

Dr Andrew Gregory

Senior Environmental Consultant



Who am I?

I am a geographer and environmental scientist with an interest in all things rivers, rocks and mountains! With some 11 years' experience, I have worked in a range of roles including research and engineering, complex field and office work, and project management.

What do I do at ERM?

I work as a hydrologist and environmental impact assessment (EIA) specialist within the Integrated Water Management Team in ERM's Manchester office. I am involved in a variety of projects encompassing everything from assessing the potential flood risks that could arise from the construction of new railway lines, to understanding how the development of hydro-electric power stations in Africa could affect the local flora and fauna, and how local populations interact with the river as a water supply, fishing resource and broader amenity.

Through projects such as these I have spent time covered in mud on site, given presentations to executives in the chemical industry, and designed schemes to reduce the risk of flooding to hundreds of properties. No two days are the same and a 9 to 5 desk job it certainly isn't!



What was my geography education?

My interest in geography started at a young age as I was always interested in the outdoors. As such I was attracted to the physical side of geography; rivers, volcanos, the water cycle, and understanding why the world looks like it does.

Whilst I knew I wanted to pursue my passion for the earth and how it works, I wasn't sure what career options would be available to me after I left formal education. After A levels I headed west to sunny Aberystwyth University where I did my B.Sc. in Geography and it quickly became apparent that the opportunities available for a Geography graduate stretched far beyond drawing diagrams of oxbow lakes! At university I became interested in glaciers and glaciology. In the era of climate change, the causes and effects of melting glaciers has far reaching implications for our relationship to the environment, from reducing the availability of fresh water in glaciated catchments, to the risk of catastrophic flooding from glacial lakes.

From there I headed north to study for a PhD. in Glacial Geomorphology and Sedimentology at Newcastle University and even further north to conduct my research on the glaciers of Southeast Iceland. One of the things I love about geography is that as much as you can learn in the classroom, getting out there and experiencing it in action is the best way to acquire the skills and expertise you'll need in your career. It is often the transferable skills that you pick up in the field; resilience, critical thinking and questioning of the 'accepted rules' that become the most valuable later on. Spending so much time outdoors, immersed in the subject allowed me to witness processes that had not previously been documented and I had never been taught in the geography classroom.

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How do I use fieldwork in the job that I do now?

The field work I undertake now predominantly involves site visits to survey development areas and map the waterbodies and watercourses that could be affected. It is also essential to get out into the field in order to 'get a feel' for the area. We are very fortunate that there are so many excellent remote sensing resources at our disposal that we can often take for granted the benefits of getting your 'boots on the ground'. Maps are great, it was maps that ignited my interest in the environmental world, but they are no substitute for seeing the world with your eyes.

What inspires me about geography and fieldwork?

I took this photograph whilst standing in a muddy pool in Iceland, if that's not inspirational, I don't know what is!!



What has been the most interesting highlight of my career so far?

There have been many highlights of my geographical career, undertaking fieldwork in the Swiss Alps and Iceland is very high up the list. However, the most interesting was probably travelling to Ghana to give a presentation to representatives of the World Bank about the potential environmental impacts of, and mitigation plans for, the development of a hydro-electric power station. For me, it is only when you balance the needs of the physical environment with those of the local population that you begin to really understand the linkages that geography is all about.

What tip would I give to someone thinking of following a geographical-related career?

Before starting my PhD I wrote to quite a few specialists to offer my time to help with research projects they were working on. Spending a few weeks here and there really opened my eyes to what was out there and helped me decide what it was I wanted to do. Take the time to try new things and gain experience in the areas you are interested in. There is no point striving to work in cold mountain climates if you prefer working in hot desert environments.