



**Your name:** Hugh Armour

**Volunteer role:** Task Organiser

**Name of voluntary organisation:** Sheffield Conservation Volunteers (SCV),  
<http://uk.geocities.com/sheffieldconservationvolunteers/>

**What attracted you to volunteering in Sheffield's environment?**

I had previous experience working with other conservation volunteer groups and knew I'd enjoy the work. It was, also, a way to get to know the area, being new to Sheffield & Yorkshire, and to meet some new people who shared at least one common interest.

**How did you find out about the voluntary opportunities that were available?**

Via the Sheffield Conservation Volunteers website and some flyers in the local Volunteers Centre.

**How long have you been volunteering?**

Six years with SCV and around 16 years with other organisations outside the Sheffield area.

**Have you, or do you, volunteer with other environmental or other organisations?**

I've volunteered with a few other local conservation groups in Scotland and with Scottish Conservation Projects Trust, the National Trust for Scotland & the John Muir Trust, all before moving to Sheffield at the end of 1998. I've, also, been on various NTS, BTCV & Earthwatch working holidays and still try to do at least one a year.

**What skills, knowledge or techniques have you learnt by volunteering?**

I've learned various construction techniques for building dry stone walls, boardwalks, fences, footpaths and things like turf dykes & artificial otter holts, badger sets etc. I've, also, learned that you can often make use of the materials supplied by nature to supplement anything you may have brought with you; that the application of brute force & a big hammer is, sometimes, the only way to get something to go the way you want it and that, at other times, standing back and having a think about it can solve the problem that the hammer won't. In addition, I've, also, had experience of using various data gathering, species monitoring & trapping methods on projects run by Earthwatch, who support environmental and conservation research projects.

On the organisational side, I'm responsible for organising SCV's task programme, so liaise with our various clients, schedule work and on occasion, do site visits and assessments. Before coming to Sheffield, I did a similar job with a local conservation group in Stirling but, at different times, organised publicity for the group. At the time, I had no experience of doing this and, basically, learned "on the job" with some guidance from others in the Stirling group who had done these jobs, previously.

As well as the practical skills, I've acquired some knowledge about various aspects of the environment, wildlife, conservation & environmental management and why a lot of the work we do has to be balanced against other, conflicting interests, such as land use and public perception.

And, finally, I've acquired an appreciation of the fact that even though at times what we do as volunteers may seem to be insignificant in the big picture it does count. It may not seem much but in a year our



group, does the equivalent of one full time employee working 8 hours a day, 7-days-week, without any time off, for a year and a half.

### **What is a typical volunteer day for you?**

I work shifts so, when I'm out with SCV on a Sunday, I have a bit of a lie in – and don't get up until around 7am!!! I'll meet that day's driver, at about 9am, and anyone else who is meeting at the Sheffield Community Transport compound, where we store our minibus, help check out the minibus and hook up the trailer, if it's required. We pick up the other volunteers at our two pick up points in the city centre, at about 9:30am, and pick up the tools we need from our tool store and be heading for the work site by about 10am. We sometimes meet another volunteer group there (e.g. if we're working with North Sheffield Conservation Vols. on one of their sites) or with the site owner, (e.g. one of the Sheffield Rangers if it's a council owned/maintained site).

If we are working on a site by ourselves, I will, usually, have done a site visit beforehand (I organise SCV's programme of tasks) & know what work needs to be done and I'll brief the group once we're on site. We'll, also, do a safety talk - how to use the tools, hazards to be aware of on site etc. While we're doing this, we'll, also, get the most important task of the day out of the way – someone puts the kettle on. We'll crack on with the work we're doing until the kettle boils and have a quick 5-10 minute break once it has. Then we'll basically continue working until we've finished the work assigned or it's time to call it a day. We'll take a 30-45 minute lunch break sometime time between Noon and 1pm.

If we're working on a new site or have volunteers out who have never worked on the site before we'll, also, use the lunch break to do a quick talk/tour about the site. After lunch we'll have another 10 minute tea break about 2:30pm. If we haven't finished everything we have to do by 3pm, we'll start finishing up what we're doing and tidy the site up. If it's during the summer months and the weather is nice, we may stay a bit longer, just to finish the work in one go, but even then we rarely leave the site any later than 5pm.

As a post script to the day's work, I'll sometimes go to a local pub quiz with other members of the group on the Sunday night.

### **What is the best bit about volunteering?**

For me, it's the fact that I'm outdoors and contributing something back into the countryside, which I love. And I get to hang with a bunch of people I like and enjoy being with.

### **Has your voluntary work had any impact on your professional career, private life or any other aspect of your life?**

My voluntary work hasn't had much impact on my professional career – I'm a computer operator, so there's not much overlap. However, while living in Stirling, I did learn the programming skills (in my own time) that let me design and administer a web site for Stirling Conservation Volunteers. That did give me a better skills set, although I've never felt inclined to develop my career in that direction. The company I, currently, work for is quiet supportive of voluntary work and has a number of active programmes and campaigns in the environmental field, both within the company & in support of external organisations such as WWF & Earthwatch. In fact, that is how I first became involved with Earthwatch – through a sponsorship programme run by my work.

In my personal life, I've made a number of good friends within SCV and we get together on a fairly regular basis for social events.

School for Environment Case Study



**If you had to “sell” volunteering in Sheffield’s environment in one sentence, what would you say?**

Sheffield is the greenest city I’ve ever seen in the UK, in terms of the amount of woodland, moor and “managed green spaces” within the city boundary and with all that’s here there’s plenty of opportunity to get involved, learn a few new skills and make some new friends while doing so.