

Exploring the Psychological Rewards of a Familiar Semi-Rural Landscape: Connecting to Local Nature Through a Mindful Approach.

Miles Richardson and Jenny Hallam

University of Derby

Author Note

Miles Richardson, Department of Psychology, University of Derby; Jenny Hallam, Department of Psychology, University of Derby.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr Miles Richardson, School of Science, University of Derby, Derby DE22 1GB, U.K. Contact: m.richardson@derby.ac.uk

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Abstract

This study analyses a 53,000 word diary of a year spent engaging with nature through over 200 short trips to a semi-rural landscape. Thematic analysis revealed two themes; the transition from observer to nature connectedness and the ways in which the natural environment was experienced once a connection was made. These themes are discussed in relation to theories that seek to explain the positive effect of nature and nature connectedness. The findings are important as they suggest that repeated engagement with local semi-rural countryside can lead to a mindful approach and psychological rewards that do not require travel into the wilderness. The work also informs further research into trip frequency, duration, diary keeping and mindfulness in the natural world.

Keywords: nature, nature connectedness, biophilia, well-being, mindfulness

Exploring the Psychological Rewards of a Familiar Semi-Rural Landscape. Connecting to Local Nature Through a Mindful Approach.

The human need for, and connectedness to, the natural world has been the topic of a great deal of research over recent years with some important findings related to benefits to health and well-being e.g. (Howell, Dopko, Passmore, & Buro, 2011; Nisbet, Zelenski, & Murphy, 2010). The relationship has been evaluated through measurement, for example connectedness, but aspects of people's experiences in nature have been more difficult to assess empirically (Mayer & Frantz, 2005). Given that our connection to nature is a subjective, lived experience it is important to consider findings from other methodologies and there has been a recent emergence of research using qualitative methods that can explore the depths and details of our encounters with nature (Hinds, 2011). Indeed, Hartig et al. (2011) identified a need for further research into "the feelings that people have when they are in nature as well as the feelings that they have toward nature" (p.157). Their review concluded that there was a need for further research into the feeling of a connection to nature, covering overlapping concepts such as emotional affinity, the self and connectedness to nature. Therefore, the present research uses a qualitative methodology to investigate a subjective account of engaging with nature through the analysis of a 53,000 word, year-long diary of over 200 short trips to a local semi-rural landscape (Richardson, 2012).

Research exploring engagement with the natural world has suggested that nature has a positive affect on people. Three important aspects of nature research - the affect of nature and theories as to why the natural world is important to us, measures of nature connectedness and its relationship to mindfulness will now be reviewed.

There are many accounts of the psychological rewards of engaging with the natural world. They cover aspects such as restoration, personal growth, creativity and inspiration (McDonald, Wearing & Ponting, 2009). For example, Eigner (2001) reported the amazing feelings of happiness and inner calm of being close to nature. Similarly, Hegarty (2010) collected self-reports of nature connectedness which included a wide range of descriptions including calmness, wholeness, wonder and peacefulness. There are many theories to explain the positive influence of nature and these cover three main areas: innate, cultural, and personal (Hartig et al., 2011). Many of the theories in these proposed areas of influence are particularly focussed on why nature is good for well-being, for example the Attention Restoration Theory (ART) and Stress Reduction Theory. These can give some indication of the affect of nature connection, however, the present paper is focussed on the psychological rewards associated with continued engagement with nature, rather than resulting health related well-being.

An established theory that underpins a great deal of research into nature connectedness and relatedness is biophilia e.g. (Nisbet et al., 2010). Biophilia is defined by Wilson (1984) as 'the connections that human beings subconsciously seek with the rest of life' (p. 350). It is proposed that we have an innate drive to affiliate with other living things, animals, plants and the wider natural landscape. There has been a substantial amount of research into the concept of biophilia (e.g Kellert and Wilson, 1993). It is hypothesised that this need for nature has a biological and genetic basis owing to our evolution in the natural world over millions of years. We did not evolve in an artificial urban environment, therefore, we have an unconscious need for natural environments. As biophilia can only be inferred there is a lack of convincing support, however, the concept of biophilia is widely accepted and has provided an important catalyst and background for a great deal of work regarding human-nature relations (Hartig et al., 2010). For

example, the basis of measures of nature connectedness and relatedness that we shall consider in the next section. Gullone (2000) suggests that the biophilia hypothesis is particularly relevant to research with a humanistic perspective, that is when describing deep emotional connection with nature. This together with the substantial research base related to biophilia and the human relationship to nature merits further consideration in the present work.

Based upon their research over fifteen years, Kellert (1993) proposed nine values or dimensions of biophilia linked to the human dependence on nature for survival and personal fulfilment. These values have some support, for example being associated with models of ecotherapy (Burls, Care, & Lane, 2006). The nine values are summarised in table 1 with a primary function assigned for each by the first author. As the nine values relate to human survival and personal fulfilment, it is the latter that are the most relevant in the current context and it is suggested that the psychological rewards of nature found by engaging with a local landscape would relate most to the symbolic, humanistic, naturalistic, aesthetic and moralistic values.

Table 1 - *The nine values of biophilia (Kellert, 1993).*

Value	Description	Function
Utilitarian	The material benefits derived from the natural world.	Survival
Dominionistic	The desire to master and control nature, increasingly destructive, for functional advantage.	Survival
Negativistic	Aversion, fear and antipathy towards nature, particularly threatening aspects.	Survival
Ecologistic-Scientific	The urge to understand nature through reductionist systematic study (scientific) and the interconnection in nature (ecologistic).	Survival and fulfilment
Symbolic	Nature as a symbol is reflected in the development of language and therefore thought.	Survival and fulfilment
Humanistic	Deep emotional attachment to nature expressed as love and care of individual elements.	Fulfilment
Naturalistic	Satisfaction from direct contact with nature. Encompasses the wonder, fascination and awe experienced in relation to the complexity and diversity of nature.	Fulfilment
Aesthetic	The beauty of nature and the landscape. Includes the awe experienced in relation to physical appeal.	Fulfilment
Moralistic	Ethical responsibility, affinity and reverence for nature. Reflected by harmony, connection and spiritual meaning in life.	Fulfilment

As mentioned above, many other theories are particularly focussed on why nature is good for well-being. Although this is not the exact focus of the present paper one alternative proposal is particularly informative. Whereas biophilia has an evolutionary basis in a proposed innate environmental preference, ART (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) is based on psychological restoration from the demands of modern living. This is based on two types of human attention, task focussed

directed attention and effortless involuntary attention or 'soft fascination'. ART describes four elements required for our restoration in the natural environment. 'Being away' from the demands of modern life; 'soft fascination', the effortless appreciation of the aesthetically aspects of nature; 'extent' or connectedness to the immersive space of the landscape and 'compatibility', restful and easy interaction and fit with nature based on our inherent affinity. The terminology in three of these four elements, namely aesthetics, connectedness and affinity, overlap with some of the nine values of biophilia.

Nature Connectedness

A further aspect of the research in this area that one might expect to be revealed in accounts of engaging with the natural world is the development of scales to quantify nature connectedness (NC) or relatedness (NR). Mayer and Frantz (2005) present "a measure designed to tap an individual's affective, experiential connection to nature" (p. 504). The items cover a number of themes, namely: a sense of oneness with the natural world; belonging to the community of the natural world; recognizing the intelligence of other organisms; being connected to nature; being part of a larger cyclical process; a kinship with plants and animals; shared belonging with the Earth; deep understanding of one's impact on the natural world; being part of the web of life; all life sharing a common life-force; being embedded in the natural world; being no more important than other forms of life and one's personal welfare being connected to the welfare of nature. This final item reflects Mayer and Frantz proposition that nature connectedness relates to a greater concern for environmental issues. Nisbet and Zelenski (2011) also note that feeling emotionally connected with nature predicts pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour because greater connectedness to nature is related to our ecological self which encompasses the self and the natural world around us, such that damage to the natural world can be viewed as damage to the self.

This is reflected in a second scale developed by Nisbett, Zelenski and Murphy (2009). They present the nature relatedness scale which measures internalised connection to nature, worldviews of nature and people's engagement and comfort with nature. The scale indicates the extent to which the biophilia based need for nature connection has been fulfilled or suppressed (Nisbet & Zelenski, 2011). The self subscale contains an affective theme relating to both awareness of and connectedness to nature and being aware of environmental issues. The perspective subscale contains reflective or cognitive themes relating to one's view of nature, conservation and its importance. The experience subscale contains experiential themes relating to one's desire for engagement with nature and landscape away from civilization.

Finally, the embeddedness and shared belonging items that appear in the NC scale start to reflect the thinking of Merleau-Ponty (1968). Merleau-Ponty presented an interesting philosophical perspective when he wrote of "the Flesh" as a collective term for the flesh of the human body and the flesh of the world. This was demonstrated through the reciprocity of perception and although the conventional scientific position is that subjective experience is caused by objective objects and processes (Abram, 1997) it has recently been argued that, from a scientific perspective, we are not separate from the environment, but rather we are embodied within it via two-way physical interconnections that are rarely acknowledged (Stevens, 2010).

Mindfulness in Nature

Hinds (2011) proposed that wonderment with the environment allows an uncomplicated state of mind similar to mindfulness and it is proposed that engaging with a local landscape

repeatedly can result in a mindful approach as mindfulness is both an outcome, through mindful awareness, and a process, through mindful practice (Shapiro, 2009). Mindful awareness, like repetition, brings a deep knowing and mindful practice involves systematic and intentional attention (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009), such as that demanded by a diary based account of engaging with the natural world. This is important as a mindful approach has been shown to enhance attention to, and awareness of, current experience (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and more specifically enhance the impact of experience in nature and strengthen nature connectedness (Howell et al., 2011). Howell also showed that an attentive mind, or enhanced awareness, is more important than a non-judgemental accepting one on positive experiences in nature and connectedness. Further, in mindfulness the self is not sensed as separate from everything else, therefore increasing the resonance with nature and distinct individuality as consciousness connects and integrates (Bai & Scutt, 2009). The process of keeping a diary of repeated exposure could therefore lead to a mindful approach and increase the psychological rewards of engaging with nature.

The growing body of quantitative research reviewed above has presented a valuable insight into the benefits of engaging with nature. However, as argued by Abram (1997), landscapes and the nature within them are not idealised objective realities or conceptually frozen environments shared equally by us all. For example, an oak tree is stable and solid, but it provides a different experience for those that perceive it. Furthermore, experiences of the natural world that have been shown to be good for us, such as the setting sun and waves crashing onto the shore, can be conceptualised very differently. For some people it may evoke calm, for others a feeling of awe. Engagement with the natural environment is a subjective experience which encapsulates a range of different views and perspectives. This suggests there is a need to consider how the world appears from personal experience rather than describe the world through measurement.

The small amount of qualitative research in the area of nature connectedness has focussed on trips to the wilderness e.g. Hinds (2011), for this is where the individual can be free of the distractions of modern living and the senses can attend to the natural world. Hinds and Sparks (2011) found that wild landscapes were associated with greater “*Eudemonia*” than more managed landscapes, such as farmland. However, there is little wilderness in the UK and with progressive urbanisation nature is most accessible in a rural or semi-rural landscape. It is important to consider the accessible and typical landscape to see if, with time, the positive experiences of the wilderness (e.g. Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999) can be found in the local landscape without the juxtaposition of home and wilderness.

This Study

This study is based in the accessible semi-rural agricultural landscape typical of much the UK and builds on the need for further research into connection to nature, emotional affinity, and the self. The study investigates a year-long subjective account of engaging with nature through the analysis of a 53,000 word diary of over 200 short trips to a local semi-rural landscape (Richardson, 2012). An individual case study of this length allows a deeper understanding of the potential benefits of regular engagement with the countryside to be explored and suits the aims and scope of the current paper as it allows a sharply focused analysis of naturalistic data which documents real world experience and an individual’s journey over a set time period (Willig, 2009). Further, qualitative analysis of the diary enables an exploration of subjective experience that could not be captured using self report questionnaire measures (Willig, 2009). Analysis of a

personal account moves beyond questionnaire data which gives participants little opportunity to elaborate on their responses and discuss issues which are important to them (Stainton-Rogers, 2003). As such the analysis is guided by important aspects of experience captured in the diary and not a list of questionnaire items developed by the researcher (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The different insights that can be gained using qualitative methods underpin the importance and relevance of studying diary based accounts of experience of the natural world.

Method

The case study explored in this analysis is a diary of 53,000 words (Richardson, 2012) which catalogued a year spent in the local semi-rural agricultural landscape around the Needwood area in Staffordshire, UK. The diary is based upon approximately 225 visits, typically of around one hour during evenings and weekends by a male aged 42 years at the end of the year. Each trip was recorded in the field on a smart phone and completed on a tablet PC, usually on the same day. Although the diary is written by the first author it is important to note that the diary was not created for research purposes and the author, an ergonomist, did not have a specific interest in nature connectedness research at the time of writing the diary. The diary was created as a personal reflection of recreational time in the countryside. However, the experience of keeping the diary motivated a natural progression as a researcher to study the text in detail. The completed text was therefore handed over to the second author who had expertise in qualitative analysis, but once again with no previous specific interest in nature connectedness research.

Analysis

The diary was analysed using thematic analysis which draws upon insights from discourse analysis (Braun & Kitzinger, 2001). In line with the goals of thematic analysis broad based themes present in the diary were first identified. Braun and Clarke (2006) define a theme as a “patterned response or meaning within the data set” which captures “something important about the data” (p. 82). In line with the exploratory nature of this paper the themes present in the diary were identified using an inductive approach which involved reading the diary with out a pre determined hypothesis in mind (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). An advantage of this approach is that the analysis is data driven and captures themes important to the diary writer and not information relevant to a specific research agenda (Braun & Clarke 2006). The inductive approach was facilitated by the analyst’s position. The analyst, a critical psychologist who specialises in qualitative methods, had no knowledge of biophilia research and therefore had no pre conceived ideas as to what they may find in the diary. As such the following analysis explores coherent themes which capture details important to the diary writer and present a rich description of their experience (Boyatzis, 1998).

The themes presented in the following analysis were identified using the six stages of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The diary was first read a number of times – first to gain familiarity and then at a deeper more analytic level. Analytic notes made during the immersion process were then used to identify themes which ran throughout the diary and extracts relating to these themes were highlighted. Themes which shared a common link were then grouped together and these groups were reviewed to ensure that they had an organised structure which fairly represented the wider data set (the diary). At this point two major themes were identified (i) a search for connectedness which mapped out the transition from observer to someone connected to nature and (ii) manifestations of this change such as immersion in the

natural environment. These themes were given formal titles and extracts from the diary which best represented the theme were chosen for analysis.

Extracts chosen for analysis were then examined more closely using principles of discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis is a qualitative method aligned with social constructionism. Within this framework language is not seen as a neutral reflection of a person's inner state (Potter, 1996). Instead, it is argued that language is used by people to construct their subjective experiences and achieve certain functions such as blaming (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Therefore, the combination of thematic analysis and discourse analysis enables broad based themes to be explored without losing sight of the ways in which language is used to construct subjective experience (Braun & Kitzinger, 2001). Furthermore, in response to calls from researchers such as Bhavanani (1990) for participants to take an active role in the analytic process the first author (and diarist) helped guide the analysis. At each stage he was invited to review the progress to ensure that the themes accurately captured his experience, the extracts chosen best represented the theme and the analysis of the extracts accurately reflected his experiences.

Results

Theme 1: A Search For Connectedness

A central theme within the diary was the shift from observer to someone deeply connected to the surrounding environment. This journey to connectedness is explored below.

Extract 1: Taken from Chapter 1, page 2

1. *Later in the day, walking through a ribbon of pine trees at Blithfield,*
2. *there seemed little to be observed, just the bright green moss*
3. *attempting to climb the tree trunks. I left the wood to cross the*
4. *meadow, now bare and stony, yet full of red poppies last summer. Over*
5. *the stile a fallen branch lay helpless, covered in lime and olive coloured*
6. *lichens, with leaf-buds formed and ready. The path drops and winds*
7. *through this deciduous wood and it was peaceful. It was good to stop*
8. *and be surrounded, to try and sense connection. To deal with my new*
9. *attentiveness to the external world the mind must form new internal*
10. *connections which take time and continued engagement.*

In the first section of this extract (lines 1-6) the emphasis lies in capturing the walk and describing what could be seen. This focus on what there was to be 'observed' positions the writer as an amateur naturalist mapping out their movements and carefully cataloguing salient aspects of the landscape that could be seen at that time of the year. Significantly, the position of observer begins to shift in line 7 where the 'peaceful' feeling of the wood is described. Here, a search for connection is the focus of the writer's attention. A two way interaction with the landscape begins to be established. The writer is not simply an outward facing observer, he is positioned as someone 'trying to sense a connection' (line 8).

Use of the word 'try' in line 8 suggests that connection to the landscape is not natural or easy to achieve; it is something that has to be worked towards. As such 'connection' is presented as a desired state, something which is being searched for. In the final section of the extract this search for connectedness is aligned with internal biological change as 'new internal connections' and 'continued engagement' are construed as requirements for 'new attentiveness' (lines 8-10). This suggests that consistent effort is required to train the brain to deal differently with the

outside world. Time spent engaging with the natural environment leads to internal physical changes which allow the writer to connect with nature at a much deeper level.

Extract 2: Taken from chapter 2 page 10

1. *Another world. Always suspended in time, but more so in the mist. It*
2. *was deeply soft underfoot. Rooks called in the distance, and an owl*
3. *joined in. I set off back, but didn't want to leave, so looped around and*
4. *looked out once again over the valley. Lines of trees, some marking out*
5. *the course of streams, sank into the mist from valley bottom to distant*
6. *hilltop. The mist connected me to the landscape, saturated air carried*
7. *the charge. I felt my search had brought the start of a deeper*
8. *connection, but knew there was more to come.*

A growing sense of a 'deeper connection' (lines 7-8) first manifests itself with a physical connection to the landscape. Immersion in the mist 'connects' the writer to the 'landscape' and this immersion is aligned with 'another world always suspended in time' (line 1). This physical connection is presented as being natural. In contrast to the previous extract the writer is not positioned as someone who has to try and make the connection. Instead, the connection happens without effort. The association between the connection and a loss of a sense of time in line one presents a feeling of stillness and positions the writer in a mindful state, present in the moment. However, despite a deeper connection with the environment 'there was more to come' (line 8). This points towards a continued journey.

Extract 3: Taken from chapter 2, page 12

1. *The bit stream of an unseen skylark entered my mind at a rapid baud*
2. *rate. The sun set on me and I was cast into shadow. Back along the*
3. *path I re-emerged into the light, my mind illuminated. The pond lay flat*
4. *calm, lit only by the reflected sky with a partial purple fingerprint of*
5. *cloud. Landscape squared. The bulrushes doubled, a clone of a lone*
6. *oak, moon to the power two. A pair of geese rehearsed their party call.*
7. *The cooling air chilled my fingers and I headed home, closer to nature*
8. *than the months before.*

In this extract there is a shift from immersion in the environment towards the environment 'entering' the 'mind' of the writer. The presentation of nature 'entering' suggests that it was not invited or something that the writer was seeking to observe. This further distances the writer from the position of observer as the writer is no longer outward looking and choosing what to attend to. Instead, nature is directly communicating with the writer and deciding what should be heard. Communication with nature 'illuminates' the mind of the writer and this illumination corresponds to the writer's physical movement 'into the light' (line 3). This mirroring points towards a connection between the writer's internal state and his external surroundings. In contrast to the previous extract a mental rather than a physical connection has been made. This growing connection is expressed in lines 7/8 as the writer states that they are 'closer to nature than the months before'. This sense of being closer to nature suggests that progress has been made, physical and mental connections have been established but the feeling of connectedness is not complete and there is still room for further growth. Engagement with the natural environment is construed as a never ending process which continually brings new insights and experiences.

Theme 2: Manifestations of the Change

Once a sense of connectedness had been experienced this change shaped the ways in which the environment was experienced and discussed within the diary. This section of the analysis examines the manifestations of this change – immersion in the environment, the environment as an energy source, an emotional connection with the landscape and experiencing the beauty of the landscape and being in the moment.

Immersion in the environment. Extracts 2 and 3 evidenced the progression to a physical and mental connection to the environment. As immersion in the environment further progressed an increasing number of visceral metaphors were used to construct the landscape as a living entity.

Extract 4: Taken from chapter 4, page 27

1. *The light was adding magic everywhere it fell, birch trunks, flowers,*
2. *water and clouds. A breeze cooled the balmy air, circulated the scent*
3. *and bird song, and then draped it over my skin. I lay flat and sank into*
4. *the earth, a second dimension underneath the third. In it and almost of*
5. *it.*

Here, this connection intensifies as the ‘magical’ quality of the ‘light’ is discussed. Use of an extreme case formulation (everywhere) constructs the experience of being in the woods as submersive and special as the light spreads magic to all it touches. Furthermore, the ‘breeze’, the ‘scent’ of the wood and the sound of the birdsong ‘drape over’ the writer’s skin (lines 2/3). Immersion in the woodland is presented a full sensory experience which ultimately leads to the writer becoming one with the wood (lines 4/ 5).

Extract 5: Taken from chapter 7, page 49

1. *The black bed of the stream glistened as white ripples piled and fell*
2. *beneath my feet as I stood above the dark serpent that carves deep*
3. *between the trees. I followed the dark veins through the woods, past*
4. *ivy throttled trunks until I found light over the lake.*

In this extract the stream is likened to ‘dark veins’ (line 3) which guide the writer through the woods. This construes a deep connection between the writer and the landscape as the writer, like the water, flows through nature’s veins. In line 4 the trees are also constructed as living entities being ‘throttled’ by the ivy. The conceptualisation of the environment being alive was also reflected in a growing awareness and connection to the energy present in the landscape.

The environment as an energy source. This section of the analysis examines the environment as an energy source as a further manifestation of change.

Extract 6: Taken from chapter 12, page 95

1. *There was a glorious aching stillness of powerful affect, contrasting*
2. *and surpassing the intense energy of the morning’s coast. I was*
3. *charged by the power of my familiar landscape and I felt alive in the*
4. *stillness, as a star is bright in the night sky. Where the river was audibly*
5. *unstill I looked out over the flat lands, from foreground to far, and felt*
6. *that the landscape and my mind merged, my sense of self dissolved. I*
7. *had arrived to dull shades of grey but heard the song of the Earth.*

In this extract the ‘intense energy’ (line 2) of the coast is contrasted to the ‘stillness’ (line 4) of the rural landscape regularly visited by the writer. The contradiction between energy and stillness runs throughout the extract and is used by the writer to present the ordinary landscape as

an extraordinary source of energy. Significantly, it is the still and familiar landscape and not the obviously powerful coast that ‘charges’ the writer with ‘power’ (line 3). This positions the landscape as a source of life energy and the writer as a receptacle for this energy. Connection to the earth’s energy is construed as a vitalising experience - something which makes him feel ‘alive’. In line 6 this intensified feeling of being alive is discussed in relation to a deeper connection as the landscape and the mind ‘merge’ together. Furthermore, the writer experiences ‘the song of the earth’ (line 7) rather than an overflow of physical energy or activity. The source of this song (which is in itself a flow of energy or vibration) is the ‘dull shades of grey’ which surround the writer. ‘Arrival’ back to this familiar place from the coast allows the writer to find something different in the ‘dull shades of grey’. The contrast between dullness and vitality presents the ordinary, mundane place as a site for an extraordinary experience and communication with nature.

Extract 7: Chapter 10, page 80

1. *The following day at Brankley the bird song was as crisp as the autumn*
2. *air. The freshness cooled my fingers. Finches led through hedgerows*
3. *splashed with warm tones. With the cooling of the air comes the*
4. *warming of the colours, greens ignite and warm the soul.*

Energy from the environment was not just conceptualised in relation to the mind; this extract evidences connections to the body and the soul. The visceral experience of the air cooling the fingers and the sensory experience of the ‘warm tones’ of the hedgerow (lines 2-3) combine to ‘ignite and warm the soul’ (line 4). Parallels can be drawn to the previous extract as it is the contrast between extremes (in this case warm and cold) which lead to a profound connection. The landscape touches mind, body and soul and this deeper connection is now further explored in relation to an emotional connection to the landscape.

An emotional connection with the landscape. As the narrative progressed the landscape was discussed more in terms of how it made the writer feel. This signified an important shift from observing and describing the landscape towards internal reflection and the interplay between the landscape and the feelings it provoked.

Extract 8: Taken from chapter 3, page 14

1. *Then an intense burning sun appeared, too bright to view, burning my*
2. *retinas and a trace in my mind. A burst of light matched by a burst of*
3. *my emotions. My attention drawn to the brightness I wanted to view but*
4. *could not. All I could glimpse was my slender tree which stood amongst*
5. *burning flames.*

Extract 9: Taken from chapter 7, page 51

1. *As I returned the power of a nightingales song arrested my attention*
2. *and entwined my heart. Agape I became little more than a receptacle*
3. *for its voice. A shared crescendo.*

The two extracts above explore this growing emotional connection to the landscape. In the first extract the intense ‘burst of light’ mirrors an internal ‘burst of emotion’. The landscape and the writer are now at one on an emotional level. In extract 9 this emotional connection extends to the wildlife present in the environment. The birdsong is not described in terms of its sound but the way in which it ‘entwines’ the writer’s heart (line 2). This presents an emotionally fulfilling and uplifting experience.

Extract 10: Taken from chapter 8, page 57

1. *In the fir plantation, this year's growth was blending in to that of the*
2. *previous years and the calls kept on, to be joined by others. I felt the*
3. *excitement of my return to the paths I had tracked in the days of spring.*
4. *The memories of those days seemed fresh and, like the undergrowth, I*
5. *felt like I had grown here too.*

The ever changing landscape is also linked to personal growth and development. In the first two lines the 'call' of the birds constructs a relationship between members of the forest community and the writer. Furthermore, the link between the growth of the trees (line 1) and the writer's personal growth (line 5) establishes a connection between the writer and the trees in the forest. This positions the writer as part of the forest community, someone able to relate to the trees and birds and reflect on their journey as well as his own. It is important to note that this relationship has been established over a period of time and the writer reflects back to earlier visits in spring (line 3). The 'excitement' and the call to return to the same paths indicate the pull of the outdoors and the emotional rewards it offers.

Experiencing the beauty of the landscape and being in the moment. This section of the analysis considers the final manifestation of change.

Extract 11: Taken from chapter 4, page 30

1. *A couple of days later the evening sky, a loaded palette knife drawn*
2. *across to great affect. Cerulean blue, titanium white and a hint of*
3. *paynes grey smeared overhead. The sun sat, a bright pearl dropped*
4. *into powder, energy sapped and air subdued. Crows sliced from tree to*
5. *earth and a sunburst transformed a pair of finches to butterflies of light*
6. *as they wisped between the hedgerows. Along the path cruck like trees*
7. *formed an endless barn. The familiar landscape of Dunstall free*
8. *from anticipation.*

In this extract the landscape is likened to a piece of art and positioned as a living canvas. Instead of describing the sky in detail the writer captures the essence of the sky using artistic terminology in the first three lines. The departure from a technical and descriptive account of the sky is evidenced further in line 4 as the writer explores the 'energy' present and the feeling this creates. The sky is discussed in terms of its beauty and not as an object being observed and documented. At the end of the extract in lines 7-8 this appreciation of the beauty of the natural world is aligned with mindfulness as the writer states that the landscape was viewed free of 'anticipation'. This positions the writer in a mindful and present state experiencing the environment.

Extract 12: Taken from Chapter 1, page 3

1. *I felt so tall as my shadow stretched out before me, a perfect chill on*
2. *my face, a visceral and reflective moment. My mind was as clear as the*
3. *air and I was content. I stood and soaked up the light and became*
4. *aware of all the sounds around me. General chattering, rustling and the*
5. *whirring beat of pigeon's wings as it ventured through the trees. This*
6. *was a memorable moment. It felt like a moment of connection.*

Here, mindfulness is further explored in relation to clarity of thought and increased awareness of the surrounding environment. A 'visceral and reflective moment' is construed as something which offers 'clarity' of mind and feelings of 'contentment'. Engaging with the environment is aligned with a stillness of mind and a focus on the sounds which are present.

There is no judgement or active processing of the sounds, the writer is able to stay in the moment and experience all that is around him. In line 6 this mindful, meditative state is discussed in terms of connection suggesting that mindfulness is a way to engage with the environment in a more deep and meaningful way.

Extract 13: Taken from chapter 2, page 12

1. *With so much visual form and sonic variety for the mind there was little*
2. *capacity to think about anything mundane, intrusive, let alone ruminate*
3. *on it. As if to prove the point a dunnock burst into sweet song nearby.*
4. *After scanning the trees beyond I found it six feet away. It continued*
5. *until our eyes met, quizzically it paused, restarted briefly, before*
6. *hopping a foot away to continue. I moved on, thirty minutes had passed*
7. *in an instant, but the turning of the Earth was not a concern. I stood in*
8. *the shadow of a birch to repose, beneath a half moon.*

Throughout the diary a mindful state was also discussed in terms of a loss of a sense of time. In this extract time is not presented as a ‘concern’ (line 7). Instead, the focus lies in experiencing the environment in terms of what he can see and feel and also connecting with the wildlife present. Engagement with the environment is positioned as something which has freed the writer from ‘mundane, intrusive’ (line 2) concerns and worries relating to everyday life and enabled him to be present in the moment.

Discussion

Use of an individual case study approach has enabled a close examination of real world experience in the countryside. More specifically, an analysis of a diary which documents a year regularly visiting rural areas has given an in-depth insight into the benefits the countryside has to offer. Two themes were explored in detail – one which illustrated the transition from observer to someone connected to nature and another which explored the ways in which the natural environment was experienced once a connection was made. These themes are now discussed in relation to existing research which explains the positive effect of nature.

Firstly, the diary clearly presents a positive experience as found by previous researchers, covering aspects such as restoration, personal growth, creativity and inspiration (McDonald, Wearing & Ponting, 2009), but it is the theories that might explain these positive effects that are of more interest. Parallels can be drawn between the experiences in the diary and some of the nine values of biophilia proposed by Kellert (1993). In the recreational context of the diary it is to be expected that the values strongly related to survival are not revealed in the analysis, but there is evidence of the remaining seven themes. The writer’s position as observer at the beginning of the diary relates to the Ecologic-Scientific value and the desire to understand nature, however, once the writer achieved a greater level of connectedness the entries reflected personal fulfilment in the landscape. This fulfilment manifested itself in a number of ways: (i) the emotional connection to the landscape and life within in (e.g. song of the nightingale) evidenced in the diary links in with Kellert’s humanistic value; (ii) immersion in the environment and the satisfaction this brought relates to the naturalistic value; (iii) acknowledging the beauty of the landscape (e.g. description of the sky) corresponds the aesthetic value; (iv) the comparisons of natural phenomena to symbols of nature, such as the serpent, reflected the symbolic value; and (v) the presentation of the landscape as an energy source which feeds mind body and soul reflects Kellert moralistic value. Therefore, continued and regular engagement with the countryside took the writer on a journey from what might be argued to be the more

straightforward of Kellert's (1993) taxonomy of values (e.g. aesthetic) towards higher level experiences based upon personal fulfilment (e.g. moralistic).

Similarly, the elements noted within ART appear within the analysis, for example, being away from the mundane and intrusive and effortless appreciation. There is a clear expression of connectedness and compatibility. This synergy between the diary account and theoretical proposals outlined in the research is seen further when the theme's covered by the NC and NR scales are considered. It is perhaps easier to focus at the elements that don't come through in the analysis. The NC scale includes ecological items related to a deep understanding of one's impact on nature, interconnected welfare and the intelligence of other organisms. This conservation ethic is not revealed within the diary, perhaps because the diary is a positive account and ethical concerns, whilst important, would detract from this.

Finally, the emerging descriptions such as being in and almost of the earth and sense of self dissolving, relate to the concept of 'the Flesh' (Merleau-Ponty, 1969) and suggests that the interconnections between the body and the environment (e.g. Stevens, 2010) deserve further consideration. This integration and connection of the self and nature is a feature of mindfulness (Bai & Scutt, 2009). Once the writer had established a connection with nature it is clear mindfulness became more evident in their writing and a mindful approach emerged. As suggested by Hinds (2001), the writer described an uncomplicated state of mind and presented themselves as someone who forgot their everyday concerns when they were in the natural environment. There is evidence of mindful practice in the analysis, such as deep knowing, intentional attention (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009) that is enhanced when considering awareness of the current experience (Brown & Ryan, 2003). When immersed in the countryside they were able to be present in the moment and experience the countryside in a non judgemental way.

The single, yet extensive case study, makes it problematic to generalise from the findings of the analysis, but it is clear that the focus on and use of qualitative methods in this analysis have provided a confirmatory insight into the theories that attempt to explain the positive impact and connectedness to nature and what these mean in terms of personal experience of the countryside. In line with Maslow's (1970) humanistic theory the diary presented engagement with the countryside as positive experience – a route to self actualisation. This suggests that the countryside has much to offer in terms of self development and wellbeing.

The profound changes documented in the diary suggest that engagement with a local semi-rural countryside can have a range of benefits and that people do not necessarily have to travel into the wilderness to access these benefits (c.f. Hinds, 2011). This could have implications for communities who live in semi-rural and urban fringe areas with easy access to the countryside as it suggests that fulfilling and enriching experiences can be found on their doorstep with regular short exposure. With this in mind the case study and analysis presented informs further generalisable research into required trip frequency, duration and if the act of diary keeping and expressive writing is a necessary addition or indeed the dominant factor. Similarly, there is a need to understand the causation of, and impact of, a mindful approach on repeated attentive exposure to the natural world. Finally, further research in this area would also allow the impact of repeated mindful exposure on the conservation ethic to be considered.

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