

An American in Dolton

While enjoying a cup of coffee and a cheese scone at the Village Hall the most common question I was asked was, how did an American from Florida end up in Dolton in the middle of the English winter.

After years of idle thoughts about what the next twenty odd years of my life was going to look like I finally came to a decision. I was bored with my middle class American life and needed a change. I had an easy job, a nice apartment on a beautiful island, a good car, family and friends but I felt my life had hit a dead end.

I wasn't enjoying life so in May 2013 I filed for retirement, quit my job, gave away almost all my possessions, said goodbye to my family and friends and got on a plane to Peru. For years I'd told myself that if I could ever retire I wanted to spend my life travelling and working to help people in need. I knew that at the age of sixty-three if I wanted to live out my dream I needed to do it now.

After months of searching work exchange sites such as Workaway and HelpX I decided to pick a spot and make a commitment. I bought a plane ticket and within a few days I was in Huanchaco, Peru, volunteering in a tiny, dirt floor, one room school. Suddenly my life had changed.

From Peru I went to Ecuador, Portugal, Togo Africa, Spain and now England. The decision to come to England is the fulfilment of a life long dream. I was advised by many English blokes I met along the way, stay out of England in the winter. Being an American I ignored that good advice. After all how bad can the weather be? I soon found out. But, now I'm here and I love it.

The advantage of travelling as a volunteer worker is that one can travel much cheaper than a tourist. In exchange for a few hours of work a day your host supplies a roof overhead and food on the table. It also gives one the opportunity to experience different cultures, sightsee and try your hand at a variety of jobs without making a long term commitment.

During my travels I had the opportunity to teach English in Peru; refurbish a property in Portugal that will become a vacation destination for handicapped and special needs children and their families; work in Togo with an organization that tries to reunite children living on the street with their families.

Among my adventures I climbed Machu Picchu in Peru, climbed Cotapoxi – the highest volcano in Ecuador, stood on the exact line of the Equator and shovelled horse dung in England, to mention a few.

So how did I end up in Dolton? While researching my conquest of the British Isles I thought to myself that I'd like to work with horses. I sent an email to local resident and horse owner Pat Lake who said come to Dolton and I'll put you to work.

For the past eight months I've been working my way around the world and enjoying my life as a backpacker. My goal for the next ten years is to visit 100 countries, meet 10,000 new people and take 1,000,000 photographs. Perhaps one day I'll meet you along the way.

My name is James Annan, age 64, from Sarasota, Florida. You can follow my journey or message me on Outside Of Somewhere. Com (The Misadventures of a Wayward Traveller). Subscribe at outsideofsomewhere.com