

Project Update: July 2005

We have recently finished our preliminary work at our first site, the past three months has been enlightening. Due to market fluctuations and the increased crack-down on mining in protected areas, many people at our first site are now looking for alternatives to sapphire mining. Ecotourism, although predominately seasonal employment, has captured the interest of some miners. Despite scepticism, many people came to our informational meetings about ecotourism and all the work opportunities associated with ecotourism in the area. As requested by numerous miners and other community members we provided foreign language training twice a week during the last month. We also helped local National Park Association workers conduct annual on-site ecotourism training for current guides, porters, guards, camp cleaners etc., and those who are interested in working in ecotourism.

We learned quickly that most gemstone miners in Madagascar are transient; often migrating from other mining sites or work that is physically strenuous but generates fast cash. Knowing this fact has helped us immensely and we have subsequently tailored our project appropriately.