

Volunteering

My introduction to volunteering came when I worked for a local head injury charity running their day centre. I had a very small staff, myself and 1 other and several volunteers that I inherited with the job. I had never worked with volunteers or volunteered myself. I quickly realised how invaluable to the organisation they were and also to me; they had far more knowledge of the everyday stuff and the people attending than I did at first.

There are many reasons why people volunteer and why organisations employ volunteers.

From a personal point of view I have found it to be the best way of trying something out and gaining experience, hands on training, qualifications, skills and a great way of mixing with people you wouldn't normally meet in everyday circumstances. When looking for a job in almost any sector, it is a good way of beating the 'catch 22' situation of not being able to apply for a job because you have no experience and you can't get any experience because you can't get a job. I first volunteered as part of an adult teaching course and found it wasn't difficult to commit some time.

I have since looked for opportunities that would be interesting and would fit in with work commitments and my bank balance. I have seen many fantastic volunteer placements that I would love to give a go to but unfortunately they have been in term time or have cost more than I can afford.

2009 I came across opportunities to volunteer with [The Kingcombe trust](#) which organised work parties for a number of European destinations at different dates throughout the year (Working with Eucan and with [Leonardo da Vinci](#) funding) The dates left to apply for didn't fit in around the times that I could commit to. I decided to contact them and find out what would be happening in 2010. I spoke to Nigel Spring who told me all about the work that was done and that there would be some trips in 2010. I applied and waited.....

..... New Years day 2010 I looked at my e-mails and found I had been offered a place for the Czech Republic trip in August. I was also invited to an

introduction weekend down in Dorset at the end of January. I was over the moon.

At the end of January after work on Friday 27th I set off on my own on the long drive down to the Kingcombe centre in Dorset. I was a little apprehensive as it is one of my beliefs that if something seems too good to be true it probably is. I got there late, as I got lost along the country lanes about 5 miles from the centre and everyone I asked had never heard of the place. I was greeted by Nigel, Kathy and a fantastic smell of home cooked food and a large gathering of people some of whom were to be going on trips and some who had been on trips and a few knowledgeable speakers. I felt at ease straight away.

I was shown where I was staying which was not in the accommodation at the centre but at Beech cottage, a short walk just up the road a little way. I had my own single room with on suite shower room and brilliant views.

After a lovely meal from really pleasant staff, meeting warm and friendly people some of whom were also assigned to the Czech Republic trip in August, a great nights sleep and a good breakfast this was definitely still too good to be true.

The whole of Saturday was jam packed with activities walks and talks and finding out what we would be doing on the trip. Late afternoon we went to some common ground and cleared some invasive scrub and had some fires. In the evening we went to a square dance that was very entertaining after a few beers. The Sunday morning I was completing Brushcutter training with 5 other people and in the afternoon putting into practice what we had learned in the morning and then completing a written test. I left for the long drive home about 5 o'clock and although it was a nonstop the whole weekend from leaving work on Friday afternoon to going straight back to work on the Monday morning, any apprehensions had been put aside as I had had one of the best weekends and I was completely excited about the trip in August.

I sent and received a few e-mails and Nigel kept me informed of what would be happening when and where but with all the other trips and our trip not being until August it didn't seem quite real again until about June/ July when everything started to come together with information arriving and e-mailing people I had never met about meeting under the clock in St Pancreas station by

11.30 on the 18th August to board Eurostar at the start of the long journey to the Czech Republic

The Journey

Most people I had spoken to about what I was going to be doing were envious and especially when they learned I would be travelling all the way by train. It was something I had been looking forward to and it wasn't disappointing. I was really glad that someone else had organised it all and all I had to do was turn up lug my case around and carry my ticket when I was issued with it by Richard one of the other volunteers who had been assigned the task of group leader, ticket holder, platform finder, time keeper, food buyer, train catcher for the group of 15. A good job he did of keeping us all together and in line especially as most of us had never met each other or him before. We didn't miss a train, there was not even 1 moment of panic and no loss of life or limb and we arrived to glorious sunshine bang on time to be greeted by Nigel, Kathy, Suska and Oskar at Brno station car park

part of the group outside Brussels' station



leaving Cologne station



Lucy showing the sleeper accommodation on the train to Prague

Czech Republic and the Work ([itinerary](#))

As I had come to expect everything was so organised and yet flexible enough that you didn't feel regimented. And when it rained on a day when we were supposed to work and couldn't things were shifted about so that we weren't sitting about idle. A day trip was swapped to a work day and vice versa.

The people we met were so pleased to meet us and at all the events we attended we were made to feel extremely welcome. The Mayor held a reception for us and he also invited us to his wine cellar for drinks and food one evening.

The town of Zdanice was small with a pretty park where the Histopedal festival took place on the Saturday after we arrived.



Also a municipal outdoor swimming pool close by to the one and only hotel, that we were staying in.



There were several shops spread about the town all selling similar basics, there was a couple of bars but nothing out of the ordinary. There was however a town tannoy system. Speakers attached to lampposts around the town, then at a similar time every morning there would be a record played and announcements this could be heard for miles and to us seemed a little sinister. After learning from locals that the announcements are sometimes to let people know about someone wanting to offer jobs, and also to announce events that are happening it seems slightly less sinister and a sight more useful than our own towns filled with CCTV cameras. The town pool was very welcoming after a day's work and because of the work we were doing for the town we were allowed to use it for free until it closed at the end of the summer (31st August). The food was different and considering all the vegetables we saw growing they have a mainly protein and carbohydrate diet.



*Sweet and sour
vegetarian option*



Honey cake

The accommodation was clean and adequate for our needs the girls shared 3 to a room and the boys 2 to a room. There were 2 showers and Nigel and Kathy allowed use of the shower in their rooms. Although the sun terrace washing line area would not have got through Health and Safety Regulations in the UK it was much appreciated when hot, and by the group smokers and drinkers.



sun terrace with washing line

The work was harder than I had envisaged mainly due to terrain and weather.



Some areas were fairly steep and when it rained very slippery so I spent some time on my backside especially when descending for tea breaks which amused a few. We managed to clear a lot of the invasive shrubs and build a sheep and goats pen with a farmer and his family.

We also cleared an Orchard for the lady we knew as Mrs H (Mrs Eva Zaijkova's).



A couple of evenings we had language lessons, most of us found the language difficult and were relieved when told by the tutor that a lot of Czechs find it very difficult too. I think most of us grasped the basics of please, thank you and 1,2,3or 4 beers.

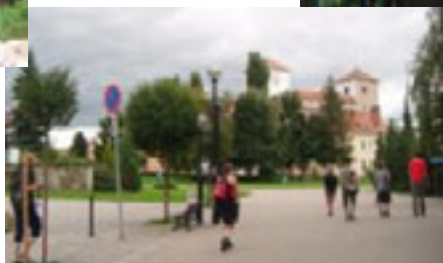


Report Zdanice Trip Volunteer Lindsey Stirton | 2010

We met some really genuinely interesting people who put on some very good events for us and we joined them at some of their festivals and learned something of their culture.

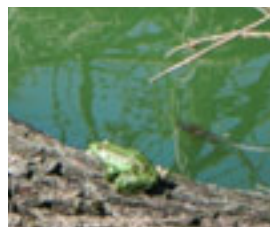
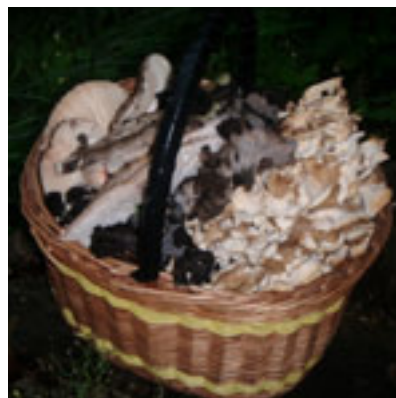
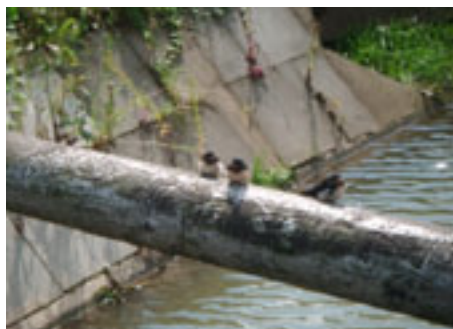


We went on some brilliant trips to caves and gorges, towns and woodlands



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We saw lots of different species of wildlife, insects, flora and fauna.



I learned so much about all sorts of conservation issues from a very diverse bunch of people ranging in age from 20-60 and from various backgrounds, some working in conservation and some like myself without a clue.

And we all got on !

I would not hesitate to take part in something similar again. I am always on the lookout for events, courses and opportunities and would love to change my career and be able to work within the conservation field. I promote volunteering at every opportunity and within my workplace based in further education the opportunity arises fairly often to talk to students and tutors encouraging and motivating them to volunteer. It was an extremely good experience and I learned a lot about myself that surprised me

I snore.....

But apparently not the loudest.....