

“This job is an immense privilege”

→ DR ALICE PAINE is a palaeoclimatology and volcanology postdoctoral researcher at Universität Basel, Switzerland, and a 2026 recipient of the President's Award

What are you currently working on?

I am project manager on the Swiss National Science Foundation-funded project “Holocene hydroclimate, drought dynamics and environmental change recorded in multiple archives from SW Asia (MITRA)”. Our aim is to understand how the climate of southwest Asia has changed over the past 10,000 years, and what the main drivers of these changes are, using the geochemistry of stalagmites from caves across Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Alongside this, I have ongoing collaborations with colleagues across the world investigating how volcanoes have shaped the climate system throughout geological time.

What's a typical day for you?

When in the department, the structure of my day depends a lot on my current focus: it could be conducting sample drilling or analyses and processing data, while other days I will have periods where my sole aim is writing manuscripts or creating figures in two-hour deep work blocks. I try to protect my writing time as much as possible because it really helps me get (and stay!) in a flow.

What's your favourite thing about your work?

For me, this job is an immense privilege. It is fascinating to constantly search for new information about our world and be able to see what it may have looked like deep into the past. There are few feelings quite



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What advice would you give to someone hoping to work in your field?

Surround yourself with a team of people who support you but also challenge you; I have several mentors at different career stages and with different personalities and viewpoints. Having a support system like this helps you to navigate the hard times, while also pushing you to keep your standards high and mind open.

as rewarding as finding something new, or seeing students make their own discoveries, nail a technique or skill, or simply just fall in love with their research. Also, science has given me opportunities to meet some truly remarkable people and visit unbelievable places, both of which I have never taken for granted.

Have you encountered any challenges along the way?

It is very easy to fall into the trap of constant comparison and overwork, and I would be lying if I said I still don't push myself too far in pursuit of a goal sometimes. After all, it is easier to work more when you love what you're doing! So, for me, learning to carve out time for stillness and reflection has been a big help. As someone far wiser than me once said: “You can't see your reflection in boiling water”; I use this as a reminder that the best ideas can only come when you are in a headspace that allows them to appear. 🧠