

# HEADLINERS

## African Adventure

### Foyle bureau members spend a month in South Africa as part of a radio internship

Three Children Express members recently spent the month of August in the beautiful city of Cape Town in South Africa, as part of a radio internship. Along with 3 other young people from Northern Ireland they worked in Bush Radio, considered the "mother of community radio in Africa".

Children's Express Foyle bureau member, Rebecca Burns, who is 17, was joined by Children's Express Belfast members Daragh Scullion and Orlaith Wood on the trip, as well as 3 others from partner organisations Public Achievement and Youthbank. During her trip Rebecca wrote a weekly column for her local newspapers, the Derry Journal and The Inish Times, reporting on her adventure. You can read all about her experiences here.

### Week One - Cowboy hats and sunrise above the clouds

Six mad hatters boarded a bus from Belfast to Dublin on Thursday 4th August. Twenty four hours and two flights later we ended up in the South African city of Cape Town.

On the first leg of our journey the people on the aircoach had to suffer our attempts, both feeble and good at singing, however we received numerous compliments on our green Irish cowboy hats.



The flight from Dublin to Heathrow passed without a hitch but our journey from London to Cape Town was another matter. It started off fine even though I have never seen or even flown on a double decker plane before. We were able to choose our own films, we had our blankets and life was great.

However, space was limited. Ten and a half hours spent on a plane when you cannot move and sleep decides not to come due to your discomfort is not much fun. Nevertheless, observing sunrise above the clouds in the morning was definitely a sight worth seeing.

Even such a long flight had to come to an end, and we entered Cape Town International Airport decked in our bright green hats and to the sound of our chaperone, Yvonne McCully's laughs as she saw us emerge through the doors.

The most important issue on arrival was to find our lodgings and to dump our bags. Previously we had been told we would be sharing one small room and there were no locks on the doors. So what did I expect? Whatever it was, I assure you it was not a bright orange hostel (that's the colour of the outside) and the most comfortable mattress in the world.

The next step after unloading our suitcases was walking to the radio station, Bush Radio. This was particularly important to me as Bush Radio is the main reason I have travelled these thousands of miles. The six of us, Katie Bogue, Rebecca Burns, Bronagh Devlin, Daragh Scullion, Cristin Towe and Orlaith Wood along with Yvonne are going to spend the next four weeks shadowing workers in different departments of the station, in the hope to acquire some of the skills necessary to broadcast a programme.

Before coming to South Africa I found it difficult to imagine what Bush Radio would be like. Even with no definite preconceptions I was surprised with what I found. We were given a quick tour around the building and were introduced to some of the people in the different departments.

As a community radio station Bush Radio takes an active involvement within the community. One of these ways is to provide a crèche facility where parents working in the nearby vicinity can leave their children during work hours. This in particular surprised me as the attitude in general is very different from similar institutions at home - you do not often find Irish radio stations that baby-sit.

The people we have met so far have been really friendly as well as being passionate about their work. The Northern Ireland group were included into the Bush family immediately as we posed for our press card photographs.

We launch into the real work on Monday 8th August, and at the time of writing I am really looking forward to it.

### Week 2 - Tik Tik and Craic - the Irish connection

As crazy as it seems we have now spent over a week in South Africa - and what a week it has been!

On Monday the seven of us set off for our first proper days work at Bush Radio with eager anticipation.

Two staff meetings and a radio production workshop preceded the most interesting aspect of that day. In the afternoon, one of the Bush journalists, Bronwyn brought us to one of the townships to see a presentation of the drug 'Tik-Tik' through drama and music. Tik-Tik, a drug similar to Speed has become very popular among young people in the Western Cape.

The presentation was delivered in both English and Afrikaans, and even though I had to guess what part of it meant, this educational production was well worth seeing.

I really believe that our Northern Irish group has landed on our feet as the second day of work turned out to be a public holiday. August 9th is National Women's Day in South Africa and it was spent by the Irish gang going on a boat ride, visiting an aquarium and watching a film in the cinema. Ah, the good life! It was also Bush Radio's 10th official birthday.

The rest of the days have also included excitement of some kind. For the moment I am assigned to the news department and I have now experienced the sheer pressure of working to a pressing deadline. A brand new news programme went on air at seven pm on Thursday. When I left Bush Radio at five o'clock it was still being put together.

I am not suffering from culture shock to the extent I thought I would. I imagined myself feeling claustrophobic in the bedroom and trying to force food down my throat without gagging. However, the bedroom, which I share with three other people, is large enough for us to have our own space and the food is similar to

that in Ireland.

Nevertheless, the issue of safety is a big one. We are not allowed to walk anywhere after darkness falls, which is around 6.30pm and taxis are expensive, limiting the places where we can go in the evening. The price for using the communication network is sky high compared with home and in every city you can see the shacks that make up the townships.

The group as a whole has bonded incredibly well and the craic is never ending. Katie Bogue has taken to swimming nearly everyday in the outside pool across the road. Sitting there in the Irish summer it may be hard to imagine a Capetonian winter to be cold, wet and windy. The reality of the weather here has caused the other residents to class her as crazy but I gladly admit that Orlaith Wood and myself have joined her on a number of occasions.

Let me finish with a request from one of my fellow members of the group, Cristin Towe who wants to tell one of her jokes. I can only apologise for it in advance. "What do you call a cow with no spots? A bull."

### **Week 3 - Friendships and Townships**

Having past the half way stage of our scholarship a sense of familiarity and routine has been built up. We know the people we are working with and I find it nice to be able to say 'Hi Nadia, Lunga, Pam or Victor.'

Our work has kept us entertained so far and this week has been no exception. Those of us in the news department were landed with the bomb that we were in charge of the department the next day. The three of us psyched ourselves, attempting to suppress the nerves. However, on arrival to the station on Tuesday it was all change and instead we were sent out to cover a student march that was taking place.

The march itself was an experience worth seeing as a thousand school children marched the streets of Cape Town protesting against violence in schools. It was a relatively peaceful march although the only stone I saw thrown skimmed uncomfortably close to my head.

As a group we were taken on a tour of the townships, led by former combatants who now work to promote peace. They brought us to the various sites and delivered the history with an arousing passion.

We were also fortunate to get a look around Parliament. The aspect that hit me most about the trip was being in the room where all the apartheid laws were passed.

Nevertheless, the highlight of the week had to be the production and presentation of our very own one-hour show, which went live on air on Saturday. Friday was spent gathering material and designating the different roles. I was one of the producers this week, along with Bronagh and this mainly consisted of putting the programming schedule together.

The nerves were rife before the show, especially for the presenters Daragh and Orlaith and the engineers Katie and Cristin. To combat this we sang a rendition of Barbie Girl to relax us all.

The show consisted of a mixture of Irish and African songs, an Irish joke, some comparative facts and funny horoscopes. We all felt it was successful but the real test will be on Monday morning when we hear the criticisms from the other workers at Bush Radio.

Before I left Ireland I was constantly told that Cape Town is a beautiful city and now, having first hand evidence I cannot disagree. There is a satisfaction in seeing a city nestled at the foot of the majestic Table Mountain. As Yvonne McCully commented everywhere you go in Cape Town you get a different view of the mountain.

This Sunday we decided a trip to the top of this natural phenomenon was in order, so after having dandered down to the laundrette in our pyjamas, we set off on our trek, fully clothed of course.

The view at the top is enough to leave anyone speechless, although our vision was hampered by the low lying cloud which sure enough turned to rain.

As you can see our week has been filled with different Cape Town experiences. On Monday it is our turn to show some of the Northern Irish culture at a staff development session. Please wish us the best.

### **Week 4 - The Long Goodbye**

The phrase 'time flies' can definitely be applied to our visit to Cape Town. I am finding it hard to believe that it has almost been a month since six of us donned our green Irish hats, boarded a plane and flew thousands of miles to join our chaperone in South Africa.

As I have mentioned in previous weeks the Capetonian winter weather is cold, especially as central heating is a figment of the imagination. Nevertheless, this Sunday the sun shone with all its glory, bringing the promise of spring to the locals.

We spent the day on a personal tour of the townships Mitchell's Plain and Khayelitsha. Brenda, one of our colleagues at Bush radio and her husband were kind enough to spend the day as our tour guides. Lunch was held at the home of Zanele, another of our South African colleagues.

Zanele lives with her five month old daughter in a tiny two roomed 'house', with the walls made of corrugated iron and a rough patch of ground fenced off at the front. There is no running water or electricity and yet we were shown around both the house and the neighbourhood with the utmost pride. Zanele's welcoming friendliness and joy at having the Irish visit has made this, personally speaking, the highlight of the trip.

Working backwards in time Saturday saw the broadcast of the second and final Irish show on Bush Radio 'Bush goes Green'. This week I had the privilege of being one of the two presenters and what a ball I had! We had a live link up with Mr Tully Kwelly in Belfast who updated us on the local Northern Irish news. All in all the show ran smoothly.

At the end of last week's column I mentioned a staff development session we were preparing for on Monday. I feel it went very well as the information we were supplying about Northern Ireland (and the way in which we presented it) was hard-hitting and effective. Cara Dillion's "There were roses" was played as well as a poem written by very own Orlaith Wood about her experiences growing up in Belfast. We included a Northern Irish hucka and spoke briefly on different aspects of our society. Thankfully it seemed to be well received.

This week also threw more practical radio experiences at us. All seven of the Irish gang were involved with an Outside Broadcast. This is when programmes are broadcast outside of the studio because a special event is taking place. We all got the chance to engineer the programmes and also witness the panic of the Outside Broadcast almost failing to take place.

The time I have spent here in Cape Town has been such a learning experience. I also feel blessed to have been sharing this opportunity with six other phenomenal Irish people who have given me priceless memories.

A big thank you also has to go out to everyone at Bush Radio as they coped extremely well with the invasion of the Irish. At the end of this Oscar speech I just want to thank all of you for reading this and see you when I get home.

### About the team

This story was produced by Rebecca Burns, 17, Daragh Scullion and Orlaith Wood. It was published by Children's Express.

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