



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **ASDP Employee Returns from Desert Adventure**

Alice Springs Desert Park's Product Development and Community Alignment manager Jodie Clarkson has returned to Alice Springs after an exchange in the United States to learn more about Arizona's Sonoran Desert.

Ms Clarkson said the exchange to Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (ASDM), as part of the 2005-2007 *International Partnerships Among Museums* (IPAM) program has enriched her life both professionally and personally.

"Living on site at the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum for the month, I was completely immersed in a new desert, surrounded by beautiful rugged hills covered in Saguaro Cactus with squirrels, woodpeckers and roadrunners for neighbours," Ms Clarkson said.

"I met many passionate and knowledgeable desert dwellers and had many deja-vu moments, due to the similarities to our Central Australian desert environment.

"I was living near Kings Canyon - a gorge with a dry sandy river bed with fig (and other) trees hanging precariously from cliff faces, shrivelled up cloak ferns waiting for the next rain, that bore an uncanny resemblance to Central Australia's Kings Canyon."

Ms Clarkson said that while on exchange she spent time with botany, zoology, administration, events, financial and other education staff giving her a great overview of how the organisation works.

"The major aim of the exchange was work towards the completion of a website for children that compares and contrast our two deserts, which will facilitate a better understanding of the survival strategies of animals, plants and people in deserts," Ms Clarkson said.

"ASDM education specialist Brenda King spent a month at ASDP last year as part of IPAM's exchange program to begin the concept planning and research for the website.

"This year Brenda and I visited schools in her region and built on information gained from students in central Australia who contributed artwork and stories to the site.

"Three classes of Central Australian students and two classes of Sonoran Desert students have contributed artwork and stories for the site.

"When the site is complete students will be able to view their work and see the faces of the other students they are pen palling and develop ongoing connections that will hopefully facilitate the development of long distance friendships.

"The website will continue to develop over time and other students in both deserts will have an opportunity to contribute."

Ms Clarkson said she not only learned a huge amount about developing and building web pages, she also expanded her professional networks and gathered new ideas that can now be implemented at ASDP.

“The exchange of ideas while I was onsite was very valuable and this will continue via email as we discover what things seem to work and what ones don’t,” Ms Clarkson said.

“Everyone I met had a positive view of Australia and there was a huge amount of interest in the presentations I delivered to primary and high school students, museum staff and volunteers about Australian desert plants, animals and people.

“Both the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum and the Alice Springs Desert Park are diversifying the experiences visitors get to attract more and varied groups of visitors through our gates.

”ASDM have a Saturday Summer Evening program during their off peak season targeted at locals, an education / conservation / interpretation club for, young children and teenagers as well as an extensive volunteer program.

“We are now looking at as models of both of these ideas for ASDP.”

The ASDM website can be viewed at: [www.desertmuseum.org/kids/oz](http://www.desertmuseum.org/kids/oz), while the ASDP site will be live in May.

Ends

**Media Note \_ For more information contact Jodie Clarkson on 89887237.**

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