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Local ladies meet chimpanzees and educate Ugandan teachers

Quite the opportunity

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Last week, Carla Taylor returned home, along with her colleague and friend, Jenny Loeb sack from their journey to Uganda. Although the ladies have many stories to share, one of the highlights for them was meeting wild primates face-to-face. 'Trekking for gorillas in the jungle - whacking our way through the trees and underbrush to find these majestic creatures was unbelievable!' said Loeb sack. 'And being able to meet and interact with our closest relatives, the chimpanzees was a very powerful experience.' stated Taylor.

The chimpanzee experience was facilitated by the Ngambe Island Reserve, which rescues and cares for orphaned chimpanzees. Loeb sack and Taylor participated in the reserves' Integration Program, which allows participants to meet, walk with and play with a small group of chimps that are being re-integrated into the forest environment. Taylor was amazed at how similar they are to us. 'We played with a younger one called Rambo who was very playful. I also got the chance to carry a female, Pasa who decided she'd rather see the forest from my shoulders. The best though was when we sat in the forest to rest. Yoyo, another female curled up in my lap! Chimpanzees have 98.7% the same DNA as humans, and their hands and eyes and ears are so much like ours – its uncanny.' This was a unique experience because generally visitors and the chimpanzees do not interact so closely.

Throughout July, the two worked with the Jane Goodall Institute of Uganda facilitating workshops to train rural primary school teachers on how to integrate environmental education into their daily school curriculum, using interactive and fun methods. These workshops were developed by JGI Uganda, in collaboration with JGI Canada, to increase awareness of the environment and encourage students and their communities to make informed decisions on how to improve their environment.

Both Loeb sack and Taylor are very grateful for the opportunity to have worked with the Ugandan teachers. 'It is a beautiful country despite its problems, and we met wonderful people, shared our knowledge and also learned a lot from them', stated Loeb sack.

Taylor and Loeb sack were also able to experience the 'real' Uganda – hiking on goat paths through the hillsides, paddling traditional dugout canoes through small islands on a freshwater lake; staying with local families and eating traditional dishes made primarily from bananas, root vegetables and goat; meeting pygmies; and even having a group of school children put on a dance show as they passed by a local leaders house.

The two dedicated volunteers spent the last four months fundraising for the workshops and preparing for this once-in-a-lifetime experience. The ladies would like to thank all of the sponsors, family and friends that assisted them in raising funds for the project. And they eagerly look forward to hearing from the teachers how the resources and information they passed on will impact their communities. To hear more about the project and their experiences visit <http://ugandaenviroed.blogspot.com/>

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