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# Hayley Jenkins-Jones

## Civil Engineer

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**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning



**Job title:** Civil Engineer

**Organisation:** Canal and River Trust

**Location:** Birmingham, UK

### How did you get to where you are now?

Geography has always been a passion of mine; I was always going to choose geography at GCSE, A Level and university. My love of geography and the outdoors made me want to focus on a career that was not office based. Once I graduated, I successfully obtained a job with Worcestershire Highways, using my geographical skills in many aspects of highway planning and maintenance. I stayed with Highways for 14 years, but whilst working with them I gained a civil engineering qualification. Along with that and my geography degree, I finally landed my dream job with the Canal and River Trust as a Civil Engineer. Geography plays a huge role in my new position on the canals and, whilst working hard for the Trust, I am currently studying for my Masters in Environmental Management with GIS. I love working in the charitable sector and once I have gained my Masters, I wish to become a Chartered Geographer and Chartered Environmentalist.

### Was there anything particularly useful that helped you get into this role?

I volunteered with the Canal and River Trust for five years at weekends whilst employed full time with Worcestershire Highways. I took part in many towpath task forces and volunteered at events and canal clearances. I loved volunteering and truly believe that it helped me gain my position with them.

### What do you do as part of your role?

I am part of the Asset Engineering Team, who are responsible for maintaining 2,000 miles of waterways. The team inspects, reports, and programmes canal maintenance work in order to keep the waterways open for all our customers, from boaters and holidays makers to businesses and walkers.

My role focuses on maintaining the locks and canals of the West Midlands region and is very varied. One day I could be out walking the canal checking for defects, another I could be measuring movement in a tunnel, another dealing with customer enquiries or planning applications and the next I could be out on site dealing with a wall collapse.

### What skills and characteristics do you need for this role, apart from geographical knowledge?

A love of the outdoors helps with this role, as the job requires you to go out on site whatever the weather. A grasp of engineering disciplines is also required as your engineering knowledge is tested daily with various situations. As you are out and about on the canals, you need to be able to communicate well with the public as well as contractors. You need to be friendly and approachable and be enthusiastic in your work as you are promoting the Trust.

**W:** [www.rgs.org/iamageographer](http://www.rgs.org/iamageographer)

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### **How does geography feature in your work/ what difference does it make?**

Geography is everywhere in the trust and it encompasses many environmental challenges that the world is facing today. We have just launched our latest 'Plastics Challenge' project whereby if everyone visited their local canal or river and picked up just one piece of plastic they would be clear within a year. Remember 'life is better by water'.

### **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

I enjoy the freedom my job role gives me - there is so much more to the job than just engineering. Some days I can spend all day outside on the canals talking to our customers, boaters, holidaymakers and our volunteers.

One of the projects I am looking forward to the most is the Trust's involvement with the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games. As my area includes Birmingham City Centre and the surrounding suburbs, I have been asked to help gather information on how the Trust can improve access to their canals in readiness for the games. The canals are the lifeblood of our community and we need to make them accessible for all to enjoy.

### **Where might you be in five years' time?**

In five years' time, I hope to have progressed to Senior Engineer. I want to be a Chartered Geographer and to have started studying for my engineering degree, which I know the Trust will support. The Trust is so supportive of its staff, they want to bring out the best in them and help them on their chosen career path. I have finally found the right company and right career path and geography has given me so many skills to achieve this. Geography can get you anywhere.

### **What advice would you give to someone wanting to go in to this career?**

I would whole-heartedly encourage them. I did not think I would get the job that I am in now, but I really wanted it, so I went for it and my enthusiasm, hardworking attitude and the willingness to learn paid off. I am now in my dream job, focusing on more qualifications and professional registration, not only in the field of

geography and environmental science, but engineering as well.

### **Why did you choose geography? Why should others choose geography?**

I chose geography because I love studying about the world. I am more a physical than human geographer and I am still blown away at the power of our planet, from hurricanes to volcanoes. Geography is a good subject to choose at any level because it has so many interchangeable skills that can be used in any career. I have a geography degree and am studying for a Masters in a geographical related subject, but that did not stop me becoming a civil engineer. To quote the great Michael Palin, 'Geography prepares you for the world of work – geographers, with their skills of analysis are highly employable.'