

Kate Kirbie, 2012
Pietermaritzburg, South Africa
Fall 2010

Entry #1

5 October 2010: Recap of the year



Sawubona! We are already two and a half months into our journey abroad to South Africa. I know all of us have found this the experience of a lifetime. Previous highlights have included going on a safari and seeing up-close-and-personal lions, buffalo, rhino, giraffe, zebra, monkeys, and more. This last weekend we were taken to go zip lining through the canopy at the edge of the Drakensburg mountain range. My Plant Diversity and Use class went on a field trip to the coast where we collected algae in rock pools as the salty waves misted (or soaked) our backs. In Behavioral and Reproductive Ecology, we got to know our nature, and our classmates, better in our weekend field trip to the southern coast to work on our mini projects.

More than anything, I have been surprised in the growth in faith I've experienced. Although I am Catholic, I've gotten to attend services covering many different versions of Christianity and talk with many about everyday issues that affect the lives of South Africans and Americans alike.

Our spring break was over a week ago now. A Canadian friend of mine and I traveled to Lesotho, the country inside South Africa, where we explored the culture, saw dinosaur footprints, and went horseback riding. We met some wonderful people on the way and explored a world off the beaten path.

We have just less than a month now of actual classes, and then finals come. Although we will be excited to see family, friends, and our SMC campus, the friends we have made here will be very hard to say goodbye to.



Entry #2



I just returned to the states a week ago. What a journey this semester has been! The last month included two trips out of the country (to Swaziland and Lesotho), final gatherings with new lifelong friends, and the inevitable intense studying for finals. Looking back, I see how much I've grown on this journey. The classes at the University of Kwa Zulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg were enriching and helped incredibly to expand my knowledge in the sciences. The friends I made, churches I attended, and late-night conversations I had, questioned but strengthened my faith in many ways. The journey took me all over the country, and to those nearby. In our brief four-day Swaziland adventure we went abseiling (repelling), rafting, tubing over rapids,

and climbing to the top of “Execution Rock.” More than anything, this experience allowed me a glimpse into a fantastic, diverse culture. I’ve learned how incredibly important it is to appreciate someone’s background or a community’s culture. Without this understanding we view others through American standards. Whether your journey is to South Africa (my preference), Italy, Spain, Ireland, or one of Saint Mary’s other awesome study abroad programs, I hope it is just as empowering and life changing as my last semester in my new home of Pietermaritzburg.

