



Press Release

Wild Swans Land in Durban Young Women's Leadership through Wilderness

The mix is heady : take four young sixteen year UK girls and put them in the wilderness in South Africa for fifteen days with four young South African girls from a very different background – mix fast and see what results....?

The outcomes the charity The Wilderness Foundation UK are hoping for are young women who can truly understand diversity, poverty, environmental issues that affect their generation, real awareness of the challenges and opportunities facing young women in their different communities, and a strong sense of self that will fast track their leadership when they return to their homes.

The project called Wild Swans is about young women, wilderness and leadership. Papers in the UK recently cried out that there just were not enough women coming forward into leadership positions and the need to develop this section of the population was critical. Mixed with the issues of climate change, fossil fuels shortages and the growing gap between rich and poor nations, Wild Swans seeks to address this through experiential learning and social mixing in a wild, simple and challenging environment.

The girls have been selected in South Africa for a deep commitment to the environment and a hunger to make their communities stronger and more aware of the big issues at stake. The UK girls bravely put themselves forward at 15 (now 16) to be the first in this dramatic pilot project and have worked hard to fundraise for their South African counterparts.

The mainstay of the programme will be their wilderness trail – the core work of the Foundation who send out about 140 young people a year out on utterly simple, purist wilderness experiences in Scotland and Africa. Carrying only a pack on your back, the experience is to sleep under the stars, leave no trace, and journey through the wild each day, ending with the sunset and starting with the sunrise. Wild Swans will walk through two UNESCO World Heritage Wilderness areas in the Drakensberg Mountains, and the St Lucia Wetlands, with five nights under the sky in the Imfolozi Game Reserve home to the white and black rhino, and all the big five. In a group of 8 they will be accompanied for the whole journey by two armed wilderness guides who will act not only as their guides but also mentors.

Once their wilderness trail of 15 days is over, there will be a wrap up for two days where the girls will reflect back on all they have learned and experienced, and explore how to take this back home and implement in their communities. They will explore their own personal change of ideas, feelings and development and take home lessons learned. The South African girls will

return home to their small town of Kynsna on the SA Garden Route, and the UK girls will then go on to live with Zulu families in the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountains for a further five days.

Not being able to look into a mirror for nearly a month will also be a challenge, as will not wearing a watch on trail, or having a mobile phone, or an i-pod or....With no electricity or running water for the first fifteen days, and none during their family stay, showers and loo seats are going to take on a whole new meaning for them on their return.

The Foundation hopes to expand Wild Swans to as many young women (aged between 15 and 19) who are keen to challenge themselves and jump from their comfort zones, and the hope is to take the project into India and Kenya thus forming trail groups of young women from different continents. An alumni of young women leaders will result and the hope is to eventually have them drive the entire initiative. Big Dreams? Necessary action? Only time will tell when they get the chance to spread their wings.

For more info on the Wild Swans please contact Jo Roberts CEO of The Wilderness Foundation UK. Telephone 01245 443073. Email jo@wildernessfoundation.org.uk

The cost is approximately £3,000 for 24 days in South Africa, including the costs of the SA/developing world scholar, flights to and from SA, all internal transport, equipment, facilitation etc.

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Registered Charity Number 1118493
Co. Reg. Number 06003527

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