

Julia McDowell - Blog 3

The trip has been very powerful. We recently returned from our expedition to Buluk. Our class is still recovering. The experience was so powerful that the students are taking time to recover. We have been given time to recuperate and fall back into the class schedule, but the past week has been surreal. We have been fortunate enough to receive guest speakers in our class, we were able to have the Leakey's proctor discussions.

We were learning a lot about how the earth formed geographically. We were able to learn about the evolution of single celled organism to multi-cell organisms. The information did not sink in until Louise Leakey addressed our class. I felt as though I was present for a live filming of a TED Talk. It was electric. She strode into the classroom with a cardboard box. She told her life story in the field, the creation of the foundation and her work. She began to talk about how technology could help shape the future of the field. She spoke about public projects that could help garner public interest; she elaborated saying that drones could help provide high quality images for prospecting. She told us about running a website that provided images to be discussed in a public forum. It was interesting to think that common people could be involved in field work. We had just gotten back from the field and it still did not feel real. We were college students that were able to take part of a unique experience.

Louise helped make the experience feel real. I felt childish excitement when she brought out 3D printed fossils. It was fun to think about some of our work being scanned. It was exciting to think that our work may be seen. It really hit home that we had the chance to contribute something to science. In that moment I realized how far we had come as a class. In the beginning we had limited knowledge about species, taxonomy, and teeth. By now we could recognize species by teeth. It made me realize how we just needed to keep trying. It did not matter if a discussion was confusing at first, it would all be clear in time. We just had to have faith in ourselves, and the work that we are doing.

We recently just finished our unit on genetics and I feel very confident. Our team is working well together. It feels as though we are apart of a small family. When one person is struggling then others will come in to help clarify. The institute provides a great environment for us to learn, to explore and to grow. I have been rethinking my major. I have been thinking about programs that I can get involved in when I return to the States. My experience in the Field School has me asking new questions. The most notable question I have been asking is "what more can I do?" This question is driving me to be more in the moment. It drive me to be apart of my team. It provides me fuel for the future. I look forward to seeing if I am a different person when I arrive back home in America.