

**Report on ‘Day of Access’ events hosted at UoE Forest and
Peatland Programme sites Rullion Green Wood and
Drumbrae, June 2026**



Summary:

Day of Access events hosted at Rullion Green and Drumbrae

- * Plants and trees can be a commonwealth of knowledge and a comforting way to talk about care, health, the 'native' and the 'naturalised', rootedness, belonging, and what it means to look after things
- * This is especially so when it comes to the medicinal and therapeutic properties of flowers and leaves (things that are good to eat/drink, and, not good to eat/drink). what settles, what comforts, what soothes, what cures. This knowledge may be as unfamiliar to people who live in a place as those who have come from afar. In some circumstances, plant-talk can be a reminder of what we (in Scotland) have largely lost, and what people from other places retain more commonly as shared wisdom
- * Sharing experience about migratory birds can offer points of cultural and geographical connection
- * Sharing knowledge of insects that can be a nuisance (midges and sandflies) or harmful to health (tics) is practical, and also a good way to trade stories and have a little fun
- * Talking about the presence/absence of different animals and birds in the landscape can be an entry-point to conversations about longer environmental histories and different episodes in land-management (deforestation/reforestation; persecution of particular species; sporting landscapes; traditions of public access, rights of way, and recreation). It also provides ways to consider the legacy of Empire and exploitation.
- * Talking about ways to care for the landscape, and specific activities aimed at habitat restoration, can be an entry to bigger stuff (like the climate crisis, net zero, carbon storage, biodiversity)
- * Some themes from the language of environmental concern and landscape conservation (*e.g. vulnerability, limit, loss, care, sickness, dispersal, refuge, shelter, sanctuary, recovery, reintroduction*) resonate with the personal experiences of participants who carry sorrow or trauma from displacement, or who continue to face very real challenges in their own lives.
- * Treated with sensitivity – that is, openly and delicately – there can be value in drawing out these parallels or affinities between the environmental and the personal.
- * Bringing together unexpected combinations of communities of need, such as people who experience chronicity and asylum seekers, works well– the parallels lessen any presumptions about identity and enriches conversations about belonging

* Food stories are good stories. We heard about fufu, kabsa, the ingredients for jollof rice. That's why a picnic can't go wrong. Humous, dates and cherries. Oatcakes and Kit-Kats. Lemon balm tea. Taste tests are always good topics for easy talk.

* offering a warmth of welcome carries certain responsibilities: a good host must be attentive to their guests, and their needs or expectations. Learning about the exercise of hosting by putting it into practice it can be revealing, signalling creative possibilities for the future. Guests ask refreshing questions which help the host rethink basic assumptions and understand their locale better

* Take the task of helping people orientate and locate themselves to an unfamiliar location. This is seemingly simple enough: all you need is an outstretched arm and a pointing finger: *"Edinburgh? Yeah, that way. And Glasgow is over there"*.

Then again, it's not! Not when you enter more fully into the country of words, and how language can create a sense of place.

* Concepts such as Highlands and Lowlands become a useful way to explore parallels between cultures. They also allow historical details to emerge, such as the presence of the Roman Empire, and other histories of cultural interchange

* Local placenames, rivers, and prominent features on the skyline are a jumble of languages: Scots, English, Gaelic, as well as those of more ancient tribes, including traces of Proto-Indo-European which came from afar. Spending time pointing them out and poring over the map can be fun. The names given to places are shareable, comparable and tradable:

"What would you call a wet, marshy place like that?"

The exercise of hosting can make you a stranger to your own country:

"In Scotland, very few of us speak Gaelic, so we don't know what the names of places mean, and so we don't know the stories that those places hold..."

"How is a wadi like and not like a glen?"

* The existence of paths and tracks can be an effective way to tell a landscape's stories. A path is a tradition, showing the way that people, or other animals, have travelled before, according to custom, and how this relates to the ways we used land

* At Drumbrae, we told our guests about shielings (traditions of transhumance), and the existence of drove roads passing through the hills, taking cattle south to market. If some paths are only remembered, others can be sustained by repetition and renewed by it. We met with groups of young

folk walking up the hill from the village so they could enjoy an afternoon of sunbathing and swimming at Cocksburn Reservoir.

*The path is a generative symbol for life's journey: open to all and shared by all, whatever limits or challenges they might experience. The inaccessible can also be a symbolically meaningful theme as we all have some experience of limitation or places we cannot enter

* A view of the landscape can see through time, to earlier cultures (hillforts), empires (the Antonine Wall), and two hills named Castlelaw and Castle Law. A view of the landscape can also travel through space, for instance, comparing Grangemouth with the Niger Delta.

* To be inclusive and accessible, creative activities can centre on something very small and simple which allows people to express themselves and their first impressions of a place.

* Our sense of belonging is always something that must be created. We distributed "viewfinders" (white cardboard picture frames!) and asked people to pick a view that they liked, or that moved them. Our photographer then took a portrait of the person, the frame, and their chosen view. An activity like this can be a small step towards a feeling of belonging. At other events we collected translations of the word *belonging* to explore its diverse cultural meanings

* We asked each person to pick one leaf or a flower and keep it safe during a short walk. At a rest-point, we showed our pickings and shared their names– at other events we have translated these into different languages. This plant miscellany allowed us to co-create a mesostic poem based on the word DRUMBRAE.

* Our work at Drumbrae was enhanced by a separate workshop we did with some of the same participants from The Welcoming at Edinburgh Printmakers, creating cyanotypes of flora collected on a *plant-listening* walk.

* Our work with people affected by chronicity was a reminder that this is often the most challenged community in terms of access, because of their limited energy, which means that even the journey to a site is challenging. The *restival* at Rullion Green focussed on the kinds of improvement which would allow resting in nature, which is a consideration very rarely thought of by organisations. We rethought the landscape from what we call a *microtonal* perspective; this suggested innovative ideas about rest-friendly seating, more benches, plantings, and even a *hut of healing*.

**some creative outcomes from two days of access at University
of Edinburgh Forest and Peatland Programme properties**

the manifesto of exile and belonging

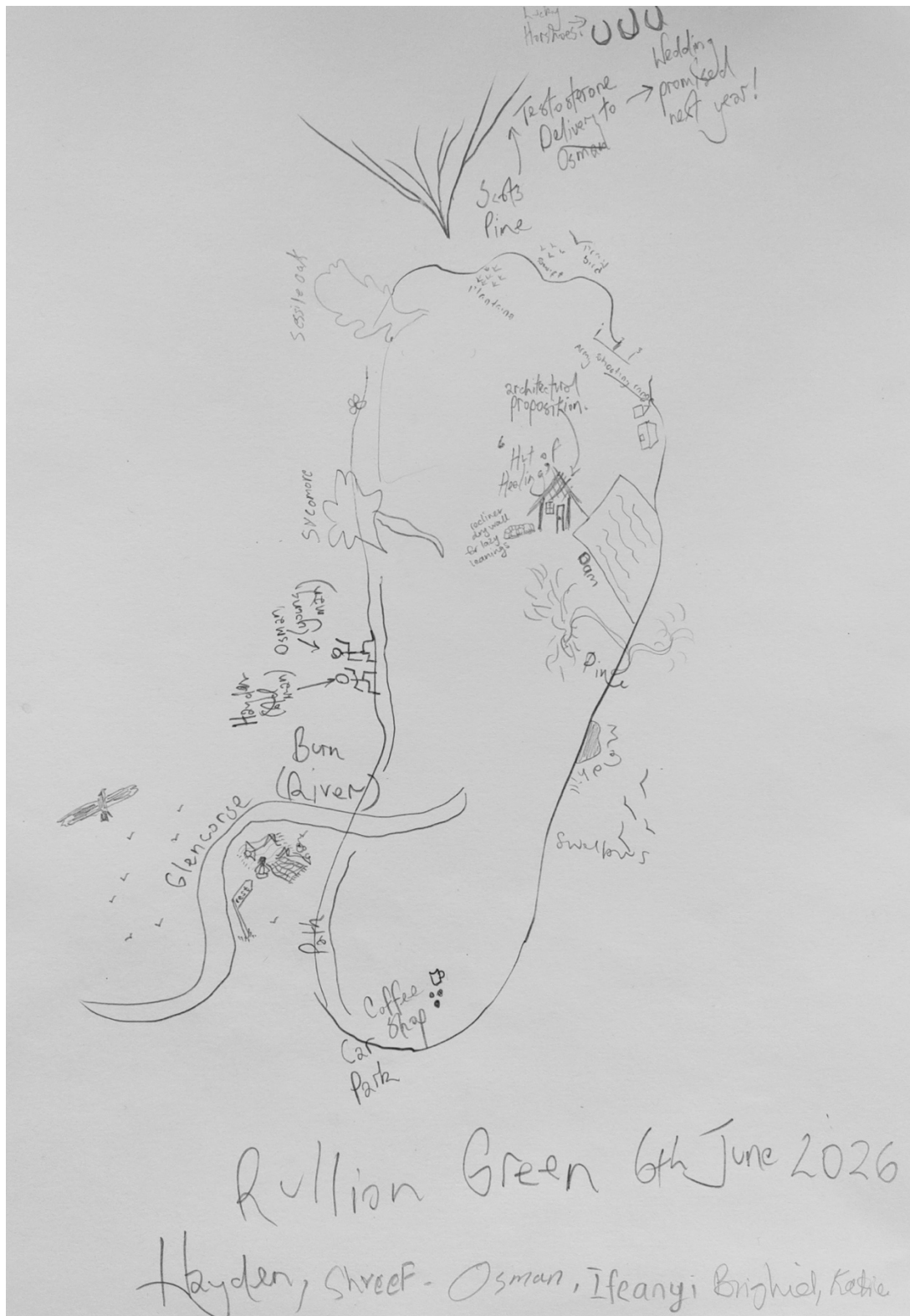
Alec Finlay, Hayden Lorimer, Tamara Colchester

1. all belonging begins in longing
2. our sense of belonging is universal and inflected with localised tints of history, memory, and loss
3. we all dream of an isle which will heal our exile
4. every culture is a patchwork quilt
5. our true home begins in the sky and ends at the centre of the earth
6. every *here* begins in a *there*
7. the T which makes Here into There may be a tree, a shelter, or gallows
8. we talk of my mountains at the end of The Pentlands, his mountains in Sudan—
then he describes his walk over The Alps
9. The Syrian Bakery has become just as much a part of the island as it's standing stones
10. every culture has a sense of rootedness and a tradition of drovers, travellers, and tinkers
11. we translate *valley* and *wadi* between us, and our knowledge of the land grows
12. plants and trees form a commonwealth of knowledge which translates between ecologies and
cultures
13. whether a plant is native or naturalised it belongs— so long as it can thrive in the present
conditions
14. in every culture there are plants which mark the opening and closing of the seasons
15. sharing experience about migratory birds, their comings and goings, the great distances travelled,
is a reminder that for some the swallow is a signature of Christmas, while for others they scream
summer

16. what's a cuckoo? – *it sounds like COO-KOO, COO-KOO* – yes! we have this also
17. to our visitors the tiny tick will seem as terrifying as scorpions and vipers do to us
18. your sandflies are my midges– just as infuriating, just as common
19. food stories are good stories– fufu, kabsa, the ingredients for jollof rice, humous, dates and cherries, with oatcakes, Kit-Kats, Irn Bru, and lemon balm tea, a picnic sharing many cultures in one location
20. paths are local, but they lead all around the world
21. light is distributed unevenly across the world
22. our visitors may remind us of things we've lost
23. the questions strangers ask are clarifying
24. there are six languages in the placenames we can see from this hill – Gaelic, Pictish, Brythonic, Scots, English, Norse – why not add a few more?
25. *Before*– the name of a country we once dwelt in, whether ill or in exile
26. our talk turns to tribes– the tribes he knows, our tribes, the mess of tribes
27. our talk turns to empire– when our culture was occupied and when we were the occupier
28. many cultures have a Highlands and a Lowlands
29. the patterns of land ownership in our hills parallel the borders of nations which were defined by arbitrary lines
30. who has the right to rest; who has the right to remain; who has the right to choose where they live; who has the right to work



Top: members of the *radical rest collective* for people with chronic illness picnicking by the ford, with asylum seekers from The Welcoming, sharing conversation– those who could walk brought shared impressions of the hillside and woodland with those who couldn't walk, and together we created a *sole map* (see page 8) representing what we saw, and hints of what we'd like to see, including a *hut of healing*. **Bottom:** picnicking with members of The Welcome by Cocksburn Reservoir, with views of the newly planted woodland (photo by Sam MacDiarmid).



Place-aware Drumbrae

close-by

Drumbrae, *the ridge-slope*– a name which contains two languages, Gaelic and Scots

Cocksburn, *moorcock burn*– species for hunting

Allan Water, *the flowing water*– *Alauna*, from the Indo-European root *to flow, to stream*

Darn Road, *dark road*– runs along the Allan Water

Dumyat, *hillfort of the Maeatae*

Black Hill, paired with White Hill (because of heather?), now wooded

White Hill, paired with Black Hill (no heather)

Loss Hill, *burnt hill*

Wharry Burn, *quarry burn*

Pendreich, *gloomyhill*– *pen* is Brythonic, *head, top, end*

Blairdenon, *the devon river plain*– *blair, plain, meadow, flat top*

Ashentroool, *the pools burn*

Commonty Wood, *the commons wood*– this was due north but no longer exists

Drove roads – from Sheriffmuir via Pendreich, Sheriffmuir Road by Airthrey or Logie kirk, to Causewayhead, Stirling to Falkirk.

faraway

Ben Ledi, *the slope ben*

Ben Vorlich, *the bay ben*

Ben Lomond, *the beacon ben*

Ben Venue, *the wee ben*

The Cobbler

Place-aware Rullion Green

Scald Law, *scabby hill*

Fala Knowe, speckled hill; *faw* is speckled

Carnethy Hill, *burial cairns hill*

Glencorse Burn, *burn of the glen-crossing*

Drumbrae species mesostics

plants

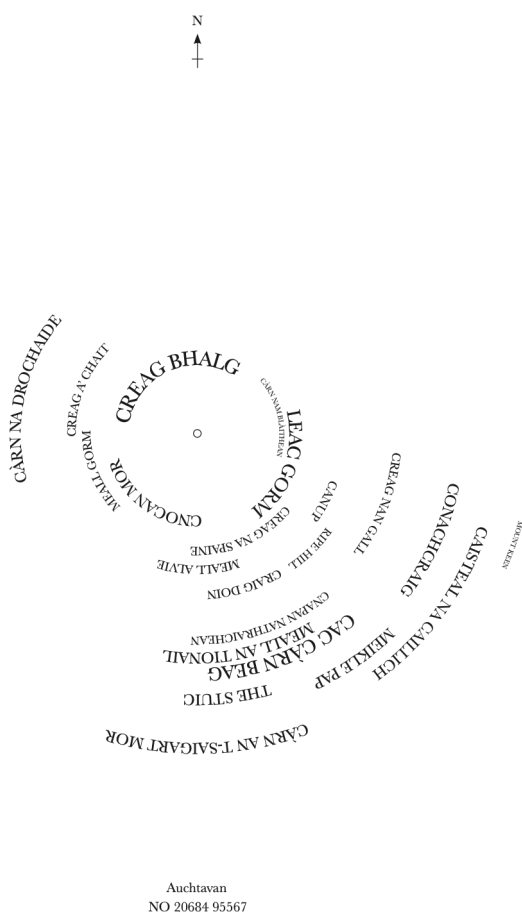
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trees

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proposals for *Drumbrae*

1. a *conspectus* visual poem of the area that is visible from the new visitor centre, showing all the visible hill names in a circle, to help people understand their location. This site offers a notable view of Perthshire and Trossachs summits, as well as lower hills to the east. Below is an example of a *conspectus*.



word-mntn



The *word-mntn* is a visual poem composed from a hill name. It offers a way of aligning in the landscape for those with limited walking. These naturally expand into a conspectus of hill names, to help people know where they are and feel they belong.

proposals for Rullion Green

We incorporated these into a text from the forthcoming book– some are relatively easy to achieve (alternative signposts, a microtonal walk, benches, awnings), others more in the nature of long-term dreams (a hut of healing), to provoke deeper reflections on access. A *hut of healing* is like a Maggie's Centre translated into the hills– a place of recuperation and creativity.

At Flotterstone, resting by the ford over the Glencorse Burn – the name means *burn of the glen-crossing the hills* – three of us held a *restival* to consider what the University could do to make their woodland estate more welcoming to *not-walkers*, while a party of asylum seekers from The Welcoming ascended the hill. Instead of a sign saying *no vehicles beyond this point* at the start of the track, why not add an invitation to deliver anyone who cannot walk into the heart of The Pentlands. The irony of current conceptions of leisure means that only fishermen feel welcome to drive up to the reservoir–why?

And we want a microtonal route in the lower stretches of the walk, on either side of the burn, with benches (with poems) every 100 metres, signposts that read in yards rather than miles, and plantings of wildflowers.

Disabled access has come to be defined by the requirements of wheelchairs– but all kinds of limit and vulnerability can inform landscape design. Katie suggests drystone *recliners* at a 60-degree angle, so you can sit and look out, with a pillow stone inscribed *rest* for your head to lean on. And can we have some moss-beds, lower than benches, for dozing. And we also want awnings by the river which move location from month to month, where we can watch sand martins dip, slow flight of the heron, and, high over the twin kips of Turnhouse Hill, buzzard dots. But now we're *really* getting beyond ourselves– we want a *hut of healing* reaching over the reservoir, set on stilts, with a veranda, a jetty, a boat at anchor named *dérive*, and views over Castlelaw Hill and Phantom's Cleugh, where *radical resters* will spend a few days in the wilds, recuperating, and exchanging friendly nods with the anglers.

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Alec's reflections on Drumbrae [also for the forthcoming DoA book]

We took asylum seekers from Iran, Ukraine, East and West Africa, and Hong Kong to the University of Edinburgh's Forest and Peatland Programme restoration project by Dumyat and Cocksburn Reservoir, where an improvised *conspectus* revealed a multilingual site in which English and Gaelic are tinted with Scots, and remnants of Pictish, Brythonic, and Norse. Nearby is the Allan Water, from *Alauna*, an Indo-European root which means *to flow, to stream*. Looking over the moor, dark ruts mark the half million saplings of a wood-to-be, named for the farm of Drumbrae, *the ridge-slope*, which jams two languages together and was famous for its parties when I was a student here. It was at Stirling that I first encountered a diverse community, with studious Malaysians learning aquaculture and novelists from Africa. Today I'm aware of my pretendy country denied the right to its own immigration policy. Today we hear the frustrations of people willing to work and benefit others, who cannot elude the draconian laws petty prejudice has imposed.

Beyond the nascent wood is the hill of Ashentrool— this isn't named for the tree, the first element is Gaelic *eas*, which makes this *the scarp of pools*. The reservoir, which hosts swans and blue damselflies, is fed by the Cocksburn, named for moorcock— grouse to us. Its scorchio and the banks are hoaching with kids who hiked up from Stirling and Bridge of Allan to swim and flirt on what may be the best day of their lives, though they don't know it yet. The heat in the south and across Europe is melting, and we're imagining what *hot* means to *accessers* from Sudan.

We're sheltered by a classic pair, Black Hill and White Hill, and beyond the dam is the farm of Pendreich, *gloomyhead*, and an FLS plantation. To the north the first edition OS includes a small woodland, Commonty, *commons wood*, which no longer exists. Near where it stood Hayden spots two oaks and wonders whether they marked a stance for resting cattle, for the Sherriffmuir Road led to Stirling Brig and the great tryst at Falkirk.

On the drive up from Edinburgh, I excitedly tell Ifeayani we're taking him to 'The Highlands'. *I have heard people talking about these Highlands a lot, but I don't understand what they are*. His question leaves us scrabbling— is it a place, historical entity, purple pastoral, or site ravaged by sheep and Empire? Chatter about clans, glens, and antlers leads him to reciprocate, sketching the tribal tensions between the Ebo, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and Fulani, which forced him to flee Nigeria. As we pass Grangemouth talk turns to the Niger Delta, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and looking ahead, the windfarm on Dun Law. We have a clear sight of the Ochils now, with the cuesta of Dumyat. Soon enough we're headed up the steep lane that cuts through Hermitage Wood – site of another folly – and, passing White Hill, Hayden says *we have entered The Highlands*. Our promontory picnic site looks onto the summit of Dumyat, *hillfort of the Maeatae*, seat of a confederation of Pictish tribes whose territory extended west towards Balfron, south towards Dalmeny, and east towards St Andrews.¹ The fort, which was

¹ <https://stirlingarchaeology.substack.com/p/new-light-on-dumyat-capital-of-the>

occupied between 500 BC and 700 AD, is remembered on the map by the name Castle Law. A collage of drystone, vitrification, and natural gorges, it commanded views of noble Ben Lomond, *the beacon ben* – a twin for Carnethy Hill, *burial cairns hill*, which we saw from Flotterstone. Hayden can also pick out Ben Ledi, Ben Venue, and over the windmills, Ben Vorlich, all of which he's run up at some time. South of us is the broad expanse of the Carse of Forth, which my grandfather said gave the best hay in Scotland and, beyond that, The Antonine Wall. I worked with students from Forth Valley to create an ecological map of this defensive lines, planting species which the Romans introduced, some of which we perceive as native.

FLORES MUNDI, WALLFLOWERS

Laurus nobilis, Noble Laurel

Prunus (domestica) institia, Damson

Anthriscus sylvestris, Cow-parsley

Morus nigra, Mulberry

Castanea sativa, Sweet Chestnut

Rosmarinus officinalis, Rosemary

Narcissus poeticus, White Daffodil

Juglans regia, Walnut

Rosa spinosissima, Burnet Rose

The Flotterstone *day of access* looked onto another south-facing Castlelaw, this one an Iron Age fort of the Votadini, with souterrain grain store used for trade with the Romans. Of course, by 'Roman' we mean the Syrians, Spanish, Bulgarians, Algerians, Belgians, French, Dutch, and all the other nationalities who served under the eagle, for our ragtag picnics of nations were nothing new when it comes to these parts.

AF

photographs of day of access, Drumbrae: Sam MacDiarmid



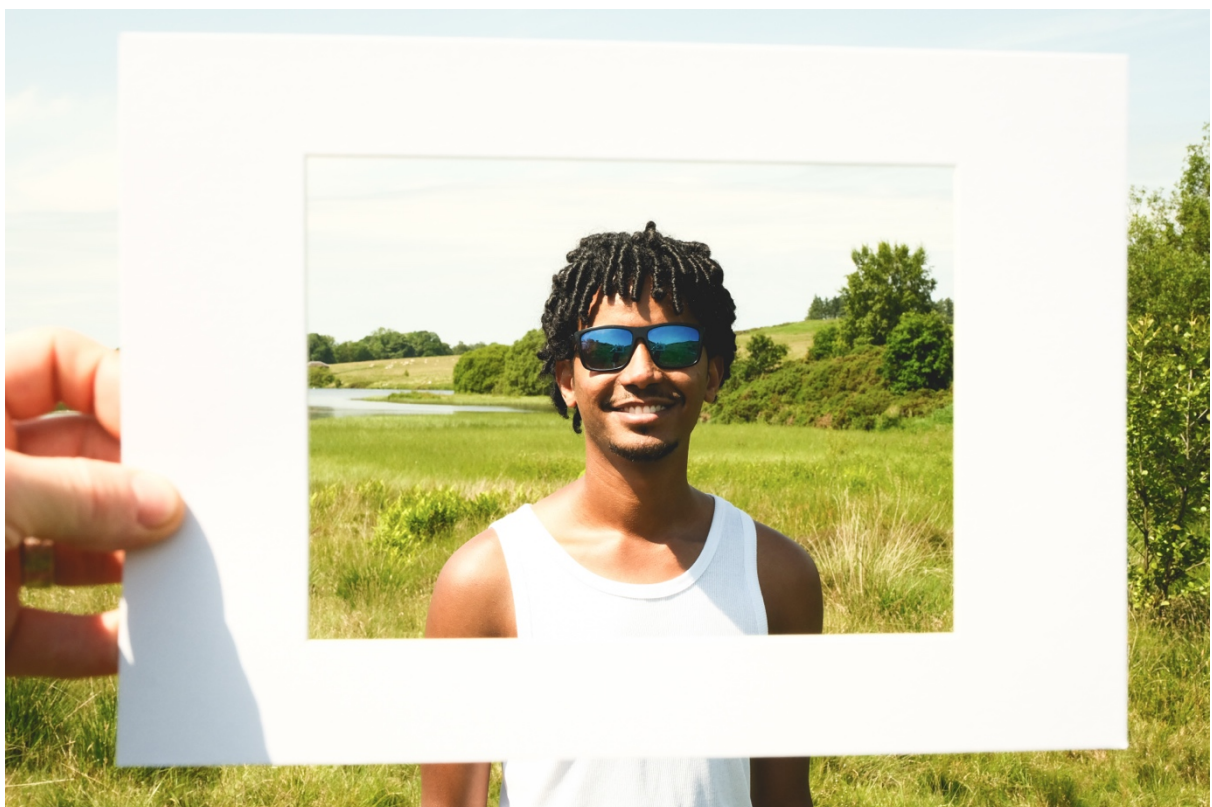
1. introducing the tree plantations and the aims of the woodland (Alec and Hayden discuss the impact of deer and sheep);
2. sky-frames as viewfinders;
3. identifying mountain views



1. sketching a Drumbrae species mesostics; 2. a plant-listening walk with Tamara, exploring local flora; 3. place-aware conspectus using placenames to explore the landscape, with Alec and Hayden



walking to the picnic spot by the reservoir



participants from The Welcoming using sky-frames