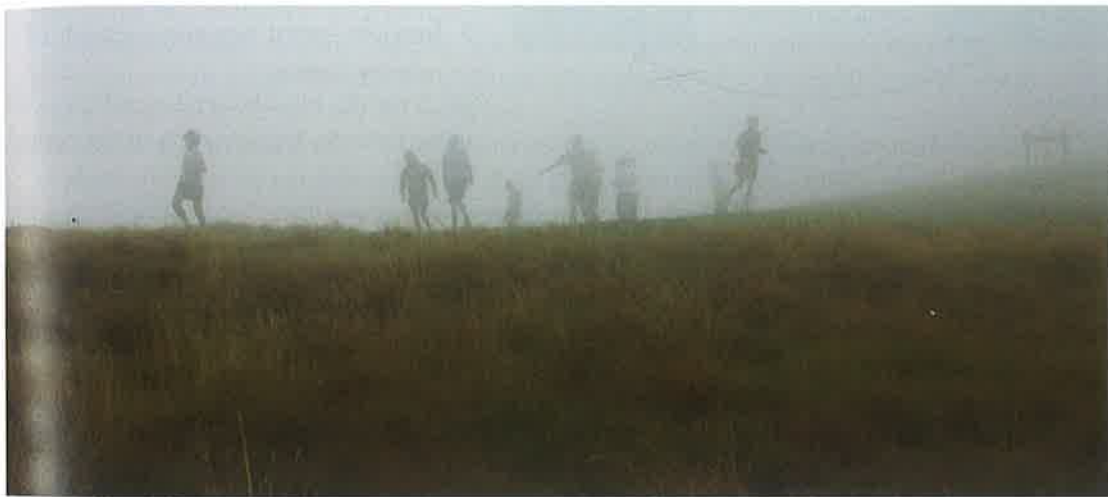


RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTS

A relationship is the way that two or more people or things are connected. Applying this to the idea of a human relationship with the outdoors should be fairly clear – we’re interested in the ways humans connect with outdoor environments, right? But how do you describe this? How do you talk, or write, about the relationships that people have with the outdoors?

This is more than just a theoretical question, because it’s exactly what you need to do as the central task throughout Unit 3. You are going to be asked to develop an understanding of these relationships we humans have with outdoor environments, and to write about them.



What do your relationships with outdoor environments look like?

Describing relationships

Think about some of the relationships you have with other people – your friends, parents, brothers and sisters, your classmates, teachers, and so on. How would you describe these?

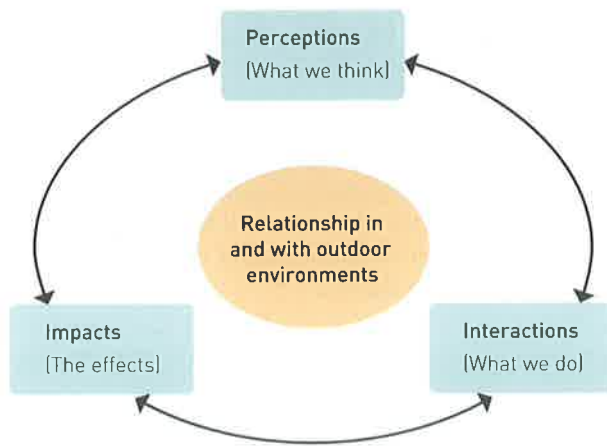
Relationships are hard to describe. They’re fluid – constantly changing as we change, others around us change and the circumstances that connect us in these relationships change. But if you were forced to describe any of your own relationships with another person, you might include some (or all) of the following:

- feelings about the person
- experiences and history with the person
- things you like and don’t like about the person
- things you do with the person.

DESCRIBING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTS – A FIRST GO

You might have found describing relationships with other people a bit tricky, but if that was hard, doing the same thing for non-human objects (such as outdoor environments) is probably going to be even harder.

One way to think about human relationships with outdoor environments (a way that we’ll use in this book) is shown in the diagram on the following page. The arrows connecting each of the three aspects in the diagram are an attempt to show how these aspects of relationships connect to and affect



each other. For example, our perceptions help to determine the interactions we have, and the interactions we have also help to influence our perceptions.

In this view of relationships, we have three key aspects of the relationship:

- 1 **Perceptions** – what we think about the outdoor environments
- 2 **Interactions** – what we do in, and with, the outdoor environments
- 3 **Impacts** – what happens as a result of our relationship.

We'll use this idea about relationships as we move through different parts of the course.

DESCRIBING RELATIONSHIPS USING METAPHORS

Having a model (like the diagram above) to understand relationships is one thing, but to write about them and describe them we need a little bit more – and this is where metaphors come in. You will have heard of these before and even used them, although you may not know them by name. Basically, a metaphor is when two unlike things are compared with each other because of something they have in common. They're used in lots of ways, but often when we're trying to understand something complex, we use a metaphor to compare it with something simpler. Here are some examples of metaphors:

- The foot of the mountain.
- Life is a journey.
- You are a pig.
- 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players, they have their exits and their entrances.' (Shakespeare from *As You Like It*).
- She ruffled his feathers.
- The world is my oyster.
- The Lord is my shepherd.

Let's look a little more closely at two of these metaphors.

- 1 'The foot of the mountain.' Mountains don't actually have feet – feet are something that humans have, and maybe we can attribute feet to some other animals too. But a mountain is not a human. So, what do we mean when we talk about the foot of a mountain? We recognise feet as being at the bottom of a human (assuming the human is standing up), which is the point of using this particular metaphor. The foot of a mountain is recognised as the part of the mountain at its base – it's the bottom of the mountain.
- 2 What about Shakespeare's well-known quote from the play *As You Like It*? The world isn't actually a stage, and the men and women that live in the world aren't players (or actors). So, what might Shakespeare have been trying to get at? In many productions, both in Shakespeare's time and now, one actor might play many roles. In our lives, we are often asked to do different things and 'be' different people – brother or sister, son or daughter, father or mother, friend, colleague, and so on. And these 'characters' do what they need and then disappear to be replaced by other characters. Could Shakespeare have meant something like this? The beauty of a metaphor is that it can have many meanings – the one intended by the author, but also potentially many others.

Here are some examples of metaphors used to describe human relationships with the outdoors:

- **Outdoors as an adversary** – An adversary is an opponent in a contest or fight. This might be a useful metaphor when looking at a human–nature relationship that sees the environment as something we are fighting against; something to beat, control and dominate.
- **Outdoors as a museum** – In a museum we collect and store valuable things. We protect them and maintain them, and we use them to learn about the world. When describing human–nature relationships that involve conservation, protection or preservation, this could be a useful metaphor. When the environment is seen as a place to study or learn, whether it's the environment we're studying or ourselves, or something else altogether, this metaphor could also be useful.
- **Outdoors as a cathedral** – Cathedrals, churches, temples, mosques, synagogues, and so on, are spaces where people worship and pray, and spend time to connect with their spirituality. The connection with spirituality and the outdoors is something we've discussed in earlier chapters and is what can make this a useful metaphor.
- **Outdoors as a gymnasium** – A gymnasium is a place where we challenge ourselves and look to physically develop our bodies. People go to gyms to work out and 'raise a sweat'. For many people, outdoor environments are places for them to do this (work out, sweat and physically develop), which makes this metaphor useful in this sense.
- **Outdoors as a storehouse** – A storehouse or a warehouse is a place where we find resources: things we need, and we need lots of them. This would be a useful metaphor for people who see the human–nature relationship as being made up of an environment that gives us access to many resources, such as food, air, water, plants, animals, minerals and more.
- **Outdoors as a mother** – A mother is the person who birthed us and who then goes on to protect and care for us. We expect a mother to love her children and to be cared for by her children when she ages. This metaphor, commonly cited by Indigenous communities (as we'll see shortly), is an important way to describe human–nature relationships that see the environment as the place from which we come, the place which provides for us and the place we must help to protect.
- **Outdoors as a web** – A web (as in the web of a spider) is a connection of many strands that interweave and combine in many ways. This metaphor could be appropriate for someone who sees the environment as a place with many interconnecting aspects. When we describe food webs in science and biology, for example, we are connecting with this metaphor as a useful way of seeing aspects of the natural world.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES



METAPHORS

- 1 Are metaphors useful in helping to explain a relationship someone might have with an outdoor environment? Choose one or two metaphors discussed in this book and analyse how useful you think it would be in helping to describe and explain the relationship that an individual or group might have with outdoor environments.
- 2 Find examples of people whose relationships might be typical of those described in these metaphors.
- 3 Find examples of other metaphors (or come up with your own) that could be useful in helping to describe and understand the relationships that people can have with outdoor environments.