

<b>Name</b>	<b>Vicky</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>&lt;20</b>
<b>Degree</b>	<b>Archaeology, Single Subject</b>
<b>Year</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Full-Time/Part-Time</b>	<b>Full-Time</b>
<b>Disability</b>	<b>Visual Impairment, Ataxia</b>
<b>Diagnosis</b>	<b>Over 5 years ago</b>

I have had this condition since I was born, a bizarre combination. I do not think the doctors themselves have got the full diagnosis. I am really short-sighted and have Ataxia and various other things like Photophobia. It makes life quite interesting. It has been a bit of a nightmare in education; it was only at A level that I accepted it, as I went to an RNIB school. I always wanted to do Archaeology, but all the Careers' Advisers I have seen said: 'Oh, do you really want to do that?' because of the visual stuff. Then I went to a specialist Careers' Adviser who said it should not be a problem.

This year will be my third season on the training dig. I worked out at the end of this season I'll have done 4 months digging. I love it: the thought that you might find something really exciting that no one will have seen in nearly 2,000 years. There is also the childlike element of being able to get really filthy. I just find it really interesting and every time I go back I find I learn new stuff. I think I learnt more last year than I did in the first year. It is just really interesting.

There has been a great sense of achievement, especially with planning. Last year I actually managed to plan something. It was not totally on my own, as I was not taking the measurements. Being able to plot all the points on the paper and draw it up was definitely an achievement. Also a local blind/partially sighted group asked me for my input in sorting out a site tour. It was quite interesting. It was the challenge of describing a large site like the training excavation; I cannot even see much of the site myself! It did bring out some very interesting challenges for me. After that, I thought I would like to learn more about presenting Archaeology, not just to the public, but how it is presented to, and how access has changed, for disabled people.

It was good working as part of a team. Most of the time I have been working with someone closely alongside of me, just to give me a hand to get in and out of the trench and stuff like that. Generally, everyone is really helpful, which is good. But I do not really know what everyone else thinks.

There have been some difficulties. In the first year we had to write a diary and an essay about the dig. I wrote 2,000 words on my experiences as a disabled person at the dig. Not exactly a safety audit, but I noted things on the actual digging side of it: tape measures, bits of string and nails; the usual things. Barrow runs, I hate barrow runs. I just cannot walk on them, I have difficulty walking along pavements, I just go around weaving all over the place. Walking along those tiny narrow barrow runs was a nightmare. It would not have been so bad if I had either Ataxia or short-sightedness. The combination makes moving around the site really difficult because I cannot see depth very well. With my Ataxia I do have problems with my balance and, coupled with my sight, it has definitely affected my spatial awareness of the site. With Ataxia you can become slightly less aware of what your limbs are doing and that certainly happens in the middle of barrow runs, which is not good and, of course, there are hundreds of holes and you can twist your ankle at any time. It certainly was very challenging.

It was very good that they let me go in the same area last year. I am going in the same area this year because, although it changes quite rapidly, I do know my way around. That has been really helpful. I do not think it would have been so easy if I had been moved over to other areas as I have never actually been over there on site. It would be learning a whole new geography and landscape.

My biggest frustration, especially in the first year, was the fact that I did have real difficulty seeing contexts. There was lots of yellow clay going onto silt, which was not difficult, but taking off silt onto another layer of silt! I did get very frustrated at that and especially my speed in sorting through the spoil. I was paranoid that with my sight problems I'd end up throwing away some vital clue to dating the entire area. I did tend to go a bit slower than other people would. The first year I was definitely frustrated that I could not do any planning. I think we must have looked at every single drawing board to see which one had the darkest lines on. But even then, it was a nightmare. Even last year I had to take my glasses off and press my nose against the paper to actually see the lines.

I have not done all of the jobs on the training dig. Apart from a couple of tours of duty at washing, I was not put to marking finds. I have not done that since I did some work experience in Year 12 at school. I would have to get used to that again if I am asked to do it. I did not really have much to do with finds. I did do environmental work one afternoon, which was fine, and I did most of the rotas on the site. However, I am guessing it must have been on purpose that they left my name off all of

the campsite rotas, which I kept very quiet about. I do not think anyone would have approved of me saying: 'I don't have to clean the Portaloo's'.

It is difficult to know how many adjustments were made for me; I do not know how much a problem I was. I was mentored by a 'buddy'. I do remember specifically one time they had just cleared the area for photos. When they put the barrow runs back they spent about 15 minutes organising it to make it easier for me. Generally, I did not get the impression that huge things were being done. They did put luminous caps on the pegs running down the middle of the baulk. Whether that was for my benefit, or the general benefit of all, I am not sure.

On the social side of things I didn't get involved as much as I could have done. The biggest problem is when it starts to get anywhere near dark. The light just drains out of everything and I am just hopeless in that situation. I did tend to stay out of the marquee, and there was no way I was going to go out and play 'ultimate frisbee' at night, because that was just dangerous. I did go to the pub sometimes, but even then walking back with good torches and miners' lamps was quite difficult. I think it was my past experience of feeling totally safe in social situations that probably meant that I did not go as much as I would have liked to.

My tactile skills have been a help to some extent. I think knowing what pottery feels like certainly helps when you find some bit in the ground that looks like a bit of stone. The tactile element has definitely helped me. That is certainly how I did most of my sorting through spoil. I picked up the shovel and went through the whole lot just feeling for things. I know if I had just looked I would probably have missed things.