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'Never mind the bullocks': animating the go-along interview through creative nonfiction

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen increasing enthusiasm for the use of go-along interviews to attend to the fleeting, more-than-human relational encounters that co-constitute people's everyday experiences of health and well-being. Go-alongs are an approach to qualitative fieldwork in which research participants literally walk (or drive, swim, wheel, kayak and so forth) the researcher through their place experiences. While such approaches have wide-ranging advantages, there are growing calls to better animate the go-along encounter; to capture and convey go-alongs that are more vivid, sensuous and entangled with the dynamic meanings and materialities that shape everyday life. This methodological paper presents a creative non-fiction, produced as a tentative response to these calls, and designed to invite further reflection on some of the key challenges and opportunities of using such emplaced mobile methods within the social sciences. Situated at the under-researched intersection of critical disability and mobilities research, it draws on the findings of a two-year study that examined how people with sight impairment in the UK negotiate and experience a sense of wellbeing (or otherwise) with and through diverse types of everyday nature.

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1. Introduction

Recent years have seen growing interest in the use of mobile methods to attend to the fleeting, more-than-human relational encounters that co-constitute people's everyday experiences of health and wellbeing in and through place (Clark 2017; Thompson and Reynolds 2019). From video ethnographies and 'listening' walks to walk/drive/swim-along interviews (Finlay and Bowman 2017; Gallagher and Prior 2017; Denton and Aranda 2019; Kaley, Hatton, and Milligan 2019), such methods are increasingly celebrated for allowing researchers 'to witness an array of embodied and emotional practices as they are experienced and performed by those involved' (Anderson and Jones 2009, 299). Go-along interviews are an approach to qualitative fieldwork in which research participants literally walk (or drive, swim, wheel, kayak and so forth) the researcher through their place experiences (Kusenbach 2003; Parent 2016). By asking questions and observing, the researcher seeks to examine participant practices and interpretations at a pace, and within a place, of mutual interest (Carpiano 2009). In this methodological paper, we focus specifically on the challenges and benefits of animating the go-along interview in its analysis and reporting. Situated at the under-researched intersection of critical disability and mobilities research (Goggin 2016), we draw on the findings of an in-depth, pluralistic qualitative study (Bell, Leyshon, and Phoenix 2019a; Bell 2019, 2020) exploring

how people with sight impairment experience a sense of wellbeing (or otherwise) with and through diverse types of nature.

With the turn towards ‘embodied, sensory and mobile ways of knowing’ (Vannini and Vannini 2017, 179), the benefits of go-along interviews have been widely discussed across the social sciences (Büscher and Urry 2009). These benefits include the ability of the approach to: act as an effective elicitation technique through engaging with a series of unfolding contextual prompts to discussion (DeLyser and Sui 2013); offer multisensory insights into the experiences of – and strategies used by – diverse individuals to negotiate the varied terrains, textures, sights, sounds and elemental presences of everyday life (Sunderland et al. 2012; Bell, Leyshon, and Phoenix 2019a); put participants at greater ease through bringing place rather than participant into direct focus (Van Cauwenberg et al. 2012; Finlay and Bowman 2017), removing the pressure to converse (Ross et al. 2009; Hitchings and Jones 2004); create a more equal power dynamic between the researcher and participant as the participant ideally leads the route and discussion (Bergeron, Paquette, and Poullaouec-Gonidec 2014); and access memories and emplaced biographical insights through the rhythmic act of talking whilst walking (O’Neill and Roberts 2020).

There has been particular interest in the potential to use go-along interviews in the large body of research examining links between human health, wellbeing and nonhuman nature encounters (Frumkin et al. 2017; Dobson 2018). Countering the growing (and somewhat homogenising) drive to identify and quantify a generalised, ‘healthy dose’ of nature (e.g. via ‘mechanisms’ of social interaction, physical activity, stress recovery or cognitive restoration – Shanahan et al. 2016), go-alongs offer the potential to re-contextualise and make space for a plurality of nonhuman nature encounters and priorities (Bell, Leyshon, and Phoenix 2019a; Bell et al. 2019b). Rather than seeking to standardise or ‘normalise’ such experiences, go-alongs offer insights into the rich and varied ‘embodied, emotional, and physical transformations that unfold as people transition through the networked spaces and places that constitute everyday life’ (Foley et al. 2020, 2).

Nonetheless, go-along interviews are not without challenge. Calls have been made to attend more critically to social, cultural and embodied diversity within the context of the go-along interview (Macpherson 2016; Parent 2016; Warren 2017) offering ‘a variety of interview formats where people can act, move and express themselves in diverse modalities’ (Castrodale 2018, 45). Countering the risk of reducing walking to a set of ‘instrumental protocols and procedures’, Vannini and Vannini (2017, 187) express the need to ‘see and hear walk-alongs that are more kinaesthetic, more vivid, more sensuous, and more entangled with the material world than they currently are’. Reaching beyond an ‘interview on the go’ (2017, 193), they suggest, ‘we should rather go somewhere to feel a place, sense a landscape and its weather, and encounter a human being with whom we choose to walk’ (2017, 193). This contention perhaps aligns with Macpherson et al.’s (2016, 372) expanded concept of listening ‘as a form of being-with and responding to a person in non-verbal (as well as verbal) ways’.

Coupled with the importance of sustaining such response-ability (Springgay and Truman 2019) during mobile research encounters, is the challenge of capturing the dynamic qualities of these ‘sensorial events’ (Vannini and Vannini 2017, 193) as we abstract, analyse, share and instigate dialogue around the findings we present. Written transcripts – and the ‘linear, unimodal, sensorially flattened’ (Iisahunter 2020, 219) papers they often inform – tend to reduce such lively qualities of encounter. In doing so, they omit many of the non-verbal, embodied, gestural aspects of communication (Macpherson et al. 2016) and the diverse more-than-human presences that flow in and out of the interview frame en route. While walking with a video camera – and sharing visual, sonic and kinaesthetic cinematic edits – may help to enrich these efforts (Spinney 2011; Kaley, Hatton, and Milligan 2019), such movement has its own unique rhythms that are ‘distinct from the act of walking without a video camera’ (Vannini and Vannini 2017, 184). The use of video, therefore, may not be appropriate with all participants or in all settings.

Reflecting on such instances in the context of go-along interviews conducted whilst accompanying – and in some cases, guiding – participants with sight impairment through varied nature-based

settings, we experiment with an alternative mode of writing in this paper. These emplaced interviews formed the final phase of a larger research study (Bell, Leyshon, and Phoenix 2019a; Bell 2019, 2020) after conducting a series of more traditional, in-depth narrative interviews. Whilst still tied to words – ‘experiential traces that are spoken, felt or thought’ (Vannini and Vannini 2017, 181) – we draw on our shared walking experiences to take you, as the reader, on a walk; a storied evocation (Vannini and Vannini 2017) of a composite journey routed through many of the terrains and elemental presences that lead author, Dr Sarah Bell, negotiated with study participants during the shared go-along experiences.

Recognising a story as ‘a journey between locations and subjects’ (O’Neill and Roberts 2020, 5), and a walk-along as ‘the perfect frame for a story’ (Holgersson 2017, 83), we experiment in this methodological paper with the craft of creative nonfiction, with the aim of animating the go-along and its insights. As noted by Coyle and Atkinson (2018, 314), this approach to analysis (known as creative analytical practice) involves the creation of ‘a composite account that draws on and brings together data generated during the research process from various participants and presents them as a single narrative’. This approach therefore uses empirical data generated within a study to write a story ‘to not just evoke emotions but also ambush people by attracting and holding their imaginations’ (Smith et al. 2013, 2053). In doing so, it invites the listener or reader to imagine; in this case, to imagine a route, to imagine the sensibilities and highly skilled techniques developed by participants to negotiate both familiar and unpredictable encounters within diverse nature settings, and therefore to reflect on the myriad opportunities available to co-facilitate more inclusive nature experiences amongst people with sight impairment. Guiding and enriching the story is the creative writing expertise of co-author, Dr Tanvir Bush, sight-impaired novelist and filmmaker who contributed to the study and its outcomes throughout, sharing a lively walk with Sarah in the process.

Before presenting the creative nonfiction piece, we introduce the study aims, research questions and approach. To close the paper, we set out some suggestions for critical dialogue around the piece and the issues it raises for future research and practice at this important intersection between mobilities and critical disability research.

2. The Sensing Nature study

This paper draws on the findings of an in-depth qualitative study, called ‘Sensing Nature’, examining how people with sight impairment in the UK describe and experience a sense of wellbeing (or otherwise) with diverse types of nature during the life course. The study was underpinned by four research questions: (a) What is ‘nature’ to people with diverse forms of sight impairment? (b) What types of encounter promote a sense of wellbeing and meaningful connection with nature? (c) To what extent, if at all, do people feel impaired with varied forms of nature and how might this change over time? and (d) What could we learn from these ways of sensing and making sense of nature? We explored these questions using a pluralistic, qualitative approach (Chamberlain et al. 2011), striving to create barrier-free, inclusive listening spaces whereby participants felt comfortable and safe to describe their experiences on their own terms, in their chosen locations and formats, facilitating greater understanding of the myriad pleasures, adventures and complexities of life with sight impairment (Duckett and Pratt 2001). All study information was made available in large print, Braille, audio, and as screen-reader compatible digital documents. Anyone interested in the study was encouraged to get in touch to find out more and, if of interest, to discuss opportunities for participating; be it through the extended activities explained further below, or simply through sharing experiences more briefly via email or over the telephone. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the University of Exeter Medical School Research Ethics Committee (Approval Reference Dec16/B/108).

Two parallel phases of fieldwork were undertaken from February to December 2017, keeping a field diary throughout to capture key reflections, observations and participant discussions after each day or encounter in the field. Phase 1 involved participating in sight loss awareness and sighted

guiding training, before volunteering with activity groups around the UK, including walking, social, gardening and rifle shooting clubs. As a researcher without sight impairment, joining in with over 15 full day activity sessions provided a valuable opportunity for lead author, Dr Sarah Bell, to recognise and confront personal misperceptions and assumptions about sight impairment. While some activity participants were keen to discuss the study aims and scope and to participate in Phase 2, others primarily related to Sarah as one of several volunteers supporting the day's activities. All discussions about the study were entirely voluntary and only encouraged if they did not detract from the activities in hand.

Participants taking part in Phase I activities referred to their visual perception in varied ways (Bell, Leyshon, and Phoenix 2019a), including 'blind', 'sight impaired', 'visually impaired', 'vision impaired', 'VIPs', 'partially sighted' and 'blindies' (though they did not recommend others to use the latter). We draw on these terms variably through our creative nonfiction piece for illustrative purposes, but each participant's preferred language was prioritised throughout the fieldwork. Participants also put varying emphasis on the influence of (often fluctuating) levels of visual perception on their nature experiences; many explained that the time and effort they had been able to invest in developing confidence, alternative sensory knowledges and place familiarity were more important in shaping such experiences over time.

Phase 2 involved in-depth one-to-one interviews with 31 people recruited from across England, with assistance from the Royal National Institute of the Blind 'RNIB Connect' magazine, the Thomas Pocklington Trust, Blind Veterans UK, the Macular Society, and several local sight loss organisations who raised awareness of the study through their member networks. Purposive sampling allowed individuals at different life stages, and with diverse forms of sight impairment, to contribute 'information rich' views to the study, rather than focusing solely on the 'typical' or average case (Flyvbjerg 2006). The sample included: 15 men, 16 women; ageing from mid-20s to mid-80s; living in rural areas, towns and cities; seven participants in full or part-time employment, 14 retired, 10 unemployed, and 18 engaged in volunteering. Participants described varied conditions influencing their field and clarity of vision, including colour, light, depth and object perception (glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, retinitis pigmentosa, diabetic retinopathy, congenital cataracts, retinopathy of prematurity, Leber's Congenital Amaurosis, Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy, coloboma, retinal detachment, rod-cone dystrophy, and sight loss caused by accident and/or brain injury). Of the 31 participants, 28 were registered severely sight impaired or sight impaired, and three were contemplating registration. Fifteen participants were born with at least one eye condition, including 12 people who had experienced further sight changes later in life. A limitation of the sample is its relative homogeneity in terms of race, ethnicity and cultural background, with 29 participants identifying as White British and two as Asian British. Despite introducing the study sample in this way, we are wary of flattening differences across participants with varying histories and fluid identities. Various aspects of our subjectivity 'interconnect, assemble and perform, within and through our bodies' (Olive 2018, 236) in diverse and dynamic ways as we move with and shape the shifting relational configurations of everyday places. Such processes cannot – and should not – be reduced to the influence of a single attribute defined in the language of impairment or deficit (Bolt 2016).

All 31 participants took part in an initial narrative interview (Riessman 2008), lasting between one and three hours, and conducted within their preferred location (mostly in or near their home) and time. In this interview, participants were encouraged to reflect on what nature is to them, how they experience and approach different types of nature during their day-to-day lives, changes through key life transitions and 'chapters' of their lives, and their perceptions about existing efforts to foster more inclusive multisensory nature encounters. These narrative interviews offered valuable insights into how people's wider life circumstances had influenced their nature conceptions, experiences and embodiments.

Twenty-five of the 31 participants took part in a second 'go-along' interview (Carpiano 2009), walking – or for one participant, wheeling – at a pace (often interspersing movement and pause) and

place chosen by them, within a setting they appreciated for encountering nature. Interview locations included participant gardens, a churchyard, local residential road/path networks, urban parks, woodland, coastal and countryside areas, with interviews lasting from twenty minutes to four hours according to participant preference. Importantly, these settings were not passive backdrops to the interviews; they constituted an agentic, 'active, present participant in the conversation, able to prompt and interject' (Hall, Lashua, and Coffey 2006, 3). The 'role' of lead author, Dr Sarah Bell, during these interviews was shaped by these presences, alongside participant preferences and their routine approaches to negotiating such settings; acting as a guide and navigator for some participants instead of a usual walking partner, or just a listener or walking companion for others (e.g. those with more experience in navigating the routes independently with a cane, walking poles or guide dog). In practice, this role fluctuated en route; as more-than-human geographies were felt through our feet, walking poles, ears and wider senses, participant guiding preferences also varied (Bell 2019). Shared and dynamic responses were needed through shifting terrains (rocks, tree roots, soils baked and soaked to varying degrees), overhanging vegetation and spiders' webs, street/path architecture, weather conditions and auditory traces (e.g. traffic, construction, flowing water, wind, other people and nonhuman animals, etc.).

In this paper, we draw on the experiences of these go-along interviews and experiment with a relatively new approach to their analysis, abstraction and (re)presentation; creative nonfiction. As noted by Smith, McGannon and Williams (2015, 59):

'Creative nonfiction is a type of creative analytical practice (CAP) that tells a story which is grounded in research data and draws on literary conventions ... each story is fictional in form yet factual in content ... grounded in real events and people's lived experiences that a researcher observed in some fashion ... whilst "being there" in the field'.

As creative nonfiction 'offers a deeply embodied, sensorial and relational account of human lives' (Smith, McGannon, and Williams 2015, 63), we experiment with its use in this paper in an attempt to move beyond the hermeneutics of lived experience to attend more carefully to the 'material-discursive relations' (Pleasants and Stewart 2020, 14) that shape walking bodies in their moments of motion and stillness. In doing so, we hope the reader can better inhabit, viscerally and emotionally (Smith, McGannon, and Williams 2015), such experiences, and begin to anticipate the balance of guiding, navigating, teetering, listening, describing and sharing that characterised the go-along encounters within this study.

While there are various ways of crafting creative nonfiction (Clayton and Coates 2020), in this paper we craft the story around a fictional preparatory walk that composite character, 'Megan', embarked on prior to participating in her go-along interview. The story weaves together salient insights, situations and extracts from across the study's 25 go-along interview transcripts (amended where necessary to ensure the flow of the story), with sensory reflections from a shared walk between the two authors of this paper, and the independent walking experiences of co-author, Dr Tanvir Bush, who has experienced the onset and progression of sight impairment herself over the last 20 years. While this approach necessarily integrates the experiences of participants across a range of visual perceptions, we seek to highlight how the more-than-visual sensorial perceptions of any one individual are rarely 'fixed' but rather fluctuate with ambient environmental conditions, sensory knowledges and place familiarity.

Informed by her position as an author, practitioner, participant and observer, Tanvir draws on multiple methods within the creative nonfiction to articulate the research inquiry at the heart of the creative work. Narrative theory emphasises the value of first-person narrative for promoting 'character' identification and reader empathy (Keen 2006), encouraging the reader to imagine life from a different perspective (Djikic, Oatley, and Moldoveanu 2013). Using first-person narration within this creative nonfiction – with the protagonist, Megan, speaking directly to the reader under the guise of an interior monologue – also provided a solution to the somewhat cumbersome challenge, experienced by lead author, Dr Sarah Bell, of articulating the go-along with both the protagonist and

researcher present in the story. In the piece presented, the reader unwittingly becomes the researcher, the companion walking alongside; hearing, smelling, seeing and feeling the unfolding landscape and its nonhuman co-constituents directly through the protagonist. The simultaneous presence and absence of the researcher in the story hint at their relative role in the research space; go-alongs do not seek to provide 'authentic windows' into participants' in situ experiences but rather to open up new opportunities for the co-interpretation of these experiences (and the myriad nonhuman actors encountered en route) between the participant and the researcher. Present throughout many of the go-along interviews (Macpherson 2008), humour also weaves throughout the piece. From a creative writing perspective, humour can be an effective way of relaxing a reader, allowing them to feel less resistant to the story and to engage in a knowing complicity (LeBoeuf 2007).

In writing this piece, we hope to highlight the intricate strategies and sensory knowledges used by participants to negotiate both risks and pleasures within different nature encounters. In doing so, we seek to demonstrate why an alternative approach to interviewing is required within go-along encounters in which both researcher and participant are necessarily primarily attuned to the contours and materiality of the landscape. As noted by Macpherson (2016), 'the terrain as well as the practice of walking itself can influence our experience of landscape and the direction and content of our thoughts'.

In this study, the participants and lead author, Dr Sarah Bell, were guiding each other, often foregrounding safety and navigational information over spoken hermeneutics in line with the unfolding demands and presences of diverse, more-than-human 'participants' en route. In embodying and negotiating these settings together, our thoughts and attention were often directed to more-than-human aspects of the landscape that Sarah might have otherwise inadvertently stepped around or ducked under without conscious reflection. Examples of this intercorporeal landscape emergence (Macpherson 2009) are woven into our creative nonfiction in response to Macpherson's (2016, 429) call to understand how we can 'attempt to document this often non-verbal, felt element of landscape experience and convey it to research audiences'. Enhancing this process, co-author, Dr Tanvir Bush, has created a soundscape using the shortened term, 'sfx' (sound effects), which is scripted throughout the piece. Usually utilised when writing for radio, these sound effects seemed to grow comfortably into the piece, and are relevant given the intention to animate and foreground some of the non-verbal qualities of experience that unfold during such go-along encounters.

3. 'Never mind the bullocks': animating the go-along

Mile 1: Start on the road to Elksham (turn off the junction at Sterling Pi and railway bridge).

Sound effects (SFX): Feet sound running down carpeted stairs and moving around a room. A clock ticks and a radio drones in the background.

Megan: I do not want to kill the researcher. It was a lovely phone call and I think her work is fascinating so leading her into a potential death trap would be rather mean of me. To ensure this doesn't happen, I plan to do the long walk again today and ensure I have noted and can avoid any danger before we do it together at the weekend.

SFX: More steps. The radio shuts off. More stomping around, a bag unzips and things are shoved in.

Megan: Okay, first I have to get out of the house. Always the hardest bit as any blind or visually impaired person will tell you, whether it is just nipping out to the shop or heading out as now for a nine-mile hike. It is safe inside one's house. It is not safe out of it. People, weather, vehicles, small children on scooters, older children on phones, are unpredictable. We 'blindies' have to be more vigilant, more 'watchful' than everyone else. Which is, I agree, ironic.

SFX: The bag is zipped shut and with a 'huff' hoisted up onto a back.

Megan: Timing is important. I, like many of us, have some residual sight BUT it is greatly affected by light. In bright sunlight I am blinded, in low light I am blind. If I get lost and end up mooching around a farmer's field at sundown I am rather scuppered. Like Cinderella. Only without the happy ending.

SFX: Water running, a bottle filled, and tap turned off.

Megan: So, sunglasses, peaked hat for glare, bottle of water, nuts and raisins in case I end up Bear Grylls-like up a tree for the night, cell phone, magnifying specs to read phone, printed instructions in bold 26font.

SFX: Paper shuffled and folded.

Megan: I grab my fingerless leather gloves – discrete but handy in taking any blows to the hands. I've stumbled on enough rogue bollards and nettle-ridden rickety styles over the years to know. The gloves clip into my two pole handles, so they won't get knocked out of my hands. Hey! Don't I look the part! Even if I am shaking with fear. Breathe in, breathe out. It's only the British countryside, girl. Come on!

SFX: A door opens and the sounds of bird song and traffic filter in.

Megan: As always, at this point of departure, I wonder if I should scribble any notes to family about how I would like to be buried ...

SFX: Footsteps and outdoor noise become louder.

Megan: I am out the door. Breathing fast, letting the spring morning sunlight warm my face, I step forward, then right back again as I have forgotten my house keys.

SFX: Feet running, shuffling, keys, feet, door shuts and locks.

Megan: Right, back out and off.

SFX: A blackbird whistles.

Megan: You beauty!

Mile 2: Follow the road over the railway bridge.

SFX: Steady footsteps on pavement and clicking of walking poles. Light traffic noise.

Megan: I know this first half a mile so well, I'm pretty sure no one passing would guess I am partially blind. I've been up and down this road most days since I moved here several years ago and have got pretty good at using walking poles to negotiate the mossy cracks in the pavements. I can subtly check for obstacles and kerbs, just as I would with my long white cane. I walk fast, head up, gazing forward. With the two poles, I always have three points of contact with the ground. Kind of gives me some stability.

SFX: Someone passes and says 'Morning'.

Megan: (responds) Morning ... (quieter) Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to pretend to be sighted but it is always a relief to be 'unobserved.' None of those slippery sidelong glances people give you. Just a person off on a walk.

SFX: Footsteps stop.

Megan: (little shriek) Yikes! Oooofff ... That was close. Nearly forgot that killer palm leaf that juts over the garden wall at the corner. Felt its downward waft towards my face just in time. Hmmm, don't think anyone noticed ...

SFX: Footsteps continue. A train in the distance.

Turn left through the metal barriers.

SFX: The clink of a pole hitting a concrete bollard.

Megan: I like the sound the pole makes on those concrete bollards. It is my signal to turn off the beaten track and out of my comfort zone. I am eager now, excited for my freedom. Which is why I need to be more careful. The lane is quite grown over with brambles and hectic high roots twisting out of the earth. Although I would love to go faster, I slow and place each foot carefully.

SFX: Footsteps continue, more muffled. Birds twitter, flies buzz.

Megan: The path is narrow, enclosed by fences, a hedge and trees making it tunnel-like. It smells of damp earth and, hopefully off the path, dog poo. My boots make almost no sound. A few minutes and – yes – bright sunlight! I have emerged into a small housing estate. It took me three trips to figure it out but now I know to keep left on this pavement, head around the back of the far house and whoooosh! Across this little lane are open fields, space and solitude. Off we go!

Mile 3: Continue ahead past the farm, then with an open field to the right, cross the stile and carry on, hedge on the left, through the hedge gap in the corner.

Megan: Stubble and tractor-torn mud stretch along the field edge. A bit tricky to walk across but if I am careful and follow the line of this ditch to my left, I can keep straight to the far end. There! A gap in the hedge ahead looks like the mouth of a cave, all dark shadows. My heart taps faster as I know my sight will disappear in all that shade. The first time I went in, I fell sideways into the ditch and managed to get my feet wrapped in what I thought were brambles but turned out to be coils of rusty barbed wire. Amazingly, I wasn't even scratched. But now I know to keep to my extreme right and sort of squeeze my way along the wire fence. I have to duck under a fallen tree en route, being careful not to impale myself on its broken jagged branches. Then right there, like magic, sits a pretty wooden footbridge, that takes you out of the murky green-brown darkness and back up into the sunlight. The first time I found it I was elated and, still now, when my pole hits the wood it makes me smile.

SFX: Sounds of careful stepping, a rattling wire fence, someone breathing heavily and a 'clunk'.

Megan: Perfect! Onwards ... I know what the researcher will want to know when I tell her that story. Why don't I take someone with me? The obvious question has an obvious answer. I don't want to. Sighted people panic too much. They over-do the whole 'risk' thing and are constantly looking for the safest route for me. They think they are being helpful and protective and they get stressed with anxiety – 'I don't think that's safe for you, I think you should stay here and I will look for a safer route, I think we should turn back now, I think there is a bull in this field' ... yadda yadda. It becomes exhausting worrying about them, worrying about me. Yes, I am going to bump into things and possibly fall. But if I am alone then it is only me feeling daft. I don't know if that makes sense? Of course, I still love walking with other people but I find it harder to concentrate on my own feet then, chatting and what not, so I am immediately blinder. Often, just walking with friends, I will grab an elbow for support so I can chat and not have to focus. That is a different experience, just as nice but it is not me out on a walk. Does any of that make sense?

I suppose I could wear a large tabard with 'visually impaired walker' on it but I would feel like a plonker. And I might actually make myself more vulnerable in some ways.

SFX: Stomping sounds, fresh breeze through grasses, tinkle of a brook, bird song, bees buzzing, a woman whistling. She stops.

Mile 5: Turn right round the footpath signpost on the left and turn left over the stile. Bear left keeping the stream left, under the wires and over the stile.

Megan: Ah this bit is lovely. A wide, long, grassy wilderness with a stream, and a thick dark hedge line over there that will guide me down this hill. Ahhh, it's just a wonderful thing to feel free in my body and be quiet, but just with different noise, with natural – well I say 'natural' noise, but you know – birdsong, trees, being able to hear the sound of a river nearby, different smells. It kind of makes me straighten up and feel less vulnerable, funnily enough ... whereas, the kind of concrete and scaffolding and crowds and cars, lorries going past, people revving, all that tension. *People*, you know, emotional tension as well, people yelling at their kids, or calling out after each other or car doors slamming ... it's very wearing. So to have a time when you can just be physical, walking, but really free in the body, to not have that constant anxiety about what's going to happen next! No thinking, just being and breathing.

SFX: Gentle stomping, breeze in grass, trees rustling, a muffled snort from away to the left. Stomping stops.

Megan: Speaking of breathing I can smell something grassy and, and, sort of gamey ...

SFX: More snorts and movement.

Megan: ... and ... ah, definitely cows and cow poo ... uh oh ... that is not a hedge, is it? I mean a hedge doesn't stand up and start edging in. Edging in very quickly?! No ... I think ... oh my word! That is an entire herd of extremely large cows! Shit! Run!

SFX: Running feet. The sounds of a fast approaching herd of cattle coming closer and closer, pounding the earth.

Megan: (breathing heavily, running) Help! What do I do? What did that guy say on Countryfile ... ? Don't run I think he said. Damn ... Too late. They are going to knock me over in a second ... I'll be mincemeat ... Shit, don't say 'mincemeat'! What about the singing thing ... ? Could it work?

SFX: Heavy cattle breathing, pounding cattle feet. Human steps stop, heartbeats. Cattle pounding forward ...

Megan: (singing in high quavering voice)

'Stop In the Name of Love!
Before you break my heart!
Stop! ...'

SFX: The sound of cattle feet slows to a stop.

Megan: ///in the name of love,

Before you break my heart!
Think it ooover ...
Think it ooover ...

SFX: Cattle breathing, snorting, still.

Megan: (Whispers) I can't believe that worked! They have stopped. I can just make out a furry wall at the crest of hill. They have actually stopped! Wow, my singing must be really terrible!

SFX: Human footsteps continue steadily.

Megan: Why the Supremes?

SFX: More stomping, bird song, wind through trees.

Megan: Must make a note for next weekend. Ask researcher to check hedges on walk. Seek singing lessons.

Mile 7: Follow left hand field hedge to the embankment of the A292950 road, turn right to second kissing gate. The path from here veers left along the field and over the railway line.

Megan: These instructions are misleading. They make it sound like the railway line is close to the kissing gate but it is over an hour away, down through a load of tussocky meadows until it reaches a lovely old wooded path. I seem to be getting further and further away from the rest of the world. I can smell deer and hear all sorts of rustling and snuffling in the bushes and trees ... that lovely shushing of trees. My footsteps are muffled by leaf mould and the path is hard to follow. It is obvious no one has used it for a very long time. It is grown over and I have to use my poles here to beat down nettles. I remember trying to turn back the first time I came but I got a pole stuck in something that turned out to be a part of an old wooden handrail.

SFX: Swishing sounds and then a wooden 'clunk'.

Megan: There we go. Handrail. I follow this a few feet and ... yup, here they are, a set of wooden steps jutting out from the hillside, heading up. I can't explain how wonderfully exciting it is to be able to put these walks together like a jigsaw, like a huge grand puzzle. There is almost a mythical quality to it, a challenge to the soul. I can do this. I am Aragorn. Okay more Frodo ... perhaps Sam Gamgee ... I scabble under the bushes here as another tree has fallen. Ivy has grown all around to form a low arch but on the other side ...

SFX: Shuffling noises through brush, heavier breathing, an avian alarm call, a swoosh and – silence.

Megan: ... sudden and sharp, cutting through the landscape is the railway track. You can feel the space, hear the slight twang of electricity. It is so quiet and empty around here that I would hear any train coming, but that doesn't stop the cold sweat tickling the nape of my neck as I negotiate the crossing.

SFX: Boots on wood, clink of poles on metal rails, boots on mud.

Megan: We've made it. But one more hazard. A stile with a steep slope on the far side. I have to lower myself carefully. I jumped the first time and had a Jack and Jill tumble that winded me. Had I broken a limb I would have been in serious trouble. I doubt anyone would have found me before the crows and foxes ... exciting, eh?! It makes me feel alive this stuff. Mud on boots, dirty knees and hands, it's good. I mean, you can be touched by nature, even in a physical way ... you know, that feel of the breeze and gentle rain, because it's almost like, it's like being touched but it's non-threatening. And so, you know it's not going to hurt you, but it is a touch. So, if a human touch might be threatening, or has been abusive and that sort of thing, being touched by nature, you know, grasses, the breeze, gentle rain, it's all very sort of accepting. I mean obviously it's all relative. If it was hurricane force wind and torrential rain, it might be a different thing. Although, I quite like that stuff too!

Mile 9: Take the enclosed path right, cross the stile at the end and turn left on a slight diagonal ... Turn left through a wide gateway near the end and right, back to the original direction: carry on over the field (a track should be visible) and over the stile onto the main road.

Megan: The track isn't visible of course. Not to me. But this doesn't matter as it is the entrance to the local park and here my wonderful old friends guide me. I call them 'The Sentinels'; beautiful ancient beech trees lined up at the hillcrest, watching over this land for hundreds of years. I think about how their roots must be all intertwined underneath my feet, like arteries and veins running through the soil. And I know it is a bit ... well, you know ... but these trees get a hug from me, IF there is no one around. Oooh, feel that sun-warmed bark on my palms and forehead.

SFX: Footsteps on soft track, wind in leaves, birds and bees singing.

Megan: I can follow the line of trees easily here, although there isn't a track. I smell sheep and I can, if I squint, make out fluffy white blobs in the far-off meadow. This is an easy – although now slightly sore footed – glide down through the park and back to the main road. Adjusting back to the noise of traffic, to people and all that energy and noise, takes a bit of extra energy but I am on home ground. I could do this bit blindfolded. Ha ha.

SFX: Noise of footsteps on pavement, traffic sounds for a little while, and then a key in a door. Door opens, door shuts and all is quiet but for a ticking clock and low buzz of the fridge.

Megan: Ahhh let's get these boots off!

SFX: Boots kicked off, thumping on the floor.

Megan: I am sun-kissed and well-worn out and bloody starving. But I reckon that walk will be easy to do again next weekend with the researcher. I mean, what could possibly go wrong?

SFX: Music swells: 'Stop! In the Name of Love' by the Supremes.

4. Concluding reflections

The aim of this paper has been to experiment with the practice of creative nonfiction as a means for animating go-along interview analysis and (re)presentation. In doing so, it responds to recent calls 'to see and hear walk-alongs that are more kinaesthetic, more vivid, more sensuous, and more entangled with the material world than they currently are' (Vannini and Vannini 2017, 187). Recognising the tendency for papers to abstract and flatten events unfolding during such mobile, emplaced encounters, we have experimented with creative nonfiction as a means to better document and convey the lively, 'felt' elements of landscape experience (Macpherson 2016). While this approach necessarily interweaves – and potentially smoothens out – the divergent sensibilities and narratives of several research participants into that of one fictional composite character ('Megan'), it invites the reader to recognise (and ideally come to question) dominant (mis-)perceptions of both sight impairment and more-than-human nature encounters. As noted by Smith, McGannon, and Williams (2015, 63), 'rather than closing down interpretive insights, stories have the capacity to open up multiple understandings'. To close this paper, therefore, we draw on our creative nonfiction to encourage further dialogue around some of the challenges and opportunities of using such emplaced mobile methods within the social sciences. We focus on three methodological themes; the shift in interview style that occurs when attention is necessarily focused on 'negotiation in motion' (Jensen, Sheller, and Wind 2015, 364); the opportunity to recognise skills, abilities and resourceful improvisation as an integral part of disability (Dokumacı 2019); and the importance of shared approaches to risk.

Firstly, the go-along interviews undertaken within this study necessarily moved away from 'walk alongs as acts of walking-and-interviewing' (Vannini and Vannini 2017, 193). Pre-specified interview questions were rarely asked during the course of these interviews. Instead, the focus was primarily on reading and anticipating the terrain, other bodies and weather, and learning to negotiate, together, what at times felt like constantly shifting assemblages of more-than-human natures. This dynamic was apparent within many of the interview transcripts, where stop-start phrases like 'rock ... step left ... tree branch ... so what do you ... oh tree root ...' constituted much of the written content. In some transcripts, this was interspersed with somewhat confused navigational discussion. Two participants offered overview sketch maps for use during their go-alongs as a way of triangulating the route in concert with their own embodied place references. At points of path divergence, discussions often ensued as to what constitutes a 'proper' path that might align with those depicted on the sketch maps, as opposed to more informal routes carved out by humans and non-humans over time (Smith et al. 2019). At these moments, participants' intimate sensory knowledge of the immediate surroundings was essential in keeping us en route, only twice requiring the timely help of

passing strangers (in each case, this was with participants who otherwise walked with sighted companions who would usually lead route navigation).

Other participants were keen to use the walk as an opportunity to clarify their mental maps of specific parts of a route, inviting a shared endeavour to locate useful landmarks and relevant points of path connection for future reference. One participant was running a bat walk in the area later that day and used the interview as an opportunity to cut back some of the overgrown vegetation en route. In this instance, half an hour of the interview transcript was labelled with the annotation '(sound of shears working in the background)' and much of the discussion followed the lines of '*Open the shears, don't cut with the tips, cut right where it, cut the leafier part ... The leafier, ah okay ... Just cut it as far back as you can, lovely, thanks ... this one? ... Oh no, leave that ... Leave that one?*'. Only when familiar paths opened up and evened out, free of the 'distractions' of weather, people or tasks to attend to, did conversation with participants expand to lengthier memories and place reflections. This was most common when a particular material or sensory presence reminded participants of reaching important milestones along the route for the first time; prompting emotive memories, often oscillating between fear, relief, peace and euphoria. As noted by Jensen, Sheller, and Wind (2015, 375), every route has 'its own embodied dispositions, visceral feeling, rhythms and affective resonance'. Yet, as demonstrated by our creative nonfiction, we rarely lingered on memory talk before necessarily returning our attention to the more-than-human co-constituents of the walk.

Secondly, what these shared encounters demonstrated – far beyond anything conveyed verbally within the initial narrative interviews – was the range of skills, techniques, sensory attunements, micro-improvisations and 'creative workarounds' (Dokumacı 2019, 493) that participants had developed to negotiate such dynamic environments, and the types of information and guiding support that enhanced opportunities to engage in conversation while putting this knowledge into practice. As noted by Parent (2016, 5529) when reflecting on her experience conducting wheeling interviews, 'maintaining togetherness had much to do with adjusting to each other's abilities, speed and ways of negotiating our environments'. Similarly, our go-alongs entailed 'a complex assembly of movements and moorings' (Sheller 2017, 629). They required a form of 'whole body listening' (Macpherson et al. 2016, 383) throughout to ensure a smooth confluence of shared movement and perception (Hall and James Smith 2017). Although hard to capture within the limits of a written interview transcript, the insights gained through such shared endeavours have been essential in developing many of the practice-oriented outputs and outcomes of the study. These outputs range from inclusive design guidance, to audio description and inclusive site interpretation advice, and guidance for ensuring walkers with sight impairment can participate in established group walks in their local area. The go-alongs foregrounded socio-material configurations that both enhanced and undermined our combined ease and fluidity of movement, demonstrating the importance of attending to and affirming 'differential mobilities' (Sawchuk 2013) to 'think about experience differently, to experience differently, and to experience difference in experiencing' (Springgay and Truman 2019, xiii). Skilling up as a sighted guide was essential to (and ongoing throughout) this process. Negotiating these settings together was invaluable in fostering deeper attention to the more-than-visual qualities of nature experience (positive and negative) that are so often omitted within the design, management and interpretation of such landscapes.

Finally, sources of potential risk were present throughout our go-along encounters, from the barbed wire, fallen trees, bulls, fast-moving traffic depicted in our creative nonfiction, to live electric fences, swans guarding cygnets, torrential rain and winds masking the clarity of verbal guiding information while negotiating slippery fell trails, and fast-moving bikes and dog leads encountered along a seaside promenade. Bringing in additional risk, one participant with a progressive sight condition was keen to wear a blindfold during the go-along interview, to see whether he would still be able to direct one of his favourite nearby countryside walks without residual vision. Adopting his preferred walking style, he attached bells to lead author, Dr Sarah Bell's, rucksack, and walked behind, using his two walking poles for stability and following the sound of the bells alongside verbal guiding information. At the beginning of the walk, he suggested re-enacting a more playful

activity that he and his long-term walking partner routinely engage in along safe, expansive walking trails; his partner deliberately zig-zagging as a test of the accuracy with which he could follow the sound of the bells even with such sudden shifts in location. Although the participant insisted that repeating this 'trick' in the context of the interview would be 'his choice, his risk', this felt like an unnecessary risk to bring into a new inter-corporeal walking situation and was soon forgotten once the walk was underway.

These experiences raise important questions about acceptable levels of risk during emplaced, mobile encounters within a research field that is not controlled by the researcher (Adams-Hutcheson 2017). These questions are particularly pertinent when shared with people who are often excluded from meaningful opportunities to engage with nature as a result of homogenised, identity-limiting notions of risk informed by disability stereotypes and misperceptions (Burns, Watson, and Paterson 2013; Bell 2020). Ensuring such research encounters are open and flexible to people who necessarily perceive and move through the world in varied ways may offer important insights into 'processes of disablement and able-bodied privilege in situ' (Castrodale 2018, 48). Indeed, as discussed elsewhere (Bell 2019), these interviews emphasised the ableism embedded in many nature settings, both *materially* in their layout, management and interpretation (Kafer 2017) and *socially* via dominant embodied norms and expectations of how 'best' to encounter and negotiate them. However, such mobile, intercorporeal research encounters must be supported by 'researcher-participant relationships grounded in reciprocity, cooperation, respect and trust' (2018, 48). When negotiated sensitively, allowing for both mobilities and moorings (Cresswell 2013), it can be a particularly rewarding experience for both researcher and participant. As commented by the airline mask-wearing participant introduced above, *'I really enjoyed our walk today. Doing it totally blind has shown me that whatever happens to my sight in the future I will always be able to enjoy what has been such a huge part of my life so far. Thank you'*. As mobile methods are co-produced forms of knowledge, one must always be aware of a shared experience of risk between researcher and participant, gauging how much risk each might be willing to take, whilst negotiating the dignity of risk sensitively and with care throughout (Foley et al. 2020).

Although something of an experiment, we hope the creative nonfiction shared within this paper sparks further dialogue about the role and potential value of using mobile methods at this often overlooked intersection of mobilities and critical disability research (Goggin 2016). Approaching mobile methods as a care-full way (Foley et al. 2020) of 'being with' individuals with sight impairment in this study, and adopting a new approach for analysing and (re)presenting such encounters through the medium of creative nonfiction, we have sought to demonstrate the intricate, (micro) mobilities developed and honed by individuals to move with and through diverse more-than-human natures in highly skilful, attentive ways. We hope that you, the reader, may have gained a more visceral and emotional sense of this process through the paper, and encourage you to open up your own senses as wide as you can next time you step outside and negotiate our ever-changing, ever-mobile worlds.

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Data availability statement

Due to ethical concerns of maintaining participant confidentiality, the research data supporting this publication are not publicly available.

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