

## **GRAMNet and CAMAS**

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Camas is a unique rural retreat premised upon environmentally sustainable living in a collective, self care environment, set within a Scottish landscape of moors and bogs on the Isle of Mull located off the western coast of Scotland. The focal point of Camas is to be found in the row of 200 year old rustic farm buildings built in a style reminiscent of the Georgian period, overlooking a stunning bay with a tidal inlet to a salt marsh inhabited by seabirds and cuckoos.

Black faced Scottish sheep and their shy lambs graze the vivid green grass alongside the bay, tended by a shepherdess and her 2 collies. The shepherdess is greeted as part of the Camas community and welcomed to the communal meals and evening entertainment. Vegetarian dining is supported by fruits and vegetables grown in the Camas gardens and tunnel houses. Guests at Camas are welcomed as part of this community and also share in some of the daily chores which include looking after the dogs, ducks, hens and cockerels; gardening; cooking; and cleaning bathrooms.

Our group comprised PhD students who are part of GRAMNet, the University of Glasgow Refugee and Migration Network. Many hail, like Peter Squires and myself from UniSA, from foreign climes that included Rumania, Poland, Germany, South Africa, Brazil, England and Scotland. Many also had prior experience with service organisations or NGOs working in the refugee space, that were a precursor to their developing research interests. The PhD discipline focus of our group was spread across ethnography, sociology, media and law; a varied discipline reach, with all sharing in a common humanitarian concern for the global refugee crisis.

There were many opportunities to discuss our research interests during the 5 plus hour journey to Camas that we took together: the train from Glasgow to the beautiful and bountiful seaside village of Oban; the ferry to Mull; the bus to the roadside entry to Camas; and then the mile long trek to Camas proper. At Camas we were thrown into living a communal, rural lifestyle, with no internet or phone access, and neither, indeed, electricity to the bathroom and sleeping dorms. Perhaps we were meant to be cognisant of the deprivations that refugees suffer. We attended group seminars on research methodology and research writing; but also shared discussions of our research focus as we participated in some of the outdoor activities that included walks and beachside activities, and even swimming – or ‘coasteering’ to be more accurate. The outdoor pursuits reflected a Camas focus upon connection - to the environment, both built and natural, and to each other. The awareness of connection resonated again with the loss of connection that refugees suffer.

Post-Camas, Peter Squires and myself had the opportunity to present our research to scholars at the University of Glasgow which gave us a wonderful opportunity to respond to questions and also receive some fruitful feedback and comparative perspectives on our research. Peter and I also had a meeting with Prof Alison Strang, a scholar and policy adviser to the Scottish government on matters concerning the re-settlement of refugees. Camas, GRAMNet and the University of Glasgow, individually and collectively provided a remarkable and very special experience. I am very grateful to have received this fellowship.