View from my apartment, which was a block away from the office. The neighborhood
DAILY WORK

• A big portion of my job was editing and organizing blog posts sent from people out in the field. After much editing and finding suitable photos/touching up attached photos, I would put up the blogs online.

• I did a lot of social media work: reading news reports and synthesizing them into Facebook and Twitter posts. I wrote a campaign focused on reaching 5,000 FB likes faster.

• Using InDesign, I designed new “factsheets” on key landscape areas and started work on WWF Madagascar’s first-ever Annual Report.

• Generally, I did a lot of English proofreading and editing. My last few weeks, I focused mainly on editing blurbs for the Annual Report.
Diving Deep; a Firsthand Look at an Overfished Reef

Sun rays dance through the water to tickle the fishermen's legs as they dive. Their muscular legs, legs that seem to hint at what it really means to live here. Auguste, a fisherman and local fishery surveyor, motions from below for me to follow. Already feeling the salt in my throat, I try to calm my lungs into diving just a few more meters towards the pale coral floor. From where I am, the reef appears naked. But as I dive closer, I see there is life six metres below.

There! There's a flurry of long, face-like, white tentacles spinning, grasping, confused, fighting and wrapping around Auguste's arm. The first wild horita (or octopus) of my life, puffing a purple exhaust. Beautiful, but now dead. It, along with the three other horita we would see in the next thirty minutes, dies at the end of a long spear. Though we were only diving to get a sense of the reef, how could we leave food behind? The octopus will be brought back to shore with us. As it was explained to me, when those on land wait hungry, how could we, throw out food?

Les pêcheurs dans le bar local, un dimanche.
© WWF Madagascar / Navarana Smith

Stills from some of the blog posts that I worked on. Read more at http://www.wwf.mg/aboutus/our_ambassadors/explore__journals/
Most proud of professionally

• Learning InDesign and making the Factsheets.
EXAMPLE OF FACTSHEET I MADE

WWF MDCO priority landscapes

Mahafaly Plateau Land and Seascape

Home to the largest remaining expanse of unique spiny forest and the world’s third largest coral reef

Key Results

WWF has been in the Mahafaly region since 2001. Here are a few key achievements:

- A four-fold increase in the protected areas network (from 43,000 ha to 174,000 ha)
- Loss of forest coverage has been stabilized in the two largest protected areas
- Since 2010 the turtle population in Tsimanampetsotsa National Park has increased
- Regional sustainable energy plans have been developed including progress towards regulation of the fistwood supply chain
- WWF has helped increase the surface covered by community-based natural resource management with the development of a greenbelt around the official national parks
- Quality of life has been improved through efficient stove and access to clean drinking water

Main Activities and Partners

To achieve our vision in the landscape we are working to create a green economy model supported by ecosystem goods and services. To do this we need to develop four key areas:

1. Securing protected areas and community-based managed areas in the landscape
2. Strengthening natural resource management to improve local community benefits
3. Create regional development plans and land use planning that is strongly supported by public and private investments
4. Support good practices within the private sector and investments and initiatives by key sectors

Focuses are dependent on collaboration and partnerships. The latter include government agencies, decentralized authorities, civil society including NGOs, research centres and international organizations, financial partners, private sectors.

People

The economic livelihoods and cultural heritage of the people of this region are closely connected to the biodiversity and natural resources of the landscape. This region is the poorest in terms of socio-economic development. People have very limited or no access to health services, water and energy. They highly rely on natural resources for daily subsistence.

Inland, the pastoral Mahafy people depend directly on the spiny forest and its many ecosystem services - for water, fuelwood, building materials, medicinal plants, and forage for their livestock, to shelter for their spiritual ancestors. The coastal Vem people communities practice a traditional lifestyle and have depended on the coral reefs over many generations. Local villages have traditionally relied on catching octopus and fishing in near-shore coral reefs as their sole source of income.

Spotlight Story

WWF works in southwest Madagascar on a number of conservation projects to protect marine, coral and coastal environments. One of our partners is the villages that live in these habitats. But the local people face many challenges due to the harsh environment. One of the biggest problems is the lack of access to clean, safe drinking water. The dry, climate of the Plateau contains incredible beauty, but sadly, not much potable water.

In 2012 WWF built the first three desalination units in coastal villages, using wind and solar energy to produce sustainable, fresh, clean drinking water. The local communities donated the land and took an active part in construction. With all three stations operational, about 7,500 people in the area have access to safe drinking water.

Vision and Goals

Violence by 2020, replaceable models of landscape management contribute to the conservation of natural world and the wellbeing of the Malagasy people, which contribute to the equitable governance of natural resources in the landscape.

Goal 1: By 2015, the decline in isolated forests is reduced by 5%, the forest core within key conservation areas is maintained over 2009 levels, the health of the reef system within the Nosy Be Archipelago Marine Park is maintained at 2012 levels.

Goal 2: By 2020, 4,000 households have access to clean water, local economic returns from fishing are improved, the number of tourists visiting Tsimanampetsotsa National Park increase by 25% compared to 2011 levels.

Goal 3: By 2030, policy and trade practices improve social and environmental sustainability in the following key economic sectors: traditional fisheries, fuelwood, mining and oil.

Goal 4: By 2030, regional development plans and land use planning are strongly supported by public and private investments and are implemented at the landscape level.
• Before I arrived, the blog posts were severely backlogged. The posts I posted had been written more than a year before. The factsheets hadn’t been updated for years and my new design turned them from a clunky, text-heavy overview meant mostly for internal use to a more user-friendly, easily digestible landscape summary that will be used digitally for public consumption and, with a single paragraph substitution, for fundraising with WWF partners.

• Having another native English speaker in the office was very helpful to my boss, the Communications Director. It’s easy to get bogged down in clunky Google-translate-esque language when you’re the only native speaker on the job. Having another pair of eyes look over your work after the initial translation guarantees much more streamlined and fluent language more suitable to the international audiences that the English translations are intended to reach.
PERSONAL GROWTH
• In Madagascar, I gained hands-on experience that I don’t think would have been possible in a similarly renowned organization in the States. Crafting social media posts that went live, working on a project as important as the Annual Report, making the Factsheet template with no previous InDesign experience – all of these tasks and more have enabled me to feel much more competent than I did at the beginning of the summer.

• Living alone in such a foreign and distant place helped me learn more about myself. It’s an annoying cliche (hello *Eat, Pray, Love*) but it’s true that solo travel can help you sort out some things about yourself and your priorities.
In addition, I got to go to Madagascar! On long weekends, I took taxi-brousses to different parts of the country. My brother came to visit after my internship ended, and we traveled West and saw amazing, amazing sights.

I learned some Malagasy by taking lessons twice a week and everyone on the street was always excited to speak to the friendly vazaha. Everyday I was shocked by the kindness of strangers. The big-city culture of Tana could not be more different from that of my hometown, NYC. I expected to have to be on-guard constantly, to be wary of chatty people, and to always have to ward off others with an impassive and stony demeanor. Instead, I found old ladies offering to cook me dinner at their homes to show me “Malagasy cuisine” and vendors giving me back money when I accidentally overpaid when misunderstanding the price. I fell in love with the country, and know that I will find my way back.