

## A BOW STUDENT'S VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA

By Brayden Binder

**By Chase Binder** - Bow High School's ELO to South Africa

Bow High School paired with Hopkinton High School recently to offer an Extended Learning Opportunity trip to South Africa. The ELO program gives students the opportunity to learn outside the traditional classroom and also receive academic credit for the work they do whether in another country or out in our own communities.

Bow High science and technology teacher Drew Groves put the trip together for the Bow students, including my grandson, Brayden Binder.

Here Brayden writes about his impressions of life in South Africa and shares some of his photographs of the wildlife. Last year, Brayden went on Bow High ELO to Cuba, which he wrote about in the December 2016 Bow Times.



Earlier in my Junior year at Bow High School, I went on the Cuba Extended Learning Opportunity, but my ELO trip to South Africa was a completely different experience. Before I left this summer I thought that they would probably be somewhat alike, just that I'd be constantly going on safaris while in South Africa. The culture, how the country runs, and what people are like are all things I expected to be similar to the US, because I saw lots of similarities between Cuba and the US.

Honestly, I could not have been any more wrong. It is a vastly different world in South Africa. Everything our culture entails has been twisted, turned and flipped upside down (they even drive on the "wrong" side of the road). From the moment I stepped outside of the airport in Johannesburg, I knew that the trip was going to be a totally new experience.

The Cuba trip focused only on culture while the South Africa trip focused primarily on the wilderness and human history. This emphasis brought up great conversations and discussions that were truly thought-provoking. Even if the subjects weren't my cup of tea, I could still appreciate how fascinating they were.

That's one of the biggest things I gleaned from the trip: how interesting everything was. The Cuba trip helped me understand how diverse cultures can be while this trip helped me understand how differently people live in other parts of the world. The biggest difference is how laid back everything seemed to be. The people looked as if they took life one step at a time just because they could.

Imagine a New York City without everyone rushing around, crowding the streets and trying to get to places on time.

As one of my tour guides said during the trip, "Things work on Africa time here." That line is often used jokingly in South Africa, but it's incredibly true. South Africans aren't the most punctual because they don't need to be. For instance, the drive to our first game lodge should have taken four hours, but took over six because the people at the lodge kept giving us directions that could be easily misinterpreted.

Directions like "take the third right" just didn't help us because we had no idea where we were.

While GPS's back home say "in 400 feet, take a right onto Clinton Street," I wouldn't have been surprised if they had said "take a left at the blueish rock right next to a gray building."

South Africans live completely different lives than people in any other place I've been to. Even though their country is one of the richest in Africa, it still is a poor country.

I was very confused the first time I heard the exchange rate—thirteen rands to every US dollar—and I thought that I had heard it wrong. South Africa is in a small recession, and things did not look the best over there. It seemed like every single house outside of Johannesburg had something wrong with it, like an unfinished roof or no door or windows or something like that. Granted, there were nice places and nice houses, but they were far outnumbered. The poverty I saw really was huge, and I know that I didn't get to see the worst of it.

Remember I said that all the

towns and places seemed crowded, like New York City, but instead of rushing, everyone in South Africa was just lounging around.

In each town I went through, there were masses of people in the streets. But strangely, they didn't seem to be bothered by the crowds. In fact, they were all smiling and having an enjoyable time with their friends. Even through all the obstacles to making good money, they still find a lot of enjoyment in life. Not saying that you couldn't do the same in the US, but poverty there is completely different from poverty here.

I was amazed by how much I could see into the people and culture just on our drives through the country. The trip overall was in-

credibly fun and a completely new experience for me, as it would be for most people.

The animals I saw weren't zoo-trained or Disney animals, they were the real thing.

The people of South Africa really are a fun-loving and carefree people, and they take things one step at a time.

The oddest thing happened when we drove by in our vans. Some people stared, and some people just randomly danced seeing us. It was the most peculiar thing! No music was playing, we aren't celebrities or anything, but they just randomly danced. I think that says more about South Africans than anything else. Even in tough times, they will find a reason to dance.



## THE BEAUTY OF SOUTH AFRICA



***South African sunsets are iconic and rivers like the Crocodile River provide a nurturing environment for the abundant South African wildlife. Impalas, elephants, cheetahs and lions roam the savannah and make for very exciting photo opportunities.***

*All photos by Brayden Binder*

