

## Employees on Earthwatch adventures

Four Alcoa employees have recently returned from trips of a lifetime after being selected to participate in Earthwatch expeditions around the world.

After nominating themselves to be involved in the program, Melanie Norman (Booragoon), Andrew Paton (Wagerup), Terry McDonnell (Wagerup) and Melinda Bolt (Pinjarra) were selected on merit by Earthwatch and Alcoa. Earthwatch pays travel and accommodation costs while expeditioners use their holiday time to participate.

These diary extracts give a taste of their adventures. Full diaries can be found at

[http://www.alcoa.com/global/en/environment/ew/2005/earth\\_watch\\_2005.asp](http://www.alcoa.com/global/en/environment/ew/2005/earth_watch_2005.asp)

### Kayaking With Whales

"Kirk and I decided to go for a sea kayak, which was fantastic. Kirk was a kayak guide for 15 years and was an excellent companion. After a few problems adjusting the old kayak, we were on our way. We hugged the shoreline, which was very scenic with trees that came right down to the water and bright green algae. We saw a harbor seal pup, huge purple starfish, and bald eagles. The harbor seals were very inquisitive and popped their heads up to stare at us as we passed. We paddled four kilometres south to Lime Kiln Lighthouse, where we encountered the whales! Very unexpected, as we had thought they were much farther south.



Melanie Norman - helping evaluate the Puget Sound ecosystem by studying its orca population.



It felt like we were in the water with them—very different to being on the boat. I was in heaven. Each day has been a new and exciting experience."

### Mountain Waters of Bohemia

"We arrive at our new home (boarding house). It's used as a ski chalet in the winter season and has six levels, including an attic and basement, with views overlooking the village below."

We are split into three groups: sample and clean rain gauges; measure stream velocities; and measure sediment and leaf cover in a culvert.



Andrew Paton (at back of group photo) - travels to the Czech Republic to help with headwater rehabilitation efforts.

John (England), Natasha (Belarus), and I tackle the culvert. By measuring culvert sediment, we get an idea of stream characteristics for the last 12 months."

"Our hosts, Joseph and Zuzanna, have been great. We have learned much about the project itself but also about the country and its culture and history. Although we only knew a few words of Czech, the locals seemed to appreciate that at least we made the effort. It was fun learning new words or phrases."

### Storm Petrels over Portugal

"Last night on the rocks was spectacular. We were 10 in number, watching the waves crashing below us and sending towers of spray in some places high above. The misty night was not cold, with warm southeasterly winds at about 12 knots.



Terry McDonnell - helping document Europe's smallest bird as it migrates over Portugal.

Our dawn return hike via the sandy beach was a surprise, for it was no more. It was washed away, leaving only rocks upon rocks.

We tagged 12 storm petrels this night in contrast to our previous effort of 106. I guess the birds were busy living up to their name and enjoying the stormy sea."

### Dolphins and Whales of Abaco Island

"The official business of today commenced with devising boat teams and dinner rosters—important things must always come first! When you have spent a day out on the ocean, food is high on the priority list upon return. With no messing about, we had a boat orientation, packed our lunches, and headed out to sea.



Melinda Bolt - heads to the Bahamas to study the dolphins and whales of Abaco Island.

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Today we recorded six sperm whale encounters, which is a fantastic result for marine mammal research. It was the most successful field day of this project for the year!

During the encounter there are a number of things that need to be recorded and observed, with the fin and tail flukes being the key to conduct identification of the mammals.



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One whale had a fantastic marking on its fin which will provide a great opportunity for identification – something quite rare for this mammal species."

"To participate in collecting valuable data and see the dedicated efforts of individuals and teams to protect the future of these enormous marine mammals is a truly rewarding and inspiring experience. Many people dedicate an enormous part of their lives to ensuring these animals do not become extinct and will be around for our future generations.