

First-Time Scrumper at Saltram Orchard - Lily Marissa Gonzalez

The grass was polka-dotted with irregular orbs, blotched in opaque red, bright green and mellow yellow. Scrumperers, some seemingly coordinating in either red or green t-shirts, hunched under the apple trees, dutifully collecting the fruit. Others vigorously shook branches to unleash a crispy hail storm, often receiving self-inflicted blows to the head and sometimes delivering them to inattentive parties. Despite keeping well away, I too got to experience my own Newton moment. Perhaps a scrumping equivalent to "*Timber!*" is required.

Up and down the path between the trees and the truck we went, lugging large sacks brimming with juicy, late-September gifts. The air was ripe with collaboration, the sound of mouths munching on crisp apples, and chatter about the weather: Sunny, despite a rainy forecast.

The crowd was made up of youth groups, rangers, groundskeepers and volunteers, all of varying ages and levels of involvement with the site. I had a chat with Dot, a trainee ranger, whilst we stuffed our apple sacks. She cycles, gets a ferry, and cycles again every day from Cornwall. And having first lived in London and then moved to a small town, she has a great appreciation for the outdoors and rural life.

Post-scrumping and in the queue for a barbecued sausage, I spoke to the keenest tree shaker. He was an older gent in red, who told me that he had been volunteering at Saltram once a week since 1996. After this and many other chats, our picnic was drawn to a natural end by the promised rain, and we all walked back up the path to the entrance.

Scrumpping at Saltram was joyful, and a great opportunity to meet a diverse group of people with one thing in common: a love for the outdoors and for a satisfying day's work within it. Ultimately, it was a day of encounters: with friendly strangers, long-lost schoolmates, and nature, sometimes in the form of a falling apple to the head.

Word count: 325