

# All in a Day's Work

## Working at Mizen Head Signal Station

### PROFILE

Mizen Head Signal Station is a visitor centre at Mizen Head, Ireland's most south-westerly point. It is where the waves of the Atlantic hit the land after 3000 miles of ocean. In gales, rain, fog or sun it is always different.



Mizen Head Signal Station  
Mizen Head, Co. Cork.

Images courtesy of Mizen Head Signal Station



The bridge to the  
Signal Station.



A model of  
the Fastnet  
Lighthouse.

### Where do you work?

I am at UCC in the second year of a B.Sc course in Business Studies. Every year since I was in Transition year in Schull Community College, I have spent my summer vacations working at Mizen Head Signal Station. We live on a farm on the Mizen Peninsula so it has been a handy job, not too far away from home, to help me pay for books, uniform and, later on, my car insurance! A lot of young people have jobs at the Mizen in the summer. It is a very exciting place to be.

### Can you describe the centre and signal station?

The visitor centre is at the top of the cliffs with a café, a gift shop and some displays about the Fastnet Rock, a famous lighthouse in the sea near the Mizen. From the centre, the visitors go along and down a steep path towards the Bridge, which is needed because Mizen Head Signal Station is on an island. There are steep paths up and down the cliffs and a sea arch. On the other side of the Bridge, the path goes up to the Signal Station at the very end. This fog signal station was like a lighthouse, but instead of a warning light to keep ships off the rocks, the fog signal gave a loud bang

every two minutes while it was foggy. This was a hard job. For each bang they tied a stick of explosive to a device and set it off. Now there is no need for the Irish Lights Keeper to man the station and make a warning bang. With modern GPS Sat Nav, ship captains know exactly where they are, even in fog. This is why there is now a visitor centre at Mizen Head.

### What's your work day like?

My job at Mizen Head is very varied. The visitor centre opens at 10am and we have to make sure everything is clean, tidy and working before the visitors come in. Usually I will go down to the Signal Station to tell people about life at the Station when it was open. The Keepers were here from 1910-1993; then the Station went automatic and the information that had been gathered by the Keepers was now computerised and sent up to Dublin. Mizen Tourism Co-operative took the Bridge and the buildings over to open them to the public. I have to know about the history of the Station and the Irish Lights, as well as local information and anything a visitor might ask. It is very interesting

meeting people from all over the world. Some days I work in the café, washing up or serving at table. Or another day I work in the gift shop and ticket office. In between we all have to go on patrol round the paths up and down the cliffs to make sure all our visitors are safe. The Mizen closes at 6pm in the summer and we have to make sure that everyone has come out before the gate on the Bridge is locked for the night. Each week the manager makes a rota that tells all the employees what their job will be on every day that week. I usually get five days' work a week.

### What are the best and worst parts of your job?

The best thing about the job is seeing the seal families under the Bridge and maybe a whale in the ocean when I am on the way to work in the Keeper's Quarters. The worst thing is when there is a howling gale and we have to close the Bridge for safety. The weather can change very suddenly. Sometimes visitors are very upset after travelling so far to go across the Bridge, but their safety is our most important consideration.

### Do you work alone or as part of a team?

I am part of a great team and it is very satisfying to see how delighted our visitors are with their visit. It is quite hard to get a job at the Mizen as staff tend to come back every year. But this will be my last year. Next year I hope to go to America for the summer, so I am going to save as much money as I can this year. Anyway, if you are interested, you can always give it a try.

### What advice would you give to someone wanting to do your job?

In my life I know that my experience at Mizen Head will stand me in great stead. One thing that I have learned is that there's always a job to be done. If you get a job, don't keep asking what will I do next. Look around and find something that needs doing, even if it is just to sweep the floor. You will get a name as a self-starter, someone who can see what the job is and get on with it without being told. In life that will take you far. If you would like to know more about Mizen Head Signal Station and come to visit look at [www.mizenhead.ie](http://www.mizenhead.ie)