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River Experience:
A Phenomenological Description of Meaningful
Experiences on a Wilderness River Journey

by

Marcus Morse

B. Environmental Design, B. Teaching (Hons.)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

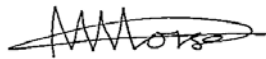
School of Geography and Environmental Studies

University of Tasmania

April 2011

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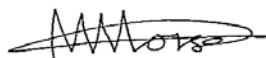


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Abstract

Outdoor educators, nature-based tourism guides and private recreationalists make use of wilderness river areas for extended journeys. The justification for running such trips commonly involves the potential ‘experience’ that it affords participants. Yet the experiences themselves are often unique, individual and difficult to describe. While ‘the experience’ is commonly used as a justification for such journeys, experience itself does not always appear to be well understood or easily articulated.

This research project explores participant descriptions of meaningful experiences on a wilderness river journey, in order to answer the questions ‘what forms of meaningful experiences might occur on a wilderness river journey?’, ‘what components of the journey facilitate those meaningful experiences?’, ‘what is the role of the wilderness landscape itself in facilitating those experiences?’, and ‘what is the potential value of meaningful wilderness experiences subsequent upon returning to everyday life?’. The research uses a phenomenological approach to elucidate individual perceptions of meaningful experiences, and then combines the recollections to reveal the commonalities within those experiences. Using interviews, journals, observations and follow-up emails from 32 participants on eight Franklin River (ten day) trips, the project moves from the individual to the collective, to identify and describe the qualities and essences of meaningful experiences on a wilderness river journey.

The research identifies two recurrent key ‘streams of experience’. These involve *a feeling of humility* and *being alive to the present*. By interrogating the thematic structure of participant descriptions surrounding these two streams of experience, invariant structures are revealed. These invariant structures further provide the opportunity to refocus on individual participant descriptions, and illuminate the essential qualities of the phenomena described.

It is argued that by understanding potentially meaningful experiences on a wilderness river journey, outdoor educators, commercial guides and facilitators will be better

able to make use of surrounding environs to facilitate such experiences. There is a focus on the unique elements of the wilderness river journey that, in this research, contributed to the unique experiences which participants valued as meaningful.

Acknowledgements

This research project has proven more difficult than I had, at the outset, innocently imagined. It has caused me to ask questions not only of my own understanding and experience of wilderness river journeys, but also of myself. Without the encouragement and support of those around me, this would not have been possible.

I owe most to my partner Pip, whose belief, realism, encouragement, support, humour and love throughout provided me the opportunity to undertake this journey. There is no one with whom I would rather be on the river. Immeasurable thanks also to my supervisor, Dr Peter Hay, for the gifts of supervision, encouragement, belief and friendship throughout, and an appreciation of times both on and off the river.

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Thanks also to the staff and post-grad students within the School of Geography and Environmental Studies, a wonderful group of people committed to inquiry and learning. And to the staff within the School of Education, who enabled me to finish this thesis in a timely manner and good humour.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Understanding the Wilderness Experience

Many of us are drawn to natural environments and to wilderness in particular. No one makes us go for a walk along the beach or in the bush, or journey down the river; we are drawn there by some impulse within ourselves. It is not easy to define what we take from such experiences, yet they are often recalled as inspirational or meaningful moments in our lives (Nettleton, 1995). Nor is it easy to understand why we might enjoy spending weeks trudging through the mud, camping under a tarp or rafting in the rain. The experiences that take place on wilderness journeys are personal and complex. While there has been much research into ‘wilderness experience’ over the past decades, there has been, and still is, a consistent call to better understand the experience itself (Ashley, 2007; Borrie and Birzell, 2001; Ewert and McAvoy, 2000; Knopf, 1987; Payne, 2005).

While ‘the experience’ is commonly used as a justification for outdoor journeys, both in outdoor education and nature-based tourism, experience itself does not always appear to be well understood or easily articulated. Where is ‘experience’ situated, and what makes something *an* experience? What is it to have a moving or meaningful experience in the outdoors? What is it about such experiences that make us feel them to be personally meaningful? Are there commonalities in the *way* people experience a particular wilderness environment? Is there something, a common quality perhaps, about an interaction with a place that might pre-reflectively affect individuals, so that, despite each post facto recollection of the experience being individually unique, there is some essence of that shared original interaction still available? Experience, then, is central to this research project. If we outdoor education practitioners are to continue to base our practice on ‘the experience’ of participants, it is imperative that we have an understanding, or ‘philosophy’, of experience to guide our actions (Dewey, 1938b).

There is still much that is not well understood about ‘meaningful’ wilderness experiences. Despite numerous studies exploring a variety of potentially meaningful

experiences in wilderness environments, including ‘spiritual’ (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999; Schmidt and Little, 2007) or ‘transcendent’ (Williams and Harvey, 2001), there is an elusive quality to such experiences that makes them very difficult to study (Ewert and McAvoy, 2000). While these experiences do take place in complex physical, cultural and social contexts, there is an imperative to understand the subtle ways in which the surrounds, particularly the ambient natural environment, might influence a person’s experiences. As Fredrickson and Anderson suggest:

Frequently these types of powerful or ‘transcendent’ experiences are experienced in a natural outdoor setting, and are usually the result of an intense physical and / or emotional challenge. However, relatively little is known as to how much of an influence the natural environment itself has on the individual’s experience (1999, p. 22).

We commonly make use of natural environments to provide the opportunity for personally meaningful or valuable experiences for participants, and often undertake journeys on rivers to provide such opportunities. River environments offer up a unique set of opportunities to explore peoples’ interactions, and, while research has been conducted in this area (Brookes, 2001; Stewart, 2004b; Thomas and Thomas, 2000; Wattachow, 2007, 2008), there is still considerable scope for further study, and for an enlarged range of perspectives and contexts. In Australia, for example, much research over the past decade has proceeded from a social constructivist perspective and has commonly involved undergraduate outdoor education students.

Journeying on rivers has long been recognised as providing a variety of meaningful experiences / values for participants that could be further enhanced by a deeper understanding of those experiences. As Thomas and Thomas suggest:

There is no limit on the potential of moving water paddling to contribute to the education of participants for more environmentally sustainable living. The richness of that contribution will be determined by the way the moving water paddling experiences are designed, framed, and facilitated (2000, p. 53).

In order to understand the ways in which educators, guides and recreationists might best provide opportunities for meaningful / valuable experiences, we must understand, to the best of our ability, the experiences themselves and the influence that the natural environment might have upon such experiences. It is the purpose of this research to contribute to just such an understanding by exploring personal experiences of a wilderness river journey.

1.2 The Research Questions and Objectives

The research questions, then, for this project are:

1. What forms of meaningful experiences might occur on a wilderness river journey?
2. What components of the journey facilitate those meaningful experiences?
3. What is the role of the wilderness landscape itself in facilitating those experiences?
4. What is the potential value of meaningful wilderness experiences subsequent upon returning to everyday life?

The research questions are derived from a curiosity about participant comments at the end of wilderness journeys that imply personally meaningful experiences, but that can be difficult to describe. The term ‘meaningful experiences’ in this research is used to define those experiences that participants on wilderness journeys perceive as:

- Significant or important
- Personally moving
- Profound, but hard to describe

The research objective is to identify the essential qualities of participants’ meaningful experiences on a wilderness river journey, in order that educators, guides and facilitators might better understand these types of experience and, therefore, be able to facilitate possible opportunities for such meaningful experience to occur.

At the heart of this research project is the problem that, although outdoor educators and guides commonly invoke the *experience* as a justification for taking people into the outdoors, ‘experience’ itself is not always well understood, particularly as it relates to those intimate and potentially profound moments that people describe as personally meaningful.

1.3 Methodological Considerations

A phenomenological approach will be used within this research. Such an approach is considered particularly effective in providing a deep understanding, and description, of participants’ lived experiences in natural settings as they might naturally occur, and was identified early in the project as an appropriate framework from which to proceed (further explained in Chapter 3). As Fredrickson points out:

Typical modes of study and research on hard-to-define values must be broadened to include studies that encourage a more phenomenological line of inquiry. Phenomenological inquiry allows the researcher a ‘window-view’ into the lived-experience of the individual, providing a rich descriptive account of various aspects of the phenomenon being studied (1996, p. 136).

I will trust in the phenomenological approach to guide the exploration of human experience as the thesis unfolds. Thus, there is a deliberate attempt at the beginning of the journey to limit theoretical pre-conceptions. As Hay suggests, “the point of phenomenology, after all, is to suspend theory so that Being can be met, unmediated” (2003, p. 247). The phenomenological approach provides a consistent philosophical and methodological framework from which to proceed towards achieving the research objectives.

1.4 Chapter Outlines

Chapter two presents a review of the main concepts implied within the research questions. These include ‘wilderness’, the ‘nature of experience’ and previously described ‘understandings of meaningful wilderness experiences’. This review does

not seek to pre-define what *meaningful experiences* on a wilderness river journey might look like; rather, it surveys the literature broadly surrounding these concepts.

Chapter three describes the way in which the research questions, my background and the intended contribution of the research combine to inform the use of a phenomenological framework. This chapter also articulates the phenomenological approach, and the way in which such an approach results in the application of particular research methods. Chapter four presents the practical research design, the decision making process, including the selection of site and samples, timeframes, and strategies and techniques employed. Included in chapter four is a description of the process used for data analysis, including the movement from the individual to the collective in search of common patterns, the use of concept maps, and the use of a qualitative software program.

Chapter five begins by considering the results of the individual thematic coding and concept mapping of recollections, and then considers the thematic relationships and conversational structures that were common amongst the collective recollections. It proceeds to a platform or ‘starting point’ from which to consider two forms of meaningful experience that appear as distinctive amongst the collective descriptions of meaningful experiences obtained from participants.

Chapters six and seven proceed to describe those potential ‘streams of experience’ which form distinctive hubs of conversational description. The streams of experience described involve a sense of ‘humility’ (chapter six) and a feeling of being ‘alive to the present’ (chapter seven). The two streams are explored via individual recollections grouped around themes and thematic relationships. By exploring these recollections, in depth, there becomes apparent a set of ‘essential qualities’ and an ‘invariant structure’ which helps to describe the *essence* of the phenomenon being considered. While these streams of experience appear as distinctive through many participant recollections, it also becomes apparent that every individual experience is unique. There is some evidence, as well, that these types of experience influence and potentially facilitate each other.

Chapter eight discusses the results of this research, in light of the previously described literature from chapter two. It also extends these discussions by considering elements of the journey which appeared to contribute to the meaningful experiences described, and the value of such experiences. Chapter nine combines the previous discussions to highlight the potential implications for guides, facilitators, program designers and educators, as well as considering the limitations of the research project and possible future directions for research. There then follows, in chapter ten, a summing up of the project.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relating to *wilderness*, *the nature of experience* and *understandings of meaningful experiences of wilderness*. The review of literature presented difficulties in the early part of the project. The original literature review highlighted the need to better understand and be able to describe the original experience, and thus, when combined with the original questions and my own paradigm, resulted in a phenomenological approach being selected. The phenomenological approach, including bracketing, involves a suspension of preconceptions that will be discussed in the methodology chapter, but affected the way in which the literature review was approached. In addition, the phenomenological approach aims to give voice to the way the world appears for us in terms of lived experience, potentially using a variety of data.

For these two reasons the original literature review was pared back to include elements that set the context of the research, while the remainder of the literature was re-read alongside the participants descriptions in order to make use of the literature to be able to add to the understanding and description of the way the world appears for us during meaningful experiences in a wilderness setting. The phenomenological approach seeks to “describe as closely as possible the way the world makes itself evident to awareness, the way things first arise in our direct, sensorial experience” (Abram, 1996, p. 35) and it makes sense to use the literature to add to or amplify the patterns that emerge within participant descriptions. At this stage the intent is to leave the notion of *meaningful experiences* slightly amorphous, in order to accurately reflect the research process, and not pre-suppose responses to the original question: “What forms of meaningful experiences might occur on a wilderness journey?”.

2.2 Wilderness

‘Wilderness’ is a contested concept (Driver, Nash and Haas, 1987). While many people have a sense of what wilderness is, applying specific definitions to

wilderness, or qualifying an area as wilderness or non-wilderness, proves more difficult. The desire for a definitive meaning of wilderness has, at times, served to promote a dualism for which the concept is criticised, and which has hampered efforts to preserve what many of us might understand as wilderness. Is wilderness real, or have we in the western world created it? Certainly the term ‘wilderness’ means different things to different people: “wilderness, in short, is so heavily freighted with meaning of a personal, symbolic, and changing kind as to resist easy definition” (Nash, 1967, p. 1). However, what are commonly recognised as wilderness landscapes do exist, and there are common threads, too, of meaning within the term.

There is a need to define the meaning of ‘wilderness’ employed within this research project for two reasons. Firstly, it defines a context of space and place within which responses to the project’s research questions will be sought, and where the matters under investigation have previously been reported. Secondly, the way people conceive of wilderness has changed over time, and this impacts on the way people experience such places today. Our experience of natural environments, and ‘wilderness’ in particular, has changed over time as our relationship to it has changed. While it can be argued that the idea of wilderness is a recent social construction (Cronon, 1995), this does not necessarily diminish the personal experiences of individuals who venture into wild places and are thereby compelled to ask questions of themselves.

Wilderness can be understood as a synthesis of both a physical entity and the way in which humans experience that entity: “the core of the difficulty lies in the fact that wilderness is not merely a condition of the land, but also a condition of the mind evoked by the land” (Robinson, 1975, p. 168). Wilderness exists partly in the minds of humans; we invented the *term* and it has become part of our language, representing an ever-changing idea, however, “asserting that ‘nature’ is an idea is far from saying that it is only an idea, that there is no concrete referent out there in the world for the many human meanings we attach to the word” (Cronon, 1996, p. 21). This section will begin by considering the origin of the term ‘wilderness’, and then consider the ways in which our conception of that concrete referent has changed over time, and continues to do so.

2.2.1 Origins and Development of the term “Wilderness”

The term “wilderness” comes from “*wild-dēor*”; where *wild* is derived from the Norse language root of *will* (willed, self-willed or uncontrolled) which was then applied to the Old English *dēor* meaning animal (creature or beast) to form *wilddēor* (Nash, 1967). Thus the original sense of the term wilderness connotes land (likely forested) favoured by wild or uncontrolled creatures: “etymologically, the term means ‘wild-dēor-ness’, the place of wild beasts” (Nash, 1967, p. 2). In other words, places that were not hospitable to humans and that may have resulted in emotional stress or loss of control; hence a bewildered state.

Such places have existed ever since the arrival of humans, but as places in which, for a time, we preconsciously existed, rather than as ‘wilderness’ that was ‘other than human’. That the term was introduced at all infers a change in human habitation and living conditions that ‘othered’ these areas: “civilisation created wilderness. For nomadic hunters and gatherers, who have represented our species for most of its existence, everything natural is simply habitat, and people understood themselves to be part of a seamless living community” (Nash, 2002, p. 43). What we have developed, over time, is a different relationship to such places.

The concept of ‘wilderness’ is socially constructed. To say that humans, and civilisation in particular, *created* wilderness, though, hints at an unwarranted dualism. Leopold offers an alternative perspective: “wilderness is the raw material out of which man has hammered the artefact called civilization. Wilderness was never a homogenous raw material. It was very diverse, and the resulting artefacts are very diverse. These differences in the end-product are known as cultures” (Leopold, 1966, pp. 241-42). The term ‘wilderness’ may be a human creation, but the places themselves are not. That we have shaped wilderness is only part of the story; wilderness has also shaped us.

While the term ‘wilderness’ itself did not gain general recognition until the late fourteenth century, with the first English translation of the Latin Bible (Nash, 1967,

p. 2), the physical referent landscapes themselves – essentially ‘where the wild things lived’ and were not improved to meet the needs of humans – have existed since human pre-history. It is the way in which these landscapes and places have *appeared to us* that has changed over time, and with it our conception and experience of such places. As humans have developed, we have storied our cultures with ways of knowing and understanding our place in the world, and the idea of wilderness has played no small part in this. Whilst we now have both the physical entity and the term ‘wilderness’, we are in danger of living in a terrestrial world where we will have but the term: “for the first time in the history of the human species, two changes are now impending. One is the exhaustion of wilderness in the more habitable portions of the globe” (Leopold, 1966, p. 242).

Today, wilderness areas (and their management plans) are commonly defined by the following qualities:

- A large size;
- Remoteness from civilisation;
- Naturalness;
- An intact biodiversity; and
- Substantially undisturbed or constrained by modern human activity.

Examples include the *U.S. Wilderness Act* (1964), *Wilderness Alberta* (1985) and the *Tasmanian World Heritage Area Management Plan* (1999).

These qualities are not inconsistent with the original intent of the term, however, there has been a tendency to try to understand and define wilderness primarily from a human perspective that often denies the intrinsic worth and qualities of wild places. Rather than accept wilderness as ‘out there’ and separate from us, there is a need to understand the context of human history that has resulted in the current western conception of such places. What follows is a description of our changing relationship with wild nature, which involves an evolving view of ourselves and our place on the planet.

2.2.2 Changing Conceptions of Wilderness: Prehistoric to Agricultural

Humans have, for the greater part of their time on Earth, been hunters and gatherers, living as part of the community of terrestrial life and inhabiting different types of landscapes: “since our divergence from apes, humans have been hunter-gatherers for 350,000 generations, then mostly agriculturists for 600, industrialized in some parts of the world for 8 to 10, and lately dependent on industrialized agriculture for just 2 generations” (Pretty, 2002, p. 5). Developing an empathetic view of the way our pre-historic forebears related to the wilderness is a difficult thing, as Max Oelschlaeger suggests: “civilisation makes comprehending the relevance of the deep past to our self understanding difficult... The problem is that we are through and through civilised human beings who have drawn rigid distinctions between ourselves and the wilderness” (1991, p. 5). Nevertheless, as we question our relationship to the natural world we must at least make an effort to understand how it has been in the past, and how it might be in the future.

It is difficult to imagine a world without civilization, and even more difficult to view such a world through uncivilized eyes. To make the attempt, though, is to accept that nature and culture were inextricably inter-related, humans lived *within* nature and boundaries did not exist. Humans lived in the natural world and were not separate from it; could not be separate from it. If wilderness was where humans lived then they, too, were the wild ones. While there could be recognition of the ‘otherness’ in all things, there would always be a connection that reflected the community of life upon which humans relied. Nature *was* culture and the basis of life. It is the imagination of a non-linear world of life and death, natural cycles and a sacred connection to the natural world.

While living as part of nature, humans undoubtedly preferred some types of landscapes, in terms of their survival, movement-friendly or comfort qualities, that may well have constructed the preferences for landscape type that still exist today (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1995; Nash, 1967). But, rather than seeking escape from, or the destruction of, non-preferred landscapes, pre-historic humans saw the *entire* natural

world as part of the system upon which they relied and were a part of, and therefore they related to all of nature in a mythical, totemic or sacred way that reflected the reliance they had on natural systems (Oelschlaeger, 1991). The wilderness then was the ‘home’ of humans, but not in the way we might view home; rather it was completely their world, without distinction or boundary. It is not possible to know precisely how pre-historic humans related to the landscapes that we now refer to as wilderness, but it seems certain that it involved both a survivalist relationship with a hostile environment and a sacred connection. While it is tempting to believe that pre-historic humans disliked the wilderness and were looking to escape it for a more sedentary civilized life, this may not have been the case. Indeed, “one thing is clear: no longing for civilization and abhorrence of wild nature led to agri-culture. Such an explanation is a modernist gesture, usually accompanied by arguments that prehistoric cultures were mere ‘subsistence economies’” (Oelschlaeger, 1991, pp. 24-25).

There appear to be convergent reasons for the gradual move towards an ‘agri-culture’, including climate change, population growth and an ever-increasing reliance on sedentary food gathering. The result of this move towards an agricultural world changed the human relationship with nature. For the first time boundaries were drawn between the human world and the wilds; between culture and nature. Humans began to conceive of wild nature. While nature for the most part was still conceived of as sacred and the giver of life, parts of nature – the wild lands – were a potential threat to the ordered and ‘improved’ areas of human life. Humans began to accumulate ‘things’, as well as defining and laying claim to land. There was delineation between fields and between human habitat and the inhospitable wild lands. This changing relationship, then, was more about the way humans changed than the way nature had been changed. What followed also was a change in the stories and myths that provided for this new view of the human / nature relationship. Indeed, perhaps the very conception of a relationship between two ‘separate’ entities, *man* and *nature*, reveals more than the perceived quality of that relationship.

2.2.3 Wilderness: A Widening Gap

The development of stories and myths has been the predominant vehicle for changing human views of the way we fit into the world, and “like some other fundamental ideas which express mankind’s vision of itself and its place in the world, ‘nature’ has a nominal continuity, over many centuries, but can be seen, in analysis, to be both complicated and changing, as other ideas and experiences change” (R. Williams, 1980, p. 67). Slowly the gap between human culture and nature widened until, influenced by Greek and Christian perspectives, the Western outlook moved steadily towards a dualistic and anthropocentric viewpoint. Over an extended timeframe humans had gone from viewing themselves as part of nature, to being delineated from nature – even ruling over nature.

Callicott points to the influence of classical Greek thinking of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. as a particularly unifying system of thought within emergent western natural philosophy. Democritus and Leucippus’ articulation of an atomic theory of matter that “claimed to reduce all the phenomena of nature to this simple dichotomy: the ‘full’ and ‘empty’, ‘thing’ and ‘no-thing’, the atom and space” (Callicott, 1995, p. 196), Pythagoras’ demand that nature be described quantitatively, Plato’s conception of a separate body and soul, and Aristotle’s taxonomy of nature, combined to inform religion, natural philosophy and the human / nature relationship in subsequent periods of history: “modern philosophy of nature might be oversimply, but, nonetheless, not incorrectly portrayed as a merger of the Pythagorean intuition that the structure of the world order is determined according to ratio, to quantitative proportions, and the Democritean ontology of void space (so very amenable to geometrical analysis) and material particles” (Callicott, 1995, p. 197).

Conceptions of a separate body and soul were reinforced with the development of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the early Church – developments that included access to the spiritual world primarily through the Church. Indeed, around two thousand years ago, in the orthodox western cosmology the view of nature moved from one of the *sacred* to the *profane*. The sacred world now resided in religion; heaven was above and the natural world below. Humans, created in the image of God, were

destined to rule over the natural world. That one thing in particular, such as Christianity, is responsible for this way of thinking, however, seems unlikely; rather religion, relationship to nature and ways of living are interconnected and influenced by the history of the world and each other. Indeed, Callicott suggests, in discussion of the historical roots of the environmental crisis, that: “the much maligned attitudes arising out of the Judeo-Christian tradition have not been so potent a force in the work of remodelling as the tradition of Western natural philosophy originating among the ancient Greeks and consolidated in modern scientific thought” (1989, p. 191). During the times of the early church, people’s conception of wilderness was one of a godless and frightening landscape; a wasteland and place to be avoided. There was, however, an additional and parallel conception of wilderness that revolved around the idea of a place to go in order to undergo personal challenge and ‘find’ a spiritual connection.

Later, as Europe moved from the Medieval to the Renaissance and thence through the Reformation, society undertook a change that has continued to influence our conception and attitude towards wilderness – a rise in the valuing of, and acceptance of, secular, economic and material points of view. Both the Renaissance and the Reformation led to economic expansion and the secularisation of authority within towns and cities across Europe. These movements, when combined with a viewpoint of humans as separate from, and potentially above, nature, changed our attitude to wilderness, and continue to inform resource practices within wilderness areas:

The Reformation did not change the idea of wilderness *per se*. What had changed, however subtly, was perspective: humankind increasingly looked at the world through economic rather than religious spectacles. Wealth was viewed as virtue, not vice. Wholesale exploitation of the naturally given ensued, for the Protestant goal was to capitalize on nature as rapidly and prosperously as possible. The consumer society lay just around the corner (Oelschlaeger, 1991, p. 75).

One of the most influential periods for our current conception of wilderness closely followed. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the ‘Age of Enlightenment’, ushered in the triumph of ‘reason’ which, at its core, remains with us in the western

world in the form of Modernism: “the legacy of the Enlightenment can hardly be overstated. Its key precepts are still the foundational assumptions of western society, and all the great political isms of the present have a common base in these tenacious core assumptions” (Hay, 2002, p. 4). This period profoundly influenced our conception of wilderness. The deductive reasoning of Descartes, the logic and anthropocentric perspective of Bacon, the science of Galileo and the physics of Newton (Oeschlaeger, 1991) were the culmination of a growing shift in the way humans viewed themselves and their place in the world:

By apparently purging material reality of subjective experience, Galileo cleared the ground and Descartes laid the foundation for the construction of the objective or ‘disinterested’ sciences... so much that we have come to assume and depend upon has emerged from the bold experimentalization of the world by the objective sciences (Abram, 1996, p. 32).

This period entrenched an expanded anthropocentrism and reinvigorated a sense of dualism. This was a world where ‘reason’ was separate from faith, science from religion, the objective from the subjective: “modernism draws, perhaps unconsciously but absolutely, a boundary between an objective or scientific and a poetic or aesthetic view of nature” (Oeschlaeger, 1991, pp. 97-98). Humans ‘examined’ nature, measured it, classified it, and were less concerned with a direct sensual experience of nature than with explaining it as matter in motion. The natural world, and wilderness in particular, became something that could be changed, something to be ‘improved upon’, in order to continue a linear progression of human advancement. Humans had moved to a belief system where they were above the natural world, and were able to reduce it to a mechanistic model that could be measured, understood and put to a rightfully instrumental use. Understanding nature, and therefore wilderness, as a machine where the physical parts could be quantified objectively, rather than understanding it in terms of a sensuous subjective whole, was both a development of previous ideas and a major shift in our relationship to the natural world.

The stories and myths that emerged from this period, ironically, included the story that ‘myths’ themselves had been laid to rest; that the sacred element in nature was

subservient, indeed did not exist, in the light of this new conceptualisation of nature as machine. Wilderness became an element under human control, one that could and should be modified in accord with human interests. Nature, and wilderness in particular, was viewed as a resource, a point of scientific enquiry, and inevitably as an impediment to mankind's advancement. Wilderness became something that, with enough effort and hardship, could be deservedly conquered.

2.2.4 Searching for Renewed Connection

Reactions against the prevailing paradigm emerged and, although none have held long-term sway, they have modified the dominant conception of wilderness. The Romantics of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, for example, reacted against the dislocational changes of the industrial revolution and the mechanistic matter-in-motion view of the world that seemed to preclude an intimate connection between man and physical nature (Hay, 2002). The Romantics sought a return to an earlier experience of location and connection - that appeared available through the natural world and was expressible particularly through language and the arts. The natural world could signify more than a mechanistic universe; it was also God's handiwork and humankind's place within a larger universe: "with exaltation at the beauty of nature comes wonderment as well, and the belief that man comes closer to the heartbeats of creation when he is alone in primordial harmonies, away from other men and their artefacts, because unlike the haunts of men these are sacred precincts" (Glacken, 1967, p. 707). Whilst there was a return to an earlier appreciation of nature, or view of the natural world as sacred, it was still to be enjoyed for the benefits it provided to humans (Hay, 1988; 2002).

Thus, for the Romantics, the aesthetic of the natural world moved from order and definition to 'beauty' and the 'sublime', a movement that included awe, wonder and terror at the immensity and mystery of it all (Fredrickson and Johnson, 2000). As Kant suggests:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe,
the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: *the starry heavens above*

and the moral law within... The former begins from the place I occupy in the external world of sense, and enlarges my connection therein to an unbound extent with worlds upon worlds (1909 [1781], p. 260).

Romanticism, then, drew on individual intuitive responses to the natural world as a source of “heightened imaginative sensibility” (Hay, 1988, p. 42).

The Romantics’ idea of nature continues to play an important role in the way we view nature (Nash, 1967). Indeed, not only does it inform our current conception of nature, but it is at times used as an argument against any ‘rogue’ conceptions of wild nature that stray into the realms of sensuous or subjective experience of nature (Hay, 2002). However, to dismiss more recent views of wild nature that highlight a strong sense of connection and relationship to the natural world, as merely re-invented Romanticism, is not always valid. As Hay suggests, in considering ecocentric perspectives within environmental theory: “the point of such a perspective has emphatically *not* been the cultivation of a heightened, *less* worldly, individual imaginative sensibility. It has rather been to reassert the *corporeality* of life; to celebrate its earthliness rather than its ethereality” (2002, p.10).

The idea of an interconnected natural world is not a new one: “a designed earth, whether created for man or for all life with man at its apex of a chain of being, has been one of the great attempts in Western civilization, before the theory of evolution and modern ecological theories emerging from it, to create a holistic concept of nature” (Glacken, 1967, p. 707). The publishing of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859), with its resultant theory of evolution that inextricably tied humans to the natural world through biology and genetics, presented a new version of an interconnected and holistic natural world. Nature is interconnected, and humankind is part of the larger natural world: “the main conclusion here arrived at, and now held by many naturalists who are well competent to form a sound judgement is that man descended from some less highly organised form” (Darwin, 1906 [1871], p. 926). While the acceptance of such a theory would seem to point towards a world of continual change and diminished anthropocentric perspective, what is perhaps most striking, post theory of evolution, is the apparent glossing over of such a conclusion: “evolutionary science led to new understandings of our environmental role. Here too,

the work is unfinished: humankind has barely begun to think ecologically” (Oelschlaeger, 1991, p. 107).

The Modernism of the twentieth century continued the view of nature as matter-in-motion, to be studied objectively and used as a resource for the good of humankind. Reactions to this, in the form of Postmodernist thinking, have placed wilderness in a perplexing position. While Postmodern science and reactions to objective truth, nature as matter-in-motion and dualisms might infer a more interconnected view of the natural world, if not the universe, that would provide nature and wilderness areas with intrinsic value independent of humankind, this has, for the most part, not occurred. As a result, wilderness is often criticised by Postmodernists as contributing to the continuation of the separation between humankind and nature (Cronon, 1995), whereas it might be viewed as humankind’s inability to gain a non-anthropocentric viewpoint that has prevented such an interpretation occurring. While there have been several moves towards viewing nature-as-an-organism, of which humans are an integrated part, the inherent and apparently intractable view ‘from’ a separate and objective position has meant that the underlying beliefs of human separation from wild nature have continued. Indeed, many of our current assumptions and beliefs are so heavily laden with assumptions of anthropocentric pre-eminence that an alternative paradigm seems difficult to imagine (Oelschlaeger, 1991). Our world today is one that continually reinforces human ascendancy and influence, and it is from this paradigmatic position that our current conception of wilderness emerges.

In attempting to understand the historical roots of our current conceptualization of wilderness, this section has sought to assert that ‘wilderness’, rather than primarily *promoting* a sense dualism that separates humans from nature, has been *configured* to conform to a dualistic paradigm that is more entrenched than is overtly apparent, and has roots extending back more than two and a half thousand years. The question remains: does our direct experience of ‘wilderness’ match up with our current ‘knowledge’, based primarily on objective reason and logic, of the way the world works, including our place in wild nature? Understanding wilderness may not be an entirely theoretical undertaking; rather, our conceptions of wilderness might be informed by personal experience and perceptions of ‘wild’ landscapes.

‘Wilderness’ today has been attacked on many fronts. It has been dismissed on the grounds that it is a social construction (Cronon, 1995; R. Williams, 1980), promotes a false sense of dualism (Cronon, 1995), does not exist in a ‘pristine’ form, and no longer exists due to humankind’s impacts upon it (Evernden, 1985). This is not the place to engage with such arguments, but it is worth clarifying how our current conception of wilderness is reliant upon a perspective that must colour our experiences of wild nature: This is the paradox, that even as we attempt a view of nature as having value in and of itself, we are only able to make the attempt through modern human eyes.

It is necessary to understand the way in which people today conceive of wilderness to assist in our understanding of peoples’ experience of such places. However, in addition, we must attempt to approach such landscapes without pre-formed *conceptions* and attempt to describe and understand our pre-rationalised *perceptions* of these landscapes:

Whatever evaluation we finally make of a stretch of land, however, no matter how profound or accurate, we will find it inadequate. The land retains an identity of its own, still deeper and more subtle than we know. Our obligation toward it then becomes simple: to approach with an uncalculating mind, with an attitude of regard... To intend from the beginning to preserve some of the mystery within it as a kind of wisdom to be experienced, not questioned. And to be alert for its openings, for that moment when something sacred reveals itself within the mundane, and you know the land knows you are there (Lopez, 1986, p. 228).

2.2.5 Wilderness Preservation

Today, in a world of individualisation and consumerism, wilderness and its preservation has become a rallying point for those wishing to react against the pace of contemporary life and apparent wanton destruction of the natural world.

Wilderness has come to represent an alternative to a civilization with an inflated

sense of self-importance and an insatiable desire for advancement, seemingly at any cost. The issue of wilderness preservation raises several questions, not least of which is one of ethics – are humans entitled to preference their own interests above those of other living creatures? As Hay suggests: “the impulse to defend the existence rights of wilderness in precedence over human-use rights has thus led to a spirited challenge to what is possibly the most fundamental tenet of western civilisation: the belief that moral standing is strictly a human quality” (2002, p. 17).

An attempt to understand wilderness and wilderness preservation based in a personal, lived experience of the natural world often leaves us bereft of language to articulate a coherent and convincing position:

There can be no ‘rational’ argument for wildlife preservation, just as there can be no logical explanation of quality experience. It now seems to me that argument *itself* – in the sense of reasonable dialogue – is not only inappropriate to our subject matter but also may be destructive of it. There is no ‘logic’ in feeling, in experiencing, in states of being. Yet these same phenomena appear to be the prerequisite for wildlife preservation (Livingston, 1981, pp. 116-117).

Thus, there is an imperative at the base of our understanding of wilderness experience that is difficult to articulate and often based on personal experience, as Leopold also suggests: “wilderness areas are first of all a series of sanctuaries for the primitive arts of wilderness travel... I suppose some will wish to debate whether it is important to keep these primitive arts alive. I shall not debate it. Either you know it in your bones, or you are very, very old” (1966, p. 248).

2.3 The Nature of Experience

Experience is a term not easily defined, as Gadamer suggests: “however paradoxical it may seem, the concept of experience seems to be one of the most obscure we have” (1975, p. 310). What do we mean when we talk about experience? What is *an* experience? Where is experience situated? The following section does not seek to

categorically define what experience is, rather, it seeks to outline some of the key attributes of experience within which the concept is situated.

The concept of 'experience' lies within a paradox which calls into question the validity of one's self-sufficient and privately knowable world. Experience has, at times, been defined as personal, subjective and ineffable:

The word experience has often been used to gesture toward precisely that which exceeds concepts and even language itself. It is frequently employed as a marker for what is so ineffable and individual (or specific to a particular group) that it cannot be rendered in conventionally communicative terms to those who lack it (Jay, 2005, p. 5).

And yet, alternatively, experience can also be viewed as being primarily constructed by social contexts and language itself; as sitting *within* language. This view of constructed and commodified experience, prominent in the latter part of the twentieth century, can be a challenge to personal, lived experience, regarding it "as a simplistic ground of immediacy that fails to register the always already mediated nature of cultural relations and the instability of the subject who is supposedly the bearer of experience" (Jay, 2005. p. 3). However, as Jay goes on to suggest, a concept of experience which sits between these alternatives is perhaps more appropriate: "‘experience,’ we might say, is at the nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity, between expressible commonalities and the ineffability of the individual interior" (2005, pp. 6-7).

While there is a variety of possible definitions of experience, in the context of this research an 'experience' is broadly taken to involve a personal encounter or event that is lived through; which involves the perception of something through the senses or the mind. A view of experience that is personal, mediated, lived through, and is deemed meaningful and qualitatively significant, is presented below.

2.3.1 *Experience as Personal*

Experience is personal. Two people can experience the same event very differently. We can watch a movie with a friend and have alternative experiences of the same film. Even an event that is described by two different people in a similar manner cannot be objectively knowable as the same. We simply cannot see into another person's mind. There is an element of experience that is subjective, personal and that, almost by definition, remains knowable only to oneself. The language of description, then, cannot convey *an* experience fully to another because language is not experience.

While it is not possible to objectively validate two experiences as exactly the same, those experiences are very real for the experiencers themselves. Through experiences we come to know the world. Experiences bring meaning to our world and they influence the way we will experience the world in the future (Dewey, 1938b, p. 25). Experiences are real for us and are personal not only in the sense that another person cannot fully know them, but also in the sense that they may reveal much about the way we personally view the world.

2.3.2 *Experience as Mediated*

Though apparently antithetical, views of experience as 'personal' or 'mediated' need not be diametrically opposed; indeed, the discourse between the two provides insight: "we need to be aware of the ways in which 'experience' is both a collective linguistic concept, a signifier that yokes together a class of heterogeneous signifieds located in a diacritical force field, and a reminder that such concepts always leave a remainder that escapes their homogenizing grasp" (Jay, 2005, p. 6).

Our experiences are influenced and mediated by social and cultural norms. We are part of society and as such we carry with us, whether we are aware of it or not, cultural baggage that operates as a filter for our direct experience. As Stewart suggests, "how we interpret our experiences is a function of how we have learned to see the world around us. Our 'way of seeing' our world is shaped by our culture" (2003, p. 313). To be a middle or upper class Australian today brings with it an

understanding of nature and the wilderness that will inevitably mediate experiences of an outdoor journey. Linguistically, too, experience is mediated (Martin, 2005). While experience is not language *per se*, the two are inextricably linked. Not only do we use language to describe our experiences, language also, in part, shapes our personal conception of experiences. Thus, experience might be viewed, to some degree, as occurring within a linguistic or semantic context.

While experience may be viewed as mediated by the cultural and linguistics norms of a particular social grouping or sub-group, equally, experiences themselves might group together to define a social grouping. In other words, a set of shared or common experiences may link together a group or class of people. Within experiences there are commonalities which can be expressed and provide meaning for both individuals and groups of people.

2.3.3 Experience as Interactive

When we have an experience we are interacting with the world; we are experiencing ‘something’, an object that can be physical or an abstraction held in the mind. The term ‘experience’ in the context of this research, though, does not infer an experience of something in the unidirectional sense that it is purely us having the experience separately from an object in the world. Rather, the experience is the interaction between oneself and the object of our attention. By saying we are experiencing ‘something’ we are directing our attention towards the ‘something’ and our *interaction* with it.

The continuous and fluid nature of the process of living and interacting with the world through our senses largely explains why ‘experience’ is so elusive. We constantly process multiple sensory inputs, but for one reason or another we select what to direct our attention towards and, therefore, experience. As William James suggests: “my experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind – without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos” (1901, p. 402). Our experience of something is not necessarily physical. It could be an event, thought or emotion – but our attention is directed toward something, and in

directing our attention towards something we are making a choice to interact with the object of our attention.

As I direct my attention towards something I perceive it. To have an experience, then, is to direct one's attention towards something and interact with it; it is to *perceive* the world:

I cannot say truthfully that my perception of a particular wildflower, with its color and its fragrance, is determined or 'caused' entirely by the flower – since other persons may experience a somewhat different fragrance, as even I, in a different moment or mood, may see the color differently, and indeed since any bumblebee that alights on that blossom will surely have a very different perception of it than I do. But neither can I say truthfully that my perception is 'caused' solely by myself – by my physiological or neural organisation – or that it exists entirely 'in my head'. For without the actual existence of this other entity, of this flower rooted not in my brain but in the soil of the earth, there would be no fragrant and colorful perception at all, neither for myself nor for any others, whether human or insect (Abram, 1996, p. 53).

2.3.4 Experiences as Lived Through

If our experiences are moment-to-moment interactions of directed attention then we should have a continual stream of momentary experiences throughout our day and, indeed, our lifetime. But experiences do not appear to us as a continual series of uniform events. Instead, we group moments together to form 'an experience', some of which appear more important or meaningful to us than others: "the stream of our lived experience... is not really a 'buzzing blooming confusion.' It presents itself as a meaningfully ordered context" (Kohak, 1992, p. 174). What does it mean to have an experience? What is it that allows us to differentiate one experience from another?

Things can be experienced, but not always in a way that results in *an* experience. Dewey suggests that we can have an experience "when the material experienced runs

its course to fulfilment... Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self sufficiency. It is *an* experience” (1934, p. 151). The experience is allowed to run its course without distraction, and is unified by a common quality. Thus, life is not a continual flow of random interactions with the world. We are able to look back and pick out specific experiences in our lives: “if something is called or considered an experience its meaning rounds it into the unity of a significant whole... An experience is no longer something that just flows past quickly in the stream of the life of the consciousness – it is meant as a unity and thus attains a new mode of being one” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 60)

2.3.5 Experience as Qualitative

An experience has a quality that defines it, that holds the parts together. When we look back on experiences we have had in our lives, they are not only fully lived through but contain qualities that bind the moment-to-moment interactions together to make up the experience. There are qualities of an experience without which it ceases to be that which it is. These qualities are not always easily described. For example, when we view a piece of artwork or read a poem, we often perceive it as more than just the objectively known brush strokes and colours on the canvas, or the words on the paper. It is possible for these objects to invoke a quality that is more than the parts:

A painting is said to have a quality, or a particular painting to have a Titian or Rembrandt quality. The word thus used most certainly does not refer to any particular line, color or part of the painting. It modifies all the constituents of the picture and all of their relations. It is not anything that can be expressed in words for it is something that must be *had*. Discourse may, however, point out the qualities, lines and relations by means of which pervasive and unifying quality is achieved (Dewey, 1938a, p.70).

It is necessary to have some knowledge of paintings to have the experience of a certain quality, such as that given in the example above. These qualities, then, are not fully in the object attended to or the experiencer themselves; they are an interaction between the two.

2.3.6 Experience as Meaningful

Meaningful experiences in the context of this research are taken to mean the experiences individuals deem to be particularly moving, important, affective and/or difficult to describe. The definition has been left deliberately open and broad so as not to presuppose what individuals may find meaningful.

However, it is necessary to consider where we need to look for this ‘meaning making’. As Baumeister and Vohs suggest, “the empirical knowledge about the process of making meaning is still in a very early state of development” (2002, p. 616). What are the essential structures that create the meaning of an experience; how do we have ‘that experience?’ In a neurological sense we have been able to pinpoint where certain types of mechanistic reactions, such as pain, vision and memory recall, occur. However the same cannot be said for ‘meaning making’. There appears to be no central processing unit that ascribes meaning to our world. Much of this is often ascribed to our consciousness, where consciousness is taken to mean being aware of the external world or the “having of perceptions, thoughts and feelings; awareness” (Sutherland, in Chalmers, 1996, p. 3). In other words, to be conscious of the world is to experience the world, to pay attention to the world, and to endow it with meaning.

We make meaning from our experiences; we come to know the world and interact with our world through experiences. To have an experience is to present something to the conscious mind, to pay attention to it. While each of us has firsthand knowledge of what it is to be conscious, consciousness itself is little understood. Chalmers (1996) suggests two overall categories of consciousness, one being the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness, while the other is the ‘easy problem’. The easy problem of consciousness includes our ability to verbally report on occurrences, to make decisions about actions and reflect on experiences. While understanding how these aspects of consciousness work is anything but easy, they are related to neurological cause-and-effect processing within the brain, and can theoretically be unravelled to some degree. On the other hand, there are aspects of our consciousness that appear more difficult to track down, such as why we have subjective experiences that make us feel a particular way. The problem with this form of conscious experience is that it is unknowable, in the sense that we cannot fully reflect on the

experience as we have it; we cannot know or express the qualities (or ‘qualia’) of the experience as we are experiencing it. This is the ‘hard problem’ of consciousness – ‘hard’ in that it asks questions to which we cannot fully know the answers:

When someone strikes middle C on the piano, a complex chain of events is set into place. Sound vibrates in the air and a wave travels to my ear. The wave is processed and analysed into frequencies inside the ear, and a signal is sent to the auditory cortex. Further processing takes place here: isolation of certain aspects of the signal, categorization, and ultimately reaction. All this is not so hard to understand in principle. But why should this be accompanied by an *experience*? And why, in particular, should it be accompanied by *that* experience, with its rich tone and timbre? (Chalmers, 1996, p.5).

The intuition of the quality of an experience may in fact run deeper than our reflection on it. Experience may have a *pre-reflective* component that occurs before we categorize or conceptualize it, and that profoundly influences us. While this element of experience must, by definition, remain in one sense a mystery to us, the search for those qualities remains worthwhile because they are so significant in bringing meaning to our world. Are we able to describe these pre-reflective building blocks of meaningful experience in a way that will enable us to better understand and facilitate worthwhile experiences? This research attempts to identify and describe the commonalities within meaningful experiences.

2.4 Understanding Potentially Meaningful Experiences of Wilderness

The wilderness has long been regarded as providing a source of meaningful experiences for individuals (Bell and Lyell, 2002). From biblical wanderings in the desert to current wilderness adventure tourism, individuals have described personally meaningful and profoundly moving experiences. Rather than seeking to categorise from the outset what participants might constitute as meaningful, this research will approach such experiences, as far as possible, with an open mind. There is, however, a need to consider what has previously been understood in terms of meaningful

experiences that relate particularly to wilderness or natural settings. These understandings include:

- The Romantic Sublime,
- Mysticism,
- Spiritual and Transcendent experiences,
- Peak and Plateau experiences,
- Flow experiences,
- Preference for Nature,
- Attention Restoration Theory,
- Sense of Place,
- Experiences of the Sacred and the Idea of Pilgrimage, and
- Wilderness Experience as a Social and Cultural Construction

For each of these understandings, a description of the experiences involved and links to experience of wilderness or natural settings will be outlined. This is not to imply *necessarily* that the wilderness itself is the catalyst for such experiences; rather, it may be a backdrop for particular activities, cultural norms or social contexts that have facilitated such experiences.

Several of the understandings considered involve a spiritual or religious connotation, or at least a suggestion of categorising that which is, almost by definition, ineffable. While the primary reason for leaving the definition of meaningful experiences amorphous is to avoid pre-supposing participant descriptions, a secondary consideration is that in discussing meaningful experiences there appears to be a cultural roadblock that might inhibit people from discussing experiences that are labelled, from the outset, as spiritual or religious but which may well fall within the bounds of meaningful experience (Tacey, 2003).

2.4.1 The Romantic Sublime

The Romantic Movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constituted a reaction against the dislocation of industrialisation, urbanisation and scientific rationalisation of nature. It involved a desire to return to an earlier way of

understanding the world based upon a strong sense of personal connection. There was an emphasis on, and authentication of, the individual's experience of the world, and, in particular there was a validation of emotional response to the natural world. Nature was sacralised, imbued with the divine, and came to represent the unattainable 'other'. There was a yearning towards communion with the unreachable through close interaction with the natural world and a desire to describe that which was beyond human understanding (Hay, 2002). An aesthetic distinction was made between the *beautiful*, objects in the landscape which were limited, and the *sublime*, a manifestation of the limitless which, although potentially inspired by objects in the landscape, was viewed as situated within an individual's mind.

The term 'sublime' is commonly traced to *Peri Hupsos*, or *On the Sublime*, a treatise attributed to Dionysius Longinus in the first century A.D. The text draws attention to the capacity of 'sublime' words and speech to raise up within the listener that which is above the usual level of response or emotion and transport one beyond the usual boundaries of human understanding. The sublime was deemed to be capable of evoking within a person a sense of the lofty or transcendent; of inspiring one to new heights (Shaw, 2006). For Longinus, there exists a set of definable qualities within language and the arts that can inspire grand thoughts or violent passions within the receptor. The subsequent translations of this text in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly in England, combined with the upheavals of the era, influenced the theorists of the Romantic period in their considerations of the human relationship to nature.

Experiences of the sublime were deemed to include feelings of awe, inspiration, being lifted above the usual human realms of experience, feeling diminished in the face of an unknowable 'other', and terror. Experiences of the sublime involve an inability to fully describe experiences in the face of something greater than oneself: "sublimity, then, refers to the moment when the ability to apprehend, to know, and to express a thought or sensation is defeated. Yet through this very defeat, the mind gets a feeling for what lies beyond thought and language" (Shaw, 2006, p. 3). For the Romantics, the qualities of the natural landscape were integral to understanding the sublime. As Wattchow suggests:

The Romantics launched the ascendancy of outdoor places as desirable destinations. The sublime experience they sought in nature refers to heady mix of ideas that embraced temporary solitude from society, a search for self-knowledge and personal improvement and ideals about the wilderness experience as a spiritual quest (2007, p. 16).

In particular, mountains and crags were viewed as representing the vastness or greatness inherent within nature which could inspire the imagination. Writers such as John Dennis and Joseph Addison reflected on their journeys across the Alps, experiences which involved both a joy at the beauty of nature, but also a sense of horror or terror at the sheer immensity and unattainability of it all. There was an inherent paradox between ‘feelings of terror’ in the face of the unattainable other and ‘a sense of joy’ at being able to stand separate from, or even above, wild nature. While the Romantics highlighted the human relationship to nature, they drew a clear distinction between humans and nature. Indeed, the experience of the sublime was viewed as a distinguishing ability of the human mind:

The essential claim of the sublime is that man can, in feeling and in speech, transcend the human. What, if anything, lies beyond the human – God or the gods, the daemon of Nature – is matter for great disagreement. What, if anything, defines the range of the human is scarcely less sure (Weiskel, 1986, p. 3).

An understanding of the human relationship to nature which focussed on an aesthetic response to the grand within nature was, at the time, more novel than it may appear today. We have come to validate such affective responses:

‘To me,’ said Byron’s Childe Harold, ‘high mountains are a feeling.’ We comfortably agree, believing that the emotions we feel – or are supposed to feel – in the presence of grand Nature are universal and have been shared by men at all times... Like men of every age, we see in Nature what we have been taught to look for, we feel what we have been prepared to feel (Nicolson, 1959, p. 1).

The Romantic Sublime can be viewed as a response to the loss of a simpler life in, and with, nature that had previously been taken for granted. It was, however, also a response to a profoundly new way of viewing humans' place on the planet, and indeed, within an ever expanding universe. The Romantic Sublime, then, involved an emotional response to the infinite within nature.

The individual's response to the natural world was the focus of Romanticism and there was a desire to understand such emotional experiences. This is particularly notable in Edmund Burke's (1958 [1756]) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, in which there is a shift in focus from the sublime being inherent within nature towards the sublime being analysed as a psychological function. This marked a crucial point in the transition from a focus on understanding the *qualities of objects* within nature, to understanding the *qualities of the experience* as they occurred in an individual's mind. This trajectory was further developed by Immanuel Kant (1952 [1790]) in his *Critique of Judgement*. As Monk notes:

Until interest centred definitely in the analysis of the subject's experience – that is, until the question, 'What effects do so-called sublime objects have on the mind and emotions of the subject?' became more important than the question, 'What sublime qualities does the object possess?' – no steady progress in the aesthetic of sublimity was made. The growth of aesthetic toward a subjective point of view reaches its fullness in Kant (1960, pp. 8-9).

The Romantic Sublime thus marked a significant moment in the way human responses to the natural world were interpreted.

2.4.2 Mysticism

Mysticism can be described as an arena of human experience that involves direct unmediated contact with a transcendent reality (Cook, 2004, p. 160). This transcendent reality has at its core a conscious relation to an 'other'. While agreement on a succinct definition is not easily forthcoming within the literature,

there is considerable commonality in descriptions of the *qualities* of mystical experiences (Cook, 2004; Hood, 1975).

William James (1902), provides early insights into the psychology of mystical experiences, and proposed four ‘marks’ of an experience that, when present, would justify the term ‘mystical’. Those marks were:

1. *Ineffability* – The experience itself defies description, is extremely difficult to put into words, and is more a state of feeling than an intellectual process. It follows that the quality and worth of such an experience is difficult to pass on to others.
2. *Noetic quality* – The experience involves a state of ‘knowing’, allowing insights that are deemed significant or important. Additionally, there is a perceived element of authority in terms of the knowledge imparted.
3. *Transiency* – The experience is often short (usually less than half an hour), but can recur and develop in terms of richness and importance.
4. *Passivity* – A sense, though not necessarily a consciousness, that your own will is held in abeyance, and of being held by a larger ‘other’ or superior power (summarised from James, 1902).

James offered up a wide range of experiences to be defined as mystical, and placed experience within nature squarely in the realm of mystical experience. While discussing mystical experiences and connection with some Infinite Power, he notes: “certain aspects of nature seem to have a peculiar power of awakening such mystical moods. Most of the striking cases which I have collected have occurred out of doors” (1902, pp. 385-386). Underhill also observed that transcending the normal world of sense is often associated with direct experience of nature: “to attain a radiant consciousness of the ‘otherness’ of natural things, is the simplest and commonest form of illumination. Most people, under the spell of emotion or beauty, have known flashes of rudimentary vision of this kind” (1911, p. 282).

Describing the commonalities of mystical experience as a sense of union, ineffability, ‘realness’, the sacred and the opening up of paradoxes, Stace (1961) further differentiates between ‘extrovertive mysticism’, where the unity of the world is perceived in the other (trees, river, grass etc...), and ‘introvertive mysticism’, where unity is experienced in the self as a universality of consciousness. A key

concept in considering the mystical experience for Stace is the idea that it is more than just an emotional response. Stace separates the idea of the experience itself from potential subsequent interpretation. First is the sensation (perceiving) of the experience and then follows conceptual interpretation (conceiving) of the experience. In other words, mystical experiences may have commonalities or universals, but the interpretation of them may be culturally driven or dependent upon an individual's subjective experience. While for many, like Rudolf Otto (1958) who described a numinous experience of the 'wholly other', the term holds religious connotations, by considering mysticism more generally it is possible to also gain insights into potentially non-religious examples of mystical transcendence, particularly in natural settings.

2.4.3 *Spiritual and Transcendent experiences*

The terms 'spiritual' and 'transcendent' have commonly been used to describe meaningful experiences within wilderness contexts (Ashley, 2007), and potentially draw on a wider range of experiences within nature than mysticism. For some, these terms might imply a religious experience, however, again, neither term is synonymous with religion and both have broader definitions (McDonald and Schreyer, 1991; Potter and Gray, 1999; Stringer and McAvoy, 1992). For example, McDonald, Guldin and Weatherhill, in a discussion of wilderness spirituality, consider the awareness of an 'other' and the subsequent self / other *relationship* to be essential elements of the experience, however, the construing of the 'other' as God or some other universal entity is a personally subjective element of the experience:

It seems more useful to describe the wilderness experience as primarily a personal discovery, and second, a discovery of relationships. The deeper meanings and interpretations are a third part of this experience, but these meanings must be left to individual interpretation... It is the interaction of 'self' and 'other' within the wilderness context that defines (solely on a personal level) the true meaning of wilderness spirituality (1988, p. 194).

While “spirituality is conceptually challenging and difficult to define” (Beringer, 2000, p. 157), there are common understandings related to wilderness spirituality. Many of the understandings of spiritual experiences within wilderness settings involve the affective or emotive domains; in particular, feelings around a sense of relationship between the self and some ‘other’ (Stringer and McAvoy, 1992). Whereas mysticism is more often associated with the ‘wholly other’ or being held in abeyance by an ‘infinite power’, spirituality highlights the potential relationship with the perceived ‘other’. Ashley offers an understanding of the defining characteristics of wilderness spirituality:

A feeling of connection and interrelationship with other people and nature; a heightened sense of awareness and elevated consciousness beyond the everyday and corporeal world; cognitive and affective dimensions of human understandings embracing peace, tranquillity, harmony, happiness, awe, wonder, and humbleness; and the possible presence of religious meaning and explanation (2007, p. 65).

Descriptions of ‘transcendent’ experiences in natural settings bear commonalities with understandings of spiritual experiences in similar contexts, and are, at times, used interchangeably within the literature. Williams and Harvey (2001), in considering transcendent experiences within forests, describe the key characteristics as:

- a strong positive affect,
- feelings of overcoming the limits of everyday life,
- a sense of union with the universe or some other power or entity,
- absorption in and significance of the moment, and
- a sense of timelessness (summarised from Williams and Harvey, 2001).

Levin and Steele also describe the common characteristics of transcendent experience as “unity, positive moods, transcendence of space and time, noetic incorrigibility, paradoxicality, ineffability, transciency and positive changes in attitudes and behaviour” (2005, pp. 90-91). Of the experiences deemed to trigger transcendent experiences, nature and the wilderness are often foremost. Laski (1961) found nature to be the most common trigger of ‘ecstasy’ amongst non-religious

people, while Keutzer (1978) cited ‘beauties of nature’ as the most potent trigger of transcendent experiences.

It has long been recognised that subjective emotive experience of natural environments eludes understanding: “we know next to nothing about why people prefer certain types of environments, and even less about how they envisage or experience landscapes” (Lowenthal and Prince, 1975, p. 119). While there has been considerable research into this matter, much of it has occurred within a positivistic epistemological framework that makes it difficult to plumb the depths of *experience*, particularly experiences that may be transcendent: “more rarely do we encounter research which attempts to uncover the nature of the experiences enjoyed by visitors to the wilderness” (Porteous, 1991, p. 99). There is an understanding that natural and, in particular, wilderness landscapes provide opportunities for meaningful spiritual or transcendent experiences, yet a better understanding of the *experiences* themselves is still required:

To gain spiritual meaning from nature, we need to understand what it is about a place that contributes to what Williams and Harvey (2001, p. 256) describe as a ‘human-environment transaction’. In other words, what landscape elements can create deep emotional experiences? Or what, when present, represents the *genius loci* – the spirit of place? Plainly, further research is needed to answer these types of questions (Ashley, 2007, p. 55).

2.4.4 Peak and Plateau Experiences

Maslow describes ‘peak experiences’ as something like mystical experiences – moments of great awe, ecstasy or unity, involving “pure positive happiness when all doubts, all fears, all inhibitions, all weaknesses, were left behind” (1962, p. 9). While the category of peak experience might bear similarities to mystical or transpersonal experiences (Privette and Bundrick, 1991), Maslow goes on to suggest: “it must by now be obvious to those who are familiar with the literature of mystical experiences that these peak experiences are very much like them, and overlap them but are not

identical with them... The total mystical experience, as classically described, is more or less approached by greater or lesser peak-experiences” (1962, p. 18).

Maslow reported that peak experiences occurred in everyday life, including “from moments of fusion with nature (in a forest, on a seashore, mountains, etc.)” (1962 p. 10), and many studies of peak experiences have highlighted a connection with experiences of the natural world. While interviewing participants about ‘peak experiences’, Wuthnow asked if interviewees had “experienced the *beauty of nature* in a deeply moving way?” (1978, p. 61). This question proved to be the highest ranked question of the research and Wuthnow reported that “more than eight in ten have been moved deeply by the beauty of nature... of these, more than half in each case have had peak experiences which have had deep and lasting effects on their lives” (1978, p. 61). Many of the participants were subsequently reinterviewed about their experiences of nature, and Wuthnow suggested: “the descriptions give evidence both of the diversity of these experiences and the similarity of feelings which they elicit. It is especially important to note the intense feelings of meaning” (1978, p. 63).

At the core of peak experiences are commonalities within the experience itself, however Maslow (1970) noted that individuals tended to interpret their experiences in accordance with their personal, geographical or social situation. Maslow considered spiritual, transcendent and peak experiences to have much in common at their core, but that they were interpreted differently depending on their context:

This something common, this something which is left over after we peel away all the localisms, all the accidents of particular languages or particular philosophies, all the ethnocentric phrasing, all those elements which are not common, we may call the ‘core-religious experience’ or the ‘transcendent experience’ (1970, p. 20).

Two further aspects of peak experiences are of interest for our purposes. Firstly, Maslow reported that more or less everyone has ‘peak experiences’ but that many chose to suppress or ignore them. Secondly, peak experiences are transient in nature: “I found all peak-experiences to be transient experiences – temporary not permanent.

Some of the effects or after-effects may be permanent but the high moment itself is not” (1962, p. 14).

While studying peak experiences, Maslow began to separate out a category of experience that he deemed to be less emotional. These ‘plateau’ experiences, as Maslow called them, were “a serene and calm, rather than intensely emotional, response to what we experience as miraculous or awesome. The high plateau always has a noetic and cognitive element, unlike the peak experience, which can be merely emotional” (Hoffman, 1988, p. 340). Plateau experiences are intertwined with what Maslow saw as the paradox of unitive consciousness:

I can define the unitive consciousness very simply for me as the simultaneous perception of the sacred and the ordinary, or the miraculous and the ordinary... There is nothing excepted and nothing special, but one lives in a world of miracles all the time. There is a paradox because it is miraculous and yet it doesn’t produce an autonomic [nervous system] burst (Maslow in Krippner, 1972, p. 113).

In detecting the sacred and the miraculous, Maslow (1970) felt it was possible to transcend everyday experience and widen your perspective of the world: “There is a sense of certainty about the plateau experience. It feels very, very good to be able to see the world as miraculous and not merely in the concrete, not reduced only to the behavioural, not limited only to the here and now” (Maslow in Krippner, 1972, p. 115). This widening of perspective, then, could also result in a shift in values about what is basic, about “what’s important and what’s not important” (Maslow in Krippner, 1972, p. 119).

Particularly revealing in terms of plateau experiences induced by experiences of the natural environments is the sense that the witnessing of the miraculous might occur as an instigation of the surrounding environs, alongside the realisation that the beauty of things was existent continually: “unlike a peak experience, which can be felt originate within the individual, and is emotionally gripping, the plateau experience can represent a witnessing of aspects of the environment which are external to

oneself and a perception of previously unnoticed attributes of the environment” (Cleary and Shapiro, 1995, p. 8).

In terms of Maslow’s (1954) well known ‘hierarchy of needs’, self-transcendence, as described here, is often presented as a vehicle for achieving ‘self actualisation’ (commonly presented as the highest level of motivation). However, Maslow’s later writings suggest that he came to view self-transcendence itself as a higher motivational level (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Maslow, 1969; 1971). In so doing, Maslow recognized the importance of peak or plateau experiences in achieving a transcending of everyday life and the self, as well as recognizing that such experiences could potentially encourage people to behave altruistically (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Indeed, Maslow believed that a lack of transcendent experiences could be detrimental to a person’s well being (Cleary and Shapiro, 1995; Maslow, 1971).

2.4.5 Flow

The concept of ‘flow’ is, at times, used as a way of understanding participant experiences of adventurous activities in natural, or wilderness, settings. In *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, Csikszentmihalyi (1975) used the term ‘flow’ to describe a type of experience that resulted in the merging of one moment with the next in highly motivated individuals. Csikszentmihalyi observed and interviewed a variety of people, such as chess players, surgeons and rock climbers, isolating perceptions held in common while they were fully engrossed in their activities. Individuals’ motives were found to rely heavily upon intrinsic rewards (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 1990). During these experiences subjects experienced a lack of distinction “between self and the environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present and future” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1974, p. 58). While Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory relies heavily upon the activity to provide the catalyst for the experience, and commonly views the environment as the setting or background for the activity, others have suggested a second form of flow experience that occurs at moments of inaction and is heavily reliant on the surrounding environment (Mitchell, 1983; Williams and Harvey, 2001). Flow theory, then, is of particular interest in understanding both adventurous and non-adventurous experiences that might occur in a wilderness setting.

Flow theory rests on an understanding of consciousness as an *interaction* between person and environment. Consciousness is described as what a person pays attention to as chosen from competing sources. In this way consciousness is viewed as an interaction that involves a process of *selective* attention: “what to pay attention to, how intensely and for how long, are choices that will determine the content of consciousness, and therefore the experiential information available to the organism” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1978, p. 339). Consciousness, then, is viewed as the complex process that allows humans to select that to which attention is paid, to process the selected information, and to store it in memory (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). This process of selective attention involves choice. It is possible to be *aware*, not only of surroundings, but also of ‘self’. In paying attention to oneself, or being aware of oneself within consciousness, it becomes possible to choose goals that are not necessarily automatic responses to genetic programming or surrounding environments: “consciousness gives us a measure of control, freeing us from the complete subservience to the dictates of genes and culture by representing them in awareness, thereby introducing the alternative of rejecting rather than enacting them” (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 91).

Commonly in our busy everyday lives, consciousness involves some effort in order to pay attention to, and make selections between, ‘things’ that are in the interests of oneself. When a person’s experience of the activity, or surrounding environment, presents challenges that are closely matched to opportunities for action for the self, then it appears to be possible for the conscious awareness of the surrounding environment and the self to *merge*, presenting “ways for people to test the limits of their being, to transcend their former conception of self” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 26).

Flow is the experience of being completely engrossed, of effortlessly paying attention to things, and is reflected in a process of being intrinsically motivated or captivated by what one is doing in the moment. Experiences of flow are characterized by:

- intense and focused concentration on what one is doing in the present moment,

- merging of action and awareness,
- loss of reflective self-consciousness (i.e., loss of awareness of oneself as a social actor),
- a sense that one can control one's actions; that is, a sense that one can in principle deal with the situation because one knows how to respond to whatever happens next,
- distortion of temporal experience (typically a sense that time has passed faster than normal), and
- experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding, such that often the end goal is just an excuse for the process (summarised from Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Key factors involved in the experience of 'flow' are a level of perceived challenge and a level of perceived ability to meet those challenges through action. The perceived levels of challenge and opportunities for action are dependent on the activity, or surrounds, at the time, a person's previous experience of similar situations, and their relative performance.

Much attention has been given to the idea of adventure, often in the outdoors, as providing the 'challenge' to attract and hold a person's attention (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). In particular, adventure involves an unknown outcome that can provide a subjective sense of challenge inherent within a situation. However, there are subjective experiences that contain similar 'flow' characteristics but are not necessarily a result of a stimulus field from the activity; rather, they occur at times when the activity focus fades into the background and the stimulus field appears to be a result of the surrounding landscape.

Mitchell (1983) considers the question of why people go mountaineering. While the physical activity and challenge is viewed as the predominant contributor to the merging of action and awareness for climbers, there are times when this merging occurs without the presence of physical opportunities: "when physical action is limited, that challenge often becomes one of appreciating some presumably inherent beauty in the setting at hand" (Mitchell, 1983, p. 146). Examples of such experiences

include non-climbing moments and bivouacing overnight – moments that provide opportunities for what Mitchell refers to as ‘creative action’:

Thus, for some, the experience of the mountain is sublime. This experience may be found in the passive appreciation of natural beauty or in the active merging with the mountain through the dynamics of climbing. Though the passive condition is the prototypical setting for the creative enjoyment of mountaineering, it is not common... The essential element of these experiences is that they offer a potential for creative action (1983, p. 147).

While flow offers a conceptual understanding for meaningful experience in the wilderness through adventurous or challenging activities, it also offers a way of understanding non-adventurous experiences within the wilderness that offer an experience of *merging*.

2.4.6 Preference for Nature

The idea that humans today have a preference, and possibly evolutionary predisposition, towards the natural world can be related to both living organisms and landscape typologies. While the idea that humans enjoy or prefer natural surrounds is not a recent one, the fact that it might be genetically linked to human biology is. Humans have spent much of their existence living closely with nature and it is hypothesised that this has resulted in an attraction towards nature. Of particular interest to this research is preference for specific landscapes such as wilderness, however a general attraction to a bio-diverse environment also offers insights.

The concept of ‘biophilia’, introduced by E.O. Wilson, is defined as “the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike tendencies” (1984, p. 1), and is manifest through an emotional or affectual response to other living organisms and complex natural worlds. The feelings or emotions invoked are viewed as the result of a set of *learned* rules, with which humans are genetically stamped, and which have served us throughout our evolutionary history: “the feelings molded by the learning rules fall along several emotional spectra: from attraction to aversion, from awe to

indifference, from peacefulness to fear driven indifference” (Wilson, 1993, p. 31).

The resultant feelings, then, can have an impact not only on our tendency to want to return to such contexts, but also on the quality of our lives and well-being. Among the possibilities that the biophilia hypotheses suggests is that the attraction towards life and lifelike tendencies is “likely to increase the possibility for achieving individual meaning and personal fulfilment” (Kellert, 1993, p. 21).

While not necessitating a genetic attraction to life, there is a more general idea that humans today may be predisposed, for a variety of reasons, to natural and, in particular, wilderness landscapes. Research has led several environmental psychologists to consider responses to wilderness as reflecting an individual’s preference for certain environmental qualities. For example, Kaplan and Talbot (1983), using data collected over a decade, reported that many subjects responded to the wilderness setting in a way that produced meaningful experiences.

Experiences of wilderness settings on a two week program, as reported by Kaplan and Talbot, included a sense of wonder, tranquillity, serenity, integration, wholeness and oneness: “the wilderness inspires feelings of awe and wonder, and one’s intimate contact with this environment leads to thoughts about spiritual meaning and eternal processes” (1983, p. 178). The experiences changed over time, and were viewed as a response to a new and potentially hostile environment which involved a getting-to-know the environment process. Experiences were often reported as significant or personally moving: “the experience with the environment changes us quickly and quietly. By and large it is not a process to which words are attached. Nor are people aware of how radically affected they are by the way they see the world” (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1995, p. 136).

Reporting that individuals experienced heightened and beneficial psychological states, Kaplan and Talbot (1983) isolated four factors relating to the wilderness landscape that they considered integral to such meaningful experiences:

- being away (distant from home);
- extent (sense of connection to something larger);
- fascination (effortless attention); and

- compatibility (landscape compatible with desired actions) (summarised from Kaplan and Talbot, 1983).

Kaplan and Talbot posited that people have two basic needs in the environment, that of understanding and that of exploration (Stamps, 2004), and that the above factors predict a preference for certain environments. In particular, ‘fascination’ and ‘compatibility’ are tied to the satisfactions and benefits of being able to operate effectively in an environment, while ‘being away’ and ‘extent’ are tied to ideas of exploration and that the environment potentially holds still more to discover and experience.

The characteristic of *being away* is used in a conceptual context; that is, it requires a person to feel they are away from ‘everyday’ situations (Kaplan and Talbot 1983). For people living in today’s modern cities, the way in which natural settings achieve this is not necessarily reliant on the physical distance usually involved in reaching what we might understand as wilderness *per se*; rather, it can be achieved by a quiet moment in a local park removed from the usual human inventions and interruptions. It does, however, require that feeling of escape, or leaving something behind.

Extent implies the possibility of extensions to the currently viewed environment; that is, the possibility of worlds beyond the environment that is concretely available (Kaplan and Talbot 1983). Within wilderness contexts ‘extent’ can be made available in the form of disappearing ridgelines, a stream carrying on around a corner or thinly spaced trees disappearing into the distance. It also implies that the space currently experienced is part of something larger, or an extended world; it is about a sense of connectedness.

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Fascination is related to the way in which attention is attracted and held, without external motivation, in an effortless way. A person experiences a sense of renewal due to the fact that there is no need to use *directed attention* towards stimuli (Kaplan and Talbot 1983). The stimuli involved, then, are deemed to be fascinating in themselves, and can be in the form of aesthetic sensory stimuli such as waterfalls or sunsets, or in the form of cognitive or physical stimuli involving an element of the

unknown or challenge (similar to the idea of flow discussed earlier) that can provoke a sense of internally motivated fascination with the task at hand.

There is also a requirement that the environment provides a sense of *compatibility* with required action – that is, the environment offers the information that provides a person with the feeling that they are going to be able to achieve the tasks required; that there is the opportunity to achieve desired outcomes (Kaplan and Talbot 1983). At its basest level, the sense evoked is that the environment is compatible with survival. In the absence of such compatibility markers, the landscape may be perceived as dangerous.

By considering each of the characteristics described it is possible to see that they are clearly available, particularly over time, in a wilderness environment. It is the combined *relationship* of the elements within a wilderness landscape that brings together these characteristics which, given sufficient quality and time, are able to evoke meaningful experiences based on a preference for wild natural landscapes. The ‘wilderness laboratory’ was found to provide a surprising level of opportunity for meaningful or spiritual experiences in wilderness contexts (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1995). These meaningful experiences were considered to be a form of restoration or spiritual renewal and inspiration, indeed: “a surprising outcome of the research has been the remarkable depth of such spiritual impacts” (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1995, p. 147).

Kaplan and Talbot (1983) recognised that some of the restorative benefits coming from wilderness experiences may also come from alternative contexts or settings: “one is thus tempted to look beyond this particular setting to any environment in which similar factors operate... We have termed this presumably diverse class of beneficial settings *restorative environments*” (p. 193). Understandings of restorative effects of environments, particularly through attention restoration, have subsequently been developed (Hartig, Kaiser and Bowler, 2001; Hartig, Mang and Evans, 1991; S. Kaplan, 1995).

2.4.7 Attention Restoration Theory

Attention Restoration Theory (S. Kaplan, 1995), as with several other understandings of meaningful wilderness experiences, has its foundations in an understanding of consciousness as the process of selecting what it is to which one will pay attention. In particular, it builds on James' (1892) understandings of 'voluntary attention'; that is, attention that is focussed through effort onto something that is deemed to be important, but which does not of itself attract or hold one's attention. The basis for such a self-willed form of necessary attention is hypothesised to be an evolutionary tool that allows humans to pay attention to those things that may impact upon survival or involve problem solving, but which require an effort to sustain attention, such as listening for sounds of predators.

The result of this voluntarily applied attention, or 'directed attention' (S. Kaplan, 1995) as it is sometimes termed, is that the effort to apply focus, and thus inhibit other sensory inputs, may result in fatigue. This may then lead to feelings of stress, an inability to apply directed attention, irritability, or a focus on short term problems (S. Kaplan, 1995). According to Attention Restoration Theory, we are able to rest this process of directing attention by sleeping, or by being involved in *involuntary attention*. The second form of attention, which Kaplan refers to as 'fascination', involves being focussed on something in a way that requires no effort. The stimulus involved is able to effortlessly gain, and hold, one's attention. Examples might include beautiful landscapes, watching animals play or being involved in a safe but potentially uncertain activity.

'Fascination' in and of itself is not deemed to provide rest from directed attention; rather, the other three characteristics discussed in Kaplan and Talbot's (1983) study of wilderness experiences (being away, extent, and compatibility) also play a part. Attention Restoration Theory widens the context for potential restorative environments from wilderness to other situations. However, wilderness and nature are still considered to be prime restorative environments and particularly capable of supplying each of the four characteristics required: "in this perspective the role that natural environments play is a powerful one. Experience in natural environments can

not only help mitigate stress; it can also prevent it through aiding in the recovery of this essential resource” (S. Kaplan, 1995, p. 180).

The impact then, through attention restoration, is characterized by a sense of ‘renewal’, not only of the body but of the spirit, or, in other words, a complete reinvigoration of the whole-self. Not only are experiences of spiritual renewal attributed to directed attention restoration, but also, potentially, feelings of focus, meaning and purpose, through the re-application of a rested voluntary attention. The processes involved within Attention Restoration Theory are considered to be primarily in the *perceptual* arena, rather than necessarily the *conceptual*. That is, the processes of ‘fascination’ and ‘directed attention’ occur rapidly and are not reliant on reasoning, conceptualisation or language (S. Kaplan, 1995).

2.4.8 Sense of Place

Meaningful experiences of both natural and built environments have also been understood to involve a ‘sense of place’ (De Botton, 2006; Malpas, 1999; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). *Place*, in this sense, is considered to be the mediation of a spatial location and a person’s experience of that location: “places are fusions of human and natural order and are significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world. They are defined less by unique locations, landscape, and communities than by the focussing of experiences and intentions onto particular settings” (Relph, 1976, p. 141). Place is a part of geographical space that becomes defined by the feelings attached to it through experience: “the catalyst that converts any physical location – any environment if you will – into a place, is the process of experiencing deeply. A place is a piece of the whole environment that has been claimed by feelings” (Gussow, 1972, p. 27). As Tuan succinctly puts it: “places are centres of felt value” (1977, p. 4).

A sense of place involves feelings of belonging, affection and comfort that result from the interaction between person and place. Rather than viewing the person-place interaction as a programmed function of survival within an environment, the very meaning of place emerges from the *relationship* developed between person and

terrain. Place provides more than a backdrop for experience; rather, place itself can be integral to the creation of meaningful experiences. In suggesting that some environments can instil a sense of place imbued with meaning, there is a recognition that this is due to both the characteristics inherent within the place and the personal history that the individual brings to the transaction (Relph, 1976).

Just as relationships between people help to define who we are, so too do relationships with place: “a deep relationship with places is as necessary, and perhaps unavoidable, as close relationships with people; without such relationships human existence, while possible, is bereft of much of its significance” (Relph, 1976, p. 41). Such relationships are able to root us in the world and provide a meaningful sense of belonging. Just as it is possible to have intimate personal relationships, so too is it possible to have intimate experiences of place (Tuan, 1977). A sense of place is characterized by feelings, or affective responses, that often include a sense of attachment, connection, merging of person and place, and care.

Experience of place involves direct experience but is also influenced by indirect cultural or social experiences that help to define it: “there is far more to experience than those elements we choose to attend to. In large measure, culture dictates the focus and range of our awareness” (Tuan, 1977, p. 146). While the relationship with place is a personal one, there are shared social experiences that are the result of commonalities of experience within place that people are able to mediate and share.

As with any relationship, the way the relationship to place is approached affects the experience. A sense of place is about authentically and meaningfully experiencing a place, about *being* in a place. Relph (1976) defines two types of authentic sense of place, the ‘self-conscious’ and the ‘unselfconscious’. A self-conscious sense of place pertains when one is deliberately aware of the significance of place; when place is experienced reflectively or conceptually, through effort. By openly attending to place experiences which might involve a known level of cultural significance, such as a sacred site, it is possible to experience a sense of place that involves approaching place conceptually, attending to it, and developing an authentic relationship with it. On the other hand, unselfconscious sense of place involves being in a place, experiencing it from the inside and effortlessly empathising with it. It involves

approaching place without preconceptions or rationalising the experience: “in unselfconscious experience an authentic sense of place is rather like the type of relationship characterised by Martin Buber (1970 [1923]) as ‘I-Thou’, in which the subject and the object, person and place, divisions are wholly replaced by the relationship itself, for this is complete and mutual” (Relph, 1976, p. 65).

To experience an authentic unselfconscious sense of place, there is a need to approach the relationship with a sense of openness or vulnerability to the place, rather than with an over-bearance on analysis or rationalisation. As Lopez enjoins:

Put aside the bird book, the analytic frame of mind, any compulsion to identify and sit still... the purpose of such attentiveness is to gain intimacy, to rid yourself of assumption... the key I think is to become vulnerable to a place. If you open yourself up, you can build intimacy. Out of such intimacy may come a sense of belonging (1997, p. 25).

It is no easy matter to discard and leave behind preconceptions, stories or expectations that might distract from an open and honest relationship based on the vulnerability of the moment. By approaching a landscape with expectations we may, in some way, rob the experience of unselfconscious authenticity. The connection to the unimagined, unconceived and unthinkable may be lost:

What I aim to do is not so much learn the names of shreds of creation that flourish in this valley, but to keep myself open to their meanings, which is to try to impress myself at all times with the fullest possible force of their reality. I want to have things as multiply and intricately as possible present and visible in my mind (Dillard, 1976, p. 126).

When individuals journey into natural environments they bring with them a personal history and attitudes that impact upon their relationship to the place. There are also inherent characteristics within the environment that will impact on individuals to produce meaningful experiences that are not fully understood (Fredrickson and Anderson, 1999). What are the characteristics of a space or place that make it particularly amenable to ‘sense of place’ experiences? While it is possible to create

places that encourage authentic self-conscious sense of place, the characteristics of an environment that encourage the unselfconscious sense of place experience are more difficult to define: “an I-Thou experience of place is a total and unselfconscious involvement in which person and place are indissociable; such relationships are probably uncommon and certainly difficult to achieve in contemporary societies” (Relph 1976, p. 78).

Experiencing an unselfconscious authentic sense of place, involving feelings of belonging, comfort and connection, is about *being* in a place. It is about what Heidegger refers to as ‘dwelling’ in a place, experiencing it from the inside, empathetically. It is from these feelings of being at home that we are able to reach out and explore. They provide a sense of rootedness, of identity, that is integral to human experience. Meaningful experiences can be attributed to transactions at very different scales of place. While a favourite campsite is a meaningful place, so too can be the ‘wilderness’. As Tuan suggests, “place exists at different scales. At one extreme a favourite armchair is a place, at the other extreme the whole earth” (1977, p. 149).

2.4.9 Experiencing the Sacred and the Idea of Pilgrimage

Inherent in many understandings of meaningful experiences of wilderness, is the idea of the ‘sacred’. For Eliade, the sacred is a clear break from the everyday homogenous, or profane, world: “man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane” (1959, p. 11). The sacred is an intrusion into our everyday lives that reveals itself as extraordinary. It is not, however, manifest entirely as an object or place; it is rather a revelation of something over and above the ordinary – a paradoxical *experience*:

By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding milieu. A sacred stone remains a stone; apparently (or, more precisely, from the profane point of view), nothing distinguishes it from all other stones... the cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany (Eliade, 1959, p. 12).

A sacred place, then, is not necessarily sacred of itself; rather, it is the overlay of personal experience that involves a sacred viewpoint or mode of experiencing.

This experience of the sacred can become a centre-point of identity, a point of departure. The sacred is a way of *being in*, or seeing, the world. In order to see the sacred in everyday existence, it is considered necessary to have an experience of the 'sacred' initially: "for nothing can begin, nothing can be done, without a previous orientation – and any orientation implies acquiring a fixed point" (Eliade, 1959, p. 22). For those who have experienced sacred space, the world is a universe within which the sacred has already manifested itself, in which, consequently, "the breakthrough from plane to plane has become possible and repeatable" (Eliade, 1959, p. 30).

Nature, and wilderness landscapes in particular, are often considered sacred. The very structure of the natural world *reveals* something out of the ordinary. The starry night, the mountain ranges, the constantly flowing river, all reveal a world beyond our everyday existence. Everyday experience is transcended, in a way that implies an alternative reality:

All this is not arrived at by a logical, rational operation. The transcendental category of height, of the super-terrestrial, of the infinite, is revealed to the whole man, to his intelligence and his soul. It is a total awareness on man's part; beholding the sky, he simultaneously discovers the divine incommensurability and his own situation in the cosmos (Eliade, 1959, p. 119).

Mazumdar and Mazumdar (1993) point to elements within nature that are sacralised, such as mountains, rivers and trees, as being objects, or symbols, of attachment within natural landscapes that have existed in cultures for thousands of years. McDonald and Schreyer suggest that beyond the objects themselves there rests a meaningful or spiritual aspect of such experiences influenced, in part, by myths and stories: "some environments are culturally invested with meanings that make them

particularly prone to support spiritual experiences. Perhaps the one that is most representative of that in American culture is wilderness” (1991, p. 186).

Pilgrimage involves a journey towards sacred place (Osterrieth, 1997), and offers a way of understanding meaning-making on wilderness journeys. Osterrieth suggest four main stages that consistently appear within pilgrimage accounts; preparation for departure, journey, encounter, feast and return. These four stages can also be put in terms of place and the process of pilgrimage:

1. Preparation for departure = Home (separation)
2. Journey = Wilderness (limen or sensory threshold)
3. Encounter = Sacred place (aggregation to the sacred)
4. Feast and Return = Festive place (aggregation to the profane)

(adapted from table in Osterrieth, 1997, p. 32)

Integral to an understanding of meaningful experience through pilgrimage is the intent of the individual to set out on a challenging journey towards a sacred place in order to transform themselves or better understand their place in the world: “places can be identified where people seek particular experiences, such as the experience of wilderness and danger or the experience of transformative release from the limitations of daily life” (Osterrieth, 1997, p. 26). Understood in this way, ‘pilgrimage’ to a known sacred place may involve a ‘self-conscious’ authentic sense of place (Relph 1976), but might inhibit an ‘unselfconscious’ authentic sense of place.

Pilgrimage involves a voluntary journey towards a place that holds special meaning for an individual, and requires both effort and competence to attain. The experiences involved in the journey are often recalled as meaningful, transformative and difficult to describe. Arnould and Price describe the experiences of participants on multi-day rafting trips in the Colorado valley thus: “for many the river trip is a rite of intensification... The pilgrim returns affirmed and renewed. The experience itself is vividly recalled but difficult to describe because of its emotional content and perceived distinctiveness” (1993, p. 42). The idea of pilgrimage can add a layer of understanding to a personal transaction with a sacred place where a voluntary journey towards that place is involved.

2.4.10 Wilderness Experience as a Social and Cultural Construction

Over recent decades, wilderness experience has come to be seen as highly dependent on a complex socio-cultural context. This has been driven, at least partly, by a desire to better understand the complicated and unique experiences of the individuals and values involved. This movement has involved a greater variety of qualitative, rather than quantitative, survey based, methods, and a broader understanding of what might be occurring on extended outdoor journeys given the complex nature of human experiences of wilderness today (Wray, 2009). There has been a particular interest in the *meanings* that people ascribe to wilderness experiences and a desire to further explore subjective personal experiences in far greater depth.

Central to what might be termed a socio-cultural approach is the idea that ‘wilderness’ is a social construction. Cronon (1995) suggests that wilderness is a complex social, political historical and cultural construct which, at least in North America, was spawned by cultural conceptions of the ‘Romantic Sublime’ and the ‘wild frontier’. Such considerations have been highlighted within Australian contexts as well, with particular consideration given to the role of colonial settlement in shaping our current experiences of wilderness (Brookes, 2001; Stewart, 2004b; Wattchow, 2007). Indeed, in this way both ‘wilderness’ and ‘wilderness experience’ can be viewed as socio-cultural constructions; the wilderness experience is shaped by our inescapable ideas of wilderness, and these experiences, in turn, may reinforce western dualistic views of nature. As Brookes suggests of experiences on the Franklin, “the case of the Franklin River rafting illustrates how the ideas of wilderness and wilderness experience are mutually constitutive. The expeditions are shaped by, and in turn reproduce, a concept of nature as distant and revered. Understanding nature is reduced to aesthetic and bodily sensations, and abstractions which circulate in literature and popular culture” (2001, p. 17). Our experience, then, is driven by the meaning which we ‘ascribe’ to wilderness; a meaning, which is constructed within our own social and historical context rather than a value-neutral interaction with the environment:

The notion that landscapes, including wilderness, are socially produced suggests instead that their meaning is anchored in history and culture and not simply the objective, inherent, enduring, tangible, and visible properties of objects in nature. The point is not to deny the existence of a hard reality ‘out there,’ but to recognize that the meaning of that reality is continuously created and re-created through social interactions and practices (D. Williams, 2000, p. 78).

However, the idea of ‘ascribing’ meaning potentially reveals much about the socio-cultural perspective. As Crist, arguing against a social construction of nature, points out: “the assumption underlying the supposed neutral inquiry into ‘how people *assign* meaning *to* the world’ may be pried open by countering its mirror image formulation of inquiry into ‘how people *receive* meaning *from* the world’” (2008, p. 503). In other words, it might be argued that the social constructivist perspective on nature, though seeking to highlight the potential reproduction of an unwarranted human-nature dualism, itself places humans as the ‘meaning-makers’ above all else.

While a socio-cultural understanding of wilderness experience places great emphasis on the meanings and values which individuals bring to their interactions within the natural world, this does not preclude other understandings of wilderness experience. The idea of ‘sense of place’ has seen a resurgence in ways of understanding experiences of nature within a broader socio-cultural context (Wray, 2009). It does, however, suggest that what often occurs on wilderness journeys might be more complex than previously considered. Understanding wilderness experiences as primarily a social or cultural construct has called into question, for many researchers, the validity of such experiences in terms of gaining an *authentic* ‘sense of place’ (Wattchow, 2007; 2008). There is a particular focus on what participants might bring with them to any interaction in a natural environment.

There is also a suggestion that, because participants move into an area with predetermined expectations that structure subsequent experiences, for many on wilderness journeys the subtleties and peculiarities of a place might not be attended to. Considering the experience of participants on the Franklin River, Brookes suggests that “the meaningfulness of the expedition is not so much derived from the

river as projected onto it, with ‘wilderness’ providing a copious stock of symbols and associations” (2001, p. 15), and that, “having no intention of returning renders many details transitory, many distinctions irrelevant” (2001, p. 16). In this way, extended wilderness river journeys such as the Franklin may be viewed as experientially pre-packaged and ‘commodified’, delivering a sanitised and pre-determined experience. This position will be critiqued in section 8.2.8, in light of the findings from this research, which are inconsistent with such an understanding of meaningful experiences for participants.

2.4.11 Commonalities within Understandings of Meaningful Wilderness Experiences

Implicit within many of the aforementioned understandings of meaningful wilderness experiences are more general understandings of our world, including:

- a view of our world as a continual interaction between person and surrounding environment,
- an understanding of consciousness as being defined, at least in part, by what we choose to pay attention to,
- a recognition that people can be deeply affected by *experiences* and that those experiences can provide meaning to their world,
- a recognition of the affective or emotive domains within meaningful experiences
- the possibility that meaningful experiences might involve a perception of, or relationship to, an ‘other’,
- a recognition that experiences can involve both *perceptual* and *conceptual* components, and
- a recognition that our experiences are, at least in part, influenced by our social and cultural context, including language.

Through the distillation of the literature in this chapter, a framework has emerged in which understandings of ‘wilderness experiences’ sit. This research proceeds from a viewpoint that recognises personal experience as an intimate interaction between person and surrounding environment. While our experiences of the natural world are

clearly influenced by our social and cultural context, the approach described herein does not deliver primacy to the human projection of meaning onto nature; rather, it acknowledges that experiences of the natural world are interactions involving the perceptual, conceptual and emotive domains.

2.5 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has outlined the key concepts of *wilderness*, *the nature of experience* and *understandings of meaningful experiences of wilderness*, that are integral to the research questions. It has presented a review of the literature surrounding each of these key concepts. Wilderness has been presented as both a physical entity and social construct; as a changeable phenomenon occurring within time and space, and influenced by human understandings of themselves and their place in the world. Human experience of wilderness has changed over time, and our understanding of those experiences has developed, and is continuing to develop, with the aid of research which seeks to gain insight into the experiences themselves. While much of the literature reviewed in this chapter will be revisited in the discussion of results (chapter eight), the following chapter will outline the methodological approach employed.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework, methods and techniques that are employed within this research. While the ultimate intent of the following two chapters is to make explicit the methods and techniques used, initially this chapter will focus on the selection of the methodological approach.

There is a need for an overall philosophical and methodological framework within which to conduct research (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Crotty, 1998). In the case of this research project a phenomenological approach is used to provide that consistent operational framework. The adoption of a phenomenological approach arose from a perceived need to achieve an integrity between the *research questions* (with implied procedural parameters), my own *background* and the *intended contribution* of the research project. The first section of the chapter describes why a phenomenological approach was deemed most likely to deliver the coherence and consistency sought, while the second section describes the phenomenological approach itself.

3.2 The Research Questions

The research questions are central to the selection of an appropriate methodological approach (Mason, 2005). As described earlier, the questions of this research project are:

1. What forms of meaningful experiences might occur on a wilderness river journey?
2. What components of the journey facilitate those meaningful experiences?
3. What is the role of the wilderness landscape itself in facilitating those experiences?
4. What is the potential value of meaningful wilderness experiences subsequent upon returning to everyday life?

The following section considers the question ‘what is implied in terms of methodological approach within the research questions?’ The research questions consider human experience and, therefore, come with certain procedural parameters. By researching meaningful human experiences, we attempt to make explicit deep-seated values, beliefs and motives for action that normally remain hidden.

3.2.1 The Study of Human Phenomena, and Alternatives to a Positivist Paradigm

The research questions primarily consider what it is like to have different types of experience and how we have those experiences; they are concerned with human experience: “all insight into the relations between man and the environment is grounded in experience” (Lowenthal and Prince, 1975, p. 119). It is inherently a study of human phenomena, where phenomena are the way things appear for us. It is an attempt to gain a better understanding of the way in which we personally experience the world. By investigating meaningful human experience we are firmly within the realm of human science research.

Human science research offers a wide range of possibilities in terms of methodologies and research processes (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Some of these possibilities fall outside the dominant traditional positivist paradigm used within the natural sciences (Crotty, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1983). Positivism privileges the production of knowledge of which we can be absolutely ‘certain’; that is, knowledge that can be directly verified through the senses or logically deduced from pre-existing knowledge (Seamon, 1982). The positivist paradigm rests on a premise of mechanistic cause and effect, faith in the objective reality of ‘truth’, and a radical separation of researcher from the ‘object’ of the research. There is only one reality, and the truths of that reality are objectively knowable.

While positivism has proved to be an extremely effective research paradigm within the natural sciences, to gain knowledge about those objects that behave in a mechanistic way, to extend this into the realm of human science research is not always appropriate (von Eckartsberg, 1998a). What do we do when we are attempting to research our own personal experiences or to study the very subjectivity

of others' experiences? What if we are looking to explore meaningful human experiences; how do we quantify or mechanistically explain 'meaningful experiences'? Should we follow the positivist paradigm and attempt to reduce all variables to a scientifically controllable situation, or acknowledge that, if we are attempting to study the whole of an experience as it naturally occurs, we need to look to an alternative way of knowing that accounts for the central importance of subjectivity? Within the study of human phenomena, the question of whether the researcher can legitimately stand separate from the research, or whether it is even the most useful standpoint, challenges the view of human experience as a mechanistic causal object that can be measured and quantified:

Traditionally, social scientists have been warned to stay distant from those they studied to maintain 'objectivity'. But that kind of detachment can limit one's openness to and understanding of the very nature of what one is studying, especially where meaning-making and emotion are part of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002, pp. 47-48; see also von Eckartsberg, 1998a).

Alternatives to positivism do not constitute a single school of thought, or a philosophy with a strict formula or set of propositions (Polkinghorne, 1983), but force the researcher to approach social situations 'as they occur to us' so that we might consider phenomena with which we are intrinsically and emotionally connected, such as 'meaningful experiences'. While positivist research privileges pre-formed hypotheses, the reduction of variables, and quantitative measurement systems, alternative paradigms clear the way for open questions, theory building, qualitative studies and a naturalistic approach:

Qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest... The phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally in that it has no predetermined course by and for the researcher such as would occur in a laboratory or other controlled setting. Observations take place in real-world settings and people are interviewed with open ended questions in places and under circumstances that are comfortable for and familiar to them (Patton, 2002, p. 39; see also Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Human science research offers possibilities, then, not only for the way we go about our search for knowledge, but also in our attitude towards knowledge itself. Given that many outdoor and experiential educational pedagogies rest on non-positivist paradigms, it is perhaps surprising that so much applied research within the field still rests firmly on a positivist paradigm (Allison and Pomeroy, 2000).

This is not to say that positivist scientific approaches are always inappropriate within the human sciences; rather, that they are not the only valid approaches with which to seek knowledge and understanding of the world in which we live (Patton, 2002). As Knopf suggests, in order to answer questions about human to nature relationships, researchers need to “abandon strict preoccupation with objective analyses of environmental attributes and begin looking at the environment from the eyes of the experienter” (1987, pp. 808-9). By considering how experience ties us to the world, the next section will show that an alternative view of knowledge is not only appropriate in this case but preferable.

3.2.2 Procedural Parameters

Implied within the research questions are several assumptions: that experiences provide meaning, that people are able to differentiate between the quality of their experiences, and that the researcher does not already know the answers to the questions. These axioms suggest guidelines for undertaking the research, particularly in terms of procedural parameters.

Firstly, whatever methods are used should respect *the experience* as it naturally occurs. That is, the procedures used should not impinge upon people having the experience or interrupt or modify the experience in order to test a set of ideas or hypotheses. Secondly, the best source of peoples’ personal experiences is themselves. While it is possible for the researcher to access his or her own experiences, in order to gain a variety of viewpoints there is a need to access peoples’ recollections of experiences. Not only is there an implication that the research should *respect the experience*, but it should *value the experience of others*. In other words the methods should involve an empathetic viewpoint that is sensitive

to peoples' experiences. Thirdly, the researcher should approach the research questions with an open mind. The object of the research is not to prove an existing idea or theoretical understanding; rather it is to explore and develop an understanding of experience as we live it, in an effort to facilitate future meaningful experiences.

These considerations imply accessing peoples' experiences through some form of recollection, in an open-ended format that minimally impinges upon peoples' experiences of a wilderness journey. The questions themselves are suggestive of a qualitative approach involving interviews, journals and/or observations. It is imperative, however (as noted above), that peoples' experience of the wilderness journey as they live it be minimally influenced by the research.

3.3 The Researcher

My personal paradigm is partly evident within the framing of the research questions (Mason, 2005), however there remains a need to make transparent my background and view of the world: "paradigms represent a distillation of what we *think* about the world (but cannot prove). Our actions in the world, including actions as inquirers, cannot occur without reference to those paradigms: 'As we think, so do we act.'" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 13; see also Creswell, 2003). The following sections will consider my background, river experiences and pedagogical approach.

3.3.1 My Background

My own background in relation to wilderness journeys is threefold; recreational, commercial and educational. While it was recreational and commercial guiding that initially drew me to the area of wilderness journeys, it is the educational component of my outdoor experience that has most strongly influenced my desire to conduct this research project. It is as an outdoor educator that I feel the most responsibility to facilitate worthwhile meaningful experiences.

My recreational and commercial guiding experiences extend over a 20 year period. The professional guiding component has taken place in diverse regions and countries

around the world and are characterised by the common thread of extended journeys, usually up to two weeks in length, often in wild landscapes. Though occasionally in another capacity, I have mostly worked as a rafting guide on these extended river journeys.

While my initial attraction to work as a rafting guide on extended journeys was centred on the expectation of adventure, increasingly it was the experiences of the clients themselves that attracted my interest. For most clients, to raft on a river for a week or more is to be out of their comfort zone, often in an unknown landscape, and with people they do not know. Clients often observed that it had been an outstanding holiday, but also ‘so much more’, and I became intrigued by all that might be implied by ‘so much more’.

My recreational experiences have also been based around extended wilderness river journeys, with like minded people. I have joined expeditions and first descents on remote rivers around the world with small groups of paddlers, and while the experience of being on these trips often involves a high degree of adventure, there appears so much more to these experiences than the adventurous activity.

I have also worked as an outdoor educator in schools over the last decade. Compared to my commercial and recreational experiences, trips undertaken in this context are rarely as long, daunting or wild, with school programs often dictated to by parameters such as perceived safety, available time slots, or a desired set of measurable outcomes. While I have heard many moving descriptions of experiences from students on such trips, they have been, for the most part, less frequently or intensely expressed than those by clients on commercial trips. Whilst there may be many reasons for this, such as the focus of the trip and willingness, or ability, to articulate personally meaningful experiences, I have a deeply felt desire to better understand what is possible within outdoor education programs, particularly as it relates to wilderness journeys. (These observations reflect my own teaching experiences in educational institutions, and are not intended as a reflection of outdoor education in general.)

My own experience of guiding and outdoor education has left me with two main questions. Firstly, what forms of meaningful experiences occur for participants on wilderness journeys and how might these be facilitated? Secondly, are similar experiences described by adults potentially shared by students on extended outdoor education trips? Whilst the second question holds considerable interest for me, the journey towards answering that second question appears, for me, through the first. Without being able to articulate, understand and describe the range of meaningful experiences that might occur on a wilderness journey, it is difficult to know what we might look for in alternative contexts: “in phenomenological research, the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher’s excitement and curiosity inspire the search. Personal history brings the core of the problem into focus” (Moustakas 1994, p. 104). My own background has inspired this research, and there is a need to make explicit the meaning of such experiences for me.

3.3.2 The Meaning of my River Experiences

I have a deep desire for extended wilderness journeys. I am drawn to them. Exactly why, I have difficulty describing. For the most part, my wilderness journeys have met with success, been exciting, been socially interesting and have helped define who I am. But there is something more to them, something to do with a relationship to the landscape, to others, to myself, that I find hard to define. But I do feel they are good for me. They provide me with something which is otherwise difficult to achieve. It is as if the landscape requires me to account for myself, to see how I have changed, and how I might need to change in the future. As Lopez suggests: “the land urges us to come around to an understanding of ourselves” (1986, p. 247).

3.3.3 My Pedagogical Approach

As an outdoor educator and outdoor guide for over twenty years, I have developed an interest in travelling with people on extended river journeys. In particular, my focus of attention has been upon how individuals experience a river journey and construct

meaning through those experiences. I am particularly interested in how wilderness landscapes might have an impact on the construction of experiences.

I approach this research from the viewpoint of an educator, not only in the sense of school-based education, but also in the context of guiding adults, and with inputs from my own recreational experiences. I believe the purpose of education is to provide opportunities for development and growth, by gaining life capacities and knowledge of the world in which we live. How do we know the world? We come to know the world in which we live at least partly through experience, and that direct experience not only reflects the nature of the particular world in which we live but provides the best opportunity for people to come to know themselves and that world. Our past experiences provide the building blocks with which we make meaning of our present and future experiences: such experiential *continuity* and *interaction* are central to Dewey's (1938b) theory of experience. My own *pedagogical* approach is informed by constructivism, which emphasises the accumulation of knowledge and the construction of meaning through experience.

3.3.4 The Pedagogical Dilemma

There is an important question implicit within the research. Is there part of an experience of a wilderness journey that occurs as an underlying 'truth' or response to the wilderness for people today? This question does not imply that people necessarily reflect on, or conceive of, the experience in the same way, but asks 'is there a commonality within pre-reflective experience?' To state the question in a different way, is there a common pre-reflective aspect to experience that can be described in order to better understand the opportunities that are present within meaningful experiences on a wilderness journey? It is, I believe, incumbent upon outdoor educators and commercial guides to understand the pedagogical possibilities within such a question, and to be able to make the best use of possible surrounding environments in order to facilitate potentially meaningful experiences. As Dewey has written:

A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing condition, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile (1938b, p. 40).

3.4 Contribution of the Research

It is hoped that the contribution that this research will inform pedagogy for educators, guides and facilitators, so that the considerable effort and time taken to plan and provide outdoor experiences creates the most worthwhile opportunities for development. It is hoped that:

- a) descriptions of what it is like to have meaningful experiences on wilderness journeys will ring true for those who have spent a good deal of time on such journeys;
- b) educators, facilitators and guides will be better able to articulate the range of beneficial experiences possible on wilderness journeys; and
- c) educators, facilitators and guides will have a better understanding of the components of a wilderness journey that might facilitate such meaningful experiences.

3.4.1 Describing Meaningful Outdoor Experiences

It is hoped that by as sensitively and as fully as possible describing the different types of meaningful experiences that study participants have had, readers will be able themselves to relate comparatively to the experiences described. By *describing* the commonalities underlying the experiences readers should be enabled to not only better understand their own experiences in the outdoors, but also appreciate them within a possible range of experiences for others. Such experiences are difficult to

describe, are often pushed to the back of peoples' minds, and are consequently difficult to reflect upon or discuss freely.

The majority of research in the area of outdoor recreation and education has been focussed upon outcomes rather than the process itself, despite calls for a greater focus on process (Priest, 1999). Research into the process of outdoor experiences has largely been conducted within the positivist paradigm and traditional approaches to research. Yet for many outdoor guides and educators a shift in paradigm from positivist to an alternative understanding of knowledge and experience would be more in line with their own personal understanding of the process of outdoor experiences (Allison and Pomeroy, 2000).

An additional intent is to provide educators, guides and planners with the ability to *articulate* a variety of meaningful experiences to others, so that outdoor recreation and education opportunities will be valued for an increasingly wide range of experiences and outcomes. An outdoor educator might wish to run a program that involves an extended wilderness journey; the educator should be able to describe and validate the potential for personally meaningful experiences, and to gauge the students' development during the trip. Planners on the other hand should be able to articulate to management agencies the experiences inherent within recreational tourism and the components of a journey that might contribute to such experiences.

This research also seeks to identify the components of a wilderness river journey that contribute towards the *facilitation* of such experiences. It goes to the heart of the research to suggest, as Dewey (1938b, p. 40) does, that we as educators (and here I include commercial river guides, as well) have a responsibility to understand the surrounding environment and the valuable experiences that arise therein. It involves being able to describe and, at least partially, understand what is at the 'core' of potentially meaningful experiences for participants; in other words, what is the 'essence' of the original, lived experience.

3.5 A Phenomenological Approach

In selecting a methodological framework from within which to operate, priority was given to finding an integrity and consistency between the research questions, my own view of the world and the intended contribution of the research. A phenomenological approach offers that integrity by mandating a qualitative approach that privileges personal experience, is descriptive, searches for common essences and is consistent with a pedagogy informed by constructivism. It provides a framework within which to investigate human experience, as Fredrickson suggests: “various modes of phenomenological inquiry are seen as ideal in exploring the inherent complexities of person-place interactions” (1996, p. 139). This section will outline the key elements within a phenomenologically-informed research project.

Rather than a strict scientific method, phenomenology instead provides a point of vantage from which to view the world. It is a perspective upon the nature of knowledge. While there are many different ‘styles’ of phenomenology (Seamon, 2000), at the heart of these styles is “the phenomenological task: the descriptive investigation of the phenomena, both objective and subjective, in their fullest breadth and depth” (Spiegelberg, 1960, p. 2), or, as Heidegger asserts, “to the things themselves!” (1962, p. 58). Phenomenology, then, is a return to the investigation and description of the essence of things as we live through them: “*phenomenological research is the study of lived experience*. To say the same thing differently: phenomenology is the study of the life world – the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it” (van Manen, 1997, p. 9). Thus, phenomenology provides a framework through which to research and interpret lived experience. It is both a philosophical tradition and a methodological approach to research. It attempts to provide a better understanding of the world as we directly experience it by studying phenomena, where phenomena are taken to be objects or experiences as they are experienced (Seamon, 2000) or illuminated to us (Heidegger, 1962).

While phenomenology makes use of an individual’s first hand experience to explore and describe phenomena, it is not just a method aimed at explicating individual experiences: instead “the aim is to use these descriptions as a groundstone from

which to discover underlying commonalities that mark the essential core of the phenomenon” (Seamon, 2002, p. 159). This is done by approaching the phenomenon that the researcher seeks to understand from a variety of perspectives, often using interviews, personal accounts or texts to search for patterns that define a particular phenomenon. For this reason, sampling is rarely random; rather, the sample reflects an ability to gain first hand accounts that are as thorough as possible. Phenomenology begins with descriptions of lived experience, but it attempts far more than a moment-to-moment description; it attempts to describe the organisational principles and structures of consciousness:

In other words, the phenomenologist pays attention to specific instances of the phenomenon with the hope that these instances, in time, will point toward more general qualities and characteristics that accurately describe the essential nature of the phenomenon as it has presence and meaning in the concrete lives and experiences of human beings (Seamon, 2000 p. 159).

3.5.1 The Classical Phenomenologists: Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty

Ever since Edmund Husserl coined the term, ‘phenomenology’ has sought for the underlying and universal components of consciousness that are common to human experiences. Husserl believed that phenomenal experience of the world was the basis of knowledge and, therefore, the foundational underpinning of both science and philosophy. Though rightly viewed as the forefather of phenomenology, he sits within a continuum of philosophers and researchers concerned to describe what it is to experience the world and to study what it is to make meaning from our world. As phenomenology itself is continually evolving, so too did Husserl’s ideas, developing from a focus on a transcendent ego or consciousness (Husserl, 1931) to a focus on our pre-reflective life world of experiences (Husserl, 1970a). Husserl’s major concern was to describe the ‘invariant structure’ (Seamon, 2002) or constituents of meaning and knowledge as they present themselves in our consciousness.

Husserl considered essence and intuition to precede empirical knowledge of the world (Moustakas, 1994). While he was not alone in this belief, his application of

this insight to scientific investigation did set him apart from his peers. Husserl sought to explicate phenomena as they appear in our consciousness, before we apply our own conceptions and norms to them, as the primary constituent of which both human meaning and knowledge are built (Van Manen, 2009c). While Descartes sought to move out from a known point towards the world and gain knowledge deductively, Husserl sought to begin from an inseparable interaction with the world and intuit knowledge as it originally occurs to us (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl sought to not only gain knowledge, but to consider how knowledge came into being; in other words, to question the building blocks of knowledge: “we must exclude all empirical interpretations and existential affirmations, we must take what is inwardly experienced or otherwise inwardly intuited (e.g. pure fancy) as pure experiences, as our exemplary basis for acts of Ideation” (Husserl, 1970b, p. 577).

Two of the major themes that Husserl (1931) developed were that of the phenomenological *reduction*, and the idea of *intentionality*. The phenomenological reduction, or ‘*epoché*’, is a way of approaching the constituents of consciousness without pre-conceptions or judgement. The problem with trying to describe phenomena as they originally appear to our consciousness is that we cannot study them *as* we are experiencing or paying attention to them. Our only access to them is through later recall that is subject to reflection and conceptualisation. Husserl’s way around this was to deliberately suspend judgement and pre-conception and focus on phenomena as they present themselves to us. In this sense, Husserl’s phenomenology was descriptive, in that it sought to describe the phenomena as they originally appear in our consciousness.

Husserl also developed his mentor, Brentano’s (1838-1917) *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1973 [1874]), conception of intentionality (Moustakas, 1994; Solomon, 2001). ‘Intentionality’ signifies that our consciousness is always directed towards something (Van Manen, 2009c); it is the relationship between the way an object appears in our consciousness and the object itself. While this may appear to contradict the inseparability of ourselves to the world, for Husserl it did not. The two parts of intentionality remained inseparable. They were the *noema* and *noesis*, and one could not exist without the other. The noema is the way the phenomenon appears in our consciousness (the content or ‘what’ we pay attention to), while the noesis is

the interpretative act (the process or the ‘how’ we pay attention) directed towards the noema (van Manen, 1997). The essence of a phenomenon, then, is the combination of these two illuminated within consciousness.

In order to look for the essences of experience Husserl (1931) looked within consciousness to see what was given to us, in a way that attempted to suspend pre-conceptions and judgements through phenomenological reduction and reveal the invariant structure of consciousness. For Husserl consciousness was a transcendent realm that existed separately from specific experiences, and it was here that his search was situated (Seamon, 2002). While Husserl did later focus his phenomenological intent on searching within a life world of everyday experience (Solomon, 2001), it was philosophers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty who were to move the search for the essence of phenomena fully into the world as we live within it (Seamon, 2002) and pre-reflectively experience it (van Manen, 2009a).

Heidegger (1962) was concerned with what it was to be in the world. Rather than questioning what made up the building blocks of knowledge, Heidegger’s primary concern was with what it is to exist (or be) in a world of meaning. The question from Heidegger’s perspective was one of ontology rather than epistemology (van Manen, 2009a). What does it mean to perceive things as meaningful in our world? This question moved the search for the essence of a phenomenon from a transcendent realm of consciousness to the realm of lived experience, of which consciousness was a part. From Heidegger’s point of view suspending ‘existence’ to concentrate on ‘pure phenomena’, as Husserl (1931) had done, did little to focus on the act of *being* in the world (Spiegelberg, 1960).

Rather than a cognitive and directional view of intentionality, Heidegger’s (1962) view of intentionality is in the world as we experience it and involves a relationship between a person and their world (von Eckartsberg, 1998a). Rather than us directing our attention towards something uni-directionally and revealing its meaning, as if we were separate from it, it becomes an equal relationship whereby we are impacting upon the object and the object is impacting upon us as we experience it. The arrow of causation is multi-directional – the interaction takes place in both directions – we are

in the world and our experience is inseparable from our world (Seamon, 2000). We are the creators of our world, and our world creates us (Heidegger, 1962).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) extended the idea of being in the world to include the way in which we exist implicitly in the world through our bodies. Lived experience, then, becomes an embodied experience that we cannot escape. That is, when we describe the phenomena of lived experience we are doing so in a way that includes our embodied experience of it. In this way Merleau-Ponty “widened the meaning of intentionality to include preverbal thought (thinking that exists in action) or the prepersonal dimension of bodily intentions and meaning” (von Eckartsberg, 1998a, p. 12). We are in the world, and the world is an extension of our bodies: “the true abode of human consciousness is in the world which opens up around man. Consciousness is comprised equally of man’s activity in orienting himself to this world, and the activity of the world in expressing itself within human consciousness” (Moss and Keen, 1981, p. 110).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes consciousness as ‘openness to the world’, in the sense that consciousness is a constant interplay between the person and the world. We are wholly in the world and therefore cannot view it from an exterior vantage point:

Merleau-Ponty’s work... suggests that participation is a defining attribute of perception itself. By asserting that perception, phenomenologically considered, is inherently participatory, we mean that perception always involves, at its most intimate level, the experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which is perceived (Abram, 1996, p. 57).

From Merleau-Ponty’s point of view, “the most important lesson that the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (1962, p. xv). Phenomenology is “the study of essences” (p. vii), and those phenomenal essences are to be uncovered by thoughtful and empathetic reflections on embodied lived experience.

Both Heidegger (1962) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) acknowledge Husserl and consider their work to be a progression of his insights. The theme throughout remains the study of phenomena as they appear for us, and in particular how they appear for us in our pre-reflective lived experience of being in the world. While Husserl believed that a full reduction was possible through the ‘epoché’ involving a transcendent ego or consciousness, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty placed consciousness, and therefore phenomena, fully in the world as an inseparable relationship between a person and their world.

This section has avoided the distinction that can be made between the ‘transcendent’ phenomenology of Husserl and the ‘existentialist’ phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Instead, it has viewed the distinction as a progression. While there are clearly differences of philosophical outlook, the intent to search out the essence of phenomena in our conscious lived experience is common to all the classical phenomenologists. The approach used in this research project is philosophically situated at the ‘existential’ end of the phenomenological progression, however, the true test of the approach is situated within the method used. By using a phenomenological approach, this research will describe the ‘essence’ of potentially meaningful experiences for participants, so that they might ring true for participants, educators and guides, in order that they might be better able to articulate and understand the lived experience of others.

3.5.2 Application of methods

As Merleau-Ponty has observed, “phenomenology is available only through a phenomenological method” (1962, p. viii). At the heart of the phenomenological method is the direct involvement of the researcher in the phenomenon, an approach to the phenomenon that suspends preconceptions and judgements, that utilises direct human experience as the source of the data, and enjoins a sympathetic reflection on the data that seeks to explicate the commonalities within the experiences (von Eckartsberg, 1998b).

There is no single phenomenological method (Spiegelberg, 1960), however there is a common theme that seeks to understand the world in which we live through the study of our pre-reflective lived experiences. The methods are rooted in the philosophical tradition previously described. What follows is a description of several key elements of a phenomenological approach, and the resultant practical application of those elements in terms of research design and methods used.

3.5.2.1 The Life-world

The life-world, or lived experience, is a term used within phenomenology that expresses those moments in everyday experience that ‘just happen’. While they can be usual or unique experiences, they are experiences that we do not necessarily always feel the need to explicitly reflect upon. It is the world as it naturally occurs for us and as such contains experiences in their most full and original setting. It is the natural attitude of being in the world, and it is from here that phenomenology has its starting point:

A lived experience is a distinctive and characteristic mode in which reality is there-for-me. A lived experience does not confront me as something perceived or represented; it is not given to me, but the reality of lived experience is there-for-me because I have a reflexive awareness of it, because I possess it immediately as belonging to me in some sense. Only in thought does it become objective (Dilthey, 1985, p. 223).

In the context of this research, the wilderness journey experiences need to occur in their most full and natural condition for the individuals involved. The journey itself should not be impinged upon, or the experiences of the participants disrupted, for the purpose of testing pre-existing theories.

3.5.2.2 The “Reduction”

In phenomenology, ‘reduction’ does not mean to make smaller; rather it is derived from *re-ducere*, meaning to ‘lead back to’ (van Manen, 2009b). Thus, phenomenological reduction means attempting to get back to, or connect with, lived meaningful experience. The application of the reduction is often in the form of

bracketing – suspending assumptions and approaching phenomenon with an open mind. Rather than inferring a particular set of procedures to be followed it is about developing an attitude of attentive reflection; to consider the phenomenon as it produces meaning, free of the preconceptions with which we live.

From a research point of view this applies to both the way the primary researcher approaches the phenomenon under investigation, and the way descriptions of experience are drawn out from co-researchers (in this case the participants). The primary researcher must approach the phenomenon with as open a mind as possible and suspend any pre-conceptions held about the phenomenon. While we must attempt to ‘bracket’ our assumptions and preconceptions, this is not fully achievable because we are always in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). However, in attempting to bracket, we draw attention to the preconceptions that we do hold about a phenomenon, and thus gain a deeper understanding about how our world appears for us.

When drawing out descriptions from participants it is important to remember that whenever we reflect on an experience we are to some degree applying our minds to it after the event, we are recollecting it as it occurs to us in the present. The implication is that considerable effort needs to be spent in ‘getting back to’ any specific experiences that are being described. In other words, in the context of an interview, recollecting the experience in its fullest and original sense is the desired goal. It is for this reason that the interview is to be preferred to the questionnaire, as further and deeper exploration is constrained by the inflexibility of the questionnaire structure.

We have suggested that ‘meaningful experiences’ are often difficult to describe, especially in the original sense that they occur to us. But the very attempt to describe these experiences may assist with the phenomenological reduction in a practical sense:

Noticing the ineffable helps us wonder at the world in which we live; consequently, it assists us in our execution of the phenomenological reduction. Then the awareness re-emerges that our reflective life is situated

entirely within the unreflected life, and again we realize that everything verbal has its roots in the non-verbal (Dienste, 1985, p. 8).

3.5.2.3 Intentionality

Consciousness is always directed towards ‘something’, and in this process the person and their world are inextricably linked. The conscious experience is necessarily directed towards an object, while the object provides the context for the conscious experience (Seamon, 2002) and the two are inseparable. The implications for the research method are important. Intentionality provides the cornerstone that makes legitimate the methods used, as well as having practical implications.

In terms of researching meaningful human experiences intentionality means we are unable to fully remove ourselves from the research context. Instead we must find a way of laying bare the nature of this interaction as it occurs for individuals in their world of meaning. We are the creators of meaning in our world and the question arises as to whether there are universal commonalities to the way we come to know or make these meanings.

From a practical point of view, this means that, while we are not necessarily aware of intentionality in our conscious thought as it occurs, it is nevertheless available to us for inspection retrospectively, in our conscious recollection of experience. We must apply strategies and techniques that enable us to fully explore people’s recollections of experience as completely and accurately as possible. While this will clearly differ from person to person or situation to situation, it must remain a central concern in applying the methods.

3.5.2.4 Essences

Phenomenologically speaking ‘essence’ is a term used to denote the way in which phenomena reveal themselves to us as we encounter them pre-reflectively within lived experience:

Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-‘thing’ what it *is* – and without which it could not be what it

is... The essence of phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon (van Manen, 1997, p. 10).

The essence of a phenomenon, then, is that which is necessary to allow the experience to exist. It is a search for the unique components of an experience that are not replaceable; in other words, what it is that we cannot take away if the phenomenon, experience or object is to remain 'what it is'. Von Eckartsberg (1998a) provides the example of an apple. While the apple might be red, we can equally imagine a green apple or even a purple one if need be. The question is what could we not take away in terms of the qualities of the apple if it is to remain an apple. What is the 'essence' – the definitive qualities of the apple that make it an apple? This search for commonalities in the way the apple is revealed to us is the search for *essences*.

But essences are more complicated than they initially appear. While they go to the heart of what phenomenology is (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), we need to remember that essences are not just 'of an object'. We are operating within a view of the world where the person and their world are inseparably linked, and as such essences reveal not the essence of the object, but the essence of the *interaction*, of the person / world; more specifically, the essence of the interaction for a given person, in a particular context of time and space. While essences infer a generalizability and search for what is common to a phenomenon, they are also at their heart *individual*. The ability to generalize, then, is based on commonalities between individual interactions with the world, rather than discrete objects themselves. As such, they reveal what the 'interaction' requires to make it what it is; they reveal the way we perceive objects, but also speak to the way we are in order to perceive objects the way we do.

In terms of the practical application of methods, 'essences' speak particularly to the size of the sample and the style of analysis. Given that we are searching for 'that which makes a phenomenon what it is' we require enough data to get to the heart of this problem. Rather than setting preconceived ideas or limits for the sample size, collection of the data, and the analysis of it afterwards, we need to adopt a more interactive approach. We must analyse incoming data as it emerges for us, check it for appropriateness, sensitively reflect on it and continue to collect data in light of

what we find. In this way the sample size and analytical technique will be revealed as the essences become apparent. There should come a point where any new incoming data consolidates and reaffirms the essence of the phenomena under investigation, and any return on further investments diminishes:

The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience...

The human scientist determines the underlying structures of an experience by interpreting the originally given descriptions of the situation in which the experience occurs (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

3.6 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has outlined the elements that significantly contributed to the selection of the methodological approach, including the research questions, my own background and the intended contribution of the research. In doing so, the chapter has made explicit the ways in which my view of the world impacts upon the development of the research project; the ways in which I might make decisions and practically influence the research as it unfolds. This chapter has also considered both the philosophical and methodological implications of a phenomenological approach and the way in which the practicalities of the research design will be implemented.

Chapter 4 – Practical Research Design and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this section, I will describe the practical design of the research. Conducting research on wilderness journeys brings with it a particular set of difficulties that require sensitive decision making. As Ewert and McAvoy suggest, “it is difficult to conduct research with organized wilderness group programs and the researcher faces a number of challenges in conducting research that is valid and reliable, yet not overly intrusive to the participants” (2000, p.14). In describing the decision making process involved there is a theme of balance; a combined sensitivity to the research questions, phenomenological approach, participants and experiences of the wilderness journey itself. How decisions were arrived at, based on a process of respect for these elements, is explained.

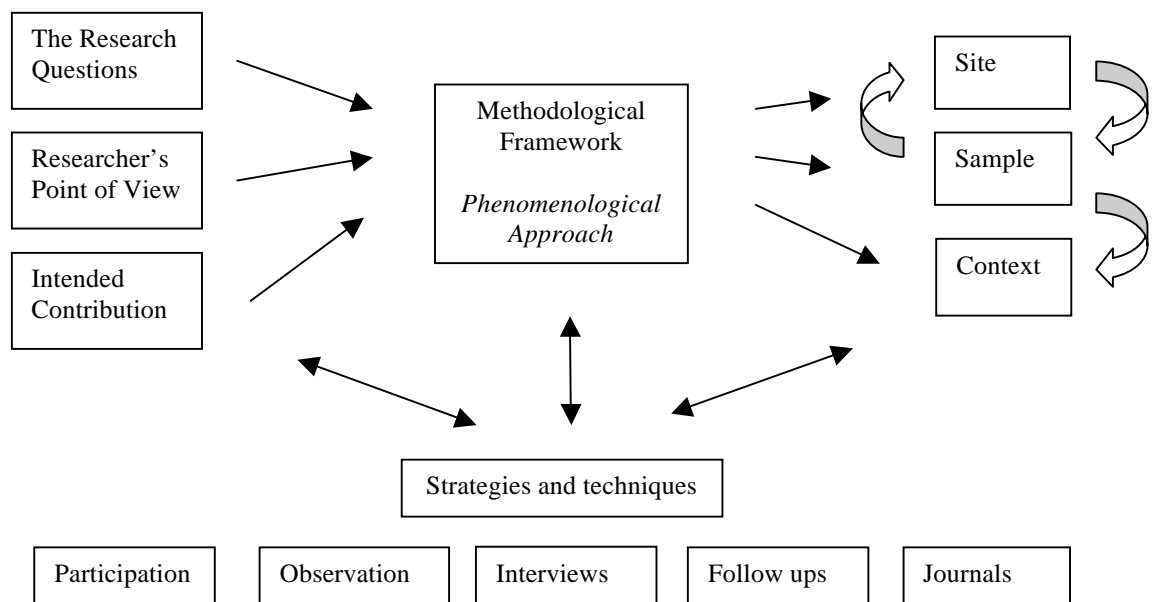


Figure 1. Concept Map of Research Design Process

4.2 Selecting the Site

The selection of the Franklin River as the site for the research project reflects a desire to investigate meaningful experiences as they occur and as they are vividly lived. There is an element of risk in this research design because it demands finding meaningful experiences for participants' on a wilderness journey *in-situ*. The selection of the site, then, is crucial in maximizing the opportunities for meaningful experiences. While there is no guarantee meaningful experiences will occur for participants on a wilderness journey, selecting a site such as the Franklin River, an extended iconic Australian wilderness journey, would seem most likely to foster such experiences: "we learn most about a thing when we view it under a microscope, as it were, or in its most exaggerated form" (James 1902, p. 48).

The Franklin River provides a remote, intact and unique wilderness landscape, through which participants can journey over an extended period, and one that is well known for leaving an indelible mark on participants: "I have worked on rafting expeditions all over the world, the Franklin remains the most consistent at giving its visitors an unforgettable adventure. It is one of the Greatest Wilderness Rafting Rivers in the world" (Waterson, 2008). While any narrative of experiences can never be the same as the lived experience itself, by gathering a variety of participant perceptions of the Franklin River journey this research aims to describe the essence of the meaningful experiences as they occur for participants. The selection of the Franklin River is based on maximizing the opportunity for the description of just such experiences. The selection of an iconic wilderness site, such as the Franklin River, requires careful attention to the social and cultural conceptions of that area that will be present for both the participants and myself. More general ideas on the conception of 'wilderness' are covered in Chapter two of this thesis, while what follows is a consideration of the more localized specifics of the Franklin River itself.

4.2.1 The Franklin River



Figure 2: Location of the Franklin River, South-West Tasmania
Source: (Independent, 2008)

The Franklin River sits at the centre of the 4,500 square kilometre *Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park* and within a World Heritage Area. The Franklin's journey begins in the small streams and tributaries in the Cheyne Range, which themselves begin to reveal the essence of the Franklin. Not only does the Franklin River remain a relatively intact wilderness, buffered by extensive mountain ranges and valleys, but so too do its tributaries. To look up into the contributing streams of the Franklin River is to glance into micro-worlds that disappear enigmatically behind rock walls and ancient forests. Here is a world that, though once inhabited by humans, remains relatively intact. As Griffiths and Baxter observe:

Rivers like the Franklin are rare in Australia, and indeed the world. From its source high in the mountains of central Tasmania through to its meeting with the Gordon 125 kilometres later there are no settlements along its banks and no farms within its catchment. Its waters still run as pure as they did when the Tasmanian Aborigines first settled here tens of thousands of years ago (1997, p. 1).

The Franklin River hints at a world far older than human habitation. The geology surrounding the Franklin River is predominantly Precambrian (Kiernan, 2008); in the case of the upper and middle Franklin River area it is around 700 million - 1.1 billion years old. Mountain ranges and valleys were formed not only by folding and uplifting, but by the erosional activity of the rivers and streams themselves over an extended period of time. The limestone of the lower Franklin was laid down around 450-500 million years ago, when the area was for a time under water. Kiernan describes it:

The Franklin rises in Tasmania's Central Highlands and in its middle reaches flows westwards and then southwards around the previously glaciated Frenchmans Cap massif... Downstream of the Andrew-Franklin confluence ridges of Precambrian quartzite rise to 400m altitude within 1 km to either side of the Franklin River at 280 m until it emerges into a broader valley floored by limestone (2008, pp. 327-328).

The forests, too, hark back to an earlier era, before Gondwanaland broke up some 95 million years ago. Many of the plants within the temperate rainforest of the Franklin River are remnants from a time when Australia, Antarctica, South America and India were joined (Collins, 1990). To be on the Franklin River is to glimpse into a world that takes the human imagination to its very limits.

4.2.2 The Journey

The Franklin River journey (Figure 3) is usually between nine and eleven days on a rafting trip; beginning at the Collingwood River on the Lyell highway and finishing on the Gordon River at Sir John Falls where a seven hour yacht trip takes you down the remainder of the Gordon River and across Macquarie Harbour (photos in Appendix 10). Commercial trips commonly consist of two rafts, two guides and up to eight clients. World Expeditions describe the journey thus:

For both rafters and outdoor enthusiasts, the Franklin River is synonymous with wilderness conservation. It is one of the world's last great wild rivers and forges its course through the rugged Southwest of Tasmania, through deep gorges, quiet pools and magnificent temperate rainforest... Any descent of the Franklin is demanding, and although it is not necessary to have previous rafting experience, some wilderness knowledge, along with a sound level of fitness is essential. A flexible nature and a willingness to become part of a small crew immersed in the vast and remote wilderness will ensure a wealth of experiences (World Expeditions, 2008).

The upper reaches of the Franklin River are characterized by gravel races and numerous small rapids, interspersed with flat pools and relatively open valleys. At low to medium water levels (common in summer) this section can be shallow, difficult to negotiate in rafts, and often not entirely what participants had in mind. It is however a chance for most folks to find their feet on the river and get into the swing of an extended rafting journey. The upper section usually takes two days to negotiate, and includes features such as the Franklin / Collingwood Junction, Log Jam and Nasty Notch.

The middle section of the Franklin begins by dropping into Descension Gorge which contains a series of more 'committing' grade 3-4 rapids, depending on the water level, and finishes with the Irenabyss, "a remarkable narrow gorge whose silent waters offer a stark contrast to the excitement of the rapids above" (Griffiths and Baxter, 1997, p. 41). On leaving the Irenabyss there is a section of river that includes Debacle Bend, Rafter's Race, The Crankle and Blushrock Falls. This section, characterized by more defined rapids, takes a couple of days, and it is often near the end of the fourth day on the river that the Great Ravine is approached.

The Great Ravine is perhaps the most spectacular, daunting and wild part of the Franklin River. Over a distance of five kilometers the river drops through a series of mandatory portages (grade 5-6) including the Churn, Thunderush and the Cauldron, as the river goes through a 300-metre defile. Due to the extensive portages (between two to six hours each) it is usually necessary to spend a night somewhere inside the Ravine, commonly at the Corruscades. After exiting the Great Ravine through

Deliverance Reach, the river has a few drop pool rapids until it opens up to Rafter's Basin. Downstream from the Basin is Propsting Gorge, including Ol' Three Tiers and culminating in the Pig's Trough, Rock Island Bend and Newland's Cascades.

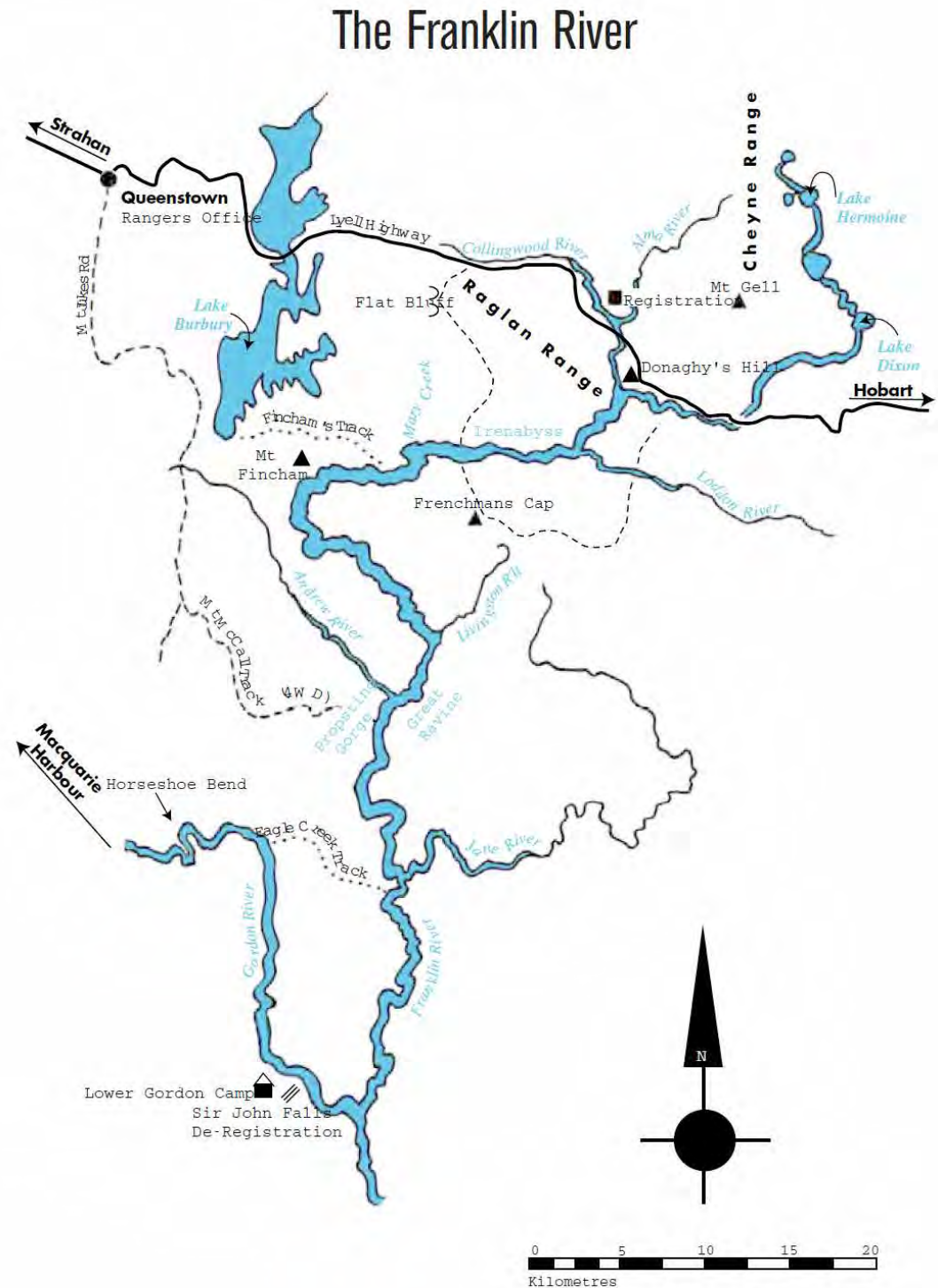


Figure 3: Franklin River, South-West Tasmania
Source: (Griffiths and Baxter, 1997, p. 37)

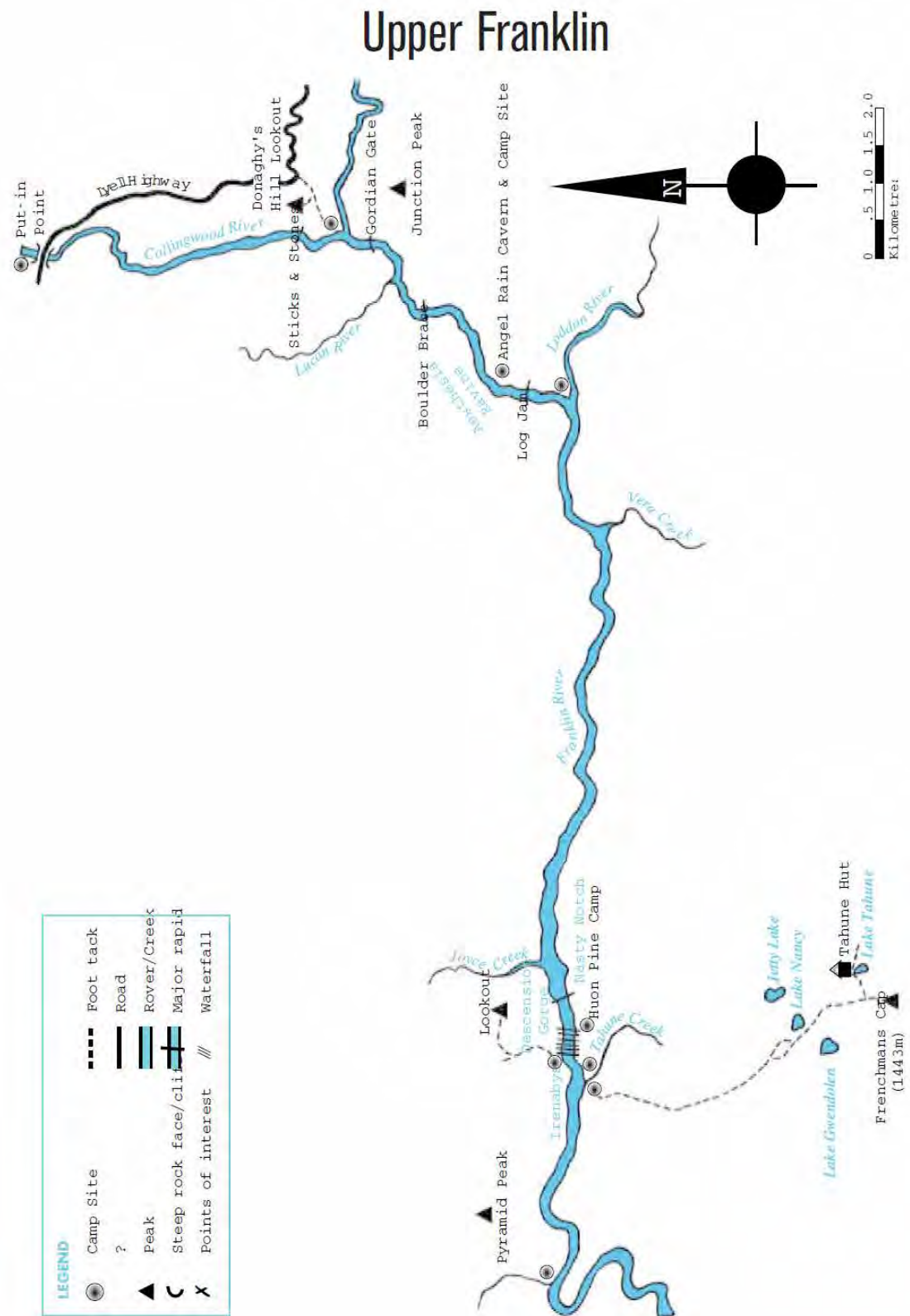


Figure 4: Upper Franklin River, South-West Tasmania
Source: (Griffiths and Baxter, 1997, p. 39)

Middle Franklin

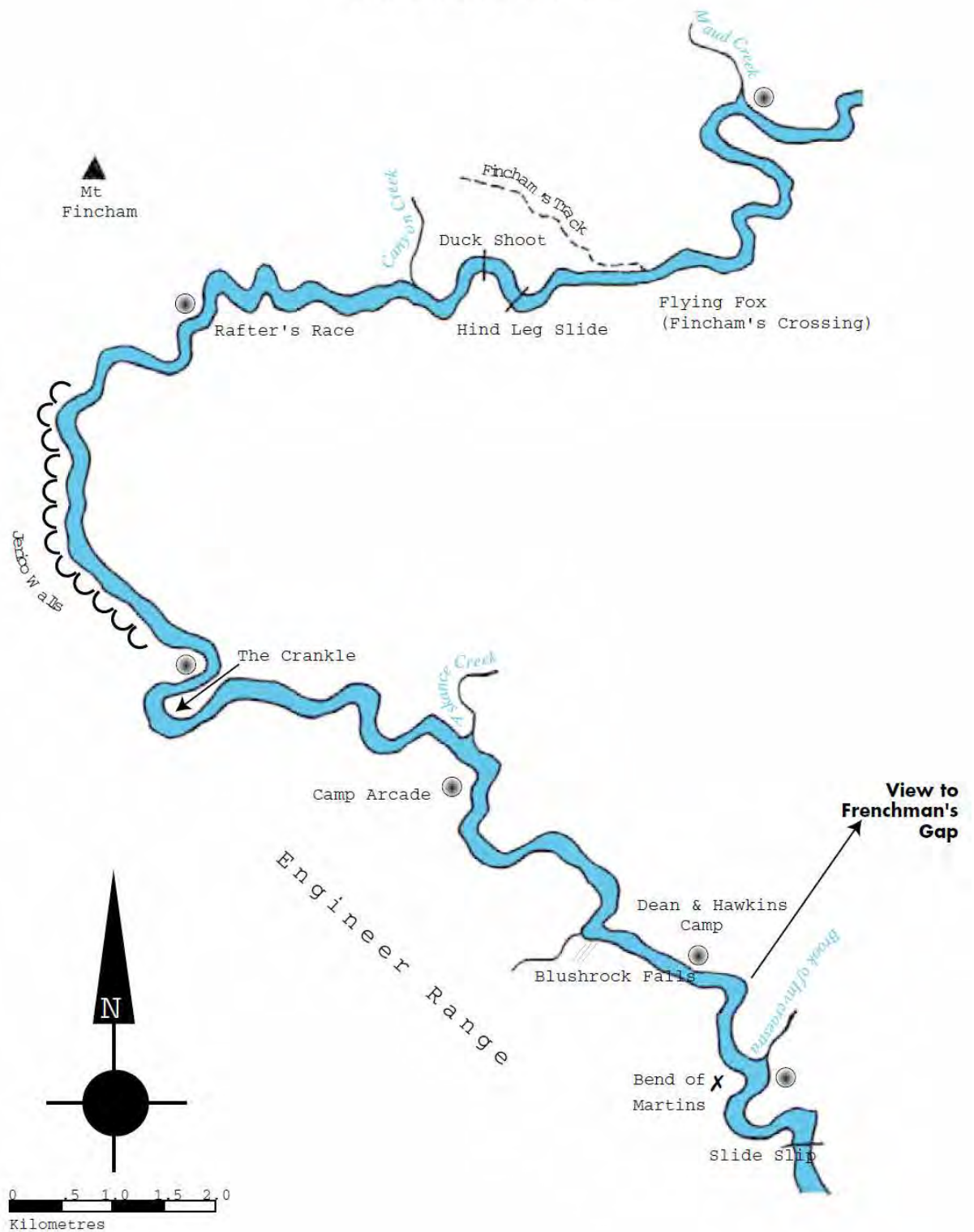


Figure 5: Middle Franklin River, Southwest Tasmania
Source: (Griffiths and Baxter, 1997, p. 43)

The Great Ravine

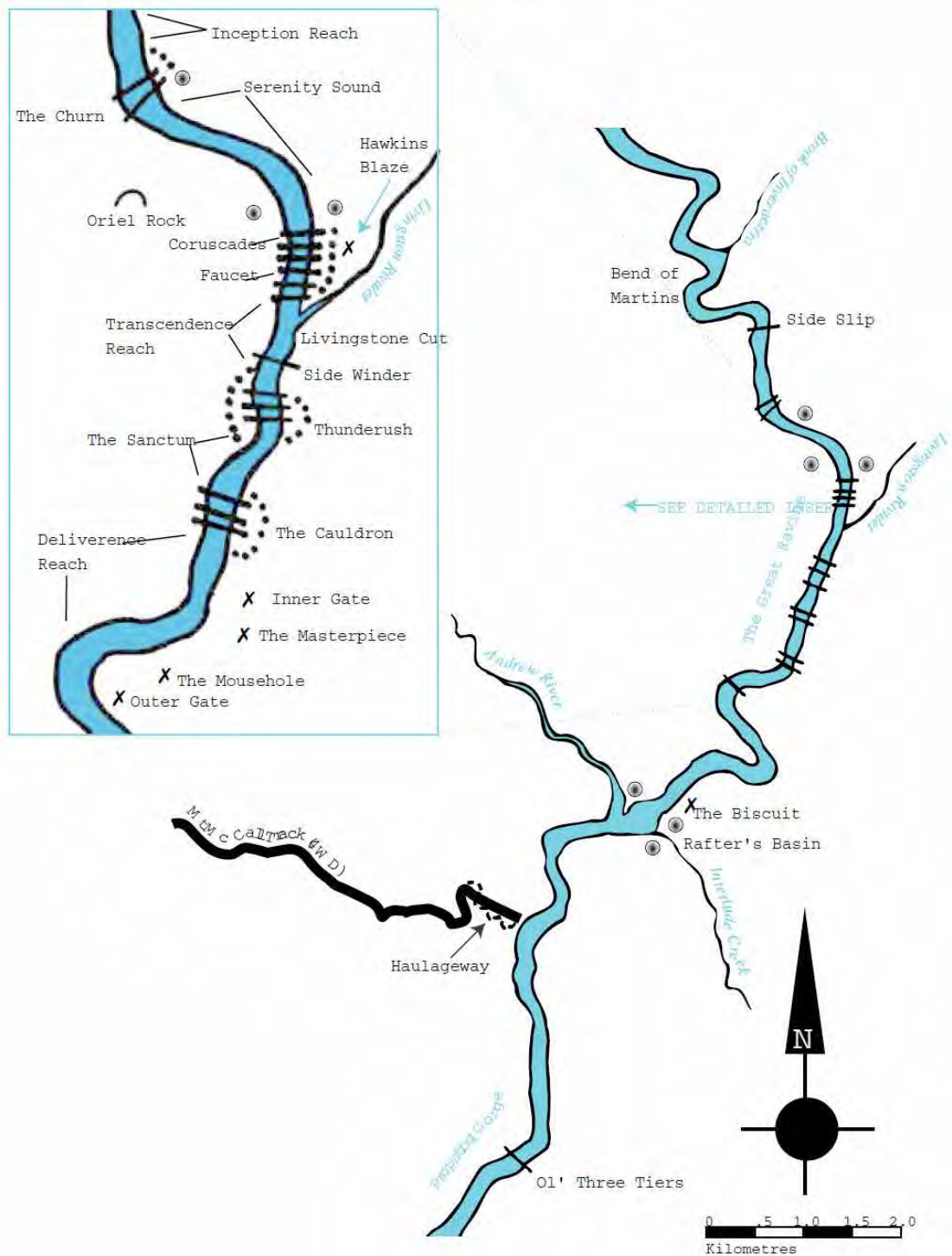


Figure 6: The Great Ravine, Franklin River, Southwest Tasmania
Source: (Griffiths and Baxter, 1997, p. 45)

Lower Franklin

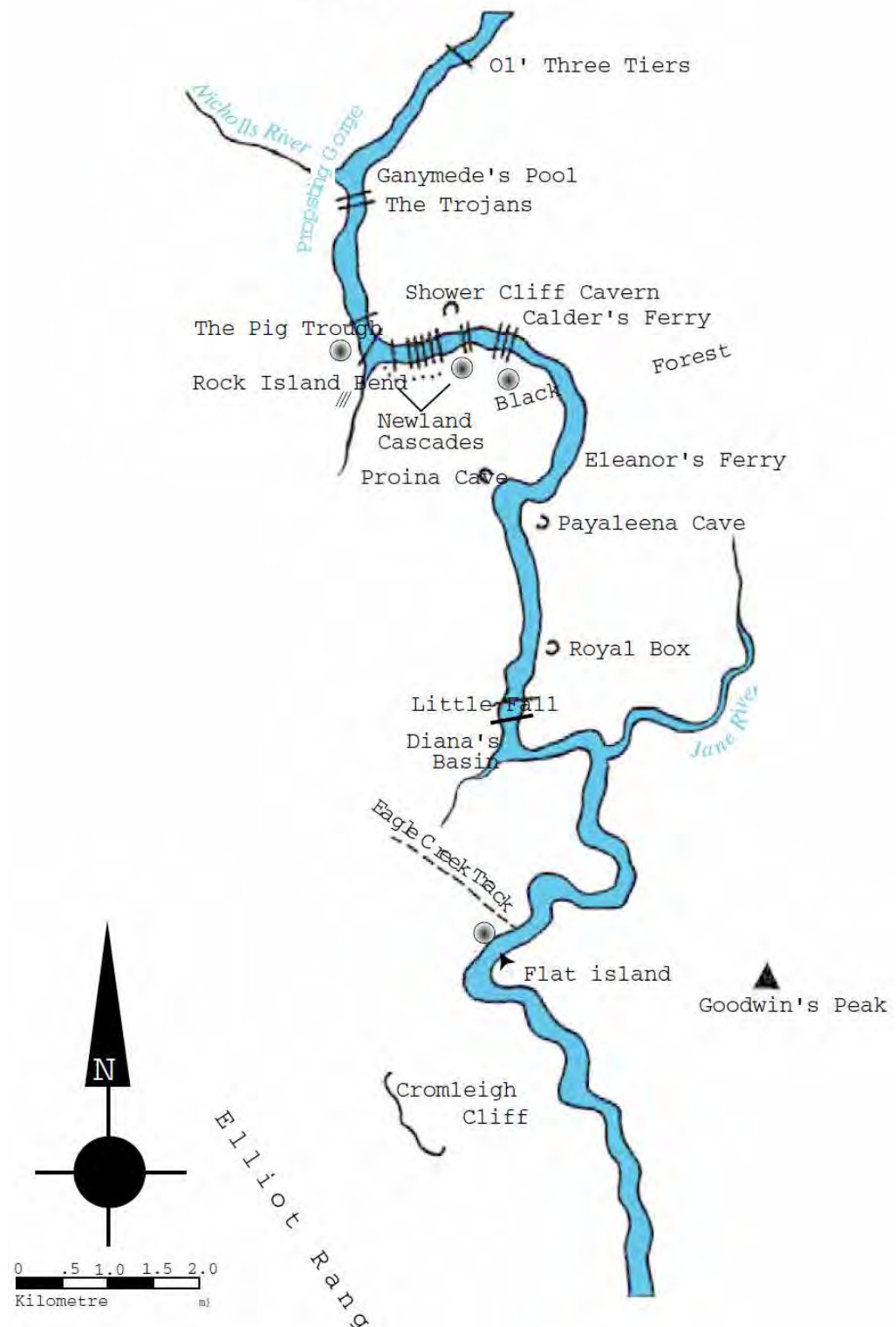


Figure 7: Lower Franklin River, Southwest Tasmania
 Source: (Griffiths and Baxter, 1997, p. 51)

Gordon

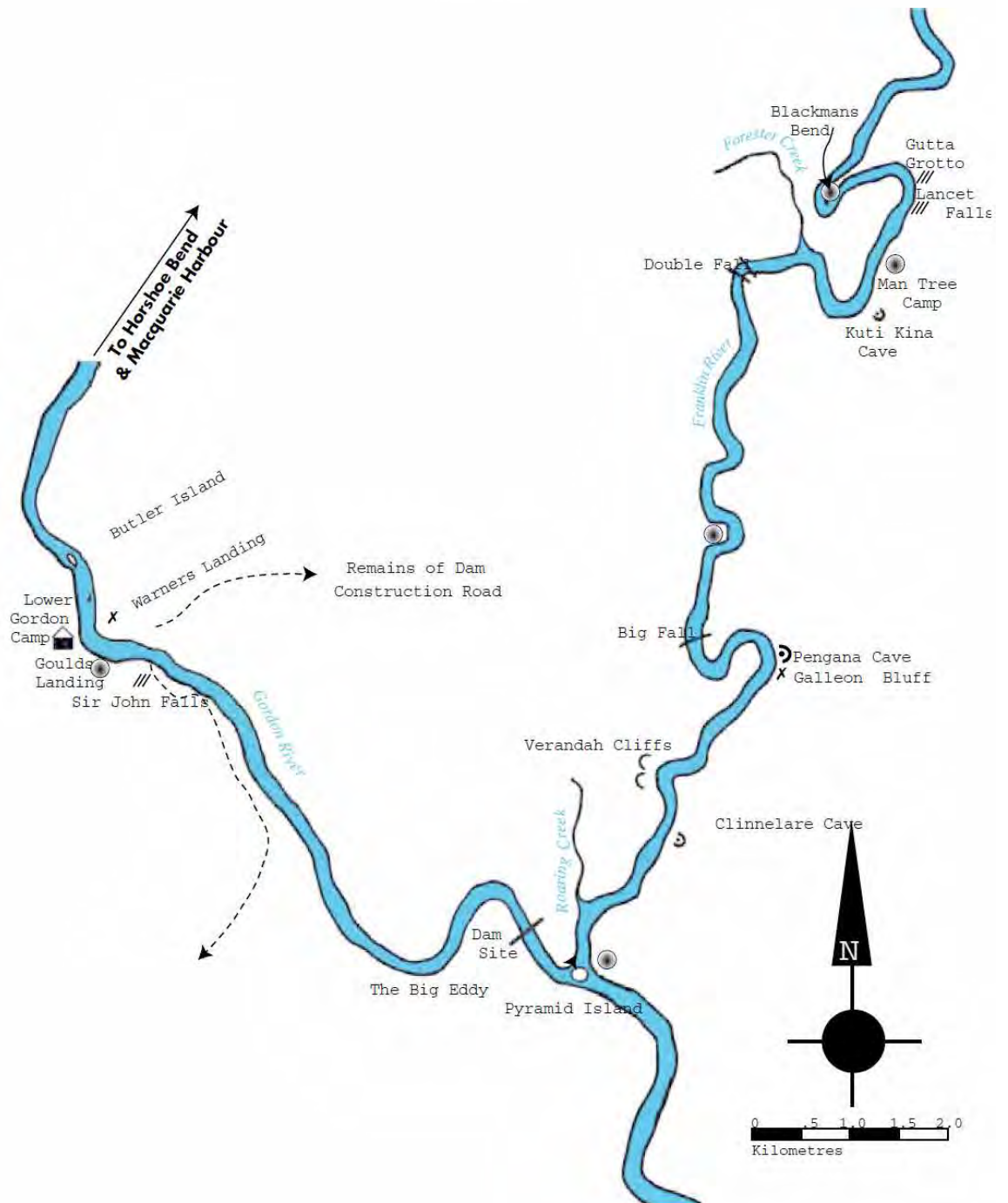


Figure 8: Gordon and Franklin Rivers, Southwest Tasmania
Source: (Griffiths and Baxter, 1997, p. 55)

At Newland's Cascades the Precambrian geology dives underground and the river releases you into the stunning limestone country of the lower Franklin (Kiernan, 2008). The lower Franklin is a contrast to the upper and middle reaches of the Franklin and contains two days of relatively flat-water paddling beside limestone cliffs and blackwood forests. Turning a corner at Newlands Cascades the sky expands and the sense of release is palpable. The Franklin continues to its junction with the Gordon River above Sir John Falls. Typical ten day trip campsites are:

Day 1- The Junction or Angel Rain Cavern

Day 2- The Irenabyss

Day 3- The Crankle or Camp Arcade

Day4- Corruscades or the Churn

Day5- Rafters Basin

Day 6- Newland's Cascades or Black Forest

Day 7 - Rest Day around Newland's / Pig's Trough

Day 8- Blackman's Bend or Big Fall Beach

Day 9- Gordon Junction or Sir John Falls

Day 10- Return.

4.2.3 Human Experience of the Franklin River

The Franklin River and its surrounding lands have a history of human interaction. To some it may seem a long history, extending back some 35,000 years, or two thousand generations, of indigenous relationship to the land. To others it may seem relatively short, with much of the geology predating 700 million years. But it is perhaps the history of the last two hundred years that has left such an indelible imprint on the minds of many Australians, and has resulted in the stories and myths that help to define what the Franklin River represents today.

Caves on the lower Franklin have revealed evidence of Aboriginal occupation 15-20,000 years ago (Kiernan, 2008). At this time the landscape was very different. Tasmania was connected to mainland Australia by a land bridge, the polar ice cap was only around 1000km to the south, and the lower Franklin was grassland (Griffiths and Baxter, 1997). While a changing climate changed the use pattern for

Aboriginal peoples, there is evidence to suggest Aboriginal occupation of the Southwest over the last few thousand years, and particularly during European settlement (Flanagan, 1985). Aboriginal culture continues strongly in Tasmania today, and reflects a close relationship to the landscape that has existed for tens of thousands of years:

GA Robinson's journals provided some idea of Aboriginal perspectives, when he recorded that different tribes claimed various tree species as 'theirs and call them countrymen'. Aboriginal languages provide evidence for the complex interrelation of people and landscape, with words for hill, mountain and the like clearly metaphorical in origin, and bearing associations with words for spear, head, and other body parts. Aboriginal cultural landscape was constructed in a 'sacred geography' where distinctions between the living and non-living are less real than in the West (Lehman, 2006).

Since early European piners, explorers and convicts ventured into the South-West river country, nearly 200 hundred years ago, there have been a variety of accounts in terms of human interaction and relationship with the river country. The popular and predominant view has been of the South-West as a "barren wilderness" (Flanagan, 1985, p. 3), that required men to undergo tremendous hardship if they were to gain a deserved human foothold upon it. A perception of South-West Tasmania as uninhabited wasteland and near impossible landscape to traverse served several purposes for the early European authorities. A land uninhabited by Aboriginal peoples was easier to take possession of and exploit for resources, while a land that was itself uninhabitable and terrifying was a natural deterrent from overland escape for early convict prisoners at the Sarah Island penal colony. But in many ways this story denied the reality of interactions with the Franklin and its adjacent terrain for Aboriginal peoples, piners and early explorers, and their various relationships to the land.

While there is undoubtedly truth in the notion of tremendous hardship, it does not necessarily follow that the early piners, convicts and explorers bore the confrontationalist attitude to this barren wilderness that is often implied (Flanagan, 1985). Much of the exploration of the middle and upper sections of the Franklin and

Gordon rivers by the piners and explorers occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. There are numerous accounts from piners and explorers who visited the Franklin River that suggest a profound connection to the land:

I suppose if anybody had reason to hate those rivers, it was us fellas that worked in those places, but I never had any hate for the river. I could always see beauty in the river – always see it there. A lot of places up the river, if these tourists could see it now, they'd wonder what the world was made of (Charles Abel, in Kerr and McDermott, 2000, p. 184).

I'd like to be able to start all over again... go back to the Gordon. Yes, she's about the best place I've ever been – ever likely to be. Beautiful flats along the rivers there – just like the garden of Eden mate – sassafras an' the stinkwoods an' all the trees – beautiful place (Reg Morrison, in Kerr and McDermott, 2000, pp. 184-186).

A river is the only living thing that never dies; there is no force in Nature so impressive to me, and it is a symbol of the mystery and beauty of the world. In Western Tasmania running waters are full and frequent; you are never far from their music or thunder (Whitham, 1949, p. 14).

The early paddlers and rafters, too, have helped enhance the reputation of the place as a wild and sometimes terrifying landscape. Since the initial attempt to descend the Franklin in 1951 by a group of four canoeists, the river has held a reputation as a wild, challenging and even deadly journey. It was not until the third attempt in 1958 that the river allowed a group of four to pass its length. And it is that idea of 'passing through' a difficult and challenging environment, rather than 'conquering' the river, that has lived on to the present day. Few people would launch themselves onto the Franklin without some fear or trepidation.

The idea of the Franklin as an uninhabited wilderness also persists within the conservation movement, as manifested in the celebrated 'No Dams' fight to save the Franklin River. In trying to protect the Franklin from a proposed hydro-electric project, conservationists invoked a paradox within environmental debates; that the

place should be saved for future generations as a pristine and untouched wilderness free of humans, because it had such a restorative and profound effect on human visitors. On one hand there were demands for it to left in an untouched condition and on the other for it to be visited (Brookes, 2001); for it to be saved for what it is, but on human terms.

The myth of the South-West as an uninhabitable and awful place is one that has persisted in the minds of many to the present day (Flanagan, 1993). However, the idea that wilderness is a 'pristine and untouched place' is alive and well within Western culture (Cronon, 1995), and requires no prior knowledge of the Franklin River itself. For many the idea has served to exaggerate the separateness between 'us' and the 'wilderness':

Wilderness remains represented to us as the Other; though where for Louisa Ann Meredith [1812-1895] it was malevolent, for us it is benign. It is represented as a profound antithesis of much that we find repugnant about our modern world; natural as contrasted with artificial, virgin forests as opposed to sullied streets, spiritualism as against materialism, the solitary as opposed to the crowded (Flanagan, 1993, p. 14, years added).

Whatever the perceptions of participants on the Franklin River journey, there is little doubt that some approach the trip with a sense that the natural world is 'out there' and that they are in many ways separated from it. People come to the Franklin with, if not preconceptions, at least stories of the Franklin and the wilderness that it represents. As Stewart discusses in relation to participant experiences of the Murray River, "understanding a place, the river, isn't just about our experience of it but also the cultural meaning we may take with us about how we might relate to places or landforms... Personal experience also needs to be seen in relation to broader cultural understandings of place" (2004b, p. 53). There is a continual interplay between culture and personal experience that must include any experiences of rivers, Thomas and Thomas reflect that "the cultural context of rivers is influenced by, and has influence on, human nature relationships" (2000, p. 51), If we are to understand the context in which recreationalists and tourists navigate the Franklin River today, we must understand the pre-digested myths and stories that have a shaping influence

upon their experiences. This is not to necessarily deny the reality of the experiences that participants on a Franklin River journey have; rather it is to place them within a context that might assist us in understanding the essential qualities of those experiences.

4.3 Selecting the Sample

Sample and site selection within this research project are inextricably linked. Both are focussed on achieving the facilitation, description and investigation of meaningful experiences of participants on a wilderness journey as they vividly occur.

This research uses purposeful sampling, this being deemed most likely to provide data of an enhanced quality. Purposeful sampling, in the context of this research project, involves looking for meaningful experiences in contexts where they have been previously observed and are most likely to be accessible and well articulated:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling (Patton, 2002, p. 46).

Efficient data collection mandated access to multiple participants from individual trips. Using entire trips as the context allowed for the possibility of my own participation on the journeys and the development of relationships with fellow participants that could help explicate descriptions of personal experiences. A further criterion used in the selection of trips was that participants voluntarily chose the experience, and that the purpose of the trip was recreation and/or holiday, rather than the improvement of technical skills.

Though the sampling technique here described might seem to be an example of what Patton calls “convenience sampling” (2002, p. 241), in terms of using multiple participants from existing trips for the sake of *convenience*, at the heart of the sample selection was a process of “purposeful random sampling” (2002, p. 240), whereby

participants were *purposefully* selected based on contexts where the phenomena under investigation had been previously observed, and *randomly* in the sense that trips, and therefore participants, were selected prior to any experiences (meaningful or otherwise) taking place. In other words, participants were not selected post trip – based on reported meaningful experiences. Rather, they were selected prior to any experience and regardless of likely outcomes. I selected the first available trip of the season, and continued to use subsequent trips as they became available based on the timeframes and available spots on the trip. In this sense the participants were: “randomly selected in advance of knowledge of how the outcomes would appear... The credibility of systematic and randomly selected case examples is considerably greater than the personal, ad hoc selection of cases selected and reported *after* the fact – that is, after outcomes are known” (Patton, 2002, p. 241). A selection of both commercial and private trip participants was used in order to gain variety within the selection process.

The overall result for the sample was 32 participants (aged 17-65), with 20 males and 12 females. All participants were on mixed gender nine or ten day trips on the Franklin River during the period 2006-2009. The sample size was not fixed prior to the commencement of the research. Instead, by focussing on the research questions the sample size was determined by the quality of data available from each new participant that added to the insights of the meaningful experiences described by other participants.

4.3.1 Commercial Clients

The commercial company, World Expeditions, was approached in September 2007 through a letter to the Australian operations manager outlining the research project and requesting the opportunity to invite clients to participate in the research over the summer 2007/08 season. World Expeditions agreed to provide:

- Access to clients from selected trips, initially through a letter of introduction and then at the pre-departure meeting prior to the trip.
- A place on the Franklin River trip for myself as a de-facto client, where the clients agreed to allow me to participate and observe.

I participated in three commercial Franklin River rafting trips during the season, which provided the following sample:

Table 1: Sample of Participants from Commercial Trips During the 2007/08 Season

World Expeditions 1		World Expeditions 2		World Expeditions 3	
7 Clients – 5 participated		8 Clients – 6 participated		7 Clients – 7 Participated	
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>
Female	26	Male	61	Female	33
Male	30	Male	63	Male	44
Male	49	Female	31	Male	65
Male	47	Male	60	Male	42
Female	35	Male	48	Male	25
		Male	29	Male	40
				Male	40

For the season 07/08, World Expeditions had an overall ratio of less than one third females to two thirds males, so while the commercial participant sample involved a higher proportion of males to females, it reflected the general ratio within trips for that season. Whilst not all clients on the trips participated in the research, all agreed to my participation on the trip and to be observed. The critical factor for the four clients not participating was the inclination not to be interviewed at the end of the trip, with a lack of time available being the commonly cited reason.

4.3.2 Private Recreational Participants

Private recreational participants came from three distinct categories; individual participants from two private trips during the 2006/07 season, a private trip during the 2007/08 season and two trips during the 2008/09 season. I was present, as a participant, on four of the five journeys. While I had no direct role in selecting any of

the participants for these private trips (each trip was pre-organised before I had interaction with the group) in all cases the leaders/guides of the trip were known to me. In this way the sample selection was similar to that of the commercial trips in that the original contact was based on the convenience (depending on dates) of a pre-organised trip.

From the guided private trips, the following participants were added to the sample:

Table 2: Sample of Participants from Private Recreational Trips During 2006-2009

Private Extras		Private Guided 1		Private Guided 2		Private Guided 3	
3 separate trips 2006/07		2007/08 7 participated		2008/09 2 participated		2008/09 2 participated	
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>
Male	59	Female	35	Male	42	Female	17
Female	38	Male	35	Male	36	Female	17
Male	59	Female	31				
		Female	31				
		Male	35				
		Female	36				
		Female	28				

Participants were assigned pseudonyms and a code that represented the trip they were on. For example, Diane (WE3) was a female participant from the third World Expeditions trip, whereas Morris (PT1) was a male participant from the first Private Guided Trip.

4.4 Strategies and Timeframes

Given the site and potential sample, the question arose as to how to put the research together in terms of strategies and timeframes. Rather than using a single research method, a decision was made to use multiple methods, in order to approach the research goal from a variety of perspectives. The strategies and techniques include:

- An introductory letter
- Attendance at a pre-departure meeting
- Participating on the full journey as a client / participant (where possible)
- Observations recorded during the trip
- Interviews of between 40 mins-1 ½ hours within 2 weeks of the completion of the trip
- Participant journals (optional)
- Follow up email at 4 months
- Follow up email at 12 months.

Due to the strategies and techniques used, and the need to at least partially analyse incoming data after each trip, the turn around time frame for each trip during the season was about four weeks. The rafting season for the Franklin River is confined to the spring and summer months, as necessitated by river levels, weather conditions, and the amount of daylight. The resulting research design is shown on the following page:

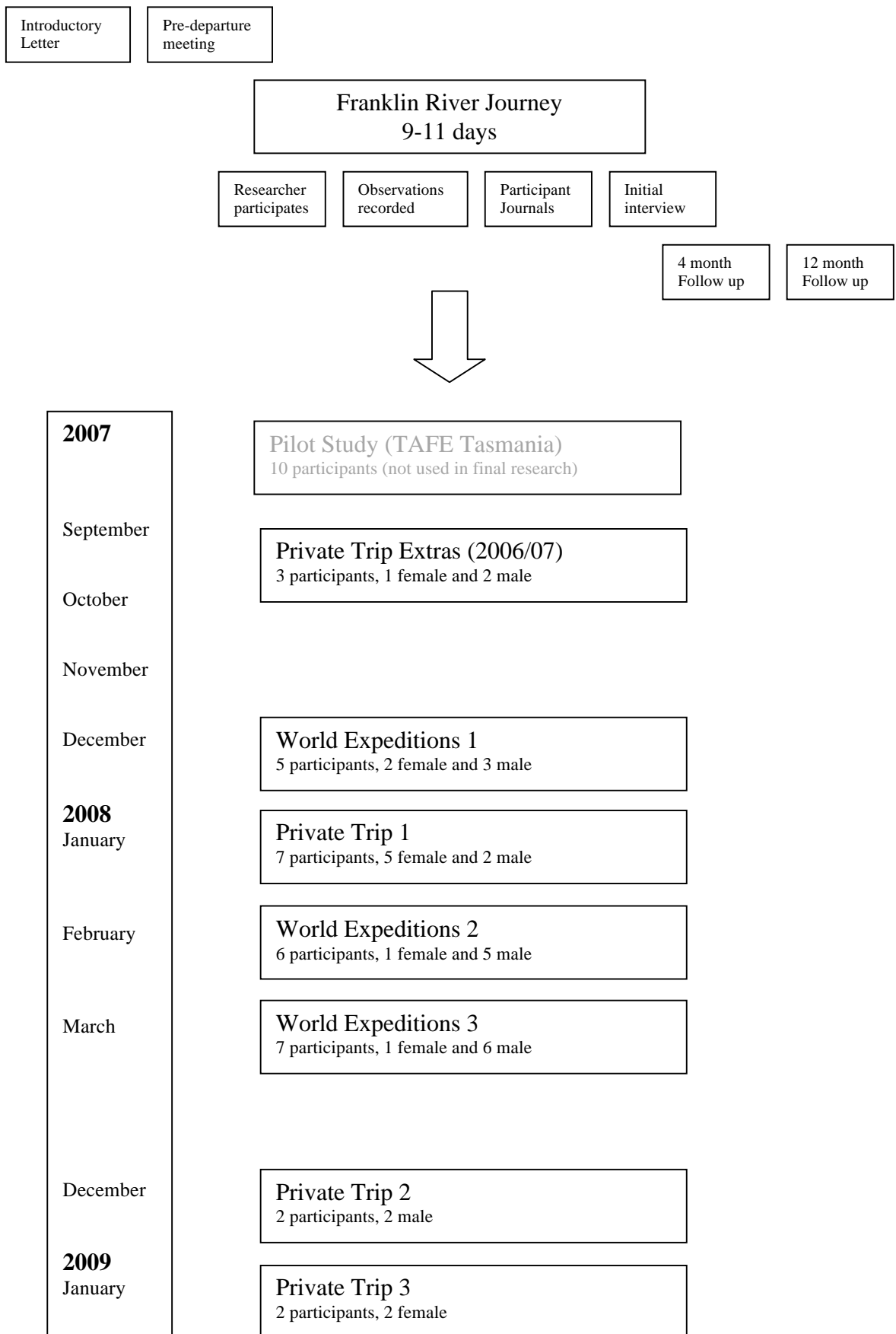


Figure 9: Timeline of Research Design

4.5 The Pilot Study

A pilot study was run for the purpose of trialing and refining the methods to be used. It involved a TAFE Tasmania training course within the certificate IV Outdoor Recreation course in October 2007. The trip was primarily designed for students to gain the technical skills and knowledge involved in guiding an extended rafting trip. The students had previous rafting experience and knew me as an outdoor educator through TAFE Tasmania. A letter was given to the students one month prior to the trip explaining the research project, ethical considerations and a consent form. In addition, I met with the students one week before the trip to further explain the purpose of the research and provide the option of a journal. All ten students agreed to participate in the pilot study.

At the completion of the pilot study, participants were asked to provide feedback in terms of the various research methods used, such as the introductory letter, journals and interviews. This process was beneficial in refining the research process and providing practical examples for me of the importance of positioning myself within the journey so as not to impinge on the participants' experiences. In particular valuable feedback was received in terms of interview settings, questions, structure and timing.

Participants were encouraged to use a personal journal, an A5 bound notebook with a short set of general instructions at the start (Appendix 3). The idea of the journal was to provide participants with the means to record their thoughts and feelings as they journeyed down the river. The overall feedback was that the journals were a valuable 'option', but not one suited to everyone. Several participants felt that the requirement to use one might either add to or detract from the overall experience, depending on the individual.

Interviews were also trialed during the trip and up to three weeks after the trip. Interviews occurred on days 3, 5, 7 and 9 of the trip and then subsequently at 1, 2 and 3 weeks after the trip. Participants who were interviewed during the trip (days 3, 5

and 7) felt that while they were able to identify the significant events of each day, they were not able to comment on the experience as a whole. Participants expressed a view that the journey on the Franklin River was an entire or complete experience in itself. Interviews conducted in the three weeks after the trip were trialed in a variety of locations and participants suggested that recreating the attributes of the journey itself were particularly beneficial to the recall and discussion of meaningful experiences. Participants indicated that they rarely had the opportunity to discuss 'meaningful' experiences from a trip such as the Franklin and appreciated the opportunity to do so with someone who had shared the same journey. Each participant had their own unique view of the journey, and as such was keen to express their perceptions and experiences in their way, and as it appeared for them.

In addition, participant perceptions of my presence on the trip itself were received. While all ten participants felt that my participation on the trip added something to their trip in a positive way, several points were made. These included the need to continually ensure that I was open and honest about the research, was able to be myself, did not overtly impact on participant experiences with requirements during the journey, approached the research in an open minded manner, and recorded observations in an unobtrusive way.

4.6 Techniques and Procedures

Research in the wilderness is difficult, and comes with its own raft of challenges (Ewert and McAvoy, 2000). The factors that can make wilderness journeys unique such as remoteness, exposure to the weather, difficult terrain, group size and length of trips also tend to make the collection of data difficult (Hattie, Marsh, Neill and Richards, 1997). Lived experience on a wilderness journey is a complex process involving time, place, environment, group members, the activity and of course the individual themselves.

While an individual's experience is mediated by their personal and social background, this research does not specifically explore the background of the participants involved. This is deliberately done. A journey down the Franklin River provides a rare opportunity for people to step outside themselves; to re-invent who

they are (at least momentarily), free of the usual expectations from friends, family or society. In order to respect the possibility of this type of experience, questions were not asked verbally or in a written form that pertained to matters such as where participants lived, what they did for a job, where they grew up or how much money they made. This strategy proved effective from a guiding point of view, and was considered important in not impacting on the participant's potential experiences. Information collected included gender, age and previous outdoor experiences.

4.6.1 Introductory Letter and the Pre-departure Meeting

The introductory letter (Appendix 1) was sent to clients approximately one month before the departure date, by World Expeditions themselves (in the case of the commercial trips). The advantages of this were that it could be done without me being present, provided a perceived link between the research project and the commercial company, and I did not need access to private client contact information. The disadvantage was that it arrived with other trip information from the company such as gear lists and trip plans. The letter outlined the purpose of the research and the methods involved, while it left the agreement to participate / consent components until the pre-departure meeting. This worked well, with many participants later indicating that they only made their decision to fully participate in the research after meeting and getting to know me at the pre-departure meeting.

The pre-departure meeting proved crucial to the development of a trust relationship with clients. The trips themselves are small (a maximum of eight clients) and as such the participating individuals are pivotal in determining the 'feel' of the trip. For many of the clients a major purpose of the trip is to relax and unwind, so any perceived intrusion on those experiences would be viewed negatively. Once I had clearly explained the purpose of the research, however, most clients agreed to participate. Some clients who declined to be part of the research at the pre-departure meeting had become enthusiastic research participants by the end of the trip and would figure prominently in interviews. All participants that agreed to participate were asked to sign the consent form (Appendix 2).

The pre-departure meeting was also an opportunity to set the tone for the research. By making the point that I did not have a pre-determined hypothesis, but instead was there out of a curiosity about how the participants might uniquely experience their journeys, an open and transparent tone was established.

4.6.2 Participation and Observation

The phenomenological approach enjoins the researcher to share the experience of the research 'subjects' as similarly as possible (Seamon, 2000). As Patton asserts when discussing the methodological implications of a phenomenological perspective: "the only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible for ourselves. This leads to the importance of participant observation and in-depth interviewing" (2002, p. 106). While I had previously spent extensive time on the Franklin River, it had mostly been in the role of a commercial guide or private trip leader. As a result, I arranged with both the commercial company and private trip leaders to go along on trips as a client or participant, with surprising results. Early on the first trip as a client it became clear that the 'client's' experience of the river was very different to that of the 'guide'.

Participating on trips involved achieving a balance between experiencing the river as a novice client and being oneself; between investigating peoples' perceptions of meaningful experiences and not impacting on the experiences themselves; between reflecting on one's own experience and remaining open and neutral to the experience of others. Participating in the field as a researcher can change the experience for others. By stating that the focus of the research project was on meaningful experiences, some participants may have paid more attention to certain experiences than they might otherwise have done. While this may seem advantageous in terms of achieving a focus on the meaningful, it also brings with it the potential disadvantages of added reflective layering and potentially changing the experience itself. While it is not possible to fully negate these influences (Patton, 2002), care was taken to minimise them.

At the heart of the question of balance is the idea of empathy. For me, participating on the journey was aimed at gaining an empathetic understanding of the types of meaningful experiences that participants had. The practice of empathy also contributed to minimising researcher influence on participants. By understanding and empathising with participant experiences, a sensitivity to the attributes of the surrounding conditions that might contribute to experiences was developed. That is, an *empathetic* attitude guided my participation and interactions on the journey. Patton (2002) suggests an 'empathetic neutrality', or an empathy delivered in a way that does not pre-suppose or judge the views, thoughts or experiences of others. This empathetic neutrality is entirely consistent with a phenomenological approach. In constantly making decisions about how to participate on the river journey, empathy and respect were the two guiding principles.

While the primary focus was to participate on the journeys as a client / participant, an inviting opportunity to observe the way the trip ran was also presented. Although the main objective was to be a full participant in the setting, there were times when I was drawn to be an observer or spectator of events. In this way, then, I could be described as a client / participant with an underlying interest in researching how people perceive or experience the river journey. The objectives of participating were:

- To share the experience of being a client / participant on a wilderness river journey in order to develop an empathetic understanding of experiences as they occurred;
- To develop a relationship with fellow trip participants in order to be able to investigate as fully as possible their meaningful experiences; and
- To observe participants and events on the trip in order to assist with future interview conversations and confirm insights.

In order to be as unobtrusive as possible, my own observations were recorded in a journal in a way that was consistent with that of participants on the trip. As a result observations were usually recorded slightly away from the group, early in the morning, during the late afternoon or in bed of an evening. This proved to not only be a successful strategy for recording information, but also for modelling the use of a journal.

4.6.3 Interviews

Interviews were the primary data collection method for the research project, which seeks to give voice to individual points of view, as well as to explicate more collective or synergetic effects:

If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them... The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations (Kvale, 1996, p. 1).

The interviews were approached as conversations. By accompanying the participants on an extended journey, I developed relationships that allowed for an empathetic interaction to take place. The interviews were a chance to converse and to discuss perceptions of the world. It was not unlike one of those 'in depth' conversations with someone that happen spontaneously and all too rarely.

Conducting one-on-one interviews required not only careful planning but also on-the-run decisions. The pilot study (discussed earlier) proved beneficial through the insights it gave to timing, structure and interview tone. The trial and error approach of the pilot study was particularly effective when decisions needed to be made on the basis of prior experience rather than purely theoretical understandings.

The interviews prompted participants to recall the meaningful experiences of their Franklin River journey as accurately and descriptively as possible. Their timing played a large part in achieving this. While there are advantages in asking participants to recall particular events soon after they occur (Borrie, Roggenbuck, and Hull, 1998), in some cases this may compromise the overall experience itself. This is reflected in Dewey's description (quoted earlier) of *an* experience: "when the material experienced runs its course to fulfilment... Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self sufficiency. It is *an* experience" (1934, p. 151). In other words, given that the purpose was to explore experiences of the Franklin River journey, it seemed imperative that the journey be

allowed to flow through to completion, both in terms of time and the shifting nature of the landscape experience.

However, there is also an imperative to investigate the experiences while they are still as fresh in participants' minds as possible, so that the process of reflection and social construction is kept to a minimum. Most participants were keen to discuss their experiences on the last day of the trip, which involved a seven hour yacht journey on the Gordon River and Macquarie Harbour. This had the advantages of a private and outdoor setting (often on the roof of the 60ft yacht wheelhouse), a view of a similar landscape to that which had been traversed on the river, a relaxed atmosphere without the pressures of time, and no requirement to meet after the trip (many participants flew out of Tasmania the following day). Borrie *et al.* suggest that in terms of verbal reporting "material is more likely to be remembered and reported if the context of recall is similar to the context in which it was first experienced and entered into memory" (1998, p. 178).

Thus, the majority of participants (20) were interviewed during the last day of the trip, either on the banks of the Gordon River or on the yacht journey out, while most of the remaining participants (9) were interviewed within two weeks of the completion of their trips. The exceptions were the participants from the 'private extras group' from the 2006/07 season (3) that were interviewed approximately six months after their experience of the river. Where the interviews took place after the trips every effort was made to use natural outdoor settings that were relatively private and placed the participants in as relaxed a mood as possible.

In terms of the structure of the interviews, after trialing a variety of interview styles during the pilot study, a semi-structured or 'interview guide' (Patton, 2002) structure was adopted (Appendix 4). This achieved a balance between keeping an open mind and staying focused on the phenomenon in question. As Patton suggests: "it makes sure that the interviewer / evaluator has carefully decided how best to use the limited time available in an interview situation... it keeps the interactions *focused* while allowing individual perspectives and experiences to emerge" (2002, pp. 333-334).

Participants were asked one or two general questions to relax them and then asked: ‘What did you find most meaningful or personally moving about your journey down the river?’. This question was framed in such terms in order to encourage participants to describe their overall experience from their own point of view. Depending on responses, further questions were asked and notes taken, these to be followed up later in the interview. Specific examples of experiences or events that provided instances of meaningful experiences were sought, and attempts made to delve as deeply as possible into those experiences. Questions like ‘can you think of a particular point on the trip when you felt like that?’ proved to be effective in allowing participants to unlock more detailed descriptions of feelings and emotions connected to an experience. Many interviews had an ‘hourglass’ form that flowed from the general to the specific and then back to the general. At times participants chose to describe a more generally meaningful experience of the trip that could not be tied to any particular instances.

I recorded interviews on a digital recorder. Notes taken were useful for identifying themes that could be revisited later in the interview, and also seemed to settle the participants and encourage them to extend their responses. The interviews ended with a summary of the key themes as I had heard them, and asking the participant if they ‘had anything else that they would like to add or felt was relevant to the interview?’. This question often triggered further conversations. Every effort was made to put the participants at ease. In many cases participants indicated that they would not have openly and honestly described their experiences had I not taken the time to participate in the trip:

Overall we need to view the verbal report from the eye of the respondent and the burdens that we are placing upon him or her. The task of reporting should be straightforward and relevant, in such a manner that motivates and facilitates accuracy (Borrie, *et al.*, 1998, p. 179).

The strategies used during interviews included:

- Using simple, straightforward and open ended questions;
- Proceeding from the participants’ ordering of events;

- Encouraging descriptive recall, and in particular the description of feelings and events;
- Following through with questions about events at a specific time or place during the trip; and
- Discussing the things of interest, or meaning, to the participant.

While interviews are used extensively within qualitative research, including phenomenological research, the accuracy of verbally acquired data has at times been called into question. Focusing on recreational activity research, Borrie *et al.* (1998) list the problems associated with such data as the generalizing of novel experiences, the unreliability of memory recall, respondent concern to supply the responses thought to be desired by the interviewer, and the production of socially acceptable answers more broadly. While efforts were made to minimize the impact of such factors, researcher-desired responses and socially acceptable answers can be difficult to eliminate from the interview process (Fontana and Frey, 2005).

Every effort was made during the trip to be transparent about the project without signaling my personal views or discussing my own experiences. An effort was also made to make clear, during the interviews, that it was the participants' unique perceptions of what it was to be on the river that were valued. Nevertheless, in some cases there did appear a desire to deliver what the participant assumed I was after. To an extent this seems unavoidable. What is avoidable, however, is the open disclosure of any anticipated responses on my part, and this was largely achieved.

In terms of the tendency to supply socially acceptable answers, participants were challenged both in their ability to describe what is often 'hard-to-describe' and also in their ability to describe their experiences without the filter of reflection and social construction. Meaningful experiences may be ineffable, or held as intensely private. In trying to put those meaningful experiences into words, participants were often searching for words, and in an interview situation, participants will often employ a layer of reflection before responding. As a result, responses can, and probably must, involve the deployment of socially acceptable norms. These are inherent challenges within the study of meaningful experiences and are related to an overall phenomenological challenge; how to get back to the immediacy of the original

experience. This added an extra dimension to the ongoing refinement of the interview process.

The interviews were followed up by an email 4 months after the trip which summarized the individual interview and outlined the perceived themes. This was done in order to check with participants that what was said, or interpreted, was accurately portrayed, as well as gaining further insights and post trip perspectives.

4.6.4 Journals

The journal was designed to be an unobtrusive way of participants recording their experiences on the river as they happened or at least relatively soon thereafter. It was mentioned in the introductory letter and offered at the pre-departure meeting one day prior to departure. The journals were A5 notebooks, printed on recycled paper with an explanatory note on the inside cover (Appendix 3) and came with a variety of pens and pencils. No set way of using the journals was stipulated, and participants were left with the option of supplying them for photocopying at the end of the trip, and, thus, to be subsequently used in the research, or keeping them private. Around half the participants (17 of 32) took up the offer of the journals at the pre-departure meetings, and of those 14 were happy to have the contents photocopied at the completion of the journey.

4.6.5 Following up

Four-month follow up emails (example in Appendix 5) were used to

- confirm the accuracy of my thematic interpretation of the original interview;
- gain further information regarding any of the themes discussed in the interviews; and
- gather a perspective four months after the trip in regard to the most meaningful experiences and any impacts experienced after the participant's return to everyday life.

Twelve months later follow up emails (example in Appendix 6) were used to

- confirm the accuracy of my thematic interpretation of the four month follow up;
- gather a perspective twelve months after the trip in regard to the meaningful experiences and any impacts back in everyday life; and
- Thank the participants and inform them of the research timetable.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

In terms of the methods and techniques used within this research, a key ethical consideration was to preserve the integrity of experiences for the participants and non-participants on trips; in other words, that the research project did not negatively impinge on the experiences of participants whilst on their Franklin River journeys, or on their return to everyday life.

Ethical considerations were always present, particularly as I was a participant / observer during trips. How to ask questions, how to watch, how to respond or how to behave as a participant with prior experience, were all decisions that had to be constantly made. Rather than setting predetermined rules, these decisions were approached with a sense of care and empathy for the participants and their experiences. Ethical considerations were present so consistently throughout this research project that they have been addressed in the previous sections in an integrated manner, and will continue to be so within the following sections.

In terms of the data analysis and portrayal of results, the key ethical consideration was one of remaining true to what was legitimately available within the data: “regardless of what criteria we wish to adopt for interviewing, ‘the most important ethical imperative is to tell the truth’” (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 144; the quote within the quote is from Johnson, 1976). Thus, the current project sought to give voice to the perceptions of participants in a way that is true to the original intent of the conversations and recollections of participants.

4.8 The Nature of the Data Analysis

In this research project I seek to reveal the essence of meaningful experiences for participants on a wilderness journey, in this case the Franklin River. We are called by common sense, and a phenomenological approach, to privilege the first hand accounts of meaningful experiences by the participants themselves through interviews, journals, observations and follow up emails. These first hand accounts are our data. The question next arises: how do we discover and describe what is within our data? Data analysis methods emerged and developed as the research evolved, guided by the overriding intention to uncover and describe the *essences* of participant's meaningful experiences. At the centre of the process is the continual 'mulling over' of peoples' recollection of lived experiences:

The essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structures that govern the instances of particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon. In other words, phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning of structures, of lived experience (van Manen, 1997, p. 10).

To put the process metaphorically: it is akin to continually turning over the soil in a garden. As with the turning over of the soil, the process of mulling over the data can be both therapeutic and rewarding in itself.

The research seeks to explicate not only the meaningful experiences involved in wilderness journeys, but also the *meaning* of those meaningful experiences as they appear for us. What we are seeking will be multilayered. No matter how comprehensive our resulting descriptions are, however, they will fall short of the actual lived experiences of participants. Though we are trying to do the impossible by fully explicating lived experience, there is a consolation in knowing that the organic nature of our descriptions entails an element of mystery and the unknown. By taking our time – by continually turning over the soil of our data – the research aims to achieve descriptions with a depth and complexity that reflects lived experience as accurately as possible.

Phenomenology uses lived experience as the starting point, the point of departure, for a journey towards the essence of phenomena (Seamon, 2000; van Manen, 1997). In order to uncover the universal internal meaning of structures of lived experience, there is initially a need to describe the structures of the phenomena as they appear for individuals. We must begin at the surface and turn our data over to a greater and greater depth, taking care not to dig deeper than the depth of our data allows.

4.8.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis attempts to capture the whole by describing its experiential parts – its ‘themes’. Themes cannot fully describe a phenomenon, and are not definitive or real objects in themselves. They are a way of capturing, or trying to hold onto, the elusive meaning of a description of lived experience. Rather than saying a theme is *something* it would be more accurate to say that a theme *exists within*:

“phenomenological themes may be understood as the *structures of experience*. So when we analyse a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience” (van Manen, 1997 p. 79).

Thematic analysis, then, seeks to describe that which is recurrent within individual recollections of experiences. Ultimately, in the phenomenological sense, it is about describing the universal structures within a collection of recollections. It begins with the unique and journeys towards the collective.

This journey towards the collective, universal or essential quality of lived experience involves not only describing themes, but differentiating between what van Manen refers to as *incidental* and *essential* themes: “in determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (1997, p. 107). In other words, it is to differentiate between those themes that happen to be tangentially connected to a phenomenon, and those themes without which the phenomenon would cease to be what it is.

In determining essential themes, phenomenological researchers are able to use a process called *free imaginative variation*. This involves imagining a phenomenon in

the absence of a particular theme. Does the phenomenon remain what it was, or does the removal of that theme determine that the phenomenon can no longer be what it was? In this way it is possible to move towards describing the essences of a phenomenon, or provoke the description of further themes.

4.8.2 The Emergent Nature of the Data Analysis

The data analysis process was emergent. The process was driven by an intent rather than a hard and fast set of procedures. What was done in analysing the data was enjoined by the intention to uncover and describe (both in the unique and the collective) meaningful experiences for participants on a wilderness journey. Decisions were made as the data analysis progressed. In this way the process can be seen as a series of steps that continued to unlock what was within the data, based on what had previously been revealed. The data analysis was a slow multifaceted approach towards a descriptive explication of the essences of participants' meaningful experiences.

4.9 The Process of the Data Analysis

The research data consisted of first hand participant recollections and descriptions of meaningful experiences in the form of interviews, journals, participant observations and follow up emails. The following sections outline the process used to analyse the data.

4.9.1 Initial Interview Analysis

The interviews themselves were recorded on a digital recorder and downloaded onto an audio computer program. After having participated on a Franklin River journey, and subsequently interviewing the research participants, the initial priority was to perform a primary analysis of the interviews soon after each trip. This provided information to assist in gathering further data on any following trips (usually within the next month). To do this in the required timeframe interviews were partially transcribed and topics and themes noted. The result was usually four to six typed

pages of transcript (for a typical one hour interview) in paragraph form, that were segmented around topics or themes discussed as the interview progressed. A single interview was listened to two to three times in a day, during which the transcript was slowly built up. These partial interview transcripts were printed and combined with notes made by myself during the course of the interview. Once in hard copy, additional notes were made in the margins of the pages in terms of topics and themes discussed. Information that was relevant to gaining data from the next trip was summarised in my journal and taken on the following trips.

Information that came out of this process included:

- A knowledge of topics and themes discussed by participants;
- A reminder that everyone experiences the world differently;
- Direct feedback in terms of interview structure and technique;
- A knowledge of which questions, prompts or techniques produced in depth responses; and
- Possible gaps, or lack of depth, developing in the data.

This process continued until the end of the rafting season.

4.9.2 Subsequent Interview Analysis

At the completion of the season, further analysis of the interviews became the focus of attention. During this next phase each interview was reviewed (often more than once), usually over the period of an entire day. The purpose was to add depth to the partial transcriptions through extending the verbatim transcriptions, and segmenting analysis around themes discussed. The latter often revolved around a single full response from a participant during an interview or involved the breaking up of several lengthy responses. A typical one-hour interview might be broken down into around 35 to 50 segments. At this stage, although not completely verbatim, the transcriptions ran to eight to twelve pages and contained extensive verbatim sections that were deemed to be valuable, as well as interview notes.

4.9.3 Themes

A list of topics and themes was constructed and revised based on the interview transcripts, journals and observations. This list included both specific topics (places, objects or particular things) and themes (hubs or focuses of experience): “phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experience, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes” (van Manen, 1997, p. 90). The purpose of including the topics that surrounded the themes was to add both depth to the thematic descriptions and the possibility of extrapolating components of a wilderness journey that might be present for certain types of meaningful experiences. Although the list of topics and themes was progressively revised, the number of topics and themes fluctuated consistently between 60 and 80.

In order to check the validity of the themes and topics listed, an independent researcher was provided with two interviews and asked to construct their own list of topics and themes. This was then compared with my equivalent list. The results were two lists containing similar themes, though at times, while the ‘intent’ of a theme was the same, the attached theme wording would vary. As a result, these variations were discussed with the independent researcher and a more extensive description of the intent behind each of the listed themes recorded.

4.9.4 Coding and Concept Mapping

The next step in the analysis involved coding the transcripts of the interviews. The transcriptions were coded while listening to the audio interview files concurrently. Listening proved to be an invaluable tool for recalling the interviews and the intention within participant descriptions. Short sections, or segments, of audio were listened to several times as the hard copies of the interviews were coded. At the same time a concept map of each interview was drawn up, showing the flow of the conversation and the way in which topics or themes were linked. The concept maps reflected theme relationships and, at times, inferred directionality in the way things appeared for participants or in the way meaningful experiences unfolded.

During this initial phase of coding and concept mapping of the interviews, two further checks were conducted related to the appropriateness of the transcript / audio analysis and the accuracy / validity of the codes ascribed. The appropriateness of the coding method using segmented transcripts combined with direct audio was checked by comparing it to coding done at a later time with full verbatim transcriptions. To do this, four of the early interviews were fully transcribed by a professional service, coded, and then compared to the existing coded transcripts. All of the coding from the full verbatim transcript was identically available within the existing transcript / audio document. For this reason, the original method of transcription using the segmented transcripts and audio combined was deemed to be appropriate for coding, and was retained.

In addition, the coding and concept mapping process was checked. Two independent researchers were given two interviews each (hard copy and audio) to code and map. Along with the interviews, the independent researchers were given the list of topics and themes to use for coding and a verbal explanation by the primary researcher of the themes. Specifically, the independent researchers were asked to code and map the interviews. This exercise proved to be invaluable not only for feedback, but for providing the primary researcher with the confidence to proceed with the coding and mapping of the rest of the interviews. The two independent researchers had a high level of agreement in terms of their own coding and mapping of the interviews and of the appropriateness of the themes and topics. While there was almost complete agreement on the coding items used for each segment, one independent researcher at times did not have as many codes for equivalent segments. The independent researcher involved felt that this may have been due to a lack of familiarity with the remainder of the data.

The list of topics and themes for coding was updated as the analysis progressed. As interviews were replayed and read through, more themes began to seem 'obviously there'. What may not have been initially apparent began to leap out. This process of coding and mapping continued until the interviews were completed.

4.9.5 NVivo 8

At this point in time a decision was made to use a qualitative research computer program, NVivo 8. The program was used primarily as a database to order, modify and retrieve data. NVivo 8 offered a method of inputting the interview data and analysis that could provide a direct link between the audio, transcript, codes and concept maps. This also offered an opportunity to consolidate and refine what had up until this point been a fluid list of themes and topics.

The process involved in inputting the data into NVivo 8 provided further opportunities for ‘turning the data over’. For each of the interviews, the following process took place:

- The current segmented transcription (Word documents) were time-stamped to match with the digital audio file;
- The audio of the participant interview was loaded onto NVivo 8 as a ‘source’ file;
- The time-stamped transcriptions were imported into the audio source files and combined so that the segments directly matched and were linked with the audio;
- All appropriate interview sections were fully transcribed;
- The completed list of themes and topics were inputted as ‘nodes’ to be used for coding;
- The transcriptions, and therefore the audio file, were directly coded using the nodes;
- The original coded transcriptions were compared with the NVivo 8 coded transcription to ensure consistency and accuracy;
- Segments were expanded to include additional full verbatim transcripts where appropriate;
- Concept maps were created as ‘models’ and expanded to include all nodes used in an individual coded transcript;
- The concept map nodes were directly linked to other node examples across the data set of interviews; and

- Each interview was summarised into between four and eight key thematic points that could be used in the four-month follow-up emails to check with participants for accuracy of interpretation.

NVivo 8 proved to be a very efficient way of managing and retrieving information in terms of a database. It also proved to have two additional advantages. It was able to confirm my impressions concerning common patterns and relationships between themes and topics, and it assisted in uncovering additional links for further exploration.

4.9.6 Central Nodes

In an effort to identify central hubs in terms of meaningful experiences, the interviews were analysed collectively in an effort to locate:

1. Commonly discussed themes; and
2. Links to other nodes from these common themes or topics, both
 - a. through the coded interviews
 - b. through the concept maps.

This was not an attempt to find cause / effect relationships within the data; rather it was an attempt to better understand and describe the central hubs / nodes / themes within the participants' recollections of meaningful experiences.

As this process progressed it was the concept maps that enabled the conversational relationships to emerge, resulting in an overall concept map of common links and relationships throughout the interviews. Each of these relationships was checked for validity using a relationship matrix from the coded interviews (see Appendix 9). The result was a relational concept map of the overall themes and topics that showed several strong central hubs or themes around which many other themes and topics were clustered (see Figure 14). At this stage, several key themes or central focuses for 'meaningful experiences' were identified.

Again, this overall concept map was not based on cause / effect relationships, nor was it representational of any one unique participant experience. Rather, it was based

on conversational relationships evident throughout the interviews; relationships that could provide a deeper understanding of the participant responses, and provide a focus around which future analysis could be built.

4.9.7 Triangulation and Depth

In order to further understand the key themes that were emerging, other sources of data were introduced. These sources included researcher observations, participant journals and the replies to the four month follow-up emails. None of these sources were coded in the same way that the interviews were, but were read in order to augment existing understandings of the ‘central nodes’ of meaningful experiences described.

For each cluster of responses based around a central node or ‘type of meaningful experience’ differing levels of perception emerged. That is, for a particular type of meaningful experience, there were congruent collections of description involving the senses, emotions, feelings, focus of attention or thoughts. This was a direct reflection of individual responses to specific experiences on the river. For example, in recollecting an experience on the journey a participant might mention the perception of objects within the landscape, the surrounding environs, emotions or feelings invoked at the time, their focus of attention, or thoughts that occurred to them. In describing these multiple levels, a depth was built up around these hubs of meaningful experiences. In a phenomenological sense these levels of perception revolve around the way things appear for us. They concern ‘intentionality’. In discussing the challenges of intentionality and explicating phenomena, Moustakas suggests four main processes:

1. Explicating the sense in which our experiences are directed;
2. Discerning the features of consciousness that are essential for the individuation of objects (real or imaginary) that are before us in consciousness (Noema);
3. Explicating how beliefs about such objects (real or imaginary) may be acquired, how is it that we are experiencing what we are experiencing (Noesis); and

4. Integrating the noematic and noetic correlates of intentionality into meanings and essences of experience (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 31-32).

While it is impossible to fully describe lived experience, by combining multiple layers of description from multiple sources we are able to build a better understanding of the essence of a phenomenon:

From our phenomenological standpoint we can and must put the question of essence: *What is the 'perceived as such'? What essential phases does it harbour in itself in its capacity as noema?* We win the reply to our question as we wait, in pure surrender, on what is essentially *given*. We can then describe 'that which appears as such' faithfully and in the light of perfect self-evidence. As just one expression for this we have, 'the describing of perception in its noematic aspect' (Husserl, 1931, p. 260).

When considering different levels of perception, the question of just how deep to dig arises. This occurs in a very practical sense. For example, when coding a particular segment of an interview, several codes may be obvious, but there may also be a hint of another theme that is not made explicit. The decision about whether or not to include this elusive level of meaning is one that I had to continually resolve. By immersing myself in the data, I gained a 'feel' for the phenomena in question, and confidence was gained when intuitions of meaning were explicitly confirmed later in the same interview, within an additional source such as a journal, or by several other similar accounts that include the intuited meaning:

Qualitative interpretation begins with elucidating meanings. The analyst examines a story, a case study, a set of interviews, or a collection of field notes and asks, What does this mean? What does this tell me about the nature of the phenomenon of interest? In asking these questions, the analyst works back and forth between the data or story (the evidence) and his or her own perspective and understanding to make sense of the evidence (Patton, 2002, pp. 477-478).

The data analysis was multi-layered, and Figure 10 shows the flow of the data analysis process within this research project.

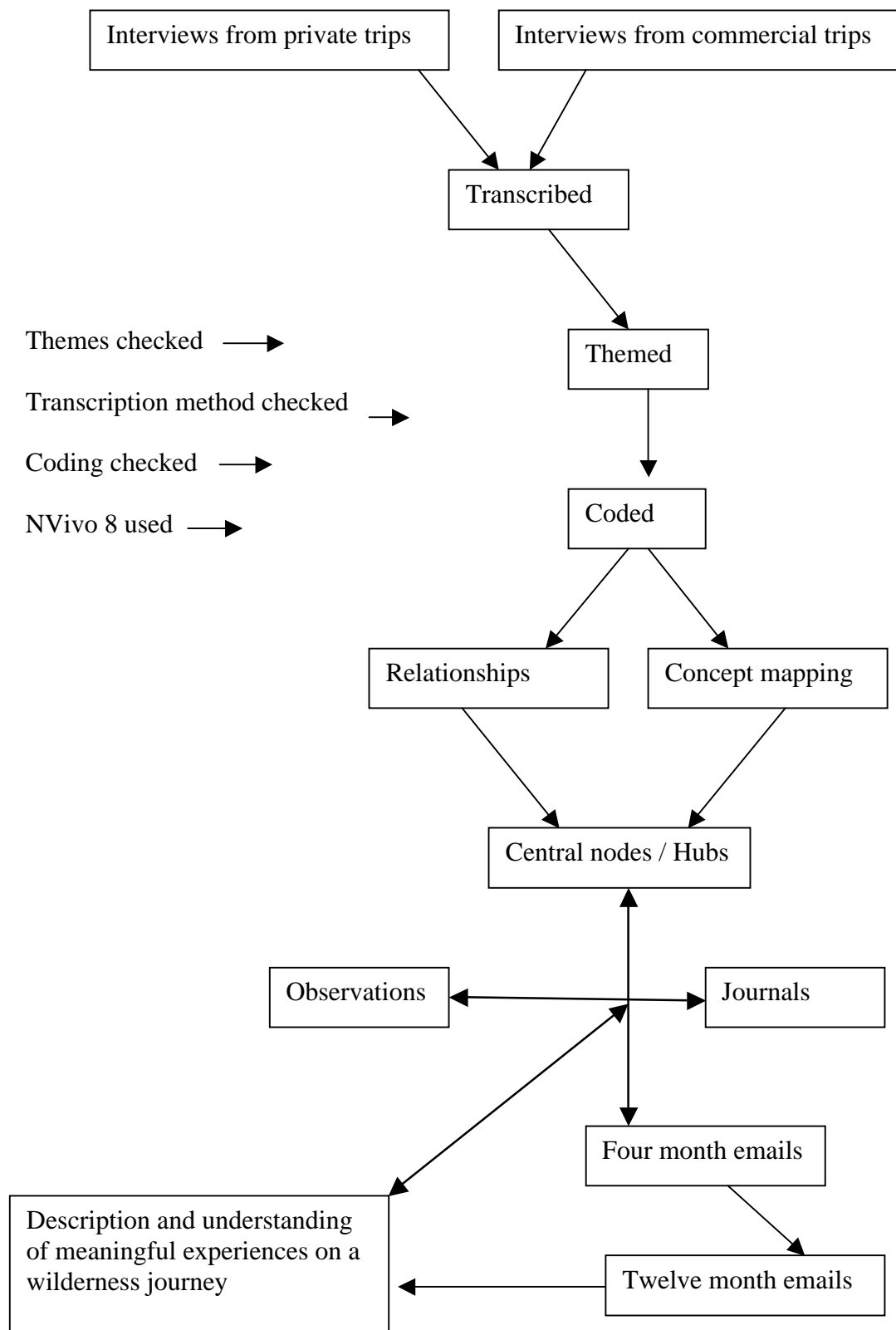


Figure 10: Data Analysis Flow Chart

4.10 Criteria

Ultimately the research will be best judged by those who have had similar experiences; by how well it explicates the essence of the phenomena and ‘rings true’ for them. The research aims to articulate the ineffable, in a way that elicits recognition of the possibilities for meaningful experiences on wilderness journeys.

Can we apply criteria to assist in determining the credibility of the research project, particularly as they pertain to the validity of the overarching paradigm? Patton suggests just such a set of criteria. These provide practical benchmarks by which to judge the quality and credibility of research methods, analysis and findings. They include:

- Subjectivity acknowledged (discusses and takes into account biases)
- Trustworthiness
- Authenticity
- Triangulation (capturing and respecting multiple perspectives)
- Reflexivity
- Praxis
- Particularity (doing justice to the integrity of unique cases)
- Enhanced and deepened understanding (*Verstehen*)
- Contributions to dialogue (Patton, 2002, p. 544).

These criteria act not only as a benchmark by which to judge the final product, but also as a guide for the data analysis process.

4.11 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has outlined the practical research design, including site, sample, technique and strategy selection, and the data analysis process. The chapter has sought to make the decision making process explicit; a process informed by the research questions, a respect for the participants’ experiences, and an empathetic attitude.

Chapter 5 – Preliminary Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to initiate phenomenological description of meaningful experiences on a wilderness river journey. Phenomenological description enjoins articulating the *invariant structures* and the *essences* of the meaningful experiences described by participants. It involves a search for patterns. The chapter moves between the individual and the collective, and begins by exploring the coded recollections in order to reveal common themes, relationships and structures. The structures, in turn, reveal central hubs around which meanings appear to cluster. By exploring these hubs, and moving between the individual and the collective, the chapter describes possible ‘streams of experience’ as recalled by participants on a wilderness river journey. The research takes cognizance of Potter’s observation:

When I reflected upon the co-researchers’ interpretations of their wilderness experiences, I realized that each was distinctive, each held different meanings, understandings and subjectivism. But while all of their personal paths were unique, as singular as a snowflake landing upon an outstretched palm, all bore commonalities (Potter, 1993, p. 190).

5.2 Common Themes

The original 32 interviews were coded using the themes listed below (Table 3). These themes emerged from a process of repeated listening to and transcription of the interviews, from observations and from journals, as well as feedback from an independent researcher during the coding process. The themes were grouped into six main context areas, in order to facilitate an efficient coding process. The interviews themselves were coded in segments of conversation, often with a one hour interview containing around 35-50 segments. These segments were then coded using single or multiple themes. Interestingly, several of the thematic relationships that appeared occurred between themes from different context areas. Table 3 lists the themes, in their context areas, as well as the number of interviews that they coded and the total number of times the coding was used.

While the original questions and subsequent interviews were focussed on ‘meaningful experiences’, not all of the included themes were at the heart of the described experiences themselves. The themes *categorise* what participants discussed and do not individually denote an experience; rather what constitutes a meaningful experience is an elusive question which requires further understanding of how the themes are related and structured. Indeed, given the nature of the search for pre-categorical experience, the essence of any experience likely lies between, or around, a group of themes. The collective frequency of thematic coding provides an insight into the commonly discussed themes; however, it does not reveal the *relationships* between the themes nor the possible *structures* of the recalled meaningful experiences.

Table 3: Table of Themes and Frequency of Times Used for Coding

Hierarchy	Themes Used for Coding	Interviews Coded	Total No. of Times Coded
1. Social context			
Tree Node	Social Struggle	5	7
Tree Node	Teamwork	13	23
Tree Node	Social / Community	16	30
Tree Node	Social Space	19	25
Tree Node	Solitude	19	37
Tree Node	Guides	21	36
Tree Node	Clients	21	36
2. Activity context			
Tree Node	Effort to Get There	7	9
Tree Node	History	8	12
Tree Node	Satisfaction / Achievement	10	16
Tree Node	Adventure	11	25
Tree Node	Safety	13	17
Tree Node	No Dams	15	19
Tree Node	Rafting (as different)	18	36
Tree Node	Unique Experience	19	40
Tree Node	Physical Challenge	20	45
3. Being context			
Tree Node	Own Mindset	4	5
Tree Node	Renewal	7	11

Tree Node	Immersed	7	12
Tree Node	Focus of Attention	7	12
Tree Node	Relaxed	8	12
Tree Node	Discovery	10	14
Tree Node	Bodily Senses	10	20
Tree Node	The Quietness	11	24
Tree Node	Routine / Rhythm	15	31
Tree Node	Journey / Pilgrimage	16	34
Tree Node	Compared to Home	17	35
Tree Node	Being Away	20	38
Tree Node	Simple Basics	20	44
Tree Node	Length of Trip	23	42
4. Environment context			
Tree Node	Stars	4	7
Tree Node	Visiting	4	5
Tree Node	Irenabyss	9	13
Tree Node	Side Trips	10	17
Tree Node	Not in Human Terms	11	17
Tree Node	Newlands	12	17
Tree Node	Mystery / Exploration	12	19
Tree Node	Not One Thing	13	21
Tree Node	Weather	14	19
Tree Node	Small Features	14	24
Tree Node	Aware of Human Impact	15	30
Tree Node	Whole Landscape	16	25
Tree Node	Power	18	36
Tree Node	Pristine	18	38
Tree Node	Trees	19	25
Tree Node	Ravine	19	28
Tree Node	Geology	20	51
Tree Node	Scale	20	65
Tree Node	Diversity / Change	21	62
Tree Node	Remote	22	36
Tree Node	Wildness	22	43
Tree Node	River	24	59
Tree Node	Beauty / Aesthetic	26	81
5. Experience context			
Tree Node	Actively Engaged in Experience	2	3
Tree Node	Surprised By Experience	11	11
Tree Node	Feels Good	12	27
Tree Node	Gratitude / Privilege	13	16
Tree Node	Threatened / Vulnerable	13	35
Tree Node	Hard to Describe	15	30

Tree Node	Connected to Nature	15	35
Tree Node	Part of a System	18	45
Tree Node	Exists on Own (macro and micro)	19	66
Tree Node	Awe / Wonder	22	49
Tree Node	In the Moment	24	65
Tree Node	Diminishment (personal and human)	24	83
6. Outcome context			
Tree Node	Confidence	3	4
Tree Node	Family / Friends	6	8
Tree Node	Reassured by System	7	12
Tree Node	Empathy	8	13
Tree Node	Clarity	8	17
Tree Node	Environmental Concern	9	16
Tree Node	Patient / Calm	11	16
Tree Node	Fade / Hold Onto	12	19
Tree Node	Questioning / Understanding	15	36
Tree Node	Experience as Outcome	16	35
Tree Node	Perspective (renewed and new)	23	83

5.3 Common Relationships

Common relationships between themes can be explored by considering the coding frequency of a theme at the same conversational segment as any other theme. For example, by searching for the number of times the theme ‘beauty / aesthetic’ occurs alongside other themes, commonly occurring relationships with that theme can be highlighted. Table 4 shows the themes that occurred commonly at the same time as ‘beauty / aesthetic’ in participant recollections, and the frequency of those relationships.

Table 4: Frequently Occurring Themes with 'Beauty / Aesthetic'

	A : Beauty Aesthetic
32 : Diversity / Change	28
33 : Geology	12
57 : Exists on Own (macro and micro)	12
44 : Scale	9
18 : Bodily Senses	8
43 : River	8
17 : Being Away	7
46 : Small Features	7
54 : Awe / Wonder	7
61 : In the Moment	7

38 : Not one Thing	6
40 : Pristine	6
51 : Whole Landscape	6
56 : Diminishment (personal and human)	6
58 : Feels Good	6

It is also possible to see how several relationships might be connected by selecting one of two apparently related themes and considering relationships that commonly occur with that secondary theme. For example, by selecting the theme ‘in the moment’ which is related to ‘beauty / aesthetic’ it is possible to see what themes are, in turn, related to it (see Table 5). While it does not guarantee that the relationships are directly linked, when the insights are combined with careful attention to the original interviews and the common structures of experience it is possible to see where valid conversational links do occur.

Table 5: Frequently Occurring Themes with 'In the Moment'

	A : In the moment
30 : The Quietness	10
22 : Immersed	9
28 : Routine / Rhythm	9
6 : Solitude	9
17 : Being Away	8
21 : Focus of Attention	8
29 : Simple / Basics	8
18 : Bodily Senses	7
32 : Beauty / Aesthetics	7
73 : Perspective (renewed and new)	7
2 : Guides	5
19 : Compared to Home	5
24 : Length of Trip	5
59 : Feels Good	5

Each theme can be checked individually for frequency of relationships. It is also possible to create a single relationship matrix that compares each theme with the number of times it occurs alongside all other themes within the interviews. This matrix (Appendix 9) is extensive (76 rows X 76 columns) and provides a method for highlighting the most commonly occurring relationships between themes based on frequency.

An understanding of the relationships between themes offers further insights into the described experiences, although there are limitations to what can be revealed.

Because the interviews are coded in segments, often by more than two themes, no insight into *how* the two themes might actually be linked can be imputed. Also, it is difficult to gain an overall picture of where the heart of the experiences, taken collectively, might lie. In order to gain a more accurate understanding of how the relationships do fit together it is necessary to return to the individual interviews and carefully map individual and collective *structures* of the thematic relationships, by considering the conversational flow of described experiences.

5.4 Common Conversational Structures

In order to look for common thematic structures within individual interviews a concept map was developed for each interview by carefully listening to the way the thematic relationships were linked in conversation. These concept maps contain the coded interview themes from each individual interview arranged in a way that links thematic relationships and provides a visual representation of the structure and possible directionality of recalled experiences. An example is provided in Figure 11, while additional examples appear in Appendix 8.

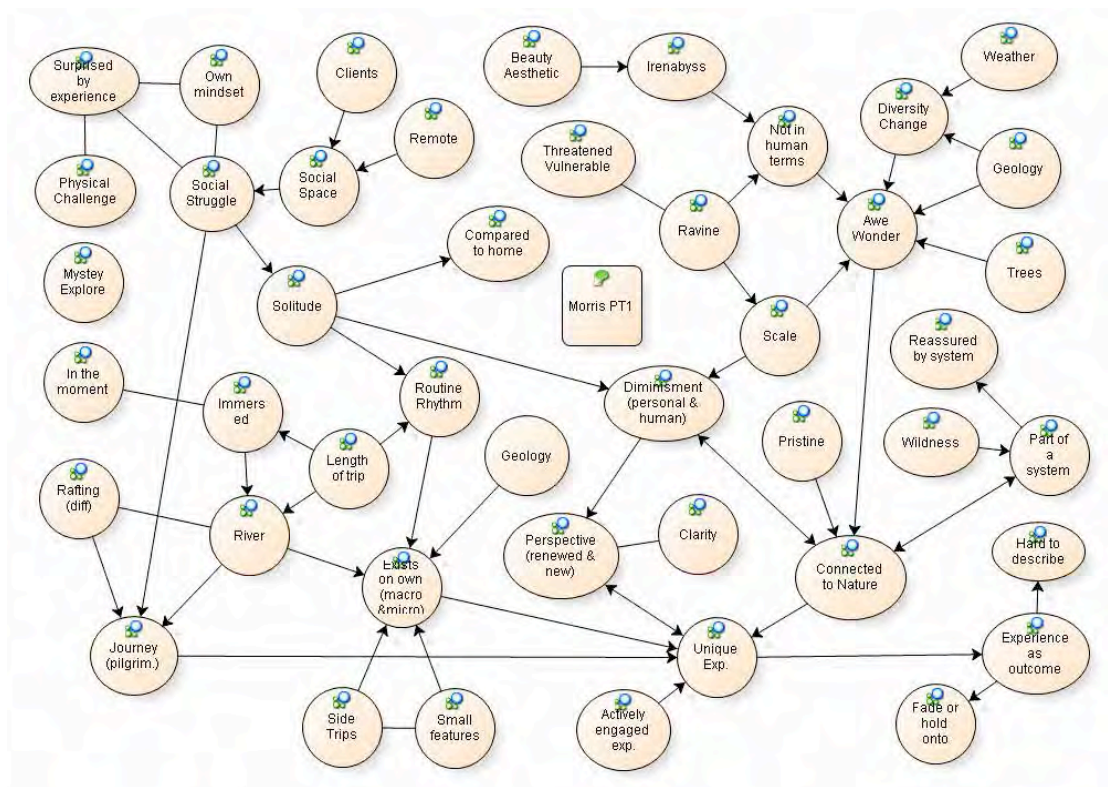


Figure 11: Thematic Concept Map of the Interview with Morris (PT1)

By constructing a concept map of each interview it is possible to get a *feel* for each conversation, and to reflect upon flows and thematic connections. Not only does this method offer possibilities for analysing individual interviews, but also for searching for common structures within collective interviews. By starting with a frequently coded theme it is possible to look for common links to other themes by counting the number of times that theme was linked to other themes throughout the collective interview concept maps. For example, by considering the theme ‘perspective’ it is possible to locate related themes and map those relationships, as in Figure 12, and record the number of conversational connections.

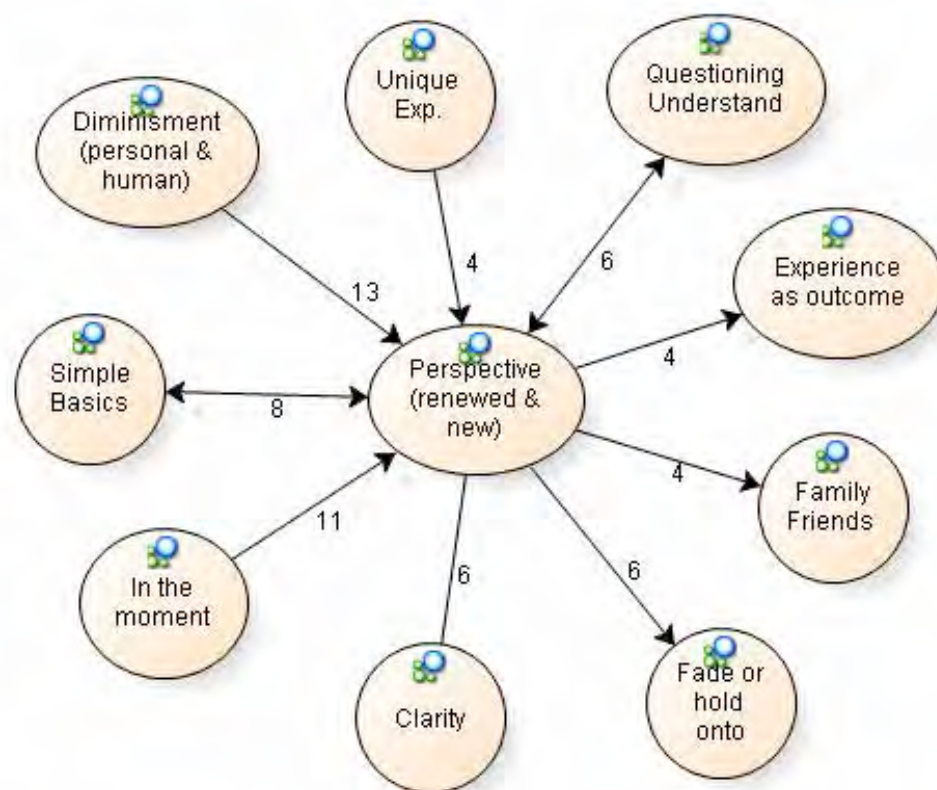


Figure 12: Common Conversational Themes Surrounding the Theme of 'Perspective'

From this point connected themes can be further expanded using the same process. For example, by expanding the theme ‘diminishment’ in this way, a more extensive concept map of relationships is created, as demonstrated in Figure 13:

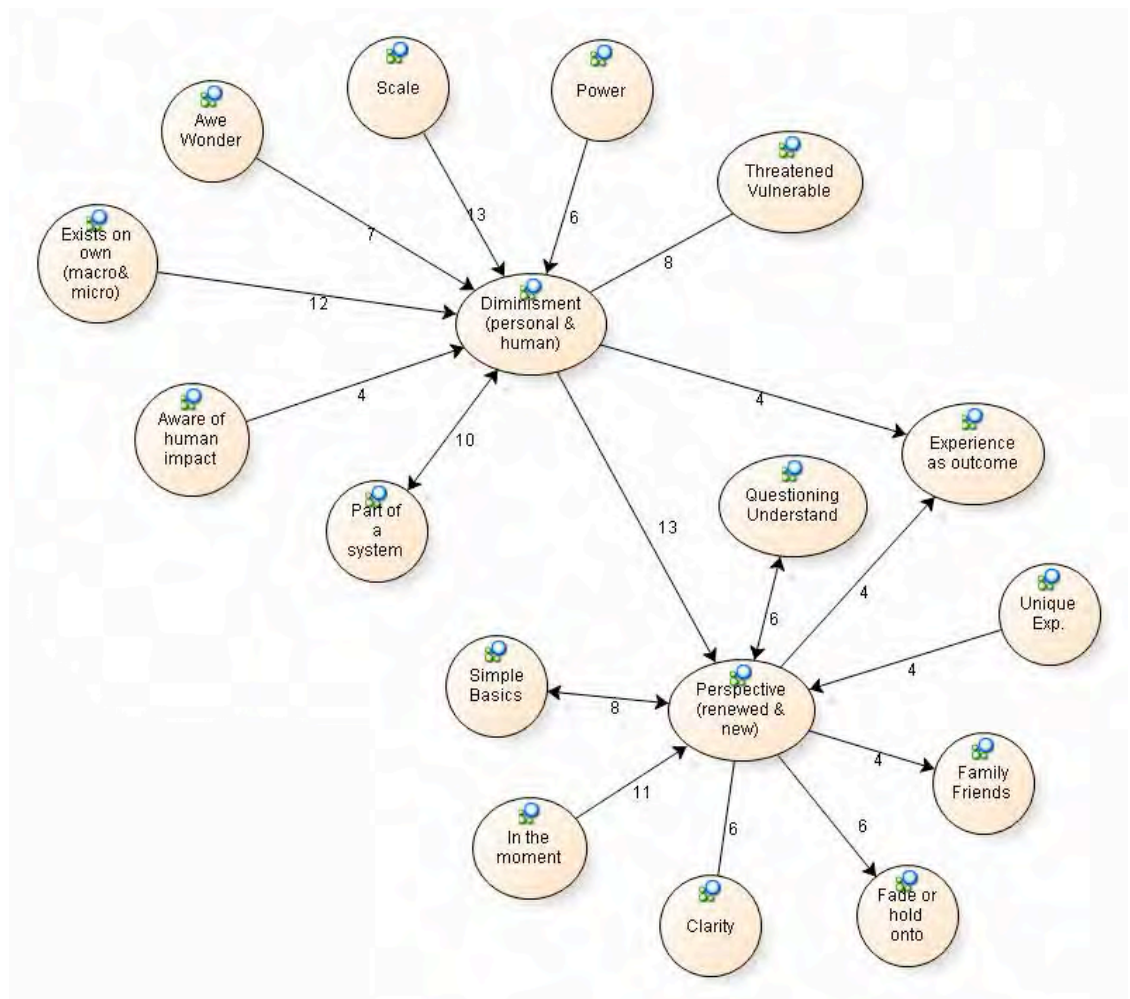


Figure 13: Conversational Themes Surrounding 'Perspective' and 'Diminishment'

To ensure that each of the connections represents a valid and significant relationship, and to avoid missing potentially strong relationships, it is possible to use the thematic relationship matrix (Appendix 9) discussed earlier to check the *frequency* of each connection in terms of segmented coding. While it does not necessarily follow that an individual interview conversation follows any particular series of links, it does provide a *common structure* of described experiences.

Additionally, as the concept map was expanded out to search for overall structures, some themes were revealed to have stronger connections than those originally discovered and were therefore moved to reflect the subsequent stronger connection. It is important to keep in mind that this overall concept map is based on the most commonly occurring conversational linkages and thematic relationships, and as such does not contain some of the less frequently occurring connections. As each theme

was checked and tested for thematic relationships, an overall structural concept map was developed (Figure 14):

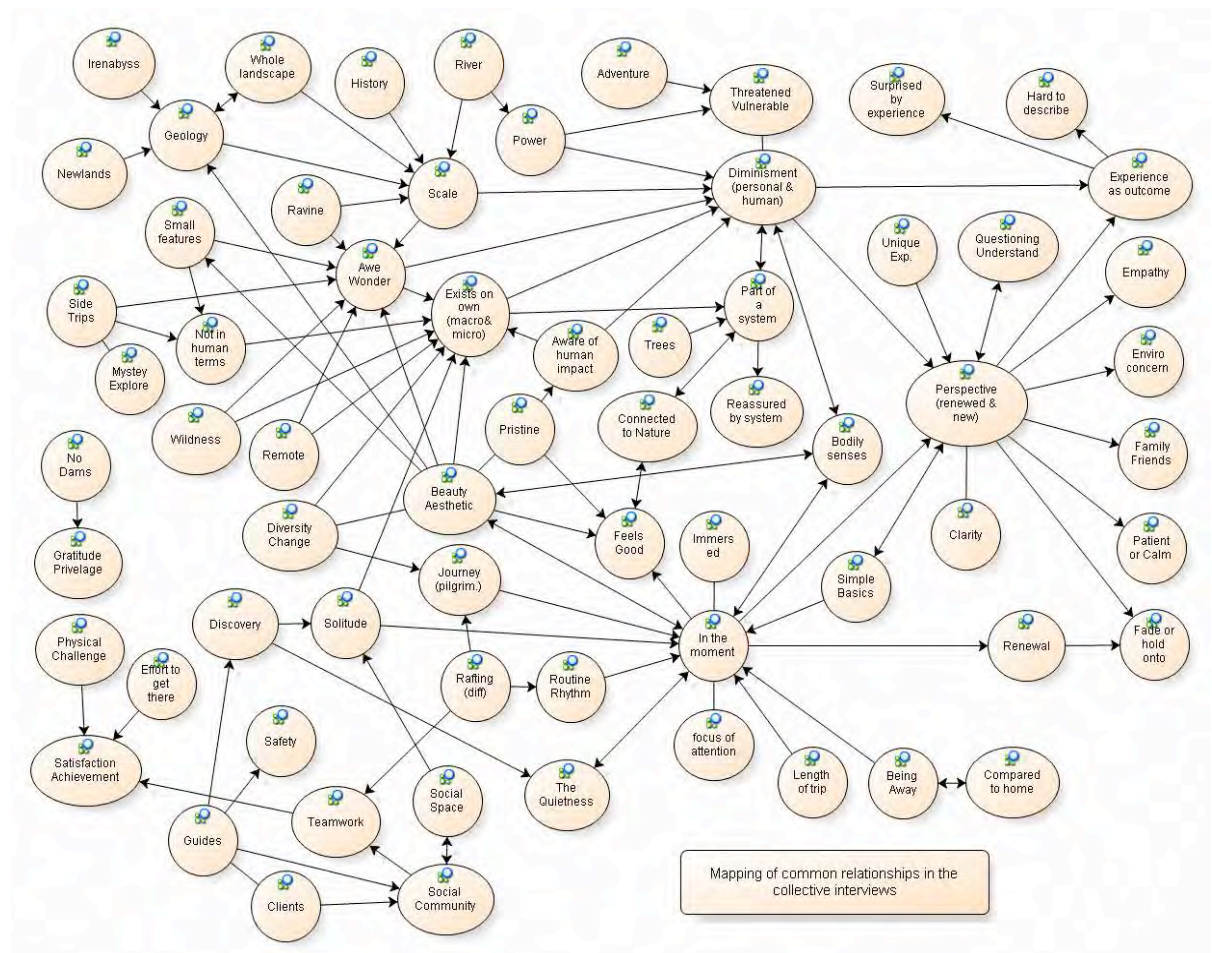


Figure 14: Concept Map of Common Relationships within the Collective Interviews

This overall concept map **does not** represent every interview, or indeed any single interview; rather, it represents the common structure of thematic relationships as they occurred throughout the interviews. It is not intended to provide a model that explains meaningful experiences, but rather to locate the central hubs of meaning as they are described by participants. By locating the common and therefore invariant (most likely) structural elements of meaningful experiences, it should be possible to describe those experiences from the inside out. In other words, by combining common themes, relationships and structures it is possible to locate the central hubs and their surrounding relationships, providing a starting point for the phenomenological description of possible meaningful experiences on a wilderness river journey.

5.5 Describing Meaningful Experiences from a Phenomenological Perspective

The understanding of what participants find most meaningful on wilderness river journeys must to some degree be incomplete. We can only ever use words to describe what for many people are complex, emotional or mysterious experiences that are recalled post-reflection. The experiences on the river journey, as they were lived, will never be fully described. Indeed, the post-categorical words used by participants in recalling their experiences must not only be incomplete, but to some degree are mandated by personal or societal pre-conceptions. We are, therefore, required to reflect not only on what is said, but also that which is not said but may be made discernible through careful interrogative reflection. As Merleau-Ponty suggests of this reflective process:

It must question the world, it must enter into the forest of references that our interrogation arouses in it, it must make it say, finally, what in its silence *it means to say*... We know neither what exactly is this order and this concordance of the world to which we must entrust ourselves, nor therefore what the enterprise will result in, nor even if it is really possible (1968, p. 39).

While the potential impossibility of the task may, on the surface, appear a hindrance, it also provides the opportunity to search at a deeper than surface level, to not be satisfied wholly with the words or categories used, and to interrogate individual experiences in light of collective recollections. As Liberman observes, reflecting on the Merleau-Ponty position cited above: “Merleau-Ponty’s doubt here is humbling, but our task here is such that we can put that humility to good use” (2000, p. 39). Because experience itself is elusive, this research project will make use of common thematic relationships and hubs of experience to find a *starting point* from which to further explore the experiences described by participants.

5.5.1 Starting Points for Reflection

The overall concept map reveals at least two potential ‘streams’ of recalled experiences (Figure 15), which appear to commonly flow through the thematic hubs of ‘diminishment’ and being ‘in the moment’; that is, while they may be connected,

there appears to be distinctiveness in the way in which participants described these two types of meaningful experiences. This is not to say that the themes of ‘diminishment’ or being ‘in the moment’ perfectly encapsulate the essence of the participants’ experiences (in fact, they likely do not), but that the streams of experience surrounding them might provide a starting point for reflection on potentially meaningful experiences. Of the 32 participants, 24 described an experience involving a sense of ‘diminishment’, while 24 also described experiences involving a sense of being ‘in the moment’. Although many participants described both types of experience, they were often at differing points of the interview. Four participants described neither type of experience, and eight described either one or the other. The following table shows the breakdown of participants by the themes of ‘diminishment’ and being ‘in the moment’. This **does not** infer that all participants had similar experiences; rather, it provides a starting point from which to explore commonly occurring streams of experience within *individual* recollections.

Table 6: Participants Describing Themes of 'Diminishment' or Being 'In the Moment'

	A : Diminishment	B : In the moment
1 : Amy PT1	Yes	Yes
2 : Beth PT1	Yes	Yes
5 : Clive PT1	No	Yes
6 : Morris PT1	Yes	Yes
7 : Rosie PT1	Yes	Yes
8 : Sarah PT1	Yes	Yes
9 : Vickie PT1	Yes	Yes
11 : Donald PT2	Yes	Yes
13 : Trent PT2	Yes	Yes
15 : Amanda PT3	Yes	Yes
17 : Monica PT3	No	No
18 : Alison PTE	Yes	Yes
19 : Richard PTE	Yes	Yes
20 : Shaun PTE	No	Yes
21 : Cory WE1	Yes	No
22 : David WE1	Yes	Yes
23 : Jackie WE1	Yes	Yes
24 : Lesley WE1	No	Yes
25 : Lester WE1	Yes	Yes
26 : George WE2	No	Yes
27 : Graeme WE2	Yes	Yes

28 : Peter WE2	No	No
29 : Phillip WE2	Yes	Yes
30 : Rachel WE2	Yes	Yes
31 : Wayne WE2	Yes	No
32 : Bill WE3	No	No
33 : Charlie WE3	Yes	No
34 : Darren WE3	No	No
35 : Diane WE3	Yes	Yes
36 : Jessie WE3	Yes	Yes
37 : Nick WE3	Yes	No
38 : Scott WE3	Yes	Yes

5.5.2 Beyond the Thematic Hub

The first stream of experience, however, appears to involve something much more than just a sense of ‘diminishment’, and while there is a desire to avoid presupposing the qualities of that stream of experience, a more overarching description is to say that the stream of experience appears to involve a sense of ‘humility’. The second stream of experience appears to involve more than just being ‘in the moment’, it seems to infer a heightened sensitivity or *aliveness* to the present moment; again, in a more overarching sense it appears to involve being ‘alive to the present’, to both time and place. To this end, the two streams of experience, which will be used as ‘starting points’ for further interrogation of the meaningful experiences described by participants, will be referred to as the streams of experience involving:

- a feeling of *humility*, and
- being *alive to the present*.

Using terms such as ‘humility’ and ‘present’ is an attempt to assist search for the essence of two potentially distinctive types of meaningful experience, without presupposing that the essence of those experiences will be directly described by the themes themselves. In other words, it is an attempt to leave the essential qualities of those streams of experience amorphous. While it may appear that both terms used to describe the streams of experience have been selected with minimal reference to direct articulation by participants, they are the result of a good deal of ‘turning over’ of participant descriptions and recollections centred round those two potential

streams of experience. It is necessary to avoid using themes to pre-define the essential quality of the ‘streams of experience’. The following chapters will interrogate the streams of meaningful experience surrounding both a feeling of ‘humility’ and being ‘alive to the present’, in order to search for patterns of possible *invariant structure* and to describe the *essences* of the phenomena described.

The experiences described involve elements of mystery and complexity that this research seeks to illuminate rather than categorise. It is important that, in breaking down the experience into smaller constituent parts, sight is not lost of broader qualities. It seems likely that the themes themselves will not describe an essence, or invariant structure, that might surround the experiences. Rather, the thematic descriptions might illuminate a structure that *underlies* the categories.

Interrogating the recollections of participants foregrounds the qualities of the experiences described, and an overall sense emerges of experiential qualities that are not always overtly stated but that quietly insinuate themselves. This clearly allows for a great deal of researcher subjectivity, and such interrogations of the participants’ own descriptions can only be claimed as valid if their evidentiality is also patent to the reader.

5.6 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has:

- Reported on the overall frequency of themes within individual interviews;
- Described how thematic conversational concept maps were formed for each individual interview;
- Provided an insight into the process of collectively checking for thematic relationships using an overall matrix;
- Outlined the process of forming an overall concept map of commonly occurring conversational theme relationships which incorporated the matrix analysis; and
- Described how this overall concept map highlighted two potential ‘streams of experience’ within the collective data.

Crucially, this chapter also described how these collectively located ‘streams of experience’ will be used to **return to the individual** recollections and narratives of the participants, in order to interrogate and ‘turn over’ the data. Through this deep consideration of the individual within the collective, the possibility of an invariant structure and essence of the phenomenon might be revealed.

It should be stressed at the outset that every individual’s experiences are unique. It is not a matter of trying to ‘squeeze’ individuals’ responses into either pre-formed or emergent conceptualisations of the phenomenon. What follows in the upcoming chapters is an attempt to illuminate lived human experience. It is not suggested that all the participants who describe similar feelings or perceptions had the same experience; rather it is to suggest that at the moment of interaction between person and place there might be some commonalities that can shed light on essential qualities of the experiences described.

Chapter 6 – Interrogating the Stream of Experience Involving a Feeling of Humility

6.1 Introduction

There is a stream of experience involving a feeling of *humility*, which commonly includes descriptions of themes such as ‘diminishment’, ‘part of a system’, ‘scale’ and ‘exists on own’. These themes frequently occur, have strong thematic relationships, are at the centre of a structural chain of meaningful hubs, and often include the way aspects of the wilderness landscape of the Franklin River appear for participants. What does the structure surrounding the stream of experience involving *humility* look like, and what are its essential qualities? This chapter will attempt to answer that question, and go still further. By interrogating the participant descriptions involving key themes, the chapter outlines possible invariant structures surrounding the meaningful experiences and articulates the *essences* of such experiences.

This is not an attempt to describe the meaningful experience of ‘humility’; rather, it is an attempt to describe the stream of meaningful experience for which feelings of *humility* and associated themes are a part, on the Franklin River journey. While the experiences described by participants commonly reflect feelings of diminishment, they are often recalled as remarkably uplifting or renewing experiences that add to one’s life. For example, while participants often described feeling humbled or diminished in the natural landscape, this was usually viewed as a positive experience.

6.2 Interrogating the Thematic Descriptors

The stream of meaningful experience which involves a feeling of humility, then, will be explored by interrogating the thematically clustered descriptions and their underlying relationships and structures. These themes include several sub-themes which were particularly related to the surrounding experience. Participant

recollections will be interrogated, and reflected upon, under the following thematic descriptors:

1. **Diminishment** (including Threatened / Vulnerable)
2. **Part of a System** (including Connected to Nature and Feels Good)
3. **Scale** (including Geology and Whole Landscape)
4. **Exists on Own** (including Aware of Human Impacts and Small Features)
5. **Power** (including River)
6. **Awe and Wonder** (including Wildness and Remote)
7. **Beauty and Aesthetic** (including Complexity / Diversity and some locations)
8. **In the Moment** (including Immersed / Awareness)
9. **Perspective** (including Questioning / Understanding)
10. **Experience as Outcome** (including Hard to Describe and Fade / Hold Onto)

Though not all interviews were available using this technique (because not everyone described feelings within this stream of experience), the technique itself provided a clear focus around the meaningful experience being explored. Figure 16 provides a visual map of the thematic relationships that are considered. As the relationships are interrogated, the qualities of each are summarised, and examples of participant recollections included. The recollections have been carefully chosen to support the literal analysis as well as the interpretative analysis that seeks to illuminate the essence of the meaningful experiences described.

While some of the key themes (such as ‘diminishment’ and ‘scale’) may appear to be clichéd or somewhat obvious responses to a wilderness river journey such as the Franklin, there are underlying patterns inherent in the *way* in which these themes are related to other thematic descriptors which may shed light on the elusive *structure* or *essential qualities* of the overall meaningful experiences described. This method of approaching an ‘overall’ experience by compartmentalising or categorising ‘parts’ of the described experience may appear counter-intuitive, however, it is hoped that by breaking the experience down, and then rebuilding it around underlying patterns, the ‘hard-to-define’ essences of the experiences described will be illuminated.

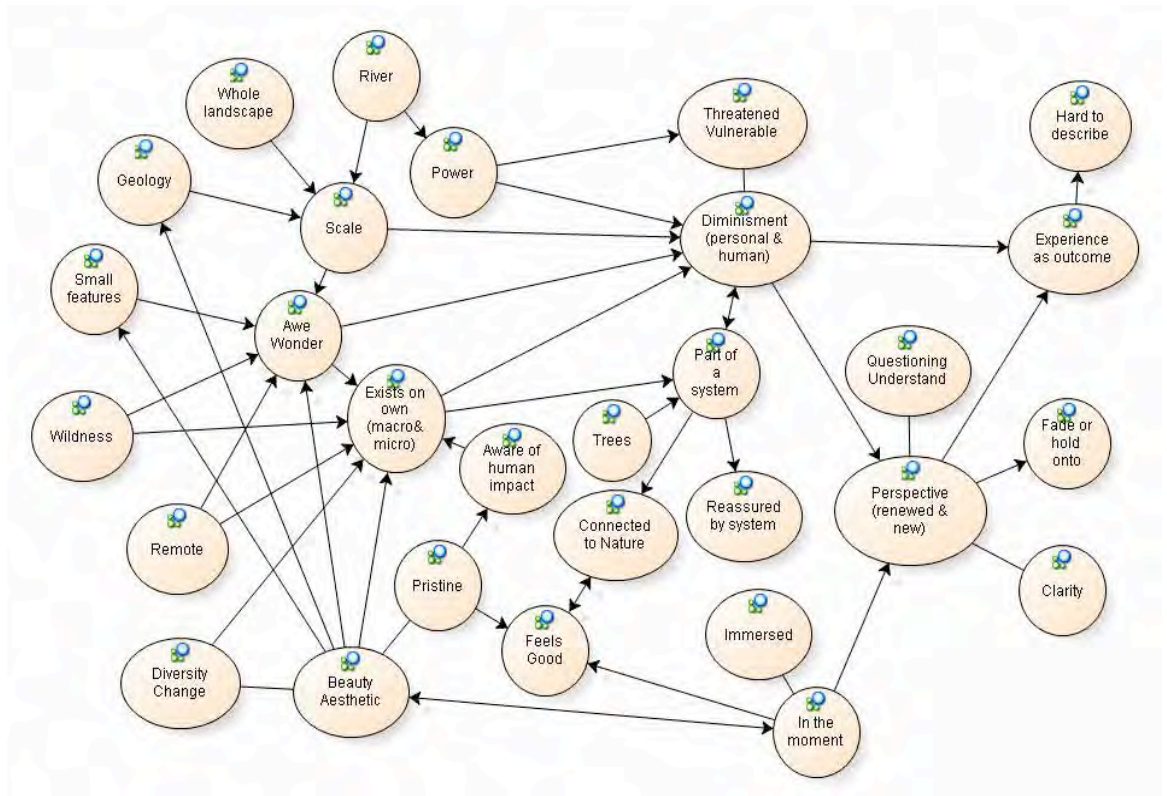


Figure 16: Thematic Relationships Surrounding the Stream of Experience Involving a Feeling of Humility

6.2.1 Diminishment

While it is not accurate to use the term ‘diminishment’ to describe the overall experience, there is an element of the experience that involves reduction or loss. Participants commonly reported feeling diminished in the face of something larger than themselves, humbled by the place or less in control. Feelings of diminishment in the face of something larger were often in terms of the natural environment or the ‘place’ itself and were both spatial and temporal. Participants reported feelings of humility or humbleness that flowed from the natural world, and particularly its incomprehensibility.

Feeling small in the face of ‘something’ larger was a common description, and while participants could recall places and times when they felt that way, often involving particular features on the river, the sense of diminishment was not entirely in relation to those individual features. It was more that the features discussed were signposts to gaining a more general sense of the size of the place, both physically and temporally. This ‘something’ could be described as the place, or extended to include the natural

world. While is not surprising to feel small in relation to the physical features on the river, such as the towering cliff walls in the Ravine, what was perhaps surprising was the number of subtle ways in which smaller features along the river made participants aware of something larger that was undeniable, humbling and beyond imagination.

Feelings of humility could also involve a perceived reduction of the self or a diminishment of one's own importance. It commonly involved a sense of being reminded that the place, or the natural world generally, could carry on without us, without our input, and will continue to do so after we have left. For many participants that level of diminishment was both terrifying and enjoyable.

"I think if I was to pick one thing that has stayed with me the strongest, it's definitely the intensity and 'immensity', maybe is a better word, of that place. And how overwhelming that is and how that dislocates and displaces you as a person, I guess, because that's something that's really... An experience, is just thinking about... Yeah, kind of being lost in something that's almost beyond... Lost in a space and experience that's beyond your own comprehension or ability to place yourself in it or with it." (Vickie PT1)

"And when you stop and you look around you, you realise how profoundly unimportant you are to the natural flow of life as it unfolds in there. And I think, so I think that sort of lesson in humility. So when I say I'm left with this feeling of awe and an impression of the extraordinary beauty of it, its impact on me as a person is a humbling one. And it makes me profoundly aware of how unimportant I am personally, that how either my species is not the be all and the end all. It's not the last word in value on the planet." (Richard PTE)

Participants related feelings of diminishment to a loss of control. Certainly many participants were out of their comfort zone in terms of rafting the Franklin River, but there was a more profound loss of control. The river dictates where you go, weather and water levels allow you to proceed, rapids move with a sense of unstoppable gravity and power, and there is a sense of the inescapable on the river journey. Combined with this at times was the realisation that one's presence in such an environment was in some ways inconsequential in the scheme of things.

"It was just, the scale of you as a human just becomes incredibly small and you're looking around you and thinking, wow it's a big tough environment and it's uncompromising and it doesn't care that you're there and you've got to go in and

you've got to essentially meet it on its terms and if you think that, if you think that you're ever entirely or 100% in control then you're kidding yourself because it's got to be respected and it's got to be, it's a balance between you and nature and it's in nature's favour and you just feel incredibly small but also incredibly happy to be there and to be aware of it and to see just how impressive the environment is... it's just a wonderful experience for me.” (Donald PT2)

“Yeah and how it's like wild. I guess I liked it because it was also like where you couldn't really control it, that's what I really like about nature, like you can't control it so we didn't really know what was going to happen and we just had to go with it whereas like here you know if it's raining you can get in the car or something. That's what, I don't know but, there you know if it's raining or something, I don't know just, do you know what I'm getting at kind of?... Yeah not in control of anything really and it's as if you're closer to yourself.” (Amanda PT3)

There was a sense that the diminishment or loss of control involved a stripping away of something, perhaps some unnecessary baggage that makes one feel in control or try to stay in control. There was a sense that one could be laid bare to the world but that that could be a relief. It was both frightening and exciting. As Hay recalls of a trip down the Franklin River: “I stand on a rock high above The Churn and there is a grip of fear upon me. I lose words. I lose personality – and this is disturbing and exhilarating, both. I am challenged to know myself; I am challenged to lose myself. Perspectives change. I travel an arc of time that has become no-time” (2008, n.p.). This challenge to the self appears profound, and has as its companion the possibility of fear or vulnerability.

“The sense of diminishment that you get which can be both inspiring and also a bit frightening because it's ego dissolving.” (Richard PTE)

“I think it's important for people to be a little bit dislodged. I think we've got a pretty unrealistic sense of control and I like the idea that people get sort of lost in something that's beyond them, and myself. I think, in some sense it's good to be, I don't know, to see something that you can't see its frame or you can't see its....I think it's important, um, I think it's also... I think that, I don't know, the gaps just widening between us and our connection to natural environment and I mean it's... Like it's becoming more and more about resources than actual emotional or physical experience for the individual. And you experience it through such structured examples, like I mean even a trip down the Franklin is structured in a sense, but it's different from a video or a photo or your wall, calendar, or...yeah, I mean that's a pretty extreme example.”

Interviewer: “So you're wanting people to be dislodged. What would you hope that that would do for them?”

“Well I think dislodge but I think it can be kind of humbling and I think that’s probably important, considering the way that we tend to, I don’t know, see ourselves I suppose. I think it’s good to be tripped up a bit, but I also think it’s really good to just indulge in wonder and let our imagination be, to just go exploring and experience things that don’t necessarily have reason or...yeah, or even purpose. I think that’s really important for me and I hope, I don’t know, it’s almost like that childlike thing of daydreaming or just letting your imagination...be taken out of your almost, out of your control in a sense as well.” (Vickie PT1)

Feeling diminished or humbled often appeared to have two parts, a tension between feeling threatened or vulnerable, and feeling comfortable or connected. This apparent tension was related by participants not only to the physical challenges of the trip inspired by the environment, but also to the potential challenge to the self inspired by the same. Certainly, there appeared for many participants a sense of intimidation garnered from the environment, particularly where the scale or power of the place was evident. While for some the experience was accentuated in particular places, for others it was an overall experience, or appreciation, of the place.

There was a sense of being ‘comfortably terrified’, which is not to say necessarily that there was comfort in being terrified, but perhaps that there was an additional element to the experience that provided comfort. What seems certain was that for many the experience was both threatening *and* comforting. It was about an interaction with the landscape which both threatened and enfolded.

“But the other thing is these feelings of diminishment and the ego dissolving nature of being on the river, part of which does come from the adventure component but part of which is simply a reaction to the grandeur, not the macro grandeur but also the grandeur of those little micro worlds, they could so easily, it could so easily not be awe inspiring and uplifting, but profoundly threatening too.” (Richard PTE)

“In the Ravine I, it was the first time that I felt, um, intimidated by the environment. Where I felt very small in that place. And, the water was low, so, I mean it probably is much louder normally, but it still thunders in there, um. So it’s, I felt I got quite an adrenalin hit, like oops. Because we’ve got our little boats to start doing the first haulings and you sort of climbing along, we weren’t doing high portages but just, you know scrambling. And just the scale of it. Um, so there, it’s probably related. You know at times the sense of um, being very small was uplifting, in that I quite like knowing that my shit’s not really that important and that I’m just a tiny atom in this huge thing. Um, and then the flip side of that at times was ‘oh shit, I’m only this tiny thing’. So yeah, they’re two sides of the same coin.” (Morris PT1)

6.2.2 Part of a system

There was a common tension between feelings of diminishment and feelings of being part of a larger system or feeling connected to nature.

“So there was that side of being alone in this big environment, as well as feeling connected to all things. Those two feelings aren’t mutually exclusive I don’t think. I think there’s a relationship between them.” (Morris PT1)

“I ask myself the question, how can I feel so connected to a place and at the same time be so terrified?” (Alison PTE)

These feelings appeared in terms of an awareness of the surrounding environment, particularly where the elements of the environment appeared as part of a larger self-supporting system that could enfold participants. While the place was considered threatening, it was not so in a malignant way, but rather as a system that operated regardless of participants being there. A self-operating system. The forests, in particular, appeared to support the idea of being part of a larger system. There was a recognition that individual trees, or perhaps more accurately micro-worlds connected to a single tree, are beautiful and infinitely complex in their own right and yet they are only a tiny part of the larger forest system. The smaller parts are infinitely valuable and worthwhile in themselves, yet they are only part of a larger system.

The geology, too, brought an awareness with it of a larger system that operates on a timescale beyond human imagination. To look at the smooth pebbles that came down from the upper reaches of the river to the lower, tumbled and rolled, implied a larger system at work; a system involving geological timescales, ancient earth movements, wearing rocks, oceans, evaporation and rain.

" The insignificance of humans in the world is what it is I think... And I think that a lot of people don't ever see that side of the natural world and, and... see how... see how intricate and small, everything fits together so perfectly [...] everything out here fits in together, like that tree rots, falls over, like you have this life, its leaves fall to the ground, rot, and it falls and leaves a space for something else to grow. It's all just a cycle of natural things and I think as humans we forget that we are only a part of this. It's so easy to forget that." (Rachel WE2)

“I guess one thought that comes to me, that I was thinking about as the trip went on, is the sort of journey of the water. You know, where you were sort of tracing it. I

mean, it's hard to define a bit of water but I guess you can think about a molecule or a volume of water and this idea that, you know, it starts up at a sort of tributary or falling down sort of the landscape, and then reaching this quite rocky and small Collingwood and then, you know, just kind of its path over these falls and rapids and kind of ending up then with joining on where all the smaller rivers join on and then when the Franklin widens right up and then joins this really big river that we're on now, the Gordon. So that's one thing I was thinking about with being in the lower Franklin."

Interviewer: "So those were the thoughts... does that thought go anywhere else? Make you feel, or think about, other things?"

"I guess it makes you think about the systems. You know, it's essentially a big system and, you know, all these elements that we're seeing play a part in this system that works quite amazingly. So I suppose you could relate that – I mean, just thinking now, you could relate that back to the temporal quality of us being there, or me being there, and seeing this system or in some sense being part of it. But at the same time, not that I have any impact as such upon the system. Yeah. Because for me, I had a nice moment looking across the Newlands Cascades campsite, straight across at the cliffs across the other side, just watching the river flow. And that was my thought, you know? I feel insignificant in terms of the fact that all those water molecules have come from somewhere else, but then from the sky, but then from evaporation in the sea, but then from rivers before and all that. And that should make me feel small but it doesn't necessarily. I almost feel very small but part of something." (Jessie WE3)

Feeling part of a system *and* threatened by 'something' often appeared to occur simultaneously in response to the natural environment. Contributing factors within the environment were apparent size, complexity and extent, as well as its independence and the perceived power of the natural world. They were, as one participant put it, 'two sides of the same coin'. It is, as we have seen, as if the same experience of place at once terrifies and comforts. If we search for the essence of that coin, it appears as an *awareness and interaction* with the natural world that has at its core a realisation of infinite complexity and of a scale that operates regardless of humans being there, as well as the resultant paradox of interacting with 'something' that is an *other*, but of which we are also a part. As Zimmerman suggests of his forest journeys, "the woods were a blessing to me because they were 'other' to me even while they were also kin to me" (1992, p. 269). Reported feelings included the idea of being enfolded by, taken into, or being protected by parts of the landscape. As Richard Flanagan reflects on one of the river's best known campsites:

Even by the extraordinary standards of the Franklin River, Newland's Cascades stands out for river travellers as one of its most extraordinary features [...]. There is concentrated at this site that great sense of serenity and awe—spiritual feelings if you like—that make the Franklin, in the words of the late James MacQueen, 'more than a river.' To stay there—to sleep and wake in the bowels of a mighty river—to stand beneath that vast overhang and gaze up at the wildest of storms, to gaze upon and hear the mighty rapids roaring at your side, yet to be protected by the same environment that is so harsh, is one of the more remarkable experiences to be had in this life (Flanagan, in Newton 2007, p. 45).

There was a sense that one could be 'lost' in something larger, both in the sense of space and time. Hay observes: "the ancient Gondwana forests reached over me, gathered me into time itself" (2008, n.p.). And associated with these feelings of being part of a system were feelings of comfort and safety, a contentment to know that individually we are part of something much larger, an assemblage of the natural world that is not dependent on us, but which is beautiful and has its own value.

"Just the rainforest in particular, all the different plants and how all the trees and how there's like none the same anywhere else in the world kind of thing. I don't know, it was just like how it's all there and it's all intact, there's like nothing's been cut out from the undergrowth and it's all the big trees, like nothing's been changed, I don't know. I just thought that was, like it was nice, and I felt safe in it because it was, I don't know, secure." (Amanda PT3)

"Yeah, I think because you know where you are so you have a strong enough position to be able to just let yourself absorb it and be lost, maybe emotionally in it, but not actually physically. You know that you probably can only experience that because you've got... It's like the whole sublime thing, you can only be lost in that because you've got your feet firmly on the ground. You know where you're standing perhaps. Some people also put it in a way that it would be, I don't agree with it necessarily, but at the same time that you feel small, a part of something bigger, so you feel diminished. At the same time, you're also aware that you're part of that system and there's something comfortable about that." (Vickie PT1)

"We were sitting there, feeling, I don't know, we were two little people, me and [another participant] having our heart to heart, and... big rock, little people, it was good. And maybe that's like that rock in the Churn! Maybe that's it, yeah. Made me feel comfortably little, don't have to deal with big things (laughs). This may not be true at all, this may not be what I think, this may just be what I'd like to think, the, if you're, just a little lalala, scurrying through, um, instead of, feeling the usual 'oh no I'm just a little person, I can't, you know, one person in the big world and everything,

and I can't do much difference'. It's like when you are just a person in the big world maybe it doesn't matter (laughs). Maybe you fit in." (Rosie PT1)

Several participants observed that a component of the experience was an openness to or *awareness* of a connection to a larger system. At home, by contrast, other thoughts and concerns crowd in, whereas on the trip participants were more open and aware of their surrounds and associated feelings.

"It also happens to you. Because there's no distractions, so you, you, it gives you that time, and mental time as well. Partly because of the distance maybe involved, to... focus on the things around you. And that's how you start to see that you are, might be, you still are a part of the system. As opposed to separate from it. The natural system." (Rachel WE2)

"Nothing really has changed for me in relation to my thoughts on the trip – it is still very vivid in my mind and I can recall images and experiences as though they were photos, from along the river. The environment and wildness that was all around is still the most moving and memorable thing from the trip. I can still recall and often do, the small intricacies of drips on moss, whirlpools of swirls or the mass of greens that formed the rainforest around. Being integrated into that web is for me a special memory of the trip." (Rachel WE2 12 mth)

"Unplugging yourself from um, um, punching through the veneer of civilization and touching the thing that we all came from, I think. And that's it, you know, this is the 'thing' – the system that allowed this to generate and sustains it, also generated us. And we couch ourselves in so many luxuries and ways in which we divorce ourselves from this world... So that to me is a wilderness experience, getting away from the, you know, punching through that veneer, and, and you know touching base again with where we came from." (David WE1)

One of the strongest relationships with the theme of feeling part of a larger system was with the theme of feeling good. Many participants struggled to identify exactly what it was that made them feel good, but there was a certainty about the feeling. An interrogation of descriptions by participants provides an insight, with many descriptions reflecting a sense of reassurance, comfort, contentment, peace, calmness or relief in the experience.

Participants felt connected to the natural system with which they were interacting. By accepting they were part of a larger assemblage, and perhaps relinquishing some control, they felt reassured. In many ways the realisation that one is a small part of something larger is difficult to avoid on an extended wilderness journey such as the

Franklin River. There is an entropy to the journey; you travel in the same direction as every part of the river system, from source to sea, with the flow of the river and the tumbling of the stones. It is necessary, seemingly unavoidable, to comply with the flow of the river.

Several participants reported times on the river, particularly during portages, where they had an experience of looking down from above on the group operating as a team of ants within a much larger environment. Participants also articulated the idea that the ability to operate and move within this larger landscape provided a sense of empowerment; despite one's smallness there is still the ability to be a function *within the system*.

"I mean it's nice that you're following the river its entire length, so you're completing the journey, and well, all rivers, well mostly, without exception end up in the sea, so that's where you have to go. But you don't really want to go there, you want to stay in the really scenic stunning parts. But you can't stay there, because it's inevitable (laughs), the water flows toward the sea. And you have to go with it, so that's a kind of... that's reassuring in it's own way, you know you have to kind of comply with the rules of the river and gravity and all that stuff." (Sarah PT1)

"I felt extremely empowered by how I felt by being there, and, I was, I was feeling, feeling small... I can't explain how, how that is, but, but that's what I felt... (long pause) Yeah, I dunno, I guess 'cause despite your size you can still be, you can still climb that big mountain, you can still go over that big rock, you can still swim in that big river, you can still climb that big tree. Like there's, you can live with it in harmony. Yeah, I'm not sure, if I'm going to be able to verbalise that." (Beth PT1)

Also revealing was the sense of relief that participants expressed, which appeared to be associated with the idea that they no longer needed to try to feel significant in themselves (in the same way a tree in the forest is insignificant within the overall forest, but is nevertheless indescribably complex and 'perfect' in its own right; it just 'is', complete in itself, and yet only part of a larger assemblage). What appeared to follow was a sense of contentment in the knowledge that participants could just 'be' in the system, in the world. There was a release from the pressure to try to feel significant.

"I like it, feeling insignificant is good... I don't know, it's sort of, I'm not really religious, but it's like um... it's just awe, I don't know how to describe it. Why do I like it? Because, it's, it's simple, and it's perfect. And in that insignificance, like those little trees like, there's thousands of them, millions of trees there. And, each one on

its own is big and strong and green, it's beautiful. But when they're put together, like they're, each individual one in amongst the forest is insignificant, because it's just one amongst thousands, but, together it's spectacular. And so I think by, maybe by, feeling insignificant it makes me feel quite significant, it makes me feel part of it, but, and because I like it it's good to feel part of it." (Rachel WE2)

Interviewer: "In one sense you are made to feel quite small but in another sense it seems like you quite enjoy that feeling?"

"Yeah, you get energy from it, definitely, and it makes you feel like you belong to something I just find out here." (Diane WE3)

There was a certain sense of reassurance or peace that came also from the knowledge that the place operates on its own, and would continue to do so without human attendance (see 6.2.4). Participants' sense of self-importance was, at times, reduced as they accepted being part of a larger system, and there was an accompanying feeling of contentment about being a smaller part of that system, a sense of relief in not needing to convince oneself of one's own significance; we are what we are, and that is part of something larger. The acceptance of this appears not only to provide relief and reassurance, but also a certain clarity or sense of perspective. Again, the 'two sides of the same coin' analogy is appropriate: not only do participants feel good in terms of being part of a larger system, but, perhaps more surprisingly, participants generally reported that a reduction in the sense of self 'felt good'.

It did not appear to be the fact that participants were 'part of *nature*' that had the most impact; rather that they were 'part of *something*'. The critical component appeared to be the simultaneously occurring perception of an interaction with an '*other*'; the experience was for many a reminder that such an interaction or experience was possible.

"I think it puts us in perspective, we are quite small in terms of, in terms of the things on the planet, um, yeah, but in terms of how I feel. I don't know, it does make you feel kind of peaceful. On a base level if I was to say what, it gives you a moment for pause, you feel peaceful, you feel calm, you feel like, you know, the day to day pressures have been removed from you because you've had to take some effort to get to that environment but you do, um, you feel reflective I guess." (David WE1)

"I think, it's good to have, be a bit overawed and, you know, a bit insignificant at times in the whole, sort of thing, that you're not altering anything, not too much out of it. I think that can be a rather nice feeling, um, to my way of thinking." (Phillip WE2)

6.2.3 Scale

A perception of scale was commonly described by participants, and with it came the potential for cliché; this is the obvious conventional response. However, to say that one feels small in a landscape of such immense size may be the obvious response, but it should not be ignored on this account. Rather, there is a need to reflect on what might lie beneath such a response to the landscape for the potential part it might play in facilitating meaningful experiences. Certainly the perception of scale was for many participants both an unexpected and undeniable element of the river journey.

The physical and spatial scale of the landscape was available to participants in many ways as they journeyed down the river. The sheer size of the valleys and ravines, the size of the boulders in the rapids tossed about by the river, and the unpredictability of the elements all contributed to a physical sense of scale. The very imminence of the river landscape was a reminder of one's physical smallness. As Newton recalls:

It is not easy, in this age, to feel small in the landscape. It is a feeling that often comes at the top of a mountain, on a vast plain or desert when an ever-expanding horizon can be seen in all directions. On the Franklin it is the opposite. The view is bordered by cliffs and pungent rainforest. The feeling is that of being swallowed by the land. You cannot see the weather coming and the only way out is to keep travelling downstream (2007, p. 41).

The Ravine was a particular place on the river where the physical scale of the landscape was made apparent. Several participants have a clear recollection of drifting into the Ravine, above the Churn, and seeing the other raft being dwarfed in such a dramatic landscape.

“I found the Great Ravine, on entering it, pretty fantastic. Just the scale. And one thing I enjoyed was just kind of – when you’ve got, you know, another raft in front of us and just sort of off, you know, maybe 50 metres in front of us or something, just that scale of just kind of this little yellow boat alone in this huge gorge and the scale is just crazy. So I enjoyed that.” (Jessie WE3)

"Ah, again in reference to, the natural environment that we are in, I felt that a lot [diminishment] when we were, coming through particularly the Great Ravine where we saw these boulders teetering you know, on other boulders, and just how, how small you feel, ah, physically compared to that." (Beth PT1)

"I mean, I think scale is one thing, like the scale of the mountains and when you start to drop down into the lower parts, going through the Great Ravine, and that was incredible, like that's a real scale thing where you are reduced to something quite small... It's a bit, it's a strange experience. It's other-ly, it's other worldly from here to be, yeah... I don't know, I think it's... I find it really exciting to just be so removed from what is your normal environment and be where we have such control over our domain I suppose, yeah, to be put into a place like that where you can't, intellectually it's a step behind, you've got a whole kind of sensory experience." (Vickie PT1)

While the physical elements of the river in themselves invoked a sense of scale, profound feelings of scale were often related to an indefinable 'something larger' that the elements within the landscape hinted at.

"Yea, and that def... I guess, those places had the most impact. Where it couldn't be easily defined, Irenabyss, the Great Ravine, places where it's just... awe, I keep using this word awe, but it, it's a sense of kind of gasping 'Fuck'. I think I even said fuck a few times, just like... it's bigger than us and older and... yeah, spiritual." (Morris PT1)

"Things are very... nature does things quite easily. Like I know it can be powerful and wild and, but the closer I look at nature, it doesn't make a big effort. You know even moving a big rock is kind of effortless. I don't know if that makes any sense... Well, that valley was formed by drops of water just over a hell of a long time. So it's created something, huge, yeah phenomenal, but, it's not like, it's not like 'quick we've gotta break this rock wall to...' It just does its thing (laughs). It's kind of laid back." (Morris PT1)

Participant recollections, however, of a physical sense of scale were surprisingly outnumbered by recollections of a temporal sense of scale. The Franklin River revealed a timescale for participants that was both daunting and comforting, and occurred for participants in many ways as they journeyed down the river. From the relatively recent history of European explorers, the ancient forests, an indigenous history stretching back some 35,000 years, and an almost incomprehensible geological timeframe of more than a billion years, the river evoked reflections upon temporality. While the geological history is unimaginable in human terms, for many of the participants the more recent history of indigenous and European existence was also difficult to comprehend.

"But you know, walking, walking in that rainforest yesterday, seeing those giant myrtles. I thought, I just thought these trees have been here for longer than I have been around. But that's, that's what large trees do for me. I'm just awed by their size and how long they've been around. Yeah, so you do, you do feel somewhat insignificant, but I think, I think that should be a natural reaction." (Graeme WE2)

"I did a lot of wondering, a lot of wondering about, the passage of time, you know, I've talked about time and how there was no compression of it and constraint of it and the timelessness of it. But then, I've got this one particular rock I remember sitting at, um, big fall beach on our last night... so when I was sitting on this beach, particularly thinking about these rocks, I guess I was wondering about all that had come before it, you know, the river had been so serene for us, but I know that it's been completely tumultuous at other times, so it was wondering about both. What natural things had passed before, as well as what, um, man had passed before 'cause I was reading books about the guys who used to go up in the old punts... Just with a bit of interest as to, you know, who's trodden here before us, who's been here, and really, also, also being a little bit limited in how far I can try and come back by, in, how old these things are, you know. 'Cause we are such a young nation that, nature's way older than we know it." (Beth, PT1)

"It, it kind of, again, just reminds me of, that we are all just little individuals who have a short stay on earth and, you know, that cave was here twenty thousand years ago, and I'm gonna be here for a hundred. And, it does kind of make you think about what, while you're here, what impact or lack of impact, or what you want to do while you're here. It certainly, it certainly does that, for me." (Diane WE3)

"It also reminded me of how transient we all are. Those cliffs and rocks will be there for many years after I am gone." (Diane WE3 12 month reply)

Scale seems to be made apparent both as a realisation that there *is* something larger and indescribable, and that we are *in* that something larger. For example, it is not just about recognising any apparent time-scale, there is also the recognition that we are part of that time-scale; that we are enfolded in that *something* larger. It is not only about the scale of the place in terms of it being bigger and older, but also the fact that you are placed within that larger something, inside the landscape, inside a larger time-frame, inside time. This could be both terrifying and comforting, but also inherently challenging. As Hay reflects:

The river holds all of time within its flow. I'd once thought Europe old – that I lived in a young place, one lacking any thread to a deep, unfolding past. All its history ahead of it. I'd thought this until I came to the Franklin, until the ancient Gondwana forests reached over me, gathered me into time itself, and

my life changed, my scale of things, and my understanding of what is right and what is wrong (2008, n.p.).

Interviewer: “What do you feel? Like, what does it make you – what do you get from seeing that [scale in the landscape]?”

“I think one thing I find – I mean, the scale in a sense, I guess the size, the time, you feel how sort of temporary you are I guess, in a way, and how old the place is. And I found it interesting, the idea – and sort of scary in a way, I guess, this idea, this idea that, you know, you’ve sort of got these massive waterfalls that have been – you think how long they’ve been flowing for and every day, even, you know, when I’m at home or at work or you’re not thinking about these things, that water’s still flowing. And that’s an amazing thought. The way, you know, every day that landscape has got its rhythms of, you know, the water flowing and tides and the rain and how – I mean, in some sense it’s kind of two things. You think, ‘Geez, that’s a huge thing and it’s been going for so long and I’m just so temporary to be here within it’, but at the same you kind of feel how it’s fragile, in a sense that, you know, our impact on it, and you hope it won’t stop it or change. I suppose that’s quite a strong feeling I had about it... I mean, I guess I have thoughts of, ‘Geez, I hope this is okay’, but largely I enjoy it and appreciate it.” (Jessie WE3)

The perception of the geological time-scale also occurred in many ways: the revealed strata in the valley walls, the smoothing and shaping of the rocks by the water over time, and the apparent tumbling of larger rocks to make smaller rocks as the river carried on downstream. While each of the perceptions was of a different appearance within the geology, there was a common theme: a time-scale beyond human reckoning and a natural world that goes on regardless of humans being there.

“We went to a couple of waterfalls and up the lost world canyon and um, went to the, the, the aboriginal cave and stuff like that. And that was gnarly, like I, I mean these are little creeks that have just carved their way through solid rock to get to their output, to get to the river, to get out to the sea, they’ve just gone straight through this rock. It’s just, yeah, the interplay of those forces, I mean you know that over time water wears away rock. And then you just see that, that incredible time scale is all sitting there in front of you in evidence, in this chasm that goes through solid rock.” (Sarah PT1)

“I’m really taken by the changing rock structures, because, um, I’m thinking of how many hundreds of thousands or millions of years those changes have evolved in. And, I think it would be a shame for future generations not to be able to see that. To not be able to, ah, look at that part of nature and realise just how short a term we have here.” (Charlie WE3)

“I think that my favourite campsite was the one where we were camped under the rock ledge, you know under the big rock, and, I think because it just makes you remember, sort of, you're just a very small speck in a very big organism that is the planet. You know you, kind of, things go on and you're just a very tiny little, little part of it, but you should be glad that you've had the opportunity to be part of it I suppose.” (Diane WE3)

In terms of what appeared for participants geologically it is interesting to note that many of the perceptions are enhanced, or at least made more readily available, within a river environment. This is particularly so on a river such as the Franklin that has so dramatically cut through the ambient geology and played such a large part in forming the landscape. In such an environment engagements with geology are almost unavoidable, especially when you travel, over several days, through the river's inscriptions upon it.

“Just the cleanness, and ah, being remote and being out there. And um, but, ah, I also appreciated that, where, where, you know like it's the head of the river, the big rocks and stuff like that and as you go down they get smaller and smaller, and end up as sand and, um, get swept into the harbour and maybe into the beaches and stuff like that, and then long term be, you know, squashed on the bottom of the sea and then one day raise up again, as you can see up on the side of the river that's, they were once at the bottom of the river and being raised up sideways and, um, longways, and yeah, yeah, yeah, just got amazed with nature. The fact that we've been here for a millisecond where some of that dirt's been evolving for years and years and years and years and years and years and years, and then, then so, um, just amazed by that.” (Lester WE1)

6.2.4 Exists on Own

There was, for many participants, a surprising realisation that the place ‘exists on its own’ regardless of whether or not people are (or were) there. Though the old conundrum about whether or not a tree falling in the forest makes a sound if no-one is there to hear it has an almost ridiculous quality to it, for many participants it genuinely appeared as a revelation that the place might go on regardless of people being there. This was reflected not only in interactions with the larger landscape, but also in engagements with smaller micro worlds, such as waterfalls that continuously flowed, or a world of moss and ferns that was seen to exist in its own right, completely and continuously, with no-one to appreciate it.

"It's a weird concept because you only sort of think – you know, as humans we – I mean, you tend to only – you don't think about that, you know? Something seems to, in some ways, only exist when you're experiencing it and when you're there. That idea could be related to lots of things. You know, there's all kinds of things going on all around the world and you could kind of say, well, you know, when you go to some, like, Asian country, South-East Asia in the past, and think of all those little motorbikes and stuff that you experienced on the roads that right now would be driving around and you could kind of relate that to that. But it's not as powerful as that idea of, yeah, this water that's just rushing down all the time. There's two things there. There's that idea of the power and the temporal nature of us being there, in the fact that it's continuing all the time." (Jessie WE3)

"It is amazing to think right now that the Franklin is still flowing with all that force through the rapids and the Great Ravine. I'm certainly left with a respect for the place and feel privileged / proud to have been out there. The strongest feelings / memories I'm left with are of the power, beauty and solitude of the place." (Jessie WE3 4 month reply)

"How beautiful and pristine it is and also how, um, we can over emphasize our impact on, or our role in the planet. Whereas really it just, you know, it can get along perfectly fine without us and that's a humbling, that's a humbling sensation, and that's nice, that's nice just to know that you're completely not really required, you know it's nice[...] yeah, it's good just good knowing stuff like that is out there." (Jackie WE1)

"For me, and I don't know if I'm, if I'm sort of going away from the question or not, but, waterfalls are, I find them amazing. Just, just to think, how, how it, it's just a non-stop... well not really non-stop... but for the time we're watching it, it's just non-stop water gushing out[...] I find it hard to comprehend that it can come out at such volume for also for so long a period, that it can come out for that long." (Peter WE2)

The river in particular exuded qualities that evoked the observation that the place functions on its own. The lack of control that participants had over the level and flow of the river or the direction of travel was a constant reminder that the river was an unpredictable entity. While it existed on its own, it was not malevolent – it just did what it had always done. Humans were not in control. It was not a place designed for humans; in many ways the participants were visitors who chose to travel down the river, to go with it. While the geology spoke directly to the scale in physical terms, it also hinted at the undeniable fact that the place was conceived and formed on a timescale unimaginable in human terms. The processes that shaped the place happened regardless of humans and in a way that resulted in almost indescribable beauty and complexity. The place was perceived not just as other than human, but as very much 'more than human'.

“It makes you realise how the planet has its own value, how it has its own its own impetus, its own impulse. You know, if I was going to switch on the front of my brain and use the jargon I'd say it has its own telos, its own self organising capacity. It doesn't need us to organise it. It can do it very well without us. And it can carry, life on earth can carry itself along perfectly fine without us.” (Richard PTE)

“It's not a human place. In a sense when you're down there – I felt this when I was there: ‘I don't know. I feel slightly uncomfortable, I do feel a bit of a trespasser’. It just wasn't a human place. This was a place that belonged to another life or even other geological forms, you know? You can hardly call the river a life form. It's a sustainer of life, but it's not itself a living thing. But when I was there I profoundly felt that in a sense this entire place belonged to the river and everything that depended on it. It didn't have to manipulate it in order to survive in it, like I did.” (Richard PTE)

The beauty, complexity and constant change of the river environment added to the sense that the place existed on its own. Participants were forced to ask themselves: “what seemingly complete and perfect micro-world might exist around the next corner or behind the bend of an incoming creek?” To appreciate the completeness of a small stream is to ask the question, how many more of these exist in the surrounding hills or in the entire South-West of Tasmania? There was also something inherent in river travel that lent itself to both a view of the river as a self-supporting entity and the possibility that the river was part of some larger, self-supporting entity.

“And really, um, that's probably the most outstanding thing that I took away from it, is seeing the river from it's own perspective. 'Cause travelling down, it's like a silver thread that you travel that's, um, what is it, it's fixed, like it's really fixed spatially, it follows it's own route, and it's really marked geographically. Like you can't just jump off it and jump, jump on it. It's like a very thin unified entity that you start and you finish. And that's something that's very different from bushwalking tracks, where you have to criss-cross the land. You know, I mean even mountains ranges, they blend down into valleys and then they go up into, they're not as defined. Well, for me they're not as defined as a river. Even though a river grows from junctions with other rivers, it maintains its own identity. Yeah, so, well, for me that's my only rafting experience ever.”(Sarah PT1)

Participants were aware of the ‘pristine’ nature of the place, in the sense that there were little, if any, sign of human intervention. It was a very different experience to walking on a board walk through the rain forest. Several participants commented on the fact that they had not walked on a flat, or man made, surface for 10 days, and that the jetty at the end of the trip was a very confronting experience in itself. While being aware of the lack of human intervention in the wilderness landscape, participants were also reminded of the fragility of the place and the fact that humans

could change it. The awareness that humans could have a significant impact on the place was a reminder that we should not always attempt to change or improve the natural order of things. There was a sense of *respect* for the natural assemblage, and again, a reassurance that the place exists and carries on without us.

Interviewer: "You mentioned that you are reminded in a place like that how small you are... what is it about places like that, that make you get a sense of that, or feel that?"

"Because, probably, the rest, when you're in the city, it is pretty much us trampling over everything, there's man-made this and man-made that, and there's service stations and freeways and hotels and restaurants and, you do kind of feel like man runs the show... there's not necessarily a lot of help for you out here... Just being out here where, where humans are not in charge, they don't run the show, we're fortunate to be able to make our way through here." (Diane WE3)

"You're very aware of, you know, all of, how massive the footprint of humans is, in terms of resource use and sprawl and land usage and waste. So it's, it's like a relief to go, and actually have some wilder places where you can go and, yeah, appreciate everything that's not to do with us." (Sarah PT1)

"A consistent feeling of peace, beauty of the surrounds, the Irenabyss (coming around the corner and the floating down looking up at Frenchman's Cap and the cliffs), moved by the natural state of forest meeting river meeting rock, no sign of corruption from technology or man, timelessness." (Beth PT1 12 mth)

The small features and micro-worlds that left such an impression on participants were available in many ways on the river journey. From the incoming waterfalls, mossy miniature worlds, a spider's web, to the alpine micro worlds of Frenchman's Cap, participants became aware of what diversity was available within the landscape. Indeed, in situations such as Frenchman's Cap it could be an experience of fog and mist that forced some participants to focus their awareness on the micro-worlds. It seems as though micro-worlds were so readily accessible on the Franklin River journey that whenever a set of circumstance occurred that increased participants' awareness in that direction, there existed the possibility of a meaningful experience. These worlds provided not only an appreciation of the beauty and diversity of the natural world but also a sense of the incomprehensibility and scale of something that exists on its own.

"I love the micro worlds, you know? I loved all the tiny, the little mossy lichen assemblages of plants. I love getting... and I'd look at that and I'd think, how complex. And you multiply this by infinity because it's all... this is what... that's what the river is." (Richard PTE)

"It's life. It's the I mean, it's also a geological process, but it's simply the way the planet unfolds that stops me in the tracks, gobsmacked. And that's never left me. You know, a year later I still think constantly of that little cut and that basin, you know, where the water fell up above the river at the Pig Trough." (Richard PTE 12 mth)

A couple of particular places recurred in participant descriptions as providing a sense of self-contained micro-worlds, and that the place existed on its own – the waterfall above the Pig Trough was one, and another was the small canyon sometimes known as Lost World. Each of these places was commonly described as providing a sense of completeness or integrity that reminded participants that places were self sufficient, and that these little worlds were 'perfect' in their own way, whilst suggesting that something larger contained these individual worlds and sustained them.

"I felt quite humbled actually around that area [the waterfall above the Pig Trough]" (Beth PT1)

"That place, where was that, the Pig Trough was the most amazing thing. Up there in that basin... It was its own world. When you got in there it was self contained. It was this wonderful little world. A world in miniature." (Richard PTE)

"The other place that was really awesome was the Lost World". I just was blown away, you know, because I had, there had been no expectation, I didn't know we were even stopping and we pulled over and all of a sudden, it's just like, again!, you know, there's more, and that came really late, I think that was on our second last day. Yeah, and it was just absolutely awesome, and it's only a little ways that you walk in, you know, but I guess it was just another contrast and just something else thrown out from this great wilderness and, I think, every time you see something like that you just think, gosh, it's, it's round, round basically every corner." (Beth PT1)

"And the little cut that you go through the cave to get to that apparently doesn't have a name [Lost World], that, too. You leave a world that is known and then you move into this complete world that's almost secret. And you know, it's as if... and you wonder... you wonder how many, how much of this the island keeps to itself and reveals its own reluctance." (Richard PTE)

6.2.5 Power

The Franklin is a powerful river. With each cubic metre of water weighing a ton and moving with an irresistible force of gravity, the rapids can be extraordinarily powerful. But it was not always the rapids that provided a sense of power for participants; rather, there were often other signs in the river environments that hinted at the power of the river. Boulders the size of houses visibly worn smooth by the flow of water, canyon walls scoured clean, debris high up in the trees and small rock pools formed by swirling eddies all provided evidence of the potential power of the river, even at low water.

Stories, too, of the river rising up to a metre an hour in the Ravine, or of difficulties encountered on past trips, reminded participants that this was not a place to taken lightly. The power of potential floods was particularly evident to participants at low water, with cliffs stripped of trees to a height of more than 15 metres and the flood debris caught in the canopy many metres above existing campsites.

"The river itself, the shape, the enormity, the power of it. To see just see where it has just pole-driven trees into rock formations or into the ground, and some of the campsites where sort of 20 metres above the river level at the time there's still wood, way way up above us. Um... to see the river flowing is to have some sort of idea that the power that it has got. To see the rocks and the trees and all the other stuff that it has moved along just because it wants to or because mother nature can." (Cory WE1)

"A lot of us would talk about the bits of stuff in the trees. Like we'd be sleeping down here, and then way up there, like, twenty feet above us there'd be those twigs and leaves and stuff that were caught in the floods. And just to think, wow, the water was that high. Um, so we were thinking about that quite a lot, what it would be like." (Rosie PT1)

"Oh the potential, yeah, the potential energy, I mean, you know how strong the water is at that depth and yeah, yeah, it's a bit of a boggling thought actually. Particularly when we camped at a high camp, I can't remember its name, and ah, even at the high camp there was debris (laughs) like 15 feet up, I thought oh shite, the river's been up this high. Really... I really couldn't contemplate the, yeah, I reckon it would be, it would make you feel a lot smaller, for sure." (Beth PT1)

There was a sense of the relentless power of the river, with participants describing the river as having its own obligations, operating under its own forces, and continuing regardless of whether participants were there or not to observe it. Again, the river was *outside one's control*. It was common to consider how the river might

be in flood, even when the trip itself was at low water. The river was visibly dynamic, and the continual wearing and smoothing of the boulders, the worn holes in the canyon walls and the rounded pebbles on the shore all spoke to the continual movement and force of the river environment.

"When you're going along at low water and you can see the high water mark and just knowing that you are there on a river that's kind of, um, the time you're on it it's pretty placid, it's kind of, um, it's kind of a bit relaxed, but then you look at the rapids and you know that really there's a deadly amount of force in this water, that you kind of take water for granted in a way. And then it gets in an environment like a river and it can have unknown dangers in the fact that it's just doing what it's obligations are, you know, rushing along powerfully, it gets to a rapid, it's all squeezed into that little gap and it's just rushing forward and so you just kind of respect it[...] The reality is that there's no, um, maliciousness in it, it's just the way of things. The river's there, it keeps going forward, you're just there to appreciate it for a little bit." (Jackie WE3)

"The river's carved its way through a pretty gnarly series of rocky ranges and canyons. And the power of the water over time is really apparent, and maybe, in some ways, it was more apparent to us, because it was this all-time summer low. So the flood lines were sooo high, you know, there were smashed up trees like 40 feet up or, you know, completely smashed areas, so you were kind of chronically aware of the potential power of the river, even though it was in abeyance for the time we were on it." (Sarah PT1)

"And sometimes, I mean, the tree line on those canyons. You see wherever that tree line was, was what was functional for those trees to survive, through flood... I guess that dynamic rearrangement of the landscape is really evident... just, because you know it is a dynamic feature, to have seen it once doesn't feel like you have captured it all." (Sarah PT1)

The river was perceived as a strong feature within the wilderness landscape, and there was a sense of its dominance in the surrounding environment. It was clear from the rock walls and canyons that the river had carved its deep way through, and was at the heart of the landscape. The river was its dominant artery, and rafting it made many participants acutely aware of this. There was a sense that once you were on the river you were committed. As it wears its way down it creates steep banks and supports a thick, often impenetrable, rainforest environment that is difficult to both access and escape from. The river is alive, dynamic, and you have little choice or control over how you move with it. There are no tracks or options – you go where the river compels you to go.

“So that name [the Franklin] actually penetrates out, past all those junctions... If you invert the world it [the river] dominates the landscape of the area, as much or more than the mountain, which is the more obvious feature. I guess if you poured a cast and turned it upside down then you’d see the influence of the Franklin, wouldn’t you... so, so actually following it... you know, it’s a pretty major feature.”(Sarah PT1)

"The experience of seeing a place via a different medium, via a raft, was mind, mind-boggling how powerful it was. 'Cause as, um, a walker, you know, you propel yourself along tracks and, choose when to stop and stuff, but I felt, um, it's so mighty, that, yeah, you're committed, you're committed to that journey down that river. And I felt that was really empowering but also quite frightening at times." (Alison PTE)

"It's such a dramatic landscape, isn't it, and, isolated, but it felt more isolated 'cause it was just a river, there was no walking tracks. So to me, when I go walking there is human intervention there. But I think for me it was in its purest form, I mean apart from some of the... the hydro stuff. But I felt it was pure wilderness, and I'd never felt... felt like that before." (Alison PTE)

“It leaves you to question the hubris that humans customarily take with them wherever they go. Much more effectively. Because you are so small. The cliffs tower above you and the river races you along and, you know, you can manipulate the river to survive, but you can't do anything but go with the river.” (Richard PTE)

There were similarities, too, between descriptions of the place existing on its own, the scale of the landscape, and the power of the river. They commonly appeared to point towards something that operates of its own accord, with its own forces and timeframes, in a way that is not dependent on human perception or influence. This may seem unsurprising, however, the way in which it was felt, and the surprise of participants at these realisations, does offer an insight into a world where such experiences are not common. In a busy, human-created environment, such intrusions rarely have the opportunity to become the focus of one’s attention.

"I haven't really spent much time on a river, and the... you can very easily see the... well I was going to say it's very easy to see that force. Like, it's easier, perhaps, to see that force, the power in nature, because you're on it every day and following it through and you're seeing the changes as the river goes from up high to down low. And so it's obvious, like it's there, you can't get away from it." (Rachel WE2)

“One of the things, you just sort of acknowledge the force or nature, you know, and there’s sort of, I guess, an element of danger there that you can see. I mean, just thinking about what that water could do to you, kind of thing. But also the way the water’s kind of carved its way through the stone over time and just the sound of it. And just the idea that, you know, it’d still be going right now and went all last night.” (Jessie WE3)

“The morning into the gorge. Mist in the trees, obscuring the tops of the hills, knowing that something with power lay below. A sense of mystery and power. Fear and awe at something, an unknown something.”(Jessie WE3 Journal)

6.2.6 Awe and Wonder

Feelings of awe and wonder, too, appear to be born of an experience of an ‘other’, and commonly occurred within participant descriptions. The experiences of awe and of wonder, though connected can, again, be considered two sides of the same coin. Awe and wonder often occur at the same time but also speak to the paradox considered earlier; the perception of an ‘other’ and the realisation of the fact that one is ‘part of’ that other. While there was a wonder at the beauty and complexity of the natural world that cradled life, there was also a standing-in-awe of the enormity of that potential otherness.

The theme of wonder was often invoked when the experience was overwhelming or indescribable in some way, and it was this ‘sense of wonder’ of which participants often spoke when describing their desire to return to the original experience of the place itself. It was also a sense of wonder that stayed with many participants over an extended period of time, often as other qualities of the experience faded.

Interviewer: “So I’ll take the experience of intensity or immensity and you said it kind of dislocates you. What does that do for you as a person?”

“I think it’s very healthy. What does it do for me? That’s a hard one. This is a great question to be asked. I think that, for me, I just desire this sense of wonder, and I think that’s... Or maybe it’s like trying to experience something other than the structure and the built environment that you’ve become so used to, and that I find that kind of experience of wonder in a place like that or in the natural world. It’s just that, ‘wow’, to be wowed by something that’s bigger and greater and extraordinary and beyond anything you could ever make or do or imagine, is quite... It’s just a really... I mean, what is it? I think it gives, it brings you some sort of awareness of yourself in relation to that. And I think... I don’t know, maybe it is just a self awareness thing but in maybe it works as a reduction of the self or something, which feels healthy perhaps.”(Vickie PT1)

“And as time passes that recedes into the background and you’re left with all this sort of wonder, I think, and awe.” (Richard PTE)

“Very much for me the most important elements of the experience are still the sense of awe and wonder at the natural world, the connection and feeling of being a part of a larger system and that sense of diminishment that I had within it.” (Rachel WE2 4 month reply)

“Someone talked about getting out in wilderness not being getting away from it all, but getting back to it all. I like that idea. All in all, a kind of intimacy with the place we were travelling through, and with friends that emerged once we’d ‘settled in’ as a group and ‘arrived’ in the landscape. Just an unambiguous sense of wonder at it all.” (Amy PT1 12 month reply)

There was a sense within participant descriptions that the wonder available in the natural world was not as readily available in the human-made world of everyday life. While there is an almost inevitable acknowledgement in the wilderness environment of a world beyond comprehension, there are opportunities for this in the urban world as well. It seems possible that the ‘openness’ to, or awareness of, the natural world that participants experienced on the extended journey may have played a part in this perception. Comments were also made in relation to the perception that today wilderness environments are dramatically other-than-human, in that many of those landscapes that are easily amenable to human habitation have already been settled. In other words, it is no accident that today’s wilderness areas are often difficult to move in, steep, inhospitable or impenetrable; if they were not they would probably have been permanently occupied. The Franklin River and South-West Tasmania are, post-European settlement, good examples of this. The steep, rugged mountain ranges of the South-West have for the most part escaped extensive logging, settlement and large scale mining (although previously occupied by Tasmanian Aboriginals). The very impenetrability of such landscapes may also induce a sense of awe and wonder at the other-than-human world. The sheerness and wildness of the landscape did provide a sense of awe for many participants, including feelings of terror or dread.

“I think, wild is like a combination of a whole bunch of things, but it has some kind of power to it. Whether that’s from the height of mountains, or the force of the river, whatever, then it’s, it’s usually, or, I mean like the Grand Canyon, you know, the heat of the sun. Or some component, the power of nature that is awe inspiring, and that is associated with wild. Like, impregnable, inaccessible, it’s got those element connotations to it. Whereas, that’s not what you get from the word ‘woods’, or ‘meadow’ or (laughs). So it might just be the ‘thick tangle of the forest’ makes it impregnable, that would be why... it does have a connotation to it that it’s not easy.” (Sarah PT1)

“Well that’s why it’s left. Because... because everything else has been taken over. It’s been converted to agriculture or it’s been converted to cities. You know, the only places that weren’t logged were the one’s they couldn’t get to. You know stuff like that, that you start on the flatlands and work your way up and, mountains and rivers

are two inaccessible places to humans and that's generally why they're protected. Huh (laughs). Because they were the last things left... they inspire the most public support in some instances, because it's really... people feel a closeness to spirit-ness that brings out all in the intrinsically valuable places.” (Sarah PT1)

“It doesn't make me jump up and down and say there must be a God, but it makes me jump up and down and say there must be the way existence enfolds is, it's so full of wonder and magic. And you go about your ordinary course of events and you don't come into contact with that wonder and magic.” (Richard PTE)

Wonder was often spoken of in a way that implied that it *absorbed* a person. As the place washed over you, you were immersed in the extraordinary wonder of it. It could hold you, and hold your attention. There was no desire to turn away from that feeling of wonderment. Like feeling a part of the system, it felt good, and there was a deep desire to return to such a state. The feelings of wonder often flowed from the beauty of the place, in the sense of its diversity and relatively pristine nature. There was also a sense that the integrity of the place contributed to feelings of awe and wonder. This was particularly true in terms of the perceived wildness and remoteness of the river environment.

“I guess it, I don't know, it's like you just, you're allowed to turn your eyes on something that's extraordinary, for a certain time. And that's all you have to look at, you don't have to look [at] anything that's really dull or really ugly, or, you know, you're just looking at something that's flat out extraordinary and, and that is something that's really healthy for you to just absorb, through the skin, into your self, into your soul. And I mean than whole experience, it gives you stars in your eyes... And that was really magnified for me by how unfamiliar and grand the Franklin River is.” (Sarah PT1)

6.2.7 Beauty / Aesthetic

The term ‘beauty’ figured prominently in the participants’ descriptions, and was one of the most common themes. Though connoting a certain difficult-to-define subjectivity, the way in which the term was used by participants reveals much about its intended meaning. Most striking was the frequency and strength of its association with the theme of ‘diversity and complexity’. The apparent infinite number of potential manifestations, the seemingly complete and ‘perfect’ micro worlds along the river, and the implied possibilities of the unknown around the next corner, all spoke to the *beauty* of the natural world for participants. It was a term used when

other descriptors seemed inadequate, and participants frequently used it to describe their experience of the wilderness river landscape.

“And there's all sorts of things that I haven't valued much as an environmental thinker, as not having much relevance, have been fore-grounded, like... like beauty. Because I've always said well beauty's, you know, ecology doesn't recognise anything called beauty. But when you go down the Franklin you do realise... and wilderness is another because wilderness is a tainted and contested concept. But when you go down the Franklin you do realise that you have to have different categories of the natural world because it's not the same as a walk up [a local park]. It's a whole different order of natural assemblage and it has a whole different, it makes a whole different impact on your psyche.” (Richard PTE)

“I can still recollect and feel sense of awe for the natural unspoilt beauty of the natural wilderness we travelled through. I can wonder at the magnificence of the landscape, forest, rock and river formations in my mind's eye. I'm aghast at how a short-lived, tiny creature such as man can have so significant an impact on a wilderness that has developed over eons.” (Charlie WE3 4 month reply)

In its use, though, it also spoke to the heart of the problem for several participants. Beauty is a subjective quality being applied to a more-than-human world, and this mismatch was appreciated by participants. That the term ‘beauty’ was *questioned* by participants illuminates an ambiguity in its intended use; to describe an extremely complex, diverse, more-than-human world that has a value beyond human subjective evaluation or description simply did not sit well with many participants.

While the descriptor, ‘beauty’, was commonly used in association with elements of the natural world, such as geological features or rainforest, it was also used in a way that implied feelings of ‘awe and wonder’ or a sense that the place ‘existed on its own’. In particular, the sense that the place existed on its own was often strongly related to the idea of *complexity* and *diversity* in the natural world. For some participants it raised the question of whether the place not only existed on its own, but could be deemed beautiful even without any human valuation as such.

“Well, certainly this place is... this is... it's probably more diverse than I thought it would be, so that's... it's certainly exceeded my expectations in terms of, in terms of beauty.” (Diane WE3)

“... this is just such a difficult thing to articulate... But to go there and stand in it, look around. It's the sort... it's the thing you've really got to experience to really understand it. You've got to experience it... goes back to seeing the beauty that

nature can create, the diversity, the thing that it's been developing for tens or hundreds of thousands of years to get to that point.”(Cory WE1)

“And beauty. It's awesomely beautiful, and that's entirely a human attribution of value. But I'm more and more wondering whether there is nevertheless an intrinsic beauty in nature which is beautiful whether there's a human there to see it and label it as beautiful or not.” (Richard PTE)

“The beauty thing has me confused because I kept thinking as I went down the river, God, this is so beautiful. But as I said, I've never rated beauty much. And it wasn't beauty that I went down the Franklin looking for. Grandeur, gobsmacking awesomeness, but not beauty in the... you know, film stars are beautiful. I don't rate beauty. I never have. And as I said, one reason is beauty seems to me to be an entirely human attribution. Always has seemed to be that. And not something known to ecology. And now all of a sudden I'm saying how here is a here is a structure of geology and biology that is beautiful beyond all words and it seems to me that that beauty does transcend the attribution, its attribution by humans. And as I said, if no human ever goes down the Franklin ever again it will still be the most awesomely beautiful place. Even without a human being there to label it beautiful.”

Interviewer: “So there's an order of beauty above the subjective?”

“There must be, yes. Which I have yet to come appropriately to grips with... I resist. I resist. I resist, obviously I'm going to resist any trajectory through that line of thought that takes me off into the notion of some higher intelligence that's shaping this beauty. It's decreeing beauty. The beauty has to somehow or other be a natural property. But nevertheless a property which is intrinsic to the way the natural world organises itself.” (Richard PTE)

That the place functioned without regard for human involvement was also manifest in its association with the theme ‘pristine’. Terms such as ‘pristine’ or ‘perfect’ reinforce the discredited myth of a South-West wilderness as untouched by humans, and highlight, as well, the paradox of humans visiting places to which such descriptors are applied. When the theme ‘pristine’ was coded in connection with beauty and diminishment it was often used in a way that implied an *integrity* to the place that did not require human intervention. In other words, the pristine quality was an outcome of a complex system operating on its own. It was for many participants the pristine quality of the visual experience that pointed towards this as not a human world, and there was also a strong sense that this was good.

“You know, well worn tracks going into places in Tassie, and you know walking around Cradle Mountain which is certainly fairly pristine, but there is a lot of infrastructure there, and you're only really, you know, you're a short walk away from a formed road. Whereas you get the sense in the Franklin that, there really are many untouched areas, and that's the beauty of it I think.” (David WE1)

"A lot of it is aesthetics. It's just, um, it just all looks so good, which means it feels so good too, to be looking at it all. And so looking at all these wonderful, wonderful plants, and growing in all different ways, you know, like off funny rocks and the way, I don't know, different ways waters flowing over and between and through other rocks and foam on top, and, it just looks good. And it feels good to be looking at good things!" (Rosie PT1)

6.2.8 In the Moment

The theme of being 'in the moment' was closely related to several hubs that surround the stream of experience involving humility and will be considered here in that context. The meaningful stream of experience currently being explored commonly involves an interaction with the wild landscape that is heightened by a sense of being in the moment. The key element relating the theme of being 'in the moment' to experiencing the wild landscape appears to be *awareness of* or *immersion in* the surrounding environment; in other words, an ability to focus one's attention fully on the surrounding environment, through all the bodily senses.

"The meaningful thing for me, in general, when I'm looking for adventure, like when I was invited on this trip, is the experience of switching into a different mode. So day to day life has a certain mode that you're dealing with and it's more routine, you're under electric lights, you're basically being a city dweller. You come down here and so it's getting switched into a different mode. It takes a few days, I think, to happen. I mean definitely it doesn't happen on a two or three day trip but at some point in the trip there's a transition into ... the awareness of the place becomes more... basically people like myself, I have become more aware of where I am and what's happening around me and I start seeing things that I wasn't seeing before, as far as the landscape and the fauna and a lot of it is the group dynamic too, like how that meshes. So in this trip I would say, what I got out of this trip is great affirmation of something that I've been seeking my whole life, is giving in to a place where moments of awareness happen." (Trent PT2)

"It also happens to you. Because there's no distractions, so you... you... it gives you that time, and mental time as well. Partly because of the distance maybe involved, to focus on the things around you. And that's how you start to see that you are, might be you still are a part of the system. As opposed to separate from it. The natural system." (Rachel WE2)

There is a sense that the participants experienced a heightened awareness of their placement in both time and space. There is a clarity and enhanced sensitivity to the natural environment that involves a level of attunement and of wellbeing about the experience.

“Absolutely. I mean I can’t think of any time when it wasn’t... yeah it’s always when you experience mother nature in the raw form and because it requires a separation from the mode of being basically... I mean if you’re in the world you’ve got to be thinking past, present and future, if you’re driving a car you’ve got to be thinking what’s going to happen around the corner. I mean you’re doing that here strategically when you’re planning a river trip too, but at the same time you’re not thinking about the turn when you’re in the Nasty Notch. So I think being in natural environments is the only place I’ve ever had moments of awareness in.” (Trent WE2)

"The major thing for me though is coming closer to nature. And noticing... noticing how all the small intricacies that go to making up the bigger whole. So your eyes, you, you sort of, when you go back and live in your mainstream world, you sort of get a bit clouded over and you're in this routine of everything and things are just there that are around you and you don't really look at them much. And when you come out here, I find that you just... you look more carefully at everything, like you are more conscious of, not everything, you're not more conscious of everything, but you are more conscious of the natural world."(Rachel WE2)

Elements of the trips that appear to contribute to such feelings are the length of the trip, a mode of travel through the landscape (rafting) that was unique, the size of the group, the simple rhythm of the trip, the solitude and the quietness. While these relationships will be further explored in Chapter 7, it is worth noting here that such elements played a part in the participants’ meaningful experiences described, in a way that involved a sense of humility or diminishment. Participants often described a feeling that involved getting *into* a place where moments of awareness happen.

“You start to feel your place on the raft and all that sort of stuff, and so as you become more comfortable there, you possibly do... can consider everything else more. You can consider more, yeah. So I guess it happens... And the place changes a bit as well and becomes more dramatic and probably affects you as well. But yeah, I think it was a really good length of time to go for that reason. I was just thinking about how would it be to go for four or five days. You almost would not quite get to that stage where you’re really comfortable doing the job, and so you can really see and sense what’s happening around you.” (Vickie PT1)

“Through my life I have seen some really beautiful natural scenery, but more often than not has been not so much a fleeting glance, but a less than total immersion in it. It has been either through sightseeing, bushwalking or rogaines, where at most you might be there for a night. Being ‘immersed’ in the environment with no immediate

exit possibility allowed me to appreciate it more. At the camping sites I was more than happy just to continually look around at the various views, often for hours, and taking in both the beauty and individuality of the scenery. Just the way that the scenery changes as you travel downstream added to the experience, there really are three different Franklin Rivers. Taking in the different rock formations (just looking at all the different patterns in the mud rock was great, if I wasn't there with the time to take it all in I wouldn't have appreciated it as much) on the trip down the river was an experience in itself, and the slow pace of the trip encouraged me to do this.”(Cory WE1 4 mth)

Participants described being absorbed or immersed in both the moment and the surrounds, and many participants discussed experiences, particularly on the lower Franklin, involving a sense of solitude and contemplation. Quietness allowed participants to absorb the subtle power of the place. Many participants recalled moments of solitude, both in the raft and in camp; even when they were in close proximity to others. It seems that solitude was a state of mind rather than necessarily a physical separateness.

“You do get moments of solitude in the raft because, especially when you get... I guess... the times where we're just paddling and there's not things happening all the time and you're able just to... your mind starts to just – you know, you stop for a while, you talk, and then you paddle long enough and people just seem to stop talking and just paddle and everyone just thinks. So I think they're moments where you get to just think about it. Yeah, they're good, those times. I mean, I'm not sure if there are things I can specifically think of in relation to that but, yeah, there is a solitude you can get even when you're in the raft in a group, and just, you know, appreciating the rocks and the size and the different trees and the sounds of the water and those sort of things.” (Jessie WE3)

“Even on the lower reaches of the river when we were just drifting along and possibly because that gave you more time for contemplation... I can remember being beset by these feelings [of diminishment] at least as powerfully then as well. And the river by that time mightn't be running as quick, but it's a more substantial river by then as well. And so you get a different... you sense its power in a different way I think then. Now, and it might have been that I was feeling a lot more confident by the time we got to the lower river too, but the lower river stilled me. You know, we chatted away on the raft, we chicked with the boys in the kayaks, but there were long periods when we just went along and said nothing. And that's certainly what I was... what was going on for me. I was being overwhelmed, not in a negative sense, but the power the river was at its most potent for me then and I didn't actually have to fight it. I just followed it along. This is very interesting: I've only thought of this, so this is entirely speculative. But it may be that the actual times when the river... when the experience most impacts upon you, is not the times when you're really working hard. Not the times when you're actually getting the adrenalin rush.” (Richard PTE)

“Well, one is the quietness. Because in quiet all of those sorts of... all of that sort of subtle power becomes more apparent, rather than the overt power of the rapid.”
(Richard PTE)

6.2.9 Perspective

Participants on the Franklin River journey commonly described a shift in perspective or clarity of perspective around values. While many participants found it difficult to articulate this experience, there was a high level of agreement within such recollections. Experiences of a perspective shift were particularly related, in conversations, to both the stream of experience involving humility and the stream of experience involving a heightened sensitivity to the present. There was a sense that the meaningful experience surrounding humility *dislodged* something for participants, and that they were moved to question themselves or their way of viewing the world; in a sense a diminishment of the self correlated with a clarity of perspective. Something lost, something found.

"What I get from the trip is probably a sense of perspective more than anything else, so you realise you're, um, you are just a tiny thing that doesn't really matter. And, everything is much bigger than you, so you can dispose of your normal everyday worries and everything else, because you're in a very different environment, where the... the elements that are around you have much more importance than anything in your head before you actually turn up on the trip." (Wayne WE2)

“What is it at this point, seven days into the journey that makes me feel things so deeply and see things clearly?” (Alison PTE journal entry)

There was a sense that the experience flowed from *plunging into*, or being *overwhelmed by*, the wildness of the place for an extended period of time. Such dislodgement occurred along with a sense that the place existed on its own and within a timescale beyond comprehension. Participants were reminded of their own temporality, yet there was the accompanying reassurance about being part of the larger system.

"My constant questions of where I fit into the world. As the Franklin swirls beside me, tears swell inside me... this wild place has tapped into a wound that has been scratched and needs some healing." (Alison PTE journal entry)

“I liked being humbled by the place. Um. And if anything I reckon that the changes I've experienced since I got back have... are partly to do with having a better sense

of scale. 'Cause literally, I mean, being in that environment I'm quite... I'm looking all the time at what's around us. So quickly I got the sense of myself as quite small in that environment. It seems... I think that's helped me to see that the things that can seem big are actually not. And that's, that's a wonderful experience. Yeah, that's very, um, yeah, positive. It helps me see things in a more realistic perspect... from a more realistic perspective."

Interviewer: "So that's had an impact back, when you've come back?"

"Yeah, yeah, quite marked... I felt and still feel, it's diminished a little but it's still there. I feel more inner space. And it's gotta be connected to that, being in this large outer space. Um, something's happened in... in... yeah, so my sense of scale has been adjusted somehow." (Morris PT1)

"It does give you a lot more perspective. So things that would really stress me out at work you kind of think, well, it really doesn't matter that much... deep down you sort of have to manage the stress of your life to a certain impact and say, well, yep, I'll do a good job and I'll do the best that I can but at the end of the day, that's not what it's all about."

Interviewer: "So what do you think gives you that perspective?"

"Well I think it's just... it's sort of coming out here and just seeing, seeing the grandeur of the place, how long it's been here, how long... how much longer it's going to be here after I have gone." (Diane WE3)

"You're forced to focus on something else, and just completely, um, experience new things, have... have new experiences, that might to a certain extent kind of change your perspective on things... And then coupled in with that is... and one factor of that in changing your perspective is... is... is the greatness of this place, and that there actually is this whole massive world outside of your own little... little environment that you live in everyday. And that's important to keep that in the back of your mind. So I think it's a combination of those two." (Diane WE3)

"Yeah, I mean if something's completely overwhelming, eventually you do consider... Yeah, you do get some sort of perspective or shift in perspective or something." (Vickie PT1)

A sense of heightened or shifted perspective was often associated with words such as 'renewed', 'reaffirmed' or 'reinforced'. While a few descriptions did provide a sense of a transformed perspective, for most participants who described such experiences, the sense was rather of a 'refocussing' about what they believed in or valued.

Participant perspectives were prised adrift, but not necessarily through an epiphanous 'moment of enlightenment'; rather, there was a *sense of rediscovering* something that had always been there, but that had been covered or hidden. Though participants occasionally described how their perspectives had changed, they were more likely to

identify feelings associated with the experience. Where commonalities within changed perspectives were articulated they revolved around a sense of empathy or desire for relationship with other people or the environment. But more common was the sense that something ineffable had occurred; something dislodged or *dislocated*, and a sense of a veil having been lifted.

“Yeah, I mean, I suppose it does change you. I hope that it changes you I guess. I hope that the scale of the landscape and the scale of the place maybe helps you put other things in your life into scale, you know, to be able to compare sort of these things to, you know, the smaller things in your life that can seem big, I guess, it is arguably good for. Being out there, you kind of stop thinking about the noise in your life, I guess, and there is a clarity that I think you get there that I hope that I can maintain. I sort of feel that, you know, often probably you sort of come back and the noise is still there. But there is certainly a simpleness and a clarity that you get when you’re out there. You stop thinking about a lot of things that really aren’t that important.” (Jessie WE3)

“It kind of made me look at myself a bit more and think about my morals, not because like, I don’t know... like where I am in my life I was like, do I want to do that or do I kind of want to try other things, like, go off and do this and stuff because I really loved it. So, yeah, that’s how I benefited from it I think.” (Amanda PT3)

“I found that... I find that you really, your perspective becomes very clear. And for me, some of my hardest decisions or deepest thoughts have been when I’ve been out of my normal existence looking back and... and... and that’s when I write the most... if I’m in an environment where I’m feeling inspired by the people I’m with and the beauty... I really love beauty... I love being in beautiful places and that’s where that’s so, of freedom of my mind or my thoughts. And then, yeah, really having a look at your life. And that’s what that was all about really. Where am I at and what’s next... I guess that gave me that clarity of thought.” (Alison PTE)

“I have done a few trips like that over time and I think the first few trips I did, like, this changed who I was. I find these sorts of trip to be energising, refreshing and a reminder of what’s important to me as opposed to changing the way I do things.” (Diane WE3 4 mth)

The description of clarity involved both a sense of revelation and a heightened level of conviction, or ‘knowing’, in terms of values. Renewed perspectives on what is important in life or in what a participant might believe accompanied a conviction to *do something* – to act upon the re-pledged perspective.

“I am a ‘greener’ person from the experience. The beauty of the natural environment means more to me now than before, and it will be a shame whenever any of it is lost. I have signed up as a member of Greenpeace in support of their efforts.” (Cory WE3)

"I came back determined to play a much more active role... I'm certainly going to be on the front line when the pulp mill site gets occupied. Whereas, you know, before the Franklin I would have... probably wouldn't have opted to do that. I probably would have been happy for other people to have done that in my name. Yes. So I think for me it's sharpened and heightened tendencies that were already there and it's made me... it hasn't made me so much a different person, but it's made me a more committed person and a person much more dedicated to make sure that how I comport myself on a day by day basis fits all this." (Richard PTE)

"It I don't think... you can't be the same. When you come back to the world of people I don't think you can act the same. In my case, this was a reinforcement of things that I've thought and values that I've held and emotions that I customarily feel in any case, an affirmation of them. For some people it's actually... I suspect it will actually reconfigure those. In my case it affirmed them. Highly profound." (Richard PTE)

"I realised life is very short. And I think you need just to do what you wanna do, here and now, because life is short. And that for me symbolised the fact that the Franklin wasn't... wasn't nearly there. Thank god, but, yeah. I guess... I just... it made me realise it's... time is sacred and it's a blessing... yeah, it made me just, I guess, be a bit more, probably not procrastinate as much because, yes, I always have these great plans and sometimes I don't follow through with them. So I felt more pro-active in following up things that made me feel good." (Alison PTE)

"The Franklin trip clarified in our minds ideas that we had been moving towards but it brought us to discuss them in greater detail and make some firm decisions about how we want to live our lives. Having made these decisions we are sticking to them, where in the past we might have tended towards them but at times not been true." (Rachel WE2 12 mth)

A sense of heightened or shifting perspective was commonly related to values. While the experience involved a stripping away, or even a dislocation, there was a recognition that such an experience is good for oneself, and that one might get to know oneself better or grow as a person; guidance and reassurance for how one might *be* in the world.

"One way that this has had an impact is that I'm much calmer... and gentle and relaxed. Just as I go about my normal day by day. I don't know if still something will happen that will derail a day, what I intended to do for the day, and an expletive will be not deleted. But I'm much more capable of... just being. I might not know what I was actually doing. Yes. I have a more sort of calm and centred... way of getting through a day... I think this is in no small part due to the Franklin experience." (Richard PTE)

"All of those sorts of things. Which I wouldn't get. You know, you go up, you walk down the [local park] or you, you know, you walk along a beach with no one on it and you're aware of the proximity of nature. But it doesn't challenge the central way

you put humans in the universe in the same way that a trip down the Franklin does. It doesn't challenge the central role you assign to humans until you get down there." (Richard PTE)

"But now I think the values that I have are from my experiences that I have in the wilderness, and my capability, and my friends." (Alison PTE)

The common response was one of *questioning*, or a desire to *understand* oneself or one's place in the world. Participants described moments when reflection took place on a profound level. They struggled to find ways to describe the experience, but it was often around a sense of diminishment and newly heightened perspective that participants described an experience that transcended their everyday life and view of the world. The experience was difficult to hold, but was highly valued as a meaningful experience in itself.

"One of the things it reminds me of is how little contact we now have. How quarantined we are from those sorts of experiences. And we sort of settle for the half experience. You know, the bushwalk and the stroll along the beach, or the bushwalk along in some sort of semi-natural park on the urban fringe and those sorts of things. Even a stroll to [the local park], it's a different order, a lesser order of contact with the natural world. It's not one... it doesn't involve anywhere near the same degree of fundamental challenge to who you are and what you value." (Richard PTE)

6.2.10 Experience as Outcome

One outcome that participants took with them from the trip was a desire to be able to return to, or relive, their experience in their mind; reliving the experience could invoke valued feelings of calmness, a sense of contentment or clarity of perspective. There was a desire to return to that *sense of wonder* or experience of something 'other'; to be interwoven with the world. The experience appeared to bring with it a heightened awareness for participants of both the natural world and themselves.

"The experience is the important thing, that is what people want to hold in their minds: the moments, the memories, and try to invoke the feelings of happiness, connection, contentment etc... Hopefully the comments above answer this question. It's amazing to me how readily I can recall the trip and its details – I thought it might have slipped from view by now. Few people have the luxury of time or means to take such a trip, and I'm keenly aware of that. And I'm still amazed that I actually rafted the Franklin – albeit at record low levels in benign, sunny conditions where there were no surging walls of roaring white water calling for courage I'm not sure I possess..." (Amy PT1 4 month reply)

“(The Franklin trip) I wouldn’t... I don’t... you know, I wouldn’t withdraw that or undo that for quids. That to me is probably the single most important experience for the year. And that... that time committed to that is something I’m really more than happy to do over again, by hook or by crook, so... I would rate it as profound, a profound experience, in my life scheme of things.” (Sarah PT1)

Many participants observed that one of the outcomes from the experience was a decision to do more trips of a similar nature, in the wilderness, over a period of time, in order to have similar experiences of the natural environment. Participants also expressed a desire to re-create the quality of meaningful experiences on the river within their everyday environments. Participants recognised, particularly in the four month follow up emails, that there were many opportunities for similar types of experiences at home, but that it helped to have had the ‘full-on’, profound experience in a wilderness setting to help them know what they were searching for. Participants felt that they could be more attentive to things in the natural world at home, particularly the micro-worlds in their everyday environments, or intrusions of the natural world into same, and thus be able to replicate the experiences on the river. The initial experience on the Franklin River was often valued for the sense of clarity, even certainty, that it provided in interacting with the natural wildness of the world.

“Like riding a bike, like to me the Franklin at the end of it saying ‘yep, I know what it feels like to be on a bike now’. I might not be able to recreate that exactly back, but you might be able to take... Even just to go for a walk along the beach, to look at the sunset differently or just to listen more or something like that or to see more things in the world than you would. To try and have some of that wonder about stuff, because there’s lots of stuff to have wonder about in an urban environment as well.” (Vickie PT1)

Interviewer: “You talked a couple of times about the difference between like [the local park]. Coming back from a trip like that has the experience of walking through [the local park] or along the beach or anything changed for you?”

“When I sit here and we are talking I’m constructing those experiences negatively in comparison. But when I actually do them, that’s not how I do them... If I walk down the [the local park], which I’ve done two or three times this year – down, not up. If I do that I do it a lot more slowly than I would have done once. I stop and look at things a lot more. Again, what the Franklin experience has helped me to do is be a lot more contemplative, to see a lot more, to just dissolve into the experience. Once upon a time if I walked down the [the local park] I’d be chattering away with whoever I went with. I noticed the last couple of times that I’ve been down there I haven’t wanted to talk.” (Richard PTE)

Interviewer: “So if you see more do you see more of this idea of, you know, beauty or whatever? Do you notice things more?”

“Yes, I'm more aware of things, yes. At the micro level I notice more. And that's, I think, to do with the extraordinary pool that those little complex micro worlds on the Franklin had. Right from day one. Right from right from the first camp site. I was enchanted by them. And they, and it's the micro worlds that really, that really give you the sense of the complexity. Because you look at a tiny little... what's right there in front of your eyes, this far away from your face, and you see such extraordinary ecological complexity in that little... And you think, now here's this entire river full of an infinite number of those little things. Yes. So the micro worlds were at least as crucial at giving me this sense of the awesome complexity that living processes are capable of achieving, as did the sort of large scale.”

Interviewer: “If you notice more like, any of those kind of, you know, beach walk, whatever, do you notice any more just walking around the streets normally, like suburbs, urban, here, this sort of thing?”

“I think I'm probably more alive to the intrusions of the natural world. You know, the... inter-human space. I probably am, I think. I think I'm more likely to look at small things. And pick up on small things, like a bird call that doesn't seem to fit and such things. When we went down the Franklin I had that camera with the great macro lens that I've never used since because I borrowed it from work, but now I walk around with a camera taking photographs of minute things all the time. And I didn't used to do that. Yes. And I find my attention is more and more focused on that sort of intricate little detail. Wherever I am, yes. I see the patterns in tree bark. And I always, I think I always had that sort of sensibility, but it was focused on a larger scale. So if I looked at... if I walked towards a grove of trees I would look at the grove of trees as a grove of trees, whereas now I'm more likely to get as close as I can and then look at the bark and look at the leaves and look at what's in the leaf mould.” (Richard PTE)

“Relating to the environment, I am as caught up as ever in the dilemma of city living, with the constant intention to spend more time out of town and/or out bush. I'm not sure that the Franklin trip has changed that, except to provide another example to me of the compelling reasons for getting out of town more often, ideally for stretches of time longer than a weekend. I don't think the trip changed the way I relate to the environment – but rather, reminded me of the fact that I love to spend time out bush, sometimes in remote locations. It was a reminder rather than an introduction to that sense of a strong, unmediated relationship to the bush.” (Amy PT1 4 month reply)

Emotional responses such as calmness, contentment, appreciation of the quietness and a sense of wonder were the affective components of the experience to which participants felt a desire to return. There was also a recognition that, over time, one's ability to recover the experience and emotions from the trip might begin to fade. The experience reinforced the value not only of the experience itself but also of those wilderness places.

"I think it reinforced what I normally do for my own head space... the, that Franklin trip definitely reinforced that for me, that time out in the wilderness, particularly that native Tasmanian wilderness, is really really important for me." (Beth PT1)

"I took about two weeks to become accustomed to being back in reality. It was as though I had this hypersensitivity to the impacts that humans have made on the land and nearly everything I looked at really upset me. The day we came out into the rural countryside for the first time I even started crying because it just seemed all wrong compared to the beauty and interwovenness of the wilderness we had been in on the Franklin – and that wasn't even a city or built up area but a green field with cows, fences and a road. I remember about a month after the trip had finished we got back to Melbourne and drove on a 16 lane freeway around to Geelong. On either side it was a dustbowl with rubbish blowing in the wind. Cars and trucks everywhere and a tall wire fence. I said to [partner], "please don't ever let me forget that this isn't normal". I know that before we left on our trip I had gone to work every day and sat in a traffic jam up Parramatta Rd all the way, breathing in that smog and just thinking that that was part of a normal daily routine and a natural part of life. Being on the Franklin and all of the other wild places we were in in Tassie brought it home to me that my old life is a made up madness and not at all the way it is supposed to be... I do think that for me anyway though, the impact of wilderness experiences has been built up over time. It wasn't as though I just went on the rafting of the Franklin and then decided that I wanted to live closer to nature and natural cycles. The Franklin trip was a bit of a tipping point though which crystallized some thoughts that I had had previously about the way that I want to live my life." (Rachel WE2 4 month reply)

"On reflection the most powerful thing I do take forward is my need to have that outdoors time, for the space and the peace and the natural beauty of it all." (Beth PT1 12 month reply)

While participants found it impossible to completely describe what was, for many of them, a complex and mysterious event, the effort taken to reflect on the experience and forefront it in the mind was viewed as valuable. Nevertheless, many participants reported that their feelings and memories of experiences on the Franklin had faded over time.

"Having undergone the experience and having been profoundly affected by it, you then have to turn around and search for what are inevitably an inadequate string of words to articulate it. It never quite works because the experience is more inchoate, less tangible than you can, than words will suit. More complex than words can ever, I think, adequately represent." (Richard PTE)

"Yeah, and it's all in the back of head, like you do know, somewhere unconsciously I know why, I just can't grasp it, like I don't know." (Amanda PTE)

“[Feelings] faded, that's why I need to get back out there to remind myself from time to time.” (Nick WE3 4 month reply)

“Definitely [feelings] faded, as once something is out of sight it is out of mind. Too many influences can affect you directly and this results in the movement of the Franklin memories from the active part of your memory to a little used corner visited on rare occasions. Reading your questions, I see how easy it is for the immediate feelings following the trip to be diluted by other life influences.” (Wayne WE2 4 month reply)

While the linguistic descriptions could never equal the lived experience, several participants valued the opportunity to relive or recall the experiences through the research process. There was a sense that talking about such experiences not only reinvoked the emotional experience, but it also validated the reality of such experiences.

“For me the reflection enriches the experience. It enriches it and consolidates it. Like even saying this now, I kind of knew some of this but, saying it, um... yeah, reinforces what I've experienced. So it actually is part of the journey to reflect on the journey.” (Morris PT1)

“I still have the same feelings and perspectives on the trip, although my clarity of them probably isn't as good as it was when I was still out there. I don't think it's necessarily a case of memories fading, but being removed from a place doesn't allow that same sense of immersion you get when you're out there. However, I certainly have some vivid memories and images in my head of the Franklin River and its surrounding landscape. I don't think these images / feelings will fade.” (Jessie WE3 4 month reply)

“Feelings are the same when I get a time to reflect but that is becoming few and far between so thank you for engaging me again to allow more time for reflection! I still have a strong sense of the feelings and every time I walk the mountain or sit by the rivulet or smell the damp (not much at the moment due to lack of rain!) It does take me back to the 'aerial view' I described and the river tranquillity.” (Beth PT1 4 month reply)

“I'm amazed at how the positive, slightly dreamy post-Franklin trip perspective has lasted. The maintenance of this worldview has certainly been helped by a stint of not working, so with plenty of time to, e.g., sit in a sunny chair and read, or write a letter to a friend, regaling them with stories of the river... I've just had plenty of time to reflect on the aesthetic splendor, as well as the more metaphysical dimension to the experience. And entertain thoughts of when our next trip might be.” (Amy PT1 4 month reply)

“I think, in this scenario, with us discussing at the time especially, and me being made to think about or reflect on the experience, that many ideas that might have been left at the back of my mind were clarified and made to move into the long term

memory part of my brain... I feel that in life you gradually build up a series of experiences that have had a profound impact on you. They are the ones that you look back on as being standout things you have done. You might go years between adding to this particular bank of profound experiences. For me the Franklin River trip was one of these.” (Rachel WE2 4 mth)

6.3 An invariant structure?

The previous section of this chapter has outlined the common themes, relationships and conversational structures within participant recollections. This dissection and categorisation of recalled individual experience, can only be an imperfect replication of the original lived experience, however, the phenomenological method aims to make use of such recollections in order to capture the common essence of a phenomenon (Seamon 2002). By taking apart the individual recollections, and looking *through* the structure of the conversations, this research aims to highlight patterns that might shed light on the common, repetitive or *invariant* qualities of such experiences. Seamon (2002) has suggested that for Husserl this task was a search for the ‘invariant structure’.

In searching for an invariant structure, consistent with the phenomenological approach, there is a need to look beneath thematic structure and relationships. This structure may not be easily discernible within the individual transcriptions themselves; rather, they may be revealed through a careful reflection on the collective. What is the ‘invariant structure’ of the meaningful experience being explored, and what is it without which the experience would cease to exist? By grouping several thematic relationships together it is possible to see a pattern emerging that underlies the experience described by participants.

6.4 The Essence of the Meaningful Experience

The following sections will describe the underlying commonalities amongst participant descriptions which, for many participants within this research project, made the experiences ‘what they were’.

6.4.1 Interweaving with a ‘Something Other’

There is a sense that the binding force in the meaningful experience surrounding humility is an interaction / **interweaving** of oneself and a ‘something other’. The experience of ‘interweaving’ involved the simultaneous paradox of being both separate (in response to something other) and connected (a part of something other). The experience appears to be pre-categorical and in part indescribable, though with certain identifiable qualities. These qualities revolve around feelings of diminishment or humbleness in the face of ‘something’ undeniable, immense, overwhelming, inexhaustible and larger than us. Feeling a part of that larger assemblage / system / ‘something other’, and being aware that the other exists on its own, of its own accord, has, as its key ingredient, an awareness of the ‘something-other’. The question is: how does it make itself apparent to us; how do we become aware of it?

6.4.2 The ‘Things’ become ‘Something’

The ‘things’ that we interact with, and which claim our attention, particularly in the natural world, point towards a ‘something other’ that is not literally described. The river, the geology, the forests, the micro-worlds, the macro landscape, all suggest something that exists but which is not wholly describable in its parts. We are directed towards the evidentiality of the something there by scale, temporality, beauty (diversity) and a flow of change that are beyond our imagination and invoke a sense of awe and wonder.

As we plunge into the ‘wildness’ of nature, in moving from things to the ‘something’, we are forced to acknowledge that what we ‘see’ is not always to be categorised as we might presume. The tumbled stone is not necessarily just ‘a stone’, will not always remain the stone as it now appears, and indeed, has not always been that stone. We are adrift within a world of continual transformation, endless possibility, unimagined scale. The stone contains possibilities of a larger something within itself. It has travelled the length of the river and a long passage of time, has been ground down from something larger, and is a part of the larger infinite assemblage. Indeed, the stone is more than a thing that will become another thing; it is a part of something that is wholly and indescribably larger.

The awareness of micro-worlds points towards an infinite number of possibilities and complexities within time and space, complexities and possibilities that are part of a ‘something’ that exists on its own, is boundless, and is beyond human categorisation or valuation. It is an awareness of a more-than-human world that is worthy of respect. Not only do such experiences point directly towards the workings of our world that are beyond the usual realms of human understanding, but further, they can speak to the interrelatedness of our universe, and therefore our place within it:

‘This,’ he said, handling it, ‘is a stone, and within a certain length of time it will perhaps be soil and from the soil it will become plant, animal or man. Previously I should have said: This stone is just a stone; it has no value, it belongs to the world of Maya, but perhaps because within the cycle of change it can also become man and spirit it is also of importance. That is what I should have thought. But now I think: This stone is stone; it is also animal, God and Buddha. I do not respect and love it because it was one thing and will become something else, but because it has already long been everything and always is everything. I love it just because it is a stone, because today and now it appears to me stone’ (Hesse, 1951, pp. 116-117).

While every individual’s experience is different, and such qualities appeared to differing degrees throughout participant recollections within this research, it is in this sense that we are within the world in a way that might not occur to us in our everyday lives, and which is revealed to us through the things pointing towards ‘something larger’, that appears as common thread herein. It is an experience that provides a moment for pause.

6.4.3 A Tension between Vulnerability and Comfort

We are interrupted and intruded upon. We become vulnerable, open to the world, lost to ourselves, called to question ourselves and our place in the world. Yet this is not necessarily a reductive or negative experience. There is reassurance and comfort

available within the interaction / interweaving. We are enfolded by this place (something) as well, taken in to become part of something bigger; an assemblage. There is a paradox inherent within these heightened feelings of connection to nature, or of being part of this larger assemblage, for we experience this interaction with an *other*; we are in this 'other'. This apparently separate 'something-other' at the same time binds us into itself. In some ways we lose our 'selves', the importance of ourselves, and in doing so we potentially find ourselves as well, our place in the larger scheme of things, and there is a contentment in that. As Henderson suggests, "one does not sing the praises of the awe of nature. Rather, one comes to see and accept one's place in a grand design at the level of the comforted soul" (1996, p. 140).

6.4.4 The Interweaving of Ourselves with the World

We are content to see ourselves as separate from the world: there is *us* and the way we perceive the *world outside*. Yet, when we plunge into the natural world, it makes itself apparent to us and we are open to it; *we perceive it and it perceives us*, it is something other and we are a part of it. Our fabric becomes part of the same fabric; beyond imagination or description. We are stripped of a part of ourselves and we see the world with a renewed perspective and a revealed clarity. It is potentially a profound experience.

6.4.4.1 Relatedness and Divergence

At the heart of this profound experience is a paradox: that we can perceive 'something' as the other, and also that we are a part of that other. These two perceptions are related, and yet divergent; we cannot really be a *part* of the world and be *separate* from it at the same time. Nevertheless, the imminent perception that we might be either affects our experience of the world; it makes us more aware that we are *in the world*.

Merleau-Ponty (1968) describes the 'reversibility' of such perceptions; for example, our right hand 'touching' an object in the world and at the same time attempting to 'be touched' by our other hand. The perception that our right hand might be the 'touched' potentially heightens, or affects, our experience of the 'touching' of an

object in the world. That is, the perception that we might touch this ‘something’ other, and yet be part of that something other being touched, places us more directly in the world. It is this potentially imminent ‘reversibility’ which appeared to affect participants so profoundly. It is possible to be one *or* the other but not both simultaneously:

It is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization, and one of two things always occurs: either my right hand really passes over to the rank of touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch *it* (1968, pp. 147-148).

Rather than attempting to suggest that the two experiences can occur at the same time, Merleau-Ponty (1968) suggests that the simultaneous realisation and intertwining (‘chiasm’) of the *relatedness* (I cannot touch the world without being aware that I might be touched) and *divergence* (I cannot touch and be touched at the same time) of the two perceptions is at the heart of being ‘in the world’; there is an inescapable openness to the world; it intrudes into us and we intrude into it:

When I find again the actual world such as it is, under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body, I find much more than an object: a Being of which my body vision is a part, a visibility older than my operations or my acts. But this does not mean that there was a fusion or coinciding of me with it: on the contrary, this occurs because a sort of dehiscence opens up my body in two, and because my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we pass into the things (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 123).

It is not so much then that we are either ‘separate’ or ‘connected’ to the natural world, but the realization that we might be both, imminently, that places us fully *in the world*. To be at once in awe of the surrounding environment and comforted by

the enfolding within that same environment was at the heart of the meaningful experience for many participants.

6. 5 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has outlined the collective conversational structure of thematic descriptors surrounding the ‘stream of experience’ involving a feeling of *humility*. It has interrogated those thematic descriptors by exploring individual participants’ descriptions of meaningful experiences. Considering the individual in light of the collective allowed the invariant structure of the experiences to emerge. The essence of the phenomenon was revealed in the pre-categorical, and involved an interweaving of oneself with the world; a placing of oneself within the world.

Chapter 7 – Interrogating the Stream of Experience Surrounding Being Alive to the Present

7.1 Introduction

As with the previous stream that coalesced around a feeling of ‘humility’, the stream that surrounds being ‘alive to the present’ does not necessarily imply that being *present* is itself the essence of the meaningful experience; rather, that it represents a stream of experience through which participant descriptions commonly flow, and has at its core several themes which are interrelated. These themes include being ‘in the moment’, which itself has particularly strong relationships with several other nodes of description. While being ‘in the moment’ has already been discussed (6.2.8), this central node will be explored additionally via strong relationships to other nodal thematic descriptors in order to uncover the essence of the lived experience.

7.2 Interrogating the Thematic Descriptions

The themes that will be explored in this chapter are:

- 1. In the Moment (6.2.8)**
- 2. Immersed**
- 3. Focus of Attention**
- 4. Being Away**
- 5. Length of Trip**
- 6. Routine / Rhythm**
- 7. Simple / Basics**
- 8. Solitude**
- 9. Quietness**
- 10. Beauty**
- 11. Renewal**
- 12. Perspective**

Figure 17 provides a visual map of the thematic relationships that will be considered. As the relationships are interrogated the qualities of each will be summarised and examples of participant recollections included. As with the previous stream of

experience explored, recollections in this chapter have been carefully chosen to support both the literal and interpretative analysis.

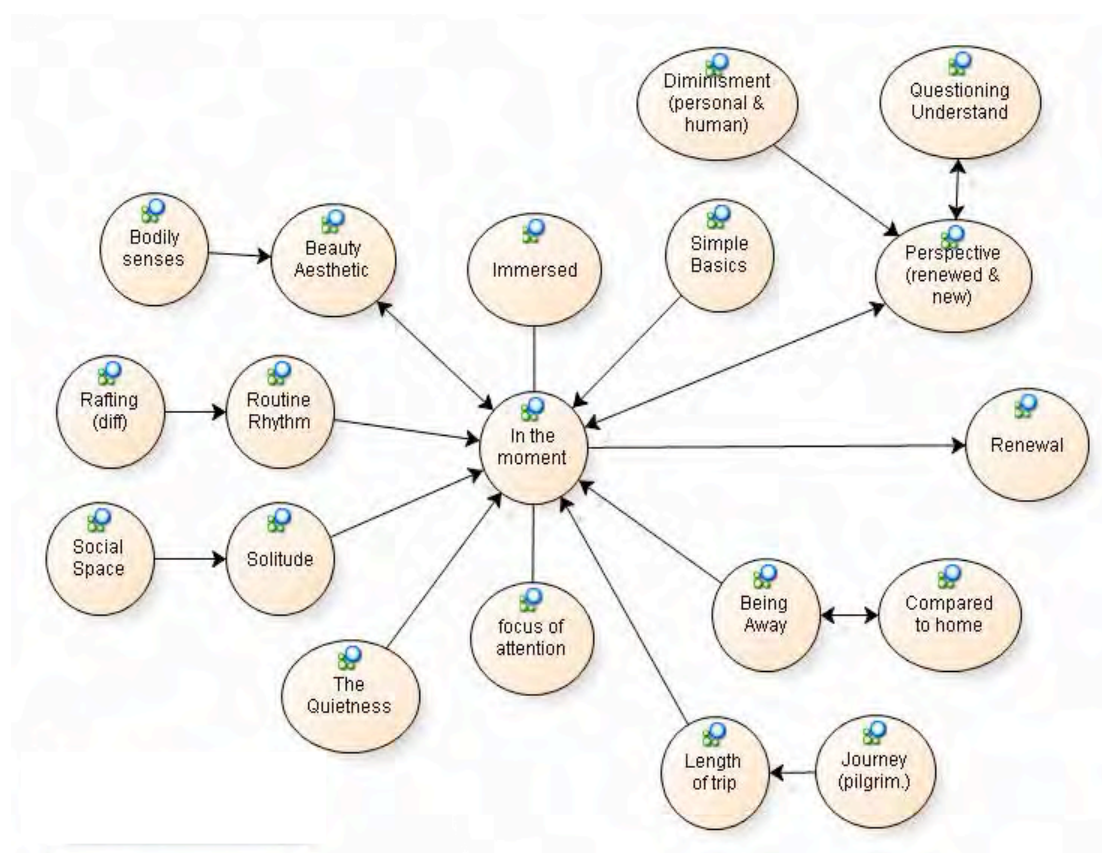


Figure 17: Thematic Relationships Surrounding the Stream of Experience Involving Being 'Alive to the Present'

7.2.1 In the Moment

The theme of being 'in the moment' has been explored in 6.2.8, particularly as it related to the stream of experience surrounding humility. It was a commonly articulated theme in participant recollections and was also used in contexts which did not necessarily relate to a sense of humility, diminishment or connection.

Recollections involving such descriptions were often centred around feeling *completely* 'in the moment', free of any distractions or intrusions, alert to the surrounding environment and being able to pay particular and *effortless* attention to that which might usually go unnoticed. It was a way of being in time and space that went, by definition, unnoticed, and was difficult to describe afterwards. Any attempt to capture such an experience at the time must in some ways detract from living the experience.

“It’s a moment of awareness. I don’t know how to explain it, but that’s the only way I can sort of describe it, like a moment where it all is there. So I’m calling it just that, I just can’t think of the name. You know, there’s a moment where you’re coming out of there and there’s the temptation to grab it and hold it and maybe it’s just better to let go. I just let it pass and I appreciate what happens. I appreciate that there is a change from the moment before and maybe I can’t identify it or label it, but it’s there, and so that’s basically the feeling that happens.” (Trent PT2)

Rather than repeat the exploration from the previous chapter, this chapter will explore the theme via the particular relationships of other thematic descriptors in the stream of being ‘alive to the present’.

7.2.2 Immersed

A sense of immersion as it relates to being ‘alive to the present’ was recalled in two distinct ways. Firstly, being inside or ‘within’ the surrounding environment; enclosed by the walls of the river, enfolded within the overhanging forest or immersed in the river environment itself. However, this sense went beyond simply being within the environment to being *lost* within the environment; to a sense of being *completely* within the environment. It was a feeling that was commonly associated with ‘feeling good’ and was a valued descriptor of the overall experience.

“I felt immersed in the environment. Um... and... and that’s to do with the length of time there and also, that particular environment being the container for the experience. I mean you’re between two rock walls basically – where the river flows is where you go.” (Morris PT1)

“Through my life I have seen some really beautiful natural scenery, but more often than not has been not so much a fleeting glance, but a less than total immersion in it. It has been either through sightseeing, bushwalking or rogaines, where at most you might be there for a night. Being ‘immersed’ in the environment with no immediate exit possibility allowed me to appreciate it more. At the camping sites I was more than happy just to continually look around at the various views, often for hours, and taking in both the beauty and individuality of the scenery. Just the way that the scenery changes as you travel downstream added to the experience, there really are three different Franklin Rivers. Taking in the different rock formations (just looking at all the different patterns in the mud rock was great, if I wasn’t there with the time to take it all in I wouldn’t have appreciated it as much) on the trip down the river was an experience in itself, and the slow pace of the trip encouraged me to do this.” (Cory WE1 4 mth)

"It can be looking into the water, like looking into a rapid and just seeing, and getting lost in that. And I remember doing that, like I remember just looking, not really thinking anything about anything practical, just looking into it going 'that is so beyond me'." (Vickie PT1)

"A total immersion in natural beauty for 9 days was a huge experience." (Cory WE1 12 month reply)

Secondly, there was a temporal component of being immersed which involved being in the present moment with little concern for, or even awareness of, past or future events. These experiences were strongly associated with a sense of being able to pay attention to more than was usually accessible. This was more than just being away from usual distractions; rather, it was particularly about what was available to focus on both in terms of the surrounding environment and the activities being undertaken. While it involved an ability to focus one's attention on particular things, it was also about noticing new or what might usually be considered things that could easily escape one's attention.

"The river trip was invigorating, inspiring and life-affirming. Someone talked about getting out 'into' the wilderness as not being about getting away from it all, but getting back to it all. I like that idea. All in all, a kind of intimacy with the place we were travelling through, and with friends that emerged once we'd 'settled in' as a group and 'arrived' in the landscape." (Amy PT1 12 month reply)

"I mean I can't think of any time when it wasn't... yeah it's always when you experience mother nature in the raw form and because it requires a separation from the mode of being basically ... I mean if you're in the world you've got to be thinking past, present and future, if you're driving a car you've got to be thinking what's going to happen around the corner. I mean you're doing that here strategically when you're planning a river trip too but at the same time you're not thinking about the turn when you're in the 'Nasty Notch'. So I think being in natural environments is the only place I've ever had moments of awareness in. (Trent PT2)

"It's like time stops. When you, you know, you're standing on top of a mountain and just out around you, it's just like a perfect moment." (Rachel WE2)

7.2.3 Focus of Attention

Recollections involving the focus of one's attention commonly described both *what* was focussed upon and *how* that experience was for participants. There was an appreciation of being able to focus attention on what was not part of everyday life, or

might under usual circumstances go unnoticed – commonly the ability to focus on the micro or smaller parts of the natural environment, the beautiful, the exquisite, or what might be perceived as utterly complete or ‘good’. The qualities of what was being focussed upon appeared to impact significantly upon the quality of the interaction taking place.

Interviewer: “Those moments that kept appealing to you, with things like leatherwood blossoms or lichen or sun or... what is it about those things that you found so appealing?”

“I guess it, I don’t know, it’s like you just... you’re allowed to turn your eyes on something that’s extraordinary, for, a certain time. And that’s all you have to look at, you don’t have to look at anything that’s really dull or really, ugly, or, you know, you’re just looking at something that’s flat out extraordinary and... and that is something that’s really healthy for you to just absorb, through the skin, into yourself, into your soul. And I mean that whole experience, it gives you stars in your eyes... and that was really magnified for me by how unfamiliar and grand the Franklin River is.” (Sarah PT1)

“They’re just exquisitely beautiful. Just absolutely beautiful. I mean, I just love those little details, I don’t, so much, when I... when I look at landscape, or particularly when I, if I’m taking a photo or whatever which I guess reflects what I see, I tend to see the little details. And that’s... I just think they’re just exquisitely beautiful. I don’t know what it is that appeals to me, why I find them beautiful. I just do. There is a kind of a luxury about your day, spent just enjoying and noticing those things, that being what you’re turning your attention to, is things like, sunlight on water, or, you know, the mist curling off it in the morning, like actually having the time, and turning your attention... and spending your attention... turning your attention to those sorts of things rather than, I don’t know, a to do list, or running from A to B or, I don’t know, anticipate things that may or may not even happen. Um... you’re just looking at what is in front of you. But, and that seemed like a really nice way to be spending my days.” (Amy PT1)

Central to many recollections was the ability to focus one’s attention in an ‘uninterrupted’ way – not only that there were few intrusions, but that there were few intrusions for an extended period of time, which allowed the experience to run its full course. This was highly valued and was strongly related to feeling present ‘in the moment’. These experiences were not necessarily during the intense moments of the trip; rather, they commonly occurred during moments of release or relaxation as a participant travelled quietly through the river environment.

“It was just such a delight to not have my attention fractured by a million competing demands as was the case with my work last year, and therefore, to be able to bring my full attention to one thing at a time. The work, if you could call it that, was executing tasks (paddle / hauling rafts / ‘over left’ etc...) as per clear instruction by people who obviously really knew what they were doing. I’m accustomed to having a hell of a lot of responsibility within a highly pressured workplace where things move incredibly quickly. Being transposed to a river where I was a punter, a novice, following instruction was great. That allowed for a great deal of headspace to consider the surroundings, and whatever else drifted into my head, or popped up in languorous conversation.” (Amy PT1 4 month reply)

“So the moments of awareness too would come just momentarily for me where I just felt really happy and pleasant, really satisfied with everything, and those were the times when you come out of those intense situations. The Irenabyss was one of those spots actually where that was... but that was still very early in the trip and it wasn’t complete, but then coming through those gates at the bottom of the Gorge and looking back and seeing the two rocks, it’s like ‘wow’ and just drifting down into the beach there and having a real camp at the beach.” (Trent PT2)

"It's the... the break from thought, and the complete and utter distraction of something else. So, if I, you know, I'm sitting in a raft and we've gotta get over a rock, there's no point in sitting there thinking about work. You've gotta... it's... it's... it's the fact that you're forced to focus on something else. And just completely experience new things and have... have new experiences that might to a certain extent change your perspective on things." (Diane WE3)

7.2.4 Being Away

The theme of ‘being away’ involved a sense of leaving things behind; things that were usually considered integral to everyday life. Whether it was technological devices such as phones and street lights, or pressures from work and family life, it was the loss of such competing intrusions that was recalled as providing the space for intimate interactions to occur. The absence of technology had a profound impact on many participants. There was a realisation that even things like ‘lights’ have an impact on the way we live and perceive the world. On the Franklin River, for example, there is often little to mediate between participants and a view of the stars. Not only did participants find that they could survive in an environment relatively free of technologies, but they also recalled relief in the simplicity and lack of distraction of such an environment.

“And how much stuff that you’ve got at home, that... like hair dryers, and shampoo, and conditioner, everything that you have at home you’ve just gone without and

you've coped. You know. It's just amazing that you just adjust. I mean we have a lot of stuff at home that we could probably throw out, that we just hold onto. But if you haven't got it you don't miss it, in some things, but there's other things there, if you haven't got it, you really work out what you miss and what you don't miss."(Lesley WE1)

"It was just, such, ah, what's the word... um... it was the whole atmosphere of... and... and the fact also of... that, um... you were there completely by yourself, and there was um, no distractions, no mobile phones, no street lights, no traffic lights or anything like that. Ah, it gave you time to think. And a lot of the times, ah, sort of sitting in the boat, you know things like drifting along on the water... ah, gave me time to think." (George WE2)

Interviewer: "So if you're thinking about what your kids or future generations might get out this place that's saved, is it an environmental consciousness, or is it something else that they might get out of being in the wilderness as well?"

"Oh, I think they'll get an environmental consciousness, but I think they'll also... I think they'll also experience what I'm experiencing. You know, the fact that there's a lot of pressure, a lot of stress and pressure in, you know, in their home environment if you're living in large towns and cities. And they... they need to get away and experience... but to be, you know, to be, out, out in the wilderness for 10 days, 10 or 11 days. Ah, it is... it is totally relaxing. I slept under the stars the other night, and I, I just enjoyed it, so much, just being able to look up at the stars and think 'when was the last time I did this'? I've never done it! I've never slept under the stars! You know, I've always slept under tarps or tents. And it was, it was just an exhilarating feeling. Just to be there. Yea, to be there. And you know that's... that's very relaxing. It's very relaxing just sitting here, looking at the trees and talking. And then, I just saw a few birds flying over the river. I just heard some birds! You know, that's what I enjoy. And it is, it is very relaxing. Ah, but whenever you go away it takes about a week to really, you know, relax and get into the swing of anything. So I've really enjoyed, you know, being out there, out there with nature, and really relaxing, and forgetting about everything else." (Graeme WE2)

It was not that technology was viewed as a bad thing *per se*; rather, that it was viewed as a distraction. Competing sources of stimulation meant that experiences at home could be mediated or cut short. Technology was not the only source of competing stimulation identified, with several participants talking about being away from family and friends. While participants clearly valued such relationships, they also recognized that they involved pressures and commitments which intruded upon their everyday experiences. While participants spent time thinking of home life while on the trip, there were moments when the pressure and competition from these sources receded into the background, and they felt that they were able to be 'present' and interact with their surrounds in a way that is rarely possible at home.

"Trips like this are really the only opportunity that you get to truly escape, kind of, your... your life. And we've talked a little bit over the course of the trip about the fact that you're... you're fairly tied up to work, with emails, and especially if in your job you work with different time zones you just often never really get a break. And unless you can physically go somewhere out in the wilderness where you can't take a mobile phone it's very hard to get away. And I think over time that's going to become more and more important." (Diane WE3)

"Even being away from your own family, because, um... that might be a worthwhile distraction, but it still takes up quite a bit of energy you know, and thought, when... when you're committed to caring for others you're thinking of them a lot. So yeah it's definitely being away from, being away from, ah, a lot of those technological distractions, I think, is an aid to considering our place in the environment. Being away from the routine demands of work, and the expectations of others in the work environment, helps." (Charlie WE3)

"You've got greater capacity to absorb it all, because you're away from your usual worries and flurries... but it's just so pretty, so pretty all the way along, it's just completely and utterly gorgeous, like how can you not get bowled over by it?" (Rosie PT1)

7.2.5 Length of Trip

The length of the trip was an important theme for many participants. Not only was it frequently discussed, but it was often recalled as a crucial element of meaningful experiences. This was true not only in terms of being 'alive to the present' but also in the way that these themes combined to allow one to focus attention on features of the landscape, particularly the small and the beautiful. The length of the trip was often deemed to be one of its defining elements, and a catalyst that enabled one to get *into* the place, landscape or 'moment'. It involved being immersed in the environment free from distractions.

"And being away from that [work, technology and family] for more than just a day or two. This has been an incredibly different experience to what I've experienced, just, you know, being on a dive weekend, or being on a, you know, one or two day rafting trip, where it really is about thrills and pleasure, and ah... and you are not very far removed from the hot shower and the hotel restaurant and the, you know, the phone calls. It [the length of the trip] made a huge difference to me." (Charlie WE3)

"Once I really got into the groove, which probably was like day three I reckon, or maybe when I woke up on, maybe after three nights, maybe on day four. Um, there wasn't, it was just a sequence of, of sensations of, and, ah, experiences, that I... it wasn't like a standout moment, it wasn't like some, oh this is, like, for example, it

wasn't Rock Island Bend. Do you know what I mean? And I, and Rock Island Bend, that image and that place means an enormous amount to me, I'm terribly familiar with it, it's probably the only part of the Franklin that I would have recognised before going down it. But it wasn't Rock Island Bend, it was, you know, like the leatherwood blossom on the water or that little bit of lichen, or the sunshine on the rock. All these tiny little sensations, and, um... things that you would notice and just in that really moment to moment presence. It's, I mean it's terrible cliché to say you're in the moment, but I just felt like it was a succession of amazing... I just was full to the brim of, of these beautiful sensations of smell and sight and sound. But no one kind of pinnacle moment in the trip, or sensation, because it was just all exquisite." (Amy PT1)

"Um... well one of the things I thought about a lot, particularly early on while I guess I was still in the human world and hadn't quite just totally clicked over into being just in the landscape in that way." (Amy PT1)

Many participants were able to trace a shift away from being in the world in the way they were accustomed, to being in the world in a new or different way. A point in time, a threshold, was passed over whereby participants were *in their surrounding environment* in a very different way. The threshold was commonly mentioned as being around day three or four. While this could be related to several possible factors, including what was happening on the trip on that particular day, it was recalled more often as the point in time when one's everyday existence started to fade into the background; when one could become lost, completely, in the place. Participants also mentioned that at the end of the trip their everyday world began to intrude into their thoughts and break the 'spell'. Thus, in the context of this research, a trip of at least six or seven days appeared necessary to allow participants to move into a different way of being in the world; to really be immersed in the place and discover a way of being on the trip, a way of noticing things, and absorbing them into oneself.

"I think... I think too, you have a different experience. Ah, I don't know, I... my impression is five days is the turning point. So, ah, where we've done shorter walks for, ah, lesser periods, you... there's something happens to you... you... something happens to you, you change in some way after you've been away from civilization for, ah say, four or five days. And, ah, it's a good... it's a good feeling when that happens. You, ah, you... and I don't know, I don't even know really what it is that happens, but some... something happens to, um, to change, ah, just the way you're looking at the world I think, and, ah, unfortunately you soon lose it... that sort of, sort of sense of whatever it is." (Shaun PTE)

"Like you start to feel your place on the raft and all that sort of stuff, and so as you become more comfortable there, you possibly do, can consider everything else more.

You can consider more, yeah. So I guess it happens... and the place changes a bit as well and becomes more dramatic and probably affects you as well. But, yeah, I think it was a really good length of time to go for that reason. I was just thinking about how would it be to go for four or five days, you almost would not quite get to that stage where you're really comfortable doing the job, and so you can really see and sense what's happening around you. Yeah, I don't know, maybe it's different for everyone and maybe that doesn't happen at all." (Sarah PT1)

"The length of time is really important, and one of the things that I've, I've been talking to [another participant] a bit afterwards. And... and really I've just been trying to think about things where you could, what you could do, what else you could do somewhere... somewhere for ten days, 'cause that... that, the length of time did seem important in terms of, actually putting, getting your head into gear and really involving yourself with what was going on, where you were, mmm. Yea, the only other experience like that I've had was... was totally solitary, with a tree sit in W.A. which was, I don't know, about nine days. And there was much the same trajectory, of kind of... it was about day four or five where I was just totally where I was. And again it was very much about, a bird flying past or a, you know, leaf falling down, like that, this kind of a sensation-based experience. You're quite, you're really quite, ah, overwhelmingly in it, in how much I felt moved by it, you know? Amazing." (Amy PT1)

"But I think the power, the power, the power of... that the Franklin trip has is the duration. For nine days out of urban distractions, you know, you don't think about spending any money, just, you don't even, there's no monetary exchange, you don't even think about your wallet (laughs). In fact I struggled to find mine at the end of the trip because I hadn't thought about it for nine days." (Alison PTE)

7.2.6 Routine / Rhythm

Rhythm was particularly related to two aspects of the river journey. Firstly, there was the rhythm of the trip itself in terms of the routine, priorities and day to day activities. Participants talked about leaving one set of rhythms behind and moving into another, often simpler, set of rhythms as the trip progressed. This change to a rhythm that was perceived to involve a more basic set of priorities allowed participants to drift into the moment and become immersed in the experience as a whole. Again, what was articulated was a capacity to let one's mind pay attention to things as they immediately appeared, free of competing thoughts, and with enough time for the experience to move under its own impetus.

"The longer that we were on the river, I just loved it more and more. I fell in love with it more and more... It was such a pleasant routine." (Alison PTE)

"The first campsite was really beautiful, and I just, as the days went on, I got more and more into the rhythm of it. And I wrote about it and it was like, sleeping, eating, getting up, drifting, you know it was... it's a really beautiful rhythm. And it did take me a while to get into it." (Alison PTE)

"There's something about... I guess there's just none... none of the garbage you get, ah, not so much physically but mentally. The, ah, all the, um, hullabaloo of modern society. Ah, to be away from that, I think it's wonderful. And ah, also I think it's nice to be somewhere where you... you... ah, I mean when you, if you're walking or rafting, you've sort of got your day, you think OK now we need to get somewhere, and that's all you really need to be thinking about. So you get everything together, you make sure you've got everything packed up properly, either on the raft or in your pack and um, then... then you head off and you've got that nice physical exertion, and you sort of soon get into a sort of, um, a dreamy state where you're thinking about all sorts of things." (Shaun PTE)

Secondly, there was a *meditative* rhythm involved. Performing a repetitive action produced a stillness or quietness that was seen as providing time to be comfortable with oneself; to find one's own rhythm free of distraction. The idea of paddling along quietly in the raft was commonly cited as just such a time. There was, as well, a perception of clarity in many recollections surrounding rhythm.

"The longer you're in a place the more it becomes the known. 'Cause, you know, every day you're there, your memory and connection to your other environment fades. So that place is your place. Um, and there's... even though there's the awe and the mystery and the newness of it, it's also, you know... you wake up in simpler kind of places and routines develop. And there's a rhythm, there's a rhythm with the river, there's a rhythm with each other, and with yourself. And... and that deepens over time... I loved... I mean once we got to a point where we could actually paddle for more than a few minutes, I loved the rhythm of paddling. I find that very meditative... so that allows a rhythm, your own rhythm to emerge." (Morris PT1)

"When you're paddling on the water, which is not that often, there's a rhythm to that as well that provided quiet time." (Sarah PT1)

"Sometimes you just paddle along, and especially in the lower sections where you do quite some paddling. And you just start to think around things, and get your head free, and you have that during a bushwalk too, you know, you just... life is very simple, you know. You have your backpack or your dry-bag there and, um, that is the only thing you have to pack, your main task in the day... well, if you are not the guide of course. And, well, that simplifies life very much and gives you space to think about other things and then if you just paddle along, yeah, that's fine, so you just look around and think about other things as well, and gives you time to relax and get to yourself a bit." (Clive PT1)

7.2.7 Simple / Basics

The theme of 'simple / basics' was also about leaving behind a different mode of operating in the world. Participants recalled that a lack of clutter and distraction allowed them to quietly reflect on things. There was a desire to take that level of simplicity home to everyday life, and a reflection that it was a good way of being in the world. It added to the sense of total immersion in the place and in the experience. An experiential authenticity was evoked by not having to attend to the usual distractions of multiple tasks. Coupled with the length of time, it was an escape from the usual diversions of life. Additionally, the set of simple priorities involved in such a journey was, at times, mirrored by participants' thoughts about priorities of life more generally.

"I do quite like, um, getting out in the wilderness, just to have a simple life for a change, when your life's all about schedules and deadlines and flights and transfers and meetings and this and this. It's kind of nice when all you've got to worry about is keeping your feet warm and finding a rock to sleep under. It's actually just really refreshing to have a really simple life." (Diane WE3)

"You don't want to just manufacture some kind of epiphany having just travelled down the Franklin River, but you think about the things that, um, really appealed about... you think about why on earth, if it's such an amazing experience, why on earth don't we live our lives in a way that, particularly given that we are so privileged, really, that we can make choices about how our life looks and how our day to day looks, um, why don't we incorporate more of that kind of, ah, quality, to our day to day? And so that's what I've been thinking about, not least spending more time outside. Nothing makes me happier than sleeping on a thermarest outside. It's really simple." (Amy PT1)

"The other thing that I love about, um, just those [wilderness] experiences is everything is just stripped back to basics, you know, you've got your little shelter, and your food, and you congregate at dinner time, and it is so simplistic, you know? And then that open up for lots of great discussion and reflection and, whereas here [town], you know, you put music on and most people watch television. And all that stuff just... just gets talked away all the time... all of the time." (Alison PTE)

"Being out there, you kind of stop thinking about the noise in your life, I guess, and there is a clarity that I think you get there that I hope that I can maintain. I sort of feel that, you know, often probably you sort of come back and the noise is still there. But there is certainly a simpleness and a clarity of thought that you get when you're out there. You stop thinking about a lot of things that really aren't that important. It's just kind of the basics, each day, eating and sleeping and surviving, but you're still pretty happy generally. So, yeah, that's a temporary thing and I hope that there is a permanent thing to be gained out of it." (Jessie WE3)

7.2.8 Solitude

The Franklin itself is an enclosed and bordered system. Due to the steepness of the river banks and the thickness of the bush there is little room to move, even in the campsites. Coupled with this is the reality that, for a good proportion of the day, participants are rooted to a 14 foot raft. And yet solitude was a commonly recalled theme, particularly as it relates to a sense of being 'alive to the present'. It was a highly valued component of the journey, with many of the meaningful experiences recalled by participants involving a sense of solitude. This could occur in the company of others, particularly on the raft, and was by no means a purely physical sensation. When participants described the feeling of solitude they were often suggesting a *quality* of interaction with the surrounds or themselves that was not intruded upon by others, even though they might be physically close.

"You do get moments of solitude in the raft because... especially when you get, I guess, the times where we're just paddling and there's not things happening all the time and you're able just to... your mind starts to just... you know, you stop for a while, you talk, and then you paddle long enough and people just seem to stop talking and just paddle and everyone just thinks. So I think they're moments where you get to just think about it. Yeah, they're good, those times. I mean I'm not sure if there are things I can specifically think of in relation to that but, yeah, there is a solitude you can get even when you're in the raft in a group, and just, you know, appreciating the rocks and the size and the different trees and the sounds of the water and those sort of things." (Jessie WE3)

"And the Irenabyss, the same again, I mean I had 3 raft loads of people within sight and within hearing, behind me, as I came through the Irenabyss, I was only, you know 25 or 50 metres ahead, but it was exactly the same. It was just like, this is my river; this is my space." (Beth PT1)

"There were times like where talking sort of stopped, and for me it always comes back down to the small things, so like you're sitting in the raft and just going along and... and just watching the little, ah... the two little eddies on the edge of the paddles as they go straight past you – that was, yeah, fantastic." (Bill WE3)

"Just a bit of time for yourself. Even though we are together it's time for yourself." (Lesley WE1)

"I just felt like my mind was so quiet. It was just... everything was just, just so quiet, and it was just literally being. I think it's probably the most I've felt just at peace and at one, just being able to be there, and... I know I was sharing it with other people, but it was also like it was just me as well. It was nice. 'Cause we all had our own

little time round camp, where we were just sat doing our own things. I just felt like I could just be, and every day was just a... a beautiful day, and I was really living, I wasn't stressing and I wasn't wasting any energy doing anything apart from just, you know, hanging out, being there, and just loving it. Just loving, loving life, loving the river, loving the environment, loving the interaction."(Beth PT1)

7.2.9 Quietness

When participants discussed the quietness of the journey it was, again, often associated with the *quality of the interaction*. It was linked to the lack of distraction, or intrusion, into one's experience; it was about things settling down to a slower or 'more natural' pace. Quietness was recalled as a feeling or sensation that was both a catalyst for meaningful experiences and the result of such experiences. In other words, there was a sense that the theme of *quietness* had to do with one's ability to be completely immersed in the moment, allowing interactions to occur without any kind of pre-empting, and that such interactions could themselves produce a certain *stillness* within oneself. Several participants recalled the 'quietness' as a defining component of meaningful experiences for them.

Interviewer: "Were there any particular moments on the trip when you really felt like you were in the wilderness?"

"Oh, well, just sitting up there a while ago, when you, um, approached me about this interview, ah, I was just enjoying the, um, the quietness and the solitude of it. Ah, the rest of the trip, ah, has been a fair bit of activity, um, but it's moments like this where you can sit down and... and take in the quietness." (Scott WE3)

"What was glorious about the river for me... it was so glorious to be on the river, and I just kind felt like I, um, just felt quiet, just quiet in my mind. And I felt like a whole lot of my hard edges were softened. And I felt like... I felt like... I felt like how I felt when I used to blockade and spend a lot of time in the bush. And that, just actually how you feel in your body, and, how you... the pace that you're moving through your day. It felt like... oh, I was like, oh, I remember this, I remember just you know, the day being about getting up, and organising breakfast and then, you know, just travelling through the landscape, the tree, the... through the day, in kind of real time. And ten days on the river feels like the longest time, whereas ten days here is gone in an instant... just quietness and slowness." (Amy PT1)

"What I like is the quiet, you know, like it's, kind of a therapy for me to go bushwalking or something. I work in an academic field, and so, pretty much as soon as I start walking it gives me some quiet, like there's the rhythm in your... your day, whether you're walking on the track or rafting on the river. And your immersion in that landscape, it just gives you some quiet in your head. And you kind of just immerse yourself in what's around you and... just what you see, or what you smell,

or... the rhythm of your own body as well, that... that quiet is probably what I'm after rather than the sense of small or large." (Sarah PT1)

"It may be that the actual times when the river... when the experience most impacts upon you is not the times when you're really working hard. Not the times when you're actually getting the adrenalin rush... The times between that, I think. That's when the river speaks to you."

Interviewer: "So I guess that my next question would be... what's going on at those times that allows the river to speak to you?"

"Well, one is the quietness. Because in quiet all of those sorts of... all of that sort of subtle power becomes more apparent, rather than the overt power of the rapid. It would be really interesting to see how people who go down in rafts where you get a lot more time for this sort of quiet contemplation, whether they get a different experience from people who are in kayaks who are still working hard even when they're not in the rapids and getting down the river a lot more quickly. " (Richard PTE)

"And the waterfall, round Rock Island or Pig's Trough. That was just really serene, quiet, the most haunting place. I was up there with [other participant], and I turned round to have a look at something, and turned back, and I couldn't see him. And ah, he'd just squatted down, and he'd just blended into the... into the back of the wall. He was wearing a black top or something but, so you know he was a little bit camouflaged. But I just... it was just... it was a really, beautifully quiet serene place. And I guess the whole time on the river what I loved was the quiet of... you know, it's almost like a deafening peace. You've got the rippling of the water, and with that you have the cascading of the waterfall, but it was all so natural, there was no corruption of... of any other noise that we know; electronic noise that we know. So I think it was for that, and... and 'cause it was a little bit away from camp as well, so it was a little bit of a... a wander myself, and there were a couple of other people dotted round, but again they kind of disappeared, physically as well as metaphorically. Because, there you were." (Beth PT1)

"And the guides were really good as well, in terms of not pre-empting our own experience, or the things that we would notice... there were always... always splendid things around every corner. And I really appreciated the guides', um, kind of, quietness as well. And that's one thing I didn't expect, the amount of quiet time we would have on the river. Which I'm not sure that's because it was so low, so there was a lot of, you know, not so crazy water going on. But I didn't expect that – quiet reflection. And the guides were really good in terms of not saying 'oh this thing's just around the corner' or whatever. They would respond to whatever it was that we were noticing. And that was really nice. Like it didn't feel like a prescribed experience. I've never... I mean I've never had a guided bushwalk or anything either, so I've never really had any kind of guided experience. But I thought those three were really good at letting us have whatever kind of experience it was we were having, which was magnificent." (Amy PT1)

7.2.10 Beauty / Aesthetic

The theme of 'beauty / aesthetic' has been explored in 6.2.7, particularly as it relates to the stream of experience involving a sense of humility, and much of what is discussed there is relevant here as well. Interestingly, the themes of 'beauty / aesthetic' and being 'in the moment' were also commonly linked, and the relationship appeared to flow in both directions during recollections. That is, noticing the 'beautiful' was recalled as aiding one's ability to be 'in the moment', while at the same time being 'in the moment' was recalled as facilitating one's ability to notice the 'beautiful'; particularly in terms of the easy to miss micro-worlds that involved such complexity and implied infinite possibilities. In this way the theme of 'beauty / aesthetic' involves a link between the streams of experience involving 'humility' and the stream of experience surrounding being 'alive to the present'.

The way in which participants became aware of 'beauty / aesthetic' in the surrounding environment was not just in terms of the visual. In many cases participants described how they experienced the beauty of the place as if it was soaking into them, not only through the senses, but also in a way that placed them directly within the landscape. It was, for many participants, not only about how things appeared but how one's attention was first drawn to and then held by the beautiful, as the experience unfolded.

"Your senses take in the aesthetics... I don't know it's just, ah, an overall feeling of the place. You're um, just... yeah, out... out there and, ah... and just enjoying it at a very basic level of, ah, you know... of existence... like yesterday, just wandering, I was wandering around on the beach, you know bits of driftwood, just being aware of a different place." (Nick WE3)

"It's a totally... a whole sensation. I mean the sound and the smell, and... and what you're actually looking at as well... it just felt like a sensory banquet, you know? I was just so satisfied with the whole experience when I came back, when I thought about it, as I was enjoying it, you know, even as it was happening." (Amy PT1)

"It was certainly a feast for the senses – and travelling through utterly unfamiliar country on a river (an unfamiliar medium) – the sensory experience was heightened. The low river and fine weather meant that there was plenty of quiet, reflective time paddling, where it was easy to drop into a quite meditative space (paddling giving us unison) very conducive to daydreaming. I think there is something about being entirely outside what was known and familiar to me that helped to sharpen my awareness of sights, smells, textures, sounds[...] I was quite deliberate about

bringing my attention to those observations – it was a way to appreciate the surrounds as we slipped through the landscape – and a way to ensure that thoughts of work and life elsewhere didn't crowd into those quiet paddling stretches. Sharing observations was also a really nice way of knitting a shared experience together – different people would point out different features or things that struck them as beautiful” (Amy PT1 4 month reply)

"Yeah, yeah, well I didn't go so far as thinking about it. I just love it. I just look at it, and go, yeah it does the right thing in my brain. Like the aesthetic receptors go ding! Oh I like that, like those pebbles, like those little wattle trees that are so tiny and they're just germinating in sand." (Rosie PT1)

"The beauty, I really love, beauty... I love being in beautiful places and that's where that sort of freedom of my mind, or my thoughts, happens. And then, yeah, really having a look at your life. And that's what that was all about really. Where am I at and what's next... I guess that gave me that clarity of thought." (Alison PTE)

7.2.11 Renewal

While participants regularly described a sense of *renewed perspective*, there was also a strong sense of *personal* ‘renewal’ described, particularly as it related to a sense of being ‘alive to the present’. This sense of renewal was about more than just relaxation and being away from home; rather, it involved feeling comfortable with oneself or gaining a sense of contentment with oneself. There appeared to be a connection between themes such as ‘quietness’, ‘focus of attention’ and ‘length of the trip’ that provided moments for personal reflection that felt satisfying and provided a sense of personal renewal. This sense of renewal was something that participants wanted to hold onto, or take with them, but which was recalled as difficult to describe or retain.

"So I think, there's something that really rests your brain when, largely, you're just engaging your body for ten days. That's what's working hard, not your brain. So, yeah, I just feel quite rested." (Amy PT1)

Interviewer: “Looking out over the river against the cliffs and those moments of quiet, what's different about those moments for you?”

“Oh it's just that you... just the fact that you can grab those moments from time to time. I think, um, I think that's what's important. This is not the only place where you can have that sort of thing, you know, you can get out in the bush, anywhere, and just sit down and, um, just wait for the birds to fly around you. You can do that in a lot of places, doesn't necessarily have to be here, it's just that, oh, I think it's something that everybody needs. Time to just, ah, relax and unwind a bit and think about, ah,

think about life, itself... oh, there's something about those moments that just impresses you quite deeply. It stays in your mind." (Scott WE3)

7.2.12 Perspective

‘Perspective’ was one of the most commonly occurring themes during the interviews, with nearly two thirds of participants describing experiences that included the theme; often more than once. The theme was closely related to being ‘present’ and commonly revolved around the idea of refocussing on what was important, particularly in relation to *values*. Participants recalled having the space and time for reflection and to be able to focus on what was important to them. Indeed, the meaningful experiences associated with the stream of being ‘alive to the present’ were viewed as reminders in themselves that slowing down, noticing small things and enjoying being in the present were of value.

"Then we got to Newlands, and it was that beautiful sunny afternoon. And I don't know what it is about the energy of that place, but man it was very different to anywhere else I felt on the river... And I just started crying! I just had this amazing, like, feeling of, ah, a purge of, I guess, all the things I kind of fight... fight with here in an urban environment. I found it was really... I had a lot of clarity of thought. And, in that rugged isolated place it, um, it just blossomed I suppose, yeah. And I had... I just had lots of revelations for my life." (Alison PTE)

"I think experiences like the Franklin, and some other times I've been out and about in the wilderness in Tassie, and not exclusive to Tassie, but certainly wilderness experiences, every time I've come back from something I, I definitely feel like I grow as a person to be able to cope better, from those reflective times, and also from just really having that mind space just to... just to try and process what... what stresses you, and how you should be able to let it go." (Amy PT1)

Interviewer: "What is it about those experiences in the wilderness that cause you to question your values or think more deeply about your values?"

"Ah, I'm truly in the present moment, like there's no phones involved or anything. I am there, and that's what I found on the Franklin. Even though I had reflections on my life here, I was there, every moment was in the present. Whereas I think being in the present, opens up, um... just that clarity, you know, just that clarity of feeling good about yourself." (Alison PTE)

"And I think... I think you need to 'cleanse the soul' sometimes... um... I think that's what these sort of experiences do, they do cleanse the soul, cleanse the mind and... and when you go back, maybe, maybe, you might just think about things a little differently. You know, say, well, there are... there are some things that are important and some things that are not so important." (Graeme WE2)

Interviewer: “So those kind of things, do they have, you know, when you’re kind of in the moment, or aware of what you’re saying, does that have a ... does it last a long time or is it a short time?”

“Yeah it’s very short. What I’ve learnt is you can’t hold onto it, you just have to be there. It’s instantaneous really, I think. The only thing that you can really notice about it is that you’re suddenly feeling happy and aware and things may seem even brighter; you may even start noticing things. So I think the moments of awareness are moments that you couldn’t really write during it because that would, for example... or consciously record it anyway. So it’s just there and then you reap the benefits of it afterwards.”

Interviewer: “So that’s my next question. Obviously it feels really good, but what sort of benefits do you reap from it afterwards?”

“I think mostly just being more content. In general we live in a society where you’re basically trained not to be content with the way life is. You’re always looking for more jobs or better houses and things like that. So I think it’s hard to be truly content in a situation where you’re kind of in a frame, in the world. So that’s where nature has its place for us humans. We can be there and see what is of value.” (Trent PT2)

7.3 The Essence of the Meaningful Experience

Within and between the thematic relationships described in the previous sections there are several defining or essential qualities of the meaningful experiences recalled by participants. These experiential *essences* are common within individual descriptions, and without them the experiences themselves would not be what they are. They are at the heart of what it was for participants to have meaningful experiences that fell within the stream of being ‘alive to the present’.

7.3.1 An Intimate Interaction

Being ‘alive to the present’ involved a *quality of interaction*. Central to the stream of experience was a quality of interaction with oneself or the surrounding environment that was essentially intimate or unmediated. There was an apparent lack of usual distractions upon, or intrusions into, experiences described; or more accurately, into the *way of being in the world at that moment*. This intimacy involved a sense that experiences were able to run their course or occur at their own pace. It involved a complete immersion in the moment or the interaction, to the extent that it was the

moment, place or the interaction itself that appeared to intrude upon participants. It was as if the lack of usual intrusions provided the space for the interaction itself to intrude, and be deeply felt.

7.3.2 Effortlessly Aware

There was a quality of being ‘alive to the present’ that was about paying *effortless attention* to oneself or the surrounding environment. Not only did the attention or awareness involved appear effortless, but it often involved an awareness of oneself or the surrounding environment that could potentially go unnoticed or unseen; an effortless awareness of that which might usually escape one’s attention. This was particularly true of the intricate and infinitely complex ‘micro-worlds’ or the perceived as ‘beautiful’ within nature. This essential quality of being ‘present’ involved an aspect of interaction that participants perceived as completely effortless, but which they had difficulty capturing or holding onto. Almost by definition, the process of cognitively considering the moment or interaction itself required effort and, thus, the spell was broken.

7.3.3 Being Lost Within

The apparently effortless intrusion by the interaction went hand-in-hand with a sense of being almost completely immersed in time and place. Lost ‘in the moment’, lost in the present, lost in the place, lost in the effortless interaction. Participants could be enfolded within the place and lose their sense of past and future – but also apparently be *captured* by the qualities of the interaction itself; a merging of person and experience. That is, there was an element of the experience of being ‘present’ that was self-fulfilling or might even be said to have constructed the experience. Experiencing the quiet could invoke a quietness, which could itself accentuate the sense of quiet being experienced, providing an enfolding within the experience; an immersion within the moment being experience.

7.4 Interactions between Experiences

While the two streams of experience have been considered separately in this and the previous chapter, as they appeared distinct within participant descriptions, there was a good deal of evidence within the data that the experiences not only interacted, but indeed ‘fed into’ one another. This was particularly apparent in the way participants were able to interact with the surrounding environment, and commonly involved thematic descriptors such as ‘beauty / aesthetic’, ‘bodily senses’ and ‘feeling good’. It appeared that the link was in terms of the *way* the surrounding environment was perceived or felt. In other words, the emotive and sensual response to that which appeared as beautiful was common to both streams of experience. *How* one paid attention to the surrounding environment affected *what* one paid attention to; equally *what* one paid attention to impacted upon *how* one was able to pay attention, and this commonly occurred within the emotive, sensual and pre-categorical realms of experience.

7.5 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has explored, via the individually recalled descriptions of meaningful experience, the essential qualities of the stream of experience surrounding the sense of being *alive to the present*. It was a commonly recalled stream of experience and appeared to affect participants profoundly. It was, in many ways, the part of the trip to which participants had a deeply felt desire to return. It involved a *felt* response that was different to that which might be commonly achieved in everyday life.

Chapter 8 – Discussion of Results

8.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the results obtained, in relation to the understandings previously described in the literature review. In addition, the components of the journey that appear to contribute strongly to meaningful experiences and the potential value of such experiences are discussed. The purpose of this chapter is to provide additional insight into the essence of experiences so as to assist practitioners and facilitators to conduct, and potentially gain the most from, outdoor wilderness journeys.

In the previous chapters, patterns and commonalities within individuals' experiences were sought, and descriptions provided, of possible invariant structures. While the results illuminated several common patterns that appeared to be the *essence* of the streams of experience for many participants, there is no escaping the fact that the experiences for each participant were varied, complex and often difficult to describe. The journey, or series of experiences, cannot be reduced to a single 'thing'. No one experience over-rides all others; humans are diverse and complicated, so it should come as no surprise that many of the experiences described were unique. One 'type' of experience does not necessarily preclude another from occurring; indeed, one type of experience might contribute towards, or facilitate, another. Equally, placing an experience within a theoretical understanding does not preclude it from conforming to other understandings.

8.2 How the Results Sit Within Existing Understandings of Meaningful Experiences in Wilderness Environments

The commonalities within understandings of meaningful wilderness experience described previously in 2.4.11 included:

- a view of our world as a continual interaction between person and surrounding environment,

- an understanding of consciousness as being defined, at least in part, by what we choose to pay attention to,
- a recognition that people can be deeply affected by *experiences* and that those experiences can provide meaning to their world,
- a recognition of the affective or emotive domains within meaningful experiences
- the possibility that meaningful experiences might involve a perception of, or relationship to, an ‘other’,
- a recognition that experiences can involve both *perceptual* and *conceptual* components, and
- a recognition that our experiences are, at least in part, influenced by our social and cultural contexts, including language.

The experiences described in this research project exhibit most of these qualities.

This research highlights the idea that there is a continual *interaction* between a person and their surrounding environment, and a potentially pre-rational component to experience. By considering the meaningful experiences in terms of other understandings previously described in Chapter 2, it is hoped that the *essences* of the experiences will be further illuminated.

8.2.1 Neo-Romantic?

There are significant similarities between the qualities of described participant experiences in this research project and the ideas of the Romantic Sublime. Qualities such as a feeling of diminishment in the face of something larger, an interaction with an ‘other’ and a desire for a simpler existence are common both within this research, and in descriptions of the Romantic Sublime (Shaw, 2006). Indeed, it might appear possible to simply categorise the essence of the meaningful experiences within this research project as Neo-Romantic. However, by carefully considering the experiences described by participants, both similarities and key differences are revealed. This discussion of results will point towards the potential for the experiences described by participants in this research to be considered as something other than Neo-Romantic; indeed, to show that they are potentially different from the experience of the Romantic Sublime at a fundamental level.

In the writings of Romanticist authors such as Wordsworth, Emerson and Thoreau, there is a felt response to the natural world; a response that involves a desire to connect with something larger than oneself. The Romantic Sublime involves a sense of awe and trepidation at the grandness of nature. The experience described by these writers involves an interaction between the individual and something 'other'. The Romantic experience of the sublime not only elevates the spirit, but is essentially a testament to the special nature of the human individual to be able to transcend the earthly world; a feature which can be viewed as defining, and potentially separating, humans from the natural world (Hay, 2002, pp. 9-10). Within the present research, however, there is evidence that the essence of the experience is one which, though a response to something larger, is not an unreachable or unattainable 'other', but rather an 'earthly' other of which participants are already a part. The focus of several participants on micro-worlds within the landscape hints at this.

For the Romantics, the elements within the landscape that were described in terms of the 'sublime' were commonly mountains, rivers and vast forests, all of which alluded to the immensity and sheer unknowability of the natural world. While this was sometimes the case within this research, it was often the micro-worlds, the tiny intricacies, which caught participants' awareness, and appeared to facilitate the meaningful experiences. While such elements within the landscape did point towards 'something larger', in the sense that the completeness and complexity of each micro-world represented the possibility of an infinite number of such worlds, these worlds did not necessarily remain 'above' or separate from participants, or require them to be 'lifted up' to interact. Rather, the experiences of the micro-worlds often provided a sense of intactness, rightness, of comfort that things were already as they should be and that the participants could sit *within the world* as it is.

In this way, while participants experienced the world as an interaction with something near the limits of human imagination, the experience of the natural world does not necessarily require transcendence, or a 'raising up towards', of the human spirit; it is rather characterised by a contentment with one's place in the world, a place *already within* the natural world. This is not to suggest that the experience of the micro-worlds of the Franklin River was fundamentally different from similar

experiences inspired by the macro elements of the landscape, such as the towering cliffs or the river itself; rather, by considering the descriptions of the micro-worlds we are alerted to a potential difference within many of the meaningful experiences described. These experiences, as described by participants in this research, had, as an essential quality, an interweaving, or sense of being *within the world*, which suggests a point of difference from the Romantic experience of the sublime. The experiences described appear to involve remembering and affirming one's place *within the world*; about being a small part of something larger; a questioning of one's individual separateness from the world. In this way the experiences of participants described within this research point to experiences that, in part, "reassert the *corporeality* of life; to celebrate its earthliness rather than its ethereality" (Hay, 2002, p. 10; quoted in greater length on page 16). The experience of 'other' in this sense is not necessarily an appertaining of the divine, or of divine creation. Rather, it is of an 'other' in an interconnected sense; of an 'other' of which we are already a part.

Brian Wattchow (2007, 2008), in considering the experiences of university outdoor education students as they journeyed down rivers, found two major themes, 'rivercraft' and 'romancing the river', within journal descriptions. While the theme of 'rivercraft' – involving a focus on the development of white water skills – was not prevalent within this research, possibly due to the differing foci of the journeys, the theme of 'romancing the river' was similar to the stream of experience surrounding 'humility' within this research. Wattchow found typical responses from students in line with the Romantic Sublime – in which "the view of the crashing rapid or the exhilaration felt in the storm sweeping across the mountain that provided the celebration of nature necessary for the romantic traveller to reconsider his or her relations with the natural world" (2007, p. 16) – whereas, within this research, it appeared to be the *paradox* of 'diminishment' *and* 'connection', commonly available within the micro-worlds, which involved the reconsidering of one's place within the world and provided a moment for pause.

8.2.2 *Spiritual / Transcendent*

Much common ground exists between the experiences described by participants within this research project and recent definitions of wilderness spirituality and transcendent experiences in natural settings. A focus on a “feeling of interconnection and interrelationship with other people and nature” (Ashley, 2007, p. 65) and “sense of union” (Williams and Harvey, 2001, p. 249) strike a particular chord with the way in which participants described their experiences. This sense of interconnection or union is revealed within the paradox described by participants – while the landscape was immense, perhaps beyond human description, they felt strangely part of it; within it. Again, as discussed in terms of the Romantic Sublime, it was not always the grand within nature that inspired such feelings, but the micro-worlds and forest microcosms which, in their completeness, were signposts towards a sense of contentment which might stem from being an integral part of something beyond imagination. Though beyond religious categorisation, many of the experiences described within this research project could be defined as spiritual.

Common to the consideration of spiritual and transcendent experiences is a focus on qualities in the arena of *perception*, over and above any conceptual interpretations that might be given. There is a focus on searching for commonalities within the original ineffable elements of the experience; and it is this search within the perceptual realm which is used to provide the essence of such experiences. Considering the results of the research project in this way highlights the potential importance of perceptual commonalities within experiences; for example, the way in which elements within the landscape might be *perceived* as something larger. In highlighting the perception of something larger, our attention is drawn to the *way* in which this other is perceived. While many participants described something larger, beyond human comprehension and perhaps involving the ‘more-than-human’ world, this was not entirely a perception of the ‘wholly other’ in a religious sense, as Otto (1958) might have categorised it. There was, for participants in this research, a placing of themselves *within* this something larger; a perception of the other as a ‘Thou’ in Buber’s (1970 [1923]) sense of the other. The quality of the ‘other’, then, which is so pivotal to the experience, often involved not simply an interaction with, but an *enfolding within*. Indeed, this appears to be a critical component for many

participants and provided a bedrock of comfort from which to explore the experience.

Also evident was a sense of the authority from which any *noetic* quality might come. While participants in the research described a sense of ‘knowing’, in terms of ‘what is right and what is wrong’ or what is of value, there was a sense that this knowing was *remembered, reasserted or renewed* from within, rather than deriving from a separate or higher authority. Again, while one’s thoughts might be considered ‘held in abeyance’, this, too, appeared to be the result of the person / place interaction, rather than stemming from a separate higher authority.

While many of the experiences described within this research might be considered as spiritual or transcendent (Ashley, 2007), it is worth considering the way in which participants described any potential transcendence or ‘lifting out of’. In terms of what participants described as transcendent, it was commonly in the context of transcending their ‘everyday lives’. Common distractions, worries and concerns were left behind and participants felt more connected to themselves, their beliefs and their place in the world. These descriptions do not necessarily infer a transcending of the ‘self’ in the sense of being taken out of oneself; rather, they appeared to involve a reconnecting with oneself and the world; less a matter of being taken out of oneself than of redefining, or *questioning*, the distinction between oneself and the world.

8.2.3 The Simultaneous Perception of the Sacred and the Ordinary

Experiences described within this research hold many of the hallmarks of peak experiences (Maslow, 1970), such as a sense of awe, happiness and meaningfulness. Common too, is the transient nature of the experiences. However, the quality of the experiences described, particularly those related to the stream of experience surrounding being ‘alive to the present’, were particularly in line with the described features of plateau experiences; involving an awareness of that which might usually remain hidden, especially elements within the natural landscape (Cleary and Shapiro, 1995). The experiences themselves were not necessarily described as emotional or

nervous system ‘bursts’; rather, they commonly appeared cumulative over time and seemed to seep into, or imbue, one’s overall experience of the journey.

Central to many experiences was the directing of one’s attention towards those things that usually remain unnoticed – small details such as the swirls on the water, a spider’s web, water-worn geology, floating leaves or the texture of the bark. This interaction involved a perception of the mundane in nature as infinitely beautiful and complex, the ‘simultaneous perception of the sacred and the ordinary’ which Maslow described as the element of unitive consciousness within the ‘plateau experience’ (Maslow in Krippner, 1972). It was the interaction with such potentially ‘ordinary’ or micro elements that commonly appeared to facilitate participant perspectives about what was important and of value in life, or as Maslow put it, “what’s important and what’s not important” (Maslow in Kripner 1972, p. 119).

Elements within the Franklin River landscape invoked a sense of the ‘sacred’ for many participants, such elements including micro-worlds, geological features, trees, ridgelines and the river itself. It was not just the elements themselves that invoked a sense of the sacred, though; rather, the sacred was found within an overlay of further meaning evoked by those elements. Participants were able to attach particular significance to elements within the landscape which seemed to point towards a reality sitting just beyond their day to day, their *profane*, understandings of the world. Indeed, the theme most commonly attached to such experiences was the gaining of a sense of perspective, which manifested in participant descriptions as a transcending of the profane world. The questioning of oneself and the self-transcending sense of perspective involved in participant experiences may have reinforced the sense of vulnerability felt by many participants.

Interestingly, in the four and twelve month follow-up emails, many participants described a renewed ability to perceive the ‘sacred’ on their return to the everyday world. Many of these experiences were still within the natural world (for example taking walks in the park), however, some participants also described experiencing a sense of wonder in more urban areas (although still often focussed on *intrusions* of the natural world in the urban). This supports the idea that once people have

experienced a sense of the sacred, possibly on a wilderness journey, they may be able to replicate such experiences in different, more ‘everyday’, contexts.

8.2.4 ‘Flow’ and the Interaction with the Surrounding Environment

The experiences described within this research project fit within the characteristics of ‘flow’, as previously described (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975); however, this research provides evidence for a form of flow which is more reliant on the *surrounding environment* than it is on the adventurous activity being undertaken at the time. The experiences described by participants reflect an interweaving of, or lack of distinction between, person and place, self and surrounds, and past, present and future. An interesting factor within the described experiences is that this merging appeared to stem from an interaction between participants and their surrounds which was reliant on aspects of the environment *effortlessly* holding one’s attention. So engrossed were participants in the interaction, that there appeared to be a merging of self with the surrounding environment, in the sense that participants’ attention, desires and requirements were directly in line with the interaction taking place. In this sense, it was the way in which participants were able to approach the interaction, as well as the surrounding environment, which appeared to facilitate such engrossing interaction.

Rather than this ‘merging’ being the result of *activity* challenge and action opportunities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), it appears that the integral factor for participants in this research was the challenge within the *surrounding environmental landscape* – from the apparent perception of the ‘something more than is initially available’ within what would usually be perceived as the ordinary – combined with one’s ability to place oneself within that surrounding environmental landscape as a functioning part of it. In other words, when one is wholly focussed on an environmental stimulus involving a world-perception that challenges the profane, yet presents an action-opportunity to place oneself within that world, then the interaction might result in an engrossing *merging* of self and surrounds.

This consideration of flow highlights the ability of the participants to approach their interactions with the surrounding environment *free from distraction*; to be able to effortlessly focus their attention on, and experience, the place. Would such experiences be described by participants if there was a focus on skill development at the same time, for example? Clearly the fact that participants feel ‘up to’ meeting the challenges presented by a perception of the world as something altogether more than it might first appear is crucial as well, in that they were able to perceive the interaction as presenting *opportunities* as well as challenges.

8.2.5 Preference for Connection to Nature

The findings of this research are consistent with Kaplan and Talbot’s (1983; 1986) descriptions of profound experiences, within an extended period of time (9-14 days) in a wilderness environment (1986, pp. 185-186). Kaplan and Talbot’s (1983) key factors, in terms of environmental qualities that combine to contribute to such experiences, are ‘being away’, ‘extent’, ‘fascination’, and ‘compatibility’ (for an explanation of each quality the reader is referred back to section 2.4.6). Kaplan and Talbot’s factors are commonly related to the human need to *explore* (being away and extent) and to *operate effectively* (fascination and compatibility) (Hagvar, 1999; Stamps 2004).

Kaplan and Talbot’s (1983) factor of ‘extent’ refers to the idea that certain landscapes suggest the possibility of ‘something more’ than is initially viewable; that there are further possibilities in an ‘extended’ landscape. The findings of the current research suggest an effective interplay between ‘extent’ and ‘compatibility’ (sense of connection to something larger / landscape compatible with desired actions) which potentially combines to result in a feeling of connection to the natural world. Additionally, themes which were similar to Kaplan and Talbot’s ‘being away’ and ‘fascination’ (distant from home / effortless attention) appear to be linked through the way in which participants’ paid attention to the environment around them. In other words, while the research highlighted similar key factors, they were potentially related differently, in that the essence of the meaningful experiences described was the result of an interweaving between person and place; indicating that perhaps the

way participants *approached* a landscape (‘being away’ and key factors around ‘fascination’) and *interacted* with the landscape (particularly involving ‘extent’ and ‘compatibility’) might present an alternative relationship between experiential factors: specifically, that a preference for certain environmental qualities might be related to an innate desire to feel a small part of something larger, rather than necessarily an innate desire to explore and operate effectively.

This research also highlighted the way two streams of experience (‘humility’ and being ‘alive to the moment’) might interact, and similarly Kaplan and Talbot (1983) viewed ‘extent’ as a binding force for ‘fascination’ (effortless attention) and directly related to a desire for *connection to the world*. This research supports a link between an interaction with a surrounding landscape which hints at ‘something more’ and a sense of connection to the natural world, and, further, indicates that ‘extent’ plays a pivotal role in many of the meaningful experiences described. Of note is participants’ sense that the place exists ‘on its own’ regardless of humans being there; that it is ‘real’. This is considered a key factor by Kaplan and Talbot in their original description of extent, and is discussed as *higher level coherence*:

This higher level coherence is what gives the ‘other world’ a sense of reality. The wilderness experience is ‘real’ in some rather concrete ways, as well as in a somewhat more abstract sense. It is real not because it matches one’s map of the everyday world (which of course it does not do), but because it feels real – because it matches some sort of intuition of the way things ought to be, of the way things really are beneath the surface layers of culture and civilization (1983, p. 90).

Kaplan and Talbot (1986) viewed *exploration* and *effective operation* as two basic needs which contribute towards our attraction to the mystery in nature (Hagvar, 1999; Stamps, 2004). However, it is worth considering the way in which our desire to be part of something larger might also contribute to the meaning that we might gain from time spent in wilderness environments.

8.2.6 The Potentially Restorative Nature of the Journey

Attention Restoration Theory (S. Kaplan, 1995) involves the suspension of one's 'directed attention' in favour of having one's attention held in an 'effortless' sense by the surrounding environment, and many participants within this research described feelings consistent with the outcomes posited by Attention Restoration Theory – renewal, meaning and purpose – particularly related to the stream of experience around being 'alive to the present'. The consideration of meaningful experiences in terms of Attention Restoration Theory highlights, within this research, the potential importance of being able to perceptually experience a *rested focus of attention*; an effortless attention. It draws attention, once again, to the ability of the surrounding natural environment to supply fields of stimulus which are able to gain, and hold, one's attention. Fields of stimuli commonly described by participants particularly included perceptions of beauty, complexity and diversity.

Attention Restoration Theory involves many other contributing factors as well as *effortless attention*, such as Kaplan and Talbot's (1983) factors of being away, extent and compatibility. The complex nature of such experiences is born out in the results of this research. The elements of the wilderness journey that have contributed to the meaningful experiences for participants have appeared varied, complex and interwoven. It is not possible to narrow it down to one or two causal elements and assert that it is they that have resulted in outcomes such as a sense of renewal; rather, it has proven to be a complex and shifting set of circumstances for each individual's unique experiences. There are, however, several recurring themes around the idea of *effortless attention* which appear to have played a more prominent role than others. These include being away, remoteness, a sense of connection and being in the moment. In the case of this research it appeared that a capacity to attend to particular elements of the landscape depended upon both the environmental stimulus itself and the way one was able to approach the interaction; a complex interaction, difficult to define and unique in each circumstance, but one which supported the idea of a wilderness journey constituting a potentially potent restorative experience.

8.2.7 Sense of Place, and Approaching the Interaction

Sense of place is established in interaction between person and surrounding environment, with the quality of this relationship affected by both the place and what participants might bring with them to the experience (Relph, 1976). While participants bring a series of previous experiences and cultural perspectives to any interaction, it is perhaps by considering the differentiation between what Relph (1976) describes as the ‘conscious’ and the ‘unselfconscious’ authentic experience of place that much is revealed about the potential power of this wilderness journey. An unselfconscious *authentic* sense of place involves approaching a defined ground with an openness, vulnerability and absence of preconception. Applying this to a wilderness context that is also the focus of the present study, Potter writes:

Wilderness defies accurate evaluation; it retains an identity of its own, much deeper and more intricate than we can ever know. The students began to understand this; they sensed that the wilderness must be approached with an open mind and felt its variety of expressions – colour, textures, weather, and life. As Lopez (1986) argued, wilderness’ mystery must be accepted as wisdom to be experienced – sensations that are felt when something sacred is revealed (Potter, 1993, p. 200).

Achieving an unselfconscious authentic sense of place, particularly in the context of such an iconic wilderness journey as the Franklin River, is, however, difficult to achieve. In particular, the inevitable preconceptions about such a journey, and the lack of time spent in any one particular location, constitute factors difficult to overcome. However, there are several elements of the journey that work towards achieving a potentially authentic sense of place. The following section will explore the ways in which a sense of *vulnerability*, openness and connection might contribute towards experiencing an authentic sense of place.

Many participants reported a sense of surprise at the profound impact of the place, not only in a physical sense but also in terms of the challenge to their sense of ‘self’; who they are, and how they fit into the world. Though people inevitably bring cultural and personal expectations to bear on their experience, in many cases the

experience diverged from participants' preconceptions. Participants described a sense of openness and vulnerability to the place as they journeyed down the river, with the capacity of the surrounding landscape to invoke a sense of *vulnerability* commonly articulated by participants. Certain key places, such as the moment of paddling into the Ravine, standing at the top of the Churn or looking out from the cliffs below Newlands, stand out as particularly 'vulnerable' moments, inspiring intense and concentrated feelings.

Vulnerability was also described in terms of the adventurous and challenging nature of the journey. There was a level of concern at the beginning of the journey for many participants about whether or not they would be physically up to the journey, both in terms of coping with the rapids, and also more generally in terms of the portaging and physically 'putting in'. For many participants this level of anxiety made them feel personally vulnerable. While many of these initial concerns were mitigated (often by the guides), there was, for many participants, a sense of trepidation about what each day might bring. Such feelings were exacerbated by the knowledge of being on a river that was constantly capable of rapidly changing water levels or throwing up unforeseen obstacles and challenges.

While the *potentially* adventurous nature of the journey played a part, so too did the fact that participants were *actually* engaged in dangerous and physically demanding activities such as rafting difficult rapids or portaging around unrunnable rapids on slippery rocks. The fact that there is 'actual risk' involved, and that there is potential for loss on such a journey (including loss of life) did appear to change the way in which participants were able to 'be' during other times on the journey. Many of the participants reflected that it was not during the adventurous rapid running or intense moments of portaging that they found themselves involved in what they described as the most meaningful aspects of the journey. Rather, they felt that it was in the quieter times that these experiences occurred. At those quieter moments participants recalled experiences which suggest that they were able to approach the landscape with a sense of openness that appears, at least partially, tied to the more adventurous moments. There appears the potential, as described by participants, for the adventurous or risky components of the journey to change the quieter moments for the participants – adding an *intensity* to the in-between moments that may have been unavailable

without the challenging nature of the extended journey. In other words, the sense of *vulnerability*, or openness, induced by adventurous moments on the trip, may have contributed to achieving a more unselfconscious authentic sense of place (Relph, 1976) than is otherwise possible.

Whether or not such an openness or vulnerability towards interactions with the surrounding environment results in an authentic ‘sense of place’ is debatable. Indeed, some adventurous river journeys have been considered to run counter to authentic place experiences. Wattchow suggests that, “for the participants in this study the message would appear to be clear. The desire to adventure in wild nature runs counter to ambitions we may hold about a place responsive outdoor pedagogy” and further suggests that, “rather than an encounter with a particular place, it is an encounter with a kind of archetypal space – a wild, adventurous and sublime river upon which the paddler can define themselves” (2007, p. 18). While the experiences described within this research may not imply an attribution of meaning towards a *particular* place on a localised scale, they do appear to attribute meaning to the ‘place’ on a larger scale which may well be, at least in part, facilitated by approaching and potential interactions with a sense of vulnerability.

Experiencing an authentic ‘sense of place’ may also be connected to the *foci* of the journey to be undertaken. As Stewart suggests of undergraduate students experiencing the Murray River: “a focus on mastering skills to manage the craft, paddle, equipment, and remaining safe and comfortable can divert attention from the particulars of the river; can make the river a venue for canoeing rather than a place to get to know through canoeing” (2004a, p. 143). Wattchow, too, suggests that “unless outdoor educators can change the way they conceive of and structure encounters with rivers, in a such a way that it escapes from the ‘technical’ and ‘Romantic’ grip of the dangerous rapids, then these rivers (or sections of these rivers) may be destined to remain largely experiences of a placelessness” (2008, p. 17). While a focus on the technical nature of such journeys may negatively impact on participants’ ability to experience an authentic sense of place, Wattchow does suggest that even on such journeys “there were experiences where the river slowed on its floodplain when, for many participants in this study, it did seem possible to experience a direct, sensuous encounter with the river” (2008, p. 17). It seems likely that the *focus* of the

commercial and guided private trips studied within this research project, being different to those of Stewart's (2004a) and Wattchow's (2007, 2008) studies of undergraduate programs (with potentially a younger and more confined age range), had a significant impact on how 'meaningful experiences' were perceived by participants. In particular, the way in which participants experienced the more adventurous elements of the journey as providing a kind of 'comfortable vulnerability' might contribute to facilitating meaningful interactions with the surrounding environment.

While this research and Wattchow's (2007,2008) findings suggest that many of the slower moving parts of the river provided meaningful experiences of place, there is a fundamental difference in the way in which the more adventurous components have been interpreted. Wattchow views the rapids (adventurous parts of the journey) as detractors from serious reflection and place connection, while I would argue that the adventurous sections of the river provided a 'punctuation' or contrast to the quieter sections of river, and thus encouraged moments of reflection and openness to the surrounding environment during the slower moving parts.

It is also interesting to consider how the necessary physical *movement* involved in a wilderness 'journey' or pilgrimage might contrast with Tuan's conception of 'intimacy with place' as being partly defined by a "pause in movement" (1977, p. 138), or with Heidegger's conception of 'dwelling' in a place. Whether or not the idea of 'movement' or journey is conducive to experiencing a 'sense of place' is a question considered by Mullins and Wattchow, who suggest that "for many, travel and mobility are considered as one of the primary threats to a deep and meaningful experience of a place." (2009, p. 7). While movement through a novel environment might preclude a localised experience of place, again, within this research it appears that some participants did experience a more generalised 'sense of place'. While physical movement might negate 'dwelling' in a localised place, several participants suggested that the physical movement of the journey mirrored an emotional journey whilst on the river. Some participants *moved* both physically with the river, and also experientially. In other words, moving with the river was in some ways like 'keeping still'. For some participants a *threshold* was passed over, whereby the surrounding world, at times, appeared differently; a possible movement from the profane towards

the sacred. Some participants *moved* towards imbuing features or locations with meaning that was personally significant. It appeared that the movement *into a place* physically, for some participants, may have facilitated the ascribing of personal meaning to places.

Participant interviews reported strong feelings of belonging and of comfort that appeared to be the result of a potent mix of being ‘present’, environmental stimulus, and the changeable nature of the extended journey which did result in a *sense of place*. It is potentially through a sense of vulnerability, openness and belonging that people may be able to begin to reach out and explore their world in a connected way – by feeling comfortably at home within the world.

8.2.8 Wilderness Experience as a Social and Cultural Construction

If wilderness experiences are considered reflections of our own cultural history, and of pre-packaged desires, expectations of, and intentions for the journey, then the reflections of this study provide more insight into our current cultural condition than about the intrinsic nature of the experience. Much of the discourse surrounding social and cultural construction of the wilderness experience (for example, Brookes, 2001; Cronon, 1995) centres around the idea of reinforcing cultural or historical norms (such as the nature-culture dichotomy), and, indeed, much of this research has reflected the centrality of just such a concept. It is, nevertheless, interesting to consider the actual extent to which the nature-culture dichotomy might be reinforced during the journey. There is no doubt that wilderness areas, such as the Franklin, do appear as separate to our ‘normal’ lived lives (one of the key values reflected upon by participants was ‘being away’). In considering the essence of meaningful experiences for many participants, though, it was the apparent *paradox of separation and connection* that was at the heart of what they reflected upon as meaningful to them. While the Franklin *per se* might not have been essential to the generation of such experiences, there appears little doubt that the peculiarities of an environment like the Franklin are conducive to experiences that included a deeply felt sense of connection and belonging.

It is possible to view the experiences of participants on the Franklin River as being primarily the result of socio-cultural context. Brookes argues that the commercial tourism experience of the Franklin River “delivers an experience which is both profound and satisfying” (2001, p. 17), but goes on to suggest:

Far more is attributed to the experience than is warranted; the sincerity of rafter responses to the experience does not diminish the observation that what was encountered was not nature unencumbered by presuppositions and culture, but the opposite. Tourism of this kind is not an antidote to the estrangement from nature of modern life, but something far more ambiguous which contains much of the estrangement it purports to transcend (2001, p. 17).

Understanding the experiences described here in this light suggests that that they are merely a reflection of participants’ sense of meaning and value. Meaningful experiences are the participants’ projections of their own preconceptions and cultural expectations upon social and environmental interactions on the river. Participant descriptions may reflect nothing more than a cultural yearning for a sense of connection with the natural world.

It is contended here, however, that, while our interactions must take place in a social, historical and cultural context that will affect our interactions with the natural world, this is not to suggest that the meaningful experiences described by participants will necessarily reproduce nature-person dichotomy and produce ‘estrangement’. It is self-serving of our species to claim that the only way we can understand an interaction with ‘otherness’ is by considering that experience a ‘human construct’. As Snyder pointedly observes, “for all the talk of ‘the other’ in everybody’s theory these days, when confronted with a genuine Other, the non-human realm, the response of the come-lately anti-nature intellectuals is to circle the wagons and declare that nature is really part of culture” (2008, p. 353).

This research does not attempt to deconstruct the experience of participants in terms of historical and cultural context. Rather, it focuses on gaining further insight into the human experience of personal interaction. The research, though, points towards the

possibility that, rather than reproducing estrangement from the world (Brookes, 2001), such experiences may produce a deep sense of being in the world, albeit in a complex manner.

In so far as participants were surprised by the intricacies and micro-worlds of the slower sections of river, there appears to be an element of unexpected interaction with the place itself. The purpose of this research is not to determine whether such experiences should primarily be seen as a social construction or something else; rather, it is to consider the essence of the experiences for participants, in light of possible understandings, and in this way, the complex interactions reported here point to something more than a commodified experience that merely reproduces estrangement from nature.

8.2.9 Insights Gained

To consider the results of this research in light of the previously discussed understandings from the literature review is to highlight several key elements related to the experiences described by participants. These include:

- The *perceived* qualities of meaningful experiences
- The importance of the particular environment in evoking ways in which one might be able to approach interactions with the natural world
- The importance of the landscapes' capacity to suggest 'extent'
- The potential for intense interactions to contribute to other meaningful experiences
- The sense of acceptance and comfort about being a part of the world with which one is interweaving / merging / being enfolded within
- The interconnected nature of the world in which one feels themselves being interwoven
- A paradoxical sense (in light of the above) in which this immersion also constituted a point of dislocation, but at the same time presented a possible point of departure from which to explore one's world
- The simultaneous perception of the sacred and the profane

- The paradoxical interweaving of the perception of ‘something other’ and of ‘being part of that something’
- The complex and unique nature of the meaningful experiences described

8.3 Elements of the Franklin River Journey that Appeared to Contribute to the Meaningful Experiences Described

The aim of the following section is to highlight those elements of the wilderness river journey that might assist in facilitating similarly meaningful experiences for participants on future outdoor journeys. It is hoped that an appreciation of the sometimes taken-for-granted elements of the journey described herein might provide ideas for planners, managers, educators and guides, as well as a reinforcement of what is already being achieved but is difficult to describe.

8.3.1 The Journey

Key elements of the Franklin River trips which appeared to facilitate meaningful experiences for participants were centred round the concept of the river *journey*, including leaving home, crossing a threshold, the length of the trip and feeling committed.

8.3.1.1 Leaving the Everyday World Behind

The idea of a journey involves a movement towards something, but also a leaving behind of something known, in the same way that Osterrieth describes ‘pilgrimage’ as a “leaving of home” (1997, p. 32). On a journey such as the Franklin River this takes place in a very tangible way. To stand at the put-in is to look downstream into an unknown world; into a world bordered by steeply forested hills and ridges. When the raft pulls away to disappear around the first bend, the road – and one’s known world – is left behind and the focus is immediately on where the river is going. Sitting in a raft involves looking forward and working one’s way down the river – searching for a path downstream and making small turns, selecting a route and flowing *with* the river. Participants’ whole bodies are oriented towards the river

journey and away from home. It is about constantly looking forward. Indeed, it is unusual to look upstream from the raft, in the direction from which one has come. Previous river reaches are quickly left behind, with the focus on the part of the river one is in, or on upcoming sections. In this way, the Franklin River journey is about looking forward, journeying, towards new possibilities and *leaving the everyday world behind*. The Franklin River journey is ‘contained’ in its own right – all the people, supplies and equipment needed for the journey are present on the trip and there is little cause to be focussed away from the trip.

8.3.1.2 The Length of the Journey

The ‘length of the journey’ was one of the most commonly described components that appeared to contribute towards the meaningful experiences for participants. The extended nature of the journey was described as providing the opportunity to journey *into* the place. At a certain point many participants’ stepped over a threshold or ‘limen’ (as Osterrieth [1997]) describes it) in a way that may not have occurred without an extended timeframe. Martin, in a study of human-nature relationships suggests, that “extended direct experiences in nature were universally seen, by participants, as important to developing a relationship to nature” (2005, p. 48). While it was certainly different for each participant, there was a common sense that around the third or fourth day something changed; many participants reported they were able to be completely *in the time and place* of the river. The length of the journey appeared to be a crucial component for many of the experiences described within this research, and some experiences seem unlikely to have occurred without the possibilities inherent within an extended timeframe. Kaplan and Talbot reported that “a clear pattern has emerged regarding the time course of individual’s reactions to the wilderness experience” (1983, p. 177), and go on to suggest that around day seven “the wilderness inspires feelings of awe and wonder, and one’s intimate contact with this environment leads to thoughts about spiritual meanings and eternal processes” (1983, p. 178). While this research suggests a somewhat shorter timeframe for such experiences, there was a common pattern amongst participants indicating that a threshold had been crossed over.

The length of the journey also provided opportunities for relaxation without the constraints of imminent timeframes. There was time for experiences to unfold in

their own way and to flow towards completion without being impinged upon by competing requirements. In a similar way the end of the journey did not *impinge* on the experience of being in the present moment, for much of the journey. In this way the length of the journey appeared to be a crucial element – providing a time to get *into* the place and interact with it, whilst also providing a buffer against thoughts of returning home. The lower end of journey length necessary for these opportunities to arise seemed to be around six or seven days. While it is not possible to say that this length would be as crucial in different contexts, for many of the participants in this research it was an important element.

8.3.1.3 Commitment to the Journey / Loss of Control

On a journey like the Franklin River participants make a commitment to travelling down the river with a possibly unknown group of people on a defined route with limited options or choices and guided by someone probably not known to them beforehand. In this way participants made a commitment, not only to the journey, but also a commitment to giving up some control. A rafting journey has defined ways of doing things – timeframes dependent on getting from one camp to another in a safe manner, ways of getting around dangerous rapids and ways of camping. Many of these things are beyond any individual participant's control, being in the hands of the guides or group decision making processes (commonly facilitated by the guide). When participants embark on a Franklin River journey in this way they commit to giving up some personal control, to work as a member of a team. This commitment and *giving up of control* seemed to mirror, and possibly add to, some of the meaningful experiences described by participants on the river journey. As Annie Dillard suggests, “there is another kind of seeing that involves a letting go. When I see this way I sway transfixed and emptied” (1976, p. 33). Loss of control manifests as an openness to new, unknown experiences on the journey; an added sense of *vulnerability*. Such a commitment to giving up of control might be expected to lead to negative experiences, but it seems that when the guides were sensitive to this and alleviated safety concerns, some participants found this loss of control liberating.

8.3.2 Signposts to Something Larger

A major component of the meaningful experiences recalled by participants involved features within the landscape acting as signposts to something larger. What follows is a consideration of the qualities of those elements available within the Franklin River landscape, and potentially other rivers with similar characteristics, that might facilitate such experiences.

8.3.2.1 The Geology

The geology on the Franklin River is visually accessible to participants. The river was formed by cutting its way through geological features formed millions of years ago, leaving the evidence of such formative processes exposed. The layers, intrusions, metamorphic features and tilting of mountainsides are all evidence of formative processes that are beyond our usual everyday understanding of physics. Geological features within such a river landscape are difficult to ignore, as are the sensed timescales.

The way the river carves its way through such geological features hints at an ever-changing environment. The process of change is apparent at both macro and the micro scales. The movement from the Precambrian geology of the upper and middle Franklin to the limestone of the lower Franklin is a stunning reminder that one is travelling through an environment formed over hundreds of millions of years, which is continuously undergoing change today. Small, smooth indentations in the river walls hint at the geology being worn away over time by swirling waters – potholes worn away by pebbles and sand – features pointing towards processes working over a scarcely-imaginable timescale and not reliant on human activity. Such geological features are in clear view on rivers such as the Franklin, and appeared to facilitate a moment for pause; a *quietness* within participants.

8.3.2.2 The River Itself

The river itself also hints at something larger. The power, force and inevitability of the river's flow provided the perception that the river cannot be held back, that it is operating according to its own heedless laws. The water's course continues on regardless of impediments. Rapids move large boulders and the water scours marks

high up the river walls, all pointing towards something astir on a larger, incomprehensible, scale. To journey down a wilderness river like the Franklin is to be aware, through interaction with such elements, of one's own relative importance within such an environment.

To be on the river is to go *with the river*, to be pushed inevitably deeper and further downstream. What might appear at first glance to be 'just the river' moves silt, earth, rocks and composted debris downstream towards the oceans. The river is not necessarily perceived as a living thing, but as the binding force within the winding valley. Everything within the valley – the trees, cliffs, stones and living animals – will at some stage be carried downstream by the river towards the ocean. It represents what it is now, and what it will be.

8.3.2.3 The Forests

The sides of the Franklin River are forested for almost its entire length, and the views of the forest from a raft, or from a campsite to the opposite bank, are unique to river travel. Many participant recollections of forests commonly involved *a sense of feeling comfortable and connected*. Being at the bottom of a valley there is a constant view of a wall of forest disappearing towards distant ridgelines. As well, though, to peer into the forest at river level is to see individual trees that could be more than two thousand years old, or a forest glen of rainforest plants perceived as 'complete' or possessing a kind of *absolute value* in their own right – not necessarily 'perfection' in a human sense, but possessing a *rightness* about the way they are. When this is combined with a view to the larger forest, which seemingly contains an infinite number of such items, many participants appeared to gain a sense of feeling *comfortably connected* within a world beyond their imagination.

This sense of *comfort* appeared to be gained through interaction with the smaller individual trees or rainforest 'worlds' that were experienced as complete and beyond human value. It is an experience that is unique to, or very much heightened within, river travel. On bushwalks one is often looking at the forest from the outside, at a distance. Ancient gnarled trees and mini rainforest worlds are often within the heart of a forest, and are not easily viewed on a bushwalk. On a river journey the depths of the ancient forest along the riparian strip are exposed. It is a view into, and of, the

forest that not only inspires a sense of the infinite and the ancient, but also of comfort and connection. The feelings are about the absolute rightness of the micro-worlds within the larger.

8.3.2.4 Waterfalls and Micro-worlds

Waterfall features and micro-worlds are in abundance on the Franklin River. The way the Franklin has formed means that when streams flow from the button grass plains on higher plateaux they often drop steeply, carving canyons or producing waterfalls. The waterfalls provided many participants with a sense that the place existed *on its own* and that such places were ‘complete’ in their own right. The continuous flow of the waterfalls suggested to some that there were entire systems at work that were not immediately visible. It is common to look up incoming streams and be provided with a glimpse of entirely different worlds that disappear around corners. These micro-worlds and disappearing views are features in the landscape which are rich in ‘extent’ (Kaplan and Talbot 1983). It was evident to participants on the Franklin journeys that such worlds, equally as complex as the one they were currently travelling within, could exist in each of the gullies and valleys surrounding the river itself. Indeed, such worlds must exist throughout the mountains and valleys of the South-west wilderness. Again, it was perceived that there is more than is readily available, that possible worlds beyond comprehension were hinted at just beyond the visual horizon.

8.3.3 Travelling on the River

Rivers can cradle participants within them. On a bushwalk it is possible to walk on a ridge or mountainside and extend one’s gaze homeward, or to distant shores, whereas a river does not provide such opportunities. Once on the river, that is where you are.

8.3.3.1 Constantly Connected

Visually, auditorily and physically you are constantly connected to the river while travelling upon it. Participants are continually ‘oriented’ to the river. The river valley and river banks decree that campsites are sloped or oriented towards the river or incoming streams. Where such slopes do not exist, the campsites sit with hills ‘behind’ and the river ‘in front’. The orientation to the river is continuous; one is

either travelling *down the river* or oriented *towards the river*. Movement and orientation is relative to the river.

The constant focus towards the river is expressed both within participants' language and their physical orientation towards it. Indeed, in selecting sleeping spots it is common for participants' feet to face the river (this is again, perhaps, a result of the slope within the landforms). Even when participants wander off for a quiet sit down or a stroll, the river is the defining feature. To sit on a rock and look across the river, with the forest or hills at your back, is the natural position. It is something that may seem self-evident and taken for granted, yet it is unique to river travel and appears to impact upon the way participants pay attention to the river and surrounding landscape.

8.3.3.2 Enclosed Within

To be on a river like the Franklin is to be enclosed within a valley. It is to see a narrow band of the sky for much of the time and be ringed by mountainsides and ridgelines, and to paddle under ancient overhanging trees. One's *focus of attention* is always within the valley; it is impossible to see beyond. Unlike the bushwalking experience, where one can see beyond the immediate valleys and mountains, on a river one's attention is contained. Perhaps more than that, though, much like a feeling of safety within a cave, rivers offer a feeling of being enclosed within or *cradled* by the surrounding environment. It is perhaps easier to *explore* a world from a feeling of safety and comfort. The place, the weather, the forest and the cliffs all seem to enfold you – simultaneously offering possibility, difficulty and comfort.

8.3.3.3 Unique Views and Enticing Possibilities

To be enclosed within a valley, *on a river*, also offers a set of unique views. As one looks across the river it is possible to see both into the heart of the forest, with its seemingly complete worlds, and the forest as a whole as it disappears into the distance. It is a view that is uncommon in other modes of travel. As well, there are unique views of narrow skies, worlds of infinite complexity and of an enticing river as it disappears downstream. Where one has come from – one's back – is screened, and the forward view seems more enticing for that reason. Rivers seem to have an infinite number of possibilities around the next corner. No matter where you are on

the river there is always a view downstream as the river disappears to the left or to the right, though flowing inexorably down. As you pass an incoming side-stream there is a view back up the creek that hints at infinite possibilities – above what can be seen, around the next corner. It is not hard to be drawn towards these enticing possibilities; it is at the core of a river journey. These views hint at worlds beyond view, worlds to be explored, and each one potentially as complete as the one viewable in the present.

8.3.3.4 “Naturalness”

While terms such as ‘pristine’ or ‘untouched by humans’ are not accurate in terms of the Franklin River, there *is* something defining about it in terms of its apparent *naturalness*. It is certainly possible to feel diminished, amazed at complexity and in awe of something larger in a modern urban city environment. Does it matter that the environment one is interacting with is perceived as *natural*? Does where the place came from, the way in which it was created, make a difference? Is the fact that the Franklin River environs are *perceived* as existing regardless of humanity’s presence a crucial element in facilitating the meaningful experiences described by participants? In the case of this research the answer appears to be strongly in the affirmative. It goes to the heart of the surrounding environment being perceived as *existing on its own*, and humans being a small, but not defining, part of the larger *natural* interconnected world.

Rivers like the Franklin do appear to exist in what can be considered their ‘natural state’, which is to say, unmodified by human activity. This is not strictly factual, but for many participants it appeared this way. There are only two points on the trip from where man-made structures can be seen, and the campsites themselves are often so well hidden that without prior knowledge they would be almost impossible to find. It is not an environment that is easy to access from a government agency point of view and the river ‘season’ and the annual number of trips are delimited. The fact that participants could be so confronted by walking on the flat surface of the jetty at the end of the river trip speaks to the importance of the unmodified nature of the environment. Additionally, the fact that the Franklin was saved from drowning at human hands may have in some ways shaped the “untouched” perceptions that participants had of the river.

Several aspects of the trip reinforce perceptions of the ‘pristine’ quality of the Franklin River. Rafting or paddling on the river is a relatively low impact method of travel. The majority of the ground surrounding the Franklin River is rarely trodden. The areas that are used and modified for the comfort of travellers – the campsites and portage tracks – are invariably scoured clean by regular flooding (the campsites are often within high flood zones due to the nature of the step surrounding banks and desire to be close to the river). In this way there are often few footsteps or worn paths seen on the journey. A wilderness river can, then, offer a perception of a ‘pristine’ environment free of human modification, and this perception is one that did affect participants’ experience of the place. The importance of the perception of a ‘natural’ wilderness environment is affirmed by Fredrickson in a study of spiritual inspiration in wilderness settings: “one of the themes that consistently arose in the individual interviews was the importance of being in a *bona fide* wilderness area; in other words, that the trip itself had taken place in a pristine setting, away from the trappings of modern civilization” (1999, p. 30).

8.3.4 River Travel

To travel on a river was a unique and novel experience for many participants, and this brought with it several elements that appeared to contribute to the meaningful experiences described.

8.3.4.1 A Sense of Adventure

Extended river journeys like the Franklin involve moments of real tension and risk. While the risk is managed, and for the most part low, there is a sense that the danger is real when running a steep rapid or standing high above ‘The Churn’ on slippery rocks. Concentration and tension are present. This danger and uncertainty provides a sense of adventure. While these moments of adventure are not necessarily the ones that participants recalled as being the most meaningful, they did appear to affect the way participants interacted with the environment during quieter times. McIntyre and Roggenbuck, in a study of black-water (cave) rafting experiences in New Zealand, suggest that:

Two broad categories of person-nature transactions were identified in the results of our study. Firstly, our study highlighted a situation in which nature is viewed as ‘awesome’, ‘beautiful’ and where competence is scarcely called into question... other situations were also evident where the environment presents a somewhat threatening obstacle to be overcome (1998, p. 419).

While a separation of these types of experience may well occur, it will be of particular interest to facilitators of wilderness river journeys as to how these two ‘categories’ of experience might *interact*; for example, how perceiving the environment as ‘threatening’ might influence a participant’s perception of the environment at other times.

When travelling down the Franklin there are moments of adventure – at which point participants are focussed on the activity at hand – but they are *passed through*. It is not that the Franklin has been conquered or overcome, but that one has been allowed to ‘pass’, and in this passing through, or stepping over a threshold, there are moments of earned relief in the quieter stretches of river and a sense of journeying deeper *into* the place. Without passing through the thresholds of adventure and difficulty, the quieter moments might not appear in the same way. Adventure and difficulty appeared to allow participants to journey deeper into the environment itself. Without difficulty and danger the Franklin River would not be what it is. Participants were able to feel moments of release from potential danger – to experience simultaneously a sense of uncertainty and comfort – which appeared to heighten their *openness* in the quieter moments. Wattchow hints at the possibility of similar interactions:

But of most interest for this paper is the minor theme; *Sensing a connection with river places*. This theme represented responses about more subtle, sensory encounters that participants had with slow flowing sections of rivers, and how they felt themselves first opening to, and then filling with, a sense of connection to those places. This occurred where whole programs were run on meandering sections of a river on its flood plain, such as the Murray River, and on sections of rivers below the major rapids and perceived dangers, such as the lower reaches of the Snowy (2008, p. 14).

8.3.4.2 Simplicity

An extended journey down the Franklin River means leaving behind not only everyday life, but also modern technology. Without the distraction of phones, television, radio or lights, there was a new focus on the simpler things that mattered on the trip, like shelter, food, warmth and companionship. The requirements for each day on a river like the Franklin are relatively simple in terms of what needs to be achieved. As Robert Greenway recalls of wilderness journeys, “just *being* in the wilderness, alone and together, and the simple acts of living and moving together, leaving no trace, cooking and sleeping, tuning in to fire and water and various celestial events, became the fully occupying agenda” (1995, p. 125). This opportunity to concentrate on the simple tasks of the day, free of distraction, was recalled by participants as being an important part of their trip. A focus upon what was important to individuals each day, and a sense of comfort in being able to achieve those simple things, meant that participants were fully engaged. Again, it appeared to be the lack of competing distractions in which such appeal lodged, that enabled participants to feel that they were really ‘there’ in the moment, in the place. The simple nature of the trip extended to the fact that everything one needed fitted into a personal dry-bag. These items proved to be enough, and in many cases there were several items unused for the entire journey. Options were limited, distractions removed and a sense of clarity at times prevailed.

8.3.4.3 Rhythm

The rhythm of rafting trips like the Franklin seems to contribute towards participants feeling ‘in the moment’ or in the place. There is a rhythm about the day to day nature of a river journey. One goes to bed knowing then when you get up in the morning you will have breakfast, pack your gear and head off downstream. While the intricacies of the day are unknown, there is a sense that the daily rhythm combines with a slow journey down the river; a journey *with* the river. Things will happen during the day, but the camp will be at a lower point, one further down the river. Progress will be made and the inevitability of this, and the rhythm of the days, means that there appears less to worry about; that one can relax and enjoy the moment, free of distractions. This day to day rhythm is mirrored in the activity of rafting itself, particularly on the flatter sections.

It is possible to drift along and paddle rhythmically, almost forgetting that you are paddling, and focussing on the world as it goes by or on your own thoughts. In some ways, the rhythm of paddling induces a deeply meditative state of mind. As Harper recalls of an extended canoe trip in Canada:

Near the end of a long day of paddling the sun was low in the sky and my mind had long ceased its normal chatter. I had the sensation of becoming my paddling and all that was around me. Stroke after stroke I was called to merge with my experience until 'I' was no more. Only perception existed, a perception that was more complete, more whole than I have known in a usual state of consciousness (1995, p. 196).

For some participants the rhythmical paddling appeared to add to their sense of merging or interweaving with the world around them. This perception of merging was, at times, related to a slowing down – a focus on the small and the simple – and settling into the rhythm of the place. As Abrams suggests, “perception, in this sense, is an attunement or synchronisation between my own rhythms and the rhythms of the things themselves, their own tones and textures” (1996, p. 54). On an extended river journey like the Franklin it appeared that some participants were able settle *into* the rhythm of the place.

8.3.5 The Social Space

The social experience of living in close quarters with a small group of often unknown fellow participants over an extended period of time, in a relatively unknown environment, provided a unique set of social experiences for many participants, which contributed towards the experiences described. Fredrickson and Anderson, describing wilderness experiences, found that “the way in which individuals react to and interpret the natural environment is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and the ways in which various individuals derive or attach *meaning* from various landscapes is equally complex” (1999, p. 35). They assert that the social aspect of any interaction can play a large, and often overlooked, part within participants’ meaningful experiences:

The results of this study suggest that the social dimensions that characterize the person-place interaction, and in this instance the wilderness place setting, are equally as important to consider in determining the *meaning* that one derives from a particular place. In that, this study found that the affective appeal of a particular place setting has as much to do with the social interactions that occur there, as with the overall visual appeal of the landscape itself (1999, p. 36).

While the present study was context specific, the results highlight the potential importance and impact of the social experience of wilderness journeys.

8.3.5.1 Key Aspects of the Social Context of a Franklin River Journey

Certain aspects of the social space created on Franklin River journeys appeared to contribute towards experiences that involved a questioning of oneself or gaining a renewed perspective. While these factors were difficult to pin down, they were apparent in terms of observations made during the trips and several comments during interviews. It was noticeable that the social space on the trips involved a sense of *comfort* that was, to some degree, non-judgemental. Participants commonly mixed with people they might not normally have chosen to mix with at home, listened to others' perspectives, and lived *with* the group members for the 10 days. People came on the trip, for the most part, as strangers, and while they were initially thrown together, participants worked cooperatively, depended on each other, and experienced the trip together. The result appeared to be a strong sense of social connection between participants. While it is possible that this was the result of a need to 'get on' in terms of achieving the journey, there was a sense that participants were relaxed with each other in a way that was not forced or the result of everyday behavioural expectations.

Two aspects of the river journey seemed to significantly assist in creating this comfortable social space. Firstly, there was the remote and contained nature of the journey. It was unusual to see anyone else over the ten day journey, and in this way participants were free to be the way they wanted to be without fear of being judged

by intruding strangers. This seemed to act as an invitation to *interact openly* towards others on the trip in a manner that might not be usual in everyday situations. Secondly, the guides on many of the trips tried not to ask participants about such matters as what they did for a job or where they lived – information that is usually used to categorise people within social situations. Thus, there was an opportunity to relate to others in a different way or, to some degree, to *reinvent oneself*. While these factors were subtle, and it is not easy to correlate them with participant descriptions of meaningful experiences, there are similarities between the social experience and descriptions by participants of questioning themselves or thinking about things in a new or renewed way. The unique opportunities for creating social space on extended wilderness journeys would, then, seem to be worth considering.

Many participant descriptions of meaningful experience involved a sense of comfort, much of which has been attributed to interactions with the surrounding environment involving a *lack of distraction*. The sense of teamwork that developed also contributed to feelings of *acceptance* by participants. Many suggested that it was after the first few days that they were really able to get into the place. These first few days were sometimes intruded upon by thoughts of home; however, many participants also suggested that their major concerns on the first few days centred around safety and whether or not they would be able to contribute sufficiently to the trip relative to others. Part of the first few days was about becoming comfortable in the new environment, and developing a sense of teamwork was crucial to this. As participants came to feel safe, comfortable and accepted, they were able to free themselves of the worries and distractions that concerned some during the first few days, freeing them to immerse themselves undistracted within the surrounding environment.

8.3.5.2 The Guides

The guides had a major impact upon the tone that was set for the journey. In the first few days, as discussed above, they played a vital role in making participants feel at ease, setting the rhythm of the trip, reassuring participants and providing a clear sense of safety. This provision of *comfort*, in terms of reassurance for participants of their ability to contribute to the trip and the sense that they were safe, appeared to provide a base, a launching pad from which participants could fully experience the

surrounds. Many participants suggested that without this feeling of safety they might not have settled into the trip in the way they did.

In many cases, the guides promoted a sense of *discovery* on the trips. They did not try to pre-empt the experience of the participants. A sense of wonder at a waterfall around a bend, the surprises on a walk up a side creek or the beauty and complexity of a micro-world were all contributing elements for meaningful experiences which seemed to be enhanced by a sense of *personal* discovery – a personalisation of the interaction between person and place. Encouraging participants to do their own exploring away from the campsites and on side-trips also added to this sense of discovery and was appreciated by many participants.

8.3.5.3 Solitude

Solitude is not always something we actively seek in our busy world today. As Kohak suggests, “we obliterate solitude with electronics and blind ourselves with the very lights we devised to help us see. There is nothing wrong with our artefacts, there is something wrong with us” (1984, p. xii). Opportunities for a sense of solitude on the Franklin River journeys were commonly remarked upon by participants, which in some ways is surprising; the campsites are small, activity is focussed around a small social area, and many hours are spent on a raft with others. Yet it was such qualities of the river journey as the rhythm, lack of distraction and sense of being in the moment that appeared to contribute towards participants’ sense of solitude. Thus, the solitude experienced was not always in a physical sense; rather it was a sensory, inward focussed sense of solitude. It had to do with the focus on a *personal* interaction with the surrounding environment and a lack of distraction or intrusion into that personal interaction with place. The absorption within place was not impinged upon by others, then, even though they may have been in near proximity.

8.4 The Value of Such Experiences

This research has illuminated the essence of meaningful experiences described by participants on a wilderness river journey. Being perceived as ‘meaningful’ infers a level of inherent value within the experiences for those individuals involved. Of what potential value, though, are such experiences, individually and collectively, in terms

of adding to our experience of life? Considering meaningful experiences within a wilderness setting Fredrickson and Johnson suggest: “life loses its settled nature, and we are called to see it for the great and uncanny mystery that it is. From such understandings can flow a greater depth of living” (2000, p. 180). The following section will consider ways in which one’s *depth of living* might be augmented. The experiences described by many participants were difficult to articulate, but may well continue to influence them deeply in the subtle ways described by Lopez:

The speculations, intuitions, and formal ideas we refer to as ‘mind’ are a set of relationships in the interior landscape with purpose and order; some of these are obvious, many impenetrably subtle. The shape and character of these relationships in a person’s thinking, I believe, are deeply influenced by where on this earth one goes, what one touches, the patterns one observes in nature – the intricate history of one’s life in the land, even a life in the city, where wind, the chirp of birds, the line of a falling leaf, are known... The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape; the shape of the individual mind is affected by land as it is by genes (1989, p. 65).

8.4.1 Freedom from Distractions

It is difficult, today, to gain experiences that are removed from the distractions of a complex modern world. Wilderness journeys can provide a removal from moment-to-moment technological distractions for an extended period of time. As Martin and Hewison suggest, in relation to Outdoor Education in Australia: “only in the semi-wilderness is it possible for students to be separated totally from all the clatter, distraction, confusion and dulling impact, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, of contemporary urban life in a rapidly developing and changing technological society” (2009, n.p.). Not only are participants separated from technological clatter, but also from the distractions of work and everyday social expectation. This research has shown, in the context of the wilderness journeys investigated, that freedom from distraction plays an important role in enabling participants to really get *into* place; however, the experience of being free from distractions *in itself* was also noted as being of great value to participants.

Attention Restoration Theory (see 2.4.7) suggests a potential value of such experiences in this regard. A sense of rest, recovery and *renewal* is available on wilderness journeys, through a rested focus of attention. The absence of any requirement to *direct one's attention*, through deliberate effort, towards any potentially intrusive distractions while being 'away' from everyday life, can provide a deep level of rest and recovery that is not usually available in everyday contexts. On a journey such as the Franklin River, not only is there a lack of distraction, but there are also elements of the surrounding environment that can capture and effortlessly hold one's attention. The result of such experiences appears to be a deep sense of renewal and relaxation. This rested state also leaves one open to personal and intimate interactions with the environment. Though such valuable experiences are there for the experiencing, they cannot be taken for granted. There is a need to facilitate wilderness journeys that offer such experiences. As Baker suggests, even on a wilderness journey:

The myriad of modern-day forces distracting our awareness from the land can be both overwhelming and insidious; it is all too easy to divert our attention toward the activity, the group, the gear, the gadgets – to be pulled away by the map, the altimeter, the GPS, by everything but the very landscape that can inspire our travels (2005, p. 269).

8.4.2 Transcending the “Profane”

Our ability to transcend our everyday world through wilderness experiences has changed as our everyday lives have changed. Within this research, the intimate interaction and interweaving with the natural world of many participants did provide a profound experience which transcended their everyday *profane* perception of the world. The immediacy and availability of a vast and complex natural world intruded upon them, and the value of such experiences was not lost upon participants. That such experiences appeared so valuable to participants speaks of both the inherent value of perceiving one's place in the world as one of deep connection, but also of the lack of such a perception in our everyday lives.

We find ourselves, today, in a unique position. We are living in a world where nature itself is becoming an endangered species (Kohak, 1992). The modern, western industrialised culture valorises the autonomous individual self, disconnected from its surroundings (Frantz, Mayer, Norton and Rock, 2005). We have, in large part, lost our sense of wonder at the world around us. It is against this background that we need to understand what the impacts of wilderness experiences are, and how they might assist us in living meaningful and worthwhile lives.

8.4.2.1 A Moment for Pause

Experiences described by many participants provided a *moment for pause*. By perceiving the world in a different way, and interacting with it in a way that provided insight into a domain beyond imagination, participants were provided with a sense of questioning; a moment for pause. What followed was an array of uniquely different meaningful experiences; however, this moment for pause itself appeared to provide much value for participants.

The interactions described by participants often involved a perception of the world as containing much more than was usually available to them; a world of infinite complexity and immense scale, of which they were potentially a part. This interaction appeared to contribute strongly to this *moment for pause*. As Alan Garner writes, in a novel involving a young girl and her father who view an ancient hand stencil on the wall of a cave:

They went back to the shaft, and up, and out. The sky seemed a different place. All things led to the bull and the mark and the hand in the cave. Trees were trying to find it with their roots. The rain in the clouds must fall to the ground and into the rock to the Tough Tom. ‘That’s put a quietness on you,’ said Father (1976, p. 54).

This *quietness*, or moment for pause, was valued by many participants as an opportunity to consider things from a different point of view. This is not to suggest that participants overtly entertained thoughts of ‘change’; rather, that the simple act

of pausing one's thoughts might be a valuable and common experience in itself; an openness or vulnerability to experiencing the world.

8.4.2.2 Questioning Oneself

These 'moments of quietness' appear to provide the opportunity for a questioning; a questioning of oneself or one's place in the world; a questioning of the very 'certainty' with which we 'know' the world. Louv, in *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder* (2005), quotes D.H. Lawrence on the superficial nature of such certainty:

Our great-grandfathers, who never went anywhere, in actuality, had more experience of the world than we have, who have seen everything. When they listened to a lecture with lantern-slides, they really held their breath before the unknown, as they sat in the village school-room. We, bowling along in a rickshaw in Ceylon, say to ourselves: 'It's very much what you'd expect'. We really know it all. We are mistaken. The know-it-all state of mind is just the result of being outside the mucous-paper wrapping paper of civilization. Underneath is everything we don't know and are afraid of knowing (D.H. Lawrence, in Louv, 2005, p. 58).

The questioning of our own human hubris today appears the exception rather than the rule. Opportunities for such questioning are rarely sought out, as either an educational outcome or commercial goal, and yet, such experiences are recalled by participants as meaningful and profound. What might be the value of such experiences in our world today? To question our certainty may provide opportunities for further growth, understanding and/or connection to our world. As Louv suggests, "the know-it-all state of mind is, in fact, quite vulnerable. In a flash it burns, and something essential emerges from its ashes" (2005, p. 69).

8.4.2.3 An Interweaving with the World

The essential quality of one stream of meaningful experience described by participants was an *interweaving with the natural world*, and the value of such experiences is potentially profound. The immediate benefit appeared to be *a sense of comfort*, not only in the natural world, but also with oneself and, potentially, one's

place in the world. This sense of comfort was reflected upon by many participants as valuable in itself.

To feel comfortable *in* the natural world, though, may also contribute, in a broader context, to developing a relationship *with* the natural world (Martin, 2004). Most people today are more profoundly separated from nature than has ever been the case. Humans have lived an intimate existence within nature for all their evolutionary history; today, however, this is the exception rather than the norm (Pretty, 2002). This separation from nature may have such negative impacts as physical and emotional illness, decline in social interaction and a loss of spirituality (Martin and Hewison, 2009). If a relationship with the natural world is seen as positive, then experiences such as those described by many participants in terms of an interweaving with it may be of considerable value. Martin (2005) describes a fluid continuum of relationship with the natural world, whereby participants might move from feeling *alienated from nature* towards *travelling through nature*, *caring for nature* and finally feeling *integrated with nature*. Experiences such as those described on the Franklin River journey clearly contribute to developing a stronger relationship with the natural world and, at times, fit within what Martin would consider the ‘integrated with nature’ realm: “an *Integrated with Nature* perspective is one characterised by a sense of unity with nature. It’s an orientation in which participants acknowledge a spiritual or sacred element in their relatedness to nature” (2005, p. 42). A deeper *relationship* with the natural world may well bring with it a level of care for, and commitment to, the environment. Shultz argues that “the types of environmental concerns people develop are associated with the degree to which they view themselves as interconnected with nature” (2000, p. 391). He suggests that “environmental concern is tied to a person’s notion of self and the degree to which people define themselves as independent, interdependent, interdependent with other people, or interdependent with all living things” (2000, pp. 391-392).

The impact we have on the natural environment will affect the way we are able to live in the future. While issues such as climate change can be understood through conventional science, the objectification that is intrinsic to the scientific method may continue to reinforce our alienation from the natural world. On the other hand, it may well be that the deep sense of connection to the natural world that frequently

occurs on wilderness river journeys might offer an alternative point from which to argue for similar outcomes. As Shultz *et al.* suggest:

Perhaps one of the ways in which encounters with nature can transform an individual is through a sense of connectedness... environmental education has long sought to promote pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours, but has achieved only limited success. Perhaps, educational activities that promote a connection with nature will have longer lasting effects (2004, p. 41)?

Feeling a deep sense of connection with, and relationship to, the natural world may be of immense value in this regard. For some participants the realisation of a sense of connection with the natural world appeared also to be a subtle sense of paradox that on the one hand involved the possibility of connection with the natural world, but on the other a sense of separateness from the natural world through the recognition of a 'something larger'. It was not simple enough to say that, for some, they were connected and at the same time separate; rather, both possibilities were always present. It is difficult to conceive of the possible value of such experiences, except to say that perhaps they imply a connection to the world, not so much in terms of a 'relationship' with the natural world, as constantly 'being in the world'.

8.4.2.4 A Sense of Perspective

To gain a sense of perspective on what seems important in life – to be stripped of our usual sense of self importance and to be able to interact with the surrounding environment with some humility – of what value are such experiences? Potter and Gray suggest that “the depths and richness of meaning constructed in a wilderness setting can nurture an openness to view the world from multiple perspectives, create powerful emotions, foster new understandings and ultimately lead to substantial growth” (1999, p. 65).

For many participants the experiences caused them to think deeply in terms of what they considered to be right and wrong; of what was of value and importance. The world of experience may involve a level of *pre-reflective* value or a hint of 'realness' pre-existent within the world. Kohak claims that “value is something we perceive, that is, encounter on the prereflective, prepredicative level of dator intuition, or

simply, of seeing” (1992, p. 174). This research highlighted a perception of values that had a strangely noetic quality, and there was a sense that what was important was *remembered*. This remembered value appeared to be ‘received’ from the wilderness experience:

This is why we take our students to learn ethics in the wilderness. We do not seek to teach them a list of ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ or even much at all about how to act in specific situations. We seek, instead, to inspire them to dedicate themselves to a passionate and personal search for ethical wisdom... We count on the sublimity of a life in nature to unsettle the students and open them to the possibility of a life-transforming experience. And we enlist the beauty of a life in nature to give them the experience of how rich a life well lived can really be (Fredrickson and Johnson, 2000, p. 179).

This shift in *perspective* appeared to involve a profound questioning of one’s connection to the world; of how one might be placed within the world. But, whilst reconfiguring the boundary between self and world is potentially invaluable, this may still not be as important as the *recognition of uncertainty* about making the distinction in the first place. As Hillman suggests:

Since the cut between self and the natural world is arbitrary, we can make it at the skin or we can take it as far out as you like – to the deep oceans and distant stars. But the cut is far less important than the recognition of uncertainty about making the cut at all. This uncertainty opens the mind to wander again, allowing fresh considerations to enter the therapeutic equation (1995, p. xix).

Many environmental psychologists view the individual’s relationship to the natural world as the key element in defining the way they view and act towards the environment (Beringer, 2003; Frantz *et al.*, 2005; Roszak, 1995). The ability to expand the sense of self to include ‘other’ may be a key component in changing individual attitudes to the natural world. This research supports the idea that wilderness experiences might aid in breaking down self / other barriers. As Greenway suggests, “with regard to the wilderness experience... we can say about the

psychological changes taking place in the wilderness that there is a shift from culturally reinforced dualism-producing reality processing to a more nondualistic mode” (1995, p. 131). Recent research into ‘self / other’ overlap and resultant empathy suggests that including nature in self could have important relational implications (Frantz *et al.*, 2005) and for the environmental attitudes we hold (Schultz, 2000). Schultz proposes: “objects (e.g., plants, animals, other people) are valued because of the degree to which they are included within an individual’s cognitive representation of self” (2001, p. 336). Peter Martin reflects on his experience with cliff environments: “with this growing sense of identity of relatedness with nature comes a desire to look more critically at the culture we have created and to care more for the environment of which I am a part” (1996, p. 7).

8.4.2.5 A Sense of Humility

Positive psychologists, as well, view experiences such as those described in this research as potentially valuable. Positive psychology seeks to enable individuals to lead meaningful lives by fostering well-being through an understanding and enhancement of factors leading to growth (Berman and Davis-Berman, 2005). It is concerned with understanding, developing and using positive personal traits such as empathy, humility, altruism and spirituality to assist the construction of meaningful lives (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Several of these ‘positive’ traits are connected to one’s perception of ‘self / other’. Humility, for example, potentially involves a lowering of the self barriers and the desire to protect those barriers. As Tangney suggests:

Humility not only implies an accurate assessment of oneself... but also entails a ‘forgetting of the self,’ an outwardly directed orientation toward a world in which one is ‘just one part.’ This process of becoming ‘unserved’ may have significant psychological and physical benefits (2002, p. 416).

Indeed, there may be many psychological advantages to a sense of becoming ‘just one part’ within an interconnected world, including relief from the consuming need to protect oneself from the ‘outside’ world. Tangney suggests; “there are many advantages to ‘escaping the self,’ not least of which is a relief from the burden of self-preoccupation... and the ‘Western’ imperative to defend the vulnerable self”

(2002, p. 416). A loss of the need to ‘defend the self’ or ‘gain acknowledgement’ for oneself was commented on by some participants as a meaningful outcome from the Franklin River journey.

Interviewer: “I’m also interested in your other comment that it diminishes your ego which never really fully comes back. So does it change the way you see yourself as an individual?”

“Yes. It hasn’t made me less social. It hasn’t made me less inclined to engage with the human world including its politics. It’s made me less concerned that, it’s made me less concerned that anything that I do is appropriately acknowledged... Yes. That’s probably the single most obvious way in which the loss of ego on the Franklin has stayed with me.” (Richard PTE)

Within positive psychology spirituality, transcendence, mindfulness and flow feature as recognised contributors to personal growth (Emmons, 2006; Snyder and Lopez, 2007).

8.4.2.6 A Renewed Wonder at the World

The uncertainty involved in experiences such as those described may well lead to a renewed *sense of wonder* at the world around us (Hillman, 1995). Indeed, the questioning of ‘the cut’ between oneself and the world may extend beyond what we refer to today as the ‘natural world’. The ingrained dualism in western culture, wherein humankind is viewed as radically separate from the natural world, has a long history in the western mind (Oelschlaeger, 1991) and is not restricted to ‘wilderness’ or the natural world as we might consider it today. As Emerson suggested: “philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which philosophy distinguishes as the not me, that is both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, Nature” (2009 [1836], p. 3). While this research has suggested that for many participants the essence of their meaningful experiences was an *interweaving* with the natural world of which they were a part, the sense of wonder at the interconnection experienced may well extend to include others, as well as what we might usually consider the natural world. This possibility was reflected within participants’ shifting sense of perspective, which was often

about one's place in the world, but also about relationships with others, particularly family and friends. This sense of wonder, then, appeared to be of great value:

What is the value of preserving and strengthening this sense of awe and wonder, this recognition of something beyond the boundaries of human existence? Is the exploration of the natural world just a pleasant way to pass the golden hours of childhood or is there something deeper? I am sure there is something much deeper, something lasting and significant. Those who dwell, as scientists or laymen, among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life... those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts (Carson, 1965, p. 88).

To be surprised by the world, to take a moment for pause, to gain a glimpse of another world beyond the *profane* or to question one's individual sovereignty can be a profound experience. The sense of wonder experienced by participants was recalled as something which they valued and were keen to repeat – both by going on other wilderness journeys in the near future, and by being able to *experience* that same sense of wonder back in their everyday lives. This wonder at the world was an *experience*, and it was the experience which participants valued. While it may be difficult to articulate the value of such experiences, the impacts appear to be profound, not only to individuals but perhaps also to the extended world of which we are a part. As Washington suggests, “bringing back our sense of wonder is not just a peripheral issue.... on all counts I believe that this is not just ‘something worth doing’ it is *the* thing worth doing” (2002, p. 87). It is worth doing because to have the opportunity to question oneself and one's place in the world, through *experience*, potentially involves questioning something fundamental about the way we view the world.

8.4.3 Acknowledging the Perceptual Realm of Experience

Today, much of our effort to ‘educate’ students or adults about environmental values and their place in the world relies upon scientific knowledge and logical arguments

within the conceptual realm of understanding. Yet this is not the only way to effect change, and in any case, in many ways it has proven to be ineffective for educators and conservationists seeking to preserve wild places and species. As Livingston suggests, “there can be no ‘rational’ argument for wildlife preservation, just as there can be no logical explanation of quality experience...There is no ‘logic’ in feeling, in experiencing, in states of being. Yet these same phenomena appear to be the prerequisite for wildlife preservation” (1981, pp. 116-117; quoted at greater length on p. 19). Thus, we must consider more than logical conceptual arguments if we are to influence peoples’ values. We need to include, and be able to justify, an experiential side to education and nature-based tourism that acknowledges and seeks to facilitate the pre-reflective, perceptual realm of experience if we are to influence values. We often fail to acknowledge the potential importance of ‘perceptual experience’ in relation to value. As Kohak suggests, “we do not commonly associate the language of perception with the experience of value” (1992, p. 173). Yet, if we are to acknowledge the value of participants gaining a renewed sense of perspective, of questioning themselves or their place in the world, then we must also acknowledge the crucial *primary role* that ‘perceiving’ the world might play in terms of developing values; of ‘perceiving’ what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’:

I am persuaded that the ability to formulate an adequate and efficacious conception of value is contingent on a prior, prereflective *perception* of value – and that were we to *perceive* the world as devoid of value and *conception* of value that reason might formulate would remain as formal and unpersuasive as Max Scheler accuses Kant’s conception of being... I wish to claim that value is something we perceive, that is, encounter already on the prereflective, prepredicative level of dator intuition, or simply, of seeing. The stream of our lived experience, as James, too, recognizes in the work cited earlier, is not really a ‘buzzing, blooming confusion.’ It presents itself as a meaningfully ordered context for which Husserl introduces the term *Lebenswelt* and which Jan Patocka shows convincingly to be ‘a world of good and evil,’ that is, *ab initio*, prereflectively value laden (Kohak, 1992, pp. 173-174; partly quoted on p. 241).

If we acknowledge the role that experience might play in formulating values, then we must also be able to articulate and justify the crucial role of prereflective experience. Further, we, as educators, managers and guides, must be able to facilitate, as effectively as possible, experiences that provide opportunities for such vital preconceptual interactions with the world. This research highlights the potentially meaningful role that such experiences might play in the way we perceive the world, and that might subsequently influence our conception of values. The crucial importance of such experiences is highlighted by Kohak when he suggests that “the painful flaws in our conception of values which are letting us drift to an ecological apocalypse, I believe, reflect far more a perceptual than a conceptual failure, and so call less for a new conception of the good than for a new way of *seeing* the good” (Kohak, 1992, p. 173).

8.5 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has sought to further illuminate the essential qualities of the participants’ river experiences by exploring the results in relation to the literature surrounding the previously discussed understandings of meaningful experiences in wilderness environments. The insights gained included a clear focus on the perceived qualities of the meaningful experience, the way one might approach interactions with the surrounding environment and potent elements of landscape which contribute strongly to meaningful experiences. This chapter also described in some detail those elements of the Franklin River journey that appeared to contribute strongly to the meaningful experiences described, with a particular focus on the riverine wilderness landscape itself. In addition, this chapter has considered the possible ways in which such experiences might contribute value to participants, both while they are on the journey, and potentially on return to everyday life.

Chapter 9 – Limitations, Implications and Future Directions for Research

9.1 Introduction

This chapter will consider the key limitations of the research project and make transparent the techniques and strategies that were used to minimise these.

Additionally, implications of this research will be considered for both practical and academic contexts and opportunities for further research which this project has highlighted will be explored.

9.2 Limitations of the Research

While this research has been successfully defined and guided by a phenomenological approach, it is also limited by it. Qualitative research of a phenomenological nature embraces subjectivity, individuality and multiple perspectives that occur in specific contexts, and, as such, is limited by its ability to generalise results to alternative contexts. Patton suggests a set of “criteria for judging the quality and credibility of qualitative inquiry” (2002, p. 544), and the following sections will discuss several of these in relation to potential limitations.

9.2.1 Limitations for Generalisation

A qualitative phenomenological approach to research involves a focus on gaining an in-depth understanding of human experience in a particular context (the aim of this research), and achieves this by considering the subjective perspectives of individuals or particular groups of people within that context. The trade-off for depth in understanding human experience is an implicit loss of generalizability and objective ‘truth’ which can be applied to other contexts. A phenomenological approach privileges the experience of individuals experiencing a particular phenomenon under investigation, within a specific context. The descriptions flowing from any such study, and in particular the researcher’s interpretations of the data, are subjective and

not generalizable. Wattchow, also discussing a phenomenological study, points out that:

One of the shortcomings, or realities, of this kind of research is that it cannot produce claims that can be generalised to other people or contexts. The researcher's interpretations of the data, and its representations in research texts, can only apply to a particular group of people in a particular context and time. It remains up to the reader of the research to contemplate how the finding may, or may not, apply in their situation (2007, p. 11).

While the results of this research may not be generalisable, it is hoped that the essential qualities of the experiences will ring true with readers, and that they will be able to make use of the descriptions and interpretations within this study.

9.2.2 Reflexivity and Subjectivity

Reflexivity calls upon researchers to “explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research” (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999, p. 228). Common to qualitative research, this project involved the researcher framing the questions, making decisions about how the research would be conducted, and interpreting the data. Clearly, while every effort has been made to remove my own bias from this research, some will remain. In particular, there is the danger that I might actively select and interpret data that would support my own prior beliefs. As Fielding and Fielding suggest, there is a “tendency to select field data to fit an ideal conception (preconception) of the phenomenon” (1986, p. 32). It is imperative, therefore, that I be transparent about my previous experiences as a recreational paddler and outdoor educator, as well as, in particular, my prior experiences as a rafting guide on the Franklin River. While I did have preconceptions in terms of the types of meaningful experiences that participants might have, based primarily on personal experience, there were several factors which indicate that these biases were minimised within the research project, not least of which was, from the outset, an honest desire to learn.

The phenomenological approach itself assisted in two ways. Firstly, the call for ‘bracketing’, or suspension of all preconceptions, is a clear and integral part of phenomenological philosophy and its methodological approach. Bracketing can be a hard thing to understand until one actually tries to put it into practice, and while its achievement is difficult, to have it foregrounded means that one continually critiques decisions made whilst searching for influences from personal preconceptions. Secondly, the phenomenological approach required me to experience the phenomenon from the same perspective as the participants in the study. The impact of this cannot be overstated. From early on the first trip it became clear to me that I was exploring a phenomenon from a perspective rarely experienced previously. To be a client on the Franklin River journeys was a very different experience to guiding or being in charge of a private trip. While a good deal of effort was required to let go of responsibility, the rewards were clear and present.

Working with other independent researchers also helped ensure that my own ideas did not override the process. Independent researchers were involved at three key stages; during the original research design / posing of questions, during initial emergent theming and then as the interviews were coded and mapped. This process was particularly useful in terms of the coding / concept mapping of individual interviews, as it provided feedback on the analysis of the data, but also provided the confidence to proceed with further coding and mapping. Finally, that I was genuinely surprised by many of the results from the research indicated that the data was largely selected and analysed without reference to any ‘ideal pre-conception’ of the phenomenon on my part.

9.2.3 Authenticity of Responses

There was also a danger with this research approach that, having myself on the journey, and the research outlined prior to the trip, the participants might provide ‘what I was after’. It was stated at the outset that I was interested in discussing, at the end of the trip, those experiences that participants found most meaningful or moving during the trip; in other words, what participants felt that they got from the trip. In this way, two things may have occurred: firstly, that participants may have placed an

undue amount of focus on potentially ‘meaningful’ experiences; and secondly, that participants might have been inclined to describe experiences that they believe I might find ‘meaningful’. Indeed, many may have been inclined to recall experiences that are viewed as social or cultural expectations of what ‘meaningful experiences’ might be on a wilderness journey down the Franklin River. Again, strategies were put in place to minimise these limitations to the research. From the outset it was made clear to the participants that I:

- had no ‘hypothesis’ that I was trying to prove,
- had a desire to view the river journey from each participant’s own individual point of view,
- had no preconceptions about the about the outcomes of the research,
- would minimise any intrusions on the participant’s experiences, and
- would not conduct interviews during the main part of the journey.

Ultimately, the key strategy employed in this regard was my behaviour during the trip. A great deal of effort was made to avoid discussing prior findings, personal ideas or desired outcomes during the journey. More than that though, I operated with a level of *integrity* which showed that that I was open to new experiences, learning and seeing things from others’ points of view. This absence of ‘judgement’ and acceptance of other viewpoints was something that was continually practiced whilst on the trips.

9.2.4 Particularity

One of the dangers with the approach taken to the research was that the ‘particularity’ of individual experiences might be lost in the search for collective patterns. By moving between the individual and the collective in a search for the essential qualities of participant experiences, there is the chance that the individual recollections will not be ‘telling the story’. It is the individual recollections and descriptions upon which a phenomenological approach is based, and it is imperative that they be preserved and illuminated. In the case of this research, whilst there was a phase of the data analysis that focussed on a search for patterns and commonalities, was for the clear purpose of finding a starting point from which to explore potential

‘streams of experience’ through the individual recollections grouped around thematic hubs that the search for the invariant structure or essences of the phenomena proceeded. While it is not possible (and was not the purpose of this research), to consider all the particularities of each participant’s recollections, by keeping individual recollections at the forefront of any search for the essence of the phenomenon under investigation, the research endeavoured to preserve experiences unique to the individual.

9.2.5 *Triangulation and Depth*

Given the aim of providing depth in terms of understanding the experience of others, there is always the chance that the research might not capture enough perspectives to supply that depth. This research project attempted to combat this limitation with two key strategies. The first of these was to make use of a range of data collection methods so that participants would have recourse to multiple ways of describing their experiences. By involving interviews, optional journals, participation, observations and follow up emails participants were given manifold opportunities to reflect on their experiences, and I could make use of multiple perspectives to confirm or critique emergent ideas. Secondly, the number of participants involved in the research project was left open-ended until such time as it became clear that additional data was not providing new perspectives or avenues of investigation. The sense that the essential qualities of the experience were already present within the data occurred prior to the final trip, and was confirmed by the data gathered on that trip.

9.2.6 *Quality and Credibility of Inquiry*

The previous sections have pointed out the limitations inherent within this research project, in order to make plain the ways in which such limitations have impacted upon the research. Such qualitative research, involving human experience *in situ*, will involve the subjectivity of the researcher – indeed, a phenomenological approach embraces this. Whilst there are multiple techniques employed to minimise researcher bias, limitations are unavoidable. The project has not sought to reveal ‘objective truths’; rather, it seeks to supply an enhanced and deepened understanding

of the phenomena studied, and to make a contribution to the continually evolving dialogue around this topic, both academically and practically. Ultimately an assessment about the credibility and quality of this inquiry resides with the reader of this research, and the question ‘does it ring true?’ in providing an increased understanding of the phenomenon.

9.3 Practical Implications of the Research

While the research findings cannot be generalised beyond the context from which they have been derived, there are aspects of the trips that participants persistently described as significant in terms of meaningful experiences, and which might be ‘transferable’; adding to one’s ability to facilitate similar experiences. This project has sought to deliver to guides, facilitators and educators an in-depth description of possible meaningful experiences in order to provide useful considerations for devising and implementing successful educative programs ‘on-the-ground’.

That participants recalled experiences which they described as meaningful, moving or profound, on a wilderness journey such as the Franklin River, should be encouraging to guides and educators working in similar environments. The two streams of experience identified and described in this thesis commonly involved a sense of ‘perspective’ or questioning of oneself, which highlights the potential value of such experiences. Are such experiences worth the considerable time and effort that it might take to facilitate them? This research suggests that they are. The following observations outline areas where educators, guides and program designers might make a difference in similar contexts.

A feeling of safety – The ability of the guides to assist participants in feeling *comfortable* in the environment, both on and off the river, enabled participants to settle into the trip, and potentially into the place. Many participants recalled feelings of anxiety or concern in the first day or two of the trip, but these were alleviated by the guides, and reassurance that the trip leaders would not place participants in unnecessary danger. The guides played a significant part in providing a sense of social comfort as well, often based around respect, inclusion and a non-judgemental

attitude. The lesson here for educators / guides is that adopting a ‘nurturing’ attitude towards participants, particularly early in the trip, can help participants feel physically and socially safe within what is otherwise an anxiety-generating environment. This ‘nurturing’ attitude requires a level of integrity from the guides, particularly as it relates to a social sense of safety described above. The focus, then, for educators and guides should be on recognising participant anxiety in an unknown and potentially ‘hostile’ environment, and actively seeking to alleviate those concerns in order to make participants feel comfortable.

An element of adventure – While there are reasons to ensure participants feel safe (as described above), there also appear compelling reasons to include some level of ‘inherent’ adventure in an extended wilderness river journey. The Franklin River experience features rapids, often exhilarating and technically challenging, and a sense of adventure that appeared to be a key element of the experience – and indeed a major motivation for undertaking the trip in the first place. Firstly, the difficult sections of the river provided moments of *release* for participants during some of the quieter moments of the journey, which appeared to add to their ability to interact in a meaningful way with the surrounds. Secondly, the element of adventure on the journey provided sensed moments of *vulnerability* on the trip. Again, this vulnerability appeared to provide participants with a degree of openness in their interactions with the surrounding environment and others. While the approach adopted to planning the journey decides, to some degree, the level of adventure, it was often the way the guides handled such high-adventure moments that appeared to affect participants. Moments of inherent adventure that were handled professionally by the guides constitute ‘threshold’ moments in which one’s interaction with the surrounding environment is dramatically heightened; becomes dramatically more immediate. The implication for planners and managers is that the choice of venue, and of staff, is critical in providing opportunities for the meaningful experiences described by participants within this project. An element of well-handled inherent adventure on a wilderness river journey sharpens trip participants’ experience of the place. For educators and guides on such journeys there is a responsibility to embrace the adventurous elements of the journey, handle them professionally in a way that takes into account participant desires for safety, and recognise them as valuable and effective components of the journey.

It is also worth noting the timing of the adventurous parts of the Franklin River journey. The adventure tends to be low at the start (Collingwood and upper Franklin), peaks in the middle (ravine), and reduces at the end (below Newlands). While this may appear accidental in terms of its being a function of the river itself, it does represent optimal programming in many ways, and may be worth considering in the planning of other journeys.

A sense of discovery – The ability of the guides to provide participants with the time and space to have their own set of unscripted and unexpected experiences was recalled as a contributing factor for many participants. It was commonly the small things, like the leatherwood blossoms floating in an eddy or the pieces of bark washed up on the shore that fascinated participants. But it was not just the objects within the landscape; whatever participants found meaningful or significant was potentially legitimate. It was not Rock Island Bend or Thunder Rush (iconic symbols of the Franklin) that the guides insisted participants see as the most significant parts of the river; rather, the guides allowed participants to have their own journey, relax into the place and find personal meaning. As well, the opportunities and encouragement provided by the guides for participants to explore the complex micro-worlds to be found up small side creeks, in forest glades and in canyons were often recalled as significant and meaningful. On a river journey such as the Franklin it is up to the guides to provide such opportunities, not only through knowledge of potential spots for exploration, but also through providing participants with the *inclination* to explore (sometimes without the guides) both on the river and around camp. Educators and guides on river journeys provide an invaluable opportunity when they take the time to pull over, potentially in the middle of a busy rafting day, for a brief walk up a creek, or encourage participants to explore some distance away from camp. Without the opportunities, encouragement and desire for participants to ‘discover’, facilitators are potentially failing in their responsibility to deliver, to the best of their ability, a range of meaningful and worthwhile experiences.

Lack of distraction – It became apparent, particularly through observations while on the journey, that the guides were sensitive to the experience of the trip participants. They rarely drew people back to their everyday working or domestic lives, thereby

providing people with the space to ask searching questions of themselves. Whilst such an approach might appear to increase the divide between everyday life and a journey in the ‘wilderness’, it did seem to enhance participants’ ability to get *into* the place. This research suggests that educators / guides in the field can add to participant’s lack of distractions by:

- deliberately refraining from making comments that might draw participants back into their everyday lives,
- not asking participants what they are likely to do on their return (even simple things like asking what they will eat when they get back to town can draw participants away from their current context),
- encouraging participants to explore on their own,
- allow long moments of silence while rafting with others or around camp, and
- modelling quiet, reflective moments.

Wilderness river journeys provide an environment that holds participants ‘within it’, minimising distractions. Planners and managers should act in a way that enhances this.

Length of the journey – There is little doubt that much of what has been discussed in terms of the way participants might approach interactions is made possible by the length of the trip. The extended nature of the journey provided opportunities for participants to settle *into* the place, have experiences in their own time, and free themselves from distraction. The importance of an extended journey cannot be overstated. Many of the experiences may not have occurred in such a profound way without at least six or seven days on the journey. Opportunities for experiences such as those described within this project may well be enhanced, then, when planners, managers and educators choose journeys with extended timeframes (ideally seven days or more). Outdoor educators and program designers should advocate for journeys of an extended length when they deem them to be of significant value. It can often be difficult, in a school or commercial climate, to push for longer trips, however this research suggests strongly that such efforts are potentially well rewarded.

A river environment – The river environment provided many landscape elements that acted as signposts towards something larger. Exposed geological features,

ancient forests and disappearing streams contributed to the sense of ‘extent’. Additionally, ‘beauty’ played a significant role in participant recollections. The apparently infinite number of *diverse* and *complex* worlds that were noticeable on the river added to participants’ sense of wonder. To be held *within* a steeply walled environment for ten days was also a significant factor. Clearly, the selection of the site for a journey, by program managers or educators, can play a key part in providing the opportunity for similar experiences.

Discussing experiences – Participants benefitted from explicitly discussing their meaningful experiences. Several of them expressed appreciation for the opportunity to draw those experiences back to the front of their mind, and though they could never be fully reanimated, or even described, to some degree this ‘made real’ those experiences. There can be an inclination amongst guides / facilitators to avoid talking about such ‘airy-fairy’ experiences; to simply leave ‘the experience’ to speak for itself. This research suggests, however, that if guides can openly discuss with participants what they found most meaningful about their journey (preferably near / at the end of the trip), then they may be adding value to the significance of the trip, and foregrounding potentially profound and significant experiences. Additionally, there is the potential to use language that reflects the intimate ‘interactions’ that might occur, and focus on what participants might *receive* from the surrounding landscape, rather than what they might *take* from such interactions.

Approaching experiential interactions on a wilderness river journey – As we have seen, participants benefitted from approaching the surrounding environment with a sense of vulnerability, ‘openness’ or lack of preconception. Guides and outdoor educators also have a role to play in this. While there may be value in understanding the physical, cultural or historical context that one is entering, this should be weighed against the need to not pre-empt participants’ perceptions. In particular, it seems incumbent upon educators to avoid ‘typing’ the experience one might have on a journey. By specifying a likely ‘type’ of experience, such as ‘spiritual’, facilitators may be robbing participants of the immediacy of discovery. This is a sentiment echoed by Potter in his consideration of a leader’s role on wilderness trips:

It is therefore essential to note that during the pre-trip preparations leaders should not attempt to tell students what positive feelings they should have during and after the experience... The unexpectedness of the intra- and interpersonal growth attained during a wilderness experience leads to further and more meaningful growth. Therefore leaders should paint a realistic picture of the objective components of the trip while revealing little of the subjective or affective domains (1993, pp. 303-304).

Educators and guides, then, should encourage participants to have their own experiences and interactions with the surrounding environment by promoting exploration, solitude, discovery, reflection and simply 'being' in the place.

9.4 Theoretical Implications

Aside from its practical implications, the research also has academic significance and implications. It has affirmed the usefulness of a phenomenological research framework for attaining in-depth descriptions of meaningful human experience. In particular, the application of phenomenological methods in a remote wilderness context was able to preserve, respect and privilege participant experiences. Gathering data about personal human experience is a difficult process, often amplified by working in an outdoor environment. One of the main concerns in gathering qualitative data about participant experience was that such experiences, as participants lived through them, would not be unduly impinged upon by the research itself. The techniques used in this research proved to be effective in preserving the experiences for participants.

In addition, this research has highlighted the crucial importance of considering the perceptual realm of experience. It was the consideration of what participants *perceived* within their interactions with the surrounding environment that provided the essence of the experiential interactions. Additionally, consideration of the perceptual realm allowed participant recollections to say more than was originally articulated. Indeed, by considering the possibility of the 'things' being *perceived* as 'something more', participant recollections revealed a pattern of experience that

hinted at the essence of the phenomenon. Merleau-Ponty (1968), considering the possibility of a 'pebble' being perceived as more than just a 'pebble', suggested that the perception of the world of objects as 'something more', or less, than is originally viewed, might place one 'within the world'. By considering the perceptual realm we may be able to draw, from recalled experiences, more than they originally seemed to mean:

It is by opposing to the experience of things the spectre of another experience that would not involve things that we force experience to say more than it said. It is by passing through the detour of names, by threatening the things with our non-recognition of them, that we finally accredit *objectivity*, self-identity, positivity, plenitude, if not as their own principle, at least as the condition of their possibility for us (1968, p. 162).

While it impossible to gain first-hand knowledge of what it is for another person to perceive something, by deliberately focussing on, and exploring the potential for the perceptual experience within participant recollections, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the human experience. This research has provided an example of how that might take place using a phenomenological approach.

9.5 Future Directions for Research

Several avenues for future research are suggested. This project involved commercial and privately guided rafting participants, aged between 17 and 65. There is potential to extend the findings from this research into the field of outdoor education, in order gain further insights into the possible range of meaningful experiences on wilderness river journeys within that field. The methodological approach, practical requirements and results of this project have produced much that would be of assistance in this regard.

It would also be interesting to consider differences in perceived experiences of rafters and kayakers journeying down the same section of river. Some additional considerations would need to be taken into account in terms of the 'guided', or

otherwise, nature of the trip, and the difficulty of any such trip. However, this avenue of research may well reveal much in terms of the impact of the *focus* of the journey, the speed with which one passes along the river, and one's ability to pay *attention* to the surrounding environment.

Another direction for research would be to consider the ways in which a different *focus* on the journey, such as technical skill development, relaxation, or leadership, might affect one's ability to interact at a deep level with the surrounding environment. Other research in the field relating to river journeys such as Wattchow (2007, 2008) and Stewart (2004a) indicates that a differing focus of attention during the journey may well strongly affect person-place interactions, while Martin suggests, "the sorts of activities participants thought most beneficial for development of relationships with nature were those where technical skill demands were lower" (2005, p. 48). In considering adventure activities in outdoor environmental education, Thomas suggests:

On shorter trips, my research has indicated that it may be better to use alternate modes of travel or exploration (e.g. guided rafting or guided climbing) to prevent skills development from dominating the focus of the program... In programs of longer duration, or extended sequences, the requirements for participant to develop skills may have less impact on the participants' ability to develop connections with places in the longer term (2005, p. 38).

Closely related to the impact of 'technical difficulty', two additional lines of adventure-related questioning raised by this research would be of interest:

- the role that some form of geographical difficulty or adventure might play in creating a sense of personal *vulnerability*, and
- whether or not this potential *vulnerability*, or openness, might positively affect interactions with the surrounding environment during subsequent quieter moments.

For example, would a similar length trip within a comparable wilderness river context, but which was mostly devoid of rapids, produce meaningful experiences

with qualities similar to those experiences reported here – particularly relating to how the surrounding environment was perceived by participants? While some level of adventure appears desirable on wilderness journeys, it is not clear to what extent it might impinge upon human-nature interactions, or in what *way* it might colour those interactions. Martin asks:

Are activities which are more technically demanding such as rock climbing and white water canoeing, essential to a programme which seeks relationship to nature? Considerable evidence exists in the data from this study [i.e., Martin's own study] to suggest that students did develop their relationship with nature precisely because of these sorts of more adventurous activities (2004, p. 26).

Is it simply a matter of motivation to spend time in the outdoors, then, or are there elements of vulnerability induced within such activities that might significantly influence participant interactions with the surrounding environment?

The quality of the interweaving between person and place, or between the perception of being 'part of something larger' and that something being 'a separate something other', could be further explored. It is difficult to gain all that might be gained from interviews when the essential qualities of the collective experiences are still to be identified. It would be interesting now, perhaps employing a different methodology, to dig a little deeper into the experience itself.

Finally, further investigation into the potential 'value' of experiences involving a sense of humility would be of interest. Humility has recently been identified as a valuable psychological trait within Positive Psychology (Seligman, 2002; Snyder and Lopez, 2007), and there is an increasing amount of literature related to this.

9.6 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has highlighted the implications of this research, as well as its limitations, and has suggested potential future directions for additional work. The

research has added depth to current discussions of meaningful experiences on wilderness journeys, and much could be gained by seeking additional understandings beyond those garnered through this research.

Chapter 10 – Thesis Summary

Within this research project I used a phenomenological approach to explore and describe the meaningful experiences for participants on a series of wilderness journeys on the Franklin River. The phenomenological approach proved to be a highly effective in terms of gaining access to participant recollections of lived experience, while minimising the potential intrusiveness of the research project upon participants. The phenomenological approach preserved the experience for participants, while the requirement to place myself in the same position as the participants proved to be invaluable. Without experiencing the river from a participant's point of view it would have been very difficult to let go many of my preconceptions about experiences on the river stemming my own guiding background.

At the heart of this research project, reflected in the original research questions, is the problem of understanding human experience of nature and the meaningful intimate interactions that might occur between people and the surrounding environment. The research questions have been answered by describing the range of meaningful experiences that occurred on a wilderness river journey and by exploring the unique individual experiences of participants. These descriptions of experience highlighted the components of the journey that facilitated meaningful experiences, the role of the landscape itself in facilitating those experiences, the potential value of such experiences, and, perhaps most importantly, the essential qualities of those experiences that provided such personal meaning. By better understanding the essential qualities of 'the experience' itself educators, facilitators and guides are better able to articulate, plan for and deliver meaningful experiences for participants on outdoor journeys.

The research explored, in depth, two streams of experience; experiences involving a sense of 'humility' and experiences involving a sense of being 'alive to the present'. These explorations reveal much about what it was like for participants to live through such experiences and illuminated the *perceptual qualities* of the experiences. While

the research highlights the fact that each participant had individual, unique and complex experiences whilst on the journey, it also reveals the commonalities of meaningful experiences described by the participants. By moving between the individual and the collective, the research demonstrates that there were essential qualities, particularly within the perceptual realm, that appeared to provide an *invariant structure* for many of the meaningful experiences described and an essence of the phenomena studied. The research also highlights how different types of *experience* might interact with, and indeed facilitate, other types of meaningful experiences.

The project has focussed on the *experiences* described by participants. Its findings support a model of experience as interaction; between person and the surrounding environment. The experience is neither wholly *of* an object or created *by* the person. As such, the research reveals the importance of the way an interactive experience might be approached, as well as the qualities of the surrounding environment that might contribute to *meaningful* experiences. While aspects of what has been revealed within this research may appear self-evident, they can be easily overlooked or taken for granted. By foregrounding what might otherwise be understated, the research has thrown the focus back on the *lived experience* of participants on a wilderness river journey.

The research highlights the crucial role of the perceptual qualities of interactions in terms of personally meaningful experiences. While gaining an understanding or empathetic understanding of others' experiences is a difficult task, the outcomes show that such forays into the world of experience can be invaluable in terms of extending our understanding of human-nature relationships. To have a profound and moving experience, to break through the profane, to become *interwoven* with the world on such a journey is not necessarily to hold our 'everyday lives' as poorer substitutes; rather, it might be that such experiences can add something to our lives and allow us to question our sense of self-importance and separation from the world.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Introductory Letter

<Date>

Information Letter

An exploration of experiences on wilderness river journeys

Dear Franklin River rafter,

My name is Marcus Morse, a PhD student at the University of Tasmania. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project focussing on peoples' experiences of wilderness river journeys. <Commercial operator or private organisers> have agreed to assist in this research project by allowing me to approach participants from the upcoming Franklin River rafting expedition.

I have worked myself as a rafting guide on many rivers around the world for 20 years. During my time on river expeditions I have noticed that people can have experiences that are often deemed to be personally meaningful, but which are often hard to describe. I am therefore undertaking a research project that seeks to understand and articulate the possibility of meaningful experiences on wilderness river journeys, by gaining a greater insight into;

- The types of meaningful experiences that can occur on a wilderness journey
- The components of the journey that facilitate meaningful experiences
- The role of the wilderness landscape itself in facilitating those experiences
- The potential impacts of meaningful wilderness experiences on return to everyday life.

The benefits of such a research project would be a greater understanding of the more "hard to define" outcomes from wilderness journeys. In particular this research aims to deliver to recreational users, guides and educators an enhanced understanding of how to facilitate opportunities for meaningful experiences in wilderness environments, and a deeper understanding of the potential benefits of doing so. In this way it is hoped that the wilderness, and peoples' experience of it, will be accurately valued.

If you would be willing to assist in this project I would ask you to;

- a) Participate in a recorded interview (approx. 1-1 ½ hours) at, or sometime after, the end of the trip.
- b) Reply to some questions via email, 4 months and 12 months after the trip (or by phone if preferred).
- c) Allow me to make informal observations during the trip.

An additional option would be to;

- d) Keep a journal to record your thoughts and feelings during the trip (this is entirely optional and I would provide the journal for those interested).

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you agree to participate in this project you are free at any time to decline to answer any

questions, withdraw without effect or explanation, view transcripts and withdraw any information. No participants will be identifiable in the resulting thesis or articles, and all information will be stored securely with the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Tasmania for a period of 5 years and then destroyed.

Your decision whether or not to participate in this research project will not affect your trip down the Franklin River with <Commercial operator or private organiser>. If you choose not to participate, no observations would be made of you during the trip, you would not be asked to keep a journal and no follow up interviews would be conducted.

It is difficult to gain an understanding of the tone of the research process or whether or not you might be prepared to assist in this research project through a single letter. For this reason I will be at the pre-departure meeting in Hobart the day before the trip to briefly outline the research project, benefits of the research and answer any questions. I look forward to meeting you then.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this invitation and I hope that you will agree to participate in this valuable research project. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact myself, my supervisor Peter Hay or <Manager / operator>.

Yours Sincerely,

Marcus Morse
PhD Student (UTAS)
03-6234-4301

Dr. Peter Hay
Supervisor (UTAS)
03-6226-2836

<Manager>
<Commercial operator>
<Phone No.>

Appendix 2: Consent Form

<Date>

Consent Form

An exploration of experiences on wilderness river journeys

1. The nature of the study has been explained:
 - a) in the information letter provided, and
 - b) by the researcher at a briefing.
2. I understand the nature of the study and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
3. I understand that the study could involve;
 - a) Participating in a recorded interview.
 - b) Replying to questions via an email after the trip (or by phone if preferred).
 - c) Keeping a journal to record my thoughts and feelings during the trip
 - d) Allowing the researcher to make informal observations during the trip.
4. I understand that participation involves the risks that are inherent within the existing Franklin River rafting trip.
5. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the University of Tasmania premises for five years, and will then be destroyed.
6. I agree that research data gathered from me for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a participant.
7. I understand that the researchers will maintain my identity confidential and that any information I supply to the researcher(s) will be used only for the purposes of the research.
8. I agree to participate in this investigation and understand that I may withdraw at any time without any effect, and if I so wish, may request that any data I have supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

Name of Participant:

Signature of Participant

Date:

I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation

The participant has received the Information Letter where my details have been provided so participants have the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Name of Investigator:

Signature of Investigator:

Date:

Appendix 3: Journal Guide

Hi Folks,

Thankyou for taking the time to keep a journal, I hope it adds to your trip.

Please feel free to use this journal in any way and at anytime that you wish. It is simply a way to record your thoughts and feelings as you journey down the river.

I am particularly interested to gain an insight into those experiences during your journey that you deem to be the most meaningful or moving to yourself.

In reflecting on any experiences it might be helpful to describe;

- The experience as fully as you can.
- Sights or sounds that stand out.
- Your feelings or emotions at the time.
- Your focus of attention or thoughts at the time.

Thanks again for taking the time and I hope it adds to your journey, Marcus Morse

Appendix 4: Interview Guide

Hi <participant>, how are you?

Is it OK with you if I record this interview, and make a few notes, as it makes it easier to go back over key points, and ask a few extra questions later in the interview?

My first few questions involve a bit of general background information (select a couple depending on the participant),

- I was wondering, did you grow up in a city or a country area?
- When you were growing up did you spend much time in the outdoors?
- Have you done a trip like this one before?
- Could you tell me why you decided to go on the Franklin River trip?
- If you could think back to the week before the trip, how did you find the days leading up to the trip, did you experience any strong emotions or feelings prior to the trip?

Thanks for that, my next few questions relate to the trip itself.

- **What did you find most meaningful or personally moving about your journey down the river?**

Question may need some rewording or further explanation depending upon the participant. At this stage **allow time** for the participant to answer fully, and make note of key recollections.

Experiences described will then be further explored.

Possible prompting questions

- Can you describe that experience more fully for me? (allow time for this)
- What were you doing at the time?
- Where were you?
- Can you describe the scene? (what day, point on river)
- Were you alone or with others?
- How long would you say the experience lasted for?
- Do you recall how you were feeling at the time or any emotions?
- What were you thinking about or focussed on at the time?
- What do you think contributed to making that experience feel so meaningful?
- How important do you think the natural setting or place / people / activity were in terms of facilitating such an experience?
- Do you think you were looking for this sort of experience or was it more of a surprise?
- Do you think you are generally open to this sort of experience?
- Have you had other similar experiences?
- What do you think might be the impact, if any, on you of such experiences?

The aim here is to explore and describe each meaningful experience as fully as possible. Where particular components of the experience, or journey as a whole, are mentioned, they should be followed up and explored as well.

Once an experience has been described or recalled in as much detail as seems possible in the circumstances, the description should be summarised and repeated back to the participant to confirm the key recollections.

After each meaningful aspect / experience has been described, then they should be summarise as “the most meaningful aspects of the Franklin River journey for you”, in order to confirm that nothing major has been left out.

A couple of further questions:

Were there any other meaningful or moving experiences that you would like to share?

Is there anything else that you would like to add, or felt was relevant, to the interview?

Thank you so much for answering the questions openly, and having the patience and interest to participate in this research, I really do appreciate it.

Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

Appendix 5: Email Follow up (4 month)

Hi <Participant>,

Marcus Morse here, just doing a bit of follow up in regards to the Franklin River interview earlier in the year. A huge thank you for the interview as well, it has been most useful!

The research project is going along very well so far, and I was keen to ask you a few more questions four months after the trip. If you had the time to respond via email that would be great.

From your interview, what seemed to make the strongest impressions on you was;

- <item 1>
- <item 2>
- <item 3>
- <item 4>
- <item 5>
- <item 6>

The questions then:

1. Do you feel the points above accurately reflect what you described as the most meaningful aspects of the trip during our previous interview together?
2. Do the impressions listed above still reflect what you thought were the most meaningful / moving aspects of the trip, or do you have any different recollections or reflections four months down the track?
3. Have you noticed anything since being back, in terms of impacts on yourself, the way you relate to others or your surrounds?
4. Have you found that your feelings <'and sense of perspective' where appropriate> from the trip have remained strongly with you or faded over time?

Cheers for that, I know it might take bit of time, but even a few short answers would be fantastic. Thanks again for your help and contributions so far, they are much appreciated!

Take care, and I look forward to reading your responses,

Marcus Morse

Appendix 6: Email Follow up (12 month)

Hi <Participant>,

Marcus Morse from the University of Tasmania here, and I hope this email finds you well.

I'm emailing to ask for your assistance one more time. The Franklin River research project is going along very well currently, and I'm very keen to ask a couple of questions around 12 months after your trip. The questions are listed below, and I have attached a few photos to help jog the memory.

In our last email you suggested that;

- <item 1>
- <item 2>
- <item 3>
- <item 4>

1) Looking back on the Franklin River journey a year later, what stands out for you as the most meaningful or moving experiences for you whilst on the river?

2) 12 months after the trip, has the Franklin River journey had any impact on your life at home (for example your outlook on things, plans for the future or day to day routines) that you feel might be attributable to your experiences whilst on the trip?

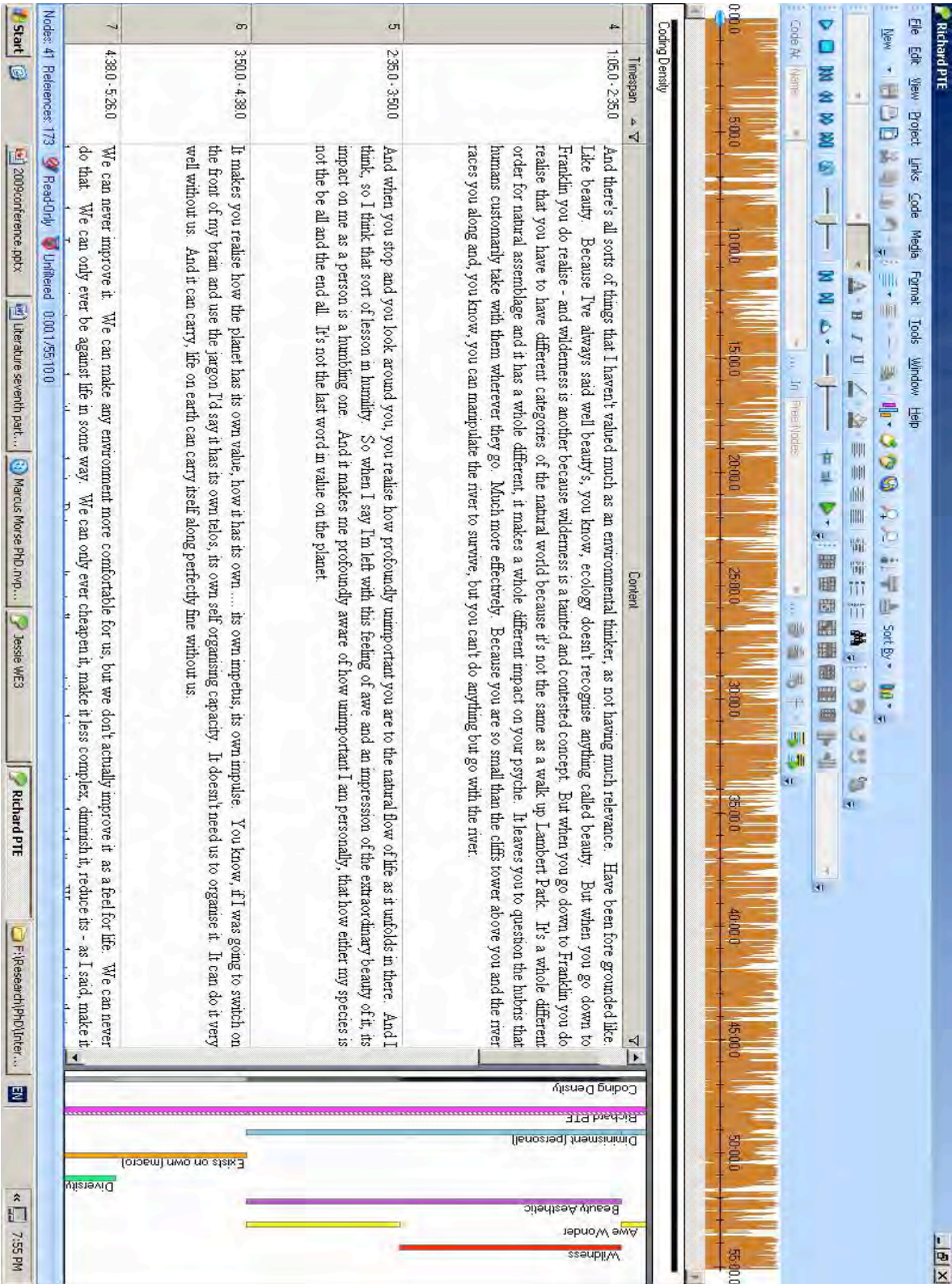
I am very aware it's a busy time of the year, but if you could spare the time to answer the two questions above, however briefly, that would be very much appreciated. I also wanted to say thanks for your help with the project so far, and let you know that I will be sending out a preliminary report on the outcomes of the research project in around a year, and then a final summary on completion of the project.

Thanks again, very much, for your help and support so far, it is very much appreciated.

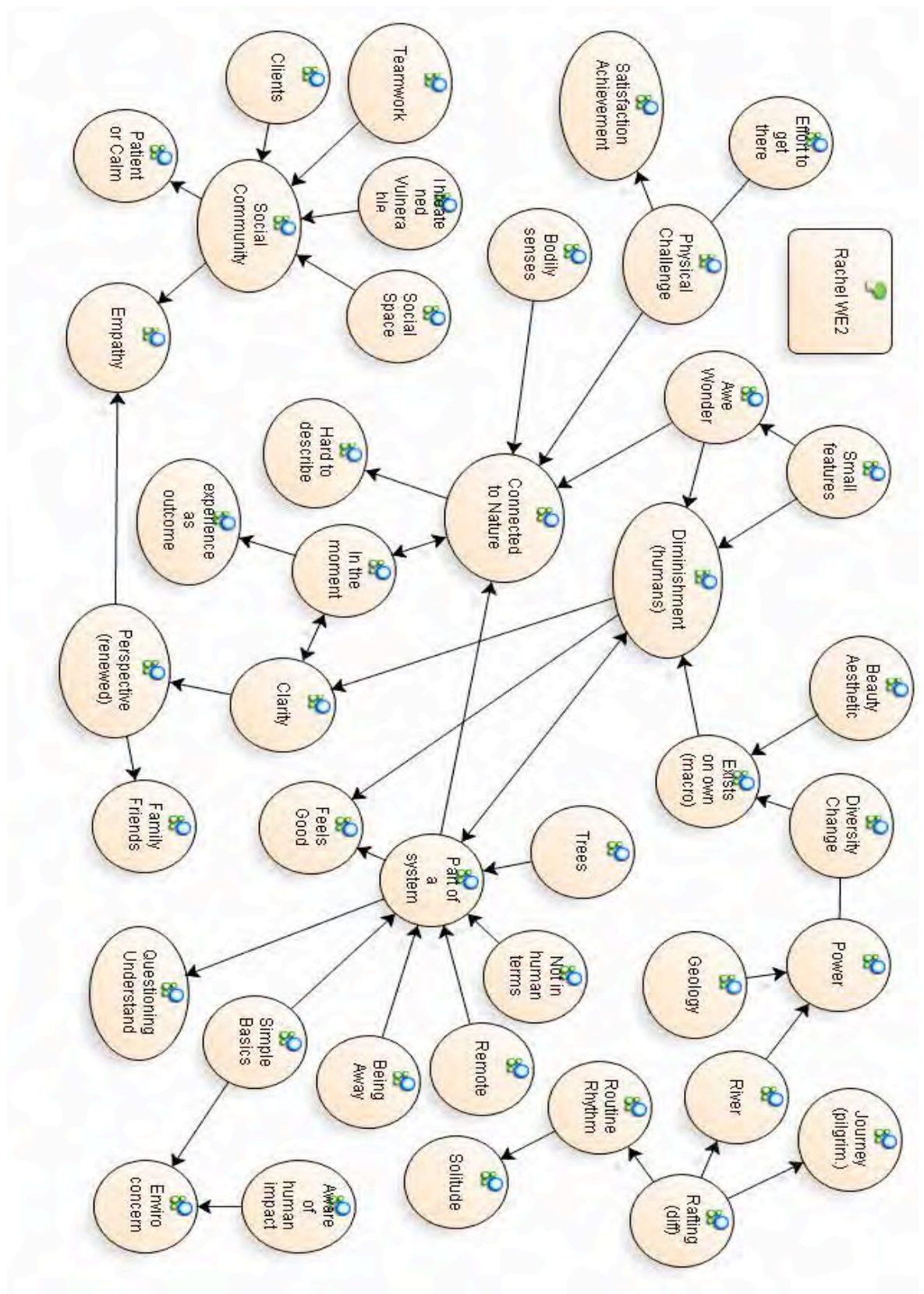
Regards,

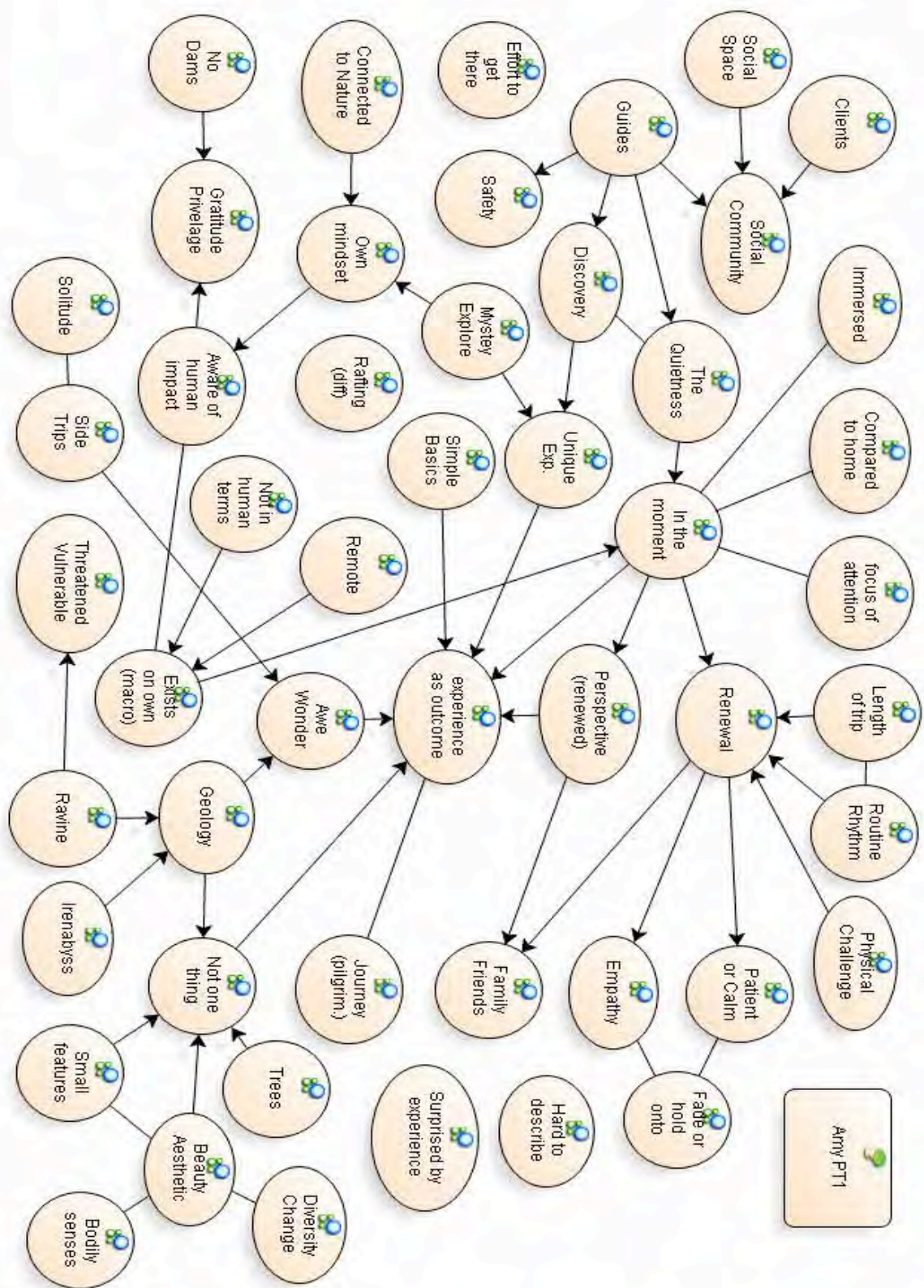
Marcus Morse.

Appendix 7: Example of coding in NVivo 8



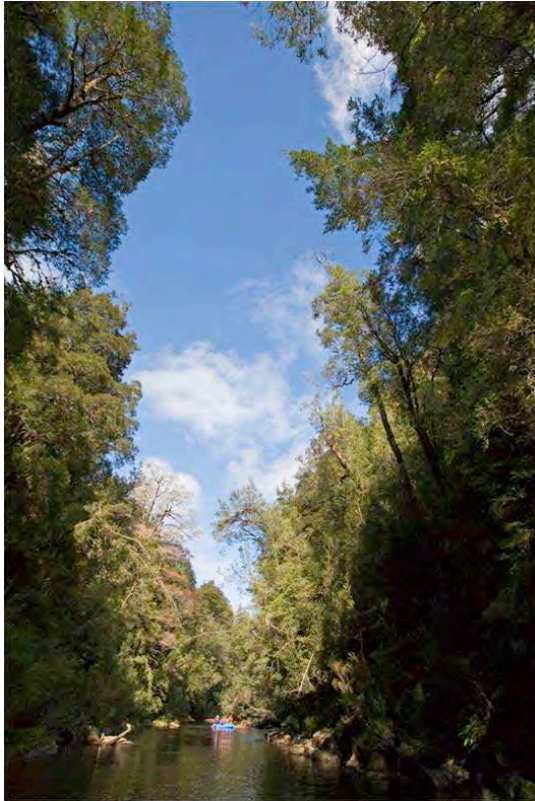
Appendix 8: Examples of an Individual Concept Map



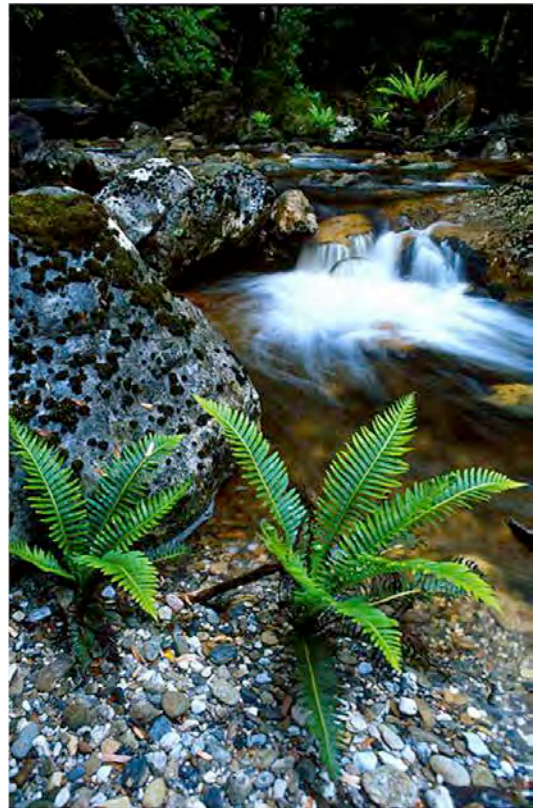


Thematic Reference Index	1. Global	2. Social / Community	3. Social / Community	4. Social Spaces	5. Social Spaces	6. Social Spaces	7. Networks	8. Networks	9. Networks	10. Networks	11. Networks	12. Networks	13. Networks	14. Networks	15. Networks	16. Networks	17. Networks	18. Networks	19. Networks	20. Networks	21. Networks	22. Networks	23. Networks	24. Networks	25. Networks	26. Networks	27. Networks	28. Networks	29. Networks	30. Networks	31. Networks	32. Networks	33. Networks	34. Networks	35. Networks	36. Networks	37. Networks	38. Networks	39. Networks	40. Networks	41. Networks	42. Networks	43. Networks	44. Networks	45. Networks	46. Networks	47. Networks	48. Networks	49. Networks	50. Networks	51. Networks	52. Networks	53. Networks	54. Networks	55. Networks	56. Networks	57. Networks	58. Networks	59. Networks	60. Networks	61. Networks	62. Networks	63. Networks	64. Networks	65. Networks	66. Networks	67. Networks	68. Networks	69. Networks	70. Networks	71. Networks	72. Networks	73. Networks	74. Networks	75. Networks	76. Networks	77. Networks	78. Networks	79. Networks	80. Networks	81. Networks	82. Networks	83. Networks	84. Networks	85. Networks	86. Networks	87. Networks	88. Networks	89. Networks	90. Networks	91. Networks	92. Networks	93. Networks	94. Networks	95. Networks	96. Networks	97. Networks	98. Networks	99. Networks	100. Networks	101. Networks	102. Networks	103. Networks	104. Networks	105. Networks	106. Networks	107. Networks	108. Networks	109. Networks	110. Networks	111. Networks	112. Networks	113. Networks	114. Networks	115. Networks	116. Networks	117. Networks	118. Networks	119. Networks	120. Networks	121. Networks	122. Networks	123. Networks	124. Networks	125. Networks	126. Networks	127. Networks	128. Networks	129. Networks	130. Networks	131. Networks	132. Networks	133. Networks	134. Networks	135. Networks	136. Networks	137. Networks	138. Networks	139. Networks	140. Networks	141. Networks	142. Networks	143. Networks	144. Networks	145. Networks	146. Networks	147. Networks	148. Networks	149. Networks	150. Networks	151. Networks	152. Networks	153. Networks	154. Networks	155. Networks	156. Networks	157. Networks	158. Networks	159. Networks	160. Networks	161. Networks	162. Networks	163. Networks	164. Networks	165. Networks	166. Networks	167. Networks	168. Networks	169. Networks	170. Networks	171. Networks	172. Networks	173. Networks	174. Networks	175. Networks	176. Networks	177. Networks	178. Networks	179. Networks	180. Networks	181. Networks	182. Networks	183. Networks	184. Networks	185. Networks	186. Networks	187. Networks	188. Networks	189. Networks	190. Networks	191. Networks	192. Networks	193. Networks	194. Networks	195. Networks	196. Networks	197. Networks	198. Networks	199. Networks	200. Networks	201. Networks	202. Networks	203. Networks	204. Networks	205. Networks	206. Networks	207. Networks	208. Networks	209. Networks	210. Networks	211. Networks	212. Networks	213. Networks	214. Networks	215. Networks	216. Networks	217. Networks	218. Networks	219. Networks	220. Networks	221. Networks	222. Networks	223. Networks	224. Networks	225. Networks	226. Networks	227. Networks	228. Networks	229. Networks	230. Networks	231. Networks	232. Networks	233. Networks	234. Networks	235. Networks	236. Networks	237. Networks	238. Networks	239. Networks	240. Networks	241. Networks	242. Networks	243. Networks	244. Networks	245. Networks	246
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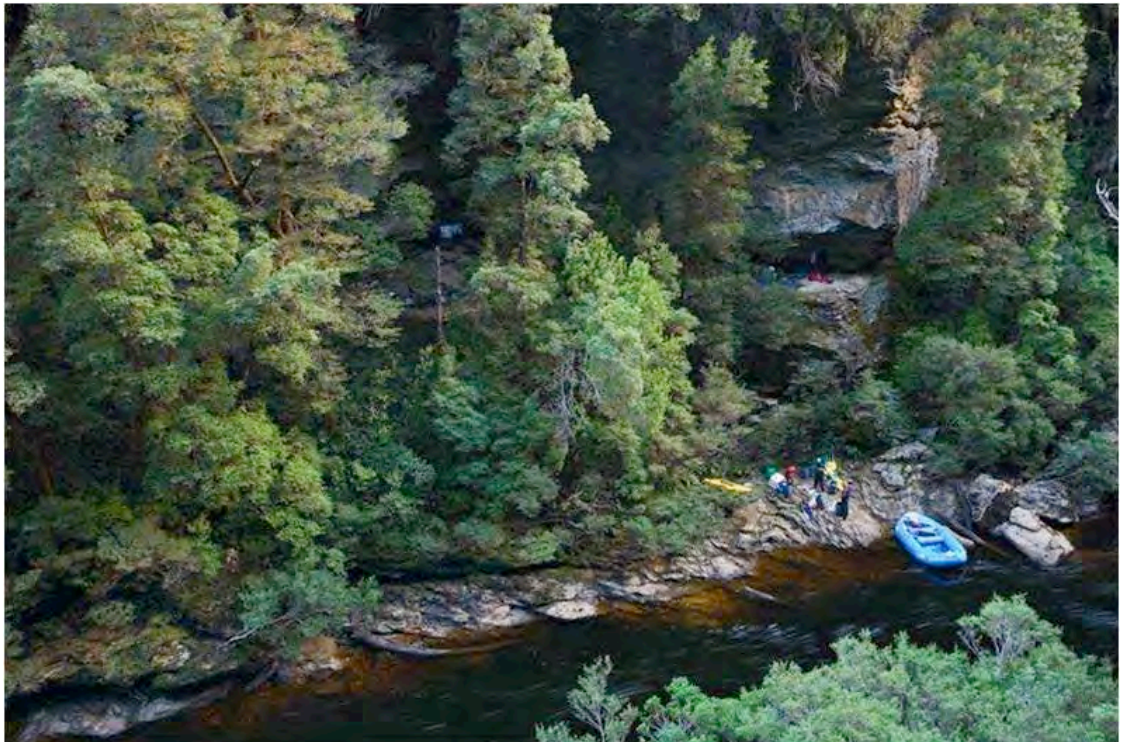
Appendix 10: Images of the Franklin River



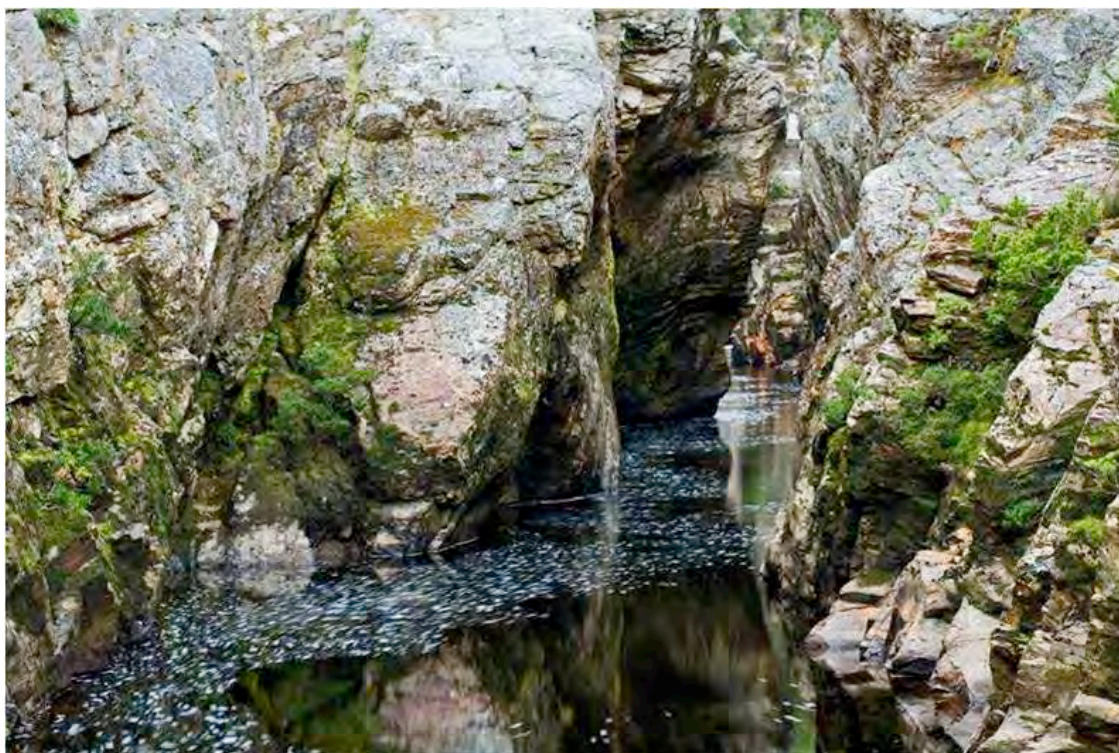
Collingwood River
Photo by Mike Martyn ©



Tahune Creek
Photo by Matthew Newton ©



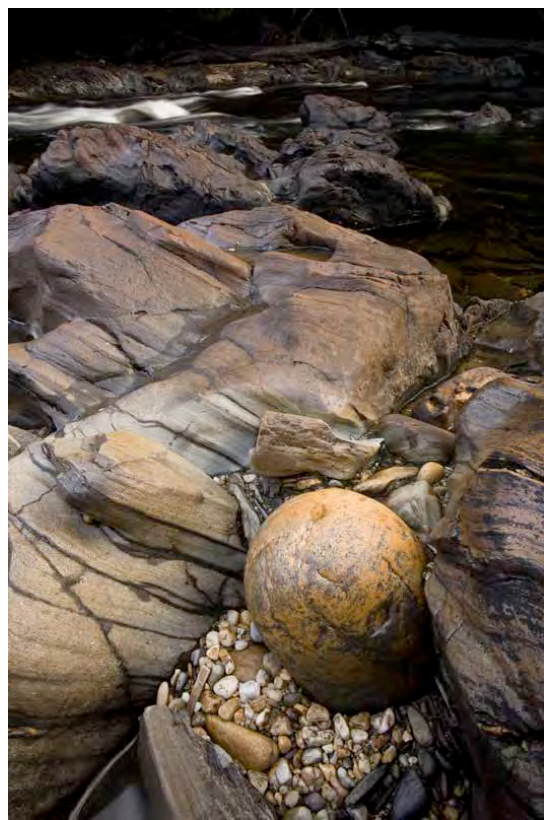
Angel Rain Cavern and Campsite Photo by Mike Martyn ©



Irenabyss Photo by Mike Martyn ©



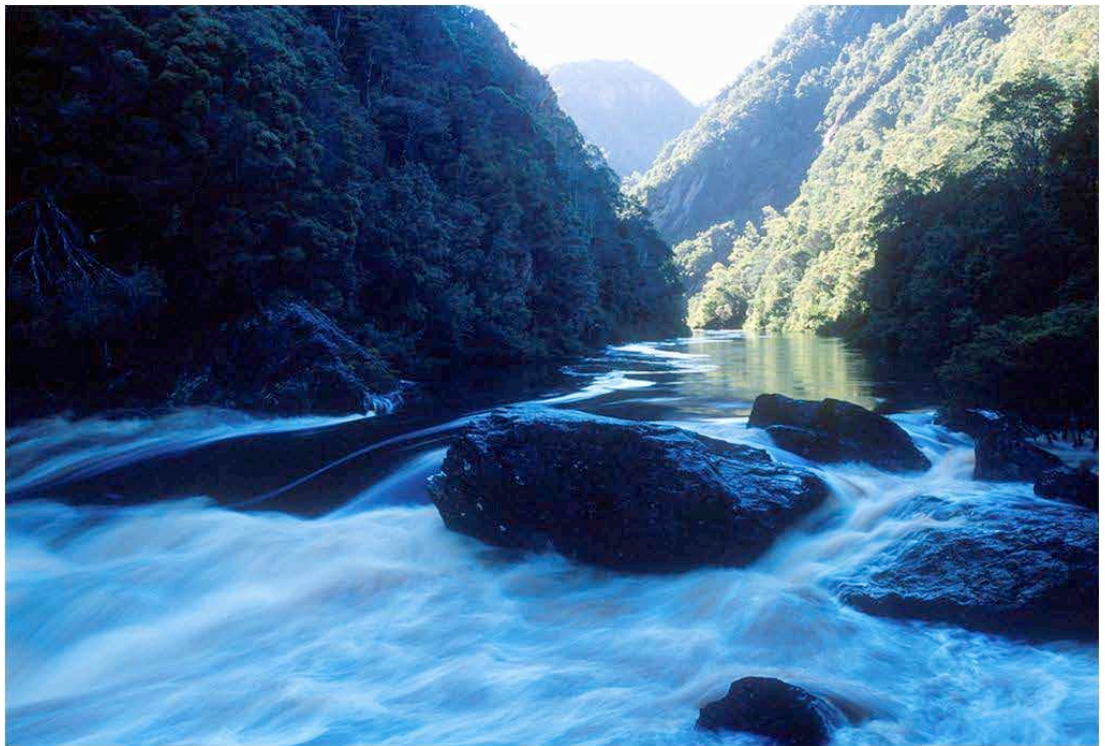
Middle Franklin
Photo by Matthew Newton ©



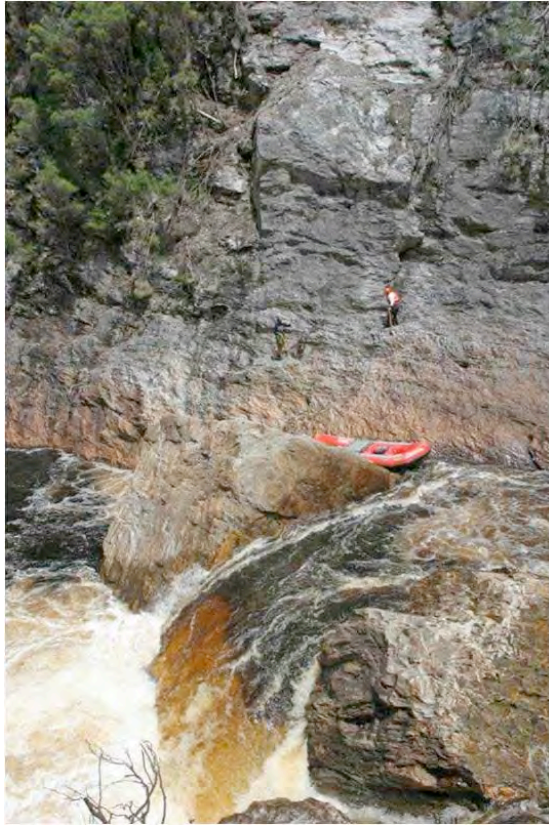
View from Beach
Photo by Matthew Newton ©



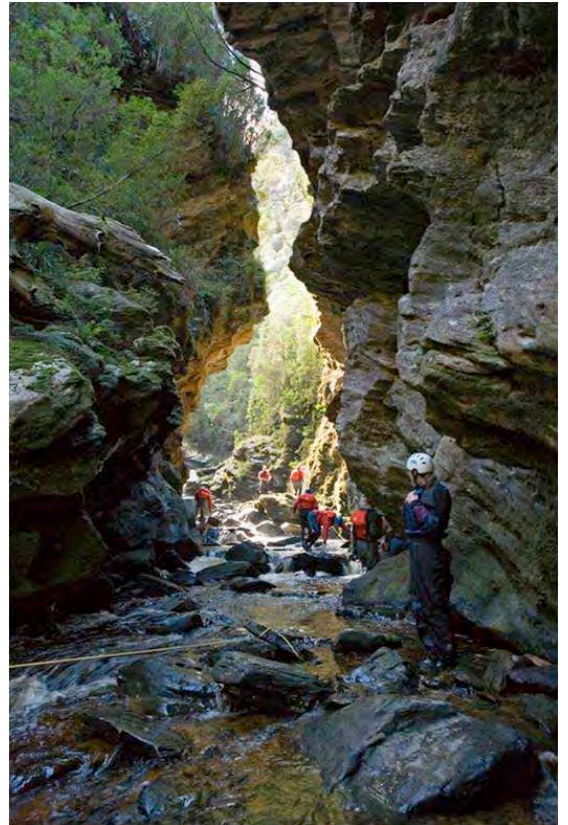
Low Portage at the Churn Photo by Peter Hay ©



Serenity Sound Photo by Matthew Newton ©



Churn Waterfall
Photo by Jane Hutchison ©



Livingston's Cut
Photo by Mike Martyn ©



Reflection at Coruscades Photo by Matthew Newton ©



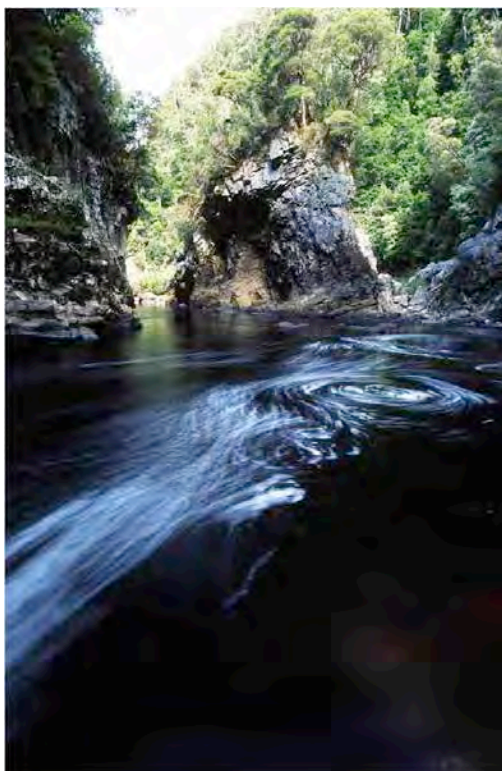
Thunderush Photo by Matthew Newton ©



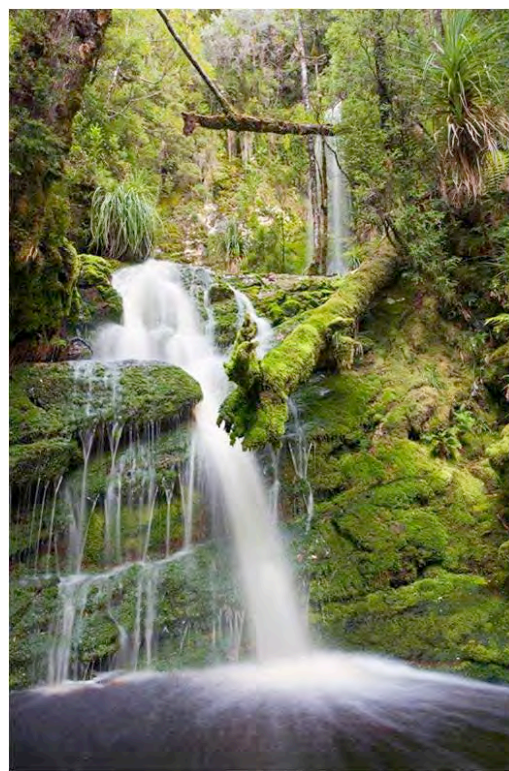
The Cauldron
Photo by Matthew Newton ©



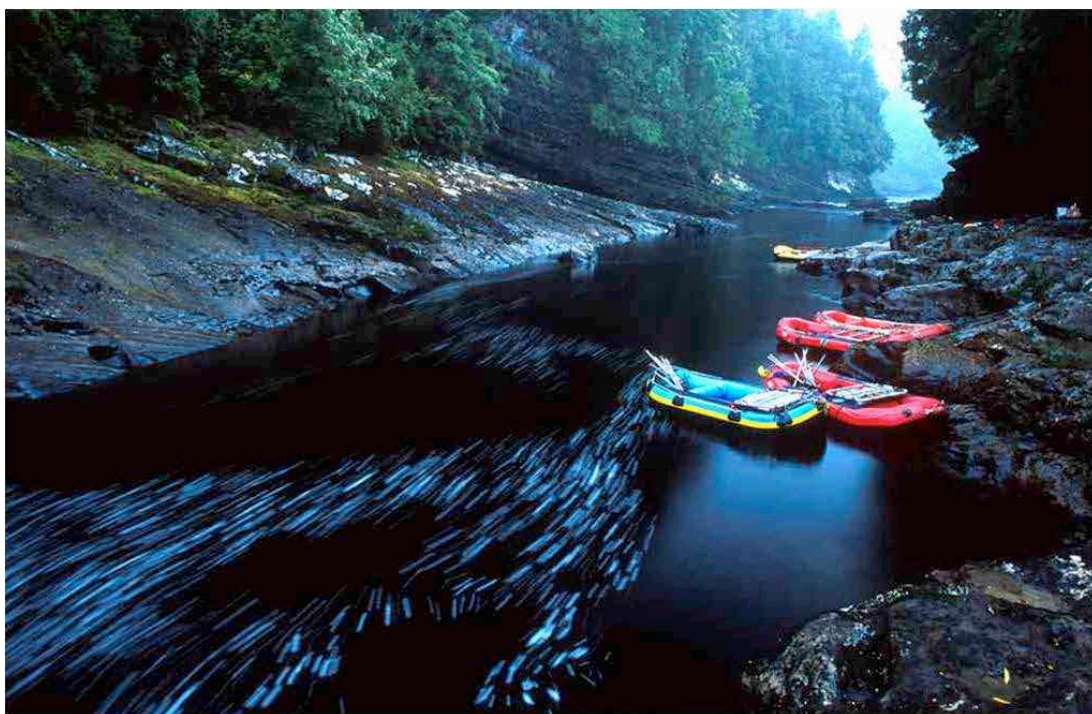
Rafter's Basin
Photo by Matthew Newton ©



Rock Island from the Pig Trough
Photo by Matthew Newton ©



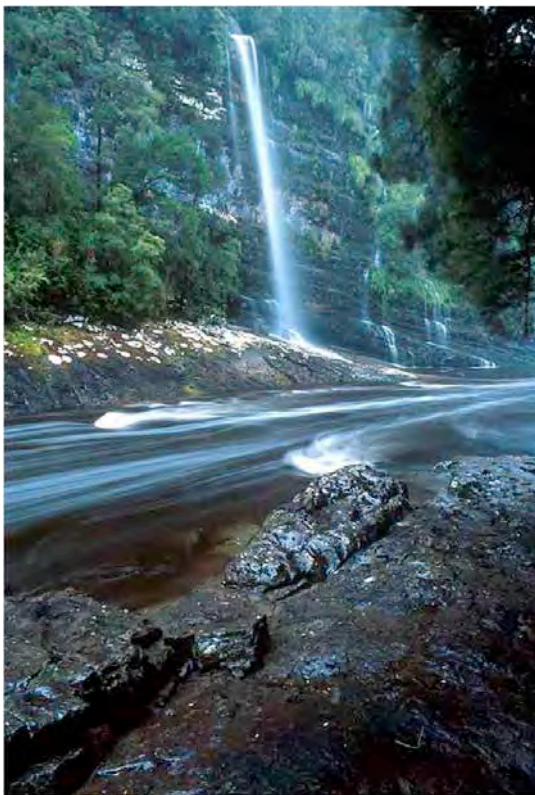
The Pig Trough Waterfall
Photo by Mike Martyn ©



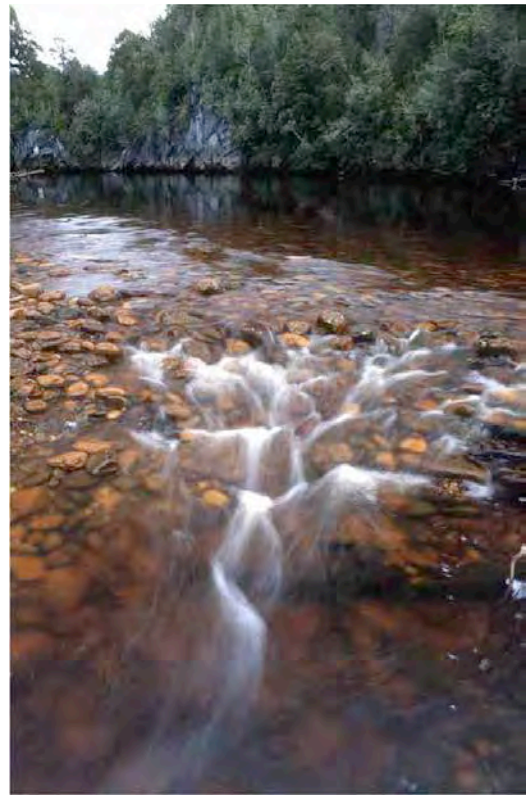
Newland's Cascades Campsite Photo by Matthew Newton ©



Newland's Cascades Campsite Photo by Mike Martyn ©



Shower Cliff Cavern
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Limestone Cliffs, Lower Franklin
Photo by Matthew Newton ©



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