1-1B Developing and exploring virtual field course environments and their role in learning

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At the University of Exeter we are exploring and investing in new digital technology to create online and virtual field courses. This includes 360° virtual reality environments, underwater lectures and static 360° tours. To date, field trip activities in Kenya, China and Cornwall have been recorded in 360° as a platform to bring these incredible field locations into every day learning. From a functional perspective, these virtual environments enhance accessibility, widen participation in schools and at outreach events and can be embedded in online courses such as MOOCs. However, whilst they offer a highly visceral environment for learning to be staged, the depth to which learners can explore them is limited by the area captured and the experiential nature of field trips inevitably suffers. In this presentation, I will detail our journey that explored the wide variety of technology and software available to record and present virtual environments and illustrate how we have worked with students to capture and develop relevant and exciting content. A key question we will explore is whether virtual environments offer unique, sub-standard or similar opportunities to learners relative to field visits. Students engaged in the design, filming and delivery of virtual environments for a new Cornwall-based MOOC on sustainability will present their thoughts on learner gains that can result from exciting virtual environments.