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McGrath, E

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Ferries as travelling landscapes: tourists and watery mobilities

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Abstract

PURPOSE

To highlight the use of small river ferries as an under-researched but novel mode of travel which enhances and brings new dimensions to tourist experiences of travelling landscapes.

DESIGN

The study used mixed methods including participant observation, a survey and interviews with ferry users and staff at one river crossing in the south west of England.

FINDINGS

The ferry attracts tourists as a different and practical mode of transport. The river crossing provides an experience of being on water whilst the material structure of the ferry significantly shapes on-board interactions and provides new perspectives of place.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This article draws on data collected for a study of ferry crossings conducted at three sites in Devon and Cornwall, England, using multiple methods. The material presented in this article focuses on one site and draws on four interviews, twelve reflection cards and observations.

PRACTICAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The research highlighted the extent to which the ferry is dependent on tourist use. At the same time it reveals the extent to which the crossing enriches the tourists experience and celebrates a ferry's contribution to local place-making and tourist experiences.

ORIGINALITY

The majority of research on ferry crossings focuses on commuter experiences, marine crossings and larger passenger vessels. This article sets out an original contribution as it offers a perspective on tourist experiences of river ferry crossings; reveals how the ferry structure influences interrelations on-board; and provides distinctive insights into place through a focus on movement across water.

KEY WORDS

ferry, mobility, tourist, river, experiences, watery

Introduction

“We’re born in water. We’re literally shaped by water. So our human form is shaped by water and we have come to the edges for our holiday on land [...] (*sound of a seagull*) [we] re-engage with the simplicity of sharing our space with gulls and fish and crabs. And retired river boatmen who take us across a river. We re-engage with that simplicity of ropes and catches”

(Interview with Ruth,¹ August 2018. First time user of the Appledore – Instow Ferry)

Tourists leave home to engage with new places in new ways (Löfgren, 2002, p. 5). Accordingly, tourists are often open to exploring ‘different senses [at] a different scale from those typically encountered in everyday life’ (Urry, 2002, p.5). One of the significant ways in which tourists relate to new places is through different modes of transport and travel. This paper explores tourist experiences of rivers and ferries, where the ferry crossing serves as a novel form of transport that attracts visitors and at the same time provides an enriched encounter with the river and its banksides. This paper has three main aims. First, it locates ferries within travelling and tourist landscapes and charts those who use their services. Second, it examines how ferries and their volunteers contribute to/co-construct the tourist encounter with the river. Finally, we argue that the river ferry crossing provides a unique form of movement affording tourists with new perspectives and sensory experiences of tourist spaces and places, which are worthy of further investigation. This article draws upon data from mixed-methods research carried out on a river ferry crossing in the South West of England.

Rivers, Ferries and the Tourist Experience

Scholars have demonstrated how individuals are often willing to explore places in different ways whilst on holiday (Andersson, 2007). Travelling up (Beedie, 2003), along (Larsen, 2001) down (Garofano and Govoni, 2012) and through different landscapes using various means of transport adds to this experience, allowing new places to be discovered and mediated through unusual sensory experiences. Consequently, different modes of transport are sought as part of the tourist experience, rather than simply a means of getting to places. This ‘transport tourism’ (Lumsdon and Page, 2007) embraces travel by trains (Crang and Zhang, 2012) planes (Rink, 2017), cars (Butler and Hannam, 2012), caravans (Leivestad, 2018), coaches (Edensor and Holloway, 2008), cruise ships (Dowling and Weeden, 2017),

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

cycling (Lamont, 2009), walking (Edensor, 2010), yachting (Spence, 2014), sailing (Couper, 2018) and canal boating (Fallon, 2012, Kaaristo and Rhoden, 2017).

Here, transport is not destination orientated, but is about what takes place *'during'* movement' (Cresswell, 2010, p.12, Ingold, 2005). And so, in all of these cases, the focus is on the journey itself, the 'points between A and B' (Bassi, 2017, Irving, 2015, Peters and Turner, 2015, Laurier and Lorimer, 2012); the time in which travelling takes place and the materiality (Bear, 2013, Ingold, 2007) of the vehicles which shape the tourist experience on-board. This is an approach which counters Larsen's (2001) stance in which 'arriving becomes everything, movement through spaces nothing but insignificant, linear, predetermined and frustrating transport' (p.3). On the contrary, it is the process of movement, the experiences and transport itself, which form and shape tourist journeys and perspectives.

Because travelling has shown to be meaningful, functional, as well as embodied, narrated and imagined (Sheller and Urry, 2004), this paper explores the relationship between tourists and the landscapes which they travel through, by incorporating the term 'travelling landscapes'. This extends Gammon and Elkington's (2016) definition whereby 'we can travel through landscapes and encounter the many spaces and places they hold, whilst gazing back to the landscape from which we came (p.1). A 'travelling landscape' perspective firstly recognises that landscape can be viewed whilst travelling, and that there are multiple viewpoints and experiences of the traveller as they are in motion. Second, and by contrast, it pays attention to the subtler ways in which landscape itself travels. The earth is composed of an 'assemblage of shifting plates, lively molecules and constitutive elements' (Peters et al., 2018) which, at various speeds, and in various ways, moves. Such movement is evident on a tidal river, whereby the changing currents create a system in a state of constant flux. At its most simple, were the viewer to remain stationary, he or she would be presented with different landscapes as the river ebbs, flows and shifts over time. The landscape of the river is mobile, never static.

This travelling landscape is negotiated by a ferry that moves, lifts and shifts travellers from land to land across a tidal waterway. It is a micro-structure (Gilroy, 1993), enrolled in movement as well as a vehicle through which travellers can have a renewed perspective of land. Once on-board, suspended on the water, passengers are more likely to feel and reflect upon the watery and mobile landscape swaying beneath them. Taking these two ideas together, travelling landscapes refer to the ways in which travelling produces different perspectives on a landscape that is itself moving, which in turn affects how the landscape is experienced. It refers to the visual, embodied and represented relationships between travel and landscape that are sought by tourists. In so doing, the river becomes more than simply a barrier to cross (Roth, 1997) but is enrolled and co-constructed as a travelling landscape that is part of the tourist experience and gaze.

There is a renewed interest in what has been called 'blue space geographies', that chart the relationship between water and society, (Coleman and Kearns, 2015, Foley and Kistemann, 2015, Pitt, 2018, Völker and Kistemann, 2011). To date, though, most attention has been given to the sea and coast (Davenport and Davenport, 2006, Hastrup and Hastrup, 2015, Peters and Anderson, 2016), rather than rivers. Whilst one collection (Prideaux and Cooper, 2009) has examined forms of active recreation on rivers, little attention has been given to ways of experiencing rivers through the act of travelling. Crossing rivers on bridges (Irving, 2015) or travelling as ferry passengers offers a more accessible way for the wider public to experience rivers. Consequently, this paper seeks to further examine the relationship between rivers and tourism by focusing upon the tourists' experiences of, and movement on, a river ferry.

Ferries have been extensively explored by Vannini (2012) as a crucial mode of transport between island communities, to enable those who choose 'island life' (p.75) to remain connected to the facilities, infrastructure and networks around British Columbia, Canada. Vannini provides a holistic perspective of the predominantly daily experiences of commuters, including how they construct "zones" or spaces on the ferry, and weigh up the time spent in travel with the benefits of living on an island. Although Vannini also does encounter tourists, their experiences are marginal to his work, as his main aim is to theorise and understand regular ferry commuters and cultures. Indeed, ferries have largely been considered as commuter spaces, (Bissell, 2018, Bissell and Overend, 2015, Corbridge, 2009, Roseman, 2019, Wright, 2012), yet to do so misses their important contribution to tourist mobilities and their ability to provide a unique experience of water and place to tourists.

To begin exploring how ferries contribute to tourist mobilities, this paper goes on to examine seasonal passenger ferries. Specifically, and in contrast to existing work, it focuses on a small foot ferry that only has the capacity to carry twelve passengers in a ten minute river crossing. Significantly this ferry does not cross from a mainland to an island (cf. Baldacchino, 2007, Cosgrove, 2007, Hache, 2007, Steinberg, 2007, Steinberg, 2013), but crosses a river between places. This ferry is so reliant upon visitor numbers that it only operates in the summer months. Although commuters and local day visitors also use the ferry, it has largely become a form of mobility to 'inform tourism, shape the places where tourism is performed, and drive the making and unmaking of tourist destinations' (Sheller and Urry, 2004). In this context, we examine why individuals choose to cross the river in this way, given that bridges exist that allow tourists to cross rivers conveniently, in their vehicles, and at a time of their choosing. (cf. Lin and Grundy-Warr, 2012, Strohmayer, 2011).

The work is based on the Appledore – Instow Ferry, in North Devon. The following section introduces this service before outlining how the study was conducted and presenting the results.

The Study Background: The Appledore – Instow Ferry

The relationship between passenger ferries and tourism is particularly apparent within Devon and Cornwall, two counties located within South West England. This area is a distinctly fluvial region due to its beaches, estuaries and rivers, and is a popular destination for tourists from within the UK and beyond (Baker, 2005, Hölzinger and Laughlin, 2016, Howard and Pinder, 2003, Tregidga, 2012).

The South West also has the highest concentration of estuaries in the UK (Davidson, 2018), which historically have necessitated ferries to cross them. Although bridges have superseded some crossings, sixteen ferries remain operational within the region, most of which are seasonal (April – October) and operate only at high tide. They operate largely, but not exclusively, for tourists. For example, walkers of the South-West Coastal Path, which traverses 630 miles of the counties' coasts, are obliged to undertake frequent ferry crossings, which can enhance their embodied experience of land, coast, stream, river and estuary (cf. Wylie, 2005). Rather than being a barrier, these add to the path's experience, as evidenced by the South West Coast Path Association's exhortation for travellers to use ferries to 'make your day out even more memorable' (2019b). Ferries are also used to connect different places, offering tourists a watery experience that is part of their journey or an event in its own right. One ferry that has been revived in response to tourist demand runs between Appledore and Instow in North Devon (Figure 1).

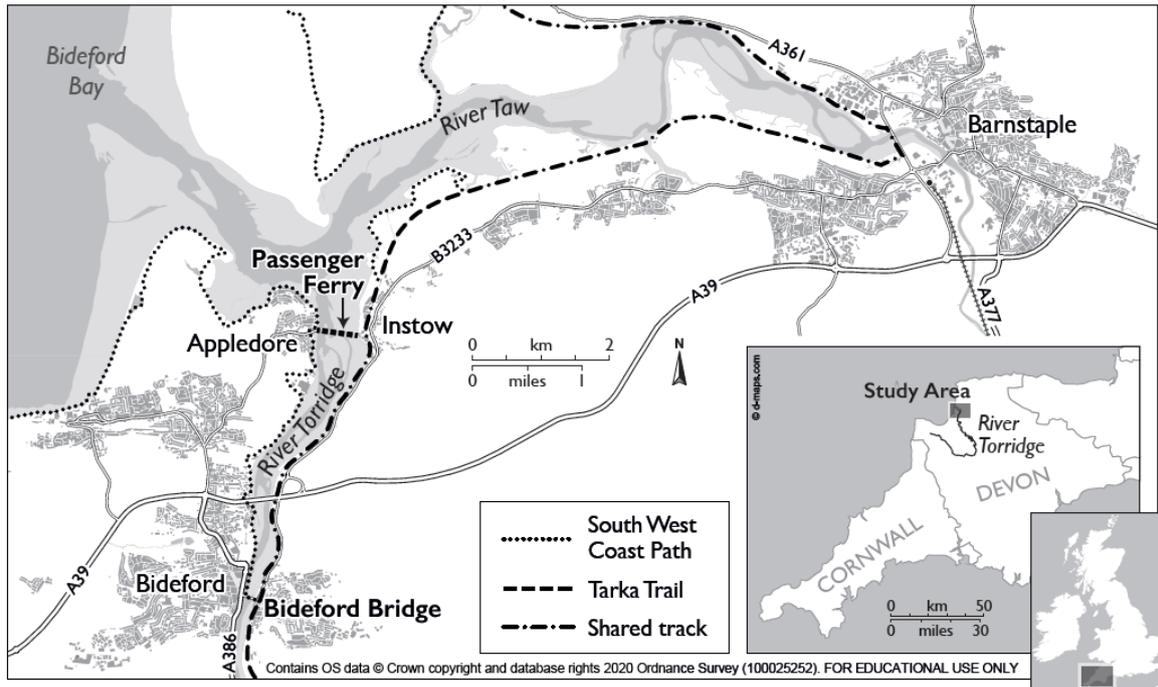


Figure 1. Case Site: Appledore - Instow

Appledore is a village situated at the mouth of the River Torridge, six miles west of Barnstaple and three miles north of Bideford in the county of Devon, England. According to the 2011 census, there are 2,817 residents living in Appledore, over an area of 445 hectares (2011a). It has a strong tradition of fishing and ship-building and at its peak, there were seven ship-building sides. The majority of those closed in the mid-20th century, with Appledore Shipbuilders Ltd the latest closure in March 2019.

Over time, therefore, the character of Appledore has shifted from a working relation with the sea to a recreational one. Cottages once occupied by those in the fishing community have now been turned into holiday apartments, a pattern corresponding to general patterns of gentrification in coastal areas within England (cf. Coles and Shaw, 2006, Davidson and Lees, 2005).

On the opposite bank is the smaller village of Instow, with a residency of 1,500 over an area of 2,995 hectares (2011b). Instow became a popular holiday destination in the Victorian era by merit of Instow Sands, a one kilometre sandy beach. It was accessed by the Instow railway, which opened in 1855 as part of Bideford Extension Railway Taw Vale Line that served tourism by stopping at coastal places along the North Devon peninsula. However, as a consequence of the Beeching Cuts (1963), Instow Station was first phased out and then closed (cf. Rhoden et al., 2009). The route of the railway tracks now forms the Tarka Trail, a popular cycling and walking path, running adjacent to the River Torridge.

The two villages are at once separated by, and connected to, the River Torridge through its ferry service. Bridging the Torridge at its mouth is impractical given that it is over a mile across and has an eight metre tidal range caused by fluctuations in the Bristol Channel (2019a). At any one tide, roughly 53 million cubic metres of water can move in and out of the Taw Torridge estuary mouth, at a speed of 5 knots (Gent, 2017). Such dramatic tidal fluctuation changes the riverscape in a rhythmical way

(Jones, 2011). At low tide, sand bars and mud flats are visible, whereas at high tide, larger vessels can navigate through the water. The ferry, though, must re-negotiate this changing channel at every crossing.

The first ferry was recorded in this location in 1639. Throughout most of its history, the ferry operated at all stages of the tide, all year round, responding to public demand. Various, it transported workers to the ship yards, operated as a postal service, and latterly (and increasingly), holiday makers (Langley and Small, 1984). Through the 20th century, a family of ferry keepers operated the ferry, but in 2007 went out of business.

In June 2011, Appledore Instow Ferry Limited was established, with the founding purpose to provide a 'community based not for profit' (Nightingale, 2011) ferry service. Accordingly, the ferry operation is reliant upon volunteers: one who helps passengers board at Appledore Slip, one helping those boarding at Instow Quay and one on-board. Only the skippers are paid. The ferry also operates seasonally (April – October) and within that can only operate around high tide (four hours), meaning that the service is determined by the broader system of river movement, tidal cycles and seasonal dynamics. In volatile weather conditions, such as during storms or on a very wet day, the ferry is cancelled. Notwithstanding, on 29th May 2019, the ferry transported its 150,000th passenger. Thus, on average, Appledore Instow ferry transports around 16,000 passengers a year, 2,500 per month, or 83 per day. These numbers fluctuate in accordance with weather conditions, tidal conditions and a calendar of events such as school holidays, or wider community days such as local regattas or carnivals. There are currently two boats in operation, 'Sheila M' and 'Lizzie M', both engine powered, and licensed to carry up to 12 passengers and three crew members.



Figure 2 'Lizzie M' waiting at Appledore Slip. River Torridge between and Instow on the other side (photograph taken by research participant Ruth, Appledore - Instow first time crosser, August 2018)

Methods

The Appledore-Instow ferry was examined using a mixed method approach of participant observation, survey/reflection cards, and ten semi-structured interviews with skippers, ferry volunteers and tourists, conducted during the ferry season of 2018-2019 by the lead author. Following ethical clearance, the author initiated an individual conversation with each prospective ferry crosser whilst they were waiting for the ferry. They were invited to create a 'travelling landscape object' (Della Dora, 2009) by drawing or writing about their experience of the crossing on an A5 card, before they got to the other side. On the reverse side, there was a short survey. One hundred and twenty five reflection cards were filled in by ferry crossers whilst on the Appledore Instow ferry; about a fifth of those the author had an interaction with. This article draws upon some of the short written responses from the survey/reflection cards and reproduces some of the drawings for illustration purposes. It does not however include analysis of the graphic and creative responses, as such a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. The analysis will accordingly begin with an overview, drawing upon quantitative and qualitative data from the survey, that details why people travel on ferries. Following this, we explore how the materiality of the vessel and its movement across the water develops relationships between passengers and the river. From a position of being on the water, on-board spatialities and embodied viewpoints enrol tourists into travelling landscapes.

Tourist usage of the ferry: frequency, purpose, and rationale

The majority of individuals encountered, seventy three (59%), marked that they were using the ferry for the first time. Forty four individuals (35%) stated that they were 'occasional' users of the ferry, and stated that they lived within a five mile radius of Appledore and Instow so were deemed to be 'local' visitors. A proportion, seven in total, (6%) crossed from Appledore to Instow on a 'weekly' level. Based on this figure, as well as data on whether it was their first time crossing, which town or area they lived in, and the purpose of their journey, it was estimated that the majority (70%) of passengers were indeed tourists. This figure concurs with estimates calculated in conversation with ferry volunteers and recorded in field notes, whereby the 'ferry serves 70 – 80% tourists' (field notes, 29th May 2018). In total, 99 percent of the tourists encountered gave their home address as being within the United Kingdom. Ten percent of those encountered explicitly that they were staying in a 'holiday cottage' or alternative rental accommodation in either Appledore or Instow. This signifies that many of the recorded experiences discussed in this paper are reflective of a first, 'in the moment' response to the river Torridge, the ferry, and banksides, Appledore and Instow. It also suggests that using the ferry, for many, is a novel experience.

One first time user, who lives in London but was on holiday in the area described how he ‘wouldn’t have gone to Appledore without the ferry crossing’ (reflection card, 111). He therefore saw the ferry as facilitating and extending his recreational options, enabling him, for example not only to enjoy the Instow ‘beach’, but also the ‘craft shops [and] crabbing’ in Appledore, on the other side of the river. Analysing the range of responses recorded for why people use the ferry strongly suggests that the ferry crossing is part of a broader recreational purpose. Replies to the question ‘what are you intending to do once you get to the other side?’ confirm the largely recreational nature of travel (figure 4)

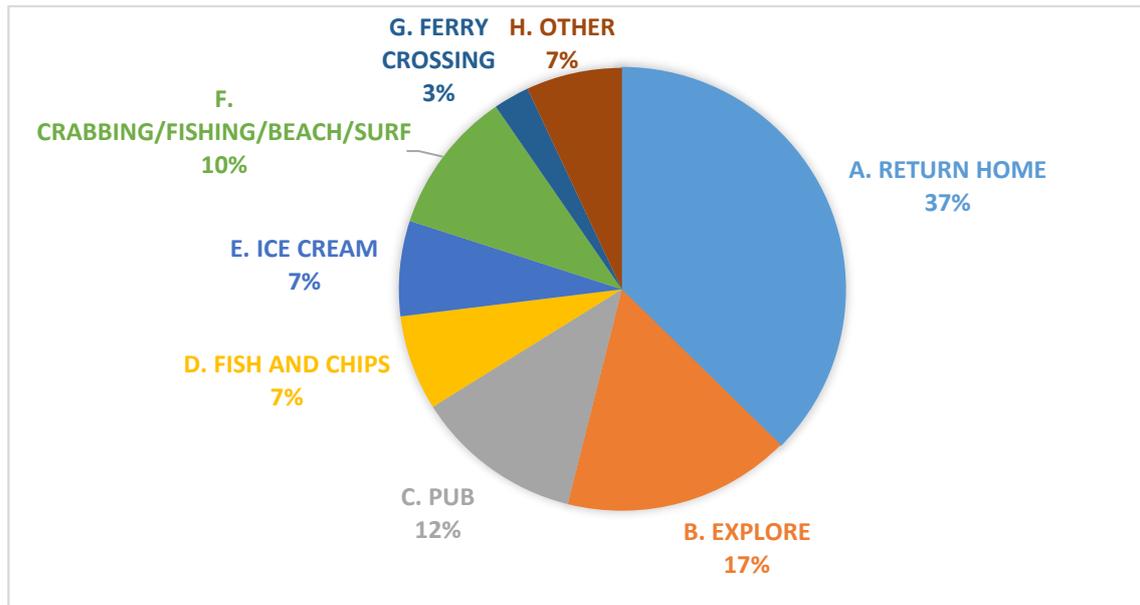


Figure 3 Visualisation of Ferry Crossing Intention, based upon quantitative survey with 125 ferry crossers

The highest percentage of people encountered (37%) simply stated they were ‘returning home’, often from a day of recreational activity. Others, (28%) wrote a response relating to eateries (pub, ice cream, fish and chips), traditional activities within waterside areas (Panayi, 2014). Another first time user of the ferry was simply intending to ‘potter along the beach’ (reflection card 69), whilst others wanted to ‘sightsee’ (reflection card 45, reflection card 109). It was noted that whereas tourists stated they wanted to ‘sightsee’, locals who were perhaps more aware of the area and what it had to offer, recorded more specific activities relating to the River Torridge, such as crabbing, tombstoning, paddling, surfing (reflection card 117, reflection 121). It was visible during the participant observation that most people travelled as part of a group with friends and family or as part of a couple, suggesting that the crossing was a convivial activity contributing to the social leisure experience (field notes, 23rd July 2018). As well as the varying purposes, ferry users offered many different rationale for their choice of transport. This ranged from financial and practical to perceived enjoyment of the mode of travel.

Rationale

Currently, a single journey is £1.50 for adults, and £1 for children, with tots and dogs free of charge. These costs are part-subsidised by local businesses in Appledore and Instow who sponsor the ferry, and concur with their non-profit philosophy, which is largely reliant upon a volunteer workforce. As a

result, a first time user of the ferry who lives locally in Bideford, reflected it is 'cheaper than the bus and much quicker [whilst providing] a holiday feeling' (reflection card 93). Skipper Isaac, concurs stating that 'the other interesting thing is that the ferry's cheaper than the bus. And so (laugh) there's a sort of pseudo-economic reason to take it' (Interview, skipper, October 2018)

It was also noticeable that both ferry users and ferry staff felt that the ferry represented a different or novel form of travelling which was attractive to users. There was a repeated narrative of the ferry being a *different* mode of transport, in comparison to other more conventional modes, such as the train, bus, cycling, walking or even travelling by aeroplane. It could be interpreted that the ferry as travelling landscape is a disruption of daily routines for tourists, as a ferry volunteer emphasised how the ferry is 'nothing like public transport and getting in the car where you just go: normally they get in their car and they go somewhere or they get on a train or a bus or they walk or whatever [but] here you're on a totally different means of transport' (Interview, Oliver, July 2018). Such a level of difference often contributed to feelings of relaxation, with one first time ferry user describing how the ferry allowed them to 'leave the car behind for stress free travel to the beach!' – adding - 'will use again during holiday!' (reflection card 1).

The ferry's sense of difference was also related to a heritage factor, with boats being one of the first technologies of motion (cf. Anim-Addo et al., 2014, Lavery, 2005). A visitor from Zimbabwe and first time user of the ferry stated 'messaging about on boats – nothing quite like it!' (reflection card 109), linking travelling on the ferry to a 'quintessential Brit. Holiday'. Another described how the ferry reminded him of 'ancient history' (reflection card 32) whilst tourist Ruth reflects upon the 'simplicity' of the ferry as a mode of transport, which is part of the appeal (Interview, August 2018). It is significant that, despite historic changes and threats to ferry services over time in favour of faster modes of mobility such as trains and cars, that the cultural heritage of water-related history remains a motivation for why contemporary individuals seek a re-connection with water through the mode of the ferry.

A visitor's anticipation of crossing over water; and the 'curiosity about the other side' (reflection card, 27th May 2018) is not to be underestimated as a significant part of the rationale for why people choose to use a ferry. Weeden (2011) has demonstrated how tourists often claim to have found a sense of 'inner peace' when close to nature, whilst Strang (2004), reveals the visual allure and sensual experiences of water which can incite emotions of 'pleasure, fun, exciting, relaxing, you feel really good' (p.57). The attractiveness of water for tourists has been extended by Kaaristo (2014) who showcases the aural qualities of being by water in Estonia. Rather than being focused on the spatiality of being next to water, the ferry offers an opportunity for people to be on, and travel across water. One ferry crosser reflected on 'the joy of the river and the peace and quiet when on the river' (reflection card 41), whilst another simply 'water makes me happy' (reflection card 106) (cf. White et al., 2010). A third used onomatopoeic language to encapsulate the sensory experience of crossing on the water, with its 'peace, calm, tranquillity, swish of the water, lapping the sides of the boat. Little ripples as the breeze ships up the surface of the water' (reflection card 31). There is an interrelation here between the feeling of being on water and its movement through the wind and the tide, with the material structure of the boat, and the impact of the water on the 'sides' of the boat. These experiences reveal how the ferry is inexplicably linked and connected to its watercourse, and how the rationale for using a ferry is often connected to the anticipated experience of being on water and traveling by water. Once the ferry leaves land and is crossing open water, the 'splashing sound'

(reflection card 112) of the water below becomes more acute, and travellers have an opportunity to pay close attention to the sounds and movements of the water below.

Using the ferry then, is a way not only of appreciating and participating in a different, cheaper form of mobility, but also leads us to consider the process of the journey. Crossing a river, and being 'on the water' is a crucial part of the experience as individuals are temporarily connected to a material moving structure, the ferry, buoyantly bobbing over a tidal river.

The ferry as tourist experience

The section above has argued that the ferry attracts passengers for multiple reasons and that the anticipation and experience of being on the water adds value to the tourist experience in multiple ways. However, it is important to pay attention to the materiality of the ferry itself, and the way in which being on a ferry shapes and structures those experiences. These include the ferry as a meeting point, with on-board interactions and conversations, often relating to what can be seen on the water, as well as the physical movement of the ferry operating from one bankside to the other.

The convivial space of the ferry

Participant observation on the ferry suggests that the structure of the ferry constructs and shapes the tourist experience (Torridge field notes, 15th April 2018). Vannini (2012) talks about the internal and external structures of British Columbia ferries, including what activities take place in various parts of the ferry, for example the passenger lounge, toilets, and car decks, and suggests that travel becomes a performance of social interactions. These performances can be traced, for instance, in how passengers perceive landscape as spectacle, engage in play and perform ritualised behaviours (p.38). However, in the case of the boats 'Lizzie M' and 'Sheila M', there is a difference of scale and therefore possibility, as both vessels are twelve seated passenger vehicles, with no private or covered space. As is illustrated in the following drawing, the benches face inwards and so, at full capacity, individuals who may be meeting each other for the first time, have to sit next to each other in close proximity:

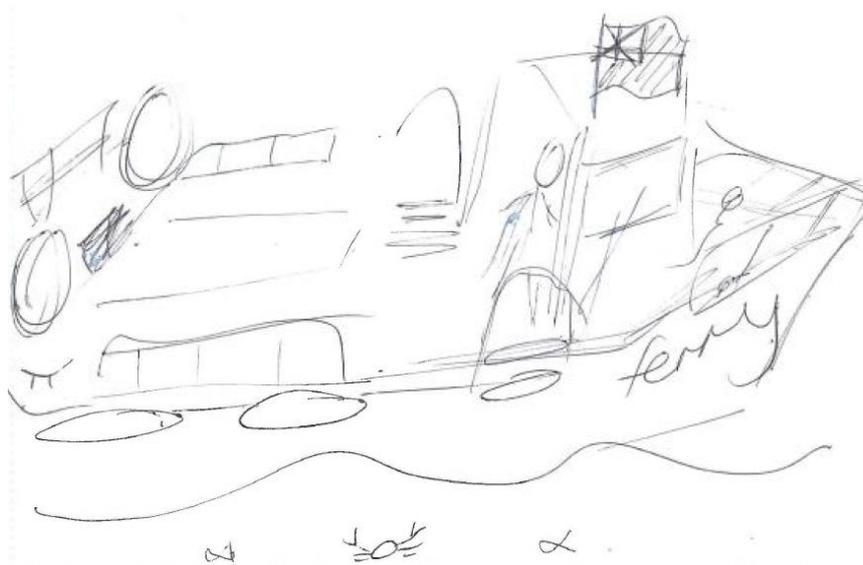


Figure 4 Drawing of 'Lizzie M', created on the Appledore – Instow ferry (reflection card 54)

Unique to the ferry as a form of transport is the role of the on-board volunteer, who has the responsibility of overseeing the safe arrival of passengers to the other side of the river. Within the ten minute ferry crossing, key tasks include delivering a health and safety notice, including informing passengers of where life jackets are positioned, issuing tickets and communicating with the skipper. In-between these tasks, the on-board volunteer may engage in conversation and small talk relating to what can be seen on the river, or answering any questions that travellers may have (Interview Ruth, Appledore – Instow first time ferry crosser, August 2018). One tourist, using the ferry for the first time, describes how the ‘people on the boat talked to us – nice sense of community/focal point with fellow travellers’ (reflection card 111). Long established skipper Isaac reflects how ‘people want to know a lot about you know “”What’s that ship over there? [...] “What’s that bird?” [...] “Why do you only run four hours a day?” [...] “What’s that place over there?” (Interview, skipper, October 2018). The conversations on-board thus both respond to the environment through which the ferry is travelling is through, and relate to the specifics of the ferry service itself, including length of time in operation. Another ferry volunteer, Ed, reflects how he enjoys ‘talking to people and signposting and connecting people to you know, places to see and cool things to do on one side or the other’ (Interview Ed, Ferry Volunteer, August 2018).

The ferry volunteer thus acts as a ‘guide’ (Interview Rita, December 2018), both physically providing a safe crossing for passengers and inter-personally curating their journey; including answering questions, signposting key bankside areas and providing local tips. Conversations on-board, facilitated by the volunteer, related to activities on the bankside, in particular the dockyard; including for example, memories of family members working in the shipyard (field notes, 15th April 2018) or the status of the ships (Interview Ruth). For a tourist who, perhaps is just spending a few days in the area, they may indeed appreciate such a local “expert” advice, and such a commentary on the history of the place in which they are visiting, as it deepens and enriches their experience (Interview Ruth). The ferry volunteer plays a key role in enriching the tourist’s understanding of the area and in guiding their experience when on the river. Through the information given by the ferry volunteer, the tourist may have an increased understanding and deeper contextual awareness of the area, and the river. The on-board volunteer therefore participates in encouraging tourists to observe the landscape and riverscape, as they are travelling, and their travelling enables them to pause, watch and appreciate, in an active way as, typically, ‘when you’re on the water you can see a long way which generally on land you can’t’ (Interview, Oliver, July 2018). This is ultimately made possible through the intimate spatiality of such a small-scale vehicle, in which the low-lying structure provides close contact with the water and an opening for people to look at, comment upon and interact with the environment with which they are travelling through.



Figure 5. Looking back towards Appledore, (photograph taken by Ruth in 'go along' ferry interview)

Conclusion: the place of ferries in tourist landscapes

This paper has demonstrated the inter-relationship between ferries, on-board volunteers, tourists and water. The Appledore – Instow ferry is so reliant upon tourist traffic that it would cease to exist without it; tourist demand is therefore essential to maintaining historic river crossings. At the same time, ferries offer travellers a unique experience of watery landscapes by engaging with the river in ways that are beyond bridges and other forms of transport. The multi-method approach of this paper, including quotes from reflection cards, interviews and photographs from go-along (ferry) interviews have charted how tourists engage with, experience and enjoy rivers in a myriad of ways.

Our work charts the ordinary and extraordinary relationships that ferries and their passengers have with rivers. On the one hand, travelling backward and forward over an apparently constant stretch of water appears mundane and yet, as our work shows, these repeated journeys are rendered unique by tidal changes, weather conditions, currents and on-board interactions. For the crew, these changes are known, acknowledged and negotiated; for the tourist they are new and exciting. Each journey produces a different encounter, making and re-making travelled landscapes with every crossing. As such, ferry travel and the tourist experience, which has hitherto been largely ignored, deserves attention by researchers. Future work could consider the routes of other vessels, exchanges with sea and bird life, as well as bodily engagements with the motor itself (its motor, smell, pitch). The paper has revealed ferry journeys as a purposeful type of leisure and tourism infrastructure.

More widely, we also posit that a focus on ferries has the potential to further understanding about the ways people engage with water. Although there is growing interest in the sea (cf. Peters, 2019)

and rivers (Krause, 2010), our work is located in estuaries. These are liminal, hybrid spaces between sea and river, water and land. Our paper has started to reveal how ferries negotiate and engage with these spaces: timing the tides, skirting low water, navigating currents and, at every crossing, landing at subtly different locations on the river bank as the water ebbs and flows. Tidal rivers are travelled landscapes that are themselves travelling.

Ferries are both a physical vessel that moves between places, and can be interpreted as a symbolic vessel linking diverse theoretical discussions within cultural geography. In so doing, ferries have the potential to enable scholars and tourists to encounter and connect new places, ideas and perspectives.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No conflict of interest declared.

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