

The Outdoor Classroom

Afoot in Costa Rica, age 6



Above: Standing alongside a mature rainforest tree gives even a six year old a sense of perspective.

Left: One of the first lessons of the rainforest is that it rains a lot!

After much soul-searching, we decided to ask our son's headmaster to excuse him the first days of new spring term to enable us to take a special family holiday in Costa Rica. We agreed that he would keep a diary and report back to his classmates, and invested in a digital camera to enable him to take his own snap shots to illustrate his story. This was to be his first big overseas adventure. What would he make of it all?

The tropical sun and humidity, the musty smells and high-pitched squeaks and croaks of the forest added to the dense cloud and warm thunderstorms of the higher slopes were real experience – Cambridgeshire this was not!

A walk on a Caribbean beach playing 'guess the flotsam' is a good way to stretch the mind to begin with. Bird-watching has hitherto not been junior's top past-time, but the directory-sized Costa Rican bird guide *Stiles and*

Skutch soon became his trusty companion. "It doesn't matter if he has identified the wrong bird" says mother very indignantly, "he's having enormous fun doing it". Being a scientifically accurate father, this took some getting used to. But, after a week, he had pretty much learnt in which order the birds appeared on the plates.

Diary highlights? Metre-long iridescent iguanas joining us to sunbathe; the haunting dawn boom of the howler monkey, thermal hot springs – bath time was never so stress free; his first experience of snorkelling in the Pacific accompanied by dolphins, and watching the Olive Ridley Turtles emerge from the deep at dusk to lay eggs on the beach, as their ancestors have done since the dawn of time.

While walking in the 'garden' at Tortuga Lodge, Tortuguero, a nature guide from another party said. "Have you seen the six metre crocodile that's here somewhere". We looked at each other and gulped. "It's not as dangerous as standing underneath that coconut tree" he added. Local knowledge is a wonderful thing.

But Arenal Volcano topped the lot. Junior had been building up his hopes of a viewing for months, despite information that the summit is seen only ten days a year. After two days shrouded in fog and unrelenting rain, the skies cleared miraculously and the summit revealed itself. As we deserted the regulation breakfast *gallo pinto* for a better view, a rumble from the bowels of the earth echoed around the valley and a huge

plume of white ash spewed from the summit. This is where boyhood dreams begin and end.

A night drive on the track back to Arenal Observatory Lodge was hard work – and then it happened! Out of the grass verge it meandered across the headlights. This was no fleeting glimpse, it stayed by the roadside long enough for a full view, "Look son", pointing with a shaky hand and trembling voice, "Ocelot!". Then, perhaps conscious of its feline beauty and rarity, it slunk back into the night. A once in a lifetime experience? For this youngster, possibly not. Possibly. An experience that can be re-created in a classroom? Never.

Adrian Penrose, WLT Trustee



Close Encounters with Wilderness

Most of the features in this issue of *WLT News* are first-hand accounts of recent visits to WLT's project areas by staff, trustees and colleagues. One of the things that sets aside WLT projects from the others is that supporters can actually go and visit the areas they have helped save. For details of staying at project sites please see our website or contact the WLT office, (details on page 2).

Although our land purchase commitments have been successfully

achieved in Costa Rica we are still working with local people on community projects on the Osa Peninsula and when Trustee, Adrian Penrose, told us he would be holidaying in Costa Rica with his wife and six year old son we asked if he could write something on the family adventure for *WLT News*.

The Penrose family and Jane Krish (see page 3) were self funded on their trips.

www.focusonforests.org

Although WLT does not primarily undertake education work we do our best to encourage young people to get involved. Often this is through teachers, and our school pack is available to children and adults alike. We are pleased to include any group who has raised funds in our Hall of Fame on the website.

Focus on Forests Booklets and Teacher's Manual aimed at Key Stage 3 (11-13 year olds) are available from the WLT office.

