

Richmond man works on world-wide quest

Former Waimea College head boy Mark (Hap) Cameron was in Richmond last week on a break from his quest to work on every continent before his 30th birthday. *Waimea Weekly* reporter Andrew Board caught up with Hap and asked him about his adventures.

Toilet attendant, fudge packer, rock collector, tent erector and orphanage volunteer – not your average CV but ex-Richmond man Mark (Hap) Cameron isn't living life to the average rules.

For the past five years Hap has spent his time working at his quest of world domination, well, sort of. Before he turns 30, on the 11th hour, of the 11th day of the 11th month of 2011, Hap's goal is to have worked on all seven continents in the world – including Antarctica. To date he has been gainfully employed in Korea, Canada, United States of America, Spain, Mexico and Australia, where he is currently working.

The roots of Hap's quest began while studying at Otago University. After his second year Hap went on a trip to Australia where he thought: "Wow, this is awesome, I have to do more of this, just that little change to Australia opened my eyes to travel."

Thus, the quest began. He returned to Otago, finished his degree, and then set about travelling the world. His first stop was South Korea where he found a job as an English teacher to business students for 15 months. While his days were spent working at the business school, his nights were taken up with earning a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, a sport he had never tried before moving to its home in Korea.

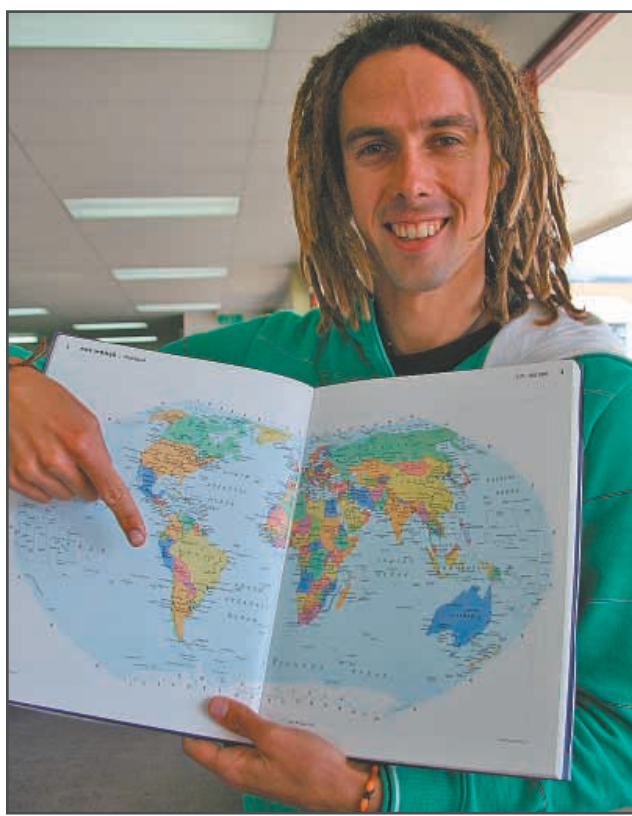
"It was pretty hard work, I was training almost every night of the week but I got there, even after spewing on my master and in Korea respect is massive. If I wasn't a foreigner I think I would have got a hiding."

The spew came about from a late night drinking session the evening before with his graduating (adult) students. "I can't believe I got my black belt after that," he joked.

It was while in Korea that Hap made a friendship with a German/Korean couple who lived in Spain and who would help him with employment in his next two continents. First stop was Spain where he was employed to look after their "17-year-old problem".

"They wanted me to tutor their son and I was more than happy to, they lived in a mansion in Spain with a maid, Rolls Royce, private jet and I pretty much had a house to myself. The family also had a super-yacht which I got to travel on a bit; it was pure luxury."

While in Spain, Hap managed to tear himself away from the mansion and yacht for four months to travel around other European countries. Then, after his stint in Spain ended, he backpacked around Brazil before his Spanish hosts offered him a job in the United States in their company as a marketing manager.



Mark (Hap) Cameron points to his favourite country so far, Brazil

"I was there for only three months and it was the only time since I graduated that I've actually used my degree." It was after his time in "the real world" that employment options got interesting for the former Waimea College head student.

"I went back to Europe for a few weeks just backpacking, then I moved back to the States and worked putting up hospitality tents for the PGA golf tour."

It was in this job that Hap witnessed one of the most celebrated moments in recent New Zealand sports history. "We were at the US golf Open when Michael Campbell won, we walked along and watched him play the last five holes. When he was on the final 18th green we were up a tree and took in the victory from there."

Hap stayed in North America and went to work in Vancouver, Canada before moving across to Banff. "I went to join half of Waimea College for a ski season, and had a couple of funny jobs. One was working as a toilet attendant. I would stand in the toilet and hand out towels, condoms and cologne. I spent my New Year looking at a toilet that year."

"The second funny Banff job was working as a fudge packer, so to speak. I would stand in the window of a chocolate shop, dressed as a chef stirring a big pot of fudge and Japanese tourists came up to photograph me. I was known as the town's fudge packer."

He then stayed in Canada and worked on an oil and gas rig in Alberta, but before he got the job he spent two homeless months with no money living in his car and eating at soup kitchens. "My mate, that I was with at the time, spent his

25th birthday in a soup kitchen, which was pretty classic." The cold homeless nights in Canada were swapped for the warm homeless nights in Mexico as Hap bought a surfboard and rode the waves of the Pacific by day and slept where it broke by night.

"After a few months of sleeping on the beach and becoming a bit of a hippie I decided to go and work at an orphanage on the Mexico/Guatemalan border as a volunteer, I still had no money but at least they gave me somewhere to sleep and food."

A two-month stay at the orphanage was preceded by another move to Denver, Colorado where his girlfriend lived. His job, as a landscaper for three months, was to be his last in America.

"My girlfriend and I backpacked in Colombia for six weeks and when we went to return into the States I got stopped, questioned and spent a night in the Atlanta City jail before being deported to Canada, where I worked to earn enough for a plane ticket home."

That was 12 months ago, and returning home to Richmond for what he thought would be a short holiday didn't stop the adventure for Hap. "Basically I got home and when we were on a break down the Sounds I managed to fracture my vertebrae and had to rest for months."

A photo and article of Hap bedridden in hospital was published on news website stuff.co.nz and the next few months were spent watching cricket and catching up with mates.

"It was a pretty good summer but I really had to get back to work so I moved to Perth to try for a job in one of the mines." His trouble finding a job was put to print when an article he penned was published by The Press newspaper. His current job, as a "fly-in, fly out" exploration field assistant (collecting rocks) in Western Australia is one of his favourites, and is giving his bank account a much needed boost.

Hap plans to spend the summer in Perth, with his girlfriend, before putting all his efforts into getting a job as a cleaner in Antarctica, "the only job down there I'm qualified for."

Then there remains Africa and South America, the latter he has visited but not worked in. He says the probability is for volunteer work in Africa and working in a snowboard season in Argentina or Chile.

So, on the 11th hour (he was born 7 minutes past 11.00am) on 11 November, 2011 Hap will turn 30 years old. His reward for completing his quest? "The journey I've been on, the people I've met, lessons I've learnt and the things I've experienced."

"I'll be 30, with a crappy bag full of dirty clothes and no assets and smelly dreadlocks but I'll have a lot of experience, a lot of different jobs, a few languages and I'll be happy. And I suppose I'll try to settle down."

To read more on Hap's adventures, including a recent "living in a mining camp" post, log on to www.hapworkingtheworld.com. His latest post is especially for Waimea Weekly readers.



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