

PRACTICING WHAT HE TEACHES

Last year, biology instructor Chris Matlack traveled by land, air and sea to learn more about such topics as his favorite hominid, Charles Darwin, and biodiversity in the rainforest. His goal was not only to expand his own knowledge, but also to find new ways to share this information with colleagues and students. Holder of the Lee C. Bradley III Class of 1943 Teaching Chair in Science, Matlack served as chair of the PEA science department for the five years immediately preceding his sabbatical leave in 2003-04.

On this continent, he took advantage of a family trip across the country by car last summer to photograph various U.S. ecosystems and will use the images in his classes. He also traveled by ferry to Nova Scotia to investigate field service learning opportunities at the Acadia University field station and the Canadian Wildlife Services bird banding station on Bon Portage Island. Although the island is too far away for students to visit during the term, Matlack hopes some students will be interested in working there during vacations.

Even farther away in Costa Rica, Matlack joined teachers from other U.S. schools to investigate establishing field sites with the Habitat Net program administered by the Smithsonian Institution. Through Habitat Net, students gather and study data from their own northern temperate forests and from tropical forests in Costa Rica in order to compare plant biodiversities—the number and distribution of species within a given area. “By becoming familiar with the biodiversity of their

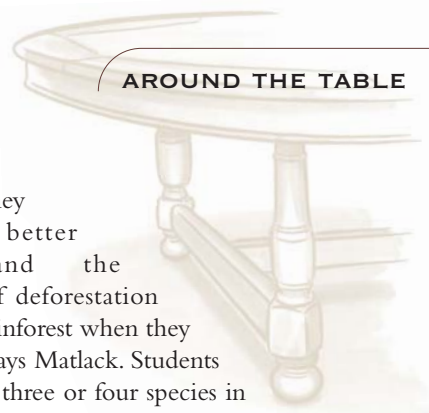


A flint for your thoughts: While visiting Down House, Charles Darwin's home in England, instructor in biology Chris Matlack walked the famous circular sand walk that Darwin is said to have paced as he puzzled out his groundbreaking theories about evolution. Darwin supposedly dropped a flint on the path for each round he made.

own forests, they can better understand the effects of deforestation on the rainforest when they visit it,” says Matlack. Students may find three or four species in a given area of a U.S. forest, but 100 examples of each one. In the rainforest, he explains, they might find 100 species in the same area, but only three or four examples of each. “How do you sustain a population with so few examples of a species?” he asks. “This is what we hope students will begin to think about.”

Matlack's sabbatical travels also included paying a reciprocal visit to observe boarding school life and teaching at the Harrow School in England. In addition to visiting A-level biology classes there, Matlack traveled with Harrow's rugby team to Eton College. “It was eye-opening to come from one of the oldest prep schools in America only to find myself at schools that have been in operation since the 16th century (Harrow) and the 12th century (Eton),” he says. Speaking of the ages, Matlack also indulged his interest in the life and science of Charles Darwin. His visits to Darwin's home,

his burial site at Westminster Abbey and his collections at the Natural History Museum in Tring proved useful in preparing for teaching an evolution course at Exeter's Math, Science and Technology Conference last summer. ●



AROUND THE TABLE

COURTESY OF CHRIS MATLACK

Measures for Good Measure



Peter Durham '85

Participants in last summer's Rex A. McGuinn Conference on Shakespeare enjoyed a highly physical dimension to their study of the Bard. Peter Durham '85 (in costume), a passionate student of Elizabethan and Renaissance court dances, led two vigorous sessions on the Fisher Theater stage during which participants learned a dozen period dances. For each session, Durham prepared a detailed handout with historical notes and Shakespearean quotations about the dances he was teaching. He also supplied a compact disc of period music for each participant. The assembled group of English teachers proved game, and Durham proved a patient and skillful instructor, choreographing to accommodate specific abilities and music at the drop of a hat. Favorite dances among the crowd included the Coranto, which was danced “pell mell about the room,” and the Volta, a controversial favorite of Queen Elizabeth I in which, according to one source, both honor and health are at stake.

By day, Peter Durham is a software design engineer at Microsoft. As a result of his Exeter engagement, he has received invitations to lead similar sessions at schools in Colorado and Maine. To learn more about his Elizabethan projects, go to <http://dance.peterdur.com>.

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