IOL Scotland Conference

30 October 2026

SRUC Oatridge, West Lothian

What's Happening Outdoors in Scotland Today?

Community Learning

Youth-Led Practice

Early Years to Tertiary Education

Bushcraft & Traditional Skills

Adventure & Expeditions

Navigation

Risk & Challenge

Mental Health & Wellbeing

Nature Connection

Climate Action

Research & Innovation

Networking

Posters & Exhibitors

And More...

Open to everyone involved in or interested in outdoor practice

IOL Members – £45
Non-members – £55

Bookings open now

Join us for an inspiring day of sharing, networking and learning

With Support From:

SRUC

LOVE OUTDOOR LEARNING

A snapshot of Scotland's outdoor sector
This isn't a conference about one particular approach, age group or setting. It's an opportunity to spend a day alongside people working across Scotland's diverse outdoor sector — from community projects and youth work to bushcraft, adventure, education, nature connection, wellbeing, research and more.

Learn by doing
Choose from three workshop sessions throughout the day, with practical and discussion-based sessions exploring different approaches to outdoor practice. Some workshops will take you outside, so come prepared for the Scottish weather!

Hear what's happening now
Sector updates and our keynote will step back from individual practice to explore some of the bigger questions facing outdoor work in Scotland — including what drives us, what we're learning and where the sector might be heading.

Meet people beyond your usual circles
Posters, exhibitors, networking and plenty of opportunities for conversation are built into the day. Come prepared to share what you're doing, find out what others are working on and make connections across different parts of the sector.

Make the day your own
With three workshop slots and three different workshops to choose from in each, you can build your own programme for the day. There are nine workshops in total, covering a wide range of outdoor practice. Choose the sessions that interest you most when you arrive.

And you don't have to be an IOL member
It's open to anyone involved in, interested in, volunteering or studying in outdoor practice.

If you have any questions, please do email Carol at carol@loveoutdoorlearning.com and she will be more than happy to help.

Designed to be accessible
We've deliberately started the conference at 10am and placed more of the programme in the afternoon, making it easier for teachers and others with morning commitments to join us for part of the day rather than having to choose between work and the conference.

A mix of learning, sharing and doing
The programme includes practical workshops, sector updates and a keynote, with opportunities to explore different approaches and perspectives from across Scotland's outdoor sector. Some workshops will take place outdoors, so come prepared for the Scottish weather!

Time to connect
Posters and exhibitors will be available throughout the day, with dedicated time for networking, discussion and a cuppa. We want the conversations between sessions to be as much a part of the conference as the formal programme.

Looking ahead
We'll finish the formal conference at 5.30pm, with an opportunity to stay on for a short planning meeting for the 2027 IOL Scotland Conference.

Timetable

10am	Arrivals and workshop sign up
10.30am	Welcome from Carol Murdoch
11am	Workshop 1
Noon	Posters, exhibitors and networking with cuppas
12.30pm	Lunch
1.15pm	Sector updates - Short contributions from practitioners working across different parts of the sector.
2pm	Workshop 2
3pm	Posters, exhibitors and networking with cuppas
3.30pm	Keynote speech
4.30pm	Workshop 3
5.30pm	Conference close
6pm	Planning meeting for 2027 conference

Keynote: The Power of Anger, Kindness and Joy in Outdoor Practice
Patrick Boxall, Queen Margaret University



What drives us to work outdoors with people and places? Drawing on his current research into creativity and outdoor learning, Patrick Boxall explores the values, emotions and motivations that sit within outdoor practice.

His research finds that conversations about creative practice quickly move beyond activities and pedagogy towards deeper questions of care, justice, and the place of people within the natural world. Patrick explores this through practices of Making, Growing, Anger and Kindness, considering how our frustrations with the world can sit alongside a deep commitment to helping people and the natural world flourish. He will explore new data, which includes the significance of joy in nature-based practice. Patrick will draw on his recent publications and present on current research that will form the basis of future writing.

This keynote invites us to think about anger, kindness and joy as powerful drivers for outdoor practice – shaping the choices we make, the relationships we build and the change we seek to create.

About the presenter:
Patrick Boxall is Senior Lecturer and Programme Lead for the BA Hons Education at Queen Margaret University. He is undertaking a PhD by publication exploring creative pedagogy in outdoor learning. He led the development of the QMU Outdoor Learning Hub, which won the Scottish Inspiring Learning Places Award in 2023. Patrick's varied career has included teaching English and Drama, school leadership, social enterprise, and the establishment of Forest College and the Forest and Outdoor Learning Awards at Newbattle Abbey College.

Responding to Mental Health Challenges in Outdoor Settings

Workshop Leader: Suzanne Robinson

Mental health challenges are becoming increasingly common across the outdoor sector, affecting both participants and colleagues. This practical workshop introduces the FIRST framework, giving outdoor practitioners the confidence to recognise signs of distress, start supportive conversations and respond appropriately within their role. The session will also explore how to recognise and respond to suicidal thoughts and behaviours, with practical guidance on providing immediate support and signposting to further help. Delegates will leave with simple, practical tools that can be applied immediately in outdoor settings.



Youth-Led Climate Action in the Community: What Can We Learn from Young People?

Workshop Leaders: Donna Strachan
Morwynn Brannan-Horobin
Thea axon
Thomas Rouse

What happens when young people are given the opportunity to lead climate action? Drawing on her current research and the experiences of young people from Seeds of Disruption SCIO, Donna explores the opportunities, challenges and lessons emerging from youth-led climate action in Midlothian. This session offers practical insights into how outdoor practitioners, educators and community organisations can create meaningful opportunities for young people to lead environmental action and shape their communities.

About the presenter:

Donna Strachan is a qualified Youth Worker, Forest School Leader and Director of Big Wild Life Ltd. She is Founder and Chair of Seeds of Disruption SCIO, a Visiting Lecturer at Queen Margaret University and Newbattle Abbey College, and is currently completing a Master of Research exploring youth participation, outdoor learning and community-led climate action. With over 20 years' experience in community development, Donna is passionate about empowering young people to lead positive change.

Resanctifying Our Relationship with Nature



Workshop Leader: Zita Jo Bowie

In outdoor learning, the interaction between people, place and activity creates the learning experience. How can we deepen our relationship with place? How might we lift the veil a little and encounter the elements and spirits of place? And what might this mean for us personally?

This workshop invites participants to explore a deeper, more reflective relationship with the places in which we work and learn, considering the role of spirit, ritual and personal connection in our experience of the outdoors.

About the presenter:

Zita Jo Bowie has had a varied career as an educationalist in community, school and college settings, including working as an Outdoor Education lecturer. Her Masters dissertation explored the accreditation process within IOL. She is now a Shamanic Practitioner and ritualist, weaving sacred aesthetics and spiritual intention into the spaces we share. Her practice is rooted in radical self-love as a path towards healing self and planet.

Outdoor navigation skills



Workshop Leader: Roger Scrutton

Navigation is a fundamental outdoor skill for educational, adventurous and recreational activities. This practical workshop introduces key navigation skills for countryside and wilderness settings , including map reading, compass use, route planning, relocation and using natural features to navigate. The session will also touch on navigation at sea and navigating in reduced visibility. Following an indoor introduction, delegates will head outdoors to put their skills into practice.

About the presenter:

Roger Scrutton is Honorary Research Fellow in Outdoor and Environmental Education at Edinburgh University, previously Reader in Geosciences at Edinburgh, and has now spent over 50 years teaching and researching ‘in the field’. He is a life- long orienteer, a UKCC Level 3 orienteering coach, one-time President of Scottish Orienteering and now a Trustee of the UK-wide Orienteering Foundation.

Nature Journalling: Deepening Learning, Wellbeing and Connection Through Nature



Workshop Leader: Pete Carthy

Nature Journalling offers a simple way to slow down, notice the natural world and develop curiosity, creativity and wellbeing. This practical, hands-on workshop introduces accessible techniques including observation, sketching, writing and watercolour, with no artistic experience required. Pete will share activities that can be adapted across schools, Forest Schools, youth and adult community projects and wellbeing programmes, exploring how nature journalling can support creative expression, mindfulness and deeper connection with nature. Participants will leave with practical ideas and inspiration to begin using nature journalling in their own settings.

About the presenter:

Pete Carthy is founder of Instinctively Wild CIC and has over 26 years' experience as a primary teacher, Forest School practitioner and outdoor learning professional both with children and adults alike. A passionate nature journaler and watercolour artist, Pete has completed over 1,300 consecutive days of nature journalling and delivers Nature Journaling, Bushcraft, Eco-therapy and Forest School programmes across the Scottish Borders and beyond.

Is It Just Mucking About?



Workshop Leader: Ely Blyth

Is outdoor education really learning? How much of the curriculum could you possibly cover on a slackline? Join Ely for a practical exploration of curriculum links in unlikely places and how we can reframe perceptions of outdoor learning. The session will involve getting outdoors and exploring what can happen when we take learning beyond traditional spaces. There is no pressure to get on the slackline if it isn't within your comfort zone.

Please wear suitable outdoor clothing and footwear.

About the presenter:

Ely Blyth is a lecturer on the Wildlife and Conservation Management course at SRUC, specialising in outdoor education and practical land management. Ely describes themselves as "not an academic" and is particularly interested in practical approaches to learning.

Seeing the Forest for the Degrees: Using the Forest School Ethos to Rewild Tertiary Learning



Workshop Leader: Ely Blyth & Lucy Thornton
What might happen if we brought some of the Forest School ethos into colleges and universities? Ely and Lucy explore four key areas they have identified for making tertiary learning environments a little more woodland. This session considers how Forest School principles can influence teaching and learning beyond the traditional Forest School setting, offering ideas for bringing outdoor approaches into college and university environments.

About the presenter:
Ely Blyth and Lucy Thornton are lecturers on the Wildlife and Conservation Management course at SRUC, specialising in outdoor education and practical land management. They are interested in exploring how Forest School principles can influence teaching and learning beyond the traditional Forest School setting.

Connecting Communities Outdoors



Workshop Leader: Laura Curtis-Moss
How can we make outdoor experiences more accessible and meaningful for communities who have traditionally been excluded from engaging with the outdoors? Drawing on Laura's work with RSPB Scotland and the Connect Outdoors partnership project, this informal workshop will explore practical approaches to identifying systemic barriers, building trust and co-designing activities with communities. Delegates will have the opportunity to share ideas and consider how we can create more inclusive outdoor experiences.

About the presenter:
Laura Curtis-Moss is Engagement Programme Manager for RSPB Scotland, with a background in environmental and outdoor education and community engagement. Her varied career has included working with schools, developing teacher education, delivering climate change programmes for young adults and managing a peatland restoration project. She is passionate about creating opportunities for people and communities to connect with the outdoors.

Overseas Development Expeditions for Senior Students



Workshop Leader: Suzie Dick

Have you ever considered leading an overseas expedition but wondered where to start, what is involved or whether it is something you could realistically do? This interactive workshop aims to demystify international expeditions, exploring why teachers and outdoor leaders might choose to get involved and what opportunities exist.

Through discussion, shared experiences and practical examples, participants will explore the different types of expeditions, how to get started, and the practicalities and responsibilities of planning and leading groups overseas. The workshop will also introduce international safeguarding, including the additional considerations of working across cultures and in unfamiliar environments. Along the way, participants will consider the benefits for young people and the personal and professional rewards of leading an expedition.

About the presenter:

Dr Suzie Dick is an International Mountain Leader, outdoor educator and Lecturer in Education at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. A Fellow and Chartered Geographer of the Royal Geographical Society, Suzie has over 20 years' experience in outdoor education, expedition leadership and teaching, working across the UK and internationally. In 2005, she co founded Women with Altitude, an initiative aimed at making overseas expeditions more accessible and encouraging women to explore adventurous environments. She is also a Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician, first aid trainer and member of Scottish Mountain Rescue.