

From Zulu culture, fieldwork and safari - a diary about the Train-Me summer school of TRACES



From 5th to 11th September 2019, the Chair of Physical Geography at the University of Greifswald and the University of KwaZulu-Natal jointly organized a summer school sponsored by DAAD in Richards Bay, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. From over 60 applicants, four African and four German students were selected. The aim of the summer school was to introduce students to practical experience in sampling and drilling field techniques, with a focus on methods commonly used in the geological and environmental sciences. Additionally the participants gained an insight into the local Zulu culture. Together we posted a blog about their experiences on the summer school website (<https://geo.uni-greifswald.de/trainme/>). Here is an abridged version:

Day 1

Rain, it's bucketing down! After a 20 h journey, us, three geography students from Greifswald: Caroline, Isabella and Marius, our photographer Magnus, and Dr. Finn Viehberg arrived at Durban airport. Here we met Eugene (Iziko Museums Cape Town, South Africa) and Jeff (Copperbelt University, Zambia) and continued to Richards Bay - our final destination.

There, Prof. Torsten Haberzettl, Paul Mehlhorn (both lecturers from the University of Greifswald), Moteng (University of Witwatersrand, South Africa) and Balemogeng (Okavango Research Institute, Botswana) were already waiting for us. After we got to know each other, Torsten, Finn and Paul introduced us to our study area and we discussed the plan for the next day.



Photos: Magnus Schult

Day 2

More rain! The Zulu culture is an integral part of the South African history. We visited Shakaland, a Zulu museum village, where a local guide showed us Zulu cultural traditions and fighting techniques.

The Goedertrouw Dam - our next destination - serves as a fresh water reservoir. We decided to take a sample for subsequent water analyses and were introduced to the necessary procedures.

The day passed quickly. Back in Richards Bay we met Dr. Jemma Finch (University of KwaZulu-Natal), who joined in for the next few days. As the actual field research begins tomorrow, we packed our rental cars. It is a lot of equipment - we are very excited.

Days 3 & 4

Bright sunshine! Today our destination was a dry bay near Richards Bay Harbour. Here we were introduced to different coring techniques and managed to recover our first sediment cores. Subsequently, we described the cores in terms of colour, carbonate content and organisms. Together with Jemma we collected pollen samples, which she then prepared for analyses using a field-method she used during her PhD. Tired but happy we returned to our accommodation. When working with large devices, teamwork is essential. It was great fun. At the end of the day, we had a look at our pollen under a microscope!



Days 5 & 6

Today our group explored Lake Mzingazi. Local policemen helped us loading our boat and off we went on the lake. We used different devices to sample the lake bottom and water. In the heat of the moment, we even forgot our lunch break. At the deepest point of the lake, we placed a rope with temperature loggers, which we recovered again on the following day. We wanted to find out whether the lake has different temperatures at different water depths. According to the recordings of the loggers, this is not the case.

Day 7

At 5 am in the morning, we enjoyed the sunrise on the beach. After breakfast, we packed all our equipment and drove to the uMhlatuze River. The area there was very littered. Easily we collected four full garbage bags! We then visited a mangrove swamp in the uMlalazi Nature Reserve in Mtunzini. We saw monkeys, zebras, a bee-eater and other impressive animals. With this small wildlife experience, our summer school ended and we drove back to Durban to catch our flights home.

The entire blog and more information about Train-ME: <https://geo.uni-greifswald.de/trainme/>

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Photo: Magnus Schult