

A HELPING HAND

Have fun and help us in our mission by volunteering at SYHA



Clockwise from top: Sarah made it to Durness to see the sun setting, the Ochil Hills and Neist Point on the Isle of Skye



IN ASSOCIATION WITH TREES FOR LIFE

CONSERVATION OF A 'LOST WORLD'

Described by writer George Monbiot as Britain's most ambitious rewilding project, award-winning conservation charity Trees For Life is working to restore Scotland's Caledonian Forest – the country's equivalent of a rainforest

The Caledonian Pinewoods once covered much of the Highlands, but today only a fraction of the original forest survives.

Trees for Life aims to reverse this loss. Its volunteers have already planted more than one million trees and have created 10,000 acres of new forest, with wildlife including red squirrels, wood ants and black grouse reaping the benefits.

Dundreggan Conservation Estate – Trees for Life's flagship project near Loch Ness – has been described as a 'lost world' because of the rare and endangered species discovered there.

But Trees for Life is about people too. Its vital work is carried out almost entirely by volunteers – with opportunities for people from all backgrounds to enjoy the benefits of positive activity in wild landscapes, and to learn skills such as planting trees or conducting biodiversity surveys.

Volunteers can join a Conservation Week – previously voted one of the Top 10 Conservation Holidays worldwide. For hostellers this can make a fantastic addition to a Scottish travel itinerary.

Spending a week among the forests and mountains often touches people profoundly.

"My experience volunteering with Trees for Life was nothing but positive. I came away with a new love for the Highlands, a heightened respect for the majesty of trees and some great new friends," said volunteer Natalie Allain.

Penny Bunting



Trees for Life's 2017 Conservation Weeks begin on 25 March. See www.treesforlife.org.uk, email volunteer@treesforlife.org.uk or call 01309 691292.

We offer volunteering opportunities to those who wish to gain work experience, to share life knowledge and skills, or in conjunction with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Volunteers assist SYHA in a variety of ways, such as undertaking general youth hostel work, painting and decorating or gardening. As a not-for-profit organisation, our volunteers are key in helping us to achieve our charitable objectives, and we are very fortunate to benefit from the contributions and hard work of our volunteers. We really value the beneficial effects that each volunteer brings to our work and we always make sure that they too can make the most of their time at SYHA Hostelling Scotland.

Sarah from Germany shares her experience and 'life after volunteering' with us



"WORKING AND LIVING IN A YOUTH HOSTEL OFFERED ME THE CHANCE TO BROADEN MY HORIZONS"

My name is Sarah and I am 21 years old. I am currently studying English, French and Economics at the University of Giessen, I volunteered at SYHA from September 2014 until April 2015.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO VOLUNTEER WITH SYHA?

Before deciding, I didn't have a fixed idea of exactly where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do. I looked through the different projects offered by 'Internationaler Bund' and was very keen on learning more about volunteering in Scottish youth hostels. I found it very

interesting, as it was distinct from the other 'typical' projects.

The combination of working and also having the chance to travel and to learn more about the country sounded very appealing.

WHAT HAS VOLUNTEERING DONE FOR YOU?

Working and living in a youth hostel offered me the chance to broaden my horizons by meeting lots of different people from various nationalities and backgrounds.

I learned to deal with different personalities and cultures, improved my communication skills and I also got to work in SYHA's National Office for two months which gave me first-hand experience of working in an office and strengthened my intention to work with languages later on.

ANY HIGHLIGHTS FROM YOUR TIME AT SYHA?

Looking back at my time at SYHA, there are definitely

several highlights to be mentioned and the more time passes, the more I appreciate the great and enriching situations I experienced.

Apart from working in the youth hostels, I also did a lot of travelling around the country! My highlights, therefore, are mainly the trips I made and the different places I visited, including climbing Ben Nevis (my very first mountain) and discovering remote, untouched places on a road trip along Scotland's north coast.

I also spent a weekend on the Isle of Skye, which (of course) was typically wet, but also extremely impressive in terms of nature.

HAS VOLUNTEERING HELPED IN YOUR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT?

It has, indeed. Especially in the beginning, when I was a bit homesick. I found living alone in unfamiliar surroundings without having close contact with

anyone from back home quite challenging and tough.

I learned to live more independently though, and to deal with minor 'personal crises' differently. Of course, I had to face a couple of difficult situations including feeling lonely, missing home, or being ill which I overcame eventually and which made me realise much more about my own personality than I would have thought.

ARE YOU CURRENTLY DOING ANY VOLUNTARY WORK?

Not currently but I would love to go back to Scotland sometime, to volunteer with SYHA for a few weeks. *SH*

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?

Please visit our website to learn more about our volunteer programmes and opportunities or email volunteers@syha.org.uk