



# Experience America's great outdoors

**Volunteer USA is the latest programme from British Universities North America Club, better known to gap year students as BUNAC.**

Traditionally known for giving hundreds and thousands a fun summer working with children on its Summer Camp USA programme, BUNAC has most recently expanded its volunteering options as an enhancement to its programme staple of work and travel opportunities in the USA and Canada. This latest launch sees the organisation back in the all too familiar territory of the USA and is the perfect complement to its existing volunteer placements in South Africa, Ghana, Costa Rica, Peru, Cambodia and China.

On Volunteer USA, independent and adventurous travellers aged 18 or over have a unique opportunity to spend eight, ten or twelve weeks working on a series of challenging outdoor projects in America's spectacular

national parks. Most are in the west coast and include the famous locations of the Grand Canyon, King's Canyon and Yosemite National Park. Participants work as part of a dedicated and enthusiastic team on a range of projects specifically aimed at helping to preserve and maintain these areas of outstanding natural beauty. Typical jobs include trail maintenance, fencing, re-vegetation of native wildlife as well as initiatives to protect local endangered species.

During project-times, volunteers are expected to work long hours often in extreme weather conditions. The standard of camping accommodation is basic but comfortable. Each project typically lasts for four days and time off between projects is provided when most volunteers return to base camp at Flagstaff. For those taking the eight or ten week option,

travel time is also available at the end of the programme which most use as an opportunity to visit Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas and other exciting west coast cities and landmarks before heading home.

As per any BUNAC programme, Volunteer USA operates in conjunction with a reputable partner organisation in America who serves as first point of contact for participants while abroad, to answer queries and provide support. American Conservation Experience (ACE) is a leading conservation corps that recruits volunteers worldwide to help restore America's most stunning yet endangered areas and like BUNAC, a non-profit organisation. Their headquarters are located in Flagstaff, Arizona, which also acts as base camp for volunteers between projects.

Twenty-six year old Andrew Sykes from Huddersfield is one of BUNAC's first ever Volunteer USA participants and signed up to a twelve week placement on the programme as part of an extended career break during the summer.

*"The work - pounding fence posts into the ground along a one mile stretch - is hard work, dusty and hot. It's about 32-35 degrees but we have shade, a luxury compared to some of the other projects. It sounds corny, but the smiles, laughter and teamwork are a shield from the fierce effects of the desert. The camaraderie, the challenge, the sense of achievement when that half mile of fencing finally pounds*

*through the bed rock - this is what really makes the experience so special. 6am wake up calls, breakfast, a bumpy drive and a faultless line of fence posts later, we have to leave early on the final night due to a major leak of the 10,000 water tank. We have ten litres of water left between eleven of us - staying there was simply not an option. Six litres of water is a lot to drink, but this climate is unforgiving and it's a necessity, not a recommendation.*

*40,000 people live in the town of Flag (as it is known locally). Internet access is free for all and it's a good place for ACE volunteers to meet up. Accommodation is split into four houses. I'm in the Apartments - think of student accommodation and you're not far wrong, except with eight different nationalities, 16 people and shared facilities.*

*Flagstaff is a good base to explore - just as many of us have. Eight of us drove north to the Colorado Rockies - mountains instead of desert, kayaks through rapids - for three days, camping 12,000ft up, rising early to catch the rising sun in the east. Living on top of a mountain plateau 7,000ft above sea level and it still being 32 degrees celsius.*

*Camping 90 miles from civilization with only the stars and ten other like-minded volunteers revelling in the isolation of it all. Learning new skills in one of the most awe-inspiring regions in the world and making friends from across the globe at the same time. All this experienced in two weeks. I used to imagine it - now I don't have to."*

The programme cost starts at £250 for a ten or twelve week programme and is payable on application. This cost goes towards: food, accommodation and transport during project times, administration, programme materials, full pre-departure support from BUNAC in the UK and guidance and supervision from BUNAC's US partner, ACE for the duration of the programme. BUNAC's offices in Connecticut and New York (summer only) also provide back-up support, if needed. Flights, insurance, food and accommodation during non-project times are extra. No visa is required and the programme is open year-round to students, 'gappers,' graduates and non-students. BUNAC also offers opportunities to work on American summer camps as well as working/volunteering holidays in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ghana, Peru, Costa Rica, Cambodia and China. Visit [www.bunac.org](http://www.bunac.org) or call (020) 7251 3472 for more information. **For more information and a Volunteer USA Application Pack, please visit: [www.bunac.org/volunteer](http://www.bunac.org/volunteer)**