Connecting with the land, knowledge and skill at Tir-y-gafel

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Contents

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Abstract

The focus of this dissertation is on the lives of residents at Tir-y-gafel, an eco-village in West Wales (Lammas 2014[1]). It demonstrates that the residents are not concerned with economic development, in the same way as the Welsh Assembly and international community are but are concerned with creating a lifestyle that enables them to add to the resources within the environment that sustain their lives on the land.

By joining the conversation between scholars such as Tim Ingold (1996; 2000; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c) David Howes (2010) and Rane Willerslev (2007), this dissertation shows that the residents do not see themselves to be separate from the environment. They do not view the environment through a cultural lens (Howes 2010) and do not have to observe it in order to experience it (Willerslev 2007). They view themselves to be part of the environment and seek ways to imbed themselves further into the landscape, as they are concerned with sustaining the land, which they view as the basis of all life.

The discussion challenges the concept of indigeneity, suggesting that it is more than being affiliated to land. It is about becoming part of it by tying oneself to the landscape through knowledge, skill and creativity that enables one to survive from the land and become part of the natural processes that take place which sustains the land and its inhabitants.

The knowledge and skill required in order to tie oneself to the land is acquired by living and working on the land over an extended period of time.

[1] http://www.lammas.org.uk

By spending time with the landscape, residents get to know it on an intimate level, observing the environment and engaging with it. At the same time, social relations between residents and the wider community are imbedded within the processes of knowledge acquisition.

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Introduction

My dissertation sets out to explore the human relationship to the environment at Tir-y-gafel, an eco-village in Pembrokeshire, West Wales (Lammas 2014). My discussion focuses on three points which will be addressed ethnographically. Firstly the concept of indigeneity is fluid and based on how an individual views their relationship to the environment. Secondly, that engagement with the natural environment requires knowledge, skill and creativity to be able to give something back to the land that sustains life. And finally, that the economic growth initiatives set out in policy, by the Welsh Assembly Government, do not resonate with the ambitions of the residents at the 'first low-impact, low emissions settlement' (Morgan 2011[2]) in Britain to apply for and receive planning permission before building took place (Lammas 2014; Wimbush 2012).

By drawing on my findings, from my fieldwork at Tir-y-gafel, I am able to analyse what the concepts of indigeneity and sustainability mean to individuals who are concerned with the environment and energy shortage; issues that are recognised both nationally, by the Welsh Assembly, (Climate Change Strategy 2010: 22[3]; Environment Strategy 2006[4]; Sustaining a Living 2012[5]; Sustainable Management of Wales' Natural Resources 2013[6]; One

[2] http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/self-reliant-residents-live-good-life-1820492

[3] http://www.wales.gov.uk/topics/envioronmentcountryside/climatechange/publications/strategy/?lang=en

[4] http://www.wlga.gov.uk/download.php?id=3972&I=1

[5] http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/environmentandcountryside/sustainingwales/?lang=en

[6] http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/environmentandcountryside/environment-bill-white-paper/?lang=en

Wales: One Planet, Sustaining a living Wales 2009[7]) and internationally by the United Nations (Argyrou 2005; Speth 2002; UN Millennium Development Goals[8] 2014; United Nations Climate Neutral Strategy 2014[9]).

My discussion will consider how the concept of indigeneity has been defined with regards to the human relationship to the environment, and how alternative views are held by residents at Tir-y-gafel, which they base on the relationship they have to the landscape. The term environment within this dissertation represents what is considered to be the natural environment by the residents. This is made up of the land that individuals build their homes on and grow food from, trees and plants that are part of the landscape, the weather that makes up the seasons throughout the year, and the air that individuals breathe and the water they drink from the natural spring.

I draw on the work of Tim Ingold (1996; 2000; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c) and his critiques David Howes (2010) and Rane Willerslev (2007), to explore how the residents view themselves in relation to the environment. At the same time, I will unpick the debate that has taken place between these scholars on the separation of the human from the environment through cultural perception; considering in detail that unlike Howes (2010) and Willerslev (2007), Ingold does not believe that the environment is separate from humans and viewed through a cultural lens.

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[7] http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/publications/onewalesoneplanet/?lang=en

[8] http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/environ.shtml

[9] http://www.greeningtheblue.org/

I will demonstrate that the residents are aware of the notion of human separation from the environment but do not consider this to be the case. I will do this by revealing that they are concerned with cultivating a relationship with the environment, by tying themselves to the landscape in a way they felt unable to when they lived in cities. They do this by embedding themselves into the landscape, becoming part of the natural processes that take place on their plots, physically building their homes into the land and becoming knowledgeable about their immediate environment. My discussion will reveal that culture at Tir-y-gafel is embedded within complex social relations (Carrithers 1990) that extend beyond the eco-village (Hannerz 1992; Tsing 2000).

My discussion will reflect upon the importance of knowledge and skill, which determines the residents' ability to create and sustain a livelihood from the land. I will demonstrate what skills are required to enable residents to tie themselves to the land and give something back to it through engaging in natural processes.

Drawing from Ingold's 'relational model' (2000: 105) I will demonstrate that knowledge and skill are acquired through continual engagement with the environment, developing a social relationship with the landscape in the same way you develop a social relationship with a friend (Ingold 2000; 2011a; see also Feit 2002; Hames 2007; Scott 2006; Willerslev 2007). I will show that creativity is important to this process and that Tir-y-gafel facilitates this creative process amongst the residents.

To conclude, I will argue that the residents I spoke to at Tir-y-gafel are concerned with creating a livelihood from the land that they can sustain relatively easily, by gaining knowledge and skill that enables them to live off the land. That their concern is with creating a long lasting relationship with the landscape, enhancing rather than consuming resources from the environment for economic gain.

Background

Tir-y-gafel: a new way forward

In August 2009, after four years of engaging with the planning process in Pembrokeshire, the 'Lammas Low-impact Living Initiative Ltd'[10] (Management Plan Tir y Gafel 2008: 4[11]) was given permission to turn a bare farmers' field into nine small holdings, collectively known as Tir y Gafel (Lammas 2014; Wimbush 2012).

The Lammas project was founded by a group of individuals whose aim was to carve a new way forward for the eco-village movement by making it more accessible to mainstream society, serving as a blue print for possible, future low-impact developments across Wales (Morgan 2011; Wimbush 2012, Simpson 2013[12]). What it means to be low impact according to Lammas, is: homes are built from locally sourced natural and re-used materials and are low in carbon output, thus creating a lifestyle that is environmentally sustainable (Lammas 2014; Wimbush 2012).

A defining characteristic of Tir-y-gafel is that it is promoting the development of autonomous plots and does not have a shared ethos which residents adhere to (Wimbush 2012; Lammas 2014 see also Positive News Archive 2010[13]; Simpson 2013; Morgan 2013). The reason they came together as a community, to apply for planning permission, was based on a number of recognised positives.

[10] Written as the Lammas project or the project from here onwards
[11] http://www.lammas.org.uk/planning/archive
[12] http://www.theguardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2013/mar/29/homes-land-and-freedom
[13] http://www.positivenews.org.uk/2010/archive/2369/eco-settlement-sets-a-sustainable-standard

Firstly, drawing together a number of people made it more financially viable to purchase the land and maintain it; dividing the cost of the land into nine made it easier to buy. It has also enabled the plots to become self-sufficient from the land because as a group they were able to purchase the hydro pump, as well as maintain it. At the same time, because residents live close to one another, they are able to look after each other's plots allowing each other to travel away from the land to visit family and friends.

When I asked residents why the Lammas Project had been set up in Pembrokeshire, I was told that it was because Pembrokeshire, and Wales more generally, were making policy changes that promoted low impact building. The Welsh political climate was conducive to the aims of the project and enabled them to apply for planning permission as a low impact settlement.

The 'One Wales: One Planet' policy document (2009 see also Technical Advice Note 6 2010[14]) promotes low impact building and outlines conditions upon which planning permission is granted under the low impact building scheme. Residents at Tir-y-gafel are expected to provide 75% of their household needs from the land within five years, and buildings have to be 'zero carbon in construction and use' (Lammas 2014; see also the Living in the Future internet mini-series[15]; Eco-Village Pioneers [DVD][16]; Living in the Future 2013 [DVD][17]; Management Plan Tir y Gafel 2008).

[14] http://wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/policy/tans/tan6/?lang=en

[15] http://livinginthefuture.org
[16] http://livinginthefuture.org/shop.php
[17] Ibid

By agreeing to the terms of the planning permission Lammas is promoting an environmentally conscientious lifestyle that complements the Welsh Assembly's vision of Wales. My research is concerned with the individuals who are living and working at Tir-y-gafel and through my fieldwork I was able to gain an understanding of what their personal goals are.

Fieldwork

From the 19th to the 21st March 2013 I conducted participant observation at Tir-y-gafel with residents. I was keen to cultivate collaboration within my interviews (Bernard 2005; Hoffman 2007) allowing the residents to guide the interview. In this sense, I could explore the relationship residents have with the natural environment and what motivates them to live and work at Tir-y-gafel. At the beginning of each interview I explained that I was interested in the human relationship to nature, sustainability and social cohesion. During the interview I encouraged them to tell me what they felt was relevant to them, prompting them with questions related to the information they were giving me and my research interests. I felt this semi-structured approach was the best way to gather the thoughts and feelings of the residents in such a short amount of time (Harvey 1996) and to learn what was important to them.

During the interviews it became apparent that for the residents, their homes were not just the buildings they had made for themselves but the landscape that surrounded them. By cultivating their lives from the land they had developed an 'attachment' (Ingold 2000: 132), which has for a long time been considered a characteristic of indigeneity. I will now begin my discussion by considering the concept of indigeneity.

Human beings and the environment

The concept of indigeneity

The term indigenous is defined as being 'originating or occurring naturally in a particular place… [to be] native' to the land by the Oxford Online Dictionary[18]. The UN consider certain communities of people to be indigenous based on the idea that their ancestors were 'living on their lands before settlers came from elsewhere' (United Nations 1997: 3 cited in Ingold 2000: 132). This is based on the idea that individuals who are native to an area possess unique knowledge of the place that outsiders do not have access to and that knowledge is passed along the generations through traditions (Howes 2010; Ingold 2000; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1996; Turnbull 1961).

Within anthropology the concept of indigeneity has been identified with the legacy of the 'Noble Savage' (Sykes 2005: 23). Sykes (2005) explains that the idea of the 'Noble Savage' is one that considers people who are seen to be native to the land, as living in harmony with the natural environment around them (see also Hames 2007; Whelan 1999).

The idea that knowledge is passed from generation to generation is countered by Ingold. He argues that 'the genealogical model' (2000: 133), which promotes the idea that knowledge and heritage are passed on genealogically, fails to understand what the environment means to the people who '*we*' (2000: 133, original emphasis) have labelled as indigenous.

[18] http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/indigenous?q=indigeneity#indigenous__5

He contends that as a result, indigenous communities have been removed from their lands based on the assumption that knowledge was passed from generation to generation. He also notes, however, that it cannot be denied 'that people of settler origin might develop deep and lasting attachments to the land' (2000: 132). At Tir-y-gafel, Drew spoke to me about the importance of getting "people back to the land" in Britain after World War Two. He also told me what indigeneity means to him.

My interview with Drew took place in his home. Like all of the residents I spoke to he was in his late thirties, early forties. He was dressed in cotton trousers and a cotton top that looked to be hand-made, and wore his beard and hair long. Whilst Drew identified himself as a hippy, he told me that the term is used differently in Wales than it is in England and is a reflection of being "embedded within the alternative culture in West Wales"[19]. He told me that he was from a middle class background but has lived in alternative communities such as Holtsfield[20] and Tipi Valley[21] for a long time.

For Drew, what it means to be indigenous was not just an idea of how one can live, but a way of living that he relates to. He sees the concept of indigeneity as aligning oneself to and finding "balance within the landscape". He told me that by his own definition he considers himself to be indigenous:

> I would class myself as indigenous… in a way it is about connection to the landscape, but somehow it's more than connection to the landscape, it's tying yourself to the landscape.

[19] Whilst I do not have the space to explore this further it would be interesting to consider the use of the word hippy in different contexts in further detail and how it is related to the human relationship to the environment.
[20] http://www.undercurrents.org/holtsfield.html
[21] http://www.huckmagazine.com/perspectives/activism-2/tipi-valley/

Like Ingold (2000), this definition serves to highlight the tension between considering oneself to be indigenous and the genealogical definition of indigeneity that the UN uses to guide their policy documents. My findings would suggest that being indigenous to a place is not simply having 'deep and lasting attachments to the land' (Ingold 2000: 132), it is about tying oneself to the landscape. Tying oneself to the landscape is done through gaining knowledge and skill that enables oneself to live off the land, becoming part of the natural processes that sustains all life on the land including oneself.

Before considering how residents tie themselves to the land in more detail, I first want to reflect upon the debate within anthropology that is concerned with the relationship humans have to the environment: the nature-culture dichotomy. Scholars such as Ingold (1996; 2000; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c), Howes (2010) and Willerslev (2007) have taken different approaches to the central notion of this dichotomy; that humans perceive the environment through a cultural lens.

An alternative to cultural perception

Within anthropology, a key discussion that is focused on the human connection to the environment is one that considers the relationship to be based on cultural perception (Argyrou 2005; Dove and Carpenter eds. 2008). The idea that the environment is perceived through culture has formed the basis of ethnographic work produced by scholars such as Colin Turnbull (1961) and Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (1996). Both scholars have prescribed to the idea that humans are separated from the environment and relate to it from a cultural perspective.

Reichel-Dolmatoff (1996), has proclaimed that the Tukano Indians, of the Amazon rainforest, Columbia 'have stored a large amount of culturally important information in all aspects of their physical environment' (1996: 10). In his ethnography 'The Forest People', Turnbull (1961) has demonstrated the belief that the BaMbuti Pygmies, of 'the north-east corner of the Congo', view the forest in a different way to outsiders:

> If you *are* of the forest it is a very different place. What seems to other people to be eternal and depressing gloom becomes a cool, restful, shady world (Turnbull 1961: 17 original format).

When looking at the forest, the BaMbuti see something completely different to outsiders, they do not see the forest as hostile because they were born there, have grown up there and are a part of it in a way outsiders are not.

Ingold notes that the belief that nature is culturally constructed is based on the idea that 'to be human… is to transcend the world of nature, to be more than a mere organism' in nature (Ingold 2010: 513). To demonstrate that humans are not separate from the environment, Ingold (1996; 2000; 2011a) has provided an alternative perspective to the idea that culture colours the way people view their world. He presents us with four alternative views of a scenario in which Cree hunters of north-eastern Canada hunt caribou. When being hunted, either by wolf or human, the caribou will stop and stare at what is hunting it. Ingold demonstrates the difference in interpreting this behaviour between the hunters and 'Western scientists'.

The first explanation of this behaviour that Ingold offers is that of the 'wildlife biologists' and 'Western scientists' (Ingold 2000: 14) who rationalise this moment as an adaptation to being hunted by wolves. During a hunt, both animals will stop to catch their breath. As it is the caribou that moves first,

keeping a close eye on the wolf, the caribou has a chance to outrun the wolf. However this does not benefit them when being hunted by man as it gives the hunter the opportunity to kill the animal. A point that Ingold does not raise is that this does not explain why the caribou has not evolved as a result of human predation.

The second explanation, is that of the indigenous hunters' perspective, that when the animal looks at them, it is in that moment it gives itself to them:

> They say the animal offers itself up, quite intentionally and in spirit of goodwill or even love towards the hunter… It is the moment the animal stands its ground and looks the hunter in the eye, that the offering is made (Ingold 2000: 13-14).

For the hunter, Ingold explains, 'killing [an animal] appears not as a termination of life but as an act that is critical to its regeneration' (2000: 13).

The third explanation Ingold presents us with, is that of the anthropologist, who does not seek to explain the behaviour of the caribou or determine the truth of what is happening. The anthropologist is concerned with understanding the different ways the world is perceived and what these perceptions mean 'given the context' (Ingold 2000: 14). The assumption held is that the environment is viewed through a cultural lens:

> In the Cree cosmology, the anthropologist concludes, relations with animals are modelled on those that are obtained within the human community, such that hunting is conceived as a moment of ongoing interpersonal dialogue (Ingold 2000: 14).

The Cree interpret their interaction with the caribou based on the social relationships they have with other human beings. Thus it is unrelated to what is happening in that moment when the caribou stops and looks at the hunter.

The fourth explanation is an alternative that Ingold himself presents us with. He suggests that the hunter relays the story of the hunt in an attempt to express, in words that allow the listener to grasp, how the hunter experienced that moment in time:

> … [the] aim is to give form to human feeling – in this case the feeling of the caribou's vivid proximity as another living, sentient being. At that crucial moment of eye-to eye contact, the hunter felt the overwhelming presence of the animal; he felt as if his own being were somehow bound up or intermingled with that of the animal… In telling of the hunt he gives shape to that feeling in the idioms of speech (Ingold 2000: 24-25).

The hunter feels the presence of the animal in the moment of the kill and recognises it as a 'sentient being', which is part of his environment and not just a kill that provides sustenance.

Both Howes (2010) and Willerslev (2007) have criticized Ingold's assertion that human beings are completely immersed in the environment around them. Howes (2010) accuses Ingold of ignoring the unique perspective indigenous people can offer the environment. Willerslev (2007) is concerned with demonstrating how the hunter has to have an awareness of himself in order to be able to engage with the environment in the first place.

For Ingold, it is impossible to step outside of the environment in order to perceive it and to experience it. He argues that the anthropological view that the world is culturally constructed is as flawed as that of the biologists'

explanations. Ingold highlights a paradox inherent within the idea that we imagine the world around us through culture. He contends that in order to do this the anthropologist would first have to step outside of the world of culture in order to view it, which is impossible according to the belief that the world is viewed through culture. For Ingold there cannot be a separation between the human and the environment, as when perceiving the environment, humans are perceiving themselves (Ingold 2000).

To step outside of the environment, the observer would have to step outside of culture, becoming a completely detached observer who is no longer even part of human society. They would have to become a fish out of water to observe life in the sea, which is impossible as fish need the water to survive. However, for Ingold, we do not swim in a sea of culture (2000, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c see also Ingold 1994). The question of what culture is arose during my ethnographic investigation and it was clear that cultural change and cultural identification was important to the residents I spoke to at Tir-y-gafel.

Culture at Lammas

During my interview with Drew, he spoke about the culture of Lammas, describing it as a culmination of mainstream and alternative cultures of the 60s and 70s, when people started to form alternative communities (Bang 2007; Morgan 2011):

> …we are an eco-village but the eco-village is not creating the culture… For me, we are part of an emerging culture and it is an emerging culture that centres around developing a harmonic relationship with the ecology... [It] also has strong elements of seeking methods of peaceful, supportive interaction with each other, seeking organic frameworks, through which to manage trade, exchange,

> outside of the box, its consciously looking at alternatives beyond the status quo.

They are stepping outside of mainstream society to develop a culture that is alternative to the “status quo”. This suggests that they view culture as something that can be moulded and that it can be determined by individuals within society. A focal point of this emerging culture was the organic development of social relations, which Drew felt was the most harmonious way to live in a community. This meant that residents had the space to retreat to their own plots and could choose when to socialise.

Drew told me that the culture at Tir-y-gafel is not being created by the place itself but by the residents who have come together to create a low impact settlement, as a result Tir-y-gafel is ‘an expression of society’ (Castells 2003: 8). The idea that culture is developed through “organic…social relations” suggests that the creation of culture at Tir-y-gafel is determined by social interactions amongst the residents (Carrithers 1990). At the same time, social interactions extend beyond Tir-y-gafel, creating networks through which culture flows between different individuals interacting from a wide variety of backgrounds, a point I will return to shortly (Hannerz 1992; Tsing 2000).

During my visit, I had the opportunity to observe a Lammas business meeting, within which issues were discussed that affected all residents at Tir-y-gafel, such as car use charges and how to make it fare for all residents. Those present demonstrated frustration over not being able to agree upon and resolve certain issues, such as the wording of an agreed statement about what Tir-y-gafel is working towards as a low impact settlement. During

their interviews residents also spoke to me about tensions within social relations at Tir-y-gafel.

Speaking to Elise[22] about social relations, she expressed how she felt life at Tir-y-gafel was “individualism almost run rampant”. That whilst they are all living on autonomous plots, their lives are interconnected as they have to make group decisions, and there was confusion as to when to act individually or collectively.

They also have stakeholders who have the right to attend the Lammas business meetings and vote on any decisions that needed to be made in relation to the project or Tir-y-gafel. Another resident, Thom recognised that this places those living at Tir-y-gafel in an insecure position, because stakeholders would have the majority vote and could vote on something that affects the lives of the residents. He advocated for a shared agreement on the purpose of life at Tir-y-gafel to safe guard their identity as a group of autonomous plots who were committed to low impact lifestyles.

I was told that Tir-y-gafel, as a community, does not have a “clear defined goal that draws” (Jon) everyone together. The residents I spoke to agreed that this was the case, but the desire to have this varied amongst them. Some of the residents wanted a shared ethos whereas others felt that it was not needed because they had a “rich community life” (Phil). It was also felt that having a shared ethos could potentially cause problems as it would mean that if you did not fit with the shared vision you would be an outsider.

[22] I will introduce each of the residents I spoke to in more detail as the discussion progresses.

I was surprised that the individuals I spoke to felt a distance between themselves and other residents at Tir-y-gafel, because whilst each interview took on a life of its own[23] (Hoffman 2007), there were common themes that ran throughout, which will be demonstrated within the discussion. It became clear through the interviews that the Lammas project had drawn certain people together (Granovetter 1983) to create Tir-y-gafel because they shared similar social and political views (Baumann 1996). They "all had this idea of wanting to live on the land… relatively greenly" (Jon) and wanted to create a lifestyle that limited damage to the environment and reduced energy consumption.

This paradox of residents feeling that they have little in common with one another, but having similar views and aims concerning the environment and energy usage, raises the question of whether there was a process of identification taking place during the interviews. That in some way they had become part of an 'exhibition' (Harvey 1996: 1) on promoting low impact living. When speaking to Sally, she told me that all she knew was that she wanted to live off the land and that since moving to Tir-y-Gafel she has become sympathetic to the goal of the Lammas project. A way in which the project aims to demonstrate the accessibility of this lifestyle, to the general public, is to show that anyone can live at Tir-y-gafel, as long as they fulfil the requirements of the Management Plan (Lammas 2014). It raises the question as to whether residents align themselves with the vision of the project when

[23] This was as a result of interviews being undertaken in different settings, either within the resident's homes or on their plots as they worked or took a break, at different times during my visit. The interviews lasted for different amounts of time as I encouraged residents to determine the length of their interview and I asked different questions based on what the residents spoke to me about.

they are interviewed by external people interested in what is taking place as a result of Lammas. During the course of the interviews it became apparent that residents held similar aspirations regarding the relationship they have to the landscape that extends beyond living “relatively greenly on the land”, which I will now consider in more detail.

Connection to the environment at Tir-y-gafel

Residents' relationship to the environment

During the interviews, it felt as if the relationship residents had established with the landscape was more developed than relations amongst one another. The residents wanted to engage with the environment and immerse themselves into the landscape; to have an intimate relationship with the land and to know the environment on a personal level. During my fieldwork, I came to understand that the relationship between the residents and the environment was much more complicated than simply being either separated or connected. For instance, whilst Annie did not see herself as separate from the environment, she did recognise the importance of using her hands to physically engage with the earth, and to do willow weaving. Through her reading into the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner[24], she had been introduced to the idea that the hands are what separates humans from animals, not the mind, and this made sense to her.

Annie lives on her plot with her husband Jon and three children. I interviewed her and her husband separately. My interview with Jon took place outside as he was cutting back willow that had been grown on his plot, he had short grey hair, wore a water proof jacket and jeans. Whilst Jon went to make a drink, Annie, who had shoulder length brown hair and wore a thick

[24] Rudolf Steiner was concerned with the practical relationship between the human spirit and the physical environment; the question of what it means to be human and the different elements that make up human lives such as art, architecture, education, science, agriculture and religion (for further information see http://www.whywaldorfworks.org/02_W_Education/rudolf_steiner.asp and https://www.biodynamics.com/steiner.html)

jacket and strong wellington boots, took a break from creating a sculpture from willow to talk to me because she told me she could only work alone. I noticed that even as we spoke she was twisting the branches of the willow she was stood next to into a braid, with the use of her hands, suggesting that having physical contact with the land was done subconsciously as well as consciously.

Jon told me that his family referred to them as Tom and Barbara from the good life. Annie referred to herself as a “passionate environmentalist” and told me that the “environmental stuff was the obvious bit” as to why someone would move to Tir-y-gafel. Before moving to Tir-y-gafel, they had lived in London and had experience of living in co-housing, were a number of families lived collectively, sharing food and household chores. They moved to Tir-y-gafel because they wanted to live a low impact, sustainable life, in a community that was safe for their children, which I will consider further shortly.

The dichotomies that Annie spoke about between the mind and the body, the human and the animal seemed somewhat paradoxical. Whilst she felt connected to the environment by physically engaging with it through the hands, she was drawn to the idea that the hands were what separated humans from animals. It raises the question of how residents view animals in relation to the environment and themselves. This suggests that whilst Annie does not view herself to be separate from nature, she also does not lose her sense of being human in relation to her surroundings (Willerslev 2007).

Whilst I did not have the opportunity to further explore the relationship Annie has to animals at Tir-y-gafel, Jon spoke to me about animals being "individuals" and not "economic units". Similar to the Cree hunters, he recognises them as 'sentient beings' (Ingold 2000: 25) that share the environment with him and are not simply meat for humans to consume. Sally also commented on how it would be "lonely [without animals as they give] some sort of extra life [to] the planet". It was clear that there was an appreciation of animals at Tir-y-gafel that extended beyond their position in the food chain.

During the interviews I realised that whilst residents did not view themselves as being separated from the environment, the idea of disconnection from nature had been introduced to them at some point. My interview with Phil took place both on his plot whilst he worked and in his caravan that was his home at the time. He wore clothes that were suitable for working outdoors, had short afro-hair and spoke with an American accent. He told me that he met his wife in California, and they moved to Bristol to be close to her family when she became pregnant. They then moved to Tir-y-gafel with their two small children as it gave him the opportunity to provide for his family. He told me that his ancestors had been slaves in the US and prior to moving to California, where he grew up, his family had been farmers in the rural south. It was at that point, he told me, his family "no longer grew anything [and] no longer built anything", which he was now doing for himself at Tir-y-gafel.

Phil was adamant that humans are not separated from nature and that he did not need to “believe that [he needed] to be more connected to nature” because he sees everything co-existing together in the here and now:

> I am here now and this [indicating to his plot] is here now and the bugs are here now and the sun is here now.

For him, everything around him, including himself was nature and thus could not be separated out. The fact that everything was present in that given moment meant that it was part of the same environment. Phil was very concerned with experiencing life in its immediacy and as I will discuss shortly he saw the importance of everything being interconnected including himself.

Sally told me that before university she was not aware that there was a “separation of person and landscape” and commented that she “just thought [she] was what [she] was”. It seemed that this concept of separation from the environment, which had been introduced to her through academia, had encouraged Sally to reflect on who she was in relation to the wider environment. My interview with Sally took place inside her home where she lived with her husband Keith and children, she had long brown hair, wore a knee length skirt and jumper. She told me that whilst she had family who were middle class, she was from a working class background and had been able to afford to buy land at Tir-y-gafel through inheritance. Her and her husband had previously been tenant workers on land owned by other people, and the move to Tir-y-gafel meant stability for them.

In Willerslev’s (2007) ethnographic account of the Yukaghirs, he is concerned with the hunter reflecting upon himself in relation to his physical

surroundings. He argues that if self and the world merged into one, as suggested in Ingold's work (2000):

> …the experienced and the experiencer would conflate, would become one, thereby making any experience of the world impossible (Willerslev 2007: 23).

For Willerslev being aware of the environment around us enables us to also experience ourselves as part of that environment, and therefore we perceive it as being separate from ourselves. Similarly Argyrou (2005) argues that to be able to speak about the environment an individual has to first perceive it. In their work both Willerslev (2007) and Argyrou (2005) argue that the environment is perceived by individuals through a process of self-reflection.

However, at Tir-y-gafel, Sally's self-reflection does not come to her automatically, but is introduced through a process of education at the level of university. Sally is not bound by this, however, as she has since moved away from mainstream education and now follows and teaches permaculture[25], which uses "principles… from natural systems":

> I got really interested in permaculture which is land based design, [a] creative way of repairing soil and repairing people's lives… it is a design led way of thinking so you actively assess what you do and how you do it and then you feed that back to try to improve your practice.

For Sally, permaculture provides her with a way of assessing her life using tools that take into consideration the health of the environment, including its human inhabitants. The idea that information, provided to us through

[25] http://www.permaculture.org.uk

education, shapes the way we view the world, is similar to how the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner appeals to Annie. Annie's children are taught with a curriculum from the Steiner Waldorf School of education[26], which encourages the use of hands whilst learning. It raises the question as to what role education and information plays in shaping how we view our surroundings and also demonstrates that residents have different educational experiences outside what is considered to be mainstream.

At the same time, whilst the residents I spoke to were aware of the idea of separation, they did not consider this to be the true state of being. They believe that the "notion [of] separation [is a false construct that] underpins consumption" (Drew), which is the basis of mainstream society and subsequently government policy (Dove and Carpenter eds. 2008). This is in line with the 'ecological Enlightenment' that is part of a 'risk society [within which society is] concerned with the elimination of environmental dangers' (Argyrou 2005: 83-4) and questions the truth put forward by recognised authorities within mainstream society. Argyrou (2005) suggests that such concerns are seen to surpass culture, as the perceived 'dangers [are observed as] reality as it really is' (2005: 84).

The residents I spoke to believe that there are environmental dangers and an impending energy crisis and that society is suffering from economic depression. This is based on observing changes that are taking place around them in the environment and information, which they have access to from national and international sources, through the internet and increased

[26] http://www.steinerwaldorf.org

globalisation (Hannerz 1992). At the same time, the residents are concerned with the relationship they have with their environment and how it makes them *feel*.

The residents I spoke to expressed how they are more concerned with developing a close relationship to the landscape, than consuming its resources, by immersing themselves into the natural processes taking place on their plots, a point I will turn to next.

Physical engagement with the environment: Process and Proximity

To further elucidate his view that humans are not separated from the environment, Ingold (2000) argues that all organisms dwell within the environment, not on it; they inhabit it, grow with it, and change it as it changes them. According to the 'dwelling perspective' (2000: 185), when considered with respect to individuals who build their livelihood from the land[27], humans take on information and knowledge through sensory engagement with their surroundings. This is done through the hands and the feet (Ingold 2000; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c), through the eyes and the ears (Ingold 2000; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; Pink and Howes 2010). Human beings engage with their environment through complete immersion into it, experiencing it both visibly (seeing the earth and the sky) and non-visibly, (breathing in air and feeling the wind).

In more recent work, Ingold considers how this dwelling is not static, but one of movement within the environment, living life 'along lines', which he calls 'wayfaring' (Ingold 2011a: xii see also Ingold 2007). Ingold considers

[27] Unfortunately there is not space within this discussion to consider the concept of dwelling in relation to wider society; of people living and working in urban environments.

that we learn, experience and live along paths and that this is ‘the essence of what it means to dwell’ (Ingold 2011a: 12). Later in the discussion I will return to consider how lines are present in the daily lives of the residents at Tir-y-gafel. I now want to reflect on how the residents ‘dwell’ within their environment by tying themselves to the landscape.

The residents recognise that they are physically connected to the landscape through the role they play in the natural processes of the environment. As organisms humans become part of the ground when they die and decompose in the same way plants and animals do. The soil we become part of in death, is also the soil that provides us, and the animals we consume with life, through its vegetation (Ingold 2007; 2011a). This cycle also exists during the life of an animal. For instance, cow and horse manure is used as compost as it is full of nutrients that aids vegetation in the growing process.

The residents I spoke to expressed how important it had become for them to be able to compost their own bodily waste. Phil told me that he had moved to Tir-y-gafel “to experience… wholeness”, which for him was achieved through “closing a loop” by becoming part of the natural processes of life. He explained that his bodily waste is fed back into the land from which it originated, thus creating a cycle through his engagement with the land; being physically part of this process of growth, composting and re-growth:

> I love peeing into a toilet in the caravan and that going into a bucket and me taking that bucket and every few days pouring it around the land where it needs to go. Pooing in that compost loo over there and a year later raking that poo, six months after that taking that out and composting that and six months after that, taking that out and spreading it on my trees.

The experience of the role he plays in the cycle of regeneration on his land, through composting his own waste, makes him experience emotions of “love and joy”. He told me that when he lived in Bristol, he had limited space to grow and compost and had to take his compost to his mother-in-law. He therefore has a closer relationship to this process at Tir-y-gafel and is actively tying himself to the landscape by participating in this cycle of composting. He is able to tie himself to the land at Tir-y-gafel in a way that was not possible when living in Bristol.

During his interview Thom explained that he had designed his plot as a series of interconnected processes. The aim was for everything to have an active role in the day to day running of his plot. One example of this was how he produced kindling:

> I go out every day and I harvest some willow… I walk to the field that my goats are in… they will eat the leaves… they will strip the bark which is good for them, at the end of the day I will have de-barked willow that I can take out of the bundle. It will dry really quickly because it’s got no bark on it, I’ve got some over there because rabbits do the same thing, so my subsidising the cost of the rabbits by giving them willow gives me the kindling, so the rabbits are doing the job for me…so everything needs to be integrated.

Like Phil, Thom is tied into a process that is taking place on his land. Through this he has a direct physical engagement with his environment. He also felt that it was important that the rabbits had an active role in such processes and that they were not just being kept for meat.

In describing his plot to me, it was a series of systems and processes designed to maximise the use of human, animal and resource energy. It was

important for Thom that everything had a purpose and that everything made sense to him, including the part he played on the land. Nothing should go to waste and in the long term, everything would be integrated and the plot would become functional and sustainable. There was a concern for not wasting energy, his own, and the resources he had at his disposal.

Ethnographies that have been concerned with the relationship hunter-gatherers have to their environment have presented insight into how the hunter plays an active part in processes of life and death. As a result they reveal an interconnection between the hunter and his environment, including 'non-human animal kind' (Ingold cited in Willerslev 2007: 24). When considering the hunting practices of the Yukaghirs of Northern Siberia, Willerslev writes that over-hunting is explained through a cycle of death and birth. The Yukaghirs kill all prey that is presented to them, even if they have reached their quota for transporting the carcasses back to their village. According to Willerslev, they do this as it enables animal populations to regenerate as the souls of animals need to be released in order for further animals to be born (Willerslev 2007 see also Feit 2002; Hames 2007, Scott 2006 for studies that look at regeneration as a mode of conservation amongst hunter-gatherer communities). The Yukaghirs, like the residents at Tir-y-gafel are involved in processes within their immediate environment. The similarity between the Yukaghirs and the residents at Tir-y-gafel is that they both live on land that allows them to fulfil their role in these processes. I now want to further explore how the landscape at Tir-y-gafel facilitates the aims of the residents.

The landscape at Tir-y-gafel

The residents spoke to me about the landscape at Tir-y-gafel and how it provided the circumstances that enabled them to fulfil their goals. For instance, having access to fresh water and vegetables was extremely important to Sally. Before moving to Tir-y-gafel, she had moved from London to Somerset because she felt it was easier to access fresh water and vegetables there. At Tir-y-gafel, Sally has access to a communal spring that was sold to them as part of the land. She compared her own water to that of the local chlorinated water, expressing how she could feel a difference between the two, on an "energetic level"; experiencing a physical and emotional difference. Being able to grow her own food enabled her to have access to fresh vegetables.

Growing their own food was also important to the other residents I spoke to. Thom told me that the food he ate, when he was younger, was of better quality:

> …we didn't have a great deal of money, but we ate really well. We lived in a town but we had chickens and ducks and a small orchard. We grew our own food, a bit like 'the good life'. So we ate really well because we couldn't afford to go to the supermarket to buy pizzas because they were really expensive. We ate significantly better food because we would make really good Italian style equivalent pizza dough with good fresh ingredients, some from the garden… I want to be able to eat the quality of food that I have become accustomed to

Thom recognised that growing his own food and keeping livestock would be affordable for him and would ensure its quality.

In a similar way to Thom, Jon also reflected upon his experiences growing up. He explained that life at Tir-y-gafel was similar to when he was a

child, that there was a higher degree of safety for his children to play outside compared to London. For those I spoke to who were parents, creating a safe environment for their children was a priority for them. Annie spoke to me about her son who has Williams syndrome, which is a form of autism:

> …there is a hub pub he can go down to, to have a beer on a Friday night. Lots of people from the local community come. He can just walk down there, there's no roads, there's no danger. He can go down there at the age of 19. At the age of 19 I had already married Jon and I had moved out, I had my own job, I was independent. Ted is not like that, he will never be like that, so it has actually worked amazingly well.

Annie wanted her son to be able to have freedom and safety and as a family they had recognised that living in a village like Tir-y-gafel would provide this for him. All of the parents I spoke to expressed the same sentiment, that life in the city restricted freedom and was less-safe for their children.

Throughout the interviews a comparison emerged between living at Tir-y-gafel and in the city. The cities mentioned: Cardiff, Bristol, Edinburgh, London, Manchester and Los Angeles are extremely diverse and not representative of cities on the whole. Despite this, similar themes and experience were mentioned by those I spoke to.

Those I interviewed had a negative impression of the city landscape. Drew described it as:

> …trashed in some way. The buildings, the roads, the heavy pollution, foul air, noise, it's all disturbance. If you are walking along the road it's a bombardment of senses, there's no pleasure. There is a kind of fear with that, the fumes, the noise, so much friction with our energetic bodies.

For Drew the environment in the city was dirty, noisy and unpleasant. It had a direct impact on him physically and emotionally. He expressed how the landscape of the city prevented him from dropping his guard and opening up to dialoguing with ecologies; being able to spend time with the environment and getting to know it without the interference of noise and pollution blocking his sensual experience of it. Tir-y-gafel gave him the space to do this and to develop a relationship with his surroundings. Drew was very much concerned with "tying himself to the landscape [by] walking and familiarising [himself] with the land… living on [it] to develop that relationship". He recognised that he was only able to do this in the type of environment available at Tir-y-gafel.

Similarly Phil told me that he had not been able to experience immediacy with the environment on the same level in places he had lived previous to Tir-y-gafel. This included cities in the UK and US and the alternative community Esalen[28], where he worked as a gardener. Living on the land that was sustaining his life was key to the experience Phil wanted to have.

Having a relationship with the land and being close to and a part of the landscape was also important to Sally. She explained that when she used to go camping she would set the tent up so that the grass and the plants were on the inside. At Tir-y-gafel, she and her husband Keith had built their current home into the side of the hill and had planned to build their main home in the same way:

[28] http://www.esalen.org

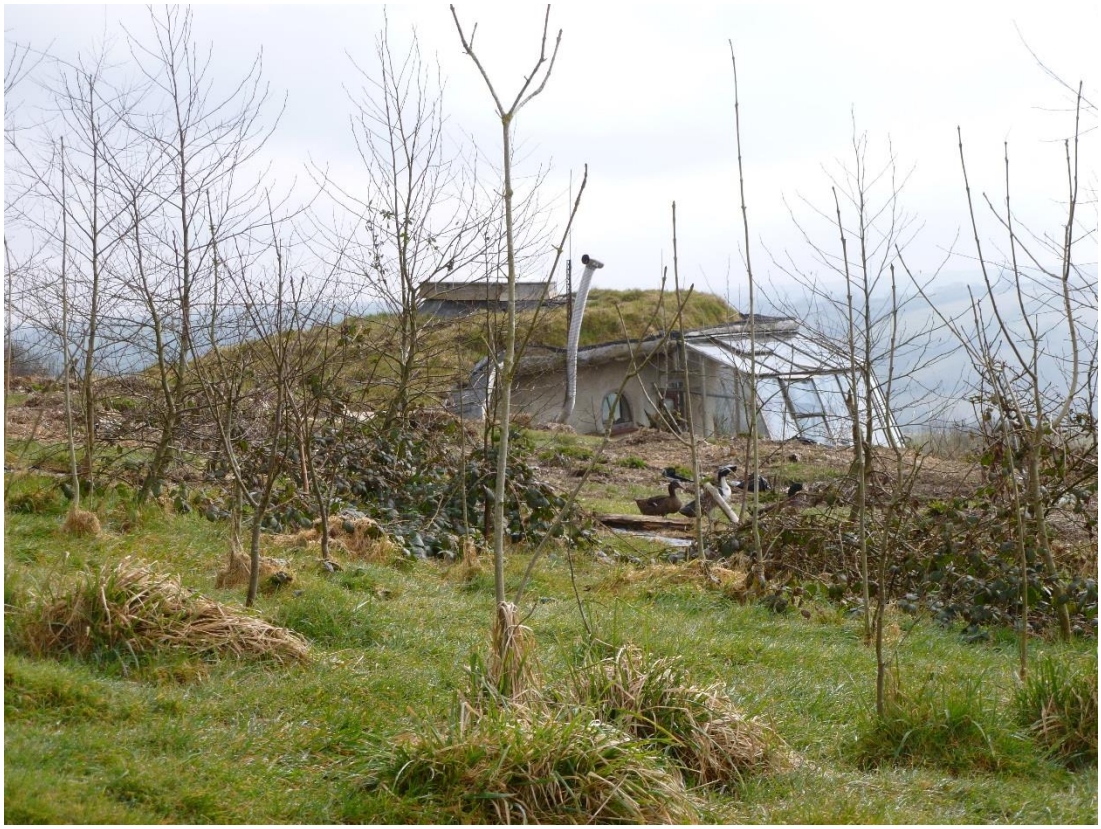

Figure 1. Sally and Keith's home, photograph taken by researcher.

For Sally this enabled her to become "a piece [of the landscape and] not something on it", by actively 'dwelling' within her environment (Ingold 2000: 185; see also Ingold 2011a). Sally was tying herself to the landscape by building a long term relationship with it and physically building herself into the earth.

Having the ability to tie yourself to the landscape and become part of natural processes, such as composting your own waste, requires a certain knowledge and skill to be able to do this successfully. I now want to consider knowledge and skill as it plays a large role in enabling residents to develop their desired relationship to the land at Tir-y-gafel.

Knowledge and skill

Learning the land

Knowledge acquisition plays a central role in the lives of those living and working at Tir-y-gafel, as they have to "re-learn" (Sally) how to live off the land. After purchasing the land, they left it for a year to allow the soil to repair itself and to see how the field would grow back once it was no longer grazed (Living in the Future internet mini-series; Eco-Village Pioneers [DVD]; Living in the Future 2013 [DVD]). The residents have had to learn the land, and to acquire knowledge and gain skills to enable them to build a livelihood from what was "a green farmers' field" (Drew), which was completely bare and had no built infrastructure. During my fieldwork I came to understand that the skills required are more than knowing how to build your own home or grow your own food; it is about understanding the intricate details of your surrounding environment, such as the weather.

My interview with Elise took place in her caravan which was her home at the time, and also her potting shed. She had short brown hair, wore jeans, a thick jacket and walking shoes. She was the only resident to live on her plot by herself, all of the plots were habited by "nuclear families" (Elise). She spoke about how she had previously lived on the road for four years "Woofing"[29], which allowed her to work on farms in exchange for accommodation and food. However, at Tir-y-gafel, she came to understand the seasons differently. Elise told me that after living in the field for a year,

[29] 'World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms' http://www.wwoof.org.uk

she came to see “winter as a process rather than a hardship” and she had gained a new appreciation of the seasons:

> I was aware of it [the seasons] before, but I was removed from it. Now I am really part of it and I want to keep up with it; I cannot afford to not notice it.

Elise recognised that her life at Tir-y-gafel depends on the skill of being able to read the seasons, as this impacted on being able to grow food from the land and plant trees successfully. This skill was only available to her after she had lived through the seasons on the land she was building her life on.

The idea of acquiring knowledge and developing skills through a continued, physical engagement with the environment, has been promoted by Ingold, as the ‘relational model’ (2000: 105). Ingold compares his own experience of gaining knowledge, from his father, as a child, to the way in which ‘Australian Aboriginal societies pass their knowledge across the generations’, by introducing the landscape to the boys during a ‘grand tour’ (2000: 20). Ingold proclaims ‘I find that the principle is just the same!’ (2000: 20). For Ingold, the process of learning about plants and fungi from his father, who was a botanist, was through engaging with them during walks in the countryside. His father would ‘literally point them out’ and get him to ‘smell them, or to try out their distinctive tastes’ (2000: 20). Ingold’s father’s way of teaching him was through a process of introducing him to the world around him and allowing him to become familiar with it through his own senses by moving through his environment.

Ingold contends that peoples’ engagement with the environment is done through ‘wayfaring’ (2011a: 148); one of continuous movement through

it, experiencing it through their senses (Ingold 2000, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; Pink and Howes 2010).

> …moving is knowing. The wayfarer knows as he goes along… grows older and wiser. Thus the growth of his knowledge is equivalent to the maturation of his own person… What distinguishes the expert from the novice is… a greater sensitivity to cues in the environment and a greater capacity to respond to these cues with judgement and precision. The difference, if you will, is not one of how much you know but of how well you know (Ingold 2010: 134-5).

Ingold (2000; 2011a) explains that it is through repeatedly engaging with the environment, through sensual interaction, that one becomes knowledgeable and skilled at reading 'cues' that individuals would otherwise lack. Howes (2010) agrees with Ingold's assertion that we come to know the world through our senses but argues that it is based within cultural perception rather than experience. The findings from my research suggests that residents gain knowledge of the environment at Tir-y-gafel through continual engagement with it.

For Elise, she gained 'a greater sensitivity to cues in the environment', being able to understand the seasons because she had come to know the land at Tir-y-gafel and the weather over a course of a year. The longer Elise stays on the land, the more she will become attuned to the different aspects of her environment, both visible (soil, plants) and non-visible (wind, temperature). By living on the land the residents are in constant engagement with the landscape and thus can get to know it quicker than if it was land they had to travel to. Jon told me that living on his plot made all the difference to developing his livelihood from it.

Residents recognised a gap in knowledge between themselves and someone who has had a longer relationship to the land. Sally spoke about "the digger man [who she views as having] some sort of knowing because he's farm generation, he has some sort of sense of the weather" that is different from her. This idea of having a certain way of knowing is similar to Ingold's proposition that people who come to know their environment gain an instinctual knowledge.

In his work, Ingold refers to Paul Anderson's idea of 'sentient ecology' (Ingold 2000: 25), which he introduced in a study he did on reindeer herders in northern Siberia:

> Sentient ecology… is based in feeling, consisting in the skills, sensitivities and orientations that have developed through long experience of conducting one's life in a particular environment…[and] hunters draw [knowledge] from… close attention to the movements, sounds and gestures of animals (Ingold 2000: 25).

The hunters rely on their instinct during a hunt, but it is instinct which has been developed over a number of years, as a result of becoming highly attuned to their environment and the behaviour of reindeer.

During my interviews I repeatedly came across the idea of an instinctual way of knowing. Thom told me that he wanted his son to develop an instinctual knowledge of the environment that will allow him to know when certain foods are available throughout the year. Thom recognised that living at Tir-y-gafel was conducive to this aim because whilst his son is less than two, he already forages and knows what to eat and what not to eat, such as the foxglove, which is poisonous. His son came to know this because he has had continuous interaction with his surroundings.

Sally introduced me to a different view, to that of Ingold, on how knowledge is acquired through instinct. She spoke of being inspired by the author Starhawk[30], who is a "psychologist, permaculture teacher and witch". She told me that Starhawk has written on how it is possible to know something just by being still in the moment, and achieving a meditative state:

> [Starhawk] thinks that becoming present you become in touch with your own deep knowing, which is that which our ancestors had, so you don't need to re-learn over generations… if a plant's resonance needed planting now then we don't know because…we are a few generations lost, but we could know if we could get to stillness.

For Sally, "our ancestors" instinctively knew when plants needed to be sewn and saw this as being an intrinsic part of being human. She suggested that knowledge can be accessed through "stillness" rather than movement within the environment (Ingold 2000).

Whilst Sally felt that she would be able to tap into knowledge through "stillness" she told me that she had lost the ability to instinctively know because she has been separated from the land for a number of generations. Sally also spoke about re-learning rather than learning skills. That knowledge is a social attribute and collectively, as a society, there is a knowledge deficit. The belief that there is a knowledge deficit at Tir-y-gafel, was held by all of the residents I spoke to. Like Sally, the focus was on the gap between themselves and previous generations that had lived on the land.

[30] http://www.starhawk.org

A knowledge deficit

During the interviews the residents demonstrated the belief that being separated from the land has prevented the passing on of knowledge, of how to live off the land, as it had been done prior to privatisation.

For the residents, the land is the key ingredient to accessing knowledge and feeling connected, because it is “the very basis of life” (Thom). My interview with Thom took place at the site where he had laid the foundations for the house he was building. We sat on what would become a wall of his home that was lay on the ground where he had placed it in advance of lifting it into place, which he told me was going to happen the next day. He had a short beard, wore a camouflage style jacket, hat and khaki trousers. He had grown up in the Gower Peninsula, had attended art school and had previously lived with his wife Angela in a small community called Owen’s field, which was close to Holtsfield. He told me that he moved to Tir-y-gafel because it was a way for him to afford own his own home and provide a livelihood for himself, his wife and son. During his interview Thom spoke to me about connection and the loss of knowledge:

> …how far back would I have to go before there was a connection to the land? My grandmother didn’t know how to make soap, the Pear company did that for her. She didn’t need to know how to do these things because other people do it for you.

For Thom, the land was the basis for everything, even soap. He felt that knowledge came from doing things for yourself, from living on the land and having a direct relationship with it.

The idea of the knowledge deficit suggests that there is a flaw in how information is shared in a world that is dominated by the internet. Despite knowledge being accessible through books, magazines, educational courses and both theoretical and practical training, residents still felt there was a gap. An example of this is the “bug hotel” that Jon was building at the time of my visit:

Figure 2. The bug hotel built by Jon, photograph taken by researcher.

The bug hotel is constructed in a way that attracts insects that live solitary lives by providing different materials that specifically appeals to them, to make their nests in. Attracting these diverse insects encourages natural pest control as they eat aphids and other bugs that would normally be removed by pesticides. He told me that he found the information on how to do this from the internet. However, he was still unsure if he was doing it correctly and

recognised that it was only through building the bug hotel that he was learning and becoming familiar with the concept.

Thom provided me with another example of implementing knowledge that was gained outside of living on the land. He told me that his wife, “who did her second degree in geography”, ran tests on the soil at Tir-y-gafel over the course of a year and was able to determine that it was very acidic. This information was essential for them to understand the most efficient way to work with the soil. However, at the same time her father, who had been “brought up in East Finland without electricity [where he] hunted and fished and grew food”, was able to provide them with the same conclusion just from touching, smelling and tasting the soil. From this, he provided the same advice that had been established through the year-long tests that had been done. Her father had gained knowledge by growing up on the land and had become able to test the soil through the use of his own senses (Ingold 2000).

Whilst knowledge is available and is passed on from generation to generation, distilled into forms of information that can be accessed through the internet, books, magazines, education and theoretical and practical training courses, it is less instinctual and more impersonal. The residents I spoke to did not have the opportunity to grow with the land in the same way someone of the “farm generation” has, or someone who has lived in “East Finland… hunting and fishing”. This relationship to the land and acquisition of knowledge, by living in the landscape at Tir-y-gafel, has only just begun for them. Whilst changes in knowledge were noted, for instance, by Elise, who has a deeper understanding of the seasons, residents recognise that, like social relationships with people, it will take time to fully understand their

environment. During the interviews it became clear that gaining knowledge and skill was closely linked to social relationships for the residents, a point I wish to turn to next.

Addressing the deficit: Sharing knowledge and skills

Whilst the residents felt that they were missing the opportunity to have knowledge passed onto them from previous generations, they recognised how they had made friendships that enabled them to share knowledge and skills. This sharing of knowledge was embedded in social relations at Tir-y-gafel and I found that this varied from person to person.

During her interview Sally had told me that Phil was going to help her plant her trees the very next day. Thom also told me that his wife had noticed the water flow was low so he and Keith had spent time that day fixing the hydro pump, which is a two-man job. By supporting one another the residents were able to achieve their own goals, such as having access to fresh water and planting trees; undertaking tasks that would not be possible alone.

Jon's experience of social relations at Tir-y-gafel was very positive, however he focused on the friendships he had established with volunteers and course participants[31], who had visited his plot, because they were keen to learn how to build low impact and live off the land. Volunteers and participants would keep in touch and sometimes return to visit his family on

[31] For further information on courses run by residents see Lammas 2014; http://beingsomewhere.net/courses.htm; http://plas-helyg.co.uk/t3/index.php?id=36

the plot. He also felt that there would be opportunity for his family to visit the volunteers in their homes in the future.

Jon told me that visitors came from all over the world and he saw this as positive because knowledge and skills are being transferred from Tir-y-gafel to national and international communities. Links between people are being set up worldwide, which resonates with Anna Tsing's theory that networks of people are built up through social movements, which she calls 'flows' (2000: 347). Similarly Mark Granovetter considers how 'weak ties' (1983: 1360) bring people together from different parts of the world, to exchange information enabling political action to spread, this also enables culture to 'flow' globally (Hannerz 1992).

Jon's experience of 'weak ties' being established between himself and volunteers suggests that cultural diversity does not have a negative impact on social cohesion, as Nils Holtug and Andrew Mason (2010) have argued. It is positive for his social life at Tir-y-gafel; thus a shared culture within social relations is not imperative. He told me that he had become more social since moving to Tir-y-gafel and that when he lived in London he felt closed off, unable to relate to others and be social, describing himself as having been a "socio-phobe".

Whilst social and political ideals can draw people together (Granovetter 1983; Tsing 2000) it does not guarantee that the social experience will be positive. During Elise's interview she spoke in depth about the social aspect of Tir-y-gafel. Unlike the others I spoke to, she felt that the "social landscape [didn't] suit [her] brilliantly". To remedy the lack of social

relations, Elise has made an effort to cultivate contact with people living in the locality:

> I've made a lot of contacts outside. I made a very definite decision to make contact in the wider community, and that's been much better. I've been gardening. On my gardening jobs I've made friends with the people. They share knowledge with me. They share plants with me which I don't get here particularly. So it feels there's slightly an element of competition, sometimes we share stuff but it's less of a relaxed situation which again might change in the future. But certainly, I've found it easier in the real world to make connections.

When I asked Elise if she did not see Tir-y-gafel as the real world, she told me that she felt everyone was living in a sort of bubble and that the walls of the bubble would get thinner and thinner over time. The idea of the real world also came up when I was speaking to Sally, who considers mainstream society to be a fantastical world like "Disney World" that cannot go on forever. The perception of reality at Tir-y-gafel differed amongst the residents and could be linked to the idea, previously discussed, that Tir-y-gafel or conversely mainstream society is a representation of reality (Harvey 1996).

Elise was happy with building a livelihood from the land at Tir-y-gafel but having good social relations was extremely important to her. She was able to satisfy this by reaching out to the local villagers. At the same time Elise was also tapping into local knowledge that might not have necessarily been available at Tir-y-gafel. Elise spoke to me about her plans for planting her trees and how she had sought advice from different people:

> …there is so much I don't know and I went to talk to someone in the next village who has an orchard and spent an hour, two hours with him. I got him to tell me all of the things he thought were important. On my gardening job today… I was asking them about their own trees. The guy with the orchard said, you must put them on the most

> vigorous root stock so they can be tall because the conditions here are far from ideal, yet the people I am gardening with, they are half a mile away from here, have got everything on the least vigorous root stock and were doing well. So all the time I am having to gather knowledge and then make decisions accordingly to what I find out.

Elise is aware that the experience of the landscape can vary between people and that the land can differ from one place to the next. As her livelihood depended on knowledge, of how to live off the land, she felt that she needed to get it right.

The relationship the residents want to establish with the land is similar to the social relationships that take place between people. They want to spend time to get to know and understand it. Knowledge is passed from person to person and from land to person through social engagement. Spending time engaging with and building intimate relationships with the landscape is part of the process of knowledge acquisition (Ingold 2000; 2011a).

Within anthropology, the idea that humans have a social relationship with the environment is not new. Both Reichel-Dolmatoff (1996) and Turnbull (1961) have explored the social relationship between the human and the environment within their ethnographic work, which focused on hunter-gatherer communities. Ingold (2000) has drawn our attention to a study by Nurit Bird-David, in 1990, on the Nayaka of Tamil Nadu, South India (Ingold 2000: 43). According to Bird-David the Nayaka refer to the 'hills, rivers, and rocks of the forest [as] big father [and] big mother' (Ingold 2000: 43) because they have a similar social relationship to the forest as to their parents, in that they are nurtured by both in order to grow and develop (Ingold 2000: 140-1). For Ingold, the relationship between the Nayaka and the forest is as real as it

is between family members. They know the forest like they know their own father or mother.

There are similarities between how the Nayaka view the forest and how residents at Tir-y-gafel want to develop a “long term relationship with a piece of land”. Phil saw his relationship with his land as one of reciprocity. He told me that his purpose was to “serve [the land] as the land has served [his] aims”. The residents at Tir-y-gafel want to know the land as if it was a member of their family or a very good friend. This challenges Howes (2010) who argues that ‘culturally informed practices that differ from one’s own are inaccessible from a purely phenomenological perspective’ (2010: 335). Whilst the landscape at Tir-y-gafel is very different to that of the Nayaka’s forest, the residents are demonstrating similar experiences.

It was clear that living at Tir-y-gafel enabled the residents to establish a social relationship with the environment, and to gain knowledge and skills that enabled them to tie themselves to the land. It was important to be able to do this in order to successfully create a livelihood for themselves from their plots. I now want to consider the aspect of creativity as it is an important part of life at Tir-y-gafel.

Creating and creativity at Tir-y-gafel

Creating and working with lines

Ingold theorises (2007; 2011a) that human beings live along and create lines as they move through the environment, and everything is interconnected along these lines.

At Tir-y-gafel I observed the different use of lines throughout the village, creating paths through continual movement within the environment (Ingold 2007; 2011a). One example of this was paths that residents had created in the landscape both consciously and subconsciously (Ingold 2007). The track-ways were constructed to make it easier to access the plots by connecting them up and providing a suitable surface for bikes and vehicles. They became a way of marking out the public and the private, as visitors were told to stay on the track-ways, preventing them from wondering too far onto properties. This is similar to Ingold's 'edges' (2007: 166) that are not physical barriers but do control movement.

When I first arrived, I was told that I could walk around the village freely, sticking to the track-ways. When leaving my interview with Sally, she gave me directions to Thom's plot that took me off track and down a path, which had been worn into the ground, as a result of people walking along the same way. The residents were creating paths between plots that were alternative to that of the track-ways and the use of these different paths would depend on who you were in relation to the village: a visitor, resident, volunteer or researcher.

When it came to the creation of buildings at Tir-y-gafel it was interesting to see the mixture that was present. The buildings that had been constructed were a mixture of round and rectangular shapes, creating both circular and straight lines. For instance, the hub building has been built mostly in straight lines but has subtle curves in the roof and the windows:

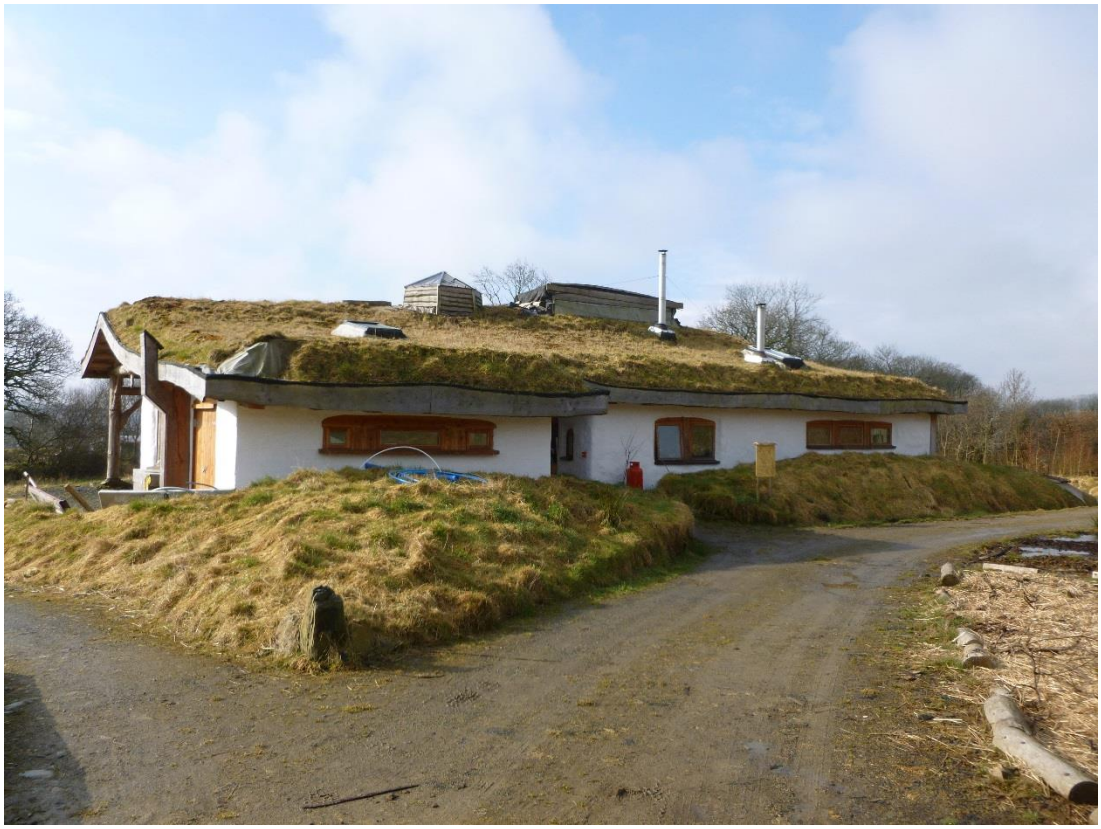

Figure 3. The hub building, photograph taken by researcher.

The hub building is made of a mixture of materials: wood, clay, glass and grass. In a similar way to Sally and Keith's home, the hub looks to be an extension of the ground rather than being placed on top of a surface (Ingold 2010).

Behind the hub building there is a map of the village which has been handcrafted in wood and protected with gloss. It is another example of

creating lines. The lines are drawn free-hand and therefore are not completely straight (Ingold 2007), but some have been created to represent a straight line, whereas other lines are demonstrably curved:

Figure 4. Handcrafted map of Tir-y-gafel, photograph taken by researcher.

The map gives the basic outline of Tir-y-gafel. Whilst it looks to be a field that has been partitioned into sections of land, each section is either someone's home or a communal area such as the forest[32] and not a small rectangular piece of land used exclusively for agriculture. It shows a village made up of different elements, both public and private that is built into a field, which is

[32] There were a total of nine plots of varying sizes, three of which made up the eco-terrace (See Appendix 1: 'Site Layout Plans' Lammas 2014).

not concreted over (Ingold 2010), with gardens and parks inserted as additional features. The grass, soil, trees and plants are not contained as they are in an urban setting where people live in houses with gardens and have to travel to the nearest farmers' field or park to be able to access a large green area (Ingold 2010).

Ingold (2007) has considered the different ways in which lines have been used to represent modernity and peoples' affinity to nature. Ingold (2007) argues that whilst there are straight lines in nature such as the Opal tree, the straight line has become a symbol of modernity; a representation of conformity. The circular line has become associated with nature (2007: 152-153). He has suggested that, in reaction to partitioning of land into rectangular strips marked out by straight lines, there was a:

> …counter-reaction [within which people yearned] for the circuitous entanglements of nature with ruined, Ivy-encrusted walls, rustic fences, twisting garden paths and rampant weeds (2007: 155).

For the residents I spoke to, the decision to build in straight or curved lines was not made based on their desire to conform to modernity or embrace nature. For instance Drew, who considers himself to be indigenous to the land at Tir-y-gafel, has built in straight lines on his plot. This challenges the ideas of what the straight and curved line represents.

I had the opportunity to speak to Thom in detail regarding the difference between using straight wood and round wood. He told me that:

> …round [building] is the most efficient way of turning a round piece of wood into the largest surface area of floor space that timber will give you… if you are working with natural materials, round is a very sensible shape… perfect for wind distribution.

The reason Thom was building his house in straight lines, was due to the "modern day lifestyle [and how his] furniture wouldn't fit in a round house". He also told me that it is easier for him to build in straight lines, how "there's no single bit of timber here that is too heavy for [him] to pick up on [his] own". He had "built the entire building [by himself and can] move the walls around [by himself because] straight lines move very easily". Thom also told me about a couple he knew who had built a round house from straight timber they had found. He felt this had been unnecessary and had been done just for the sake of building in a way that conforms to the ideals of living an alternative lifestyle. This did not make sense to Thom as it was a waste of time and energy for a less efficient building.

During my interviews I also learned that in some instances the use of straight and curved lines on a build was absolutely necessary for it to function as it was intended. Jon told me that he needed a barn door which was square, even though the frame itself was curvy, because "it needs to be level and square and flat, otherwise it's not going to work". At the same time I came to understand that from Jon's experience of facilitating training courses, he had found that individuals have different abilities of working with straight and curved lines. That ultimately these different skills complement one another in the same way a square barn door complements a curvy wooden frame.

Jon told me about a participant from Switzerland, who had wanted to learn how "to build with round wood", but had found it too difficult.

Recognising that “some people don’t have [the ability to be flexible with round wood] and need to have straight lines”, he had given the participant the job of building the barn door and “he blossomed”. Jon said that it was great for him because he finds it difficult to finish the “fiddly bits”. Whilst Jon suggested that it might have been a result of the participant training as an engineer in Switzerland, this does not explain why Thom and Drew used straight lines for their buildings.

I would argue that straight and curved lines exist within society, in cities, towns and villages because different people have over the years worked with both straight and curved lines for practical reasons or because they want to create a certain look and feel of their building. At the same time it is also linked to the creative skill of the individual, as was demonstrated by Jon who prefers to work with curved lines, and his participant who struggled with curved but “blossomed” when working with straight lines. Having the opportunity to be creative in a way that felt right to the residents was an important aspect of living at Tir-y-gafel, which I now want to consider.

Making space for creativity

Facilitation of this creativity was central to the way Jon worked with participants. Allowing participants to have the space to create was important to him and also made him feel good. At the same time, having space to be creative with their lives was important to the residents I spoke to.

Annie told me about another research study taking place at Tir-y-gafel, which was commissioned by the Government through Cardiff

University. The focus of this research was to understand why people reduce their energy consumption and one of her answers to this question is:

> …necessity is the mother of invention, if people have things taken away from them, then they suddenly become creative.

Annie felt that living at Tir-y-gafel was conducive to creativity because life had become more basic. They had to create their own livelihood from the land. Part of this was the efficient use of resources such as water and electricity that was not available to them at a flick of a switch. Jon also explained that he had developed a problem solving head since he had moved to Tir-y-gafel. This enabled him to build up knowledge and skills necessary for living off the land at Tir-y-gafel and to create his livelihood from scratch.

Similarly Sally and Thom spoke about observations they had made, which suggested that people have lost the ability to trust themselves because everything is provided for them. Sally told me that when she had travelled to Nottingham for an event, she had to ask for directions. Everyone she spoke to referred to their smartphone to check. Sally considered the possibility that those she spoke to did know what directions to give but had become accustomed to relying on the internet. Thom's example was drawn from his childhood, when people had to judge whether it was safe to get on to a train before it departed. Now, the train doors close 30 seconds before the train departs and people cannot get on to the train even though it is stationary.

Residents expressed feeling frustrated in mainstream society at not being able to do things for themselves, for example grow their own food. They also wanted to feel comfortable with being able to make decisions for themselves and to trust their own judgement, for instance when planting trees. The important point is that they felt they were not able to achieve this when they lived in mainstream society, where a lot of the services are provided and information is readily available. In towns and cities they felt suffocated by information overload. At Tir-y-gafel they had space to breathe, think and create for themselves.

Jon spoke to me about how his children had become extremely creative whilst living at Tir-y-gafel, compared to children who visited them from the local village, who did not know what to do when they were there. It was a freedom his children experienced of engaging with the environment in a way that enabled them to open up to a creative process (Ingold 2000; 2011a). Being able to open up to this process of creativity was equally important for the adults who took on the responsibility of creating and sustaining a livelihood from the land.

Creating and sustaining a livelihood

Having the ability to be creative was also important in allowing the residents to feel secure in their ability to create a livelihood and sustain it through their own efforts; not having to rely on anyone else. The idea of creating a life in the landscape was repeated throughout the interviews. Sally spoke to me about the idea of “architecting [ones whole life around themselves by being] aware of everything, where it was coming and going”. This is what she thought about, and at Tir-y-gafel she was able to achieve

this by creating a lifestyle that enabled her to know where her bodily waste went and where her water came from. Sally also told me that she had come across a similar idea in an architect book “that says… something like if your creativity is your highest realisation of your spiritual life, to build your own house really meets those things”. Sally told me that she sees the main house that they are going to build, as potentially being “one of the most satisfying things [she has] ever done”.

For the residents that I spoke to, having the opportunity to create a livelihood that they could sustain through their own efforts was extremely important to them. It provided them with a potential “lifeboat [to safeguard them against threats both] real and imagined” (Sally). They all recognised that climate change was taking place and that their society was on the verge of an energy crisis.

At the same time they were ensuring “security of supply” (Thom) in a climate of economic uncertainty. Jon explained to me that he felt more secure living at Tir-y-gafel than he had in London, even though he had less money, because he had more resources at his disposal. The residents told me that they were concerned with the sustainability of the landscape itself. They wanted to consume less resources and put more back in to the land than they took away from it, because the land is the basis of their lives.

They felt more secure having the knowledge and skill to survive from the land, which they had not felt able to fully do when they lived in cities and towns. Feeling connected to the environment was not just recognising your place within it but being able to tie yourself securely to the landscape to

sustain your life and the life of your family. It was evident that the residents were becoming part of the landscape at Tir-y-gafel and that they had the motivation and desire to do this.

Welsh and international policy (Climate Change Strategy 2010: 22; Environment Strategy 2006; Sustaining a Living 2012; Sustainable Management of Wales' Natural Resources 2013; One Wales: One Planet, Sustaining a living Wales 2009; UN Millennium Development Goals 2014) which focuses on sustainability is concerned with ensuring economic development through environmental protection and using resources efficiently. At Tir-y-gafel, this is not a concern of the residents and they repeatedly told me that economic growth was not sustainable especially because of the depletion in energy reserves. The residents were focused on having the ability to ensure "security of supply" (Thom) and create a livelihood that they could sustain relatively easily into the future.

Conclusion

Within my discussion I demonstrated that the vision of the Lammas project is conducive to the UN and Welsh Assembly's environmental aspirations. However, the residents at Tir-y-gafel are motivated by more than responsible resource management and environmental protection.

Those I spoke to were seeking an intimate relationship with the environment by tying themselves to the landscape. This process of tying themselves to the landscape was being achieved by becoming part of the natural processes on their plots, and gaining an intricate knowledge of the environment that enables them to create a livelihood from the land.

By tying themselves to the landscape in this way, I have shown that there are similarities between the residents at Tir-y-gafel, in West Wales, and hunter-gatherer communities, such as the Yukaghirs (Willerslev 2007) and the Nayaka and the Cree hunter-gatherers (Ingold 2000).

The residents at Tir-y-gafel and the Yukaghirs recognise the part they play within the environment and are physically active in the process of life and death, growth, decomposition and re-growth. At the same time the residents at Tir-y-gafel and the Nayaka have a social relationship with the landscape, which is based on familiarity, gained through continual engagement with it (Ingold 2000). Like the Cree, the residents recognise animals to be 'sentient beings' (Ingold 2000: 25) who share the environment with them, not "economic units" (Jon) for human consumption and economic gain.

My findings have challenged the concept of indigeneity (Howes 2010; Ingold 2000), suggesting that it is more than being attached (Ingold 2000) to the land, it is having the ability to tie oneself to the landscape through knowledge and skill gained during interaction with the environment (Ingold 2000).

Within my discussion I demonstrated that the residents do not perceive the environment through a cultural lens (Howes 2010) and do not have to perceive the environment as separate from themselves in order to experience it, as suggested by Willerslev (2007). The residents experience their environment through the process of tying themselves to the landscape. Also, whilst they spoke about the idea of humans being separated from the environment (Argyrou 2005), a concept introduced to some of the residents through mainstream education, they did not believe this to be the case.

Being able to tie themselves to the land was based on gaining knowledge and developing skills that they were only able to do by living and working on the land; being engaged with it in a practical way that turned information into knowledge and knowledge into skill (Ingold 2000). Simultaneously, through this process of tying themselves to the landscape by immersing themselves into it, living through the seasons and developing an intimate relationship with their environment, they are developing an intuitive way of knowing, similar to the Cree hunter-gatherers (Ingold 2000).

As my discussion has demonstrated the landscape at Tir-y-gafel enables residents to be creative in a way they felt unable to be in a city. They have the space to think for themselves and encourage this amongst their

course participants. Recognising the value of different ways of working and using material; using both straight and curved lines.

Being able to understand how the environment within which they live and work, being able to rely on their own knowledge, skills and judgement, was extremely important to the residents who wished to create a sustainable lifestyle for themselves. Having “security of supply” (Thom) and becoming “a piece” (Sally) of the landscape made them feel secure and able to sustain both the land itself and their lives within it.

My discussion is a small snapshot of life at Tir-y-gafel. It opens up the possibility for a long-term ethnographic investigation that explores the human relationship to the environment, sustainability, knowledge, skill and creativity. At the same time, further consideration of how culture at Lammas is embedded within complex social relations (Carrithers 1990) between the residents at Tir-y-gafel, participants, volunteers and residents of the local village, would benefit from participant observation that would enable the researcher to immerse themselves into daily life at Tir-y-gafel. Further to this, a more detailed investigation in to the ideals of the ‘ecological Enlightenment’ (Argyrou 2005) would be interesting to consider role of education in human relationships to the environment and other ‘non-human animal kind’ (Ingold in Willerslev 2007: 24).

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Appendix 1: ‘Site layout plan’