

I had the opportunity to join Hometree Charity during my internship for my study program of International Forest Ecosystem Management (IFEM B. Sc.) in Germany at the University for Sustainable Development Eberswalde (HNEE). I was looking to work with people involving landowners, community, and culture in the field of nature conservation. Volunteering and working in this kind of environment encouraged me to get a second degree with an emphasis on nature conservation and education.

The stereotypical postcard picture when I was thinking of Ireland were sheep grazing on lush, green pastures next to a golf club. But I learned that Ireland has a strong cultural connection with woodlands and wanted to follow that path. Hometree's blog is an inspiring read and introduction to their work. Education, workshops, fundraising, policy, tree planting, summer schools, continuous cover forestry? They are doing it all. Their active solution finding approach together with landowners, mainly farmers and community caught my interest. I often imagine what we can achieve strengthened by community. It is so powerful. Would you plant 100.000 trees on your own or rather with a bunch of helping hands and shovels?

It took a nine-and-a-half-minute-meeting with Ray, Matt and Mitch and I was ready to get my wellies, jump into my car and head to Ennistimon. But I had to wait until November. After four days through Germany, France, and Ireland the first person I met was Finnian who works at the tree nursery. Cupper, introduction, and we headed straight down to the field. We wrestled with the approximately 0,5-acre big cover (maybe slightly exaggerated) to uncover a patch for more planting beds for seedlings. It felt good after only having to deal with the steering wheel for so long. I had arrived at a hands-on place and this should be the main work field for my next two months.

Have you heard of Hometree's inspiring Wild Atlantic Rainforest project? It pursues to reestablish native temperate woodlands along Ireland's West Coast and as you can imagine involves a lot of tree-planting. Mitch (Nursery and Headquarters Manager), Finnian (Nursery Assistant) and I (Intern) would meet in the morning for a hot brew to discuss tasks for the day and week to ensure that the charity is shovel-ready once the planting season starts. Work at the tree nursery would involve a lot of manual work in the elements. Shoveling, wheelbarrow-filling, tree-cutting, seed propagation, planting, tea drinking, bird watching, quad driving, shoveling, soil preparation, shoveling, bed preparation, stock counting, and event preparation for volunteer days. Hometree hosts a Nursery and Maintenance Day every 1st and 3rd Saturday where neighbors and volunteers from all over Ireland join, lend helping hands, have fun, tea, coffee and snacks. So many great people come together. I know it's on your list and it's absolutely worth to check it out! Every 1st and 3rd Saturday!

I was also able to dive into the office where the craic is good and the fire blazing. I designed a survey helping to further evolve Hometree's annual Summer School and during the busy Christmas season helped Cia (Fundraising Coordinator and Manager's Assistant) with fundraising and we made sure to send out every single tree planting certificate, calendar, T-Shirt, hat and book hand signed and in time to so many generous people who donated.

As another internship was canceled, I was lucky to have found this opportunity with Hometree last minute. There was not much time to discuss in advance, to design and establish a sort of detailed work list or to find a project to get involved. Read about their wonderful work to get inspired and I strongly suggest that you take some time to find a project together that you can follow through during your internship.

The nursery and office are located at the same site near Ennistimon a quite remote area in West Clare with no public transport and I was lucky to have come by car. This gave me the opportunity to explore many natural sites and community events that the surrounding area of Clare had to offer. The wheels gave me a fair amount of independence. I urge you to have that in mind. The

coast of West Clare is great for surfing, hiking and has many other activities but not so much in winter though. I had a lot of time for reading and reflecting and felt lonely at some times. I was at an unknown place with unknown people. I could not expect that they knew what was going in my head, yet somehow, I found myself thinking that they had to. This led to disappointment and sometimes sadness. I was living on the site and had to close the office, shipping container, kitchen and gates almost 90% of the time. One of the most challenging part for me was the communication of my feelings, observations and needs. This was not easy for me personally but is a skill that I had to improve. Once I addressed my thoughts to the right person, I would always find an understanding and empathic conversation. Whenever I asked Mitch, Ray and especially Matt for their time they always found 10, 20 or 60 minutes and I truly appreciated this – and I still do. Change needs time and sometimes consistent reminders, and this helped to work out boundaries to separate work and free time. I consider this to be an important framework for future interns.

All staff members are ambitiously working to reach Hometree's goals to provide education to the community, afforestation, and conservation. These ambitions of this young charity come with a steep learning curve for everyone involved. Both Hometree and I jumped into the deep together. Looking back at my time with Finnian, Mitch, Cia, Matt, Ray, Baiba and Sarah I appreciate the things I was able to learn, to give and take with me. During my time at the West Coast, I realized once again that communication and connection is vital. Hometree is a place with big hearted and hardworking people. And the fun is still there. To put it in Ray's words "I have a feeling I will see you again." Thank you for giving me that opportunity.