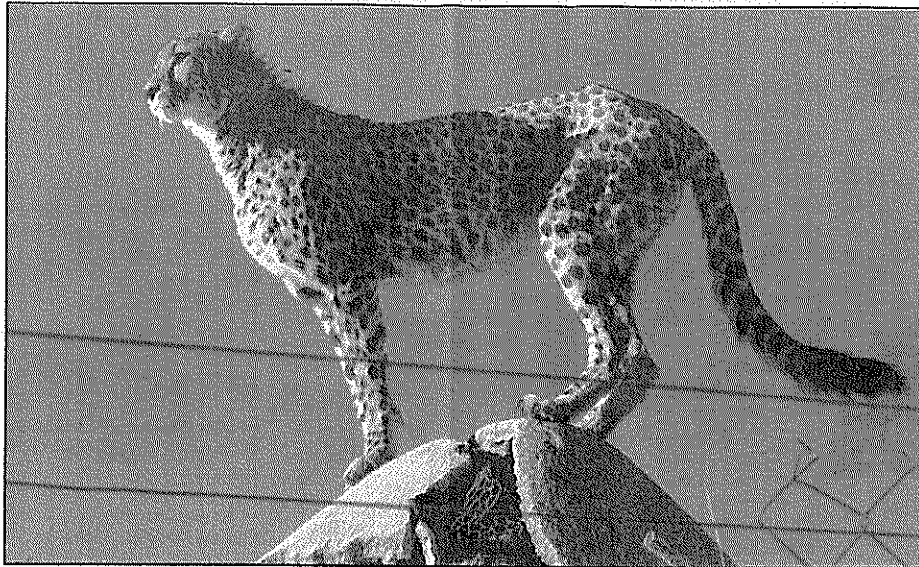


Lessons learned out of Africa



Contributed photos

A cheetah, above, standing on top of a hut scanning the area. This was a sight Sue Hanna and Elizabeth Marsh saw each morning while staying at the Cheetah Conservation Fund in Namibia. Below, Clinton County teachers Sue Hanna (left) and Elizabeth Marsh visited Namibia this past summer to gain experience with community-based conservation and inquiry-based learning. They were among 21 other teachers from elsewhere in the United States who made the trip.

WILMINGTON

Area teachers return from learning expedition in Africa

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Sitting in the middle of a field in Namibia in Africa, where wild cheetah and warthogs could easily creep up at any moment, is not an ideal situation for anyone. Neither is wearing the same set of clothes for 10 days, or camping outside in temperatures in the 30s.

See AFRICA, Page 7A



AFRICA

Continued from Page 1A

But this is exactly where Sue Hanna, Roger O. Borrer Middle School health teacher and Elizabeth Marsh, a Clinton-Massie High School biology and social studies teacher, found themselves this past summer.

Marsh and Hanna, along with 21 other U.S. teachers, traveled to the southwest Africa nation of Namibia this past summer to gain experience with community-based conservation and inquiry-based learning.

"The focus was studying the cheetahs specifically, but it's so much more than that, it's helping teachers learn to teach with more inquiry-based learning; having kids involved in their own learning; having them ask questions, and having them figure out what they want to learn," Hanna said.

The opportunity was through Project Dragonfly and Earth Expeditions, a collaboration between Miami University and The Cincinnati Zoo. The goal was to get a new perspective of teaching and bring it back to schools in the United States.

The premise of what Project Dragonfly wants teachers to gain from the experience is getting students to ask and develop questions to help them learn. In this different environment, the teachers become students involved in inquiry-based learn-

ing, so they can implement it in their classrooms.

Part of the homework for the teachers was to work with their students to develop a project using inquiry-based learning, which included a comparative question that would be answered through research and experiments.

Each teacher on the trip will be working a project and sharing the ideas, stories, successes and failures with each other, and with the researchers in Namibia, through the networking that has been established.

Hanna and her students are working with the VISTA volunteers from Wilmington College, to develop a walking path that will connect the middle school and the Cape May senior citizens home on Nelson Avenue. The idea came naturally after discussions about community. The students are developing ideas to work with the City of Wilmington as they already have plans to connect the trail. They also have written a grant to get Native American plant life for along the path.

"We have to have a comparative question, so they discussed what was the best material to build the path with — creek rock or brick," Hanna said.

Hanna has only begun to mesh the inquiry-learning into her lesson plans. It has been difficult to fully understand and incorporate all the ideas she has for her students.

"I want to do it right, and

then I can incorporate it in more everyday teaching," she said. "I want to get this big project to work and then I can do more."

Marsh's students are doing a project on recycling. The debate became whether people in the city, such as Wilmington, or people in the country, such as most Clinton-Massie families, recycle more. They are currently beginning research and gathering data.

Hanna has been teaching for 24 years. She began with sixth grade science, and is now teaching all grade levels of middle school health. She heard about the trip through a friend, and was eager to become involved.

"I love adventures, it's fun, and I love learning new things. It makes life more interesting," she said.

Not many teachers can say they spent 10 days in Africa watching cheetah behavior, or creating a network of relationships with people around the world.

Hanna is thankful and excited she had this opportunity. She hopes her students recognize how important it was, and will continue to be her.

"It's wonderful for teachers to travel, and bring that awareness back to students that it's a big world out there, and they can be a part of it," she said "It doesn't need to be to Africa, but to Mexico; just step outside our comfort zones."