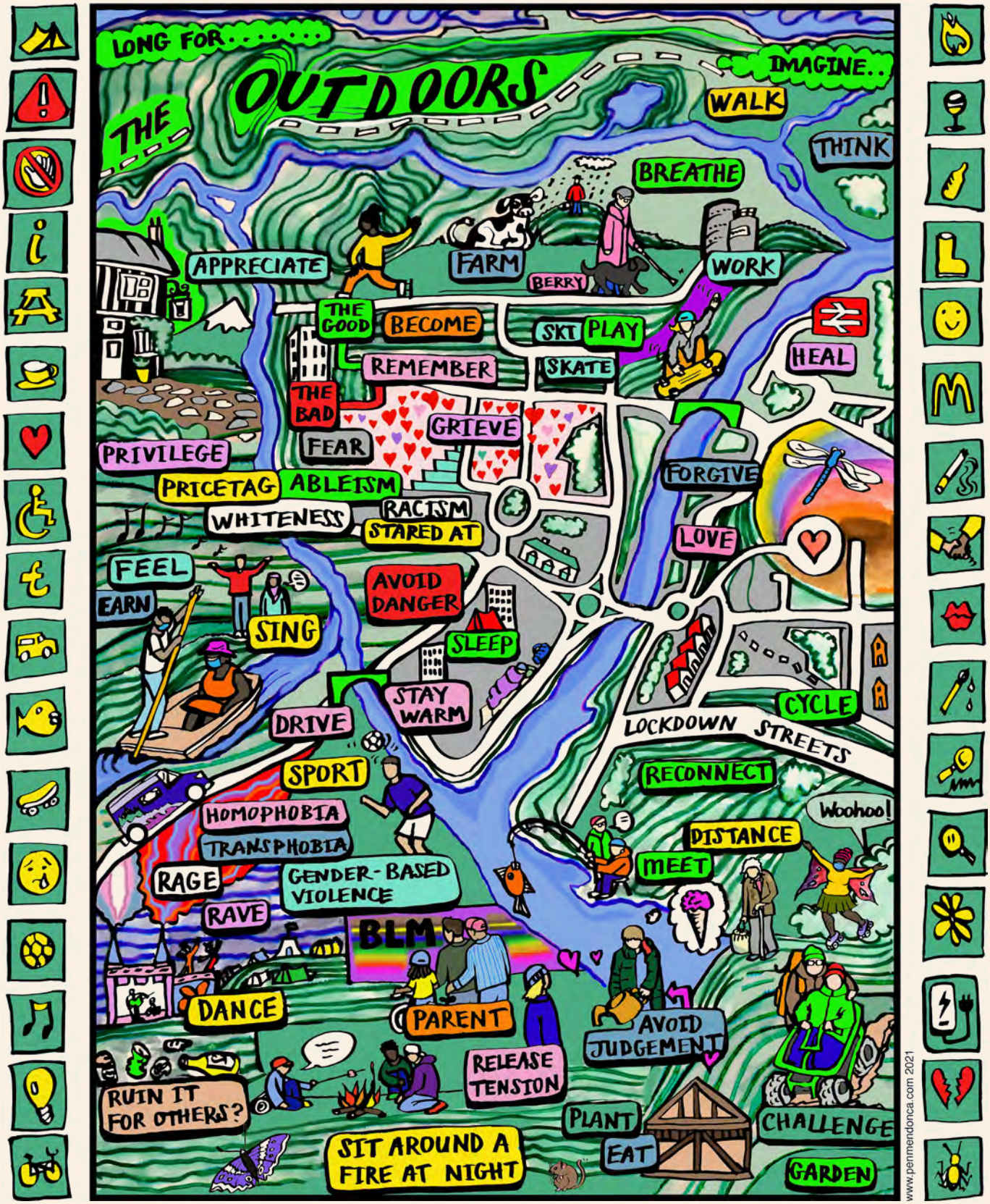

Outside Voices

An anthology of lived experience

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"With great power comes great responsibility"

YHA has great power. A phenomenal supporter base. A rich history of public good. And unique assets — special buildings in incredible places. We hold these assets in trust for the whole population. And access to them is at the core of our charitable purpose. We have a responsibility to help all. And by all, really mean all.

To do so, we must do more than simply open the door. It is not enough to wait for people to come to us. Because crossing the threshold is easier for some and more difficult for others.

From the personal stories you will read in this anthology, it is clear that people do not always feel equally comfortable or welcome or safe in outdoor space. Many of these stories are from people who are already users or members of YHA. Others are new to us. All have something to tell us on how the outdoors can be exclusive.

So, we must ask what the challenges are and where the barriers lie. Only by centring lived experiences, by amplifying these voices, can we truly understand and be a force for change.

And we do this in the context of tragedy and injustice, of protest and polarisation nationally and internationally. Following the events of the last year, there is a great temptation to respond immediately. But we seek genuine progress, not performative bland brand statements.

The charity sector can place too much focus on statistics and scale. Forgetting the human story, the individual experience. This project is about opening our ears to messages that might be hard to hear. And pushing for new ways to access ideas — through songs, poetry, art and images.

Stories are powerful things. I use my platform to share my story. Because when I talk about my challenges, it makes it easier for people to share theirs.

But also because when I share my passion for the outdoors, I hope it inspires others to pursue their passions too. And the generous stories that follow share a love and enthusiasm for the outdoors that we can all learn from.

This project has made me think even more about the potency and value of authentic voice. YHA has a corporate identity but a kaleidoscope of personal identities too. How do we use both?

I opened with a Marvel quote. A proverb made famous by Spider-Man. I didn't begin with a headline statistic or learned excerpt from an environmentalist. I shared something that Marvel-geek-me loves. How can we better connect the personal, the political and the organisational?

Most of all, for me, a large part of what makes this project so vitally important is that if you cannot see it, you cannot be it. I was one of those kids in the Moulsecoomb Project (page 46). I never dreamed of working for a charity. Didn't know it was an option. Let alone that there were opportunities to work in the outdoors or in travel and adventure. A series of events led me here. But it shouldn't be left to chance. If, by sharing more stories and lifting up more voices, it means one day, one of those kids might be our future CEO, then we will have used our power with great responsibility.

Anita Kerwin-Nye
YHA's Executive Director of Strategy & Engagement

About the project

The inspiration for Outside Voices came from the poem What Outdoorsy Means & For Whom (p.8). It provides a space to share the stories of those who are not well seen, heard or represented in the outdoor sector, and to inspire others to do the same.

Contributions come from YHA users and members, from our community consultants' networks, and through connections made as the project developed. Many people were enthusiastic to support the project by sharing their own lived experiences to effect change.

This is just the beginning and the stories just some of many. We hope readers will enjoy the work as part of a journey to grow their understanding, gain new perspectives, and perhaps even share their own stories.

Methodology

Community consultants led the collection of content, deliberately choosing a range of ways to reflect stories back. Some of the content is brand new, collected through interviews, written narratives, poetry, and cartoon graphic. Some of the contributions are the existing work of individuals or organisations.

Our priority throughout has been for contributors to share their stories in ways that feel authentic and honest to them. The majority of new stories were collected via video call due to the limitations of COVID-19. To reduce barriers to participation, some voices were gathered by others on our behalf and shared as voice recordings or transcripts.

Allowing all interpretations of 'outdoors' was of utmost importance to this work, and we kept parameters extremely broad – asking people to share their experiences of outdoor spaces as a starting point for conversations that twisted, turned, and explored to bring the rich tapestry of perspectives you can find here.

Our thanks go to the contributors who worked directly with YHA to shape the funding bid that supported this work. All community contributors were paid as staff for their involvement to cover any costs incurred and to reimburse them for their time and expertise, without which Outside Voices would not exist.

We are honoured that Dr Pen Mendonça brought her graphic cartoon facilitation expertise to the project.

Pen Mendonça

Dr Penelope Mendonça has been an independent graphic facilitator and cartoonist within the UK public and voluntary sectors for 20 years. Prior to this she worked in social care and advocacy. She is known for her work highlighting inequalities, community strengths and voices.

Pen practices and writes about values-based cartooning, a method for engagement, coproduction, and visual/textual representation. She draws on her mixed heritage, mental health and sense of humour in order to depict the extraordinary courage, creativity and colour within our rich and diverse world.

For Outside Voices, Pen graphically facilitated a number of interviews online, producing visuals in real time, then brought key themes together for the cover image. Where participants wanted to remain anonymous, she developed fictional characters in order to bring their ideas to life. We have hosted these in an online gallery for a better user experience. So, wherever you see cartoon Pen in this book, click the link.

For the full gallery and all additional resources, please visit livemore.yha.org.uk/outside-voices

www.penmendonca.com

What Outdoorsy Means & For Whom

Sherri Spelic
Sherri Spelic is an educator, author, workshop designer and facilitator, avid reader and writer at home on the edge of the Alps. Editor of Identity, Education and Power. She/her/hers.
@edifiedlistener

Not everyone who spends time outdoors can be outdoorsy.
Outdoorsy qualifies and codifies belonging:
read privilege
read price tag
read middle class and up
read whiteness
read suburbia
No one calls the homeless outdoorsy
or migrant farm workers outdoorsy.
Outdoorsy is a fashion line,
Outdoorsy completes a dating profile;
Hot or not, it means what it means.
I love the outdoors and I am not outdoorsy.

The poem was first published on www.edifiedlistener.blog as part of a the 2020 #31DaysIBPOC challenge.

For more of Sherri's #31DaysIBPOC writing see www.edifiedlistener.blog/2020/05/28/black-and-outdoors-at-a-time-like-this

Pen's graphic

Check out Pen's illustration

A family explore London through lockdown

Daniel lives in South East London with his partner Evan. Their son is six years old and is adopted. His nom de guerre/nom de social media is 'the Boy'.

Their world shrunk as the lockdown restrictions were announced in March 2020. Since then they have found much joy and freedom on their allotment and on weekly bike rides exploring London.

Our outdoor space: the allotment

"The act of growing provided us with precious hope against a background of fear and anxiety. The routine of our daily visits to feed the hens, plant, and harvest have given the Boy the predictable routine that he craves as an adopted child (and soothed me too!). The outdoor space, although intended for growing food, also gave us space for fire making, den building, mud play, outdoor cooking, and clay making. Our conversations over allotment fences became a tonic and in the absence of our usual friends and family we befriended the allotment bats, frogs, slow worms, foxes, and lizards."

@DanielHugill

"As supermarket shelves emptied and food shortages seemed a real possibility, we turned to the allotment primarily as a source of vegetables and eggs from our hens. As the weeks passed though it became much more to us. Here we escaped the home schooling and the monotony of shrunken lives. Our lives fell into step with the seasons and nature. On our daily visits we looked forward to sprouting seeds, ripening harvests, and allotment-sourced lunches."

"We have always valued our little bit of outdoors at the allotment, but it is now deeply treasured by us all."

Our doorstep outdoor adventures: cycling in London

"On our first long cycle we saw the River Thames for the first time in three months and it represented freedom and marked the beginning of many adventures. We have cycled to enjoy many London parks, to paddle in streams, to play and beachcomb on Thames beaches, and have fed kilos of oats to waterfowl."

"The absence of traffic combined with ever improving cycle infrastructure across the city have opened up the city in a radical way. With some barriers to safe cycling removed it is possible to enjoy cycling with a young child on London's roads. We have loved seeing other children cycling past us around central London but they are not yet a common sight."

"As a family with two dads and a mixed-race son we have long found the outdoor space of London to be a place of safety and acceptance. We have loved exploring London's parks, neighbourhoods, playgrounds, rivers, and canals. These have all been spaces where we feel relaxed and able to enjoy the outdoors without a niggling worry about judgement and exclusion. But lockdown arrived and fences went up around our favourite playgrounds and restrictions pushed us off public transport and we were unable to access our usual destinations. And the media embarked on a campaign to shame those walking around London parks. The usual outlets for the Boy's energy and emotions like swimming, football, gymnastics, and dance disappeared overnight along with their regulating effects. Like so many we became confined to our neighbourhood and just as this was becoming claustrophobic the Boy learnt to ride his bike. His newfound ability to cycle opened up a world of adventure and outdoor joy."

"Our cycles have renewed my sense of place in London and I hope it has fostered in the Boy a sense that this city belongs to him and is his to explore."

"Our urban outdoor adventures have allowed us to regulate emotions arising from usual everyday life (in the midst of a pandemic), burn off pent-up energy, discover our place in the city, and experience the diversity and beauty of urban nature and landscapes."

The Outside Project

www.lgbtiqoutside.org

We are LGBTIQ+ colleagues, friends and activists who work in the homeless sector and have lived experience of homelessness and the unique, complex issues our community face.

We volunteered to launch the UK's first LGBTIQ+ crisis/homeless shelter and community centre. We launched publicly at London Pride 2017, campaigning alongside the passionate and talented LGBTIQ+ community of activists and artists. These are the perspectives of some of our community members.

Defining outdoor spaces

"When you're at home some people feel safe and they define that as their safety blanket or coping mechanisms but I know for me I identify as a lesbian I don't look like a stereotypical lesbian so for me I feel like it is safer to go out and about and not have to worry about where I'm going. I don't have to be as wary of my space when I'm out."

"Places which are outdoors which are not enclosed or enclosed partially when there's freedom of moving in and out. Access to fresh air and there are birds and bees and little other creatures walking around. They can be parks, or water reservoirs, or cafés. It's all about reclaiming outdoor spaces, they're always changing, they never stay the same."

"Outdoor spaces for me in terms of that can sometimes feel unsafe. I'm transgender. I've always been at risk of people giving me weird stares. And people looking at me. Men approaching me on the street. People saying stuff to me. Sometimes now that I think about it outdoor spaces can seem very dangerous to me. And sometimes if I am going to go outdoors I think about where I'm going to go and the area so like some spaces I deem as more safe than others."

A typical outdoorsy person

"I cycle everywhere but would never call myself outdoorsy."

"People who like to party too. Is that outdoorsy? Raves. Festivals. I miss them."

"There are people living on the street... does that class as outdoorsy?"

"An outdoorsy person I would describe as very extroverted. Someone who doesn't have a lot of self-esteem issues and they feel comfortable being out in the public and out around other people. And they enjoy it. It's an enjoyable experience for them to be outside."

"An outdoorsy person wears certain clothes. They wear outdoorsy clothes. And they wear outdoorsy shoes. I think a person who's outdoorsy likes to... they're fit. So they like to be fit. They enjoy fresh air. And they must like animals and bugs and all that stuff. Because there is no way of not eating a bug when you're running through a park. I would assume that their mental health would be a little bit better."

"Do you think that a homeless person considers themselves an outdoorsy person? They might enjoy being outside, but not living outdoors."

Lived experiences of outside spaces

"The outdoor spaces I feel like were good when Covid came because it's the one space you could still meet people and you could still go to a restaurant, but I feel like because right now because of Tier 5 that's been ruined. Outdoor spaces were a haven when Covid did come but now you can't even sit outside a restaurant and meet people."

"Covid has posed extra challenges for people that are homeless or living rough or sleeping rough. As before they could go to a McDonald's and charge their phone. Like when I came to the UK I never slept on the street but I have stayed overnight on the street for a day or two but I never slept because I was too scared. When I didn't have any other place to stay, it wasn't too often thank god, but I would walk around a lot and see if somewhere was open so I could just sit there. I had money to buy food but I didn't have money for shelter or somewhere to stay. So all I wanted was to go in somewhere to sit down for a couple of hours and use my phone. And you can't even do that anymore. Now if you need to charge your phone, well there is those little BT things, but they're not everywhere and I feel Covid has kind of pushed homeless people even more outdoors because now they can't even just maybe if they want to go to like a café or something to sit down for a couple of hours so they don't feel as cold, and it's so cold outside, and they can't do that so there's not lots of, they've kind of been pushed outdoors, there's not a lot of spaces where they can just go to relax and not think about their situation."

"When I was a kid I loved spending time outdoors. I used to spend my whole summer in my Grandmas estate where there was a massive garden with an orchard and apple trees and berry bushes and plums. And some of the poultry would fly over from the neighbours so that was nice. So lots and lots of nature. It was about 10 miles from my home town. There was like a feeling of nature there. We only had cold water and no electricity. It was the best place on Earth as a kid. So I miss that. I miss the innocence of enjoying the outdoor spaces. I think, when you grow as an adult, you kind of put boundaries... preventative... you don't do much crazy stuff. 'You cannot do this here'. But parks or places outdoors where we should just — maybe not run naked — but at least, like, don't be so constipated. Come on! It's outdoors! So I think I would love to be able to experience outdoors as a kid again. I think it's easier in the countryside than in the city. Because in the city someone will always see you."

What do outdoor spaces mean to you?

"Right now I think they mean that I still have a place to go and meet my friends. It might not be under the best circumstances, but I feel like in the last couple of months I've appreciated outdoor spaces more. I start to, when I do go out for a walk I start to take in the beauty of things more. Even like just looking at nice buildings, or nice lights, or a nice park because I would never have noticed those things before but as you can't go to meet your friends in like a public space like a shopping centre any more or anything like that or go to a café or restaurant you have to kind of stay outside, go for a walk but I do kind of notice the beauty of like outdoors and everyday life. And I'm a bit of a people watcher so sometimes I like to even just go and sit at a bus stop or park bench and watch people doing their thing."

"For me it means hope. For me it means I feel like a tourist. I've been here for one year but I still feel like a tourist but I just enjoy to go out and get fresh air and feel less anxious. So yeah I feel really good outside. But it sucks because of corona and everything so kind of scared to touch things and catch the virus."

"Pre covid my spaces were the pub, the bar, the parks as well. I love those parks. Anywhere you could be with people."

"It could be a specific street or area you like to go to walk, or a bridge crossing over the river when you feel like London doesn't make sense to you anymore. These are my types of outdoor spaces. So spaces that bring joy or happiness or tranquillity or remind me of good times. But also they can be triggering spaces. Last time you found yourself not in the best mood or shape and not in the best time of your life, so outdoor spaces are not always nice and cute but they can be triggering. It really depends on where you are in life. So for me they can be different depending on the day or the memory attached to the place or who I was there with."

"Freedom. I have somewhere to not be with people. There is always a way to not be with people when you go outdoors. Whereas it's not always easy to be alone when you're indoors. They mean fun. Holidays. Concerts. Meeting friends. Watching nature. Swimming. Stretching. Exercising. But they can also mean triggers. Depends what spaces they are. Because outdoors can be triggering, like streets or parks can be triggering because of what might have happened there. It can mean memories good or bad."

"There will always be memories. Outdoor spaces are safe. Unsafe. Happy. Sad. They make you mad. It depends on who you come into contact with and what happens when you're outdoors. And your mental space. And in some countries your skin tone, your gender, your sexuality, what you identify as. So outdoor spaces are different for everyone."

How would you like to use outdoor spaces?

"For me outdoor spaces would be benches and stuff like that so I could sit on them for a couple of hours so I didn't have to walk around so much. I haven't really been to the park so much because of the weather and I miss them. I do miss going to the park."

"There are bits of nature in London that you're not always allowed to use for free. I would like to do that."

"Travel to countries that are LGBT safe. That would be nice. Just not being able to do what straight people do."

"I think it's because there is such a big class system here."

"I would like to be able to use all possible private parks. They should not be private. Like there are estates which have private parks but also in London there are squares where only people who live there have a key. It's not always Covid related it's sometimes the reality we have. Where I'm from there is no such thing as a private park. In Poland we don't have private parks. I mean there can be a garden but they're usually open for everyone – you maybe pay a tiny entry fee – but there is nothing just for locals. Considering there is way more private parks in London and the UK I think."

The freedom of the outdoors

"It's hard to remember what the outdoor spaces were like a year ago. It was absolutely fine to do everything. And now you have to think, will this park be open, how many people... outdoor gyms, they're not open. There would be so many more reasons for me to go outside to exercise, meet a friend. Now you're limited by how many people you can meet and how often. You need to make choices now."

"The main one is my mental health. I like to go for a walk if I feel closed in or boxed in. I feel better if I go for a walk. Especially if I've eaten crap all day. I just feel better after a walk."

Who does the outdoors belong to and who or what is it for?

"Some people own spaces. If you think about it more deeply, there's borders between countries. And so technically in that sense parts of the outdoors are not for everyone."

"Outdoors belongs to everyone. I disagree."

"In a bigger sense, it should belong to everybody."

"I think we should have a universal charter of outdoor spaces. That's what we need to do. The international charter of outdoor spaces. Guarantees of human rights in outdoor spaces. And I'm not sure we can agree on everything. But at least there's a freedom to feel safe outside."

"It's a little bit like this if you think of outdoor spaces in countries like Poland people are not necessarily homophobic on a bigger level but they're just uncomfortable with having people who are gay in their spaces. They're not immediately going to chase you with a knife or kick you in the face. But they're like 'just do it at home, don't bring this filth into our park'. What I would like my outdoor space to be is that people would just chill and don't get offended easily by people's life choices, or religious belief, or sexual orientation."

"Capitalism."

"People should be wary of outdoor spaces. Wary of who they meet and where they meet."

Pen's graphic

Check out Pen's illustration

The Walk

Loraine Masiya Mponela
Loraine is an asylum seeker since 2015. She's a community organiser at Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group (CARAG) www.carag.co.uk.
Loraine has a lovely son.
@lorainemponela

conquered mountains
to survive
conquered mountains
to pick mushrooms
mountains to live

walked long distance
to live
walked to maize mill
walked to fetch firewood

walked to be
walked to live
walked to thrive
endless journey

my skin
swimming in sweat
walked to the well
frozen hands
frozen feet
how did I get here
where am I

leisure walk
whimsical village
conquered vicious footpaths
aimless meandering

slippery, muddy paths
bathed in freezing air
frozen streams
thirsty living

Walked long distance
walked to be
walked to live
walked to thrive

endless journey.

Making a living from the land

Richard is a dairy farmer in West Cumbria. He is the third generation on the family farm which he runs full time with his family and father. The farm has 200 cows.

"From 20 cows milked by hand to 200 hundred cows milked by robots in three generations."

"It's getting harder to make a living from the land. There's more rules and regulations coming in. There's more paperwork."

"The farming industry is struggling to find people who are willingly wanting to work outside in all weather because basically they can get paid more for an easier job. It is a hard labour-intensive job."

"There's a lot of unseen work that goes on behind the scenes. You see like on social media and stuff, 'awe you get that much for your lambs and that much for your milk', judgement!"

"It's more pride, it's in your nature, you wanna keep stock. It's more than a job. It's your life."

"On your own, in your own field, having a picnic. In one way we felt lucky because we had the outdoor space to go. We felt sorry for people in a flat in a city with no garden. We could go for a 20-minute walk on our land and see no one. But in other ways its really isolating for mountain farmers where it's an hour drive."

"When the first wave of the pandemic come on like we were lucky our milk buyer still wanted our milk but there were other farmers out there more down south, London way, where all the coffee shops were shut and all the restaurants and everything, so the demand of milk went down. So there wasn't as many lattes and stuff. So some of them farmers had to dump their milk. So basically, they still had to milk the cows, still had to feed them, but they had to waste the saleable profit."

"If farmers are not there I wouldn't know what the land would be in 10 years' time. The land needs managed. It needs farmed. It really goes against our grain when certain people say 'oh you should just let all your animals roam free'. I heard a story once where if you leave your male cattle with your female cattle they'll all get in calf and they'll all reproduce and their daughters will reproduce and it just gets out of hand and out of management. You couldn't control it because it's nature."

"People benefit from the outputs of it without understanding what happens behind the scenes."

"Sometimes we like to go to the cities because it's something that we don't know."

"If you're born in a family on a farm you're classed as farming stock."

Pen's graphic

Check out Pen's illustration

Reflecting on rights to the joys of life

Sue Bott CBE is a lifelong disability rights campaigner and former Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Disability Rights UK. She is registered blind. In 2014 Sue was awarded a CBE in the New Year's Honours List in recognition of her work.

All who wander are not lost, even if they are visually impaired

"I love walking outdoors. It's not just exercise, but a time to get my thoughts together, to feel peace with the world. But, given my limited vision and living on my own, how do I find my way around? Luckily for me I have my trusty guide dog Berry. She and I explore the beautiful countryside around Dover and Canterbury together.

Ours is a special partnership. Like all guide dogs she is trained to take me on specific routes like to the shops or train station. This is different. We have to trust each other especially as I don't keep her on her harness on footpaths. I want her to be able to stop and enjoy all the smells.

I plan our route by looking at the OS map with my magnifying glass and memorising the details. Apps don't give me enough information. Then we set out. We make lots of mistakes because footpaths are never quite how you imagine they are going to be. Sometimes I miss signs because they are not clear, or too far away. For instance, signs for the North Downs Way are black lettering on dark wood. Then we have to retrace our steps and try again. We get there in the end and will remember for next time!

Sometimes there seems to be more than one track. Berry is brilliant at finding the right one. She is also good at finding the best bits of path to walk on when it's rained and everywhere is muddy. I just follow her. We probably walk slower than most people so that I don't fall over. It doesn't matter. There is no rush, we have all day.

The countryside has so much to give in all weathers and at any time of year. I love the colours, for instance the contrast between the copper of last year's growth and the dark green of the evergreens. I love the smells, for instance the scent of the spring flowers carpeting the woods. I love the sounds, for instance the woodpecker tap tapping away. I love the feeling, for instance the wind on my face. And I love the sky, the big clouds, the mist that makes me think on this occasion eye sight isn't everything. OK so I don't see the birds, I don't see the sea in the distance, but what I do experience is gold dust.

This pandemic has not been easy for anyone but it has given me the time to go wandering and for that I shall be forever grateful."

Sun-warmed rocks and the cold of Bleaklow's frozen sea
The snow and the wind and rain of hills and mountains
Days in the sun and the tempered wind and the air like wine
And you drink and you drink till you're drunk on the joy of living

'The Joy of Living' by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger

"Why shouldn't disabled people get drunk on the joy of living?"

Life on the road

Rob is a competitive BMX rider and coach, a photographer, designer and illustrator, musician, and lover of adventure sports and the outdoors. He lives in a converted van, currently based in and around Salford.

What drives this way of life?

"There are not very many situations where you'll wake up and you'll instantly be outside. But just cracking the door open or windows really does just cement the fact that you're outside. So that in itself will wake you up in the morning."

"You can literally feel like you're in a cocoon and if you wanna hibernate it's one of the best places to do so."

"I always just had this kind of drive on the back burner and understanding that I knew I was never going to live conventionally. And as much as I knew that I was putting myself into potentially worse situations and scenarios like financially where I might be drawn back, I took the necessary steps albeit outlandish steps I needed to get myself to the situation where I am. It all seems well and good now but if you look back a couple of years ago mentally and financially things were very different.

People feel blessed the first time they actually get away in a vehicle. They've cut the cords. They're relaxed. They're out on holiday in the same sense that you might be when you're happy and you're on your way to the airport. That initial... the feeling when you go away and you're not home and your uncomfortable but you're content in the unknown and the discomfort that you've got with it. You know you've gone on holiday and you're happy and you're excited and you feel like you're in this like survivalist state of mind – you know right we're here, where we going, what we doing – that's become my everyday because I don't feel like I have that base if that makes sense. Like taking away that base and living a more minimal life has become my everyday feeling when I wake up in the morning."

How do you define the outdoors?

"I'd probably say 'home'... Whenever it is that I'm outside I do genuinely feel like I'm connected back to the roots, like I'm rooted and I'm planted and I'm back to where I came from."

"Society kind of intentionally or unintentionally takes people away from what they are, who they are or where they came from. People will kind of live with this permanent dissonance from their origin. They call it mother nature because we were born out of it. I find it funny that people will go outside for a fag break or they'll plan to go outside for a bit but they won't want to because it's raining or they won't to go and take part in these different activities because they would rather sit and absorb content that's kind of meaningless to them or they'll go and get about their day because they're working and they won't ever kind of wake up to the fact that they are the outdoors incarnate, we are the universe, our particles are second to none to the trees to the grass, the rocks, the metal. You know every bit about existence is a part of you. And I feel like the outdoors just kind of reinforces that a bit."

"Living in a van forces the outdoors on you because you're constantly aware of rain, you're aware of the wind, you're aware of the heat coming through the van, if it's sunny outside, you know if it's hot, you know if there is a storm, you know if there are people around you. It kind of forces you into a mindful existence."

"The outdoors belongs to itself. I think ownership is a human trait."

"I don't think anybody could ever own the outside other than owning the experience of being in it or with it."

Pen's graphic

Check out Pen's illustration

Singing on the summits

Dave Camlin is a Cumbria based musician and a Lecturer in Music Education at the Royal College of Music.

His practice spans performance, composition, teaching, socially-engaged music practice and research.

Dear Native Regions

Dear native regions, I foretell,
From what I feel at this farewell,
That, wheresoe'er my steps may tend,
And whensoe'er my course shall end,
If in that hour a single tie
Survive of local sympathy,
My soul will cast the backward view,
The longing look alone on you.

Thus, while the Sun sinks down to rest
Far in the regions of the west,
Though to the vale no parting beam
Be given, not one memorial gleam,
A lingering light he fondly throws
On the dear hills where first he rose.
My soul will cast the backward view,
The longing look alone on you.

William Wordsworth, aged 16

"These are the final stanzas of a poem written by the young William Wordsworth, as he was preparing to leave his home in Grasmere to enter the adult world. It was one of the pieces that I arranged for a project in 2018 called the Fellowship of Hill and Wind and Sunshine, which took groups of singers up onto a series of Lake District summits to fill the skies with our harmonious voices. Commissioned by the National Trust, we sang a cycle of songs on the summits to commemorate two special events. As well as marking the centenary of the end of the First World War, our singing was also celebrating the historic gift of land made to the nation in 1923 by the Keswick-based Fell and Rock Climbing Club in honour of their fallen comrades.

Singing outdoors is a magical experience, the mixture of voices and bodies blending into the landscape gives a timeless feeling, with one singer suggesting, 'somehow it was the mountains that were reverberating with us.' Not everyone walking with us would have called themselves a serious walker, but the appeal of singing in these stunning locations was too much of a lure. Another suggested that the physical exertion of hiking was 'the price that's been paid forward for the experience.' We undertook some research on people's experiences, which suggested that the outdoors was being used by the singers as a resource to amplify the sense of connection people feel when they sing together. The emphasis here is not on conquering mountains, but on building relationships. We even recorded some of the mountain-top performance using virtual reality technology, so that those who couldn't hike up a mountain could still get a feel for the experience. Rather than thinking of singing in the outdoors as a kind of medicine, we prefer to view it as way of maintaining positive health and wellbeing, a way of building a 'healthy public'. If you've not tried it, there's probably a group of singers near you who'd love you to join them."

"The special moment of the day that will stay with me was the spiritual connection our small choir and songs made with the unsuspecting fell runners who raced past on the summit - a shared moment of fulfilment." [1]

Dr. Dave Camlin
dave@davecamlin.com

Mouthful Way
Dear Native Regions

0:00 3:15

From: Camlin, D.A., Daffern, H. and Zeserson, K. Group singing as a resource for the development of a healthy public: a study of adult group singing. Humanit Soc Sci Commun 7, 60 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00549-0

Grief and the sea

Iesha Small
Iesha is a writer, charity strategist and former teacher.
Visit her blog at ieshasmall.com.

Since my late teens I have found myself drawn to wide open natural spaces at difficult times in my life. At that time it meant the local commons in London that I could access by foot or public transport. When my Grandad died and I found myself once again drawn to open space, now I had my own transport, I found myself regularly driving to spend hours alone by the sea.

Untitled (You are the sea)

I have not been to your grave
You are not in that place below the ground
That wooden box cannot contain you
I know where your body is but your body is not you.

You are memories and laughter
You are songs and stories
You are food and smells
Your legacy shapes the future via the lives of the people who loved you.

You are not a quiet cemetery sleeping with others who have gone,
Some forgotten, some remembered with rituals of visiting and fresh flowers
You are the sea.
Affecting people from across space and time
Shaping the world around you even when it seems you are still.

I won't hear your voice, your laughter
Your cheeky jokes
Nor smell cakes baking
I won't see your wry smile

I hear you speaking to me in the waves
Smell you in the salt
In the sea and in the tears streaming down my face
I see you in the thousands of particles of sand on the beach

Dust we are and to dust we shall return
The sand. The sea.
Moving between my exposed toes

Where are you now?
As a youth you were a fisherman, you made a life by the sea
Now a continent and a lifetime away you are returned

The sea is vast.
Open.
Empty.

The sea can sustain life
And take it away.

It can make me feel calm
But also so sick I want to violently throw up.

I go to listen, to think.
To reflect
To rest
To be close to you
To grieve

Some relationships are complicated
You don't know where you stand.
Our relationship was straightforward.
Deep, reliable, unconditional love

It's unusual to find people comfortable with silence
Now I sit in silence by the sea.
Like you, it is a calming presence.
My companions are the gulls and thoughts of you.

You believed in a vast, eternal God.
If God exists I can find them by the sea.
Powerful.

Unchanging.
Something beautiful and at times terrifying
Something we try to harness and understand but can't really tame.

By the sea, I'm reminded of how small I am.
By the sea, I've cried to tell you how much I miss you.
By the sea, I've felt calm, as I used to when we sat together and watched TV.

I have not been to your grave
You are not there.
You are on the wind.

Wheelchair use and the outdoors

Debbie North is the Inclusion and Diversity Expert for 'The Outdoor Guide'. You can find out more about her and her series of blogs at https://theoutdoorguide.co.uk/partners/mobility-access-tog and @accessTOG @TOGwalks.

Debbie truly is a pioneer. She champions access into the hills and mountains of the UK and has changed the way National Parks approach disability. Leading from the front, she is the beating heart of the accessible charge into the countryside of the UK and sees a challenge as something to be conquered. Debbie's husband, Andy, is her ever-present partner and has been involved in her inspirational escapades from the moment she announced she wanted to travel coast to coast in a wheelchair. He promptly agreed and has allowed Debbie to crush him with the wheelchair more than once. Everyone needs their own Crocodile Dundee and that's exactly what Jonathan is. As well as the creator of The Dales 30, he has mountain leading expertise and knowledge of the Yorkshire Dales and Lake District which are second to none and is more than happy to wade into freezing water to check its depth... thigh deep, for the record.

"We've been out in the most horrendous weather together. We have been, as they would say, wetter than an otter's pocket."

"The height of the mountain isn't the issue, it's the technical aspect."

"I was just in my normal power wheelchair, Jonathan and Andy were kicking stones out of the way, we got to this beautiful landmark and you know straight away emotion because I never thought that I would get to Gordale Scar ever again."

"We are not wanting to sterilise the countryside. We are not wanting tramways and railways to the tops of mountains. What I think is the next step in accessibility is looking at the technology that is out there and making sure that there is an infrastructure within the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty so that people can have access to all terrain wheelchairs. These machines are very expensive, and out of budget for many people who want to access the outdoors. Let's look at infrastructure — instead of spending £50,000 tarmacking a track, spend the £50k on buying three or four all-terrain wheelchairs that people can borrow. This way there is no need to make changes to the natural landscape however this would have impact in changing people's ability to access the countryside. And that's really the message that I feel very strongly about and I know these two support me in that."

"When we started, it was almost felt that there was a glass ceiling in regards to creating a countryside for all but because, by our nature, we were stubborn and loud and we were doing things to show that it is possible to have adventure in the hills, despite having a disability we started shifting perceptions about accessibility."

"One mum told me that because of me and what I'm doing — creating and promoting wheelchair accessible walks — her disabled son has seen a waterfall for the first time."

"The thing I've noticed in a number of years of walking is that when I first started I noticed that it was all white, younger, male people. And the one thing that has changed is that there's as many ladies out their walking now as there are men. In fact, there's probably more. That is one thing that has changed in the outdoors. The others have not. So it kind of follows on a little bit with society but is still behind it."

"Whenever we have featured on the TV, they always add sad music at the start of the interview. *Let's be sad — she's in a wheelchair*. And then the jolly music at the end. *Yeah she's reached the top*. We always ask why. Why the sad music? It makes us laugh!"

"One of the things I believe in very strongly is access for everybody, across as many paths and into the outdoors. Many people with disabilities are unsure of where they can walk and are afraid that the route will be unsuitable for their own ability and for their own wheelchair. Accessibility is not just about access for wheelchair users, it's about access for all. All kinds of people with disabilities who avoid going out for a ramble because of the barriers that they may face. If we can get more people into more places outdoors, surely it's a good thing."

Pen's graphic

Check out Pen's illustration

"There are a lot of people who don't know about what is possible, about the technology that is out there. We always look for what is possible. I've taken people out on test drives with the TerrainHopper and there are moments when it catches you. So I took one guy onto the beach one time. You think that going to the beach is something fairly simple and straightforward to do, but for wheelchair users the beach is usually a no go area. He wanted to go out into the sea, so I took him for a paddle and he cried because he said 'I've not been in the sea for 20 years."

"He cried because suddenly he was in a place that he thought he was excluded from."

In memory of Andy

We are so sorry to report that Debbie's beloved husband Andy passed away at the end of June. We offer Debbie our deepest condolences.

Andy was an inspirational Deputy Headteacher of a West Yorkshire primary school and made a difference to the lives of so many children. He was passionate about the Yorkshire Dales, spending much of his spare time exploring the fells. In celebration of his spirit and dedicated to Andy's memory, Debbie is raising money to buy an all-terrain wheelchair specifically for children to use in the Dales. It'll be located in an idyllic spot in the National Park and made available for families to borrow, share beautiful moments, and enjoy the landscape that brought Andy so much joy.

You can contribute to the appeal at www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/deborah-north-1

Gone fishing

Angus Cameron is originally from Dorset and first fished with his grandad when he was 5 years old. He was accepted onto the Angling Trust 'Talent Pathway' for international competitive angling and was part of the group trained for both England Nationals and international teams. He is currently an international student studying a fisheries degree course in Canada.

Danny Williams is an angling development officer for the Angling Trust.

"Fisheries and oceans is much bigger out here than in the UK. In the UK you've got a huge amount of private land, it is very difficult unless you've got an 'in' in the UK to do things like fishing. Like it's super expensive, especially trout fishing. Whereas here in Canada there's a huge amount of Crown land so everyone has access to it."

Angus

"Me and my friends at school used to go out carp fishing. We used to go out carping a lot. The fly fishing for trout was a little more difficult. It depends on the species. In the UK carp fishing is a lot more accessible so most people are into that. Whereas out here it's free and it's mainly salmon fishing. Everyone likes eating fish so everyone goes out fishing. There is a different permit system out here. You can't own a river out here. That's not the culture. Some banks are owned but most of its all crown land so you buy a license from the government and that gives you the right to fish where you want within reason. Whereas in the UK most of it's private land. A lot of the big water companies are really supportive – Thames Water and Bristol Water really good. They used to be really really good with the youth teams getting us out, they used to reduce the price a lot so you can get out fishing more."

Angus

"There are young people who've had their experience of life either bolstered purely through fishing or it's become a central part. And they might do that on the local village pond, or a section of canal in the middle of a city. You're on a canal, it's 12 meters wide and your view is the back of someone's wall. It might be decorated with a little bit of graffiti to lighten it up a touch, you know? You're not fishing around rocks or sunken trees or anything that's natural. You're more likely to be using a shopping cart as one of the areas that you're trying to find holding fish because it's an area of interest in the canal and that's where they are. I think that element of 'does it have to be out in the wild' probably not. But you're taking that speck of wild anyway. In the most built up area, the only songbird you're gonna see is a Robin because he's the bravest thing to come into the garden, and maybe the occasional Pigeon. I wouldn't get a diversity of birds inside the city, but I would get Roach, Pike, Bream, Carp. Things that would excite us even though they don't jump clear out of the water."

Danny

"A lot of people who aren't into fishing think it's all luck. But more with the trout fishing and the fly fishing it's about trying to outwit the fish and outwit the other angler. I think now I would say enjoy it a little bit more, don't get so into the 'I've got to catch as many fish'. It's also about being out in these places. The world's a lot bigger than just catching fish. It's also about being out in these places."

Angus

"I was at a small village school, I struggled quite badly with dyslexia and dyscalculia so on weekends I used to help my mum out at the sheep farm and do sort of tractor work and that used to stop me from getting so angry. I used to get a little bit upset with a few of the adults at school. And then I started fishing a lot more."

Danny

"Hopefully going back to the UK next year sometime and I'm going to go out fishing with some friends there in the urban pond. I think I'd still go out fishing in smaller lakes. You can't compare Canada, but you can still get that kick by being outside, even if the environment isn't really comparable. You still get a kick because you're outside, yes it's not as good as having a mountain range running along next to you, but you still get a kick from being outside so I'd still do it."

Angus

"Affinity with the fish – move with the fish, think like the fish."

Danny

"It's not just about fishing. You've got to understand the whole environment. Everything is linked in."

Danny

ANGLING TRUST

www.anglingtrust.net

Punter Joe

Joe Murphy is a 19-year-old student who has lived in London, Cambridge and New Zealand. Joe is a film buff, a lover of history, big landscapes, and noodles. He is considering his next move. We caught up with him to talk about his time punting on the River Cam.

"I am not happy with the way the world is going. We have no right to claim nature or destroy it. We should be protecting and preserving."

Pen's graphic

Check out Pen's illustration

A song for the outside by a special needs support group

Made with Music wrote the song ‘What makes you smile when you go outside?’ with the LS29 Special Needs Support Group, and recorded it live at Ilkley Manor House before lockdown two.

They are grateful to Co-op Community Foundation for making the project possible. Made with Music try to make everything they do accessible to everyone and work with a steering group of families with a disabled family member to constantly improve knowledge. Their video was put together by visually impaired co-director Kathryn, who is also singing on the clip along with co-director Hannah and pianist Jenny.

Made with Music

What makes you smile when...

0:00 3:06

Made with Music

www.madewithmusic.co.uk

LS29 Special Needs Support Group

www.ls29group.co.uk

The Moulsecoomb Forest Garden

The Moulsecoomb Forest Garden was established in 1994 and became a charity in 2005. It is located on the outskirts of Brighton and sits adjacent to the South Downs National Park in an area of high deprivation.

Their activities are described as connecting people with gardening, food and nature through:

- working in primary and secondary schools to provide an alternative for pupils who struggle in a typical classroom setting
- running a therapeutic garden project for people of all abilities
- having inclusivity and diversity at their heart, with everyone welcome

The Garden works alongside local schools, social services, pupil referral units, the youth service, and other organisations, supporting young people to make progress in mainstream education to achieve their potential. They offer eco-therapy and outdoor education to complement the school curriculum.

The Garden's stated aims are to:

- reduce anti-social behaviour by involving excluded pupils in the running of the garden
- improve community health by producing organic, locally grown fruit and vegetables
- enhance skills and employability by offering practical based training and volunteering opportunities
- involve children in planting, growing and eating healthy food and learning to respect nature and the environment
- create and enhance wildlife habitats and protect biodiversity including old fashioned vegetable varieties
- promote sustainable lifestyles by encouraging and educating people about the benefits of organic gardening, locally produced food and composting

The activities at the Garden reflect the broad nature of their intended aims. There is so much going on, many local organisations rely on it, many local people are involved and the Garden's links into the wider community are many and strong.

Key links include Mouslecoomb Primary School and The Bevvy, a community led pub, that supports families and the elderly on the local estates.

Moulsecoomb Primary School, which has approximately 60% of its children receiving free school meals, describes itself as a compassionate learning community. The school believes that every child has a right to be educated well in an inclusive environment where they can thrive. It is a short walk away from the Garden and appears to promote a similar approach to connections with the outdoors and nature. The Garden Manager is also responsible for education outdoors at the school.

The benefits of the Garden are many and the work they do is varied and it all relies on connections to nature and the outdoors; connections with the local community; and connections between individuals.

Disability group volunteers and manager

"My carer and I came up together to see what it's like, working outside, and I like it so much. I always come here every Tuesday."

volunteer

"I used to go to day centres, they're so boring. They charge me a pound to watch TV, I can do that at home."

volunteer

"There are less and less opportunities for adults with learning disabilities, day centres closed a few years ago, and especially now during lockdown."

manager

“People with disabilities are so used to being ignored, that they think well what’s the point in speaking.”

manager

“The garden gives me more space and more privacy. Safer than going out along the streets with lots of people going near you, this is a good allotment to be in, it saves people going near each other.”

volunteer

“We do see foxes around here. We call one of them ‘Foxy’. There are lots of holes around here where badgers dig.”

volunteer

“I like planting seeds, it’s a bit calm and out of the way.”

volunteer

“If you get stuck indoors you’ll just get bored. I like being out, I don’t like being stuck indoors.”

volunteer

“After the first lockdown we started opening slowly in small groups and the state of some of the people was just horrendous. Some haven’t got any family, there was no social interaction, stuck indoors and they were just gaunt. We looked and said that for this lockdown (3) we can keep open for 15 people. We picked the people who we felt needed the support the most, and we are now slowly opening it up.”

manager

“It’s nice just to be out. I wasn’t really looking for an outside role, but it did help – especially when Covid happened. I was able to come here, watering the plants and stuff. It was a great relief to be out.”

volunteer

“It all changed when Covid happened, I had nowhere to go.”

volunteer

“The lockdown was horrible, wasn’t it? It’s so boring — go to work, come home, go to bed and go to work again.”

volunteer

Moulsecoomb Primary School

The school uses the Garden to support individual needs of children. One Year 4 boy attends the Garden on a regular basis. He has ADHD which can lead to either misbehaving or being miserable in class.

The school provides time out of lessons to attend the garden where he receives one-to-one attention from the staff. On the day I visited he was collecting frogspawn to take into the school for the reception class. This is good for the frogs, as newts would eat the frogspawn if left in the pond, but also forms part of the school's ethos of being connected to nature in class. The boy himself looked relaxed and was dedicated to the task, netting frogspawn and dumping it in a bucket, with little to no cajoling from the staff. The boy's mum said:

"The Garden was first introduced to me through Moulsecoomb Primary School summer holiday camp. They did fire building, pizza making, den building and a forest walk. It was completely free, which is great for this area. I've paid for him to go to clubs like that before, but he had so much more fun here."

"The staff do keep them in line but will let them have the freedom that they may not get at home. A lot of people live in flats, so it's great to have space outside that they can get to. They don't have as many rules, kids can be free."

"My son has additional needs, he has been coming out of school to do some activities, rather than being sat in the classroom all day getting frustrated."

"It's a sensory break and time out for him to learn new skills. Moulsecoomb Primary School is great. They don't just focus on the academics; they want children to learn life skills. They learn through hands on, rather than sitting at a desk all day."

"Today he was so excited to come here. He gains confidence being here."

"It's a great place, I come here and feel like I'm away from the city."

"I look at my son now, he would have been stuck in the classroom, causing a bit of disruption because he struggles a bit with ADHD, and being a bit hyper – you wouldn't believe it now, he's now just calm and chilled out. I know he's missing out academically, but realistically he's not going to hit the grades, he's four years behind, so we'll just go down a different path. I'd much rather have opportunities like coming here than having a phone call from the school because he hasn't coped. I mean, look at all the young adults here, this is great for them."

"When I moved to Brighton I went to visit a few schools. One, when I mentioned my son had a few additional needs, said that this wasn't the school for me, so I just walked out of there quite upset. I went into Moulsecoomb Primary School and I just felt so much different, I didn't feel judged. And look at what they were offering. He previously went to an Outstanding Christian school and they offered me nothing. They wouldn't let him go on school trips because he was too much of a high risk assessment – at Moulsecoomb he's been to London, they had no problem with him. They have included him."

"The Garden is quiet and relaxing. He has a few sensory issues. He's having that quiet space that he doesn't get at school. School is hectic and all day busy, so coming to the Garden he's gaining confidence and life skills and he's talking confidently to staff. It's good to teach children that they can learn new skills and that there's more than technology."

In partnership

There is a place for partnerships between big organisations and local groups and the Garden engages with a number of these. But to create an impact requires a relationship with the community, to go it alone is often futile. Experience suggests it's more successful when organisations seek out and support existing community networks and work on a meaningful level with community members.

" Don't think you can advertise an event, no matter how good it is, and expect people to turn up. "

manager

" We run summer events, but we've been here 25 years, I've been working in the school for 15 years and everyone trusts us – and even we have low hit rates."

volunteer

Commentary from Consultant, Matt Overd

I visited the Garden on a Tuesday which is when volunteers with learning disabilities attend the allotment. It was at the end of Covid Lockdown Three, so numbers were limited to aid social distancing. On other days of the week the Garden could be full of school children.

The first impression of the Garden, which is tucked away around a narrow corner, under a bridge, behind Moulsecoomb train station and nestled between an electric substation and a housing estate, is how steep and how big it is. And it is actually bigger than it first appears as at the top of the hill, behind the clay pizza oven which rests under a wooden framed shelter with a corrugated tin roof, are woods which lead directly to the South Downs National Park. And the site may yet increase in size as they are in talks to take over a field behind the woods, directly on the South Downs.

Inclusive practice relies on the leadership of the organisation. Many of the Trustees volunteer at the Garden and some have lived experience of disability. They understand what goes on and how best to support it.

The sense of community here is overwhelmingly evident.

This is not a place that patronises people with disabilities. Volunteers have a role in maintaining the garden, they are part of the team.

The staff run user group meetings and have regular conversations with the volunteers about how to make the Garden better. Before Covid the team would meet at a local pub and discuss their ideas. This is a level of engagement that many of the volunteers do not experience elsewhere.

Whilst the National Park does engage young people in the outdoors, many of them are children and young people who would access the outdoors anyway. Their proposition for many children from city estates is to transport them into the National Park for activities, yet they fail to make use of local facilities to first enable them to develop their own relationships with the outdoors.

The Garden provides access, through its woods directly on to the South Downs, and they often take the volunteers and other members of the community for walks, through the Garden and onto the Downs. For some this is their only access to the National Park.

The garden is alive with wildlife. From the slow worms and lizards that gather under the rubber mats placed at various locations around the Garden, to the frogs and newts in the pond – and the sparrowhawk that has been seen eyeing up the frogs lately! Foxes visit regularly and badgers have been captured on the wildlife cameras. Birdsong is constant, with the occasional knocking of a woodpecker. Seagulls are inevitable, given the Garden's close proximity to the sea.

The community organisations are networked – and can and do work together well. On day one of Covid Lockdown One the community set up meals on wheels for vulnerable people. Twenty organisations came together, including five different churches, schools, food banks and other community groups to deliver meals to people who would have normally accessed them through local provision, such as those provided by the Bevvy community pub.

It would also help the area if, when new environmental initiatives, such as rewilding, come up that the young adults like those the Garden works with get these jobs. To keep the money in the local area, to provide a living for local people and to increase the community connections to the outdoors.

A Band of Brothers

www.abandofbrothers.org.uk

A Band of Brothers (ABOB) works with young men involved in the criminal justice system. They provide them with the support they need to make the transition to an adulthood free of crime, and filled with a sense of belonging, connection and purpose.

The perspectives shared below are from two members of the ABOB community and in part reflect on the 'Quest weekend' which marks the start of the ABOB 12-week mentoring programme.

How do you define the outdoors?

"Anything or anywhere where nature has priority. Anything that is majority green or blue or is still serving a purpose more so towards nature than industry. I feel like if I was outside on a building site on an industrial estate, I wouldn't consider that so much an outdoor space myself at all. Even though there's no four walls it wouldn't feel, without any trees or sea, it wouldn't feel particularly outdoors."

"Natural space. Natural surroundings."

Reflecting on the Quest weekend

"Without the fire burning in the evenings, it wouldn't feel quite as secure and safe. You rally there. You always end up there in the evening."

"This beech tree was phenomenal...The much younger me, instead of sitting at that tree and thinking about its age and the people that had sat at it beforehand, I would have run at it and climbed it. I would have appreciated but in a different way."

"I did a lot of camping and stuff when I was a kid but with ABOB that was the very first time I'd given a lot of thought to nature."

Appreciating nature

"It's so beneficial for our mental health to look beneath the surface of nature and go deeper, nature is multidimensional and a great teacher. Getting to know the personalities of the trees and plants, giving them a name you choose. Learning how the eco system, the landscape, the elements, all work and interact together, what happens within our seasonal cycle. Us humans, we are still a part of nature, the more we understand the natural world the closer we become. In early February it may look bleak and depressing outside but things in nature are beginning to move and grow. It is good for the soul to witness and take note of these changes however small."

"Growing up I spent a lot of time outside and I'd be in the forest or climbing trees or whatever, but I never really knew many men who would stop and tell me to take in the beauty of something or point out the details of a particular part of a tree or nature or a bird overhead or the things they could hear. It wasn't really until I was a part of ABOB that people actually encouraged me to stop in nature and appreciate it for what was existing and what was growing around us."

"I don't think we can ever know everything about nature. There will always be that wonderful element of mystery to which we are all connected. It's about getting into nature, whichever form that takes and finding that connection - that spirit of place."

"The health of people and the health of the environment are so intertwined, it's almost like a mirror. Ideally it should be a symbiotic relationship."

The impact of the pandemic

"I think people are engaging with it more. I've ripped out my entire garden, built a greenhouse, laying veg with my family and I'm being far more in touch and being in my garden."

"Through the pandemic I think people have become far more conscious of the correlation between wellbeing, community and engaging with nature. Along one of the streets where I live, someone had thoughtfully chalked all the names of all the wildflowers (not weeds at all!) growing out of the cracks in the walls and pavements. Food for thought and food for the bees. Our ABOB community allotment has been a huge part of our community wellbeing in these strange times."

Pen's graphic

Check out Pen's illustration

abandofbrothers

Graystone Action Sports brings outsiders indoors

Graystone Action Sports is a large indoor skateboarding, scootering, parkour and freestyle venue in Salford. Harrison, together with this dad Austen, has been using the space since it first opened in December 2019. Both are very much part of the founding community. They shared their perspectives on the interconnectedness of the indoor space provided by Graystone and skateboarding as a predominantly outdoor activity.

Before Graystone, Austen did most of his skateboarding at the only outdoor skatepark in Manchester, nicknamed 'the cage' and located under the Mancunian Way flyover. Austen spent lots of his time standing in the cold or waiting in the van for his son. Since the pandemic, and associated restrictions with social mixing and use of outdoor spaces, Graystone became their new 'outdoors' as the size of the space meant that it was able to keep operating within government guidelines – this at a time when some outdoor skate parks were closed. As well as providing a Covid-secure environment, Graystone has meant that Harrison has been able to skate more often throughout the year protected from the weather by the large indoor warehouse space.

"I like the fresh air and when I land a trick it just it feels good, I feel like I'm in the clouds especially if it's like a sunny day and I can hear the seagulls it just feels really good."

Harrison

"The skate parks near us, there's probably around about three in walking distance but they're all in rougher areas and the skate park that we normally use in the summer unfortunately there are trees around it and it's beautiful in the summer but in the winter it's too... you can't really skate it because all the leaves are dead slippy."

Austen

"Skateboarders just don't fit in the community. They're a bit of an outsider. You're classed as being different but sometimes it's nice to be different."

Harrison

"The public don't like skateboarders because they're scared of you cos, you're so fast and so nipping in and out of the crowds and power slides. They kind of get very angry with you they don't understand the meaning. They judge you for the way you look. But once you're in a skateboard community no one judges you. It doesn't matter where you're from, your background, everyone's accepted because they're just one big family."

Austen

"Before I started skateboarding, I was like really shy, like a still am a bit shy, but I never was talking to anyone when I first started but now I can talk to anyone."

Harrison

"Everyone's got a right to be in the public but some people like you've got walkers who think they own the paths. You get shooed off if you do a bit of street skating you always get scooter guards shoving you off saying 'You can't skate here'. And that's not really fair. And what they do they put traps everywhere. So if a skateboarder likes skateboarding on a ledge they put little spikes, bits of metal every so often in the ledges so you can't skateboard them. They're dangerous for everyone. So they are closing the community up of skateboarding so much. Cos skateboarders like being free don't they."

Austen

"The outdoors belongs to the public, and animals."

Harrison

"Street skating is getting harder now. People are turning against them. Like in Manchester they've put signs up saying 'no skateboarding' and you get big fines now which has outraged the skateboard community because it's really not fair of them is it."

Austen

"The outdoors is everyone's to enjoy."

Austen

"Graystone has got everything you can have outdoors, indoors. But the beautiful thing about it is its all under controlled conditions — it's safe for the kids to go and feel free and express themselves. It's so good for the wellbeing of kids."

Austen

"My skateboard is an instrument of joy."

Harrison

Pen's graphic

Check out Pen's illustration

A mountain-top football match

Cockermouth Junior Football Club is a friendly club at the heart of the community.

The club is passionate about football and wants all players, boys and girls of all abilities, to develop football skills and enjoy the game.

The club is operated by volunteers, from the committee members to the coaches everyone donates their time free of charge. The club is thriving, young people across the community are enjoying football.

The club uses facilities at its own playing fields at Tarn Close and Cockermouth School Astro and playing fields.

Peter Kemp, Coach

Peter is a coach at Cockermouth Junior Football Club (CJFC) in West Cumbria. He has played football at a good level and now volunteers his time coaching the under 13s football team, which includes his own son. He is also an accomplished fell runner.

The idea for a football match on top of a mountain in the Lake District National Park came from two sources of inspiration. Firstly, Peter is a supporter of West Bromwich Albion Football Club who are renowned for having the highest football ground in the country. This planted the seed for Peter that maybe CJFC could have the highest match. Secondly, through his own dad who introduced him to the fells and who he remembers saying "you know something Pete, you could play football on top of Grassmoor". Peter wanted to make it happen.

"There's a mixture of feelings and apprehension but they're a team now so they know they've got to do it. You don't have to go up on a perfect day. Like, I teach the lads, everything isn't always perfect. You have to work to the conditions. If it is too cold, what do you have to do to get warmer. If it is too wet, what do we have to wear. If it is too windy, what do we have to do to compensate that. I do it for football, but I also do it for life skills for them."

"They're kids. They're young lads. They don't need to be wrapped up in cotton wool. They're a lot harder than you think. They enjoy the extremities sometimes. You know sometimes if you go out for a walk in the wind and the rain and you come back into the house and it's more enjoyable and it's nice and warm."

"And I think the sooner people start to realise that's it's okay to make mistakes the better. People want this world nowadays where you're not allowed to make mistakes. We don't want to do that because there's potential for an accident or a potential for this or that. Obviously, we don't want to hurt anyone but you've got to have a little fall or a little trip now and again because it's what you learn from. Life's all about learning. And a lot of the lads I'm seeing they're not learning all these skills because everything's done for them or they're told, 'you can't do that'."

Quotes from mountain day players, siblings and parents

"I've literally never looked forward to a walk before this one."

player, the night before

"It was a great day out. Huge achievement for everyone."

parent

"He really struggled through the first lockdown. I think it's really important for their mental wellbeing."

parent, about player returning to training post Covid restrictions

"It was hard and cold but was great fun and a huge sense of achievement afterwards. The snowball fight was brilliant."

player

"Football being off really affects him physically, socially, personally, and cognitively."

parent, about player returning to training post Covid restrictions

"Great to be together again and do a really big challenge as a team."

player

"Amazing views and really fun day. It was great to get out and be back with the team and it was a relief from Covid."

player

Pen's graphic

Check out Pen's illustration

Autism, the outdoors and other people

Tanya is mum to George, aged 10, and his 5-year-old brother. Their family stayed at a YHA hostel in London as part of Project90. Following some feedback on how positive the experience was for her severely autistic son, Tanya shared her perspective on what being outside means to them and particularly some of their experiences during the pandemic lockdowns.

Tanya's experience

"If I can't get George outside, he pours water over the entire house. He's a practical boy, likes doing something. So he doesn't do well with hanging around the house. He's okay if he's been out. He'll settle down at the end of the day."

"He really relies on his videos and things on YouTube to regulate himself. He can get a bit upset and a bit worked up at times and I think it's if he doesn't really know what's coming next or if he can't do exactly what he wants to do when we're outside. You know like fairly recently we went for a walk and we took the wrong path and we got lost but for him he got quite worked up about it because he didn't then know where we were going. So he says 'phone, phone' because he wants to watch his videos and his cartoons on it because he wants to calm himself down. It's okay here because we're right next to a housing estate but if you go right into the Dales, where we quite often try to because it's less busy, then he can't get signal so then the thing that he needs to regulate himself makes him even more cross because he's trying to get his signal and he's trying to regulate himself."

"You're doing your best under hard circumstances and then people have a go at you for it."

"The outdoors belongs to everybody but people that can treat it with respect. And people that leave it in a way so that it can be enjoyed by other people."

"Lots of people rowdy and drunk make it inaccessible to children."

"I don't think people realise the consequences of what they do, they're just having a good time."

"George wants to be out, so if he's out and doing something he wants to be doing, I mean you can see how happy it is."

George finds the reactions and emotions of children exciting – including distress and crying – and can sometimes act to create these emotions as for him they are funny and entertaining. For Tanya there is the tension between wanting to let him access areas like play parks combined with the anxiety of knowing interactions with other children can be challenging, and that other adults viewing the situation without full knowledge can be judgmental.

"People think it's just an excuse for naughty children."

"I can't react. He enjoys the reaction. So I don't. It's really really rare that he'll get any kind of reaction from me because I just know that it doesn't stop him and he likes it. It will just get him more stimulated and more wound up and he'll do things to get a reaction. So I have to be this like robot person that gets up and facilitates George in his day but doesn't show any kind of natural emotions because it has a negative effect for me to show those."

“People say, ‘Well he wouldn’t get away with that in my house.’ People can’t get it into their heads that coming down hard with the discipline does not stop these behaviours. It actually creates reactions and tension and you know this kind of high emotion that goes with the reaction. He loves it, he thrives off it and he gets stimulated by it. And people just... I think a lot of people pride themselves in bringing their children up in a very strict way and just can’t in anyway understand what it’s like to have a George. And those kind of discipline methods just do not work. Not only do they not work, they make things worse.”

Pen’s graphic

Check out Pen’s illustration

The Passing of Time

Lorraine Mighty is an English Language Teacher of Jamaican heritage. She has worked for a variety of educational institutions in the UK and overseas and currently works in higher education. Throughout the pandemic, she has turned to poetry as an outlet for coping with bereavement. She lives in Birmingham with her husband and two sons.

In the embers of parental leave
We bathed in soothing sun that spring.
Grateful of our garden
Dear protective guardian.
Buds boldly bursting into bloom
Kids splashing in the paddling pool,
Air filled with squeals of joy.
Our idyll of a bubble...

Punctured by a phone call.
Hold the wall.
Then another.
Tears fall.
Then another.
Catch my breath
And another.
Back to work.

With tentative abandon, we venture out.
A national park with towering trees
Provides shelter, perspective and reminders
Of the tallawah giants we've lost.
Near and far, our community swells with grief.
Lamenting incomplete goodbyes
I gaze out and glimpse the distant tide
Hopeful it is turning.

Leaves relent to the autumnal breeze.
Hustled along in this new subnormal.
School runs offer a reassuring routine
And renewed appreciation of
The hurried walk, and the nonsense talk
And the breath-giving beauty of rose gold skies.
Birdsong soars and surrounds us
Echoing graveside hymns unsung.

The starkness and darkness of the days
Illuminates a maze of competing needs.
A heavy fog descends, stubborn to clear.
Hope glimmers in the light of winter festivals
And as dawn breaks on the first snowfall of the year
Gleeful squeals return to our guardian.
I hold your memory near.
Spring soon come.

Finding treasure in the spoil heap

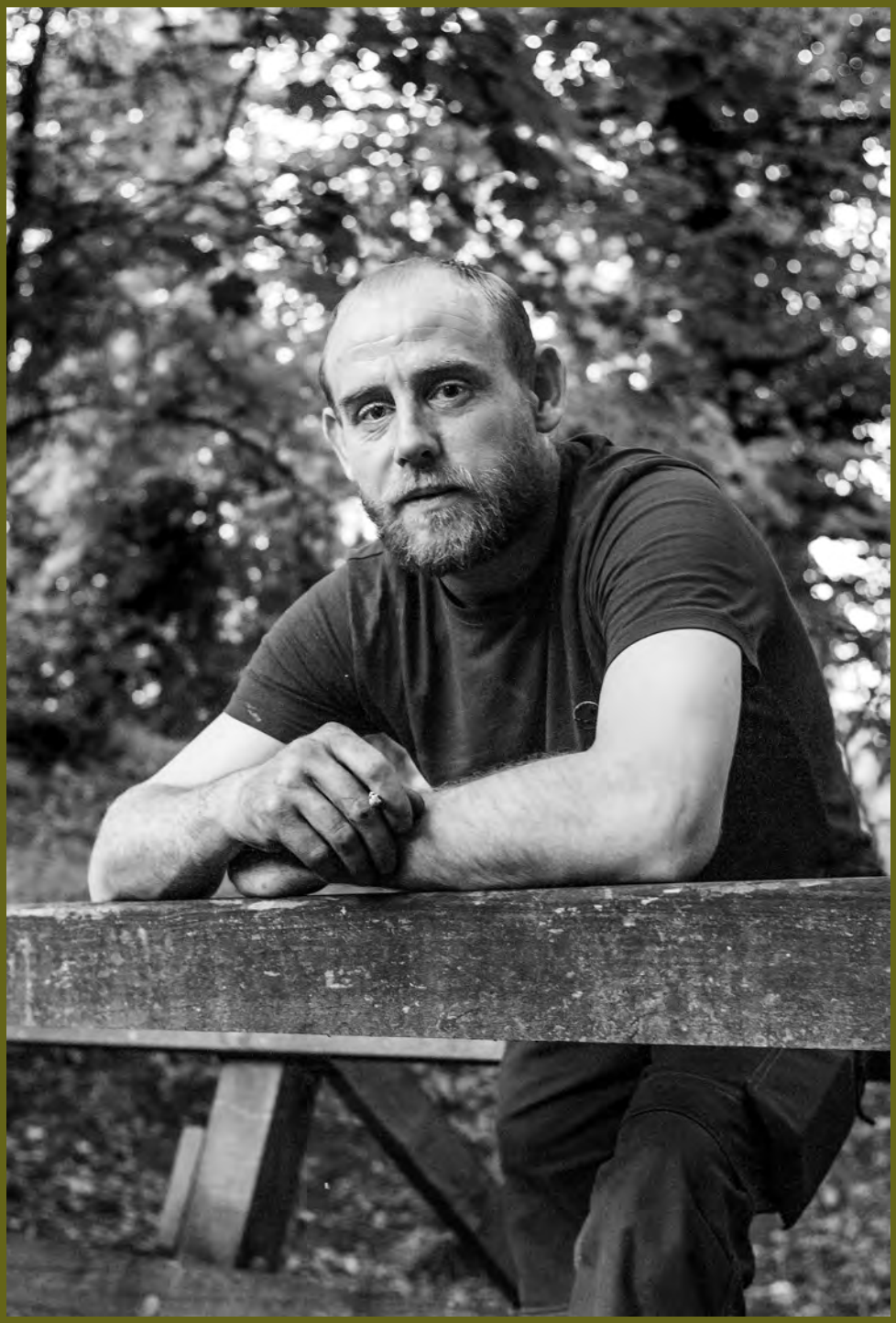


Image right

Niki Killer on the Foot Bridge by the Old Dump, Brick Kiln Lane, Nr Wirksworth, Derbyshire, 7th August, 2020.

Bolehill Mine Spoil Heap, Talking to the Bullocks at Dusk

"For years I walked down past the old Brick Kiln Lane Dump at the bottom of the meadows, often I would see Niki down there digging holes into it's layered history of crap, searching out treasure in the broken asbestos tiles and other waste of earlier generations. If I walked past another day he'd have dug deeper and got to the Victorian bottles that he was really after, he could get a bit of money for them. His mum had died when he was very young, those fields and the dump were his escape. A territory away from his house that was needed for survival through some hard teenage years to adulthood.

I got to walk with him the other day, his knowledge of archaeology is really impressive. He now has a really top spec metal detector and found a gold coin earlier this year worth a fair bit. We were talking archaeology and his best finds on the old Bolehill Mine spoil heap as the sun went down behind the quarry cliffs, when we were suddenly surrounded by bullocks. Niki's a survivor, he's had to be, this wasn't the image I was expecting to get of him, but when it happened I knew it was right and we walked on home, blanketed in the last after light, talking bullocks for a bit."

Kate Bellis, August 7th 2020

Image above

Niki Killer Talking to the Bullocks, Old Bolehill Mine Spoil Heap, Derbyshire, August 7th, 2020.

"My Mum died when I was very young... so being out here, in these fields around home was important, I still like to be out here."

Niki Killer

www.hillproject.uk

Kate Bellis is a Derbyshire based photographer

www.earthboundproject.co.uk

@KateBellis7

Reflections on the project

Gina McCabe
Outside Voices editor

It has been the greatest pleasure to hear, read and collate the content of this book. Sincerest thanks to all those who have taken the time to share their perspectives and bring their outdoors to life. There are stories of connection with self, with others and with nature. Stories of nourishment, peace and happiness. Stories of fear, judgement, loss and challenge. There are stories of ever-changing relationships with the outdoors — of an outdoors that is at some points safe and liberating, and at others full of fear and limitations. There are stories of how a pandemic has changed how people engage with and value the outdoors with illustrations of how limitations on our movements bring new freedoms and new challenges.

The stories in the book highlight commonality in experience, despite difference in place, space and activity. Mental and physical health, feelings of wellbeing and noticing nature are associated with all the stories included here — be that in an outdoor café, the top of a mountain, an urban skate park, or staring out to sea. But perspectives also reveal opposites and contrasts. Consider for example the urban spaces left behind during a nation's rush to get to the countryside in the summer of 2020. While the National Parks may have been experiencing their highest number of visitors ever recorded, for some, that opened up an opportunity to access the urban outdoors free from the otherwise prohibitive crowds, noises and stresses associated with a busy city. Consider the ease with which some have explored new pathways and walks around their homes compared to the immense effort and challenge that goes into the same activity if you are visually impaired, and the reward that comes with adding that route to your repertoire. Consider the different interpretations of 'safety and survival' in the outdoors. For some it's about having the right equipment, experience and skills for extreme environments. For others, the outdoors is safety and aides physical and mental survival from other things happening in life — a respite from the norm, a chance to go unnoticed or to blend into the crowds. For others, the outdoors provokes anxiety and fear from judgement and discrimination.

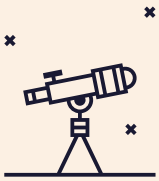
Some stories in this book tell of a loss of freedom to be in the outdoors as a result of the pandemic, and the loss of social connection that comes with that. A lack of ability to be part of group mourning or celebration, a loss of symbolism and closure in seeing a loved one buried or cremated. Others tell of the beautiful freedom that has come from being able to ride a bike down the middle of a normally busy road, giving their children new safe spaces to explore. Some, for whom the outdoors is home, have lost access to the cafés and restaurants where they can take a break from being outside, as well as finding their usual outside resting spots busier than ever. Others talk of a new fear associated with touching shared surfaces such as park benches or gates. Many share how being in a lockdown has made them appreciate the outdoors more — noticing the light shining on a building, seeing the park in a different way. People watching. There have been stories of innovation — a choir meeting in a car park and connecting to each other's Bluetooth radios to sing 'together', building a DIY skate ramp on the street because the local skate park is closed. There are reflections on a class system that visibly, and invisibly, divides one outdoor space from another — a 'residents only' park in London, a 'do not skate here' sign on the street, a place that feels off limits because it is the social domain of one group more than another, and the feelings of frustration and sadness those barriers evoke, now more than ever.

Amidst what feels like immense expectation from all angles of how we must spend time outside to look after our own physical and mental wellbeing, this book is an attempt to consider what this looks like from the perspectives of different interests, values, expectations, and contexts. When the requirements of your outside space rely on familiarity and infrastructure in order to make them accessible for your needs, but those spaces are a car journey away, do you break the rules to keep yourself healthy? When doorstep open spaces are busier than ever before with people walking their dogs, but dogs are the one thing that will make your non-verbal child run in fear, what are the other options in order to stay within the government guidelines of being local? When you have experienced discrimination and judgement because of how you look, and your only accessible outdoor space during a pandemic means putting yourself amidst that discrimination and judgement again, is it safer to just stay indoors? Or when your usual outdoor space is so crowded with new faces that it no longer feels special and unique to you, how do you feel and what do you do?

The outdoors belongs to everyone. But it doesn't always feel like it. There is lots to be celebrated and developed in terms of infrastructure that contributes towards more accessible spaces: traffic free cycle routes, gates that everyone can open, play parks that work for all children, for example. But what is clear from the contributions in this book, is that we all have a role to play in opening our minds to seeing and valuing outside spaces through the perspective of others, as well as through our own. We all have a role to play in making sure the outdoors really does belong to everyone. This book is a contribution towards that vision.

Our vision for a more inclusive future

As we wrote at the outset, YHA's charitable objects are clear: our purpose is to help all. We are committed to this purpose, to ensure that all really does mean all. It is the highest priority of YHA's 10-year strategy *Adventure. For the first time and a lifetime*.



YHA's charitable object

To help all, especially young people of limited means, to a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside, and appreciation of the cultural values of towns and cities, particularly providing youth hostels or other accommodation for them in their travels, and thus to promote their health, recreation and education.

We are determined to promote social inclusion and equity of access. It is our ethical responsibility to ensure we reduce and remove barriers that prevent people accessing our services.

But we know we have work to do to achieve this. We are grateful to the National Lottery Community Fund and Outside Voices project participants for allowing us to explore the potential and pitfalls of access to the outdoors — both for the members and users we already have, and those we hope to welcome into the future.

We know that access to outdoor resources is not equitable. We know that some people, some communities, are not made to feel welcome in the outdoors. Can even be actively attacked in outdoor spaces. Others have practical challenges in accessing spaces that are funded by the public purse or charitable resources. YHA is a leading charity connecting over 1 million to the outdoors every year but we know we still have more to do on increasing access and challenging the current inequities. With the generous support of the National Lottery Community Fund, we commissioned this work to help us, and the wider sector, better understand a wide range of perspectives and, in doing so, work with communities to promote the work that they are doing that – frankly – is often way head of us, and to work together to create different solutions.

Thanks to the funder

The Outside Voices project is part funded by the National Lottery Emerging Futures Fund.

The fund's purpose is to help amplify the voices of communities through stories, narratives and public imagination projects that lead to new ideas and questions that shape the way we think, feel and plan for the future.

The fund is committed to seeding and growing a much-needed 'Imagination Infrastructure' from community sense-making, community foresight, new narratives, and collective imagination.

COMMUNITY FUND

With thanks to project sponsor for YHA, **Steph Bocheux**

livemore.yha.org.uk/outside-voices

#OutsideVoices