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Youth Voice Conference 2026

From the 7th to the 11th of May, two members of Landscapes Youth NI, (Tara Hollywood and Ryan Nelson) were kindly invited by North York Moors National Park Youth Voice to attend their annual youth conference.



Tara represents the Ring of Gullion AONB and Ryan represents the Belfast Hills Partnership on Landscapes Youth NI

This was a conference of many firsts:

- The first time North York Moors had opened it to outside of England
- The first time it was fully youth led
- Tara and Ryan's first time in Yorkshire so we were pretty excited to head over.

We arrived early on Thursday getting in for around 4:30 to Thirsk station where David from North York Moors was waiting to chauffeur us up to the "Outstation" where we would be sleeping for the next few days. On the way up he give us a bit of a tour about the local area and one of the things mentioned that sparked our interest was the Beaver Project which is a major reintroduction project ran by the Forestry England which seems to be going really well.

<https://www.forestryengland.uk/cropton-forest/beaver-trial-cropton-forest>

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Arriving at the Outstation we were greeted by the North York Moors team, Exmoor and the Peat District delegates and after being assigned our rooms we broke the ice over a mug of Yorkshire tea and some chocolate digestives!! We then settled in for a fun games night after one of the many amazing home cooked meals made by the North York Moors team.

Friday was the official start of the conference and for those who arrived early, a morning trip was planned to the Sutton bank national park centre for

some birdwatching and a breathtaking walk along the Kilburn white horse trail.

<https://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/things-to-do/attractions/sutton-bank-national-park-centre>

Sutton bank national park centre area



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The trails took us past the local glider club who were flying overhead and skimming across the edge of the forest. We stopped every once in a while to admire the beautiful landscape surrounding us then finished at the top of hill with the white horse on it.



To get a better view of the horse in all its glory, we walked back down a few steps which seemed to multiply on the way back up hence the breathtaking part!!

While all this was going on the other delegates arrived at the Outstation.

We then headed back to do our presentations on our own protected landscapes and our youth involvement within them.



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Delegates came from a range of National Parks and Protected Landscapes, including

- **North York Moors National Park**
- **Peak District National Park**
- **Lake District National Park**
- **Yorkshire Dales National Park**
- **EUROPARC Federation Youth Council**
- **Exmoor National Park**
- **New Forest National Park**
- **Ring of Gullion AONB (Landscapes NI)**
- **Belfast Hills Partnership (Landscapes NI)**



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Each of us had to give a presentation on our protected landscape and our involvement in it, and this was one of our favourite moments from the trip especially as we both aced our presentations!!

We were also really inspired by the other delegates, each really coming out of their own shells during their presentations and it was fun seeing the different approaches and stages each group was at. Some of them only started this year and we got plenty of good ideas to hopefully implement within our own youth forum in the future.



Finishing up the presentations we were all gifted with personalised wooden name badges with our names and protected landscapes professionally burned into them by Ailish and a hand painted landmark medallion made by Liv, as well as some other goodies.

Later on after putting on our high-vis safety jackets we went for a team building activity wander in the nearby woodland, led by Luke.

We each wore blindfolds and lined up into a sort of conga line and then had to listen out for the



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sound of Luke's voice to guide us as we hesitantly walked deeper into the forest, giggling as we went.

This was a great way for us to explore the forest using different senses.



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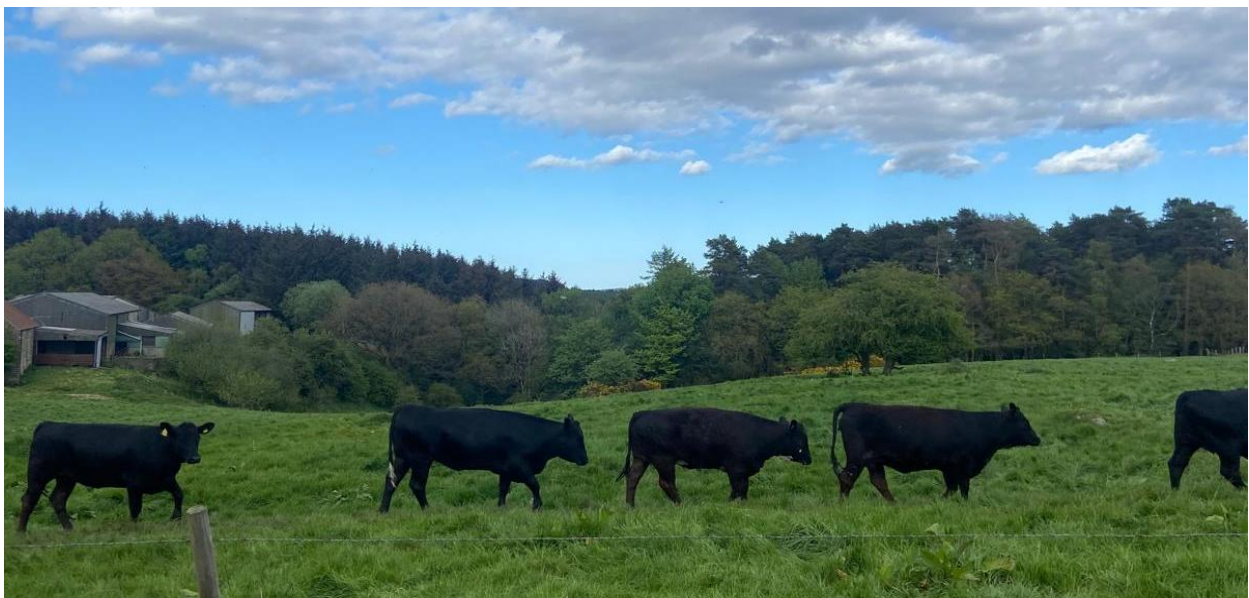
Arriving at a spot near a nice stream where we each took off our blindfolds and were then led through a little mindfulness exercise.

Just taking the time to sit down for 5-10 minutes and appreciate all the different sounds, smells and sights of the forest around us.



The whole experience was very relaxing so much so that we all slept pretty well after it maybe even some of us during it too but we'll not say who!!! 🤫

On the way back to the outstation we noticed that the cows must've been getting jealous and had decided to copy us.



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Fylingdales Moors



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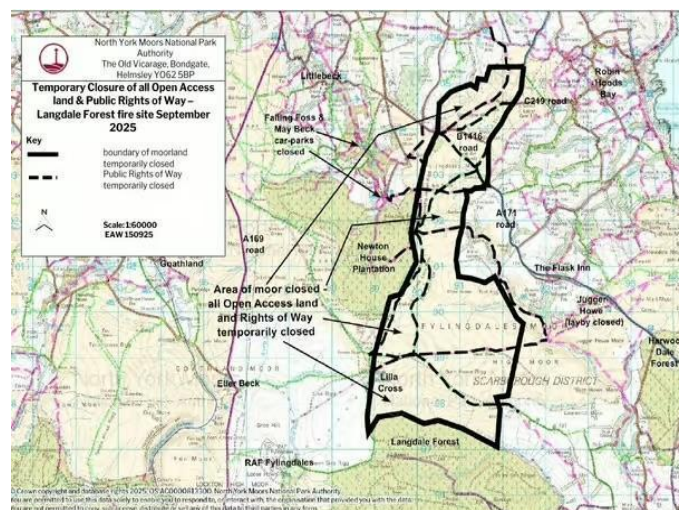
Saturday was field trip day!!!

The morning started off with a presentation on the 2025 Wildfire on the Fylingdales moors from the very charismatic Edward March-Shawcross.



Some of the things mentioned in the presentation were:

- How the fire was believed to have started from a naked flame such as a campfire or gas burner
- How it spread underneath the ground eventually reaching its peak on 25th August, the fire covered an area of up to 25km² (see map to help put that into perspective).
- How the moors area had historically been used as a military training range, meaning unexploded ordnance was present during the incident and around 20 'cook-offs' (explosions) occurred, triggered by temperatures exceeding 600 degrees.





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However, it wasn't all bad news, as Edward and his colleagues were some of the first people brave enough to go on site once it was safe to do so without getting blown up and they discovered some pretty cool archaeological finds unearthed by the fire. They weren't too sure about what they were, but it didn't stop them from being cool though!!

Edward also spoke about the projects put in place to try and restore the peatland which we were able to recognise from similar work being done back home by the National Trust on Divis, as well as work being

delivered by Ulster wildlife and RSPB on other peatland sites in NI.

One of Ulster wildlife's most recent projects, in partnership with the Ulster Farmers' Union was the installation of locally sourced wool logs earlier this year in the Antrim hills. Sixty wool logs were installed as part of an innovative peatland restoration trial, designed to slow water flow, trap sediment and support the recovery of peat-forming vegetation.



<https://www.ulsterwildlife.org/news/local-wool-put-test-innovative-peatland-restoration-trial>

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Then, after being traumatised by the presentation and a warning not to pick up anything shiny, we were able to go to the site of the fire!! This really put things into perspective seeing the devastation wildfires can have on the environment first hand.



Edward arranged for us to meet up with his friend Lowell, who was one of the farmers in charge of grazing the moor with his sheep who weren't shy about sharing their opinion on the matter.

Lowell spoke to us about the impact the fire had on the whole grazing process and then they both teamed up to give us a tour across the black ashy landscape to some of the restoration processes being implemented including:

- A lot more firebreaks to hopefully prevent a fire of this size in the future.
- Building and restoring dams to slow and hold water to try and re-wet the peatland.
- the use of plant based woven blankets to help stop further erosion of previously dug out dams and in time improve peat friendly vegetation on the moorland.

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This talk was something we related to as we'd suffered from a lot of wildfires throughout Northern Ireland and most recently in the Mourne AONB with the latest burn area reaching to the size of Lisburn (19.52km) which is our 3rd biggest city. However, knowing that these restoration projects are underway gives us hope but while we know it'll take a lifetime to see any real change, yet this feels like a step in the right direction.

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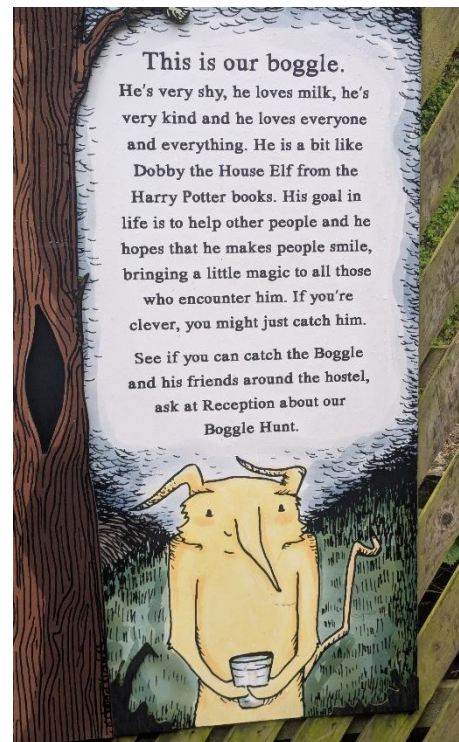


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Boggle Hole



Saturday afternoon we travelled to the mystical land of Boggle hole a coastal area and youth hostel not far from Whitby.



<https://www.thewhitbyguide.co.uk/boggle-hole/>

Home to the Boggle, some really good hot chocolate and plenty of marine life which was exactly why we were there to pioneer its first citizen science and rock pooling workshop. Eager to get out and find some crabs we all quickly huddled into the classroom to meet up with Suzanne and Emma from the Reconnect project.



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They provided us with the knowledge and tools to get started, so we each split into teams each doing a slightly different surveying style.



Our group choose to do a quadrat survey using the what3words app to mark our location we marked out our 4x4 square and got to work.



We found so many amazing things like hermit crabs, shore crabs, anemones, sea squirts, our reflections and so many different types of seaweed.

After surveying a couple of different spots we all teamed up to look for shark eggs also known as “mermaid purses” but sadly we were unsuccessful in this adventure but had a great time regardless, rummaging through seaweed.



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Following this, we headed back to the Outstation for dinner and a very fun quiz night organised and presented by Ailish and Liv.



On Sunday morning there was the option of attending a dawn chorus which Ryan slept through but Tara kept the side up for Landscapes NI and ventured out at dawn.

It started at 06:30am when the alarm went off and there was great reluctance to leave a warm bed but it ended up being extremely worthwhile. It was a really clear morning and so peaceful just sitting and listening to the birds. We used the Merlin app to identify some of the bird calls and heard species such as cuckoos, robins and blackbirds. It was a perfect start to the morning.

Later on in the morning we got a talk from Heather McNiff about the Nature Prescriptions program with the NHS and this is a promising project all about using nature to heal rather than traditional medicine.

In certain cases, it's a great way to help ease people back into nature which is definitely something worth pursuing as in our opinion we have benefited so much from spending time in it ourselves.

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Then it was on to an Alzheimer's Society workshop, which we found to be very helpful as it went in to depth on what the Alzheimer's disease is. Through a variety of different exercises and having attended the session we'll now go forward with a lot more consideration of the struggles that the disease brings.



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ESTABLISHED 2003



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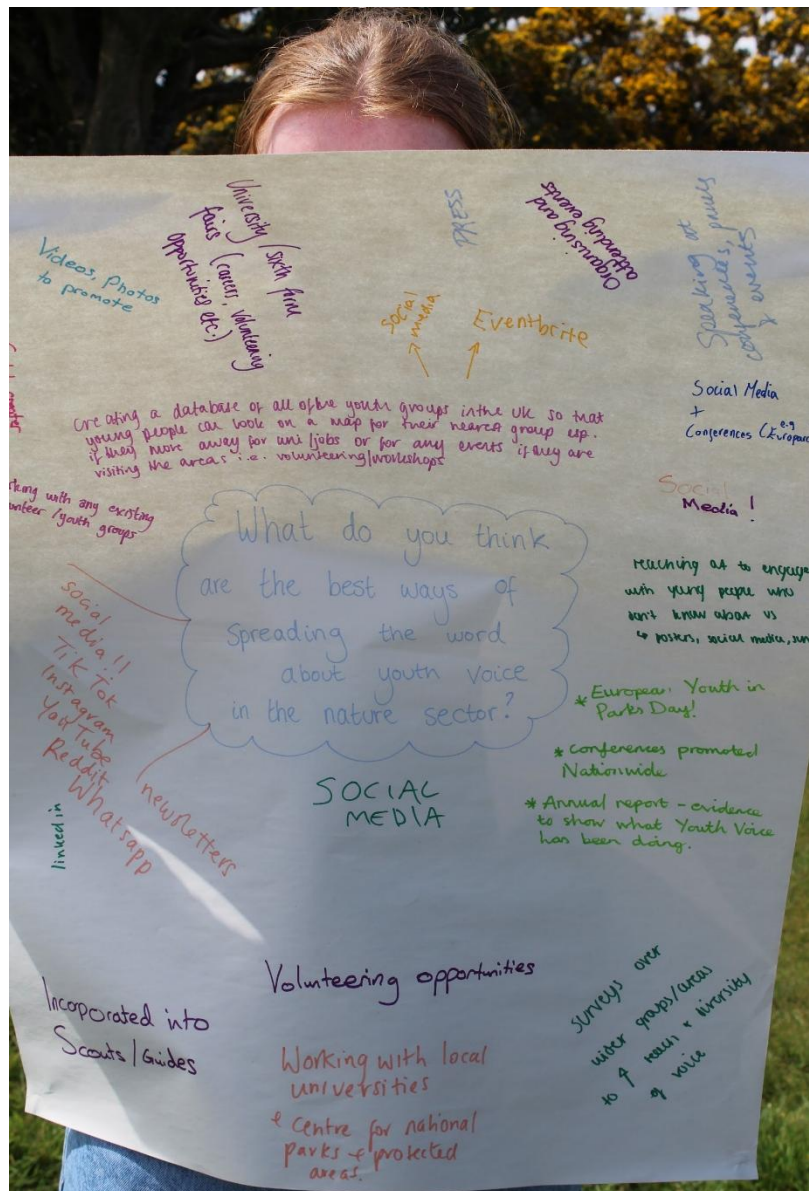
After this, we then rolled out the red carpet for the CEO of New York Moors National Park, Tom Hind, who came to speak to us about the importance of youth engagement and ways for us to improve our involvement within our protected landscapes.

We filmed some videos for social media which we haven't actually seen yet and don't know if we want to!!! 🤔

In an action planning workshop, we put down our ideas on how we wanted to move forward after the conference.

It was a great brainstorming session and everyone got stuck in, thinking about how we can strengthen our connections with each other and improve our involvement within our protected landscapes.

It looked really colourful once we had finished.





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One of the New forest delegates, Eva, came up with the brilliant idea of putting together a map of all our favourite / sick places to go in the UK, in our respective landscapes, which we look forward to exploring.

We also had a talk from Anna Bedford from the “Campaign for National Parks” and we give our input on the National Parks reimagined project which was an exercise of what we would want our landscapes to look like in 10 years in a sort of brochure format.

The goal of this activity was to have fun and be creative but it also got everyone thinking about the future of their protected areas and national parks.

Some people drew a picture of their ideal national park, others wrote a list of what they would like to see vs what they don't want to see.



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Sunday evening came round all too quickly and after an amazing few days, the conference was brought to a close. We had a little celebration sitting around the campfire eating “Smores” underneath the twinkling stars in the North Yorkshire sky.



So yeah, Yorkshire – BANGER!!

A massive thank you to Liv, Ailish and the North York Moors team for a great weekend and we look forward to collaborating more in the future

A special shoutout to Landscapes NI, the EUROPARC Atlantic Isles Section and through funding from Action Renewables for giving us the opportunity to go on this trip in the first place

Thank you 🙏

Ryan Nelson and Tara Hollywood.

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