from the UK)
- Three from the America's Region (two from Canada, one from the USA)
- Four from the Asia Region (all from India)
- Seven from the Australasia Region (all from Australia) plus 5 from Regents Pattaya who are coming for the Workshop only. We had an overwhelming number of applications from this Region, and had to limit it to seven.

The Project preparation is taking place as I write - the community in Bakot have already cleared the land, and are already building a 2-stall toilet, and a well for our visiting group! We have hired a restaurant in Takeo in which to run the training (ever resourceful!) and have built several extra activities into the Project itself including:

- We are going to be allocating a pair of participants to be the leaders for each day in order to put their workshop training into practice
- We will be running a few scenario's during the Project, typical of the sorts of occurrences one would get with a student team on a similar Project
- We are hoping that teachers will be able to mix with local teachers and schools to discuss working practices
- The group will be visiting the "Embracelets" Project where local women and girls make Cambodian traditional bracelets and jewellery to sell to raise money for their communities.
- We hope to arrange a visit to the RSIS Cambodia student team who will be 10km's away working on their own school building.
- The group will donate bicycles at the end of the Project to local families who really need them to get to school and make a living too.

It's going to be a fantastic two weeks, and because of some very generous funding from FoRS Canada, we are able to run the whole trip for only £200 per person (plus flights, insurance, inoculations, visas etc which are at personal cost). When you think how much training and volunteer Projects cost with any other organisation, I'm sure you'll work out that this is a great opportunity to learn new skills, mix with other teachers from Round Square and make a really meaningful contribution to a rural Cambodian community.

If you're interested in the trip, and come from any of the under-represented Regions above please get in touch to reserve your place!! For more information, please contact Liz Gray on [projects@roundsquare.org](mailto:projects@roundsquare.org)

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"I now feel much more positive and more confident in preparing written documents necessary for my school trips, and am not fearing and loathing them like I used to! I also realise that we need to do quite a bit more paperwork at our school to ensure that everything is up to standard for all our trips. Thanks - it was an extremely worthwhile workshop!"

*Staff Member*

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## A GUIDE TO GETTING PLACES ON POPULAR PROJECTS

Inevitably, some Projects fill up a lot faster than other Projects even though we always try to launch them at times when all schools are in term. Although we do accept students on a first come, first served basis behind the scenes we manage teams carefully to ensure that we have schools from all Regions represented.

Inevitably, we have to disappoint schools who have not been quick enough to get their applications in, or for other reasons haven't been able to broadcast opportunities to their students. So here's a quick guide on how to get your students on Projects early:

- We launch the July/August Projects the previous November/December.
- We launch the December Projects the previous April/May
- We generally launch Projects in the same countries as the previous years, and will usually have a general summary of next year's Projects on the RS website.
- Bearing in mind the above launch dates, talk through options with your students and see who might be interested early.
- We put all the Project information on the RS website as soon as a Project is launched. Pounce on the information and get this round to your students!
- Chat to us by phone or email to find out availability if you're in any doubt! We try to keep the website up to date, so please keep an eye on this!



## Newsflash!

We have an unexpected **vacancy** for a **Deputy Leader** on the December Thailand Project. They should ideally be male with experience of Projects and/or Thailand.

The Project runs from December 7 to 22!

If you are interested, please contact Liz as soon as possible:

[projects@roundsquare.org](mailto:projects@roundsquare.org)

# Leader Profile



"As Leader it is important to have everyone come together as a unit as quickly as possible and to really seize the moment and take full advantage of where they are and who they are with"

**David MacLellan**

## **What did you teach at St Clements, and how do you fill your time now that you're honorably retired?**

At SCS I taught history and economics. As well as RS Rep at SCS I was Coordinator of Student Leadership Development. I was also the Staff Advisor to the Student Council, The Ontario Model Parliament Team and the Model UN Team. Since retiring I like to say my main job is "Cottage Life" but I do work / volunteer at the Canadian Air and Space Museum in Toronto and help out at the Toronto Triumph Club ... I have a 1977 Triumph Spitfire 1500 that gets quite a bit of attention!

## **When and where was your first RSIS trip?**

Germany and the RS Conference at Salem in 2002. I was then Deputy Leader on the RSIS South Africa trip in 2009.

## **What's been your most difficult moment on an RSIS trip?**

I think the Guatemala Project and its nature ... 100% immersion in the life and work of an isolated mountain village ... the work, not only on the FogQuest tasks, but the cooking, cleaning, just all the day to day "stuff". Not to mention all the cold and the non stop RAIN! It was difficult and demanding on all of us but ultimately also very very rewarding and worthwhile for everyone.

## **What's been the most amazing moment and why?**

At Salem in 2002 it was my first meeting and the conference where St. Clement's School became a full member school of RS. I had been the "point man" on the SCS application ... it was very rewarding. I had another teacher and four great students with me who had also worked very hard on the application. Most amazing time was talking at length to Jocelyn Winthrop-Young on many occasions ... a real honour. Too many other great and amazing moments to mention!

## **What's been the funniest thing you've seen or heard on an RSIS trip?**

On the RSIS South Africa Project in 2009 we had students share their "talents" with the group and two German girls on project decided to teach all of us classic ballroom dancing. The reaction was priceless from the RS students and the local people working with us ... we had a great evening, everyone had a great deal of fun and the dancing ranged from quite amazing to quite pathetic ... me!

## **What do you consider your role to be as the Project Leader?**

As project leader you are part of a very diverse team of students and staff plus all the great local people who work with you on the project. As Leader it is important to have everyone come together as a unit as quickly as possible and to really seize the moment and take full advantage of where they are and who they are with. Lead "from the pack" and to truly model the "Carpe Diem" spirit essential for any RS Trip.

## **What advice would you give to a teacher wanting to be a leader on an RSIS trip?**

Get fully involved with RS in every way at your school, try to get involved in / or start a school based project in your region and attend one of Liz's training workshops as soon as you can.

## **If money were no object and you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?**

I would go back to Africa ... an amazing continent and great people with so much potential and so much to see. I have only been able to get to South Africa, Botswana and Zambia and there is so much more to see and do.





## Did you know?

On this summer's three RSIS Projects, the following took part:

- 30 schools
- 87 students (34 girls, 53 boys!!)
- First time that I've known boys over-take girls!!
- 5 additional adults
- 6 leaders
- 2 medics
- Numerous Project Managers!

**We spent £9,919 from the PAPF to pay for all the materials on the above Projects!**

Airlines only lost one bag (which turned up a day later)!

**The highest altitude that any team reached this summer was 5,000m at the highest point of the trek in Ladakh.**

Two greenhouses, one dormitory and one community centre were built by our teams this July!

### Prince Alexander Project Fund (PAPF)

**This December we will be sending a total of around US\$25,000 to cover all the materials needed for the Honduras, Kenya, Thailand, Cambodia and India Projects.**

**The Leader Training Project delegate fees are covering all the materials needed there, and the Cambodia Project has had most of its materials covered by kind sponsorship from Helical Bar, London.**



## Changes to the RSIS team!

Very sadly, we waved goodbye to Heather Thompson, the RSIS Project Assistant in mid-July. She took the decision to seek a full time job as the life-style of juggling several part-time jobs was starting to wear thin! She managed to find a great job almost as soon as she started looking, and is now working with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in their West Country office visiting schools and youth groups trying to encourage more to take part. It's a great job, and we wish her all the best. She's been a great asset to our team!

Very happily we have already found a great replacement! Her name is Clare Coverdale, and she lives in Bath. She has just left Bath Academy as Assistant Head of Student Services co-ordinating all the arrangements for international students to come and study here in the UK. She has also worked for a safari company in London doing all the research and planning for their trips in East Africa, and has spent time overseas travelling, trekking, scuba-diving and taking part in service work in Tanzania.

Clare started with us on September 5<sup>th</sup> and will be working two days a week, usually on a Monday and Tuesday. She can be reached on the usual [rsisadmin@roundsquare.org](mailto:rsisadmin@roundsquare.org) e-mail address. I know that you will make her feel very welcome, and you'll have an opportunity to meet her in October at the conference opening day.

*"We just picked our son up from the airport. He's had a wonderful trip and experience and we will now have to get our second son interested in a project for next year...."*

*(parent of a student who went to South Africa)*

*"My girls are back from the Ladakh Project and they have had a wonderful time. The girls have been going gaga about the great time they have had ever since they came back a couple of days ago and I must take this opportunity to thank the entire team for a wonderful project put together"*

*(School Rep)*

*"We've had a couple of days to download our son's experience on the RSIS Peru trip and he had an amazing time. He couldn't speak highly enough about the trip leaders, the itinerary and organization, the group dynamics and facilitation and the personal impact of living in a remote village in the Sacred Valley with fellow students from around the world."*

*(parent of a student who went to Peru)*