Short Work Placement

The North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NDCAONB) was designated in September 1959 and covers 171 square kilometres of mainly coastline from Combe Martin to the Cornish border at Marsland Mouth.

The NDCAONB has only two full-time staff, Dave in landscaping, Jenny in management and Cat as an educator on a two-year project called Coastal Creatures. I worked on the Coastal Creature's project which has many partners, foremost The North Devon Biosphere in which the NDCAONB sits, they also work in the same office and share an administrator called Gigha. The NDCAONB has other key partners such as, Coastwise (An independent community initiative), National Trust, Northam Burrows country park, Torridge District Council, and the Combe Martin School. During my placement, I have worked alongside these partners and many other schools, charities and governmental organisations.

Working with both small and large groups of 100+ people has helped me to develop my education skills. Working with various ages from as young as 2 to 80+ (figure 1) has given me a better understanding of ways to best approach different age groups and their various knowledge levels to help to inspire interest in everyone about the intertidal zone. I have hosted, attended and made risk assessments for many events from school trips to educating teachers on how to carry out school trips and activities to do with their classes. Public events such as rockpool rambles have helped me learn from local experts and allowed me to provide my knowledge of the coast to many groups of people.

Figure 1: Me running a strandline education session with children from West Down primary school, ages 2-12, about the organisms and marine litter found in and around the strandline.

I attended a large amount of networking environments and in my first week I was taken on a boat with members from the AONB, RSPB, Natural England, and the National Trust. The boat trip allowed me to see the north devon coast and to carry out a general bird survey and potential chough nesting site survey. I also attended an AONB SWPLF (South West Protected Landscape Forum) with the NDCAONB manager where I had the opportunity to talk to many AONB managers and representatives from the National Trust, Natural England and the Forest Stewardship Council.

My placement has also given me more detailed knowledge of the intertidal zone and the many organisms which live in it. These experiences have massively increased my ability to identify a range of species, which before was only a few wracks studied in the diversity of life module. This has allowed me to attend and run coastal surveys on the rocky shore alongside trained volunteers to collect data for the Coastal Creatures project. This data I then imputed into Irecord so it can be verified by experts. The data is then added to the NBN (The National Biodiversity Network), a database holding more than 127 million species records. Another form of data I collected was Biotope data which is an area of the same environmental and geological conditions where specific plant and animal species live. Along the coast, the biotope was mainly dependent on if it was littoral sediment or rock, the exposure and the wave energy of the area. The areas were mapped using a Trimble device (figure 2) which is a handheld GPS device running a GIS software called K-mobile, which can be connected to a desktop software called K-console to allow GIS analysis.

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Figure 2: Kate and I (who works for the partners at the North Devon Biosphere) mapping Lee Bay's biotopes using the Trimble device and a sheet of biotope codes.

gained knowledge and skills from many areas of my studies which aided me in the work

environment. The Diversity of Life unit was a massive help in species identification due to the lab sessions and reports carried out on Seaweed, Fish, and Crustaceans and also understanding the scientific names and higher taxonomy such as phylum, class and order names which allowed me to keep up with the coastal experts and educate the public. Skills gained from the Residential Field trip also aided with identification such as Roger Herbert's topshell and limpet identification practical. Physical Geography gave me a better understanding of tidal and geological aspects of the coasts which were useful when talking to experts in Natural England when on the boat and explaining to the public. Fundamentals of Environmental Science allowed me to understand and put forward ideas about environmental resistance at the SWPLF. Finally, the data analysis and field work insight I learned in Environmental Research Skills helped me to understand the data I inputted into Irecord, the Marine Conservation Society's (2017) "Beachwatch beach clean", and the Natural History Museum for the "Big Seaweed Search" and interpreted the graphs digitally made from the data.

I worked full time five days a week for seven weeks with extra volunteering on weekends, one week would be office all week 9-5 due to high tides in the days, and the next would be more field work such as surveys and school trips. I received a Devon County Council work email and work laptop for all work to be done on during my placement. I had to compose work emails in a formal manner which were checked by my mentor, this increased my confidence in composing and sending emails. I was also responsible for writing and scheduling informative social media posts about local species and events advertisement on Twitter and Facebook for #whatsthatwednesday (North Devon Coast AONB, 2017). These social media posts gave me an insight as to the way to speak on social media and the best times to schedule posts for the most interactions. The posts themselves required closer research to be done on a species each week which broadened my knowledge and research skills.

In conclusion, this work placement has provided me with an enormous amount of knowledge and experience in an area that massively interests me, and I knew little about. It has given me an understanding of one of the paths that my degree could lead me too in not only the role my mentor and I played but the other functions in the AONB and the experts and partners. This placement has helped me get my foot in the door and given me real practical experience that many jobs require or look for when employing.

Reference

North Devon Coast AONB, 2017. *North Devon Coast AONB*[online]. The compass jellyfish (Chrysaora... - North Devon Coast AONB. Available from: https://www.facebook.com/explorethecoast/photos/a.311516542202321.71569.240135532673756/1573979119289384/?type=3&theater [Accessed 31 Jul 2017].