

'I never dreamed it would be such an emotional experience'

Abbots Langley resident Sandra Higgins spent two weeks living in a Maasai village in Kenya recently. She is now back from her trip and says it will live in her memory for ever.

She said: "It was an amazing trip, and although I went intending to learn about how people live without the basics we take for granted like water and electricity I never dreamed it would be such an emotional experience. It's hard to explain how welcome and accepted we were made to feel in such a short time by people whose lives are so dramatically different from ours, and how sad we were when it was time to leave.

The village was a five mile walk away from the water source, which was a muddy spring, and we walked with the women from the village one day with their donkeys to see just what a trek it was. We helped repair a house – with cow poo mixed by hand with cow pee. These people have nothing except the few cows and goats which survived the terrible drought a few years ago, yet they welcomed us like family and gave us presents of the jewellery they make to sell, and expected nothing in return. They invited us into their homes for tea, and taught us about their culture, mainly through someone who could speak English. I was surprised that so many of the young people spoke very good English, and we learned that education is very important to them. All of the children go to school, and many boys and girls go on to university. The state school is too far for the younger children to walk to, so the village pays for a teacher to come and teach the youngest in their small church. We were shown a site where they are manually digging a small dam to provide water for the



village during the months when there is no rain, and they told us of their plans to raise funds to build a proper school near the dam which is needed for the younger children.

Unknown to the villagers, it was always the group's intention to help this village on a long term basis, and this seemed like the ideal project, so we gave them enough money to start building the school. This was given directly to a group of elders representing the whole village as this was seen as the best way to make sure the money actually made its way to the project. The organisers of the trip are already planning to take a new group to the same village next February and will probably visit and support this village for the next ten years or so to make sure they really do make a difference. They have plans to form a charity and intend to personally make sure that every penny raised goes directly to benefit the causes for which it is raised.

I suppose four months on I still get emotional about the whole trip, but then I think anyone who goes to Africa will say the same. Kenya is a beautiful country with wonderful genuinely wild wildlife and lovely, generous, warm people and I'd love to return."

Details of next year's trip can be found at www.desertways.co.uk under Maasai Experience.

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