

Interning with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Elizabeth Mayo

BACKGROUND

For the Summer of both 2019 and 2020, I was fortunate enough to intern as a Student Trainee with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a Natural Resource Specialist Position.



Pictured above, is myself and co-worker, Cameron Lewis, posing for a photo submission to the Pittsburgh District main office, in honor of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 245th anniversary of the organizations creation.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers mainly focuses their energy on dams, navigation channels, and harbors. The organization describes their mission as, “Deliver vital public and military engineering services; partnering in peace and war to strengthen our Nation’s security, energize the economy and reduce risks from disasters”.

I found my position within the Corps, by searching the USAJobs site, “park ranger” or “natural resource specialist”, as I found out the position also goes by that title.

ON THE JOB

I filled out a general application for Student Trainee, and was then asked to select out of roughly 20-30 places that I would be willing to work out of. Out of the ten options that I chose, Berlin Lake chose me back.

Berlin Lake is a lake project area of 7,990 acres, that maintains a dam and it’s lake, public hunting areas in coordination with Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and a 300 site campground run directly by USACE.

Our main mission was to monitor lake levels, to prevent flooding, but the most time consuming mission of Berlin Lake was the campground. With a small staff of only 2 permanent rangers and 4 seasonal rangers, we had over 10 volunteers to help maintain the sites. First thing in the morning, we would patrol the campground to check for tags and unwanted visitors. Then, roughly every hour throughout our day, we would patrol the campground.



Pictured: Berlin Lake staff, including the Resource Manager, pictured for National Ranger Day.

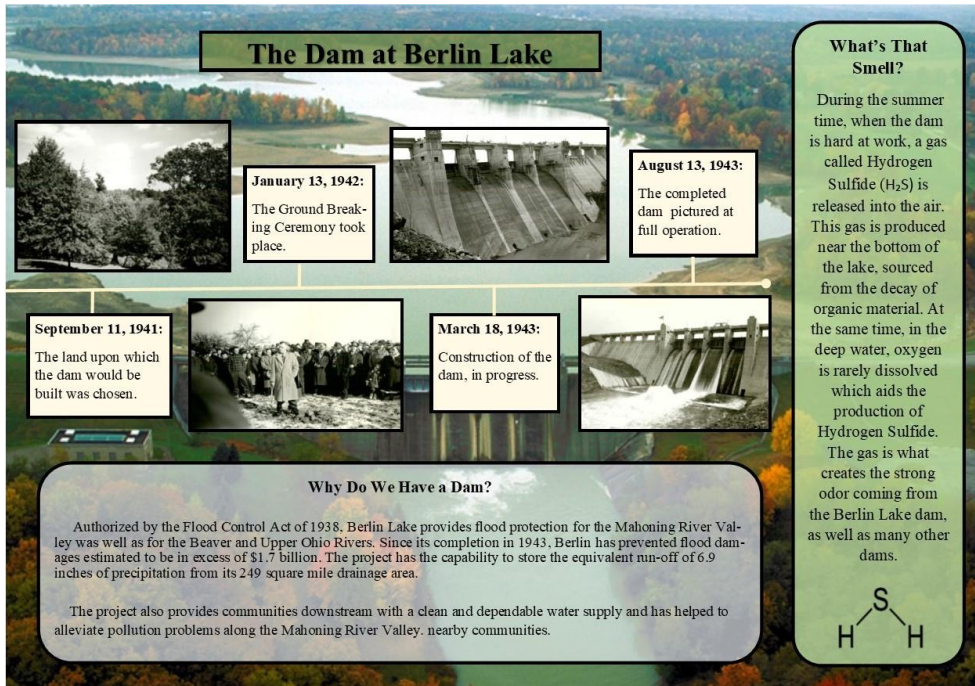
Within the campground, volunteers would do regular cleaning tasks, hand out tags to incoming visitors, and other tasks. Our job was to make sure that all campground rules were being followed. These rules included; only two cars per site, no cars parked in the grass, two dogs per site, dogs on leash, and noise regulation from 10a-6p. I never had to visit a site online for these types of small offenses, we always made sure to have someone with us, just incase. At the very back of our campground was the boat ramp, which saw heavy use on the weekends.

Beyond the campground, we often patrolled the rest of the lake’s project area. Our most popularly visited places included the dam itself, two ODNR boat ramps, an ODNR hunting area, and other roads that align with the lake.

Last summer, we tried to host one to two interpretive events every weekend. This summer, that obviously changed with Covid-19. Instead, I made an interpretive video discussing the types of buoy symbols visible on the lake and in the state of Ohio, and what those symbols mean without being able to read the words along the image.



Pictured: A snap shot of myself during my Buoy interpretive video. This video can be found on the Berlin Lake, US Army Corps of Engineers, Facebook page.



Pictured: The Interpretive board I created to be posted at the Berlin Lake dam. I created this board at the end of the summer, before I left. The sign is currently waiting to be printed and shipped to the site for posting.

REFLECTIONS

This Pathways student trainee position was super beneficial to my career path. I intend to continue my work as a natural resource specialist within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers upon graduation.

I would like to be hired on as a GS-5 and work until I receive my GS-9. I will then use my position to work around the country before I plan to settle in whatever location I deem my favorite.

For anyone else pursuing a career in nature, I would highly encourage them to consider working with the Corps until they are stable in their field/position. Once they have gained experience and quickly advanced, which the Corps is gracious at doing, they can pursue whatever other organization they dreamt of.

The internship paid well and was an excellent learning experience that will take me far on my career path.



Pictured: My co-worker, Cameron Lewis, posing with the water safety banner we had just put up. After this picture, we had to remove the banner because the wind would not give it a break,



Pictured: Myself and permanent ranger, Hannah Jacob, posing in our PPE (proper protective equipment) before we trimmed falling branches off a large tree over the dam day-use parking lot.