AESOP Experiences:

CURSWAN ANDREWS

Exchanged?! The promise of being 'shipped' away…

C. Andrews[1]

[1]Centre for African Conservation Ecology, Department of Zoology, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

Currently I am a PhD candidate in the Department of Zoology at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth. I was awarded an AESOP PhD mobility in 2014 to undertake an initial 6 month research trip to the University Paul Sabatier in Toulouse. The focus of my research centres on the evolutionary relationships of Strepsirhine primates, with particular emphasis on the trajectory of diet and basicranial morphology. I spent time in the AMIS lab at UPS under the auspices of Prof. J. Braga, where I was introduced to techniques that cannot be undertaken at my home institution due to a lack of infrastructure. This involved the scanning of museum specimens (specifically the crania of primate taxa) using µCT scanning and investigating variation in the inner ear morphology with the aid of 3D imaging software. My research will take a different approach once the scanning has been done, with focus shifting more toward cranial circulation. The bulk of my work will be done at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, where an extensive collection of these Strepsirhine primates and scanning facilities are available. The remainder of my data collection will be done in Madagascar. This exchange will definitely aid in completing my research.

FRANCI DORFLING

The science and art of facial reconstruction

F. Dorfling[1]

[1]Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa

As an MSc Anatomy student from the University of Pretoria, I had the amazing opportunity to visit Liverpool John Moores University in the UK for 6 months. The topic of my dissertation focuses on exploring facial features as applicable for facial approximations. To this end I spent most of my time in Liverpool under the guidance of Caroline Wilkinson, renowned researcher in the field of Forensic Facial Reconstruction and director of Facelab. Facelab brings together art and science by providing facial reconstruction services in the fields of forensics and archeology, as well as serving as a research and training hub for students from all over the world. At Facelab, I practiced live drawing, revised the theory of skull assessments such as sex and age determination, studied known facial reconstruction theories and techniques, as well as focused on three-dimentional reconstruction skills, both manual and computerised.

At the same time, I worked with Dr Matteo Borrini, at the LJMU Department of Forensic Anthropology, where I focused on 2D reconstructions. Together, we assessed photographic remains of the famous de Medici family of 14th century Italy. Harnessing widely used reconstruction techniques, I reconstructed the faces of Lorenzo the Magnificent, his brother Guiliano, and their ancestor Piccarda Bueri. These drawings were then compared to any known paintings of the era.

I also had wonderful opportunities to travel. From the Highlands of Scotland, to the beaches of Southern Ireland and the ruinous castles of Wales, together with my friend and house-mate fellow

South African student Kate, we explored the beauty of the ancient celtic world, tasted whiskey, played in the snow, and met many amazing people.
The AESOP program helped me grow as a person, develop the relevant skills needed for my studies, expanded my professional network and afforded me opportunities to explore unknown worlds – both physical and in my field of study.

NTOMBI NGOLOYI

Newer Journey, Fresher Perspective…

N. Ngoloyi[1]

[1]School of Agricultural, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Department of Geography, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), South Africa

Université Toulouse III Paul Sabatier (UPS) served as my host university during my 6-months AESOP masters mobility between September 2014 and March 2015. Coming from a mainly ecological and palaeoenvironmental background, which has been much of my focus during my post-graduate studies at UKZN, my endeavours at the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Moléculaire et Imagerie de Synthèse (Laboratoire AMIS) under the supervision of Prof José Braga translated to my exposure to a brand new perspective on rediscovering the past and attempting to explain and understand the present. The skills I developed have allowed me to better comprehend the concept of evolution by employing modern and innovative methods and technology that are currently not utilised at my home institution. The main one being the use of micro-computed tomography (MicroCT) as an imaging tool to produce high-resolution three-dimensional (3D) imagery. The 3D imaging techniques were used as an aid for the characterization of fossil hominids and primate taxa, particularly the study of their cranial features in order to determine a phylogenetic signal. As I have been granted an AESOP+ doctoral fellowship, this basic introduction to imaging and anthropology techniques has served as a foundation for my PhD research to be undertaken at UPS over the next three years. My AESOP student exchange was an all-encompassing experience. Outside of the academic realm, I took every opportunity to immerse myself within the French culture, learning the language, networking with colleagues, making acquaintances, enjoying the heritage and taking full advantage of my independence and Schengen visa. This experience has pushed me to adapt to cultural disparities, find solace beyond my boundaries and see the world with new eyes.

JABU TSHABALALA

Z.N. TSHABALALA[1]

[1]Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa

I am a Technical Assistant in the Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Pretoria. My mobility was under the AESOP program as a staff member. I was invited by the National History Museum at the University of Lisbon in Portugal for a one month visit to their museum and other museums within and around Lisbon. The mobility was from 14 February 2015 until 16 March 2015. During my visit, I was exposed to various types of museums and different museum curation techniques; including attending the introductory lectures of the Masters in Museum Techniques course. In addition, I was taught practical aspects of bone replication using various materials, skeleton mounting and taxidermy.

ANJA WIID

All about anatomical research and a certain “Je ne sais quoi”…

A. Wiid[1]

[1]Department of Anatomy, Faculty Health Sciences, School of Medicine, University of Pretoria

Being a South African from Johannesburg, a foreign country changes your perspective on how you perceive and experience all things new. We tend to do things the African way, roll upped sleeves and knee deep into our work or better our research. Since I received the opportunity to go to Université de Toulouse III (Paul Sabatier), a certain finesse was added to all this research. What was considered normal was now classified as old school. While I was in the ‘Labarotaire d'Antropology Moléculaire et Imagerie Synthése’ (AMIS) under the watchful eye of Prof José Braga, they showed me how to analyse microCT scans with the AVISO program, so that I can apply the same techniques to CT and MRI scans. I also performed some anatomical dissections on French cadavers in the Anatomy department to add to my own research. Despite all this hard work there was time to travel, time to meet new friends and well we even had time learn how to speak French. This experience changes my perspective on life, both on and off the academic field.