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## **Foraging tourism: critical moments in sustainable consumption**

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### **Abstract**

Despite the prevalence of sustainability discourses across the Global North, for the majority of people abstract issues of sustainability often have a low salience with the realities of travel choices. Researchers examining sustainable tourism recognise that any changes resulting in sustainable performance are likely to come about as a result of shifts in everyday highly routinised social practices, relations and socio-technical structures. Attending to these debates, this paper examines relations between social practice, sustainability and tourism through the rise in foraging tourism in the United Kingdom. Using evidence from interviews and media analysis detailing perspectives of foraging course leaders and attendees, alongside participant observation, the paper records the ways in which foraging experiences are negotiated and accomplished in commercial contexts and what participants “do” with the ideas and practices post-experience. By engaging with debates surrounding the meanings of sustainable tourism, the paper extends understanding of these concepts through the identification of foraging tourism as a facilitator in rethinking everyday practice and discourse. The paper ends by evaluating the potentials of tourism in facilitating sustainable performance and discourse.

### **1.1 Introduction**

The gathering of food has a long history. Yet, in recent times across the United Kingdom, North America, Australia and New Zealand foraging has come to refer to the finding and harvesting of perceived ‘wild’ foods, generally by those who otherwise possess secure food sources (Hall, 2013a; Poe et al., 2014). The popularity of this form of foraging has waxed and waned, since the first foraging guides were written in the late 1700s (Mabey, 2006). At present there has been somewhat of a perceived revival, with foraging activities celebrated on mainstream television, as part of award-winning restaurant fare, and supported by a range of books and guides (Emery et al., 2006; Forestry Commission Scotland, 2017; Mabey, 2006).

With this most recent interest has come the availability of foraging courses. Foraging courses are diverse in their offerings and do not fit neatly into notions of tourism. It is, for this reason, somewhat difficult to ascertain the extent to which foraging is an emerging tourist practice – however, there are indications suggesting that foraging is indeed bound up in the production and consumption of tourism. Figure 1, for example, presents data derived through the global news database, Factiva, indicating an exponential association in media discussions of foraging *and* tourism from 1982. While

not directly identifying a rise in the availability and interest in foraging courses, Figure 1 does highlight the increasing circulation of related discourses. The Adventure Travel Trade Association (Petrač and Beckmann, 2015) undertook market research with 281 tour operators, activity providers and travel agents, representing 54 countries. Their market research identified foraging as an emerging niche tourism trend, with 18% of travel agents and 39% of inbound/outbound operators stating that they have received client requests to forage with a local specialist during travel; making ‘foraging with a specialist’ the fourth most requested form of food tourism, behind ‘cooking classes’, ‘visiting a farm’ and ‘trying street food’. Moreover, 55% of operators reported having already integrated experiences of this kind into their business offering.

Attendees on such courses would not necessarily perceive themselves as ‘tourists’ – with many, for example, attending courses close to their place of residence. Nevertheless, many foraging courses are marketed and designed for individuals visiting an area and are often bound up in destination marketing strategies aimed at enabling visitors to connect with place during travel (cf. Tourism Australia, 2017; Travel Oregon, 2017; Visit Dublin, 2017; Visit Scotland, 2017). In this sense, foraging is not only a tourist activity, but that it is also currently a recognised marketing feature used by influential destination marketing organisations to attract visitors. While the relationship between foraging and tourism is far from clear, foraging courses are increasingly entwined within the production and consumption of contemporary tourism at particular destinations.

*Insert Figure 1 here.*

Over the last few years, however, mainstream media and certain conservation groups have been critical of foragers and such courses – claiming that understanding foraging as a form of environmental practice is not only an inadequate response to changing climates, it is actually a potentially unsustainable practice (cf. Barrie, 2015; Bawden, 2015; Usborne, 2016). National media focus in the UK, for example, has granted significant attention to the banning of mushroom foraging in various contexts on the grounds of sustainability concerns. Specifically, claims from conservation bodies and members of the local community in Hampshire’s New Forest, argued increased interest in ‘wild’ food and consequential foraging courses were attracting such large numbers of visitors to the extent that the ecosystem was at risk (Petrač and Beckmann, 2015). As a result, in 2016 the Forestry Commission enforced a blanket ban on mushroom picking. A similar ban was enacted in Epping Forest, while Bristol City Council has also proposed new bylaws to stop foraging in its parks and green spaces (Usborne, 2016) – although in the latter case, the bylaws failed following public consultation (Bristol 24/7, 2017).

It is important to note the complex ways through which laws relating to foraging vary geographically throughout the UK. The Theft Act 1968 (The Theft Act, 1968), for England and Wales, states that foraging is allowed, so long as it is not for commercial purposes. Understandings of 'commercial' become complex within the context of foraging courses. Local bylaws add further complexity in allowing councils, National Trust and government conservation agencies to enact variations to the Act (as seen in the above examples). In Scotland it is also illegal to forage for commercial purposes, however, foraging practices are arguably more lenient because of the 'right to roam' Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (Land Reform (Scotland) Act, 2003), which ensures everyone has statutory rights of access to private and public land, for recreation and education, with few restrictions. At the same time, however, the Wildlife and Countryside (WAC) Act 1981 (Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981), which covers all of Britain, states that it is illegal to uproot any wild plant without permission from the landowner and occupier. While it could be claimed that most foraging practices do not remove entire plants, the WAC Act introduces confusion around the classification of mushrooms as 'plants'. Broadly, sustainability issues arising through foraging in the UK have largely emerged in areas with higher population densities; that is, predominantly England's south.

In this paper, we hope to take a step beyond sustainability contestations, instead examining the ways in which foraging experiences are negotiated and accomplished in commercial contexts and what participants 'do' with the ideas and practices post-experience. While not seeking to contest the realities of sustainability critiques (Forestry Commission England, 2017; National Trust, 2016; The Telegraph, 2016), this exploratory paper is concerned with the interest and motivations relating to the rise in foraging courses in the UK. The paper aims to examine relations between tourism, foraging, and practice, evaluating the potentials of this form of tourism in facilitating sustainable performance and discourse. To that end, the paper begins with a discussion of scholarship positioned at the intersections of sustainable tourism, local food and slow travel – situating the foraging course as a phenomenon emerging from localism movements. Examination of the qualitative method and Foucauldian discourse analysis is next introduced. The data here are based on research carried out in 2015 and 2016; semi-structured interviews and participant observation are triangulated with a media analysis. Following a brief reflection on the authors' positionalities influencing the research, discussion turns to explore the way each method rendered complementary insights into understandings of foraging tourism, and the extent to which the practice brought into question everyday sustainable practice following the course. Results and discussion are present through three sections. The first, *performing as 'forager'* identifies the impetus driving individuals to teach foraging, granting attention to how ideas of nostalgia are drawn on to make sense of foraging as a response to contemporary unsustainable consumption practices. The second, *edifying*

*encounters*, examines how course leaders utilise the space of the foraging course to facilitate connection between attendees and the environment by evoking nostalgic narratives. Finally, *reconceiving practice*, turns to the perspective of course participants – identifying how embodied skills, developed through the foraging course, provide opportunities to rethink human/nonhuman relations. The paper concludes with critical discussion of foraging tourism within the broader context of tourism and sustainability.

## **2.1 Positioning foraging tourism: sustainable tourism, local food and slow travel**

Within the context of tourism, behavioural responses to sustainability are complex. Consumption practices generally reflect norms, trends and production systems that often bears no connection to their social, environmental and economic effects. Despite the prevalence of sustainability discourses across tourism, abstract issues of sustainability often have a low salience with the realities of travel choices for the majority of people (Hall, 2013b). Whitmarsh (2009) argues, by way of example, that climate change responses pose a particular challenge because environmental change is masked in already unpredictable, yet familiar processes, such as temperature change and weather fluctuations – making it difficult to reconcile personal action with wider human-induced climate effects.

Moreover, many qualitative studies establish that issues of sustainability are largely ignored in travel planning because tourists dismiss their potential contribution and the difference certain choices may generate (Hall, 2013b). Travellers have been found to draw on a range of justifications to make sense of contradictions between personal environmental politics and practice – for example, in justifying the emissions required for long distance travel to remote locations, holidays may be positioned as once off experiences, distinct from daily reality (Font & Hindley, 2017). In light of these findings, sustainable tourism researchers recognise that any shifts resulting in sustainable tourist practice are likely to come about as a result of changes to everyday highly routinized social practices, relations and socio-technical structures. While much has been identified, there is still much to learn regarding the ways everyday performance shifts through structure/agency relations, and the ways such everyday changes consequentially inform and are informed by tourism and sustainability (Bramwell et al., 2016).

Broad cultural and political shifts towards localism and ‘slow’ movements are one propensity seen to influence traveller motivations, and thus provide a productive point in which to examine relations between tourism, sustainability and the everyday. Tasting ‘local’ food is now perceived as an essential dimension of the touristic experience (Hjalager & Richards, 2011). Much scholarship has focused on the motivations driving travellers to seek out culinary encounters when visiting certain destinations (Kim et al., 2009; Yeoman et al., 2007) and the outcomes arising through such

encounters – in terms of rural development and sustainability (Bessiere, 1998; Sims, 2009; Everett 2012; Everett & Aitchison, 2008), attraction of and impediments to tourist experience (Cohen & Avieli, 2004), alongside broader conceptualisation of the entanglements of consumption, place and experience (Mkono et al., 2013; Osman et al., 2014).

What unites food tourism scholarship is an understanding that travellers are seeking opportunities to dwell in landscape, as a way to learn and connect with place and culture (Tucker, 2016). Thus, aligning with turns towards local food, is a growing movement of individuals who hope to be ‘moved’ through movement, by slowing down and (re)connecting with the world differently during travel (Fullagar et al., 2012). Such ideas suggest both nostalgic and future oriented desires for local and embodied connection. ‘The search for the authentic is believed a priority by...visitors, whose desires for immersion in the culture along with a sense of nostalgia is linked with the Slow Food and Slow Cities perspective’ (de la Barre & Brouder, 2013, 148). Whilst somewhat counterproductive to environmental sustainability, travel from this perspective becomes an opportunity to learn and rethink current practice (Tucker, 2016). Increasing interest in longer, slower and simpler ways of travelling presents opportunities to promote sustainable discourses and practices in ways that complement and benefit traveller motivations (Font & Hindley, 2017).

Despite being noted for its increasing popularity (Everett, 2016), foraging tourism remains an under researched aspect within food tourism scholarship. Early work has drawn attention to foraging tourists’ yearning for self-sufficiency (Scott, 2013) and for deeper connections to place and heritage (Hall, 2013a), alongside broader sustainability concerns resulting from ‘amateur’ or opportunistic foragers (Hall, 2013a). These discussions align with findings within sustainable tourism scholarship, where emphasis on localism and slow food in certain contexts is understood to have influenced (anti)consumption measures undertaken by travellers – such as desires for voluntary simplicity and alternative, slower forms of mobility (Hall, 2013a). Yet, there is limited understanding concerning the motivations influencing the rise in foraging courses, and the potential of this form of tourism for shifts in practice.

Beyond tourism scholarship, recent interest in foraging is largely evidenced within political ecology debates. Here, focus has been concerned with troubling conceptual and material bifurcations between human/non-human, nature/culture, indigenous/settler and native/invasive (McLain et al., 2014; Potteiger, 2015). This scholarship is helpful in identifying the ways foraging is underpinned by intersecting and multiple notions of identity, place, mobility and agency, and highlights how foraging serves as one of the complex ways individuals relate to their surrounding environments (Poe et al., 2014). To find a plant or fungus useful, foragers learn to return time and again – becoming familiar

with particular environments and places. Hall (2013a) has discussed foraging as a form of cultural memory for some migrants in New Zealand – reinforcing ideas that food ways travel with people as they move between places. Foraging, from this perspective, is thus a process of identity and heritage maintenance that simultaneously enables connection and understanding to and of new landscapes – as well as attachment through memory and practice to distant yet familiar places (Hall, 2013a). Through this process foragers come to learn about ecological interrelationships, seasonal patterns and the ways through which particular species flourish together under certain environmental conditions (Tsing, 2005). Essential here is recognition of the sensory and experiential; establishing a sensorial understanding of seasonal landscape change can contribute to a greater connection to a particular locale (Kowalski, 2014; Staddon, 2009). Such scholarship has informed understanding of the ways attendees in the present study conceived foraging as a way to trouble their own human/nonhuman disconnections. This work is helpful to the present paper, in its recognition that foraging is not a discrete and localised practice; foraging connects and moves between differing places, identities and performances. An understanding that opens up thinking to the ways foraging whilst travelling may influence performance over time.

While foraging offers connection with new places and cultures, political ecologists have highlighted the ways foraging can also reinforce distinctions between individuals who relate to place and nature in different ways (Poe et al., 2014). This is because differentiated foraging practices and species preferences reflect cultural and historic contexts that privilege certain (particularly white, environmentalist) human and non-human relationships. Such uneven power relations reproduce and naturalise characterisations of ‘others’, ‘aliens’ and ‘outsiders’ – a process that both reconfirms and troubles long held assumptions relating to what belongs, and what does not – through, for example, conceptualization of certain species as weeds and others as edible. Foraging has strong cultural and classed associations, affecting its differing positionings. To a certain extent in the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand foraging has moved away from its association with low socio-economic status (Emery et al., 2006). Conversely, in parts of Asia, and Southern and Eastern Europe foraging, to varying degrees, remains associated with lifestyles of economically disadvantaged communities (Schulp et al., 2014). At the same time, all places are influenced by complex migratory patterns informing the ways through which foraging becomes understood within very particular, yet overlapping, cultural landscapes.

Beyond political ecology debates, foraging has offered a performative and practical response to abstract concerns with food security, and human and community wellbeing (Kowalski, 2014). The practice has been shown to offer a way for individuals to interact with the food system, evaluating, subverting and integrating knowledge from environmental and alternative food movement

discourses (Kowalski, 2014). Foraging for food is thought to reduce food miles and greenhouse gas emissions, improve food safety and quality (resulting in greater health benefits) and heighten social capital (Campbell & MacRae, 2012; Seyfang, 2006; Sherriff, 2009; Spence et al., 2009). While this argument seems optimistic, it has been critiqued for its nostalgic, romanticisation of peasant and pre-industrialised rural foodways (Hall 2012, 2013a) and for its inappropriateness in a 21<sup>st</sup> century industrial context (Bawden, 2016). Moreover, the ontological realities of food production and consumption bring into question the facile dichotomy requiring food to be either global, industrially produced and unsustainable *or* local, manually harvested or produced and sustainable. In many 'wild to table' influenced restaurants, for example, locally foraged ingredients often serve as only a featured dimension of a dish; more 'traditional' wholesaler sourced products from any number of locations often making up the majority of the recipe (cf. Rayner, 2016; M. Williams, 2017). While, many 'wild to table' influenced restaurants are wrapped up in globalised gentrification processes, which bring any notion of localism into question. For instance, Noma, arguably one of the most infamous of such restaurants recently moved its entire operation (including 80 members of staff) from Copenhagen to Sydney for a 10 week residency; reimagining its menu through native Australian produce (G. Williams, 2017).

Recognising that no one process of food production and consumption is essentially 'sustainable', we are interested in exploring the ways through which foraging course leaders and attendees make sense of these complexities through their own discourses and performances. While much work has examined the entanglements of foraging and sustainability, the intersection of these with that of tourism remains peripheral to discussions of food tourism, slow travel and sustainable tourism. This is despite a recognised need within the sustainable tourism literature for greater understanding of sustainable tourist practice, and knowledge of the ways through which social trends inform and are informed by tourism. Taking all this together, the present paper takes the foraging course as its starting point – examining relations between foraging tourism and everyday practice.

### **3.1 Method**

This study forms part of a larger research project on the role of food tourism as a form of rural development and sustainability, funded by the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Council. Of the 45 participants directly involved in the broader project, the interview material of seven participants is used in this paper. Participant observation on foraging courses and a media analysis on foraging tourism were undertaken specifically for this case study, to complement the interviews. The semi-structured interviews conducted with seven course leaders rendered insights into how the foraging course was positioned as relating to sustainable practice and discourse. Given

the relatively small number of foraging course leaders in the UK, a targeted and snowball recruitment strategy was used. This involved directly contacting course leaders already known to the authors. Following interviews, a discussion was had regarding other potential contacts. Such a recruitment strategy resulted in most participants being either Scotland based foragers or were relatively well known within the UK foraging community. The interview schedule focused on the reasons course leaders foraged and the motivations guiding them to conduct courses. Interviews lasted for around 60 minutes. Some course leaders regularly discuss themes relating to foraging and courses with media, and viewed such discussions as important opportunities to generate political commentary relating to the environment, as well as a form of promotion for their own courses. For this reason, some course leaders chose to not be anonymised; this is detailed in Appendix 1, alongside additional attributes relating to participants.

Participant observation was undertaken at five foraging courses in the Scottish Highlands, providing insights into the personal and political motivations of both attendees and guides. Observations included interactions between the researchers, the guide and course participants, course attendees and the environment, as well as more general information relating to the properties and preparation techniques of the harvested flora. Observations were recorded in a field diary and analysed alongside interviews and media articles. Courses were predominantly attended over summer and autumn. Numbers on each course varied, ranging from as small as five to as large as 30. Timings of each course also differed, yet averaged two hours per session. Environments were diverse; covering seashore, hedgerow, forest and urban. Course attendees were predominantly white, although were from a mix of British and European backgrounds; understood as such through conversations that took place during the courses. Gender and age varied.

A media analysis was further conducted to characterise the sets of ideas drawn on in discussions of foraging tourism, and the ways through which various actors constructed meanings, values and identities. The newspaper database *Factiva* returned 2,406 articles on the search 'tourism' and 'foraging'; utilising the 'all dates' and 'blogs and boards' search options. All sources were then screened, to ensure each data source related explicitly to foraging and tourism ('tourism' here conceived in a broad sense as relating to travel to and attendance at courses, reflections from course leaders and attendees, environmental and economic impact of such courses and so on), giving a total of 188 sources. Such a large variation between the number of articles in the original list, compared to the final analysed list resulted from a high replication in the initial 2,406 articles, where either the same article had been reproduced across a number of news sites or authored in reference to the same original media release. These reproduced articles were identified through their use of replicated verbatim wording and were removed during the initial screening exercise.

Having removed reproductions, the final 188 sources analysed contained a variation of blogs, opinion editorials and news articles, covering a range of lifestyle, environment, marketing and economic themes. A comparison of findings with those of the few existing relevant studies concerned with foraging (cf. Hall, 2013a; Kotowski, 2016; Poe et al., 2014; Tsing, 2012) increased the confidence in the validity of the information produced.

Discourse analysis was utilised to analyse interviews, media articles and the field diary. There are a range of approaches grouped together under the term 'discourse analysis', all of which broadly seek to understand the powers and systems of knowledge mediated through text. Certain tourist scholars have turned specifically to Foucauldian approaches to understand the ways discursive contexts are constantly (re)figured and (re)created through individual talk, text and performance (Hannam & Knox, 2005). By way of example, Hanna and colleagues (2016) employed a Foucauldian discourse analysis to understand how discourse enables and constrains the way in which climate change can be discussed at particular times and places, and how discourses legitimize particular practices as either sustainable or unsustainable. While Grimwood et al. (2015) employed a Foucauldian discourse analysis to attend to how alternative discourses evolve, become silenced or constructed as peripheral and disempowered within the context of responsible tourism. Such an approach was productive in making sense of how alternative discourses resist and negotiate dominant meanings and practices in ways that open up possibilities for thinking and doing things differently.

For the present paper, a form of Foucauldian discourse analysis was chosen because we were concerned with how both alternative and dominant values, meanings and identities were constructed through foraging tourism discourses, and the ways through which course leaders and attendees made sense of and conflicted with these constructions in various ways. Alternative forms of discourse analysis, such as semiotic analysis, have by contrast, been noted as limited in their ability to understand the role of identity and agency, within broader structures (Hannam & Knox, 2005).

Foucauldian discourse analysis was applied to identify themes, particularly attending to time of text production, place of text production, emotive language and understandings drawn on, by both the authors and quoted subjects, to make sense of foraging. Rather than seeking to discover 'truth' or the origin of a statement, this form of analysis aims to uncover the internal mechanisms through which certain structures and rules over statements are maintained about foraging, tourism, sustainability and so on, that position 'what is' and 'what they can enact', as unchangeable, normal and common-sense. The methodological strength of this approach is in its ability to move beyond representation, to understand the ways individuals act, feel and think about foraging courses.

Following Rose (2001), Foucauldian discourse analysis involved a three step process: familiarisation, coding and silences. Familiarisation involved reading and rereading texts, examining the relationships between statements, groups of statements and relations between different texts. Coding, required listing emergent themes and noting where they occur in text. Here, particular attention was granted to the ways each theme is given meaning, by whom and the particular kinds of knowledge produced through text. Incoherence and inconsistencies were granted particular attention as they pointed to potential moments where differing constructions came into play. Finally, it was crucial to acknowledge who and what was missing from texts. Attending to silences underscored whose voices were being heard and why, as well as the ways such voices were drawing on particular sets of ideas to maintain understanding. In presenting the empirical material the inclusion of 'interview with author', indicates a direct quote from one of the seven semi-structured interviews conducted with course leaders. In instances where a media source is used, the authors' name, alongside the source date and location is included in brackets following the quoted exert.

Cognizant of researcher positionality in the production of knowledge (Ateljevic et al., 2005), before moving to presentation of results and discussion, we briefly outline here the ways our own personal experiences have informed the paper's framing. The first author is a white Australian. Having relocated to the Scottish Highlands to work as a postdoctoral candidate on a food tourism project, she began attending foraging courses to learn and connect with the unfamiliar landscape. In experiencing a connection to place through foraging, the question arose as to why this new practice had become meaningful within this particular cultural landscape. At one level, it was a way to gain capital. Feelings of inadequacy in both her newly employed role as a 'food researcher' and this new place, attending foraging courses and undertaking foraging alone, generated geographically bound skills and knowledge, alongside an imagined identity, that held her in place. At another level, there was a strange familiarity in the practice. While the mountainous taiga contrasted with the coastal heathlands of home, the foraged foods available in the highlands were much more aligned with her normative Western European diet. After all, the materials being foraged, raspberries, hazelnut, mint, mushrooms and so on, were things regularly consumed – foraged or otherwise. This was not experienced in the same way within New South Wales, despite spending much of her life in the bush. Such a paradox is structurally related to the first author's identity as a white citizen from a colonised land. The foraging course, however, is likewise bound up in tourism's production within the Australian context (cf. Figure 2). This strange familiarity has thrown up confusing questions relating to the intersections of identity, nationality and belonging, that informed an interest in the increasing popularity of foraging tourism in the UK context – and the politics and meanings bound up in this form of leisure.

The second author spent 25 years living in the Yorkshire hills, gathering berries, mushrooms (and rabbits and pheasants), and foraging Welsh and Scottish seashores on low Spring tides for scallops and cockles whilst on holiday. When he began these practices there was initially scant information on methods, edible types and locations, but the growth of web based media and popular programmes such as those popularised by the *River Cottage* series with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, and the Ray Mears' bushcraft programmes began to spike increased interest in the phenomenon. In 2014, he also undertook training as a Wilderness Guide, which included foraging and the interpretation of a variety of ecozones from mountainside to seashore for adventure tourists. Now also resident in Scotland, this research has been stimulated by a critical questioning of the rise of foraging as an apparently desirable, low-impact sustainable tourist practice.

#### **4.1 Results and discussion**

##### **4.1 Performing as 'forager'**

The constructions guiding course leaders in making sense of their identities as 'foragers' were complex, yet broadly aligned in their use of narratives that stood in opposition to foraging's negative contemporary associations:

While foraging is something of a good-food buzzword right now, I'm determined to debunk the notion that this is all about fine-dining and Michelin stars. Foraging is simply about finding food in order to feed ourselves and our families. It's about eating to live – and most of us in the UK have got out of the habit and lost the skill. Agriculture is 10,000 years old but we've only had shops for a few hundred years. Human beings are hardwired as foragers, it's what we've always done, it's really just gone out of fashion, so we've got out of the habit. With all the pre-packaged goods in shops, it's almost seen as dirty in post-war UK. Yet in countries such as Italy, and particularly in Eastern Europe, it's an everyday approach. (Jack, course leader, male, interview with author).

As to the whole "middle-class hobby" tag that foraging has acquired, it bothers me immensely. Let's get in a time machine and go back to Paleolithic times and point at them and say you flipping middle-class wankers! After all, at heart it is the most radically egalitarian of activities - a good awareness of things and a childlike sense of wonder being the main requirements. (Fergus, course leader, male, interview with author).

Whilst a sense of romanticised loss is central to these narratives, these understandings are also intimately connected and complicated by the potentials of foraging as a future oriented, contemporary practice. In making sense of how and why narratives of loss were utilised by foragers,

it is helpful to turn to Alistair Bonnett's (2015) concept of 'mobile nostalgia'. Following Bonnett, nostalgia often elicits condemnation and suspect. Nostalgia for a past, no longer present, has been thought to represent disappointment and a culture of blame; symbolising loss, mourning and the impossibility of return, where the past becomes celebrated whilst the future is understood as problematic. In attempting to move away from ideas of nostalgia as being necessarily backward looking and reductive, Bonnett reconceives nostalgia as interwoven, undetermined and mobile. Such reconceptualization assists in moving beyond a priori categorisation of nostalgia as either 'good' and 'bad', fixed, determined and passive - rather understanding it as fluid, becoming and dynamic. On this view, nostalgia is not necessarily, either backward looking or future focused but is rather dependent upon the ideas through which it is used within particular contexts. Following Bonnett's mobile reconceptualisation, we suggest that while nostalgia was used in ways that evoked loss, foragers did so with the aim to orient the past toward the present and future realities of consumption and environmental sustainability. The use of nostalgia in this way was further evident in narratives that attempted to present foraging as a way through which to trouble normative consumption practices:

We are challenging modes of consumption or the idea of ourselves as consumers. We don't want to be seen as consumers shopping at a supermarket. We want to be seen as caring consumers. It's about the idea that we're caring for our planet. We are witnessing the effect of fast food and repelling a bit to go back to our heritage, sense of place and connection to food. So much of what I am doing is about connection. You point to any of the [foraged ingredients] here and there's a story. Now when I'm eating that food, I'm reliving that story – of where it came from and what happened when I was gathering it. You get something from Tesco... there's no story there. (Fergus, male, course leader, interview with author).

More than a form of employment, course leaders were driven by political motivation to move away from contemporary forms of consumption – where 'heritage' was evoked as a form of inspiration relating to how contemporary consumption practices might shift. In this sense, nostalgic narratives were used to position foraging as a past activity that was caring, connected and reflective, as well as potentially useful in a contemporary UK setting.

The practice of foraging for course leaders was understood in a professional sense; with courses often serving as a main source of employment. It is perhaps ironic that a practice originally viewed as radical and oppositional to mainstream forms of consumption has become embedded within notions of professionalism. Course leaders viewed this process as affirmative because the professionalization

of foraging was understood to have enabled a more mainstream conversation around the practice, and enhanced the sense of belonging course leaders themselves felt towards the environment:

It's changed me profoundly just in the last few years that I have been doing it professionally. You'd think it would be the opposite, as soon as something becomes about money it becomes mercenary and hard headed and all that sort of thing. But I just haven't found that. It's stepped up my involvement, that's the thing. Because I'm more involved, I'm more aware. Obviously I'm receiving hard cash for what I do. But it's still absolutely breath taking to go to this place that you haven't been to for a year because it's a bit of a journey, and you go there when you know there is something in season. You just go back to this place and you just feel a part of it because of last year and the year before that. These kinds of rhythms and cycles and things which people obviously would have felt. There is something a bit more breathtaking about the rhythm and cycle that you actually have no control over. But that you are just tapping into, and participating in. (Miles, course leader, male (Eat Weeds blog, 9 August 2016).

Course leaders utilised the regular rhythms and temporalities required by a 'professional' industry to facilitate more intimate relations with the environment. The regularity of professional rhythms and temporalities overlapped with those of the seasons and years, rendering connection and familiarity not necessarily available through the experience of either pattern alone. Here, the processes through which individuals are normatively understood as rendering disconnection from the environment (such as professional employment and commodification) are reimagined as enabling intimacy. It was this intimacy and connection that professionals aimed to impart to attendees through the foraging course.

#### **4.2 Edifying encounters**

Professionalism was further brought to life through its performance of knowledge and skill in front of others during the foraging course. The space of the course was thus crucial in rendering opportunity for the forager to demonstrate a professional identity; which in turn enacted a certain authority and governance (Berner, 2008). To facilitate connection, course leaders again drew on nostalgic environmental narratives in various ways with the aim of positioning foraging as both a familiar practice and a pragmatic response to contemporary issues of consumption. Andy, by way of example, begins courses with a series of provocative questions:

One of the first things I ask the groups of people who I take out foraging is whether or not they have foraged before. Most will say no, and then I ask if they have picked a blackberry or

an apple from a tree. Suddenly most of the group are in agreement that they have not only been foraging but they have been since they were children. (Andy, course leader, male (BBC, 14 October 2010)).

The moment of recollection Andy seeks to evoke draws on nostalgic imaginings of childhood spent fruit picking in idyllic rural landscapes. Such characterisations are dependent upon romanticised and westernised constructions of childhood. In drawing on these normative ideals – familiarity through childhood connections works to break down contemporary understandings of foraging as an alternative, unusual practice. Again drawing on Bonnett's (2015) work to make sense of this, nostalgic narratives are reconfigured here as something productive and future focused, rather than reductionist and backward looking. The following statement from Adam works at a broader scale, yet similarly provides insight into the motivations and ways through which course leaders sought to facilitate belonging between attendees and the environment through nostalgic narratives:

I remain positive and hopeful for my students. It is the very skills I practice (i.e., the skills I live)—foraging, wildcrafting medicine, tracking, and many other aspects of wild living—that provide me with grounding and peacefulness in these times. These ancestral technologies provide a reliable means to attain health, become self-reliant, and disentrail people from the wage slavery that suppresses their true selves. I propose that any solutions that are offered must come from the understanding that we are infused with seven million years of hominid history that has shaped our physical bodies, patterned our ways of thinking, and created nutritional, social, and spiritual needs that must be satisfied. (Adam, male, course leader, interview with author).

For Adam, nostalgic constructions of the past, here 'ancestral technologies', are conceived as ways to respond, or live 'peacefully' with, contemporary social dilemmas relating to health, the environment and the self. There is a politics for Adam, through imparting knowledge of 'wild living' through teaching – grief, directed towards things as they once were and now are, is productively reimagined as hope for things as they could be. Past, present and future, therefore, become entangled through the foraging course and its nostalgic narratives, as a way to become hopeful for the future.

The narratives of nostalgia evoked by course leaders are romanticised and idyllic. And it is crucial to recognise these are the voices of white, Western, and predominantly male individuals. They draw on ideas relating to how we should be responding to our changing climates that overlook the time and economic constraints many possess – that inhibit abilities to enact differing practices. Yet, at the same time, these narratives are of interest because, as we will next see in the final discussion

section, they were affective to varying degrees, in engaging and edifying attendees with environmental practices that offered a way to respond to, or in the very least reflect upon, consumption practices and human/non-human connections.

While the space of the course centred on care and belonging, governance and authority were crucial in course leader's attempts to enable a certain socialisation process unfolded:

They [attendees] do not see that they are surrounded by highly nutritious food, potent antimicrobials, items for creating fire, and raw materials for clothing. In other words, there appears to be no need to value local landscapes. One manner to help people understand how valuable open space is, is to show them how much these areas can provide for them. There is no abstraction, no need to understand subtle conjecture, and no requirement to grasp less tangible ideas. (Adam, course leader, male, interview with author).

When I take people on walks, I make it very clear that if you harvest in a sustainable way, you'll do the seaweeds good. Because if the seaweeds are cut a little bit short, there isn't so much weight to pull that seaweed off the rocks during a storm. So that's been my mantra: small amounts of seaweeds that you harvest by giving them a little haircut. (Oonagh, course leader, female (National Post, 19 August 2015).

The hierarchical roles of the forager and attendee are clear in the assumptions that position the former as teacher and the latter as student. Course leaders performed as gatekeepers to non-human environments – rendering distinct boundaries between what is and what is not foragable, and what is and what is not acceptable foraging practice. Foraging professionals are thus powerful actors within this context, determining the sets of ideas through which attendees may enact. Yet, in attending to the narratives of attendees, it became clear that the foraging performances following the courses were interpreted and negotiated in different ways that were dependent on their own everyday practices.

### **4.3 Reconceiving practice**

Attendees were aware of, and troubled by, the association of foraging as a middle class leisure pursuit; it was an understanding that worked to push individuals away from taking up the practice:

We've reached a strange moment when foraging is firmly associated with upper class food — so much so that it's impossible to say you are serving, for example, *foraged sheep sorrel* or *wild fennel sprigs* without it sounding a bit pretentious. This is strange, because

foraging was once a refuge for the desperately poor, and still is in many places. (Nathanael, male (Grist blog, 20 January 2015)).

In the past I have been uninterested in foraging as I thought it was just slightly faddish nonsense. However, perhaps, this was something I could learn and pass on. I couldn't help but wonder how much Monica [course leader] sees that we don't. How much knowledge of the natural world, the seasons, of growing our own food has been lost? In recent years, there's been a definite resurgence of interest in foraging, but I wonder if it will be enough to keep the knowledge alive for future generations? (Lucy, female (Sometimes Gardening blog, 10 April 2014)).

Foraging's contemporary positioning is not straightforward. Notions of productivity were cross-cut with classed consumerism. It was interesting that despite the aims of certain wild-to-table influenced restaurants to increase the practice of foraging, for the participants of this study such an approach served as a deterrent. Rather, it was understandings of potential that enabled attendees to move past foraging's 'negative' classed characterisations.

Learning was conceived as an embodied process, involving a retraining of both the body and social convention. Here we follow Nathanael again, as he wrote:

A walk with a forager is not a leisurely expedition. Stark [course leader] did not gaze out at the vistas, nor remark on the architectural details of the houses we passed. Instead, he stared intently at the margins of the road, and regularly broke off mid-sentence to dash to one side or the other and inspect something green and nondescript. (Nathanael, male (Grist blog, 30 January 2015)).

And Sophie:

We soon had our eyes trained on the rippling shallows and hands submerged in icy water. (Sophie, female (20 March 2014)).

Attendees came to understand the ways normative social performances become reimagined in enacting the foraging identity. Interestingly, while attendees understood the learning process to largely involve rethinking embodied practice, course leaders spoke less on this theme, focusing more on the political discourses driving their practice. Nevertheless, for the attendees, focus was on learning to interact, view and sense the non-human differently, so as to train the senses to find food rather than architecture or landscapes:

Once your brain registers that there's food out there, your brain starts interacting with the environment in a different way. What was once just a green jumble in every unmown verge has begun to gain focus for me. (Nathanael, male (Grist blog, 30 January 2015)).

Learning to perform, view and sense differently provoked surprising discoveries in previously 'familiar' environments:

The blossoms of cherry trees taste like marzipan! I have seen these, every single spring of my life and never thought to eat these tiny flowers. Amazing! (Sarah, female (The Prosecco Diaries blog, 30 March 2014)).

Here the familiar collides with the unfamiliar – creating elements of surprise. Surprise, in this encounter, represents Sarah's recognition that her previous forms of embodied environmental engagement inhibited her ability to become familiar with all dimensions of the environment. The introduction of taste, alongside the ingestion of the environment, brought into question understandings regarding what is known and unknown, familiar and unfamiliar. While not all attendees experienced such transformative embodied encounters, tasting foraged foods often unsettled broader understandings relating to the normative constructions of contemporary tastes and modes of consumption:

We found mainly weeds that you can use in salads. It was interesting though that although it was all quite bitter, I didn't mind that. In fact, I could see it was appealing as there are so few foods these days that give you that bitter buzz. (Lucy, female (Sometimes Gardening blog, 1 May 2014)).

We are trained to understand certain foods as tasting good, and others bad (de Jong & Varley, 2017). Lucy's narrative highlights the ways learning to forage troubled normative constructions around what tastes good and why. The taste, and resulting joy, stemming from the bitterness caused a moment of reflection for Lucy, which resulted in the nostalgic recognition that the contemporary diet is largely absent of bitterness. Absence in this context presents both an enjoyment for something different, and more broadly, a moment of openness, directed towards the potential of more heterogeneous tastes. At the same time, however, for some enjoyment of foraged foods was rather dependent on comfort and familiarity – as was the case with Sarah's experience in tasting marzipan.

Beyond taste, conceptual boundaries between nature and culture, weed and not weed, edible and inedible were unsettled through the foraging course. This was largely enacted through the performance of course leaders:

I felt an unmistakable sense of wonder as though the wardrobe to Narnia had just been kicked wide open. Fergus's [course leader] foraging course amazed and inspired, urging me to throw out the rulebook on what is possible when it comes to wild food. I also felt that the day had closed the illusory distance that modern life can sometimes create between me and the natural world. (Sophie, female (Permaculture.uk, 20 March 2014)).

I tend to dislike invasive plants, because they take over and crowd out diversity. But when I began to look closely at these weeds I saw a lot to admire. They grow in incredibly hostile environments, without water, fertilizer, or even soil. They grow despite the fact that people frequently pull them up and poison them. They are tough, versatile, and resilient. And, as Wong [course leader] points out, the chemicals that make these weeds so strong also give them the powerful flavours prized by chefs. (Nathanael, male (Grist blog, 30 January 2015)).

Courses often centred on the harvesting of 'weeds' and plants considered to be in abundance, rather than rare or at risk species. Harvesting and consumption were positioned as a form of species management – bringing normative notions of edible/inedible, weed/not weed into question in ways that moved beyond monocultured food systems. There is much debate relating to the ethics in encouraging amateurs to forage. Narratives presented here indicate that rather than encouraging the large scale harvesting of scarce flora, as often forms the basis of media circulated moral panics relating to foraging, courses enabled a space to inform individuals of the surrounding environment in very specific ways designed to encourage a form of sustainable practice, as conceived by course leaders. This is not to claim foraging as an essentialist sustainable practice. Rather, through this example, we wish to illustrate both the complexities inherent in claiming any practice as either sustainable or unsustainable, and the ways through which the foraging course enabled opportunities for rethinking some of the normative dichotomous constructions predicated within Western consumption practices.

While many did not identify as 'foragers', following participation some did reflect on how certain conceptualisations shifted – resulting in varying levels of change in personal practice:

Eating weeds has allowed me to engage with the natural world in a new way. I chew on peppery nasturtium leaves on my way to work. When I'm making a sandwich and realize we're out of greens, I just go outside and grab some. I pluck unfamiliar plants and take them home for identification. (Nathanael, male (Grist blog, 30 January 2015)).

These are really common weeds and it's so easy to go into the garden and use them rather than just swear at them. Foraging won't change my world. I won't ever become 'a forager'

but I now have a practical basis from which to do a few things and that's all to the good. I feel more confident and empowered to engage in the plant world in a different way. (Lucy, female (Sometimes Gardening blog, 1 May 2014)).

The foraging experiences have stayed with me; they offered a connection to the land and locals that I wouldn't have otherwise experienced. And I still keep a shaker of seaweed in my cupboard, at the ready for sprinkling on salads, soups, and my favourite use, eggs over easy. The shaker contains a mixture of sea spaghetti, dulse, sweet kombu, spirulina, wakame, kombu and nori. Evidence that Prannie's [course leader] advice has stuck with me, too: "eat a small amount of a wide variety." (Laura, female (National Post, 19 August 2015)).

As noted in the literature discussion, disconnections remain between travel, sustainability and the everyday. It is difficult for individuals to relate to abstract issues, such as environmental sustainability, and recognise connections between personal performance and large-scale environmental issues. While small scale and subtle, we can here see how the foraging course was entangled with everyday practice and discourse, where the highly routinized, social practice of eating everyday was influenced by the embodied and discursive skills learnt during the foraging course. It is clear that the quantifiable potential of such behaviour change is questionable. Yet, what is of interest here is the role of the foraging course as both a tourist space and a space of knowledge exchange that spilled over into forms of everyday practice. Such entanglements are of use for scholars seeking further understanding relating to the ways notions of sustainability move between tourist space and the everyday, in ways that are informed by each. Whilst bound up within the production and consumption of tourism, the foraging course is not a discrete and localised practice only existent within tourist space. Rather, foraging is connected to identity and memory in ways that allowed attendees to connect discourses and performances with the course with their everyday practices following attendance, in ways that for some held environmental meaning and provoked reflection.

## **5.1 Conclusion**

Researchers investigating notions of sustainable tourism recognise disconnections between travel choice and everyday, highly routinized, social practice (Font & Hindley, 2017; Hall, 2013b; Whitmarsh, 2009). There is also awareness that in attempting to move towards more sustainable lifestyle and travel choices, the relations between tourism and everyday routines and socio-technical structures need to be altered (Hall, 2013b). Within sustainable tourism literature, however, further research is required to make sense of the ways through which tourism and the everyday intersect, and how individual performance informs and is informed by social structure (Bramwell et al., 2016).

The paper identifies foraging courses as one of the ways through which tourism and the everyday intersect. It does so by first examining the meanings and motivations informing foraging course leaders. It finds that course leaders place meaning upon foraging through distinguishing the practice from normative modes of consumption. Nostalgia was drawn on by course leaders to construct productive narratives that found hope and forms of response through understandings of loss and disconnection. Discussion then turned to how nostalgia was used within the space of the foraging course as a tool to assist attendees to engage with place. While these findings are useful in providing insight into the effects of nostalgic narratives, caution relating to the politics of representation and recognition of the power dynamics bound up with such narratives, is here crucial. Nostalgia is emotive because it draws on powerful normative, and potentially marginalising, sets of ideas in its construction (Bonnett, 2015). In this context, for instance, nostalgia draws on westernised and romanticised constructions of past ways of living, childhood and the environment that will resonate with very particular subjectivities. For this reason, attending to not only how nostalgia is productive, but whose version of nostalgia is evoked, is both relevant and crucial within the context of sustainable travel, food tourism and slow travel.

The paper finally moved to show how foraging tourism rendered a space where attendees could learn embodied and discursive skills. Foraging, in these narratives, was not presented as a panacea for affecting food sustainability. Rather, learning to forage was understood as an everyday practice and response to perceived human/non-human disconnections. While this work is small scale, there is political importance here because too often climate change discourses within tourist studies value large scale approaches, overlooking the political potentials of everyday practice (cf. Ashworth and Page, 2011; Ruhanen et al., 2015). Moreover, while small scale, individual practice is never only discrete and localised but rather networked and connected, part of broader transnational networks, where extra-local connections are vital social building blocks. Power, in this final section, was also shown to be messy and relational, rather than wholly top-down. Following foraging courses, attendees interpreted and negotiated knowledge within the contexts of their own everyday practice in subtle and varying ways. Rather than solely focusing on the discursive skills emphasised by course leaders, attendees were also drawn to reconceiving embodied practice within the context of their own everyday encounters in ways that enabled different human/non-human connection.

These findings identify the potential of foraging tourism; yet, they need to be understood within their classed and cultural contexts. Foraging tourism, as presented here, is a leisure pursuit valued by individuals with the environmental knowledge, time and economic means to seek slower forms of travel, that are perceived to enable more meaningful connections with place. For this reason, neither foraging nor foraging tourism are here presented as alternative ways through which to affect

unsustainable food systems. Rather, foraging tourism was found to offer certain individuals ways to become more aware of their relationship with the non-human. The individuals in this study were largely already located within certain identity positions, influencing their environmental understandings and the ways they enacted the identity of 'attende' during the courses. The findings of this research are thus geographically specific and particular to certain subjectivities. Foraging has strong cultural and classed associations, affecting its differing positionings. In the United Kingdom, United States, Australia and New Zealand, by way of example, foraging has moved away from its association with low socio-economic status (Emery et al., 2014). In parts of Asia, and Southern and Eastern Europe, by contrast, foraging remains associated with lifestyles of economically disadvantaged communities (although within these contexts variations exist in relation to what is foraged) (Schulp et al., 2014). At the same time, all places are influenced by complex migratory patterns informing the ways through which foraging becomes understood within very particular, yet overlapping, cultural landscapes (Poe et al., 2014). In consideration, future research into foraging tourism may grant consideration to the ways such practices are consequently different in varying landscapes, and encountered differently by tourists seeking particular preconceived foraging performances.

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