

EDUCATION

Explorations students prepare for India trip

Global awareness core to mission of 3-week experience

KIRA MILLAGE

THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM — High school students from Explorations Academy are heading to India next month, but it will be far from a relaxing trip.

The handful of students will be taking classes, volunteering at a rural school, helping with gardening and living without many of the amenities of home.

"The goal is not to take seven students on vacation," said Suzanne Wittman, humanities teacher at the school and one of the chaperones.

International awareness is part of the school's mission. So students get the opportunity to travel abroad about every other year, depending on where the school's dozen or so students are interested in studying.

Seven students and three adults will spend more than three weeks touring the country, starting in Uttarakhand, a rural region in the foothills of the Himalayas, and working their way south. Students will get to be tourists for a couple days in the Golden Triangle — Delhi, Agra and Jaipur — but for the rest of the time they'll be trying to integrate into Indian culture. For example, the group will take a three-day train ride, and no one is allowed to bring iPods or video games, giving students the opportunity to interact with fellow train passengers.

"It's so easy to plug in and tune out and not communicate with people," Wittman said. "Instead of listening to Beastie Boys, we're going to talk to people."

The trip will finish in Goa, a tourist region on the southwest coast, giving students a chance to reflect on their trip while enjoying hot running water and warm weather.

MORE ABOUT EXPLORATIONS

Explorations Academy is a fully accredited private high school in Bellingham. The school's vision "is to cultivate diverse communities of healthy, creative, and engaged learners and leaders, working toward a socially just and ecologically balanced world" through experiential learning. For more information, go online to www.explorationsacademy.org.

"We like to end the trip with a couple days of rewarding ourselves," Wittman said. "We do it down and dirty the rest of the time."

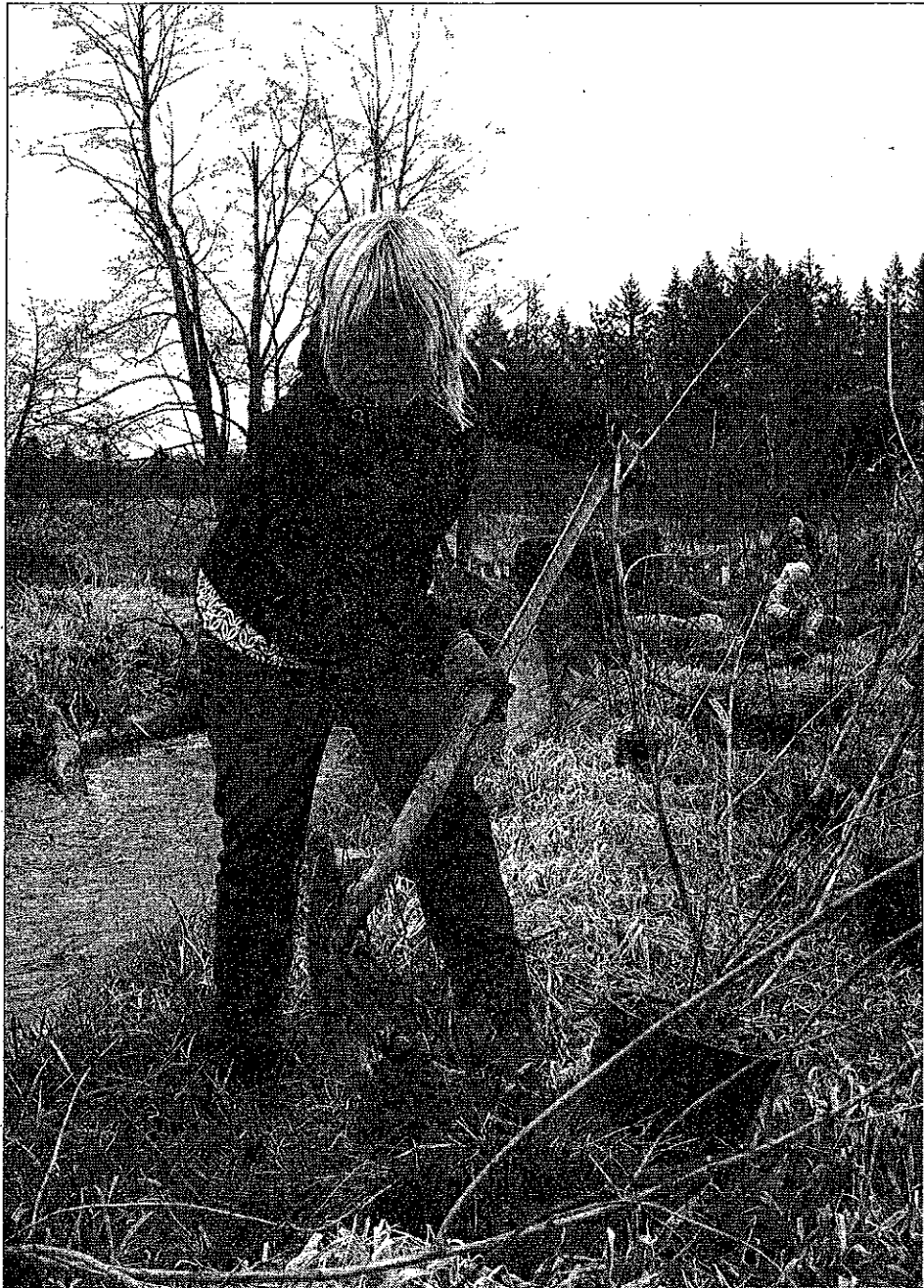
Gretta Spain, a second-year student at the school, traveled to Kenya through Explorations last year and hopes traveling to India will increase her global awareness.

"It was pretty eye-opening and maybe my eyes will open wider," the 15-year-old said. "You can't just do one thing and say you know so much differentness."

While abroad, the students will be taking four classes: human relations, Indian history and politics, Indian art and architecture, and sustainable natural resources. Third-year student Rayne Luthi is looking forward to the human relations aspect of the trip because that's when they'll be interacting with students at a school and rural families.

"The dialect I don't understand in any way and it will really sound like gibberish," the 17-year-old said. "But those are my favorite times — when you do something you wouldn't normally do because you didn't know (what you agreed to)."

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**KIRA MILLAGE THE BELLINGHAM HERALD**

Explorations Academy student Rayne Luthi plants a tree next to Terrell Creek northwest of Ferndale. Explorations students partnered with the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association to plant trees as a way to compensate for a plane trip to India in January. Students and school staff estimated they needed to plant about two dozen trees per person to absorb the amount of carbon that will be emitted in the atmosphere during their plane ride.