

**Christina
gathering plants
and berries**





Canadian Rainforest Experience

Wilderness International Ambassadors at FIS

FIS is proud to have two “ambassadors in residence”, two Grade 11 students who have earned their laurels in the rainforest on Vancouver Island in Canada this past summer. For Jamie and Christina, the adventure actually began last year when members of the Cowichan First Nation came to address students about the work of Wilderness International to conserve their homeland in the ancient rainforest of Western Canada. One way the non-profit organization does this is by holding sponsored runs, like the one held at FIS in April, the funds from which are used to purchase land for a nature preserve.

Wilderness International also partners with the Cowichan People to offer an international student exchange program, inviting selected students to experience the wilderness for three weeks, learn more about conservation issues and to spread the word to their peers and interest groups in their homeland upon return. Jamie and Christina recognized this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and submitted applications.

Each was awarded a €4000 scholarship to cover all trip expenses. In return they had to collect or earn €500 as their own personal donation to the preservation fund. As a team, which was made up of two students from FIS, two from Leipzig and six from Dresden, they had to develop and implement a summer project. The outcome was a Rainforest Recipe Book that exemplified the unique

biodiversity of the temperate rainforest by showing recipes with local ingredients and explained their cultural significance and medicinal effect.

In Canada, one awe-inspiring experience followed the next. They took part in two major canoe trips and an extended hiking trip. They gathered plants and berries and caught fish for their meals. Their labors were rewarded with sightings of black bears, sea lions, and whales and the thrill of swimming amidst the bioluminescence of the nighttime Pacific. Very special, was the inclusion in some traditional Cowichan ceremonies, like the “sweat lodge”, a sauna type-room in which a spiritual ceremony is held. The students also learned about Cowichan beliefs and to master some of their crafts like carving red cedar or gently stripping cedar bark from the trees for use in weaving.

Both students felt that experiencing cultural differences on a daily basis at FIS prepared them well for their Canadian adventure. They have come back with a good understanding of and deep commitment to the preservation of the rainforest on Vancouver Island and look forward to raising awareness within the school and the outside community.