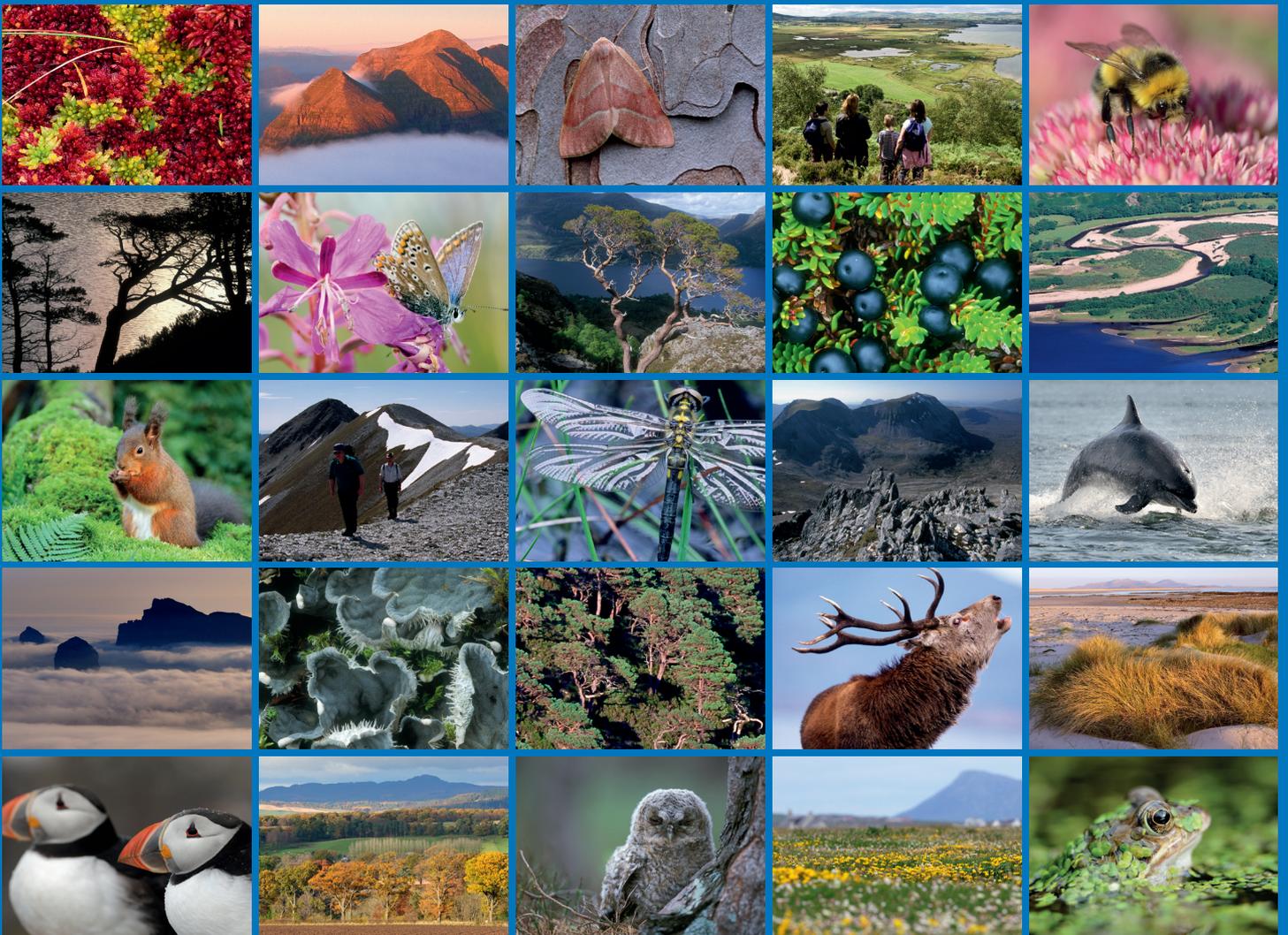


Overcoming the barriers to participation on NatureScot's National Nature Reserves by disadvantaged communities



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RESEARCH REPORT

Research Report No. 1253

Overcoming the barriers to participation on NatureScot's National Nature Reserves by disadvantaged communities

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Overcoming the barriers to participation on NatureScot's National Nature Reserves by disadvantaged communities

Research Report No. 1253

Project: Making Natural Connections

Contractor: Molly Aldam (NatureScot graduate placement 2019-2020)

Year of publication: 2020

Keywords

National Nature Reserves, outdoor access, inequalities, disadvantaged communities, Tentsmuir NNR, Dundee

Background

This report comes out of a graduate placement running from September 2019 to September 2020. As part of NatureScot's equality commitment to improve access to the outdoors for people who are underrepresented as a result of protected characteristics, the placement was proposed by the Forth and Managing Nature Reserves teams. National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are at the heart of our work to connect people with nature, yet many of their visitors are from a narrow socio-economic demographic. Our NNRs in the Forth Area were identified as sites with particular potential for making links with communities in deprived areas (according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation).

This report takes a focus on Tentsmuir NNR and communities in Dundee in order to identify key barriers to engagement with NNRs for four groups: low income communities, Black and Minority Ethnic communities, people with mental health challenges and people with disabilities. It then makes recommendations to support the Managing Nature Reserves team and NNR staff in making our NNRs more accessible for disadvantaged communities.

Main findings

Key barriers to NNR participation for the four groups in focus:

- Most of our NNRs are a considerable distance from disadvantaged areas. Disadvantaged communities are less likely to have car access, and rural public transport is inadequate in terms of route availability, frequency and affordability.
- There is a lack of publicity around existing public transport options for accessing NNRs.
- More work is needed to make our NNRs accessible for people with disabilities.
- There is a lack of cultural awareness of NNRs and the benefits they offer among low income and BME communities.

- There is fear around getting there, due to a lack of familiarity with traveling beyond urban areas. This is particularly the case for those with mental health challenges.
- BME communities can face exclusion due to experiences of racism and a lack of diversity in both rural areas and the conservation sector.

Recommendations for overcoming barriers to participation:

- Staff to proactively make links with local organisations that work with target communities.
- Making funding available for guided NNR visits for target communities.
- Ensuring staff capacity for organising and leading these visits.
- Improve the physical accessibility of NNRs.
- Working to address cuts to public transport and services for disadvantaged communities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report comes out of the 'Making Natural Connections' graduate project, which researched the barriers to engagement with nature by particular disadvantaged groups through the case study of Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Dundee. The project's aims reflect a key Scottish Government National Indicator: "To increase the proportion of people making one or more visits to the outdoors per week", and Outcome 1 of NatureScot's 2018-2022 Corporate Plan: "More people across Scotland are enjoying and benefiting from nature" (2018a). Further, NatureScot's Key Priority 1 in the *Enjoying the Outdoors* Policy Statement is that "the benefits from enjoying the outdoors should be shared by all of Scotland's people", with "special effort... to provide people of all abilities, ethnic minorities and less advantaged communities with a range of opportunities" (2007, p.12). NatureScot's current Equality Outcome 1 maps directly onto the project: *Across the range of our activities, more people from BAME communities, people with disabilities, and disadvantaged families, individuals and communities enjoy and benefit from nature* (2019a).

Ensuring that everyone in Scotland has equal access to natural spaces is important due to the well-documented benefits of spending time outside of human-made environments to physical, emotional and mental health. Further, engagement with natural landscapes and wildlife is key to engaging people to undertake the transformative action needed to address the climate emergency and biodiversity loss. NatureScot's 29 managed NNRs are an especially public-facing aspect of our work: they are key sites for connecting people and nature, where we can work to make opportunities for natural connection more equal.

The proportion of people engaging with the natural world is currently particularly unequal along lines of race, income and disability. According to the 2018 Scottish Household Survey, outdoor recreation levels have generally increased since 2012, yet there has been no increase among people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) or disabled groups (NatureScot, 2018b). Further, Scotland's People and Nature Survey reports that only 68% of people in the lowest social grade visited the outdoors for leisure in a 12 month period, compared with 92% in the highest social grade (*ibid*). This is particularly stark in the case of rural protected areas such as NNRs. For example, visitor demographics for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorms National Parks demonstrate that "the majority of Park users [are] white adults over 35" (p.29), with 66%-70% classified as ABC1 social grade and 78-79% travelling by car (LLTNP *et al.*, 2009).

While many NNRs are only accessible from cities by long car journeys, NNRs in Scotland's central belt such as Loch Leven NNR, Flanders Moss NNR and Tentsmuir NNR are relatively close to cities, and therefore well-placed to develop connections with urban disadvantaged communities. This research focused on Dundee and Tentsmuir NNR, while also working with staff at Loch Leven and Flanders Moss NNR to make community links in the mid-Fife and Stirling areas.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) identifies 37% of Dundee as made up of SIMD 1 and 2 areas (Scottish Government, 2020), coloured red on the map below. This means they are among the 20% most disadvantaged areas in Scotland. Almost 1/3 of all children in Dundee live in poverty (Dundee City Council Fairness Commission, 2015), corresponding closely to the 37% of the city's area. The proximity of Tentsmuir NNR to Dundee means that we have an opportunity to ensure that its health, wellbeing, social and educational benefits are particularly available to people living in these areas.

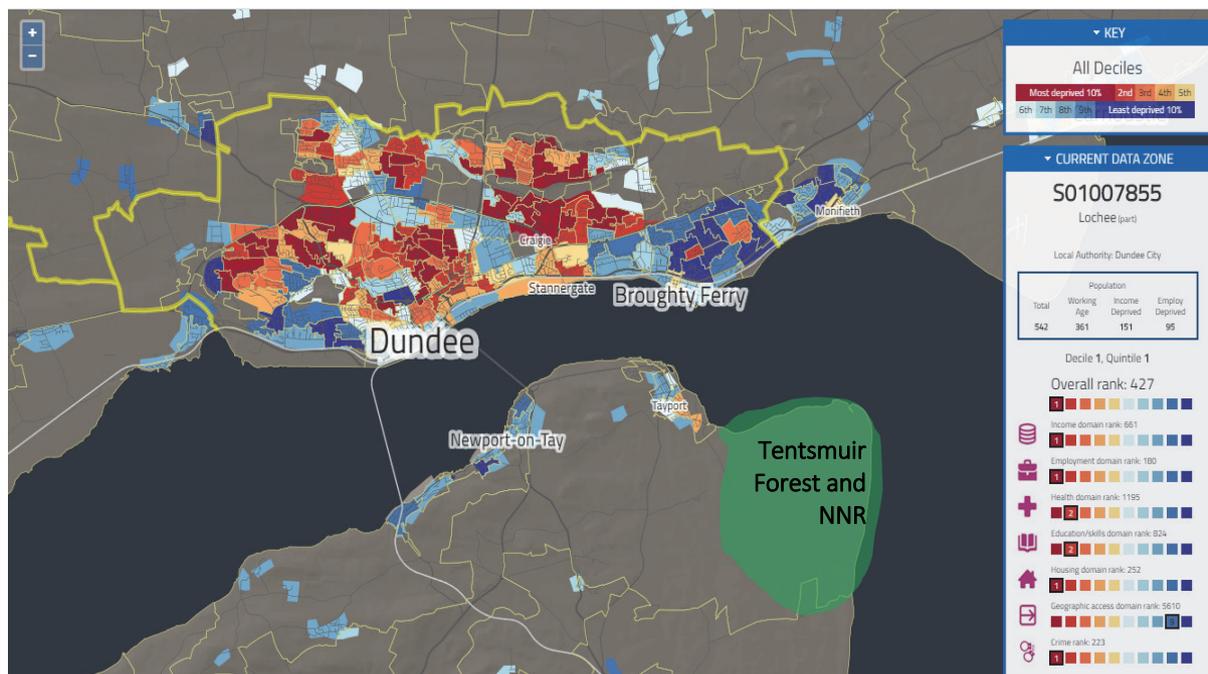


Figure 1. Areas of deprivation in Dundee according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), Copyright Scottish Government, contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012-2020.

1.1 Project aims

My project focused on four demographics:

- Low income households (in SIMD 1 and 2 areas)
- Black and Minority Ethnic communities
- People with mental health challenges
- People with physical health issues and disabilities

The aim of the project was to increase access to the benefits offered by NNRs to health, wellbeing, education and social inclusion, through both research and practice:

1) Research

- a) Report on the barriers to NNR engagement for the above groups, through the case study of Tentsmuir NNR and Dundee
- b) Make recommendations for addressing these barrier across our NNRs

2) Practice (see Annex 1)

- a) Build positive relationships between Tentsmuir NNR and priority groups in Dundee to increase their engagement with Tentsmuir NNR
- b) Improve Tentsmuir NNR's visitor infrastructure and information to improve access for disadvantaged groups

2. METHODS

2.1 Methodology

A qualitative methodology was most suited to exploring the barriers to NNR engagement for particular communities. While there are already useful list of general barriers to NNR access in reports such as [‘Scotland's National Parks & National Nature Reserves - overcoming barriers to engagement’](#) (LLTNP, 2009), I adopted a deep focus on the specific context of the relationship between Dundee communities and Tentsmuir NNR. This was useful for understanding the psychological and socio-economic complexity of the barriers. Coming from outside of these social contexts, ethnographic methods such as interviews with people immersed in them were required to listen to people’s stories.

2.2 Semi-structured interviews with community workers

I began by making contact with local organisations in Dundee, such as community centres in SIMD 1 and 2 areas, BME cultural centres, and mental health support groups. I arranged to meet with community workers from these organisations for conversations about the barriers to accessing Tentsmuir NNR. These conversations took the form of semi-structured interviews, guided by consistent themes but allowing interviewees to take them in directions that they considered relevant, in order to bring to light issues beyond my preconceptions. All of the community workers I interviewed ran regular services such as family groups, women’s groups, social and educational sessions within cultural centres, and mental health drop-in sessions. I spoke to representatives from the following 16 organisations, several of which I was put in contact with by others I researched with:

- Lochee Library
- Kirkton Community Centre
- Hilltown Community Centre
- Douglas Community Centre
- Dundee Green Health Partnership
- Dundee Ranger Service
- Dundee Rep Theatre
- Wellbeing Works Dundee
- Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action - Healthy Minds Network
- Promoting A More Inclusive Society (PAMIS)
- Arts and Communities Association
- Yusuf Youth Initiative
- We Are With You Dundee (formerly Addacation)
- Dundee International Women’s Centre
- Dundee City Council – Access Officer
- Scottish Autism

I created an interview guide with the following themes, around which I structured the conversations:

1. The situations, demographics and needs of their particular group
2. How Tentsmuir NNR might fit into their work and priorities
3. Awareness of and interest in Tentsmuir NNR among the people they work with
4. Their perspective on the barriers to engagement with Tentsmuir NNR for the people they work with
5. Any specific needs of the people they support in terms of signage and interpretation
6. The feasibility of existing public transport options for their group members
7. If they have visited with their group before, their experience of accessing the reserve, particularly by public transport, and potential improvements

8. Other groups I could contact

I recorded notes by hand during all of the interviews and wrote these up in full immediately afterwards. As my interviews progressed, I analysed the results by collating common themes.

2.3 Group interviews with community group members

While the community workers are immersed in and often from these communities, it was important to also have in-depth conversations with users of their services who are not yet as on-board with outdoor engagement. I adopted a much less formal approach with members of priority communities, as people were generally not comfortable with a set one-on-one meeting. I instead had conversations with group members during facilitated visits to Tentsmuir NNR with the Yusuf Youth Initiative, Lochee Refugee Group, Wellbeing Works Dundee, Coldside Community Centre, Healthy Minds' Network and Dundee International Women's Centre. I also attended group sessions in Dundee, such as a Healthy Minds' Network mental health drop-in and a Camperdown Park trip with a group of young families from Kirkton Community Centre as part of the Family Fresh Air Club¹. While people attending Tentsmuir visits were already relatively interested, it was particularly illuminating to speak to community members in their own spaces, to get a better understanding of their situations and the perceived relevance of NNRs beyond the geographical context in which they live their lives.

2.4 Recce fieldwork

Rather than simply being aware of transport options from Dundee to Tentsmuir through online research, it was necessary to physically experience the journey, particularly via active travel and public transport. I built several Dundee to Tentsmuir bus recces into my work, experiencing situations such as missing the bus and waiting for the next one, and having to navigate my way off the bus and into the NNR from the bus stop. I also did cycle recces from Dundee, as well as Leuchars station, to gain an embodied understanding of the difficulty levels.

¹ a programme of outdoor visits run by the Dundee Ranger Service and Community Learning and Development workers

3. FINDINGS: THE BARRIERS

3.1 The barriers to NNR access for different target groups

In general, barriers may be classed as “hard” and “soft”. Hard barriers are practical obstacles to getting to, or around, NNRs. The key hard barriers were found to be:

- Lack of car access
- Lack of adequate public transport
- Inaccessible paths and interpretations

These were found to coexist with psychological or “soft” barriers associated with a lack of familiarity with NNRs:

- Lack of awareness of NNRs
- Feeling NNRs are not relevant
- Lack of confidence; fear

3.1.1 *Low income households*

All of the demographics discussed here are likely to correlate with low income. As a result, people are likely to face multiple intersecting barriers to being able to visit NNRs.

For the purposes of this research, low income households were defined as those living in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland according to the Scotland Index for Multiple Deprivation, which corresponds with the aim within Outcome 1 of NatureScot's Corporate Plan to “improve access to good-quality green spaces for communities and outdoor learning opportunities in the 20% most disadvantaged areas across Scotland”. This roughly equates to the 1/5 of Scottish people who currently live in poverty (Scottish Government, 2020). Scotland's People and Nature Survey found that only 73% of people living in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland had visited the outdoors in the year prior to interview, compared with 82% of all adults.

Low income is a primary barrier to NNR access in general because their inevitable distance from urban areas necessitates:

- a) car or public transport access
- b) free time to travel to NNRs.

Insufficient public transport investment was found to be the most significant barrier to NNR engagement for low income groups. Rural public transport across the UK has faced huge funding cuts in the last decade, resulting in fewer routes, less frequent services, and higher fares (Tracks, 2018). The Campaign for National Parks writes that “nearly every National Park in England and Wales includes areas where buses have gradually been cut more and more since 2010. It's not surprising then that 93% of visitors to National Parks choose to travel by car” (Campaign for National Parks, 2018), and there is a similar story in Scotland. Fewer and less frequent bus services means that multiple buses are often required to travel to NNRs, making access both more expensive and more time-consuming. As discussed in the Appendix, in the case of Tentsmuir NNR there is the added issue of a lack of publicity around existing public transport access to Tentsmuir, in both NNR visitor information and bus information. This led to a further barrier whereby people without the means to drive believed that public transport access was not possible.

Lack of time is an added barrier for low income households. Working longer hours to afford necessities on low wages, having to travel by public transport, and less access to time-saving 'mod cons' and childcare all result in less time to travel farther afield for leisure.

Added to – and perpetuated by – these practical barriers are psychological barriers due to a lack of familiarity and confidence with visiting natural spaces. Teachers from a school in a SIMD-1 area of Dundee estimated that out of approximately 500 schoolchildren, 1/3 had never left Dundee in their lives, with families tending to stay in their immediate area. Likewise, a group interview with families in the Kirkton area on the outskirts of Dundee expressed that Tentsmuir NNR did not feel relevant or of interest to them. Living in communities in which visiting the countryside is not a cultural norm meant that people were less likely to be aware of NNRs or the value in visiting them.

However, psychological barriers are difficult to address while practical barriers remain: it is important to note that in the case of Dundee, the most deprived areas such as Kirkton are beyond the Kingsway (Dundee's outer ring-road) while the bus to Tentsmuir goes from Dundee City Centre. Therefore, to travel to Tentsmuir NNR, the Kirkton residents I interviewed would need to take two buses, requiring higher costs and double the time taken to drive. According to a Community Learning and Development (CLD) worker in this area, "the only way getting to Tentsmuir would be feasible is for them to be picked up from their local community". Another CLD professional in the Douglas area of Dundee described public transport options as unrealistic in terms of both time and expense for her service users, and only suitable for people living in central Dundee. Improvement to public transport and other social infrastructure is therefore needed before psychological and cultural barriers among low-income communities can be addressed.

3.1.2 Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities

BME groups are significantly more likely than white British groups to experience the above barrier of low income. For example, 65% of the Bangladeshi community in the UK lives in poverty compared to 20% of White British people (Palmer and Kenway, 2007). Thus, the issues of lack of car access and expensive, time-consuming public transport apply to BME communities. Research as part of this project is limited to Dundee's Scottish Asian community, which makes up 4% of the population (National Records of Scotland, 2017) with the largest ethnic group being Pakistani (Dundee City Council, 2016).

Lack of cultural familiarity and confidence is the main barrier to NNR access for BME groups. People from BME communities in the UK are much more likely to live in urban areas: for example, 99.1% of Pakistani residents live in cities, compared to 78.2% of White British residents (UK Government, 2018). Members of Dundee's Asian community reported that engaging with rural places like NNRs is not a cultural norm: leaving the city for a walk would not be an obvious choice for a day out. As a result interviewees agreed that people in their community are generally unaware of Tentsmuir NNR. This supports the 2013-2017 Scottish Nature Omnibus Surveys finding that 31% of people from BME communities were aware of NNRs, compared to 60% of all adults (NatureScot, 2019b). Further, even when aware of Tentsmuir NNR, several interviewees expressed unfamiliarity with what to do if they were to visit.

Added to this is a lack of confidence about fitting in on NNRs. While urban working-class communities may experience a similar lack of confidence, this barrier is exacerbated for BME people due to the predominately white visitor demographics of rural areas, strong associations of the countryside with white culture, and experiences or fears of hate crime. This can include suspicion of BME people, particularly men, for whom "a pressure to change their behaviour to prove they are not a threat" can prevent relaxation in natural spaces (Collier, 2019). As Beth Collier writes, minority ethnic communities tend to live in cities for "safety and community in

numbers”, and a sense that the countryside is “unsafe and alienating” leaves younger generations without knowledge such as wildlife identification and practicalities such as “how to keep warm, what to wear, or how to get there” (*ibid*). As a result, while BME communities do engage in outdoor recreation this is predominantly within urban areas such as parks: according to Scotland’s People and Nature Survey in 2013/14 and 2017/18, 22% of outdoor visits recorded by BME respondents were to the countryside, compared to 50% of visits across the whole population.

The barriers are increased for BME women, who are less likely to have car access, more likely to face language barriers to travelling by public transport, and more likely to face time-related barriers due to caring responsibilities for children and elderly relatives. Female interviewees from Dundee’s Muslim community therefore reported visiting local green spaces like Broughty Ferry LNR but feeling less confident to travel further afield.

The exclusion of BME people from the outdoors could be linked to a lack of diversity in the environmental sector. The 2015 Labour Force Survey reported that only 0.6% of environmental professionals in the UK are non-white, compared to 13% of the UK population: the second least ethnically diverse sector after gardening (The Policy Exchange, 2017). This means that there needs to be over 20 times more BME people employed in the environmental sector to be representative of the population. Insufficient diversity within the sector makes it more likely that BME perspectives and needs will be overlooked. Interviewees noted a focus on western, Christian festivals in common outdoor events such as Easter egg hunts and Christmas wreath workshops. Further, the lack of minority ethnic role models reinforces an impression from an early age that the countryside and wildlife are not relevant for BME people. Making training available to increase confidence in leading outdoor activities among BME community role models and organisational staff is therefore important for overcoming barriers.

Facilitated trips and events with BME organisations have proved effective for increasing familiarity and confidence with local NNRs for BME people. The charity Backbone CIC is leading on this in Scotland, not only facilitating outdoor activities for BME community groups, but also training people of ethnic minorities in outdoor leadership. According to the Dundee International Women’s Centre, people who have attended group visits to natural spaces often return with their families, and encourage others in their community to visit. This helps engagement with the outdoors to become more of a norm. All of the Muslim women I interviewed had moved to Dundee after marriage and felt isolated at home when they first arrived. Community organisations like the Dundee International Women’s Centre and Yusuf Youth Initiative gave them community links, which was key for boosting their confidence to visit new outdoor places. NNR staff should be encouraged to reach out to cultural organisations to organise visits, and work with these organisations to host events around non-western cultural festivals such as Diwali and Eid.

3.1.3 *People facing mental health challenges*

Exercise in natural places is proven to have huge benefits for mental health (Grahn and Stigsodotter, 2010; Kaplan and Kaplan, 2005). However, mental health issues simultaneously create barriers to visiting NNRs, particularly for people in cities who would be required to travel large distances. There is also correlation between low income and mental health: those in the lowest 20% income bracket are two to three times more likely to experience mental health challenges than those in the highest (Marmot *et al.*, 2010). Thus, the challenges that inevitably come with travelling to an unfamiliar rural area, as well as income-related barriers such as unaffordable public transport, are compounded by symptoms such as low mood, decreased motivation and anxiety. Dundee CLD workers reported that low confidence among low income communities to travel further afield often relates to poor mental health. For example, people attending in mental health support groups in Dundee told me about anxiety triggered by travelling on busy buses or driving to new places.

People facing mental health barriers perhaps benefit the most from attending trips with a support group, as these can create motivation and a safer environment. Programmes of multiple visits, rather than one-off sessions, are most effective for building confidence to visit NNRs independently.

3.1.4 *People with physical health issues and disabilities*

People with physical conditions face the most concrete barriers to NNR access. While 57% of Scottish adults on average visit the outdoors at least once a week, this decreases to 40% for “adults limited by a long-term condition” and 30% for “adults limited a lot” (NatureScot, 2018b). There remains a strong connection to income inequality here: 31% of adults living within Scotland’s most deprived areas are limited by a long-term condition, compared to 24% of adults living outside of these areas (NatureScot, 2018b). Disabled people are *3 times more likely* than non-disabled people to be severely materially deprived (Scottish Government, 2019), thus financial barriers to NNR access, such as lack of car ownership, are likely to compound access barriers. Further, **some disabilities and health issues can be a barrier to driving, while at the same time, rural public transport has been highlighted as a concern by Scottish disability groups due to a lack of accessible vehicles and accessible information** (Daly, 2018).

On NNRs themselves, there can be barriers to physical accessibility in the case of signage and interpretation, toilet facilities, paths and benches. While the needs of people with different health conditions and disabilities are too diverse to be covered here, Paths for All’s (2005) [‘A Guide to Disabled People’s Access in the Countryside’](#) (which at the time of writing is being updated) provides a starting point to understanding physical access. In general:

a. Signage and Interpretation

Different health issues and disabilities bring specific needs when it comes to visual information. For example, people with dementia require signage which is low and contains images, while brail and raised print is important for blind and low-vision people.

b. Toilet Facilities

The availability of toilets is a necessity for people with certain health conditions to be able to visit a place. Further, many people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) and other physical disabilities require wheelchair-friendly toilets such as Changing Places toilets. Many NNRs do not have toilet facilities at all, preventing some disabled people from being able to visit. Portable Changing Places toilets may be hired for events catering for disabled groups.

c. Wheelchair-Friendly Paths

The Paths for All report provides guidance on how to assess the accessibility of paths for wheelchair users, looking at surfaces, gradients, and barriers like stiles and gates. NatureScot was party to the development of the path grading system, and paths on NNRs must be graded in order to enable potential path users to see if a path will be suitable for them (Paths for all, 2016). However, paths on our NNRs are often strenuous and unsuitable for wheelchairs or buggies. Continued work is needed to make key paths on NNRs all-ability, following a 2016 survey of high priority paths for improvement across all our NNRs.

d. Benches

Some disabled and older people plan their walking routes according to the location of benches. Further, it is useful for benches to have armrests and backs for added support, and to have benches at various heights.

Paths for All also has a [National Path Demonstration site in West Lothian](#) showcasing best practice in inclusive outdoor infrastructure. More useful resources can be found on [NatureScot's Access Advice webpage](#).

3.2 Barriers faced by all target groups

3.2.1 Cuts to facilitated engagement services

Community-based organisations are fundamental as points of contact with disadvantaged groups, in order to coordinate facilitated visits and support them in accessing NNRs. Funding cuts to these key services repeatedly came up in my research, in particular:

- a. Significant government cuts to Scotland's Ranger Services over the last decade have seen ranger numbers drop by almost 40%, particularly within Local Authorities (SCRA, 2019). The Scottish Countryside Rangers' Association is a key delivery partner of outdoor engagement for disadvantaged communities, therefore these cuts are a significant barrier to NNR access. The Dundee Ranger Service has delivered key outdoor engagement work for target communities, such as Branching Out, a 12-week programme of outdoor activities for adults referred through mental health services. However, the Dundee Ranger staff team has been cut down to two, with only one qualified to lead Branching Out.
- b. A decade of cuts to Government funding for Councils (along with a freeze in Council Tax (Bailey *et al.*, 2015, p.6)) has had a direct impact on Dundee services which connect target communities to NNRs. One case of this is the Family Fresh Air Club, a series of outdoor visits around Dundee for families with young children, jointly led by the Dundee Ranger Service and Family Learning Services in Community Centre. At the time of writing, this project had recently ended due to cuts to Family Learning in Dundee City Council. The number of staff responsible for Family Learning had already been cut in half, and Family workers were struggling to plan programmes of sessions due to last-minute notifications of funding cuts. At the time of interviewing staff at Kirkton Community Centre, the Family Learning service was to be merged with Community Regeneration, eliminating all of their groups serving parents and young children.

The situation is the same across Scotland. COSLA, the Scottish council umbrella group, warned that the Scottish Government's February 2020 Budget for Local Government would "devastate communities" by cutting £95 million from "front line services", including services for all the target communities in focus here. Council cuts affect NNR accessibility in numerous ways other than facilitated engagement, from public transport availability to the maintenance of access roads. Outdoor education and other environmental initiatives are among the first services to be lost when councils, schools and community organisations are forced to prioritise essential social care due to financial stress (*ibid.*, p.8). Dundee City Council has also had to cut its devolved schools management budget and funding to third-party organisations (Morkis, 2019), and almost all of the schools and third sector community groups involved in this project had insufficient funds to hire transport for trips such as to NNRs. The existence and funding of intermediary services in local areas are essential for us to engage with target communities. Funding of these services is therefore absolutely key to our aims to connect disadvantaged communities to NNRs.

3.2.2 A need for better links between public transport routes and NNRs

In the case of Tentsmuir NNR, there is a lack of linkage between the bus route and the site (see Appendix). Interviewees from target communities and even outdoor leaders were therefore predominately unaware that public transport access to Tentsmuir was possible: one youth worker said that had he been aware of this option, he would have used the bus for an

overnight bushcraft activity with a group of teenagers for which he had paid for a minibus and for overnight parking.

Information was found to be unavailable or confusing throughout the process of researching and making the journey from Dundee. Tentsmuir was not mentioned in the name of the bus stop, which prevented the route from appearing from a Google Maps search for “Dundee to Tentsmuir”. When making the journey, two community groups that had already visited Tentsmuir via this route reported a lack of clarity about where to get off, with no Tentsmuir signage visible from the bus stop. For group leaders, a lack of confidence around buses when leading a group was identified as a key barrier to NNR access.

A number of interviewees identified a need to promote the option of public transport to Tentsmuir – recommending information at the Dundee bus station and inclusion of Tentsmuir in the Dundee Green Health Partnership’s Green Bus Map. Once off the bus, interviewees also described a lack of welcome directly from the bus stop in terms of signage and signposting. Others asked that we provide leaflets explaining how to return by public transport during facilitated community group visits, and ensure detailed public transport information on NNR webpages (see 4.5 below).

3.2.3 A need for toilet facilities

While toilet availability has already been discussed as a necessity for people with certain disabilities, community leaders I spoke to emphasised that their absence is a key barrier to outdoor engagement for women who are not confident with the outdoors. According to a Dundee ranger, many women who are not experienced with the outdoors “will not go anywhere unless they can be confident beforehand that there will be toilets, and they will be open”. This highlights the necessity of clear and specific web information about toilet availability and opening times. Facilitated visits are also important to gradually increase confidence in visiting places where facilities are unavailable.

3.2.4 Safety concerns

Linked to the lack of familiarity previously discussed, several people expressed fears around safety as a reason against visiting, particularly with reference to bringing children. The main fears expressed with regard to Tentsmuir NNR were of potholes along the road to the car park and of ticks. In the group interview with families in Kirkton, awareness of Tentsmuir NNR was accompanied by a perception that it is “ridden with ticks”, given as a reason against visiting.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PROJECT: OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS

4.1 A proactive approach to making links with target communities

Firstly, partnerships must be developed with organisations that work directly with target groups and are familiar with their context and needs. This applies both in terms of partnerships between NatureScot and national organisations such as the [Black Environment Network](#) and [CEMVO Scotland](#), and between NNRs and organisations on the ground in the local area.

The Countryside Access and Activities Network's comprehensive 2008 study into barriers to countryside recreation for minority ethnic, economically disadvantaged and disabled groups in Northern Ireland likewise ranked "links with local, targeted groups" as the second most important factor after "ring fenced financial resources". I repeatedly received feedback from Dundee community organisations that rather than having to chase outdoor providers to ask for opportunities, "we love being approached and invited". Being proactive in offering support is key to include underrepresented communities in NNRs and to overcome feelings of being unwelcome.

When relationships have been developed with local organisations, programmes of visits can be organised and **targeted publicity** of our NNRs can be achieved. Publicity around NNRs and what they have to offer needs to go beyond conventional channels, in order to address the disparity in awareness between white middle class communities and low income and ethnic minority communities. Partners embedded in these communities may be able to share upcoming NNR events via their social media and newsletters, recommend other channels which might reach particular groups, and advise on translating our content or making it more culturally inclusive.

4.2 Funding guided activities on NNRs for target groups

A key difference can be made by setting aside budgets to make regular NNR visits available to local target communities.

This project worked with Dundee CLD, Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action, Dundee Green Health Partnership, Wellbeing Works Dundee, Yusuf Youth Initiative and Dundee International Women's Centre to organise guided walks and activities at Tentsmuir NNR, which were led by the Reserve staff (see case studies in Appendix). Partner organisations, who hold the expertise on how best to benefit the individuals in their groups, built these visits into their programmes and priorities. Groups reported that the presence of NNR staff as **expert guides** during visits made them feel supported and welcomed, and relieved the partner organisations of the responsibility of risk assessing an unfamiliar site. Having an **organised activity** such as a guided health walk, volunteering or craft exercise is also useful to provide a focus for the visit. Engaging local organisations to work with us to increase the diversity of NNR visitors is much effective if NNR staff can offer this support.

Delivering community group visits relies on a ring-fenced budget to cover transport. Unless local charities have secured funding from elsewhere for a project involving visits to NNRs, in general, their budgets for supporting vulnerable individuals will have limited capacity for "extras" such as NNR trips. It makes a key difference if we can make it clear to community groups – rather than waiting for them to ask – that we offer funded travel for the group by public transport or (if services are inadequate) by minibus. Based on the cost of hiring a 16-seater minibuses from a Dundee-based company (£170), an annual travel budget of £2000 per NNR would suffice to meet a target of one community group visit per month.

4.3 Staff capacity

Successful engagement involves **providing training to NNR staff** to improve their knowledge of specific needs or cultures of different underrepresented communities, to give them confidence when working with and making their NNRs inclusive of a range of groups. Examples of useful training includes Equality and Diversity courses covering the language of diversity, unconscious bias, race and faith, as well as short courses for working with people with different learning disabilities or mental health conditions. In relation to this, the Countryside Access and Activities Network (2008) strongly recommends a handbook for staff. NNR staff can be pointed towards the ‘Engaging Underrepresented Groups’ Handbook which came out of this project, and provides guidance for making contact with disadvantaged local groups and delivering visits.

The steps required to research, make contact with and organise programmes of visits with local community groups can be time-consuming for NNR staff, with limits to their availability alongside the time required for their other management duties. Each visit from a community group requires 2-3 hours of staff time, plus preparation time, the length of which depends on the activity. The most time-consuming aspect of the work is researching nearby organisations representing target groups and building partnerships. Several NNR staff have reported a lack of staff time to make these connections. **To achieve our aims of increased participation by local disadvantaged communities, NNR outreach and liaison work should be embedded in the job plans of other staff besides NNR Managers, such as Area staff.** This would also ensure that a strategic approach is taken to access and inclusion.

The priority NNRs for outreach work are those which are closest to populated areas, allowing for public transport or minibus access from high priority SIMD areas. The Areas and NNRs most suited to this work are as follows:

Table 1. NatureScot’s NNRs and nearby towns (up to one hour away)

Area	National Nature Reserve	Nearby towns
Forth	Tentsmuir	Dundee
	Loch Leven	Mid-Fife communities e.g. Glenrothes, Cowdenbeath, Levenmouth
	Flanders Moss	Stirling, Callander, Doune
	Blawhorn Moss	Blackridge
Tayside and Grampian	St Cyrus	Montrose, Dundee
	Forvie	Aberdeen
	Muir of Dinnet	Aboyne, Aberdeen
South Highland	Ben Wyvis	Inverness
	Craigellachie	Accessible by train via Aviemore
Strathclyde and Ayrshire	Clyde Valley Woodlands	Lanark
South Scotland	Caerlaverock	Dumfries
Northern Isles and North Highland	Loch Fleet	Inverness

Staff time for NNR outreach work would thus be most effectively prioritised in the Forth and Tayside and Grampian Areas.

4.4 Improving the physical accessibility of NNRs

Firstly, more work should be done to build more NNR paths to all-ability standards and increase the promotion of NNRs on websites that provide outdoor accessibility information, such as Disability Scot. As in 4.2, NNRs should run visits for disability groups through organisations such as PAMIS, and work with services that enable disabled people to access difficult terrains, through beach wheelchairs, off-road vehicles, all-ability bicycles or specialist pony carts.

4.5 Rural public transport improvements

As discussed, the decreasing availability and increasing cost of rural public transport was found to be the primary obstacle for target communities to access NNRs.

Firstly, public awareness of public transport options for NNRs can be improved by better publicising these on NNR leaflets and webpages. The convention for public transport information on our *Visiting the Reserve* webpages is simply 'the nearest bus stops is in [town]', in order to limit information going out of date. However, more clarification than this is often needed, so NNR staff might use their local knowledge to keep more detailed information updated.

For example, the updated text on the Tentsmuir NNR webpage:

There is a bus stop next to Tentsmuir's Tayport entrance at the 'Tayport Shanwell Road South' turning point. The 42 Stagecoach service from Dundee to St Andrews stops here every 30 minutes. The 42 also stops on request at 'Morton Farm', from which you can walk a mile along the road to get to Morton Lochs.

The 54 Dundee to Glenrothes Stagecoach service serves both of these stops hourly in the evenings.

For up to date timetables: <https://www.stagecoachbus.com/>

NNR staff should be encouraged to assess the public transport accessibility of their reserves and push for local improvements: for example, Fife Council agreed to a request to change the name of the Tayport Shanwell Road South bus stop to 'Tayport Tentsmuir'.

However, addressing the key issues of cost and service cuts must come from both Government and local authorities. With 'connecting people and nature' as a key priority, NatureScot can contribute by making the case to ministers and Local Authorities about the link between public transport funding and widening access to nature beyond urban areas.

4.6 Championing local services for disadvantaged communities

Services on the ground – such as Community Centres, Ranger Services, and third sector organisations – are essential for connecting local communities to NNRs. Making connections between NNRs and disadvantaged people and organising programmes of visits depends on the existence of these services. Therefore, the link must be made between the continued funding of services for low income, BME and disabled groups, and access to nature and NNRs. Like public transport, funding for social infrastructure must be prioritised in efforts to make the benefits of Scotland's nature available to all.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This project focused on the barriers and solutions to NNR access for low income communities, BME communities, and those with mental and physical conditions. It became clear that there are hard, infrastructural barriers, as well as subtler cultural barriers, that must be overcome to give these communities the same level of access to NNRs as non-disadvantaged communities.

Key Barrier 1: Most of our NNRs are a considerable distance from disadvantaged areas.

- Disadvantaged communities are less likely to have car access
- Rural public transport services are inadequate in terms of route availability, frequency and affordability.
- Public transport is not accessible enough for people with disabilities
- Time barriers mean people are unable to travel to NNRs, particularly by public transport
- There is a lack of publicity around existing public transport access to NNRs

NatureScot could overcome this barrier by allocating a budget to support target community groups to travel to NNRs, and championing public transport as a key ingredient to outdoor access. Where there are public transport options for NNRs, individual NNRs should find out how accessible these are and work to improve access, e.g. through online and leaflet information and the location of events onsite.

Key Barrier 2: Many of our NNRs are not fully accessible for people with disabilities.

NatureScot should continue work on making more of our NNR paths all-ability, improving the accessibility of signage, benches and toilet facilities, and running facilitated events for specific disabled groups.

Key Barrier 3: Disadvantaged groups lack familiarity and confidence around visiting NNRs.

- There is a lack of cultural awareness among low income and BME communities of NNRs and the benefits they offer.
- There is fear around getting there due to a lack of familiarity with traveling beyond urban areas. This is particularly the case for those with mental health challenges.
- BME communities in particular experience a lack of confidence around fitting in

To address this, staff should be proactive in approaching and building connections with organisations that serve target communities local to NNRs. These groups should be invited to get involved in NNR public initiatives and event, and offered guided visits to NNRs with transport costs covered. Staff should be supported so that they felt confident working with particular groups from different cultures and of different abilities. Organisations which serve disadvantaged communities and connect them with NNRs must be championed and sustained. Familiarity with NNRs among BME communities would benefit from increased training of BME outdoor leaders, and ongoing work to increase BME representation in the environmental sector.

Between September 2019 and March 2020, this project built partnerships with community groups, delivered several Tentsmuir NNR visits and public events, and improved public transport access through improvements to public information and infrastructure. As detailed in the appendix, this work improved familiarity with Tentsmuir NNR among priority groups in Dundee. These partnerships and group visits will be continued long-term by Tentsmuir NNR staff, to increase confidence in visiting Tentsmuir within these communities. The 'Engaging Underrepresented Groups' Handbook that came from this project aims to help staff at all

NatureScot's NNRs increase their community outreach work, to make NNRs available to all of society.

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ANNEX 1: CONNECTING DUNDEE WITH TENTSMUIR NNR (CASE STUDY PROJECT)

Background: Public transport access to Tentsmuir NNR

Inadequate public transport was the most significant barrier to accessing Tentsmuir NNR for target communities. The map below indicates the public transport access points in relation to the whole site, with the NNR areas outlined in green:



Figure 2. Tentsmuir NNR in relation to public transport access points.

There is a bus from Dundee every 30 minutes that serves:

1. A bus stop at the turning circle next to Tentsmuir's Tayport entrance. While this is less than a mile from the NNR boundary, it is 3 miles (an hour's walk) from Tentsmuir Point – the most popular part of the NNR (Robinson, 2007, p.24) where its main wildlife attractions such as seals are most likely to be sighted. This places it beyond the reach of people not used to walking such distances or unable to due to poor health or disability.
2. A request stop at 'Morton Farm', a 0.7 mile walk from Morton Lochs. While easy for access to Morton Lochs, the Morton Farm entrance is 4 miles from Tentsmuir Point.

There is also a train from Dundee to Leuchars every hour that takes 11 minutes. However, Leuchars station is 4.2 miles from Tentsmuir Forest Car Park, and even further from Tentsmuir Point, so requires bicycle access to be practical.

The bus stop at the Tayport turning circle is the most viable public transport access point to the NNR. However, the importance of toilet facilities meant that many interviewees considered the Tentsmuir Forest Car Park the only viable entrance, feeling that the Tayport side of Tentsmuir was 'remote' due to its distance from this focal point.

This issue will be somewhat overcome due to the proximity of the Tayport entrance to the Larick Centre, a new community hub run by the Tayport Community Trust. A five-minute walk from the bus stop, the Larick Centre has a café and fully accessible toilets which are available to the public during opening hours (at the time of writing). Upon hearing about the Larick Centre, all of my interviewees believed that this would remedy the Tayport entrance's

perceived remoteness. Several group leaders also recommended more public events at the Tayport side of Tentsmuir, to raise the profile of the entrance. The below circuits from the Tayport entrance were developed as part of this project. They reflect a range of walking abilities, and will be graded and displayed on new interpretation panels in order to help people unfamiliar with using this entrance.

As paths linking the Tayport entrance to the NNR are not owned by NatureScot, addressing hard barriers such as path accessibility requires liaising with multiple stakeholders. Ongoing joint working with Fife Council, the Tayport Community Council, and Forestry & Land Scotland is particularly key.



Figure 3. Tentsmuir NNR routes from the Tayport entrance. (Nb. Each km measurement from Tayport is an addition to that of the previous trails).

Project outcomes

1. Improved public transport access to Tentsmuir NNR

- Liaised with local Councillors and Fife Council to action a change of the bus stop's name from "Shanwell Road South" to "Tayport Tentsmuir" and the erection of a bus stop flag.
- Installing new interpretative panels and fingerpost by the path to Tentsmuir from the Tayport bus stop, which includes a map of walking circuits from this entrance
- Improved public transport information on Tentsmuir NNR website and leaflet

2. Increased familiarity with Tentsmuir NNR for target communities

- Built relationships with community organisations serving mental health, physical disabilities, low income and BME groups in Dundee and Fife
- Delivered seven group visits to Tentsmuir NNR between January 2020 and the March Covid-19 lockdown.

3. Produced the ‘Engaging Underrepresented Groups’ Handbook to guide NNR and Area staff in replicating the work elsewhere

Table 2. Tentsmuir NNR Visit Planner

Date – 2020	Community group	Description
10 th January	Lochee Women Refugee group	A weekly support group in Lochee, an SIMD-1 area in west Dundee, run by the Community Learning and Development and attended by Syrian refugees and Scottish women
17th January	Dundee Green Health Prescriptions	A referral process for health care professionals to signpost patients to nature-based interventions
20th January	Wellbeing Works Dundee	Provides support for those facing mental health challenges
22 nd and 30 th January	Hilltown Community Centre (creative writing group)	Runs various support and social groups in Hilltown, an SIMD-1 area in central Dundee
4th February	Healthy Minds Network	Run by Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action, Healthy Mind’s Network holds outreach and drop-in services for people with mental health difficulties
10 th March	Dundee International Women’s Centre – Bazorg (Elders) Group	Provides social groups and qualifications for women, with an emphasis on those from BME communities

ANNEX 2: CASE STUDIES

Case study 1: Green Health Prescriptions visit to Tentsmuir NNR – by *Marijke Leith*

We had our first Green Health Prescriptions group visit to Tentsmuir Point in January 2020, attended by 15 people referred by their GPs, and it was enjoyed by all. The Green Health Prescription is part of the Dundee Green Health Partnership, a new health initiative run by NHS Tayside and Dundee Council in partnership with organisations like NatureScot. The goal is to prescribe patients with nature-based interventions, get them out into the fresh air and most of all to enjoy the visits. We had a crisp and sunny day, just right for a stroll along the dunes and foreshore. The group especially enjoyed the cultural history and natural history of the area. The aim of the project is to increase the patients' overall health and wellbeing by maintaining a healthy lifestyle through interactions with the environment and nature. We received very positive feedback from the group who said that they didn't feel like it was exercise because they were walking and talking and they want to return to see Tentsmuir NNR in different seasons. We hope to welcome them back again soon!

Green Health Prescriptions participant feedback:

“Everyone said they enjoyed today’s trip and would gladly go back. I don’t think any of us wanted to leave, it was such a lovely day and so beautiful! We appreciated having Tom and Marijke there to give us a bit of background and context to the area and it was agreed that the walk would have been less fun without them because as one participant put it “Things like this are great because you’re walking but you don’t realise it because you’re hearing about what is around you.”

“Very interesting. Fabulous. I loved the walk and history. Had a great time, well organised, lovely fresh air and good company.”

“Keep up the good work. Lovely people. I was fascinated in the history of Tentsmuir. Very friendly and well organised.”



Figure 4. Green Health Prescriptions walk at Tentsmuir NNR, January 2020.

Case study 2: Tentsmuir Poetry Competition and StAnza Festival event

The project work around Tentsmuir NNR also involved organising public events as part of the Year of Coasts and Waters. This included an event with StAnza, an annual International poetry festival in St Andrews, recognised as one of the leading poetry festivals in Europe. I made contact with StAnza's director and poets Valerie Gillies, Anna Crowe and Jim Crawley, to organise an afternoon of poetry celebrating Tentsmuir at the Byre Theatre. We also partnered with PAMIS (Promoting A More Inclusive Society), which supports people with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities. PAMIS promotes multi-sensory storytelling, which helps people who are less verbal or non-verbal to enjoy and participate in storytelling, by involving sensory props and stimuli in the performance. Maureen Phillip, Senior Director for PAMIS Tayside and multi-sensory storyteller, wrote [an original multi-sensory poem about Tentsmuir](#) and performed it alongside Rachel and Ariane, two young women with PMLD, to add a multi-sensory dimension to the event. Rachel and Ariane controlled recorded birdsong and seal calls, and umbrellas trailing shells moved through the audience. The event was also StAnza's first 'relaxed event', branded as such to explicitly include people with disabilities which make it hard to sit still and silently for long periods. The event was fully booked and audience feedback was very positive.

Leading up to StAnza, I ran a public competition for poems about Tentsmuir and the coast. This was integrated into work connecting target community groups from Dundee with Tentsmuir: Hilltown Community Centre's creative writing group, who came on facilitated visits to Tentsmuir, made this their project for January. Four members of the groups were published alongside 12 others in our Tentsmuir poetry pamphlet, which was given out at the StAnza event and is available [online](#). The competition winners read their poems at the StAnza event, as well as others published in the pamphlet who attended the event. The medium of poetry encouraged communities in Dundee and other nearby areas to connect to Tentsmuir NNR in a more personal and emotional way. The initiative built partnership between NatureScot and StAnza, PAMIS and Dundee CLD. Further, opportunities to be published and to read at an event built individuals' sense of personal capacity and confidence, including individuals in target communities, key to overcoming psychological barriers to engagement.



Figure 5. Performance from PAMIS at StAnza Tentsmuir event, March 2020



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