SKILLS FOR THE FIELD / INTRODUCTION TO FIELDWORK

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Lecture 2

Skanda Vale

- 'The official name for the community at Skanda Vale is "The Community of the Many Names of God" (henceforth "the Community"). The Community's emblem carries symbols from a number of different religious traditions and includes the Hindu symbol "om," the Muslim crescent and star, the Christian cross, the Buddhist wheel, and the Zoroastrian fire symbol' (Warrier 2010: 261).
- 'The vast majority of monks and nuns forming the Community are white Europeans from Christian or secular backgrounds. These individuals, when entering monastic life, undergo not the Hindu renunciatory ritual but instead take Franciscan vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty. They are attired in robes which bear some similarity to the habit of Franciscan monks' (2010: 261).
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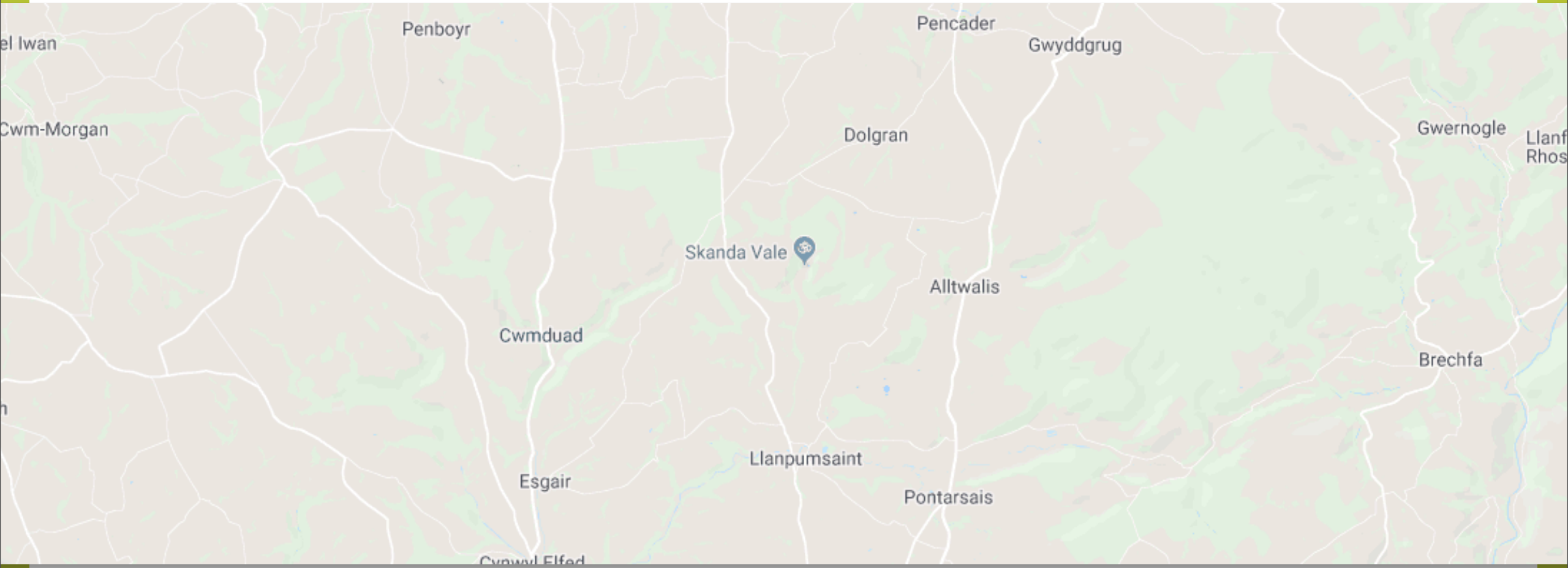
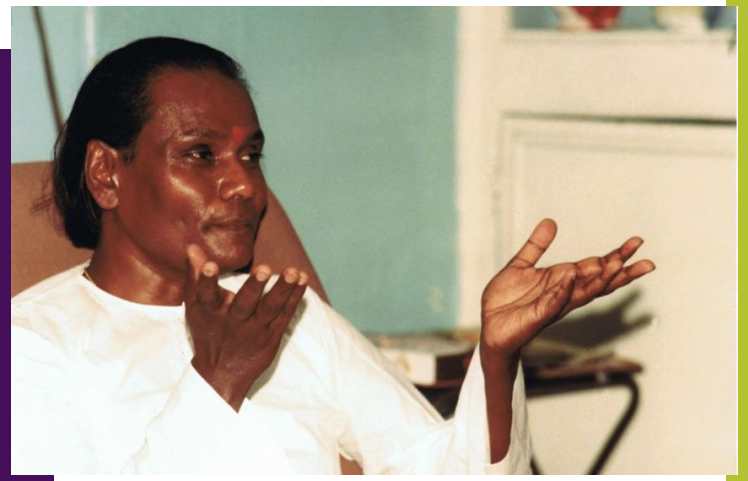
Skanda Vale Location (40 mins from Lampeter



Skanda Vale Check List



Skanda Vale will be wet, cold, and probably damp.

You NEED to bring /wear warm clothes, i.e. jumpers, gloves, hats

Some of the rituals take place outside

We are likely to be working outside

We are in Wales

Ideally bring waterproof trousers and sturdy shoes

You also need to bring bedding (duvet/sleeping bag and pillows/blankets etc)

Reflexive Journal

- What is 'reflexivity'?
- Why is reflexivity important?
- What is your 'subject position'?

Reflexivity

- Reflexivity encourages the researcher to reveal their 'own experiences, values, and positions of privilege in various hierarchies have influenced their research interests'
- And 'the way they choose to do their research [including] the ways they choose to represent their research findings' (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001: 325).
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The Reflexive Journal

- Try to capture a 'sense of place' and demonstrate how you have fully understood the importance of making visible the '…various choices and decisions researchers undertake during the process of researching" (Muck & Breuer 2003: 3)

The 'subject position'

- Indicate to your reader your 'assumptions' and 'preferences'
- How have these shaped your project, choices, criticisms etc
- Reveal to your reader how your emotions, opinions and attitudes have informed your approach
- After your fieldwork, reflect on whether your encounters and experiences at Skanda Vale changed or altered your perspective.

What do you bring with you?

- "How does you relationship and 'the broader social context affect the participants, the interview process, and the project outcomes?" (Heyl 2007: 370)

Consider

- To what end does the ethnographer collect information? (Spradely 1979: 10)

Reflexive Journal

- Support your arguments with references to wider literature
- Anthropological methods should be cited
- Links to ethnographic works will achieve higher marks

Researching as an Undergraduate

- It is your responsibility to direct your own research
- This means you need to either go to the library or use the online library catalogue (for example)
- Find relevant sources for your research
- For this course: you should be reading 2+ articles/chapters a week
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Researching is enjoyable…

- You choose who you agree and disagree with
- You explain why you think this way
- You show your reader why you think this way
- … your opinion matters.

I challenge you…

- To find two anthropological source that touch on each of the following themes:
  - 'reflexivity'
  - 'ethnography'
  - 'participant observation'
  - 'field'
  - 'ethics'
- Take note of the bibliographic references
- Bring to the next class
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Bibliographic references (examples)

- Davies, C. 2002. 'Reflexive Ethnography: A guide to researching selves and others'. Routledge: London.
- Harrison, J., MacGibbon, L., and Morton, M. 2001. 'Regimes of trustworthiness in qualitative research: The rigors of reciprocity'. Qualitative Inquiry, 7(3), 323-345.
- Mruck, K. & Breuer, F. 2003. 'Subjectivity and reflexivity in qualitative research- The FQS issues'. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung, 4(2).

Participant Observation

- Ethnographic research emerges from a series of encounters or participations
- Often these encounters take place in new and unfamiliar places with 'other's' and these experiences are negotiated by the anthropologist
- During paticipant-observation the anthropologist pays close attention to the life and experiences around them
- They often partake in these lives and experiences to gain an understanding of different emotional worlds
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Participant Observation

- Anthropologists are interested in 'doings'
- Those unconscious acts or practises that are not necessarily (and sometimes intentionally) articulated

Participant Observation

- As anthropologists we participate in the creation of knowledge
- By working with people
- Ethnography is about 'doing' rather than about 'facts'. (DeLyser, Herbert, Aitken, Crang, McDowell, 2009)

Anthropologists are ethically responsible

- Anthropologists represent the lives of others
- What and how we write can have a big impact on our informants and their communities
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Ethical considerations

- As researchers we may find ourselves in a position of privilege
- Especially due to our role as the researcher in relation to the researched
- We must be weary of creating uneven power relationships
- Be mindful of 'academic voyeurism' and 'objectification'
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Ethnographic research can be time-intensive

- Ethnographic research allows us to consider complex questions
- Questions that can be difficult to research and difficult to represent
- Language may not answer these questions, participation (that is to say 'encounters' with 'others') might
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Translation

- "Every ethnographic description is a translation" (Spradley 1979)
- "Work with informants to produce a cultural description" (Spradley 1979: 25)
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