Introduction

It is now commonplace to make strong distinctions between tourism and visiting practices in city environments and rural environments (see L.Agroup and Interarts 2005), with significantly different motivations presumed to pertain to the two kinds of activity. This being given, a whole segment of social scientific study over recent decades has taken as its interest the re-invention of the rural environment as a place not of work but of leisure (Agyeman and Neal 2006). In company with this interest, a wide variety of different theoretical perspectives have evolved. Thus one body of literature sees the push towards outdoors activities as a direct response to the ways in which modern living conditions numb sensorial experiences, leading to a need to re-engage with such experiences in some way (e.g. Le Breton 2000). This train of thought has been carried further in some quarters with the suggestion that visits to nature reserves and national parks are about attempts fill a void in people’s spiritual lives by seeking less formalized methods of spiritual engagement (e.g. Alcock 1988; Cohen 1998). Others, however, question whether this is really about spirituality or more about taking pleasure in a direct sensorial experience of place (e.g. Sharpley and Jepson 2010). A different strand of interest is dedicated not to the benefit of such activities for individuals so much as their potential benefit to rural communities, leading to a variety of discussions regarding the relative merits of responsible engagement with the natural world, commonly referred to as ‘ecotourism’ (e.g. Neth 2008). Not all analyses of such ‘responsible’ management of the natural world in response to an upsurge in visitors with widely differing interests are so sanguine. In some cases the stress upon environmental management is seen to have negative social and economic consequences because of the constraints it places upon visitors (see Paget and Mounet 2009). However, there is a body of analysis that also seeks to find ways in which a balance between these distinct concerns can be brought about (e.g. Revermann and Petermann 2002; UNEP 2011). Other works again try to situate these kinds of activities in the broader pattern of global tourism, with discussions about differing levels of active sensory engagement and interaction with these environments and the kinds of ‘gaze’ they are subjected to (e.g. Urry 2001). In these kinds of discussions the importance of natural phenomena is the extent to which they can be marked out as different from the other things with which people might ordinarily engage (Hetherington 1997), with differing kinds of value being placed upon them according to both...
this and the context in which they are consumed, for instance in the company of (or absence of) others (Walter 1982). In this vein certain analyses have sought to explore how people proceed throughout different features of visiting practice in terms of ‘touristic performance’, where even just exploring places online counts as a ‘virtual’ performance, whilst the taking of family photographs can count as a ‘family performance’ where sites photographed become generic because the photograph is what is deemed important, not the site (Baerenholdt et al. 2004). Postmodern and critical theoretical treatments, meanwhile, have focused their interest upon how places visited and things seen might be considered to be ‘texts’ that are ‘re-made’ by those consuming them through the ‘lens’ of tourism (e.g. Hollinshead 2004).

In this chapter we set aside these various theoretical concerns and focus instead upon what enjoyment of the countryside might involve as a practical matter that takes work and organization. We do this by using a recently accumulated body of data that focuses upon the observation of families and individuals undertaking trips into the countryside, notably to national parks and nature reserves, to pursue a range of different leisure activities. The advantage of proceeding in this fashion is that we take as our starting point a recognition that, for the parties involved, going out for the day is already an orderly phenomenon, replete with ordinary everyday but nonetheless methodical practices. By taking these methodical practices as a topic rather than a resource for analysis we discard a perceived notion, central to the practices of theorizing, that order has to be imposed from the outside rather than as something that is locally produced. We also thereby set aside the risk of ‘ironicizing’ the member’s point of view (Button 1991; Garfinkel 1967) by giving priority to the external topics imposed by the analyst.

Whilst some ethnomethodological work has been undertaken previously with regard to visiting and wayfinding practices and certain aspects of tourism, investigation of family visits in this way is new. As such it should be set against studies such as Brown and Chalmers 2003 discussion of the use of mobile technologies to support tourism in city environments, as a complementary body of work that exhibits parallel concerns and explores some of the same themes but in the context quite particularly of how family days out make visible the ongoing work of being a family and managing family relations. An important part of this, as we shall be exploring in more detail, is the way in which there is a tight sequential organization to these kinds of activities. Thus we will be examining along the way topics such as: the planning of an outing; the equipping oneself appropriately for such an outing; the actual work of getting there with its own attendant concerns regarding planning and equipment; the numerous ways in which the trip is actualized once on site including practices of wayfaring, observing, recording, managing mundane matters such as food, drink and toilet stops, and so on; the work of return; and the work of explication to others through both talk and artifact. This is a rich assembly of practices, loosely termed leisure-making, approached here as anything but loose in its oriented to coherence as ‘a day out in the country’ and with all due emphasis being placed upon how these outings are actually...
accomplished, or ‘made’, as a practical and highly ordered job of work. This assembly of practices is not somehow separate to the business of being members of a shared household and all of the relationships that pertain to that but is rather embedded within and constitutive of those relationships and, as we shall see, it is the just-hows and just whats of the day-today realization of the relationships that animates these practices and makes them meaningful as a sequence that unfolds.

The objective of the study we shall be looking at here was to record in detail the planning, realization and follow-up activities for a family trip to the countryside with the specific intention of uncovering ethnographically the order, practices and reasoning involved. The specific trip observed was that of a family of six to the ‘Parc Naturel Regional de Chartreuse’ (http://www.parc-chartreuse.net/) in South-Eastern France, about an hour’s drive away from where the family lived, in November 2010. The family itself was composed of Dave (50), Chloe (42), Paul (20), Jane (16), Marcus (14), and Sarah (8). The visit took place at a weekend and the nature reserve in question had recently experienced one of the first major snowfalls of the year (much of the reserve is above 1,000 metres). All of the data was gathered through natural, in situ observation and took the form of video and audio recordings, photographs, and handwritten notes. Data collection started several weeks before the trip, when the idea of the visit was first occasioned, and continued through until after the trip when photographs were downloaded and shared with family and friends.

Making a Day Out in the Country

Something that quickly becomes apparent when one looks at the overall organizational features of family days out like this, is that they are possessed of an extremely tightly interwoven order, with each part riding somehow upon the accomplishment of the preceding part. We will therefore track this order through, from beginning to end, in order to explicate in more detail each of the constitutive parts. It is the ensemble of these parts and their accomplishment that together amounts to how this particular ‘day out in the country’ was made. However, the order uncovered here is an order descriptive of the accomplishment
of many other similar endeavours and is therefore of import for how we might understand other such things, including family days out across a wide variety of possible destinations, shorter group trips out for a variety of reasons, and much longer trips such as holidays. It should be noted that our primary goal here is to provide a concrete sense of the overall order to be found in such endeavours. The examples provided here are therefore to be seen as illustrative snapshots rather than exhaustive descriptions of each component part, all of which could merit chapters in their own right.

A Visit is Occasioned

Before any other matter can be pursued, the first step towards a trip happening is the occasioning of it as a possibility. There a variety of ways in which such occasioning might take place:

1. So at least one way is that the proposition of a trip as a possibility might arise apparently a propos of nothing. This is not to say that it's actually nothing, but rather in a form that members might describe along the lines of 'nothing much in particular'. Accounts for why a trip might happen will still be available, but they will be of the order of 'because we were bored', 'because the weather is nice', 'because we need to get out of the house for a while', 'because the kids are driving us crazy', and so on.

2. Another kind of occasioning can be through reminders and temptations. For instance, some member of the party might mention that a trip was promised some time ago and it hasn't yet happened, and isn't it time it did? Or it could be that a trip is specifically offered as a way of encouraging someone to do something else, such as a particularly onerous project for homework.

3. A very commonplace way in which occasioning can take place is through recollections of places already visited, either in the course of some specific reminding, or as an outcome of happening across photographs, someone mentioning someone else is going to a place you've already been to and liked, and so on.

4. Some trips have the character of being recurrent things that are done at certain times in the year or with a certain frequency, such as each year when the swans are nesting, or getting out to the woods at least once a month. Here the occasioning is the arrival of a time when the local inhabitants might recognize that such a trip is 'due'.

5. Perhaps the most commonplace occasioning of all is the occurrence of some special event, such as Mum’s birthday, or it being Easter Monday, or an anniversary, and so on.

This is far from being an exhaustive list of potential ways in which trips out might be occasioned, but something to note is that each of these occasionings carries with it certain kinds of accountabilities and rights. This is something to which...
we shall return shortly. And, in relation to this, it is worth pointing out that the principal example to which we shall be referring here was not occasioned in any of these ways. Rather, what happened was that a decision was made that the whole family should go out for a day to the country so that a record of the visit could be made. This distinct form of occasioning had notable consequences and this, too is something to which we shall return.

Deciding Where to Go

When discussing places to go there are really three inter-related issues on the table to be spoken about. One of these is ‘when’ to go, another other is ‘where’ to go, and a third is ‘what to do’ when you get there. Let us take each of these in turn:

When

Family routines rarely allow for total spontaneity – decisions about when to go on a trip have to accommodate these routines, and involve the following kind of reasoning: Are the kids at school? What about work? What other commitments have been made? What else might be happening that day? What time does the routine say you can leave? And what time must you be back? Aside from questions of schooling, work, and prior commitments decisions may also turn upon matters such as what the weather is likely to be like on the day, whether the place might be heaving with people (for instance on a bank holiday), and whether there are things to be done the next day that might be impacted.

Dave: I’m thinking to do this on Saturday two weeks from now, the constraint is it has to be somewhere we can get to within a day, and it has to be rural. I think it has to be a Saturday, with Jane being at Lycée during the week. And on Sunday we have to be back by a certain time because of school and everything and getting up the next day. If we do it on a Saturday we can take as long as we want and get back when we like.

At the same time, decisions also have to be made by a certain time. Depending on the undertaking, the reasoning here might include matters such as: what pre-planning and preparation must be done, what purchases need to be made (and, if you have to shop before you go, will there still be time to do it?), what kind of warning needs to be given to others, and so on.

Where to go, what to do

For all of the complexity outlined above, decisions regarding when to go out for a day are still often, depending upon the original proposition, much more speedily resolved than decisions regarding where, as the example we are examining here illustrates. Short trips, with just a few members of the family, to specifically proposed places can involve little in the way of planning, and discussion can be little more than ratification of the proposal (e.g. ‘let’s go to the river this afternoon’). What one finds is that the people involved in deciding where to go depends upon the proposition and the potential cohort.
Not all days out will necessarily encompass everyone in a household. Some members of the household have limited discussion rights (young children and babies) and can therefore be largely ignored. Depending on the occasioning there may also be strongly differential rights regarding who gets to decide (e.g. if it’s your birthday, you decide). For a whole family day out for a special occasion, such as the one we are looking at here, everyone is potentially involved and this can lead to lengthier discussions. Furthermore, when the reason for the day out gives no-one particular rights of choice, it can become especially hard to arrive at group ratification. Figure 7.1 shows how the discussion in this family unfolded and the amount of frustration provoked by no-one having priority in the decision-making process. Something else we can also see here is the extent to which discussions of where to go and what to do elide into one another such that divorcing the two would be artificial. Indeed, where to go is often an implicit decision about what to do and vice versa.

Dave prepares a text file of links

Everyone gathers in the living room to see

Dave goes to the first link and everyone takes a look

The proposition is liked by some but rejected by the Paul

Dave goes to the next link – rejected again

He tries another two links…

…but these are rejected as well

Some of the family start to get a little restless
Looking at the mechanics of deciding where to go, there are some things to point out. Just as with the very first occasioning of a possibility a proposition of a place to go is necessarily tentative rather than prescriptive. So it’s not a case of saying ‘right, we’re going hang-gliding’ but rather ‘shall we go hang-gliding?’ which can then implicate either acceptance or rejection. However, there is subtlety at play here because it’s not, in any family cohort, quite as black and white as this. Instead it proves to be differentially organized. So, it turns out for instance that there are those in a family to whom it might be said ‘we’re going hang-gliding’ as a statement (e.g. younger kids). It can also be that decisions are to be made between a sub-set of the total cohort (e.g. the parents), with the decision then being reportable to others in the family in exactly these declarative terms (e.g. as news). At the same time, those who have similar rights to decide (e.g. parents, older adolescents, etc.) do not have the right to frame a projected trip to one another as a statement in this way. For them it has to be worked up as a proposition.
Once an initial proposition has been floored, subsequent suggestions may be considered iteratively. Consider, for instance, the following:

Chloe: Dad suggested visiting a glacier. A guided walk up into the mountains.
Jane: Yeah, that sounds good.
Dave: That’s what I was thinking because the alps are within striking distance and we could do that within a day trip
Paul: (dubiously) Mmm
Chloe: What else could we do up in the mountains?
Dave: I don’t know
Chloe: Bobsleighing
Dave: It depends whether there’s snow
Paul: I’d like to do that
Jane: I’d be happy to go up into the alps just to take photos
Paul: Go skiing? Family skiing trip
Chloe: Well I like skiing
Paul: I haven’t tried yet
Chloe: And if we go to a centre there’s not just skiing. (…) Iceskating! There could be iceskating
Jane: I don’t like iceskating any more
Chloe: No?
Jane: Well every time I do it I keep getting knocked down.

What can be seen here is that an initial proposal provides for the subsequent utterances to be equally ratifications or counter-proposals. Furthermore, two or more suggestions open the floodgates because apparent uncertainty provides the rights for proposal across a broader cohort. There are numerous grounds upon which the appropriateness of a suggestion may be considered; this can depend upon the original proposition and the character of the day out that has been proposed. With this in mind, time, cost, distance, weather, relative interest, majority and minority interest, novelty, risk, excitement, intelligibility, informability, proximity (for itineraried trips), adherence to the original proposition, and so on, can all enter into the discussion. All proposals are potentially accountable to these considerations and rejections can be articulated on the same grounds.

Arriving at suggestions at all can take work, depending upon the generality of the original proposition and the character of the day out being proposed. This being the case, suggestions can take prior research to amount to more than ‘shall we all go out somewhere on Saturday’, which is easily ratified but proposes nothing more than the possibility of a trip. In Figure 7.1 above we see Dave working outwards from a list of links he has prepared in a text file. Arriving at this list of links took substantial prior work on his part, with a range of Google searches, examination of specific websites, and copying over of links from the browser to the text file so that they could be quickly transported to the machine.
in the living room and thus made visible to everyone at the same time. In this way group discussion can revolve around physical presentation and display of a range of different resources associated with the possibility, some technologically grounded, some not, including: websites; search results; brochures; newspapers; flyers; maps; recollections; advertised or known about events; habits and routines; recommendations; and so on.

Planning the Trip

The work of planning for a trip pulls upon the competent use of a range of both physical and digital resources, with some aspects being directly collaborative (e.g. what to do about food), whilst other aspects may be undertaken by dedicated individuals (e.g. online searches). A number of considerations are potentially relevant here, including: how to get there; exactly what route to follow; what to take; when to leave; what to do once you are there; financing; fuelling; who to tell; contingencies to cover; and who should do what and when. Figure 7.2 provides an overview of some of the work Dave was involved in on this occasion:
Figure 7.2  The work of planning
Making Ready to Depart

Families do not just go out on day trips by walking out of the door. There is a whole range of work implicated in getting out of the door. Things of relevance, things to be taken, have to be brought together, as is illustrated in Figure 7.3:

Figure 7.3  Bring stuff together

However, much of this cannot be done days ahead of departure. Often it is work that has to be done just before you go. So, people have to be got up and organized in readiness for this, and this itself may have to be discussed the day before. In this case they decided an exact order of who would get up and wake who in turn in the morning. Things to be taken – especially food and drink – may take active preparation no sooner than the night before, perhaps even on the day itself. And then things have to be loaded into cars:
Dave goes out to car with coat and boots – Opens the boot and puts them in – 
Goes back into house and gathers up all the other coats and brings them out to
put in the boot as well

Figure 7.4  Loading the car

Goes back into house and brings out another pair of boots and a rucksack and
plastic bag to pack – Goes back into house and gets stuff on table (batteries, cameras, wallet, phone, etc) pulled together in one bag – others getting coats
and scarves on – Dave checking with Chloe whether there was anything else that
needed to go in the car – Chloe comes over to look – Jane’s stuff but she’ll sort
for herself – Other boots are going to stay there

Houses may have to be prepared for a day of absence by locking doors, shutting windows, changing the heating, and so on. Verification may happen at a number of places that the right things are being brought together and prepared, as we can see in the above interaction between Dave and Chloe. And, beyond all of this, people have to be loaded into cars, which can itself involve extensive negotiation as family members vie for what they consider to be preferred positions within the car.

It can be seen from all of the above that the work of making ready is distributed, collaborative work that may implicate and render accountable anyone in the household, yet only certain individuals may initiate certain activities (e.g. not just anyone decides it’s time to load the car), and this, too, falls within the larger organization of relationships within the household and just who may appropriately ask what of someone else.
The Journey to the Site

The next principal phase, once everyone is out of the door and into the car, is the actual journey to where it has been decided the family will go. This journey can itself involve a number of competences and considerations, some of which may be planned for in advance, such as resources for wayfinding and in-car entertainments, as we saw above.

Journeys themselves can become a feature of the day out and may involve the remarking upon and recording of passed environments and scenes of interest, especially where the destination involves travelling a route that has not been followed before.

Passing sign saying ‘Detecteur d’Avalanches – Arret Imperatif au feu rouge clignotant’ (see picture)

Dave: If anyone sees a flashing red light, panic

Figure 7.5 Noticing an ‘interesting’ sign

There may be a need to accommodate toilet stops and other interruptions. It can also be the case that the exact proposition and details of the plan will get fine-tuned once the trip is already under way, especially if delays, diversions or other unexpected contingencies arise along the way. In this particular case the priorities were fine-tuned en route as they decided that they’d go for a walk first of all, then eat, then do other things as they came across them.

Thus, as was so famously articulated by Suchman (1987), it can be seen that these kinds of plans, whilst being a vital part of how the overall endeavour is accomplished, provide nothing more in themselves than a set of orientations and provisions that are negotiated into actual practice along the way as they are made to fit with the in situ and contingent organization of the real world. This proved to be recurrently the case as the day out was seen to unfold in practice.
Arriving at One’s Destination

Arriving, especially when it’s a visit to somewhere you’ve never been before can itself involve a measure of work. Some of the attendant problems here are: recognizing you’re there; deciding it is where you actually want to be; knowing where to stop; and ascertaining whether it’s the right place to stop, e.g. if you are walking, where will you be setting out from, will you need to intermittently revisit the car? Consider the following:

Dave: Right, this is Saint Hillaire. Next question is where to stop. Just stop in the centre and hope we find it?
Sarah: I’d like to get out and stretch my legs (Carry on driving through village)
…
Chloe: Now we’re coming out of town (Carrying on driving)
Chloe commenting on coming into next village
Dave saying looking for signposts
Chloe noticing signpost for station de ski
Dave: Yeah, I think stop somewhere around here and see
Chloe: What about going up to the ski station?
Dave: What I want to do is make sure we park where we’re not too far from where we can eat – Like near an auberge. I’m not going to be doing too much driving because I don’t want to drive up into the high Chartreuse where we’d need snow tyres (Slowing down)
Dave: How about there?
Chloe: There’s a cafe restaurant
Dave: Shall I park up here somewhere?
Chloe: Yeah
Dave turning off road into parking area. Pulls into parking space next to other cars and stops.
Near tourist information office and just after cafe-restaurant Chloe pointed out.

Note here how there had been no prior decision made about an exact place to stop and it takes work in the course of driving just to figure out what an appropriate place might be. It starts with a vague effort to locate relevant signposts, but concretizes around the spotting of a café restaurant by Chloe, which will facilitate part of the plan in view of providing somewhere to go and eat as well. However, parking near the restaurant had not been formulated as a part of the plan. Rather, it presented itself as an appropriate proposition in situ. Of course, once you have come to a stop there are still things to be done. The bringing together before setting off is essentially a provisional and contingent bringing together of possibly required things. There is now the work of ascertaining
what should actually come along. Here, too, there are those who have the right
to decide and do the actual apportioning, and others who are expected to do what
is asked of them. A detail here is that it is snowy outside and everyone needs to
don certain appropriate pieces of apparel. Thus there is a rather long-winded but
necessary procedure adopted whereby Dave passes things into the car from the
boot so that people can put them on before getting out, which then becomes a
business of getting out and dressed one at a time.

Once everybody is out of the car and ready there is still work involved in seeing
what it will take to begin the visit: Just where do you go? Just what signs do you
follow? In this particular case the work involved is extensive. It involves decisions
about whether to eat first or walk first, research regarding what information is
available in situ, the work of locating meaningful signs, the work of ascertaining
what routes might be followed and what grounds would make them appropriate
e.g. duration), and, preliminary to all of this, the work of uncovering just exactly
where you are in relation to everything else that might be of interest.

Walk across car park together to look at tourist information office
Get to map on board showing footpaths around the area
Chloe and Dave work out together which car park (marked P) they are at on
the map
Chloe: OK, so there’s a sentier [footpath] (pointing to map) just here
Dave: Just there, yes. Towards the parapente.
Chloe: (tracing path around in a circle and back to P sign)

Figure 7.6 Tracing a possible route
Chloe: Perhaps we can do that. *(Looking up at tourist information office)* It looks shut to me up there, but I’ll go and look anyway.

Dave: It is shut, yeah. There’s no lights on or anything.

(*)

Chloe: So, if we’re here *(pointing to map again)* La Chappelle is there.

Dave: We’re at the tourist information anyway, aren’t we. We’re on the main road. I think we’re here *(pointing to map where there’s an ‘i’ symbol)*

Chloe: Which way are we facing then?

Dave: Erm, well we know that the er-

Chloe: The parapente is up that way

Dave: Yeah

Chloe: So if we head out-

Dave: So that’s looking that direction, yeah *(pointing to map and then pointing towards bank behind them)*

Chloe: I’ll go and see if there’s anything up here

*Chloe goes up steps to tourist information office. Dave follows.*

Walk around the outside and browse through some brochure they find next to the door, then discuss what to do

Chloe: *(as Dave walks back towards them)* I think we ought to go and eat first.

Dave: What time is it?

Chloe: It’s twenty to twelve

Dave: Is it?!

Chloe: If we go for a two hour walk everything will be shut by the time we get back

Dave: Right, okay. That’s good.

Chloe saying really thinks they should eat before they go

*Dave goes up steps to look at signpost as Chloe takes picture of information board*

*(Kids playing making snowballs during all this time)*

Dave gets to signpost and studies it
Walks back to join others
Dave: Do you not want to do one of the forty minute ones before we eat, just to
work up a bit of an appetite, because there a moulin whatisface that takes forty
minutes going that way (pointing)
Chloe: Okay lets go up and decide together
Dave: There’s several forty minute ones
All walk back up to signposts, Chloe calling them to come along as they depart
Dave: So there’s the signpost. What d’you fancy?
Chloe: We’ll head for the Moulin de Porte Traine, and we’ll decide where it
branches I suppose, whether we want to carry on to do the slightly longer one
Dave: Yeah
Chloe: If we only do the forty minute one we’ll be back in time
Dave: And we’ll build up more of an appetite because I’m really not hungry yet
All start to head off together along path indicated by the signpost

Conducting the Visit
We have already revealed in the preceding discussion a wealth of practices involved
in families going out for a day in the country that have done nothing more than get the
family to the point where they can begin their visit. In this next section we take a look
at some of the various practices involved in visiting itself. Some of these continue to
be tightly ordered and dependent upon one another’s realization. Others are much
more contingent but nonetheless central to how specific visits are accomplished
in the way they are. The actual doing of the visit is most particularly contingent
upon the decisions made, the nature of the visit, and the character of the locale.
There are, however, some notably robust features that can be seen to resonate across many such undertakings and these are the features upon which we shall concentrate.

It is in the way of visits to these kinds of settings that exactly what route is to be followed is something that is under constant potential revision, adaptation and elaboration. Almost straight away this becomes a feature of this family’s visit as the prospect of visiting a waterfall presents itself to them:

Chloe brushing snow off of signs as Dave comes up
Chloe: This is where it branches apparently
Dave: Okay
Chloe: So it’s a one hour route that way (pointing to right).
Dave: Okay
Chloe: A forty minute route to the left
Dave: Okay, we’re probably taking the shorter one aren’t we? In view of the fact they’re fretting already
Chloe: It says there’s cascades as well
Dave: Oooh!
Chloe: I wonder if it’s on the way? A frozen waterfall would be fantastic.
Dave: It would

Another implicit but vital part of visiting sites such as nature reserves is the work involved in actually finding one’s way around. A particularly striking feature here is how much of the wayfinding is both collaborative across the whole of the family and actively negotiated and made explicitly visible, e.g. ‘there’s a sign over there’. Note also the part that can come to be played by the traces left by other people.

Chloe: There’s a sign over by that tree (pointing to a tree in middle of large expanse of snow).
Paul: We’re not going to be able to read it from here are we?
...
Dave tries zooming in with his camera
Dave: I can’t quite get a focus on it because my hands moving too much.
Somebody want to come and hold it steady?
Jane comes and takes camera and tries zooming in instead
Jane can’t get a focus either. She suggests getting out her tripod but they decide it would be too much effort.
Carry on following the tracks left by other people
Chloe, Paul, Marcus and Sarah have come to a halt up ahead
As Dave and Jane reach them Dave reports on problem of getting a focus on the sign
Chloe: (Pointing to a post with two arrows on it pointing different directions) I think we have to turn right. That’s our most informative post there.

Figure 7.8  Signpost off the path
Dave: Right
Chloe: We must be heading towards that signpost there
Dave: We must be
Sarah: Mum, there are footmarks leading that way
Chloe: There are. We’ll go that way. There’s one leading that way too, but we
don’t know where it goes.
Dave: No

The remarkable and the mundane. The preceding points are tightly bound up with how the family goes about managing the fashion in which it traverses the landscape. However, there are also a number of recurrently visible features that relate to what the family does as it is traversing the landscape. Something that particularly provides for the character of a specific visit is just what comes to be taken note of along the way. This is, after all, an implicit or even overt element of rationales for visiting nature reserves: going to see what’s there and making visible you have seen it when you’ve seen it.

What all this amounts to is that there are things to be attended to and things that are passed by without remark, being oriented to as utterly mundane features of the environment in some way. It is also worth noting that it is not solely a case of people remarking for their own benefit. Much of what happens amongst groups is ‘callings to attention’ where some feature is explicitly pointed out to some or all of the other members in your party:

Paul suddenly runs ahead and stops a little further up, looking to the right.
Paul: Everybody come here!
Everyone walks up to join him.
Dave: Oh wow, yeah, I see. The mountains.
(spectacular view of the mountains with clouds banking up around them)
Paul: A nice shot.
Some aspects of what might count as remarkable or mundane fall out of the above observations. So one thing that makes a difference is the understood objectives of the visit. What one sees of a snow-filled landscape as a skier is not necessarily what one sees as someone there to walk or to observe wildlife. The sheer legibility of the environment can also matter. Being unable to recognize what it is you are seeing can make it an explicit object of reference as part of the work of trying to figure out just what it is. At the same time, certain plants or animals can be passed over by some as ‘just another bird’ or whatever, whilst for others the fact it is a specific bird is exactly what will make it worthy of remark. Some things are recurrently presented within landscapes as objects of anticipated interest (e.g. viewing points), and other things are clearly almost impossible to be appropriately made an object of interest without subsequent account (e.g. paths themselves, which might be an object of interest to those managing the site or other similar sites, but where ‘oh look, it’s a path’ would be a strange utterance for most people). This latter point emphasizes something else about all of this: differing cohorts have an important impact upon what might count as interesting in any particular case. Nothing is intrinsically interesting in and as of itself

Making a record Something that can feature strongly in family visits to nature reserves is the making of a record of various aspects of the visit, usually by means of cameras. Much of this is once again premised around what is worthy of interest and capture, with the added element that family members themselves and their actions can count as part of this. Here are some ways in which this concern was made manifest during the specific visit we followed:

Example A:

Dave and Chloe wait at the displays for everyone to catch up

When Jane arrives she gets out the family camera and takes a photograph of the view across the valley to the mountains

Example B:

Chloe breaks icicles off of house eaves as passing and hands them to the children

As walking back to car they fight with them like swords and some break in two

A little further along Paul positions two halves so that it looks as though he has been impaled on one from his back through to his front

Then he does the same on either side of his head

Jane takes a photo
Example C:

Jane decides to take some photos of the cascade
Chloe gets tripod out of her backpack for her
Jane sets up the tripod and attaches her camera
Chloe heads off with Marcus and Sarah
Jane peers through viewfinder, adjusts angle of camera and adjusts focus
Starts to take photos
Chloe calls back and says there’s a place where they can get a shot of the middle of the cascade
Jane, Paul and Dave walk up path
Chloe tells her to follow the animal tracks
Walk through trees following tracks
Dave goes to join Jane as she sets up camera in new place looking straight across to the cascade
Takes several photos then moves upstream a short distance to take more
Then comes back again and takes another lot with a different ISO

Figure 7.10 An icicle through the head
Then detaches camera from tripod and takes more shots just holding the camera
Folds the tripod down and then they head back to join Paul who is waiting for them
Then the three of them follow the path back up to join the others

Figure 7.11 Photographing the cascade

The above examples illustrate a number of discrete orientations to photography it is worth noting. In Example A it is all about capturing things of interest within the landscape, such as views. Example B is about capturing the presence and deeds of specific people within the group. In Example C the interest is overtly artistic. Notice how these differing orientations impact upon what might count as being both worthy of capture and as appropriate work and effort, with ‘art photography’ being unproblematically allowed to call upon significant amounts of investment, whilst the same amount of investment attached to ‘family snaps’ would require significant account.
Reading displays, reading the landscape  Another part of the business of uncovering aspects of the environment worthy of attention or otherwise is the work that can happen with situated displays, i.e. noticeboards or information panels of various kinds inserted in the landscape. Consider the following:

Sarah, Chloe and Dave arrive at a viewing point looking across to mountains with two boards laid across the top of posts

Chloe walks up to one and starts to sweep the snow off of it

When snow is swept off it’s just a blank board underneath

Figure 7.12  Working with situated displays
A Day Out in the Country

Chloe: There’s not actually anything on them right now
Chloe walks over to the other board – sweeps off snow
Chloe: Nothing either

... Dave tries to lift board and finds it is hinged so that you can raise it up
Dave: Ah, no no no no, No no. It doesn’t work like that, look.
Sarah: Mum!
P: It is actually a workable display that knows that it gets snowy
S: Mum!
Dave: Because it opens up (see above)
Chloe: Ah!
Dave: See
Chloe: For clever people.
Dave: Yes, for clever people. So they’ve thought about the snow

Clearly such displays are positioned by those managing the site in an effort to explicate certain aspects of the locale in some way. A couple of things fall out of this, however. First of all something has to be recognized as a display to that purpose and this is not always straightforward. Secondly, the explication turns upon the recognizability of the things being explicated in situ and this, too, can prove problematic.

What the work of trying to disambiguate a situated display reveals is that there are ways in which it forms a part of a larger enterprise of trying to make the landscape one is passing through legible. This not simply another aspect of wayfinding. It is, once again, as much about trying to locate within the environment what should and could be worthy of your interest.

Being together, being apart

Something of particular moment for how family days out unfold, especially in open environments such as nature reserves, is the work various members of the family undertake to preserve proximity and contact with one another, or the opposite. Evidently, for a family of six to retain tight proximity to one another throughout the course of a lengthy walk around a nature reserve is improbable. Rather, what happens is that various members of the group break off together to form sub-groups: various numbers of siblings together, or individual parents with certain siblings, or even, occasionally, certain individuals on their own. All of the sub-groups engage in work to retain some kind of degree of proximity to one another, usually on the grounds of lines of sight, occasionally by calling out. These sub-groups can form apparently spontaneously around a number of different orientations and are hugely flexible over the course of the visit. Individuals on their own can be understood to be going about their ordinary business (e.g. taking photos, finding a place to go to the toilet, taking in the view, and so on). Going off on your own, however, can also be understood to be problematic for the rest of the group in some way and called to account accordingly. What is clear is that all members of the group are continually engaged...
in the business of monitoring where one another are and proceeding on the basis of this. To ‘not notice’ that you have fallen behind, or left everyone else behind, or gone a different way, etc. happens on a regular basis, but it is also routinely called to account by others in the group.

Chloe and Dave set off down path, then stop and turn round to wait for others to catch up
Jane turns round and calls out: Sarah, come on!
Sarah is only just visible behind them on the path
D ave: Come on sweetie!
Jane, Paul and Marcus walk along the path towards Chloe and Dave as Sarah slowly trudges up the slope behind them

Figure 7.13 Falling behind

The art of enjoyment and the accountability of pleasure Days out in the country are also very much about enjoyment and the ways in which members of the group work to make that enjoyment manifest to one another. You are not there to do workaday stuff and if you seem to be (e.g. by walking too purposefully, taking things too seriously, obsessing about the schedule, and so on) the others in your group will want to know why.

Enjoyment (or at least a willingness to be diverted and entertained) can be made manifest in a variety of ways: through laughter; jokes; clowning around; bothering to look; bothering to pay attention; exhibiting curiosity; taking up
features as worthy of recounting and talking about; and so on. Here is a case in point:

Paul balances a snowball on Sarah’s head as she stops beside him. Then Chloe leans over and wrestles Paul down so that he falls in the snow.

Figure 7.14 Clowning around

They both roll over in the snow.

Paul: (standing up) She used a wrestling move but I knew one too.

Chloe stands up as well and both brush themselves down, laughing.

Chloe tries to charge at Paul but he backs away and she falls over.

She reaches out and grabs his leg so that he can’t move without falling over.

Then Chloe tries to pull him down to the ground but doesn’t fall.

Then Sarah throws herself down on top of Chloe.

Chloe turns her over onto her back in the snow.

At the same time as all of this, family groups also clearly work to monitor these things in various ways. Pleasure, in these circumstances, is accountable and if pleasure is not what you see, you have, as a family member, generally the right to ask why. This is somewhat differential with parents clearly most engaged in this kind of work, but others in the group can take it up as well. So things that can definitely lead to concern amongst others can be seen to include: being sulky; being snappish; refusing obligations; looking glum; etc. As the following example demonstrates, in this group there was problem with one of the members whose camera was not working properly, and ‘because her camera isn’t working properly’ became a regular account for her not displaying pleasure appropriately. An additional twist here is that such accounts have a certain duration such that they don’t continually need to be reiterated. However, they also have a time limit.
and if they continue to act in the same way for too long they will start to be called to account instead for ‘making too much of it’:

Jane comes up and asks Chloe to take back family camera
Chloe: You don’t want it?
Jane: No
Chloe: At all?
Jane: No.
Chloe: You’ve got your other lens out. You’re going to have a go with that are you? (zipping up Jane’s backpack as asking)
Chloe: But please, don’t- every time it has a problem, please don’t witter

Calling it a Day

Days out like this do not typically come with a set end time, but of course, a stage is reached, especially where people are walking or otherwise exerting themselves in some way, where various members of the group start to voice a wish to ‘call it a day’. Sometimes it is first voiced by children who are getting tired, sometimes it’s voiced by teenagers who are getting bored, sometimes it’s more immediately universal (for instance when the heavens open and everyone is getting cold or wet). However, it is important to note that bringing the visit to a close doesn’t just happen by magic. This too involves work. Propositions or requests are made. Various people with various rights and responsibilities will ratify or otherwise, just as we have seen with regard to other matters along the way. This business of negotiation is an essential preliminary to the actual business of heading back. To ignore these interactional niceties and to just make a unilateral decision that you are heading back regardless would have powerful consequences, with others in the group immediately seeking out some kind of account. Here’s how the visit was brought to a close in our principal example. Note in particular how the proposition of calling it a day is not just made on its own but also accounted for in various ways: initially it’s about fatigue; then it also comes to be about the need to get back in time to eat:

Chloe: I’m tired now, let’s go back.
Dave: But we haven’t seen the waterfalls yet (decide to go and look at waterfall first)
Chloe: (to go and look at waterfall first)

Try to follow path down to waterfall but can’t get close and path heads parallel to watercourse instead of descending.
Chloe and Dave go ahead but it carries on the same way
Chloe: Let’s go back. I want to be back in time for lunch
Dave: Yes
Chloe: It’s one o’clock. It’ll take us an hour to get back. So we could – could go up by the village
A Day Out in the Country

1 Dave: Yep
2 Chloe: And on the road
3 Dave: Yep
4 Chloe: Perhaps back in half an hour and things might still be open
5 Dave: I hope so
6 Both walk back up the path to rejoin the children

8 Getting Ready to Go Home
10 There comes a point where everyone in the group is back at the car (or other point of departure) and getting ready to go home. Note here how departing retains some characteristics of both making ready and arriving. However, it is typically more constrained. The primary aspects here are: the relocation of the car; unburdening of individuals and replacement of things in the car; the redistribution of its occupants (which does not have to be exactly as it was before and can still be an object of negotiation); and the work involved in figuring out how to physically regain the route and head for home.

19 The Journey Home
21 The actual journey home from the site that has been visited is possessed of many similar characteristics to the journey there such as matters of wayfinding, toilet stops, and in-car entertainments. However, there are some distinctive features as well. In particular these involve working up through talk certain aspects of the visit that captured people somehow. This is not just a general discussion of what took place but rather specific recountings, discussions of the order of ‘what bit did you like’, and post-mortems regarding bits that didn’t go so well. Thus the journey home becomes one of the principal relevant occasions for the mutual working up, as a family group, of what was ‘interesting’ about the day and thus ‘storyable’ in some way. The journey home is also a prime occasion for future planning. Visits beget visits and in the car on the way home is at least one appropriate place for a next visit to be discussed. In the case of this particular visit discussion in the car on the way home returned several times to the topic of what it might be like up there in the summer and this, in turn, led to the proposition of going back to visit again the following summer and see.

37 Arriving Home
39 Something else our study revealed that should not be discounted is that a family doesn’t just arrive home and that is it. Instead it takes work to get back into the house after a visit. Some of this work is obvious but nonetheless an important aspect of the overall sequence that cannot be set aside without ramifications of some kind. Thus there is work involved in physically getting out of the car and regaining entry to the home, with various people having various rights of

Rouncefield_9781409437550.indb   187
2/22/2013   11:53:57 AM
precedence regarding entry. Then people will re-distribute themselves around the home in accountably appropriate ways. In this case Chloe started to get herself and Sarah out of their outdoor clothes whilst Paul took himself off upstairs and Marcus doodled on the guitar. Jane, meanwhile, was co-opted into assisting Dave with unloading the car. The actual unloading of the car can itself involve significant labour. On this occasion Dave systematically ferried everything into the living room first of all. Only after this did they begin to then re-locate various things to various locations, kitchen things (cups etc.) and rubbish to the kitchen, cameras etc to the living room table, coats and boots by the door, and so on.

Beyond these moments of first entry the immediate post-visit phase can be seen to involve the rapid re-occupancy of the home and the re-constitution of the household routine. One of the first topics of discussion in this case, for instance, was what to do about supper. Arriving home can also involve the recognition and handling of the house’s own contingencies (e.g. matters of heating and hot water, animals and their whereabouts, what would normally have been done during the day and hasn’t been, who may have called, and so on).

After the Visit has Taken Place

After a day out in the country has taken place the relevance of the visit to other matters becomes rapidly diffuse. Talk about the visit amongst the family mostly takes place in the car or immediately afterwards. Indeed, we should note that it would become accountably odd to continue to talk about it much beyond this. Instead one finds that talk about it amongst the family from here on in will address specific features as they are occasioned, for instance by other possibilities of trips, topics of interest, or looking through the photographs.

Conclusion

To conclude this analysis of family days out to nature reserves we want to concentrate in particular upon two aspects that sing loud and clear throughout all of the data. The first of these is the profoundly sequential character of such trips: the order of realization is almost impossible to overturn without it becoming something else entirely. The other is the extent to which the activities involved become an important canvas for the ongoing accomplishment of family relations.

Family Days Out – A Sequential Accomplishment

What is evident in our analysis of a family day out is the fact that the accomplishment consists of a series of remarkably consistent paired activities. You can’t decide where to go for the day if it’s never been occasioned in the first place, but at the same time the occasioning immediately implicates negotiation regarding where to go. Decisions about where to go themselves implicate various kinds of planning.
A Day Out in the Country

You can’t go on the trip without bringing relevant materials together or without doing the work of putting those things in the car. At the same time, to fill the car with stuff and then not go on the visit is implicative of all kinds of troubles and disappointments to come. The sheer activity implicates the trip ahead. The journey itself projects a moment of arrival and, as we have seen, arrival itself is not something that just happens by beaming in. Actions taken upon arrival themselves implicate how the day might unfold. The trip itself does not unfold without a projected end and the end itself implicates the work of getting back to the car, loading it up again, and driving home. Arriving home, too, is not a simple matter of getting back but rather replete with ordinary labour regarding reconstitution of the household routine.

What needs to be said about all of this is that this intensely sequential accomplishment is no kind of mystery to the parties involved. All of the practices of realization and orientations to ‘what comes next’ are things that members of households find utterly familiar and just anyone knows that this is what it takes to go out for the day as a family and what the whole affair turns upon. We need to reconsider, in that case, the status of the numerous theoretical accounts we mentioned in the introduction regarding what is going on when people go out for the day in this way. What seems apparent here is that there is no mystery for the people involved. They know exactly what they are up to and can account for it in all of the ways we have been outlining here (and more besides). Theoretical treatments of visiting practices regarding matters such as catharsis, or the adoption of a gaze, or the seeking out of difference, or whatever, completely overlook the mundane but essential work that is involved. Instead they project a view of what is going on that is, necessarily, partial to the analyst and therefore of no truly special privilege. It is just another account, another member’s perspective, that rides upon an unspoken presumption of all the practices we’ve been looking at here, but with the added ill that it does attempt to claim privilege even though it sits outside of any one specific happening and the actual in situ reasoning that such a happening would involve.

The other matter we want to emphasize here is that families do not get together like this so very much. There are numerous ways in which families do the ongoing work of making visible their relationships with one another, their concomitant rights and responsibilities, and the whole moral order of the home. Several other chapters in this book also take a look at this topic (see, for instance, Rouncefield and Tolmie on reading and Crabtree et al. on cooking). What is of value in this case is the sheer intensity of exposure the family have to one another’s presence in cases like this. Thus all of the work, all of the negotiation, all of the practices regarding proximity, pleasure, pain and playing, are situations where the specific relationships between people are inevitably made visible through what they take for granted and what they choose to call to account. Whilst certain meals, or living
room encounters, or arguments about the bathroom, etc., provide another canvas for the working up of the moral order of the home, in the case of days out in the country as a family, this work is going on all of the time. If ever a youngest child should wonder what she might be able to get away with, a day out with her family like this provides a salutary lesson. And the same goes for everyone else. These are the potential stresses of going out together in this way, but they are also the source of important updating regarding what is going on in each other’s lives and what you are really like here-and-now, not as an abstract proposition or character assessment, but rather as a matter of just what you do or do not do in practice with the rest of your family around you and what you do or do not orient to as of interest in some way.

Acknowledgements

The research on which this chapter is based was funded by EPSRC Grant EP/I001816/1 ‘Bridging the Rural Divide’ and EP/J000604/1. Our thanks to the family who allowed the whole of their trip, from conception to finish, to be observed throughout, warts and all.