

Volunteering in the National Park

There are many generous people who give freely of their time to volunteer in the National Park, looking after its landscape, people and places. Just a few of them are highlighted here.

To the rescue

Not everyone is prepared to abandon their Christmas turkey to don waterproofs and tramp across the countryside in the dark to rescue a stranger.

But Steve Clough and Jill Armstrong, along with the rest of the 45-strong volunteer Swaledale Mountain Rescue Team regularly drop everything to take part in heroic missions.

Over the last six years, the couple have been involved in more than 50 search and rescues. These can range from saving injured people in dangerous situations to helping residents in remote houses inaccessible by normal ambulances.

The volunteers, who range in age from 18 to 65, dedicate a minimum of five hours a week to intensive medical and equipment training - all unpaid. Why do they do it?



"People are so relieved and glad to see us," explains Jill, a community development worker who moved to Gunnerside from London nine years ago. "It's very satisfying."

Jill is Fundraising Officer for the team, which relies solely on charitable donations and grants. This is no mean feat, considering it costs £30,000 to run for a year, excluding the cost of the medically-kitted out Land Rovers.

In addition to his day job as head of marketing and communications at a major city council, Steve, is Rescue Controller, taking first calls from North Yorkshire Police, sending call-outs to the team, deciding what equipment needs to be brought, and liaising with other emergency services.

"One of the characteristics of a mountain rescue volunteer is the ability to take two deep breaths and keep calm in a crisis," says Steve, "For a service reliant on charity and volunteering, the level of professionalism here is extraordinary."

Three rescue teams cover the Dales, above and below ground - the other two being the Cave Rescue Organisation and Upper Wharfedale Fell Rescue Association. To volunteer you must be fit, prepared to go out in all weathers, and have good navigation skills.

Visit their websites to find out more.

Full steam ahead

Ruth Evans claims that hosting a visit to the Settle-Carlisle railway from HRH Prince Charles was her finest moment - but in 32 years of voluntary work for the Yorkshire Dales National Park, she has many more to be proud of.

This Dales Volunteer, originally from London, has done just about everything, including drystone walling, riverbank repair, barn surveying, butterfly spotting, bridgeway creation and hundreds of guided walks.

"I loved the conservation work," recalls Ruth, who was one of few women in the eighties working on this detail. "It could be quite daunting, but I never used my female status to say 'I can't do that'."

"You really felt as though you were looking after the environment - caring for it and putting things back as they should be."

Ruth, who came up north after marrying a Yorkshireman, co-ordinates an army of 150 volunteers for the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line. She's a 20-year-long member of this self-funded organisation, which campaigns to keep open the world famous railway and organises guided walks around it.

Her latest challenge is to survey about a thousand features along the 72-mile route. Some will be considered for conservation - for example, a dilapidated plate layer's hut near the Ribbleshead viaduct is to be consolidated and enhanced with an interpretation panel for visitors.

"Network Rail and Northern Rail support the work we do," says Ruth, "and the National Park Authority values the fact that many visitors come to the area by public transport and this all helps to keep the line open."

Ruth, who spends four days a week on volunteering duties, says nothing much fazes her - except, perhaps, the time when a dog stole her sandwiches while she was conducting surveys up on Pen-y-ghent!



Good Will Planting

Climbing half way up a mountain to plant trees in freezing temperatures might not be every youngster's idea of fun in the school holidays.

But the Young Rangers, all aged 11 to 13, made light weather of their moorland mission above Selside.

They were taking part in a new National Park Authority project to get young people involved in the countryside and its protection.

"It's important to me," said 12-year-old James Chapman, "If I have kids, I want them to live in a nice place where there are plenty of plants and trees."

Tom Riley, 13, said: "The worst thing is the cold, but if you are doing something worthwhile - like if it's going to help wildlife and increase the population of owls - it's fine."

Working alongside members of Natural England, the Young Rangers planted nearly 200 saplings across half an acre of South House Moor.

Rosie Mellin, 13, said: "I think it's boring to spend your day inside. My grandmother lives on a farm and I love being outside. The best bit is digging the holes because it makes a funny squelchy noise."

The task formed part of a wider scheme to restore some of the Dales

moorland to its original wooded landscape. Almost 20,000 trees have been planted since 2000.

All the Young Rangers were using their time to clock up volunteering hours for their John Muir awards. And 13-year-old Isobel Clements was working towards her Duke of Edinburgh Bronze award.

She said: "Humans are decreasing the amount of trees so we need to increase them by planting more, one for every one that's taken."

The Authority's Outreach Officer, Catherine Kemp, explained that the February half-term tree planting was the start of an action-packed calendar for the Young Rangers.

"We aim to meet at least once a month to do a different activity, from building bird-boxes to mending drystone walls," she said.

"The kids have been so keen and committed - and this group wouldn't run without the support of dedicated adult volunteers from Settle".



Dales Volunteer wins top award

A volunteer who developed such a passion for his work that he is about to embark on a degree in environmental conservation won a national competition last year.

David Preston headed up the individual category in the UK National Park Volunteer Awards, run by the UK Association of National Park Authorities.

The 39-year-old from Askrigg began as a Dales Volunteer with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority in 2009 and has put in an average of 91 days a year - way above the 15 days the Authority asks volunteers to give.

David began by helping Access Rangers with jobs like drystone walling, hedge laying, gate hanging and repairing footpaths and bridges.

He went on to train in habitat management (coppicing and tree planting) and is working towards obtaining a

licence to handle hazel dormice so he can help protect this endangered species.

He has created an image library of tasks carried out by the north east team, as well as recording flora and fauna.

David also volunteers for a local mental health charity.

David is one of 240 Dales Volunteers working for the Authority - people who freely gave 4,200 days of their spare time in 2012 to provide vital help in the conservation and protection of the National Park and its special qualities.



When the going gets tough ...

When Roy Emmerson was struck down with a brain tumour followed by a stroke aged 24, his life changed dramatically. With the left hand side of his body paralysed, he had to abandon his PhD in Maths and rethink his dreams.

It has been a tough journey but now, in his forties, Roy is still pursuing one of the passions he has always had: his love of the outdoors.

Not only does Roy, who can walk with a stick, go sailing and rambling with his partner Nicola, in a wheelchair, but he gives much of his time over to helping others with disabilities to enjoy outdoor pursuits too.

"When I was able-bodied, I was a mountain biker and windsurfer, so it's really important to me. There's nothing better than getting out in the country for boosting self esteem and for making you feel alive," he says.



Roy has been a great asset to the National Park Authority's Access for All project.

The aim is to make more of the 2,000km of footpath routes good for use by disabled people - for example, by replacing stiles with gates, and strengthening surfaces. After recent work to create a circuit around Grimwith Reservoir, 12km are now accessible to wheelchair users and 127km to those able to walk with a stick.

Roy, who lives near Bedale, regularly attends the Authority's advisory group meetings. His current focus is on getting funding for a number of Trampers - all-terrain electric wheelchairs - to help more disabled people enjoy the Dales.

He hopes his campaign will gather momentum through his website, www.brainfadetv.co.uk - a forum for people with disabilities to share experiences and which features videos of outdoor activities as well as a blog.

We're going on a barn hunt

Scattered across the National Park are thousands of stone barns that form a vital part of this farming landscape.

In 2010, the Authority embarked on a project to record these historic buildings - many of which are more than two centuries old.

Tony Harrison is just one fantastic volunteer helping us to complete this huge survey, which will not only help us to understand them better, but also to identify the most appropriate strategy for conserving them.

A retired scientist and businessman, Tony spends on average half a day each week walking between five and eight miles up and down dale recording details of any barn that he comes across. He takes an eight-point grid reference and several photographs, paying attention to features such as windows, doorframes and, where safe, interiors too.

The 71-year-old estimates he's recorded 940 traditional barns across the Hawes, High Abbotside, Bainbridge and

Happier and healthier

For those who know and love the Dales it may be a surprise to hear there are many people living in the region's cities who have never seen them.

Shakila Hanif is doing a fantastic job to change this in her hometown of Bradford. Over the last five years, she has introduced scores of families to the wonders of their neighbouring countryside, through bus and train trips with guided walks.

"I take groups of up to 15 to places like Malham, Settle and Skipton," she says. "In August I took some ladies to Burnsall. The river and open fields reminded them of their old homes in Pakistan. They said 'Wow!' and absolutely loved it."

The aim is to encourage them to return with their families.

"Some don't have the confidence to just get up and go on their own - even reading a bus timetable can be difficult. But we've seen quite a few go back with their husbands and kids for a day out - it's much cheaper than a theme park!"

Shakila, who works as a development officer at not-for-profit organisation Healthy Living Centre in Bradford, began walking herself after she was advised the country air could help her asthma.

Now she is a dedicated Rambler, has conquered the Three Peaks with her two children, and feels much healthier for it.

As a Governor of Bolling Park Primary

School, Shakila (pictured fourth from left) also organises trips for parents and pupils.

"Last year we teamed up with the school in Kirkby Malham and planted trees as part of an 'Eco Warrior' project. They got so much enjoyment from it, they bring their parents back to see the trees and want to do it again."

Shakila, 44, was originally given a day's training in areas such as first aid and risk assessment under the nationwide Walking for Health project.

"It's about your well-being, particularly when you live in inner-city Bradford," she adds. "The clean air, the scenery, wildlife - everything around you - just makes you feel happier and healthier."



Upper Muker parishes.

"The amount of work farmers and builders put into these barns is wonderful, it's no wonder so many are still standing 250 years on.

"About half I see now are still used to shelter sheep in bad weather. Around a quarter are ruined, though, and the rest are in need of some repair."

Tony, often accompanied on his walks by his wife, says the volunteering work is both a challenge and fun: "It's not always easy to take photographs of roofs when they're under three foot of snow!"

"I have always been an outdoor person," he concludes, "and I'm much happier stuck on top of a hillside than in a town.

"Hopefully I'm contributing something to society, too."

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

National park authorities have two purposes:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area
- to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the parks by the public.

In carrying out these purposes, national park authorities also have a duty to seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities.

To fulfill these purposes, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority offers services that provide help and advice on a wide range of issues, including environmental conservation and enhancement, planning, historic buildings and sites, tourist information and footpath and bridleway management.

If you would like more information please:

write to, or call in at, our offices...

Open Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5.00pm,
Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm

- Yoredale, Bainbridge, Leyburn, North Yorkshire DL8 3EL
- Colvend, Hebden Road, Grassington, Skipton, North Yorkshire BD23 5LB

telephone...

0300 456 0030

email...

info@yorkshiredales.org.uk

or visit...

www.yorkshiredales.org.uk

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority aims to be widely recognised as a centre of expertise and excellence in environmental and conservation policy and practice, and in the quality of the services we deliver and in the quality of the landscape - we welcome your comments and suggestions about our work.