**Summer Time at the Petrified Forest of Lesvos**

I chose to spend my summer placement at the Greek Island of Lesvos, working for the Natural Museum of the Petrified Forest of Lesvos, because I wanted to have the opportunity to be part of a team that is in the process of “designing” a working sea-park. The reality of this experience was bitter-sweet but still amazing, as life always is! The disappointing part was that prior to my arrival almost nothing had been done towards the designation of the sea park (marine protected area), so I had a lot of work to do in gathering the information I needed. Another problem was that I essentially worked alone. Time was short and my feelings of stress were often high!

On the other hand, the experience of this placement taught me many things. I had to work strategically to achieve the best I could do in a limited time. This involved finding the right professionals to work with and practicing great diplomacy when interviewing local people for their thoughts on the prospect of a protected area. This was often difficult as most locals were very suspicious of the idea in principle and hence felt that I must have some hidden agenda in performing these interviews.

What proved to be a joyful and pleasant surprise for me, was the fact that I learnt a lot about the creation of a petrified forest and its’ incredible and true contribution to today’s terrestrial and marine environment. It was amazing to realize how a “dead” ecosystem can actually be the stepping stone for a better living one in various ways (by providing valuable historical knowledge or by actually protecting marine life from anthropogenic or natural dangers!!). The only problem with this was that it made it terribly difficult for me to decide what to leave out of my placement write-up!

It is amazing how much fun one can have in a village of only 400 people. I was incredible to swim and snorkel in clear-crystal seas that contain Poseidonia, corals, ancient treasures, a variety of fish, dolphins and even the endangered Mediterranean Monk seals and dolphins, all in a small gulf! I would certainly recommend it to anyone!

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