

*Encountering Landscapes:
an exploration of
environment specific
learning on an extended journey.*

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degree of Master of Environmental Management (Coursework),
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Dedication

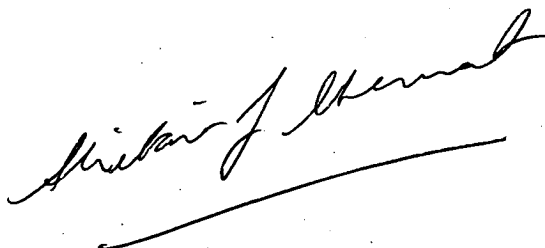
For the Snowy River – may it again flow freely!

Statement of authenticity

This dissertation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or graduate diploma in any tertiary institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Alistair Stewart

6 March 2003

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Alistair Stewart', written over a horizontal line.

Declaration of consent

I agree that this dissertation may be available for copying.

Handwritten initials 'AS' in cursive script, written over a horizontal line.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the role the physical environment plays in shaping experience and learning in an outdoor education context. In February of 2001, students undertaking the Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education) at La Trobe University, Bendigo, spent 18 days bushwalking through the Kosciuszko National Park in New South Wales. The journey traversed three relatively different environments: the alpine regions of Mt Jagungal through to Mt Kosciuszko on the Main Range; the sub-alpine areas of The Chimneys and The Pilot; and the hot, dry, rain shadow area of the Snowy River.

Drawing on the journals of 19 respondents, this qualitative project details the participants' multiple and diverse experiences and learning. Responses describe the environment providing a context for experience and learning, the factors that impacted on the experience of place, and critical thought and reflection as a consequence of experience. The findings reveal that the places encountered by respondents were not merely a backdrop but rather played a significant role in shaping the experience and learning opportunities. The findings also highlight the many contingent factors that may impact upon the experience of place. Aspects of the literature reviewed supported the findings but also drew attention to the lack of research that has been conducted in outdoor education addressing the place dependent nature of experience and learning. The findings of this project suggest that outdoor education is contingent upon place, each place having unique attributes, characteristics and history that shape the context of experience and learning.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	i
Statement of authenticity	i
Declaration of consent.....	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Chapter One – Overview	1
Introduction.....	1
Impetus for study.....	1
Statement of problem and research questions.....	2
Background information.....	3
Definitions	3
Outline of the study	4
Conclusion	5
Chapter Two – Review of Related Literature	6
Introduction.....	6
Understandings of ‘environment’	6
Experience	12
Place	12
Educational importance of place.....	14
Experience of place	16
Conclusion	24
Chapter Three – Methods and Procedures	25
Introduction.....	25
Research approach.....	25
Study participants.....	27
Physical setting of study and structure of the experience.....	27
Research method	30
Personal assumptions	31
Data collection and analysis	32
Limitations	34
Conclusion	36
Chapter Four – Research Findings Part 1:	
The environment providing a context for learning and experience	37
Introduction.....	37
Responses to place	38
Observation and understanding of the environment	45
Stories told by the place.....	48
Relationship with others	51
Learning and insights	54
Conclusion	58
Chapter Five – Research Findings Part 2:	
Factors that impacted on the experience of place	59

Introduction.....	59
Prior knowledge of a place	59
Attitude toward the experience prior to departure	63
Aspects of the place.....	64
Structure of the experience	69
Issues relating to leadership.....	75
Concepts of time	79
Conclusion	81
Chapter Six – Research Findings Part 3:	
Critical reflection and thought as a consequence of experience.....	82
Introduction.....	82
Reflection on relationships with the natural world	82
Developing relationships with place	87
Conclusion	92
Chapter Seven – Discussion and Conclusion.....	93
Introduction.....	93
Summary of findings	93
Implications of research findings	104
Directions for future research	109
Conclusion	109
References.....	111
Appendix A: Information sheet and consent form.....	116
Appendix B: Journal questions.....	119
Appendix C: Subject outline.....	120

Chapter One

Overview

Introduction

In February of 2001, 38 people spent 18 days walking through the Kosciuszko National Park (KNP), traversing three relatively different environments. While connected by terrain, purpose and mode of travel, each person encountered the landscapes in their own fashion, interpreting their experiences and learning in their own way relative to their life experiences and understanding of the world. This qualitative project is an account of 19 of these people; it is an attempt to understand how the experiences and learning of this group of people were shaped by the place they happened to be in.

This chapter provides an overview of this project by discussing the impetus for the study. Further, it details the statement of problem and research questions, describes background information, comments on definitions, and gives an outline of the study.

Impetus for study

Places shape our lives in subtle and profound ways that often go unnoticed. Places cradle our lives, giving them depth, meaning and texture. Places exist without one's experience of them, yet without place there is no experience. Our experiences are contingent upon the context or circumstances a place provides. In an educational context, the capacity for place to shape experience and learning has been largely overlooked by academic researchers. Academic enquiry into experience of place within outdoor education is relatively new. This is a startling realization given that much of outdoor education is reliant on the context provided by the natural environment. At the Australian National Outdoor Education Conference in 2001, titled 'Education Outdoors – Our Sense of Place', John Cameron commented that:

An attitude that disdains city life and only values the outdoor experience perpetuates urban deterioration and deepens the schism between the city and the bush which is so pronounced in many parts of Australia. Having a less dualistic sense of place does not mean that one has an indiscriminately benign attitude and ceases to be concerned about pollution and environmental degradation. On the contrary, I maintain that deepening our care and attention to all places is a more effective pathway to a lasting environmental ethic than appeals to fear of

eco-catastrophe or moral imperatives. It is not a matter of denying the power or value of the outdoor experience, but of putting that power to good use – lessening the polarisation and alienation of modern life rather than accentuating it (2001, p. 32).

The impetus for this study comes from a desire to gain a better understanding of the role of place(s) in shaping experience and learning in an outdoor education context.

Statement of problem and research questions

This study seeks to advance understanding of the role of the physical environment in shaping experience and learning outcomes in an outdoor education context. Much work has been done on the power of ‘wilderness experiences’ and extended remote area journeys and their capacity to develop environmental sensitivity within participants (Andrews 1999; Greenway 1995; Grumbine 1988; Harper 1995; Taylor 1999). Authors such as these frequently acknowledge the importance of the natural environment but refer to it as though it is the same for all experiences, that the same outcomes can be gained wherever one might go. There would appear to be little recognition that experiences are the product of the context provided by place. While some outcomes of outdoor education experiences might be achievable in a variety of places, many are associated with a particular place. That is, the place is not just a universal backdrop, but rather plays a significant role in shaping the experience and learning outcomes. The understandings participants develop are a result of experiences and learning in a particular environment, and a particular place. Assumptions that what can be learned in one place can be learned in other places have the potential to deny the complexities and particulars of place.

To this end, an outdoor education experience was chosen that traversed three relatively different environments, with the intention of gaining insight into the capacity of place to provide a context for experience and learning. The key questions for this project therefore are:

- 'Do participants encounter distinctive experiences/learning in each of the three different environments of the 18-day bushwalk?
- How do the three different environments of the 18-day bushwalk shape the learning outcomes and experience as a whole?

Background information

Since February of 1993, students enrolled in the second year of the Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education) at La Trobe University, Bendigo have undertaken an 18-day bushwalk (the 'long walk') through the KNP in New South Wales (NSW).

The environments traversed during the journey include: the alpine area of Mt Jagungal and the Main Range, the sub-alpine areas of the Pilot and Chimneys, and the hot, dry rain shadow of the Snowy River. This extended journey is the focus of the subject 'Field Experience 2A'. The subject objectives are:

- To further develop student's bush living and travelling skills through participation in a continuous extended journey in a relatively remote setting;
- To further develop student's understanding of cultural and natural history and how these relate to land management;
- To further develop environmental knowledge and experience in alpine, sub-alpine, river and hot, dry environments;
- To provide an extended opportunity to focus on and practice outdoor education leadership.

Participants' experience on the long walk of 2001 forms the basis of this research project. The nature of the terrain and the structure of the experience will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

Definitions

Before proceeding any further it may be helpful to explore some definitions. There has been considerable debate over the definitions of 'outdoor education' and 'environmental education' (see for example Greenall Gough 1990; Lugg 1996; McRae 1990; Priest 1986). As I wrote in 1998, the discipline of outdoor education is relatively new to Australia, while education outdoors is as old as humanity (Stewart 1998). Lugg noted that the historically popular perspectives of outdoor education in the literature have been grouped in the following manner:

- Personal development – use of the natural environment for personal development and adventure
- Social development – developing relationships with others through experiences in the outdoors
- Environment – developing understanding of and relationships with, the natural environment through outdoor education programs (1996, p. 31-32).

Donaldson and Donaldson described outdoor education as 'education, in, about and for the outdoors' (1973, p. 7), while Knapp defined outdoor education as the 'use of resources outside the formal school classroom to meet educational goals and objects' (1990, p. 28). Greenall Gough (1990) acknowledges that outdoor and environmental education share many similarities of interest and there is much to be gained from integrating the curriculum.

Definitions of outdoor education are diverse and continue to evolve. While a detailed discussion of the many definitions of outdoor education would be to digress from the intention of this project, a comment on my position may be helpful in providing a context for the approach taken in this project. It is my view that regardless of the style, techniques or objectives of an educational program out-of-doors, it is at one level or another 'environmental education', which may have positive or negative consequences for the natural world. All education carries with it hidden messages, cultural patterns and norms about how to relate to the world from which young people learn. The process of education, and educators, play a significant role in defining, reproducing and transmitting these cultural templates to the next generation (see Bowers and Flinders 1990).

The three areas outlined by Lugg (1996), for me, are not easy to separate. The style of education that I engage in looks specifically at the environment around us, our relationship with it, and the travel may be perceived as adventurous. My personal philosophy is that one is not isolated from the places around one, but rather is shaped by them. So, when one enquires educationally into place, one is also learning about oneself and relationships with others. The focus of learning may shift with the context of the experience and the place, but all three elements of personal, social and environmental understanding are always present.

Outline of the study

In order to locate this project in a conceptual framework, chapter two reviews the literature that relates to the research questions. It reports on understandings of 'environment', experience, place, educational importance of place, and experience of place. The review highlights that little research has been conducted addressing the context provided by the physical environment in an outdoor education setting.

Chapter three describes the methods and procedures employed in this qualitative project. The descriptions detail the research approach, study participants, the physical setting and structure of the experience, research method, personal assumptions, data collection and analysis, and the limitations.

Chapters four, five and six report the findings that were generated in addressing the research questions. Chapter four provides an account of the environment providing a context for the learning and experience. In doing so, it details responses to place, observation and understanding of the environment, stories told by place, relationships with others, and learning and insights. Chapter five reports on the factors that impacted on the experience of place discussed by respondents. These factors include prior knowledge of a place, attitude toward the experience prior to departure, aspects of the place, structure of the experience, issues relating to leadership, and concepts of time. Chapter six addresses critical reflection and thought as a consequence of experience. The findings of this chapter are structured under reflection on relationships with the natural world, and developing relationships with place.

Chapter seven discusses the findings of chapters four, five and six and concludes the project. Discussions include summary of findings, implications of research findings, and directions for future research.

Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of this project, detailing the impetus for the study, the statement of problem and research questions. It provided background information, discussed definitions, and gave an outline of the study. Chapter two reviews the literature related to this enquiry, providing a conceptual framework for the project.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

Without place, there would be neither language, nor action nor being as they have come to consciousness through time. Suppose there were no place. There would be no 'where' within which history could take place. 'Where' is never a there, a region over against us, isolated and objective. 'Where' is always part of us and we part of it. It mingles with our being, so much so that place and human being are enmeshed, forming fabric that is particular, concrete and dense (Grange 1985, p. 71).

Introduction

As outlined, this study seeks to gain a better understanding of the role the physical environment plays in shaping the experience and learning in an outdoor education context. This chapter reviews the literature pertaining to this enquiry. Within the outdoor and environmental education areas, research and literature that specifically discusses the question of how the physical environment impacts on learning and experience is very sparse. In reviewing the literature the following themes emerged: understandings of 'environment', experience, place, educational importance of place, and experience of place. These themes form the subheadings of the review.

Understandings of 'environment'

The terms 'environment' and 'nature' have many and varied meanings that are difficult to unravel. Both concepts are heavily laden with meaning and are frequently used interchangeably. The meanings of these terms have been discussed in detail by numerous authors (see Chambers 1982; Marshall 1992; Payne 1998; Seddon 1997; Soper 1995), yet still appear to be contested. Various religious and cultural traditions, and subgroups within these, have 'constructed' their own meanings over a long period of time (Marshall 1992). While a detailed discussion of the respective roots of 'environment' and 'nature' is beyond the scope of this project, it is appropriate that consideration be given to some of the ways in which 'the environment' is used in the literature.

A physical 'environment' in one sense provides a medium within which we undertake our lives, yet it is not a homogenous backdrop to experience, for there are many environments and experiences of them. An environment may carry multiple

meanings. Groups within a community construct understandings of an environment relative to their experience of the physical characteristics of the setting and their mode of engagement with the place. That is, meanings are attributed to an environment by the intentionality of experience (Relph 1976). Kevin Frawley, in 'A 'Green' Vision: The Evolution of Australian Environmentalism' (1992) asserts that the relationship between people and a particular environment, while not always clearly articulated, is founded on certain beliefs and values that are absorbed through a particular cultural framework which is not static, but is constantly being remade and refined as a consequence of engagement with the environment.

Payne (1998, p. 19), in 'Childrens' Conceptions of Nature', urges that 'environmental educators would do well to consider learners' views about "nature" and the "environment"'. He highlights some of the concepts that are used to describe nature: 'nature can be characterized in many ways such as a sanctuary, quarry, cathedral, gymnasium, laboratory, archive, women, spaceship, escape, zoo, resource, lifeboat, 'other', sublime, wild, frontier, conquered, place, home, property' (1998, p. 19).

Such a diversity of meaning allows substantial room for interpretation and even contradiction. Educators, and education generally, play a significant role in shaping, interpreting, defining and transferring potentially conflicting concepts of 'environment' and 'nature' (Bowers and Flinders 1990). The issue here is the need for educators to be aware of their understanding of the terms 'environment' and 'nature' and the possible constructions students may infer when these concepts are used. Payne (1998, p. 26) warns that 'environmental educators need to remain alert to the fallibility of cognitive, aesthetic and experiential concepts of nature'. For Payne, educators need to be conscious and deliberate about how they incorporate an environment, or nature, into education.

Research that addresses the significance of the environment in shaping outdoor education programs is few and far between. Marcia McKenzie (2000), in her article 'How are Adventure Education Program Outcomes Achieved?: a Review of Literature', highlights the lack of practical research being undertaken in this area. What McKenzie says in regard to adventure education might equally apply to outdoor education:

The available literature indicates that the current understanding of how adventure education program outcomes are achieved is based largely on theory, rather than on empirical research. As a result, practice is grounded in assumptions and, perhaps, in an incomplete understanding of why programs are effective. It may be that some of the current theories are inaccurate, or that there are program characteristics that are influencing program effectiveness that have yet to be considered (2000, p. 24-25).

McKenzie's literature review lists program characteristics which allegedly contribute to program outcomes. These characteristics are the physical environment, activities, processing, the group, instructors and the participants. McKenzie describes the considerable body of research that has been conducted addressing the five latter characteristics, while pointing out that 'although a number of sources suggest that the physical environment is important to achieving adventure education program outcomes, little, if any, research has explored this relationship' (2000, p. 20).

McKenzie alludes to the constraints and possibilities an environment might provide in shaping the educational experience, through discussion of the types of environments that best encourage self awareness and responsibility. Two themes emerge from her review: an unfamiliar environment and a wilderness setting seem best suited to providing adventure education program outcomes. An unfamiliar environment is favoured for the contrast it provides participants, enabling them to gain new perspectives on the environments with which they are familiar. The benefits of a wilderness setting come from its 'rules', those requiring participants to develop awareness of the consequences of their actions, and the mastery, leading to an enhanced self-concept, that comes through the tasks undertaken in such a setting.

Miles (1999, p. 321), discussing outdoor education in his paper 'Wilderness', follows a similar thread. He describes wilderness as '...a place where the processes of nature occur as they always have...'. Miles implies that the setting is of some importance to the educational process: 'no research has been done to determine how much the place contributes to the achievement of adventure education program objectives' (1999, p. 322).

The manner in which reference is made to the environment can be indicative of the importance it holds for the author/researcher. For example, Miles argues that some of the objectives of outdoor education '...can and should be about the human species' relationship to and its dependence upon, nature' (1999, p. 323). However, he then

describes wilderness as a 'rare book' to be treated with awe, care and attention. Framed in this manner the natural environment is an 'other', something removed, or separate, from human existence. The metaphor of a rare book is a disturbing one for me. It implies that the natural environment should be kept on a shelf out of harm's way, dusted occasionally, but otherwise left alone.

Other researchers have begun, in part, to acknowledge the importance of the natural environment in shaping experiences. Ken Andrews (1999), for example, in his paper 'The Wilderness Expedition as a Rite of Passage: Meaning and Process in Experiential Education', discusses the sense of place participants may develop through an extended journey. At the same time, however, the primary focus of the article is that of the extended journey as a 'rite of passage'.

In describing extended journeys as a rite of passage, Andrews (1999) refers to three main dimensions of the experience: sense of community, sense of self and sense of place. While the concepts of 'self, others and environment' are not new to outdoor education (see Mortlock 1984), the emphasis on sense of community and self and place is significant. Andrews discusses the possibility of participants connecting with the natural environment and seeing themselves as a part of the natural world. However, his discussion of understanding community and self appears to be removed from the context of place, as though understanding of community and self can be done without some understanding of where one is. This is not surprising, given that it appears to be the dominant approach within outdoor education. Though Andrews largely refers to wilderness as the place for rites of passage, he acknowledges a more thorough discussion of sense of place through reference to Raffan (1993), implying that the issue is larger and more involved than he had scope to address. To his credit, Andrews raises the point, with regard to rites of passage, that the 'process' itself is meaningful. Reading between the lines I sense that the place, as a component of the process, is more significant for the author than he acknowledges.

In the last ten years, authors within outdoor education have begun to raise questions of how humans interact with the environment. These approaches have typically focused on the environment at a general rather than specific level and have sought to discuss the need for a style of education that raises questions, for example, of

sustainability (Higgins 1996, 1996/97) and environmentally sensitive living (Martin 1992, 1993, 1999a and 1999b):

Learning from outdoor adventure, outdoor recreation and outdoor education needs to go beyond consideration of the superficial aspects of minimizing impact. What I like to call *critical* outdoor education can contribute distinctively to education for the planet, by focusing on the cultural beliefs and practices that may be contributing to the ecological crisis (Martin 1999a, p. 464).

Brookes (1994) and Martin (1999a) both highlight the need for outdoor educators to be aware of the patterns they may be reproducing when taking others into the outdoors. Each author articulates a concern that outdoor activities have the capacity to “reinforce exploitive (*sic*) patriarchal values” (Martin 1999a, p. 464). In his paper ‘Critical Outdoor Education and Nature as a Friend’, Martin (1999a) suggests that developing direct personal relationships with nature is an essential element of outdoor education if it is to empower participants to act on environmental problems. Martin, when helping students to develop personal relationships with nature, uses the metaphor of ‘know[ing] nature as a friend’:

Although to consider “nature as a friend” still places humans separate from nature, it does treat nature as a subject, not an object, and is a model I find students can more easily understand (Martin 1999a, p. 465).

The concept of treating nature as a friend is a significant departure from the common approaches of outdoor education, which typically overlook the role the specifics of an environment play in shaping the educational experience. Using this metaphor to describe relationships with the natural world may be helpful, but developing friendships is more complex than initially appears. While I may have many acquaintances, I have fewer ‘friends’. There are many factors involved in how friendships are developed that educators need to consider. How might I encourage students to develop a ‘friendship’ in an unfamiliar environment? What activities will help this process? What cultural myths surround this place that may hinder the development of a friendship? These are but a few of the questions that come to mind. Martin also considers some of these dilemmas:

Friendships develop over time as people gain personal knowledge and mutual experience... Some outdoor activities invite students to return to the one place, repeatedly; others are built on novelty and exploration...I think that content which captures students’ interest by relying primarily on novelty is not helping them understand the importance of their relationship with place (1999a, p. 467).

An essential aspect of this style of outdoor education for Martin is the importance of local history in developing students’ relationship with a place. However, he does not articulate clearly how this might be built into an experience.

Some of the research within environmental education has attempted to look more closely at the connection between learning and the experience of the natural world. Gherda Ferreira (1998), in her paper 'Environmental Education Through Hiking: a Qualitative Investigation', sought connections between participation in bushwalks and the development of environmental literacy. Ferreira reports on qualitative research involving five people undertaking three 5-day walks in natural settings. She explores the possibility that activities such as bushwalking can contribute to environmental education objectives. The research showed that the environment had a significant impact on participants' experience:

It was obvious that each hiker was conscious of the biophysical environment and aware of the beauty of the natural environment... The comments [of participants] suggest that hikers do take note of the natural environment and possibly the inter-relatedness of components of ecosystems (1998, p. 181).

While this research demonstrates that the natural environment has an impact on participant experience, it remains unclear how this occurs, and how different environments affect experience. Hart and Nolan, in their extensive review, 'A Critical Analysis of Research in Environmental Education', hint at this as well:

In our reading of the research, many of the studies on students' ideas and beliefs have focused on epistemological issues of how we come to know about environmental issues, without consideration of ontological issues, *such as the role of context and life experiences* in shaping environmental knowledge and belief structures or poststructuralist ideas (Hart and Nolan 1999, p. 28, emphasis added).

While many of the authors reviewed here consider the environment important to their educational programs, few have articulated to what degree or in what manner the place impacts on the experience. In discussing the different characteristics that contribute to program outcomes, McKenzie (2000), for example, pays little attention to the importance the environment provides in shaping experience and learning opportunities. While the way the environment is reported in this paper is probably a reflection of the style of education to which the author subscribes, it is also an indication of the way in which the environment is conceptualized in this area of research, if not by educators. That the environment is something more than an 'unfamiliar' setting in which to engage in education seems not to be borne out in this aspect of the literature.

Experience

'Experience', too, is a contested term. Martha Bell (1993) explores some of the assumptions commonly made when reference is made to experience in outdoor and experiential education literature. She draws attention to the tendency for experience to be treated as having a '...fixed and inherent meaning' (1993, p. 20). Bell focuses on two aspects of learning through experience: the embodied location of experience, and the social organization of the process. She argues that '...experience "exists" through interpretation. It is produced through the meaning given it. Interpretations of lived experience are always contextual and specific' (1993, p. 20). We may all experience the same place but we do not all have the same experience of the place. In fact, we may all have significantly different experiences of the place. While we might all do the same, or much the same things, we will place emphasis on and remember different aspects of the experience. While camping on a sandy beach beside the Snowy River, for example, I might recall who was with me last year or what was in flower that isn't this year. For students it might be any number of things: where they slept in relation to others, where they had their meal together, or the dingoes that came past on the other side of the river chasing the cygnets. My experience is not yours, though we may have been there together.

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 individual characteristics, our culture, and the emphasis our community places on different aspects of the world around us. Understanding a community, or a culture, is contextual. A community and its culture develop and grow out of their own unique history, place and set of circumstances. How we encounter and experience a place is shaped by the interpretation skills we are provided with by our community.

Place

Discourse regarding the relationship of people to the environment has been occurring for some time but is a growing concern as the consequences of our past and present actions threaten our survival and that of other species. Interest in 'place', as a philosophical subset of this inquiry, has also grown in recent times. Philosophers have devoted considerable time and energy to the questions of understanding (physical) place and our (human) place in the world (see for example Bachelard

1969; Casey 1993; Malpus 1999; Massey 1994; Read 1996, 2000; Relph 1976).

Place, as environment, nature and experience, is a contested term. Hay (2002), in his review of some of the philosophical roots of place, highlights a few of the tensions that exist in understanding place. One interpretation comes from Norberg-Schulz, who believes place has an essential quality, which he calls (not originally) 'genius loci', literally 'spirit of place' (Hay 2002, p. 156):

To speak of place having a *genius loci* is to assume a certain constancy through time; to see places as tenacious unities that self-perpetuate while people and historical events come and go. Thus, the essential nature of places changes only slowly, outlasting the people (and the other life components) to be found therein at any given moment. Such a view is in stark contrast to the conventional approach to 'environment', where place is seen to be the sum of the various components (economic, political, cultural) identifiable within finite bounds at a given point of time (Hay 2002, p. 157).

While Norberg-Schulz seeks the essence of place 'in qualities that are place-intrinsic' (Hay 2002, p. 157), Relph, alternatively, sees understanding place as an enquiry into 'experiential bonds that people establish with place' (Hay 2002, p. 157). For Relph, 'place ceases to be a mere backdrop for survival; it is imbued with meanings that transform it from a theatre of fear and struggle to a haven; a positive context for living that evokes affection and a sense of belonging' (Hay 2002, p. 157). While appearing to be at odds with each other, these different approaches to place in some way are co-dependent, or at a minimum may coexist. While places are in one sense made and remade through engagement, and are defined by constructing cultural meaning, in another sense they do exist in their own right and could well have their own meaning, but for being largely overlooked as a result of the prior approach. Engagement with a place is limited by the characteristics of the place but also by the medium of engagement and ways of seeing the place. The tension here is substantial. Culturally we make sense of places through the meaning we give them, though place plays a role in shaping that meaning (through defining engagement), all the while potentially ignoring any intrinsic qualities the place may have.

At another level, place is important for it reflects who you are, where you come from and where you might go. 'Place itself is concrete and at one with action and thought' writes Casey (1993, p. xiii). 'More than a mere backdrop, places provide the changing but indispensable material medium of journeys, furnishing way stations as well as origins and destinations of these journeys' (Casey 1993, p. 274).

Nature writers, too, have devoted attention to human-place questions, yet frequently with a different emphasis. Barry Lopez has spent considerable time wandering the North American continent observing the landscape, talking to people and listening to their stories of connection with the land. 'Landscape and Narrative' (1988), as in many of Lopez's articles, is a woven story of people engaging with the land, in this case hunters, landscape (tundra) and wildlife (wolverines).

Lopez's importance, for me, comes from his discussion of the concept of two landscapes – the interior and the exterior.

The external landscape is the one we see - not only the line and color of the land and its shading at different times of day, but also its plants and animals in season, its weather, its geology, the record of its climate and evolution... The second landscape I think of is an interior one, a kind of projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape... The shape and character of 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. These thoughts are arranged, further, according to the thread of one's moral, intellectual, and spiritual development. 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 (Lopez 1988, p. 64-65).

Lopez goes on to discuss his ideas of story, drawing on his knowledge of several indigenous groups of North America and their relationships with the land; 'each individual...undertakes to order his interior landscape according to the external landscape' (1988, p. 67). The connection between who we are, what we do, what we think and where we are is central to this research project. While the concept of place is complex, and carries tensions and perhaps contradictions, it is useful to consider its educational importance.

Educational importance of place

The endeavours of cultural geography and nature writing have '...made significant progress in the careful interpretation of the significance of experience in place. Yet, as a theme, experience of place has largely been ignored in education, including Outdoor Education' (Wattchow 2001, p. 128). In *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World*, David Orr (1992) explores in detail the reasons place has been overlooked in education, and the importance of its (re)introduction. Orr highlights three reasons why place has been ignored in education:

One is the ease with which we miss the immediate and the mundane. Those things nearest at hand are often the most difficult to see. Second, for purists, place itself is a nebulous concept... Place is nebulous to educators because to a great extent we are a displaced people for whom our immediate places are no longer sources of food, water, livelihood, energy, materials, friends, recreation, or sacred inspiration... Third, place by definition is specific, yet our mode of thought is increasing abstract. The danger of abstraction lies partly in what Whitehead described as the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness": the confusion of our symbols with reality... By capturing only a fragment of reality, unrelieved abstraction inevitably distorts perception (1992, p. 126-127).

Orr, drawing on Thoreau's *Walden* as an example of the '...possible unity between personhood, pedagogy, and place' (1992, p. 126), asserts three reasons for the importance of integrating place into education:

First, it requires the combination of intellect with experience... The study of place involves complementary dimensions of intellect: direct observation, investigation, experimentation, and skill in the application of knowledge (1992, p. 128).

This combination of skills, knowledge and intellect is likely to be essential to many outdoor educators, as it is to me. The important aspect here is that these skills and knowledge be integrated into a focus on place. 'In the reciprocity between thinking and doing, knowledge loses much of its abstractness, becoming in the application to specific places and problems tangible and direct' (1992, p. 129). Orr's second point questions the manner in which place is understood:

Second, the study of place is relevant to the problems of overspecialization, which has been called the terminal disease of contemporary civilization... A place cannot be understood from the vantage point of a single discipline or specialization. It can be understood only on its terms as a complex mosaic of phenomena and problems (1992, p. 129).

The eclectic nature of outdoor education places it in a good position to integrate a range of disciplines into its practice. The challenge again is to make place the focal point for the coming together of these different ways of seeing the world.

Finally... much of the pathology of contemporary civilization [is] related to the disintegration of the small community... The study of place, then, has a third significance in reeducating people in the art of living well where they are... Good inhabitation is an art requiring detailed knowledge of a place, the capacity for observation, and a sense of care and rootedness (1992, p. 129-130).

A commonly advocated outcome of outdoor education is 'community' (see, for example, Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton 2000). However, without making explicit the connection between the human community and the biophysical community outdoor education is at risk of reproducing cultural patterns that do not acknowledge our dependence on the Earth. As a contributing factor to the determination of who we are, what we represent and the significance and impact of education, educators

would do well to consider the place around them that is shaping the experience and learning opportunities.

Experience of place

In Australia, authors such as Peter Read (1996, 2000), George Seddon (1994, 1997) and Paul Sinclair (2001) have raised the profile of Australians' relationships with unique landscapes. While in one sense the idea of 'sense of place' in popular culture is bordering on a cliché (Wattchow 2001), its relationship to experience and practice in outdoor education is still yet to be fully comprehended. The literature within outdoor education that discusses place tends to theorize connections and the importance of experience with little grounded research in support. That is not to say that the contribution of these authors is not important, just that there appears to be a lack of research exploring how the particulars of place shape experience in outdoor education.

James Raffan, a North American outdoor educator, is one of the few who has sought to unpack the complexities of place and people's experiences. His paper 'The Experience of Place: Exploring Land as Teacher' (1993) discusses some of the research he conducted for his doctoral dissertation. Raffan's primary interest is in how people of different cultures are attached to specific places. To this end, Raffan travelled extensively through the Thelon Game Sanctuary in northern Canada, talking to people, collecting stories, art work, photographs, sketches, and writing a personal journal of his experiences. While his dissertation looked more broadly at emotive connections to place, his article examines the 'role of primary field experience and the experiential learning process in exploring the notion of land-as-teacher' (Raffan 1993, p. 41).

Through the process of using a narrative-descriptive approach in conjunction with artwork and poetry, Raffan developed four ways in which the people in his study were connected to place. He describes the four components to a sense of place, or 'types of knowledge invoked by the land' (1993, p. 44), as toponymic, narrative, experiential, and numinous. Toponymic is described as relating to place names and the process of naming. The narrative component relates to the stories people tell to describe the way the land came to be, how things were, or current travels and

encounters with the land. The third aspect of sense of place is referred to as an experiential link to land, which comes through direct personal experience. The final component, numinous, is the spiritual connection between people and place.

While all four aspects of sense of place described by Raffan contribute to our understanding of place, it is the third component, experiential, that is significant here. For Raffan:

one can learn names of places from a map or from listening to stories told by elders, or one can read about the place in a magazine or see slide shows, but without any kind of *personal* experience on the land itself, any sense of place, any emotional bond to land, appears limited (1993, p. 44).

Citing trip reports and conversations with canoeists who had travelled through the game sanctuary, Raffan stresses that not all experience of place leads to a meaningful connection with it. He discusses the significance of *dependence* on the land as a means of experiencing place: 'from the moment of dependence the knowledge of a persona about a place can make an almost exponential jump in magnitude, perhaps because at this point the land experience becomes a defining feature of that person's character' (1993, p. 44).

While acknowledging Raffan's point, and agreeing with it to an extent, nevertheless considerable tension remains for me here. Not everyone going into natural settings, travelling in a self-contained manner, will develop a connection, a sense of place, with the area. Nor do all those dependent on the land have a connection and understanding of their relationship with a place. Authors such as Bolton (1992) and Lines (1991), in the context of the European settlement of Australia, have described in detail the destruction of the natural environment carried out by people (and a culture) new to the continent despite their dependence on the land. Conversely, authors in outdoor education (Brookes 1994; Cuthbertson, Heine and Whitson 1997) have articulated connection with place that comes through respectful engagement with the landscape.

Brookes (1994), in 'Reading Between the Lines—Outdoor Experience as Environmental Text', asserts that it is essential that outdoor educators take stock of the role they play in socializing students in and toward a place. The issues raised by Bowers (1993) regarding the way humans relate to the Earth and the messages educators pass on to students are critical to the approach to outdoor education

Brookes (1994) advocates. Highlighting that ‘...settings matter in education, just as they do in fiction or drama’, Brookes (1994, p. 4) argues that educators need to develop awareness of where they educate; how and what cultural patterns and beliefs they might unknowingly pass on to students through the processes of socialization.

The impetus for this cultural questioning is strong for Brookes:

Environmental problems, Bowers argues, cannot be solved merely by changes in personal behavior. Recycling, tree planting, and similar strategies are, in effect, different ways of struggling in a web of beliefs which bind us ever more securely to a future none of us wants (Brookes 1994, p. 4)

Brookes goes on to discuss the manner in which the dominance of rational understanding and the devaluing of tacit knowledge, as components of the Western worldview, work against knowing local places:

Outdoor experiences can impart tacit knowledge of place, including the knowledge necessary to understand an ecocentric world view. Unlike rationalist knowledge, which is validated by universal criteria (such as measurable competencies) tacit knowledge is local knowledge... Outdoor activities can provide experiences that allow us to interact with, and thus get to know, particular environments. Against this, rationalist tendencies can negate such knowing at every turn (1994, p. 7).

The emphasis on generalist knowledge, as opposed to local knowledge, ‘...prepares us to make short raids on the bush as strangers, rather than develop a sense of place’ (Brookes 1994, p. 7). The current dominant paradigm does not acknowledge the importance of knowing place(s) well, intimately, respectfully. While outdoor educators may construct learning opportunities, these, at a minimum, are made available through the environment in which the experience is being undertaken. ‘Ecologically responsive experience is negotiated with a particular place, using our bodies and all our senses, and is (necessarily) mediated by culture’ (Brookes 1994, p. 8).

An interesting observation of this aspect of the literature is that authors frequently use examples of specific places to support their arguments. The observations they make are locked in the context a place provides. Martin (1999a) describes Mt Arapiles and the type of climbing it offers in detail; Brookes (1994) discusses a patch of bush close to home that he has come to know well. Outdoor educators can, and usually do, know places very well, but it is the extent to which places inform their approach and practice that is important here.

Another author who has attempted to come to terms with meaningful connection with place through outdoor education is Randolph Haluza-Delay (1999) in his paper 'Navigating the Terrain: Helping Care for the Earth'. Haluza-Delay describes some aspects of outdoor education programs that may actually hinder participants' understanding of the environment. The subheadings in this paper give some indication of the issues raised by Haluza-Delay (1999): leaders trained in technical skills, not education; program subculture forms counterproductive norms; emphasis on activity; challenge may turn the natural world into the adversary; emphasis on the group; care for the environment is limited to practice of minimum-impact camping techniques; the notion that nature is "out there"; and, the nature-civilization duality of our society. Though admitting the list is not exhaustive, Haluza-Delay's critical reflection on the way in which outdoor education programs are constructed provides a helpful window into some components of programs that might be antithetical to understanding place, at home as well as during the outdoor experience.

Haluza-Delay's paper carries some interesting insights into how outdoor educators might better assist participants in (re)considering their place in the world:

Leaders need to consider carefully how the program structure and their leadership sends messages to participants... Due to the experience and role, leaders have a responsibility to help form or constrain the possible constructions that may be developing... Leaders can watch that counterproductive norms, for example the generalization that the natural world is the adversary or enemy of the individuals on the program, do not form. They should be aware of an overemphasis on the activities of the program. Leaders could act to ensure that the time together is not just a social or group experience, to the exclusion of other benefits, by planning opportunities for interaction with the natural world as carefully as they plan opportunities for group sharing, challenging activities or other program elements (1999, p. 450).

Despite these assertions the article carries some tensions I find difficult to resolve. Haluza-Delay argues that 'adventure programs need to critically address dominant social constructions of nature, environment and the human "place"' (1999, p. 452), yet he also acknowledges that, through his own outdoor leadership, he '...tr[ies] to help people connect broadly to nature in general, rather than the specific location' (p. 451). He discusses Raffan's (1992) criticism of adventure programs, namely that a sense of place in one location may not transfer to the participant's home, and proceeds to contest it:

A compassionate sense of place links the person and his or her surroundings. From it flows a desire to make relationships more full and genuine, including relationships with the whole earth, linking ecological sensitivity in a web of concerns. Care for others logically includes care for the air we breathe, or providing healthy unpoisoned food and water for others to consume. A

compassionate sense of place goes even further to extend moral consideration to the planet upon which we depend (Haluza-Delay 1999, p. 453):

While I agree with Haluza-Delay's view, *modeling* understanding, knowledge of and connection to places, on programs and at home, would appear to me to be essential.

Cuthbertson, Heine and Whitson (1997), in their paper 'Producing Meaning Through Movement: an Alternative View of Sense of Place', discuss sense of place and its significance to outdoor educators. Highlighting the hierarchical sense of place described by Relph (1976), Cuthbertson, Heine and Whitson (1997) argue that this traditional view is prohibitive and not necessarily accessible to all. Acknowledging that it is '...extremely difficult to judge the relative value of two senses of place (with respect to their contribution to the Earth)' (Cuthbertson, Heine and Whitson 1997, p. 74), they contend that travelling ecocultures have the potential to develop connection to a larger whole through knowing many places. In raising this point they draw on examples of the indigenous people of northern Canada who, through necessity, lived nomadic lifestyles. Their key point here, for me, is that such people know the land through intimate experience. Their lives, their families and their culture depended upon this close relationship. Their nomadic existence is/was perhaps a different form of dwelling in the landscape. While outdoor educators may have a sense of place in many locations I believe it is highly unlikely to be as intimate or deep-rooted as that developed through living in one location or region.

In 'Reinvigorating Our Love of Our Home Range: Exploring the Connections Between Sense of Place and Outdoor Education' (Stewart 1998), I attempted to clarify my position regarding my profession and my connection with the Earth. My main point was that, while it might be difficult for outdoor educators to form a deep-rooted sense of place according to the hierarchy developed by Relph (1976), we do have a role to play in showing our participants ways in which they might connect with places, particularly their homes. Although I still hold to this point, my perspective of place has shifted. I have moved away from trying to understand place in terms of 'sense of place' to trying to comprehend experience of place. Both Raffan (1993) and Wattchow (2001) have been influential here. Raffan, in describing 'four types of knowledge invoked by the land' (1993, p. 44) refers to an experiential link to the land. Wattchow, however, posits sense of place in a broad framework of experience of place, arguing that 'experience, more-so than "sense", encompasses

theoretical and practical knowledge and personal and collective interpretations' (2001, p. 127). Given outdoor education's *modus operandi*, a focus on *experience* of place seems appropriate.

Brian Wattchow's (2001) paper, 'Outdoor Education as the Experience of Place', presented at the Australian National Outdoor Education Conference, 'Education Outdoors – Our Sense of Place', carefully fleshes out some of the issues surrounding the complex notion of place and experience through the use of stories of particular places and people. Each story draws on a different place, producing different, though often overlapping meaning and potential. Through the use of storytelling, Wattchow brings to our attention the different experiences of place that come from distinct landscapes. He describes canoe journeys in the Barmah Forest on the Murray River in Victoria, Australia, traditional mountain houses and walking tracks designed for children, and boating in Norway. Each provides a different perspective but an equally valid way of encountering landscapes.

Wattchow (2001) draws on cultural geographers and nature writers to help support his claim that place should become a central component of this style of education. In reviewing Australian writing that addresses issues of place, Wattchow makes the observation that:

...place is consistently dealt with as a theme, as though the answer to connecting identity with place lies somehow in the idea of place, and not the place itself. How we Australians relate to 'the coast' or 'the bush' as an idea may be very different to how we relate to the local bush or coastal place near where we live. We strive to understand the iconic and symbolic 'bush', but not that local bush near home. We strive to comprehend the significance of 'the coast' to our perception of ourselves as a nation, but have few examples of careful and intimate writing of specific coastal places. We seem to be big on heady ideas and abstract conclusion – but low on lengthy, intimate, careful observation and recording of what it means to live in specific local places (2001, p. 131).

The tensions that exist between the spirit of a place and the meanings given a place make understanding experience of place all the more difficult. As has already been highlighted, subcultures within a community place different emphases on the significance of a place, on how to use and engage a place and what a place is 'worth'. Character and meaning are given to a place through intentionality of experience (Relph 1976). The emphasis of experience can make and remake the significance and meaning of place. While professing that 'Outdoor Education's

pedagogical advantage lies in the commitment to the significance of direct experience in the education process' (2001, p. 129), Wattochow warns that:

We cannot understand ecology unless we understand community and individuality. This understanding moves closer to the image of 'place' in the way I use it in this essay – as an overlapping series of realms (personal, communal, historical, environmental) – where the experience of place resides in the coincidence of these realms. Outdoor Education may have swung too far towards the 'ecological' at the expense of intense personal (development) experiences. A deep understanding of individual, cultural and natural phenomena are all integral to finding one's place (2001, p. 132).

Andrew Brookes (1998), in his paper 'Place and Experience in Australian Outdoor Education and Nature Tourism', takes a different approach when discussing place and experience. For Brookes, the assumptions inherent in 'experience' within American and Australian outdoor and experiential education spheres are troubling:

If interpretation is taken to mean a performance of understanding (Rouse, 1987), akin to what is meant when a singer interprets a song, or a canoeist negotiates a river by 'reading' the water, the educational focus inverts; experience becomes primary, translation peripheral and constantly open to review. Thus knowledge is not extracted from experience; rather experience is knowledge itself. There is an ontological dimension to the concept of experience as performative grasp of the world. Interactions express knowledge, and at the same time the world is revealed through interaction, with the ever present possibility of new interactions revealing new realities. Conversely, the performance may reveal ignorance and render the world invisible (Brookes 1998, p. 6).

There is considerable tension here that can be difficult to see and manage. The issue rests with how emphasis is given to the experience. Learning through experience is locked in the context provided by the place and circumstances. Abstraction of the learning, through 'processing' experience beyond its situational context, runs the risk of diminishing the way in which the place shaped the experience. Conversely, an emphasis on 'experience is knowledge itself', where the knowledge acquired originates from 'being' and 'doing' in a particular place, can overlook wider issues and forces that play a significant role in defining a place and the opportunities within it.

The other significant point Brookes (1998) brings to this discussion is that of the cultural baggage that travels with us when we go into the outdoors. Brookes argues that understanding experience of place in an Australian context involves acknowledging the cultural myths that shape our approach to the land. In an educational context, intentionality of engagement with an environment (Relph 1976) is not sufficient to ensure that the experience alone will lead to learning and the development of knowledge. The manner of engagement with an environment plays a

role in determining the experience, learning and development of knowledge, but there are other factors that may impact on the process and outcomes. Australians, for example, are a predominantly urban people yet commonly their understanding of the land is based more on images and myths than on an 'authentic bush tradition' (Brookes 1998, p. 2). Experience of place is to a large degree determined by one's approach to it, which in turn is shaped by the dominant culture of which one is a part. For instance, commonly encountered cultural myths of the Snowy Mountains are loaded with images of silent, white, heroic and stoic men on horseback thundering through the hills. Rarely are they of indigenous people making their way seasonally to the mountains to meet with other groups, feast on Bogong moths and enjoy summer in the high country. That our cultural baggage mediates our interaction with place is difficult to unpack, but it is an important issue of which educators need to be conscious. Going 'bush' isn't just going bush, but is rather a complex process involving all that we have previously experienced of nature and culture, mediated by the emphasis, story and constructs that surround the encounter.

Understanding place through experience is not an easy task. The going does not become any easier when the experience is structured with educational goals. For Wattchow:

if Outdoor Education professes to teach anything at all about the land and how we might relate to it, we must be prepared to work hard as a profession to understand what happens when people encounter places, experience them, and try to make sense of the experiences (2001, p. 127).

Ultimately, for Wattchow, the challenge of incorporating place into outdoor education is a pedagogical one requiring 'intimate attention, receptivity, perception, silence, stillness, listening, sensitivity, story and an ethical relationship to place...if we want to find our way home' (2001, p. 146). For Brookes (1998), issues of place and experience are more problematically situated within questions of how Australia has been colonized, and continues to be colonized, through the process of education.

Other approaches to outdoor education that have considered human relationships with the Earth have addressed issues such as deep ecology (Horwood 1991; LaChapelle 1991; Martin 1993), the construction of knowledge through experience (DeLay 1996), spirituality (Beringer 1997, 1999; Fox 1999), the development of an ethic of care (Martin 1999b; Quay *et al* 2000), combining adventure and ecology education (Hanna 1995), and the use of the metaphor of interpersonal relationships to

develop human-nature relationships (Martin and Thomas 2000). While these articles address the manner in which humans relate to the Earth they largely discuss the issue in a general or abstract manner. While all acknowledge the importance of the natural world they rarely discuss the significance of specific places in shaping the learning context in which they are educating.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature relevant to this project by focusing on the key areas of understandings of environment, experience, place, educational importance of place and experience of place. Discussion of these areas highlights the lack of research that has been conducted that specifically addresses the significance and importance of the environment in shaping outdoor education experiences and learning opportunities. This is exciting yet disappointing, given the significance of experience of place to outdoor education. The next chapter details the approach and methods of the empirical project which is at the centre of this thesis.

Chapter Three

Methods and Procedures

Qualitative researchers are interested in telling, and are often consumed by the need to present their stories of research as an ongoing journey. Their writings must, therefore, reflect the process of research – the character and foundational beliefs of the original conceptual framework as well as the evolving one, considerations on the stumblings, in-progress victories, insights and puzzlements of the researcher as the research unfolds, disclosure of the researcher's stance and limitations as well as descriptions of the successes and failures of the ongoing stories of multiple meaning making. So, the process *is* the product (Ely, Vinz, Anzul and Downing 1997, p. 52).

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methods used to address the research questions of this project. The chapter begins by discussing the research approach and rationale for the method employed. It then details the study participants and the physical setting of the study and the structure of the experience, describes the research method, addresses the personal assumptions that underpin the approach, and discusses the data collection and analysis and the limitations of the project.

Research approach

James Raffan (1993), in 'The Experience of Place: Exploring Land as Teacher', has played a significant role in shaping the approach taken in this study, his work being particularly influential when working through the many methodologies that might be used to undertake this project. He comments:

when it comes time to assess or to prove what students have learned outdoors, efforts always come down to functional, testable knowledge—the names, the facts, the figures. The rest of the outdoor experience, the part that lingers in the heart, that goes home in story form, the part that touches the world; these are almost always eclipsed by the need to appropriate, commodify, and quantify what is learned. We seem to know very little about the effective bonds to place—the very outcomes of learning that may well drive land conflicts around the world (1993, p. 39).

Raffan highlights the challenge that faces outdoor education in researching and developing awareness of the ways in which experience and learning may be shaped by the context provided by the environment. In order to gain a better understanding of the significance of place in shaping experience and learning it is necessary to move beyond observation of factual and 'testable knowledge'.

This qualitative project is designed to gain insight into the experience and learning of a particular group of people travelling through three different environments. It is not an inquiry into 'people' alone, or of a certain environment, but rather of particular people encountering particular landscapes. While the participants may have similar experiences, they have their own individual learning and memories, and construct their own knowledge as a result of these experiences. Their experience and learning is subjective. However, the subjective nature of the data collected does not render the project's findings, or the contribution it may make, invalid:

The naturalistic paradigm assumes...that there are multiple realities, with differences among them that cannot be resolved through rational processes or increased data. In fact, extended inquiry along a priori paths will result in a greater divergence of data; convergence comes only as the interrelationships between all the elements of reality are seen. Because all the "parts" of reality are interrelated, an understanding of the "whole" can begin with a holistic investigation of any portion of it. By "understanding the whole" we refer to a working comprehension of the interrelationships that give definition to it (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen 1993, p. 14).

The naturalistic approach, also referred to as 'interpretive' by Henderson (1991), is '...expansionistic rather than reductionistic. Discovery of theory grounded in the context of a situation is the primary purpose of this research' (Henderson 1991, p. 24).

The subjectivity of interpretation results in a number of possible perspectives that help to understand and explain the meaning attached to phenomena. The combination of a low degree of imposition of constraints on antecedent variables and a low degree of imposition of constraints on possible outcomes is the hallmark of this view (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). In other words, because the interpretive view allows data discovery to occur with few rules, the possibilities of uncovering meaningful conclusions are greatly enhanced (Henderson 1991, p. 25).

Karla Henderson, in *Dimensions of Choice: A Qualitative Approach to Recreation, Parks and Leisure Research* (1991, p. 23), argues that interpretive social scientists 'assume that reality includes:

1. Multiple realities, relationships, connectedness, wholeness, and inclusiveness.
2. An emphasis on induction and grounded (emerging within a context) theory.
3. Organic (contextual) processes that focus on meaning.
4. Subjectivity and perspectivity.'

In a more recent paper, she states that the 'interpretive paradigm permits us to view human behavior as a product of how people define their world, and to see reality from others' eyes' (1993, p. 49).

A critical aspect of the naturalistic inquiry approach to qualitative research is its acknowledgment of the researcher as an element of the research process:

The naturalistic paradigm affirms the mutual influence that researcher and respondents have on each other. Nor are the dangers of reactivity ignored. However, never can formal methods be allowed to separate the researcher from the human interactions that is the heart of the research. To get to the relevant matters of human activity, the researcher must be involved in that activity. The dangers of bias and reactivity are great; the dangers of being insulated from relevant data are greater. The researcher must find ways to control the biases that do not inhibit the flow of pertinent information. Relevance cannot be sacrificed for the sake of rigor (Erlandson *et al.* 1993, p. 15).

The naturalistic inquiry approach allowed me to be the coordinator of the long walk, to lead a group and be the primary researcher in this project and at the same time acknowledge my interest in the participants' experiences and learning in the places encountered.

Study participants

Participants for this study were sought from students enrolled in the subject 'Field Experience 2A' as part of the Bachelor of Arts in Outdoor Education. All participants were older than 18 years of age, the oldest estimated at 30 years of age. Of the 32 consent forms collected 19 addressed the questions in sufficient depth to warrant their entries being included in the results. Of these 8 were female and 11 male. While a gender balance in the results would be preferable I had little direct control over how participants used their journals. The respondents travelling from south to north consisted of 6 females and 8 males and those travelling from north to south consisted of 2 females and 3 males. The logistical constraints of the experience led to two groups starting in the north of the KNP and two in the south. The detail is discussed more fully in the following section.

Physical setting of study and structure of the experience

Given that this project focuses on the participants' experiences and learning in a particular place it is appropriate to give an overview of the setting and the manner in which it was encountered. As outlined in chapter one, the long walk occurs in the KNP in New South Wales. The Park covers approximately 690,000 hectares extending north from the Victorian border, along the Great Dividing Range to the ACT (National Parks and Wildlife Service 1988). It extends across a diverse range of environments and altitudes from approximately 300 metres above sea level in the

south of the park where the Snowy River flows into Victoria, to 2228 metres above sea level on the summit of Mt Kosciuszko. In order to provide a context for understanding the way in which the landscapes were encountered I will first describe the structure of the experience and then give an overview of the environments traversed.

The structure of the experience

In 2001 the long walk involved 34 students, split into four groups of seven, eight, nine, and ten, each with a leader. For financial and logistical reasons two groups started the trip in the north of the KNP, near Round Mountain and Snakey Plain, and the other two south of Jindabyne on the edge of the KNP. Two different routes were followed, though there were sections in common. Those starting in the north spent the first seven days walking through the alpine regions of Mt Jagungal, The Kerries, The Rolling Ground, Mts Anton, Tate, Twynam, Caruthers Peak, Mt Kosciuszko, and the Ram's Head, before collecting their first food drop at Dead Horse Gap, 5km west of Thredbo Village on the Alpine Way. The following five days were spent descending through the sub-alpine region to the junction of either the Jacobs and Snowy Rivers or the Pinch and Snowy Rivers. At these two locations the second and final food drop was collected before the groups turned northeast to walk up the Snowy River to finish where the other two groups started. The groups starting south of Jindabyne followed much the same routes, but in reverse. For all groups, stage one was seven days long, stage two was five days and stage three six days. All groups had a food drop, which the participants themselves had prepared prior to beginning the walk, on days seven and twelve of the trip. Food drops were delivered by a transport operator based in Corryong.

The physical setting

As each of the three environments of the walk was traversed by groups going both north and south the areas are described as the north, middle and southern sections.

Northern section

The northern alpine section of the walk follows the crest of the Great Dividing Range at elevations of between 1600 and 2220 metres above sea level. The areas above 1800m are typically above the tree line and can be subject to strong winds, rain and snow at any time of the year. The northern part of this area is typified by gentle

rolling hills capped with Snow Gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) and heath with open cold air drainage valleys lined with snow grasses. The southern part is dominated by the alpine plateau of the Main Range, Australian's most extensive alpine zone (Slattery 1998). The Main Range is covered by snow continuously for at least four months of the year and experiences minimum temperatures below freezing six to eight months of the year. 'Precipitation is high, being in the range of 1800 to 3100 mm per year, with about 60 percent of this falling as snow' (Green and Osbourne 1994, p. 4). A variety of vegetation is to be found above the tree line, between 1800 and 1900 metres above sea level, including dense heaths, short and tall herbfields, fens, bogs and feldmark. The cover of these different communities varies according to elevation, aspect, drainage, position and past cultural activities (see Costin, Gray, Totterdell and Wimbush 2000). While the walking can, at times, be relatively easy with expansive views, the elevated and exposed nature of the terrain can produce rapid changes in the weather with snow falls possible at any time of the year. From a walker's perspective, camping spots are easy to find, though cold air drainage areas often need to be avoided, and drinking water is easy to procure. Walking can be off-track, on small human-made foot tracks or old fire trails.

Middle section

The middle section of the walk traverses the sub-alpine region to the south and east of the Main Range. This gentle undulating country drops off steeply on the south-eastern edge into the catchment of the Snowy River. The vegetation changes from Snow Gum and heath-clad hills with cold air drainage valleys to tall, wet forests of Alpine Ash (*E. delegatensis*), Candlebark (*E. rubida*) and Black Sallee (*E. mitchelliana*), frequently with dense understorey, to communities on the lower and drier slopes dominated by Narrow Leaved Peppermint (*E. radiata*), White (*E. albens*) and Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) and White (*Callitris columellaris*) and Black Cypress Pine (*C. endlicheri*). Like the northern section, this area has many old fire trails. Camp spots in the middle section are relatively easy to find, drinking water, however, depending on the year and the route may be a challenge to locate.

Southern section

The southern area of the walk travels along the banks of the Snowy River in the rain shadow to the east of the Great Dividing Range. The steep hills and slopes above the river are dominated by White Box (*E. albens*), White (*Callitris columellaris*) and

Black Cypress Pine (*C. endlicheri*) with a generally sparse understorey. The Snowy River at this time of the year, as a function of the damming upstream, is typically low, slow, dirty, silt laden, and warm. In the summer months the steep, narrow valley of the Snowy can reflect heat and typically generates temperatures between 30-40 degrees centigrade. Away from the river conditions are dry, with only the larger creeks flowing in the summer months. The banks of the river in many places are lined with Willow (*Salix* spp.) and Poplar trees (*Populus* spp.), invaders that have made their way downstream from the farming country around Jindabyne. The steep terrain in this area makes for difficult vehicle access. As George Seddon notes in his book *Searching for the Snowy: an Environmental History* (1994), with the advent of modern vehicles and declining use of horses as a mode of travel, this area has actually become more remote since European settlement of Australia. Camping in this section typically is on a sandy beach beside the Snowy River. While drinking water is easy to collect from the river, students are advised to treat it, either by boiling, chemicals or filtering, due to its poor quality.

Research method

The long walk is the primary component of the subject 'Field Experience 2A' (a copy of the subject outline is included in Appendix C). As part of the subject, students were required to keep a journal of the experience in order to demonstrate their learning and reflection during the trip. The data gathered for this project comes from two sources, the first being student responses to guiding questions in their trip journal at three different times during the experience, namely days 5-6, 11-12 and 17-18 of the trip. The second source of material comes from general entries in the participants' trip journal. As there were four groups, all in different locations at any one time, with myself responsible for one of the groups, the use of journals was the most feasible means of collecting data during the experience. Other techniques, such as interviews during the experience and participant observation, were considered but were deemed inappropriate due to the nature and demands of the experience.

As is the nature of a research project such as this, data collection changed as the quality and quantity of the material shifted. Initially it was intended that data be gathered from two different sources, participant responses to the set questions in their journals and interviews conducted after the experience, in order to ensure

credibility of the material. In the weeks following the experience, 12 participants were interviewed to gain further understanding and insight into their experiences and learning. With analysis of participant journals, it became apparent that, as a source of material, the journals were rich, detailed and provided an excellent insight into participant experiences. While participants were asked to answer the questions at particular times, the structure of the experience and the nature of the trip foci frequently led to participants discussing related issues in a non-structured way in other parts of their journal. In many cases this 'cross-referencing' acts as a means of observing changes in responses to the environments as participants move through the landscape. This 'new' source of data provided a means of verifying the credibility of the responses made to the journal questions. As a consequence of gathering these unanticipated data, the interview material was set aside.

Personal assumptions

In keeping with the approach taken in this project I feel it is important to draw attention to my assumptions and value system that have shaped the choice of research methods. Central to this project is my belief that humans are a part of the world around them; that we are merely another aspect of the natural world. Flowing from this is the idea that the distinction between nature and culture is a human construct, for culture comes out of, among other things, nature, and our understanding of nature is a function of our surroundings and our cultural beliefs. The dichotomy created by the nature-culture construct is a complex issue and beyond the scope of this project. However, this philosophy leads me to contend that in understanding experience and learning the context provided by the place needs to be considered. That is, any understanding of our experiences or learning cannot be fully appreciated without considering the environment in which it took place. While in many cases we may behave as if we are separate from our surroundings, we in fact do not live in a vacuum or bubble that moves around freely and independently of the Earth.

The approach and method used in this project flow from this notion and a desire to gain a better understanding of the multiple realities that exist within an experience such as the long walk. Henderson points out that 'interpretive social scientists assume that social reality is multiple, divergent, and inter-related' (1991, p. 24). As

people's responses to places and landscapes are varied and change over time, it therefore followed that a qualitative approach using participant journals to record responses to places provided the best means to capture the perspective of participants at different times throughout the journey.

Data collection and analysis

At the briefing class prior to departure, students were introduced to the project and their participation was sought. Information sheets and consent forms were distributed and those completed were collected. A copy of the information sheet and consent form can be found in Appendix A. Students were given a copy of the journal questions to be addressed at three different times during the trip. Journal entries occurred at the completion of each stage of the journey, where the environment was about to change from one the participant had been in for 5-6 days to the next in the experience. A copy of journal questions can be found in Appendix B. During this briefing class the Head of the Department of Outdoor Education and Nature Tourism addressed the class regarding the nature of the research project, highlighting the importance of research, urging participants to contribute and drawing their attention to the process of raising concerns (should they have any). Group leaders were present at the briefing class; prior to departure they were asked to remind participants to respond to the research questions at the end of each stage of the walk.

Upon completion of the trip participants were required to write a reflective piece discussing their learning and to submit this with their journal. It was at this time that I was able to ascertain who had responded to the research questions and photocopy the relevant journals. Journals were assessed, and moderated by a colleague for verification, before any data analysis began, to ensure that assessment was not influenced by gathering the research material. When the assessment process was completed, and respondents' journals copied, the reflective piece and journals were returned to participants.

Upon completion of the data collection the journal entries were read and analysed with the research questions in mind. As the journal of each respondent was read, and entries were encountered that related to the research topic, notes were kept detailing the area of trip, page number and the theme of the entry. These notes were then

further analysed to detect emerging themes, ideas and concepts. Themes were coded and collated. It is important to note that throughout this process I was the sole reader of the data. A brief discussion of the underlying theory of qualitative data analysis may help contextualize the approach used to process the material used in this project.

Data analysis in qualitative research has been described as:

...the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationship among categories of data; it builds grounded theory (Marshall and Rossman 1989, in Erlandson *et al.* 1993, p. 111).

Central to the process of analysing qualitative material is the notion that the 'theory emerges from the data' (Burns 1994, p. 288). Emergent, or 'grounded theory', relies on the 'constant comparative method of analysis' technique, first advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Melia (1997), in 'Producing Plausible Stories: Interviewing Student Nurses', provides a detailed account of the evolving definitions of this method in the 30-year period from 1967. While the full details of the development of this method are beyond the scope of this project it is important to note that Glaser and Strauss have more recently articulated different philosophical opinions on grounded theory. For the purposes of this project, Melia (1997) provides a useful interpretation. Drawing on Glaser and Strauss (1967), Melia elaborates on the grounded theory definition by suggesting that 'constant comparison allows for drawing on literature and theorizing in the area under study as well as the more obvious comparison of data with data, and data with emerging conceptual categories' (1997, p. 26).

Returning to the process employed, from the collation process the following three categories emerged: (1) the environment providing a context for learning and experience; (2) factors that impacted on the experience of place; and (3) critical reflection and thought as a consequence of experience. The coding used to develop these categories assisted in the arrangement of further sub-categories. These are too numerous to list here and can be found in chapters four, five and six. These categories and sub-categories were used as headings and sub-headings to structure the data in the writing of these chapters. Wherever verbatim quotes are cited, pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' confidentiality.

Limitations

Considerable debate can be found in the qualitative research literature over the concepts of trustworthiness and credibility of data collection and analysis. A variety of techniques are suggested to ensure that the end product is 'believable'. Robert Burns reports that:

A commonly used technique to improve the internal validity is triangulation. Triangulation may be defined as *the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour*... Triangulation techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and/or using a variety of methods (1994, p. 272).

Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and Steinmetz provide a slightly different perspective on the use of triangulation in the development of trustworthiness:

Checking data obtained by a variety of methods is one way of contributing to trustworthiness. Watching for the convergence of at least two pieces of data, for triangulation of findings, can be as suspenseful as it is important. Many experts indicate that triangulation characteristically depends on the convergence of data gathered by different methods, such as observation and interview. We have found that triangulation can occur with data gathered by the same method but gathered over time (1991, p. 96-97).

More recently Ely, Vinz, Anzul and Downing (1997) have discussed the use of language in the literature of qualitative research. They contend that the language of triangulation does not suite the style of research; that it is:

...mechanistic, positivistic – it represented data as a series of unchanging and fixed events, most of which could and should be corroborated. It promised far more than it could deliver. And what is more, with its message, 'triangulation' drew people away from the difficult but essential job of wrestling with complex issues of multiple perspectives and meanings (1997, p. 35).

Bogdan and Biklen add weight to this discussion by advocating that researchers avoid using the term 'triangulation' as it:

...confuses more than it clarifies, intimidates more than enlightens. If you use different data-collecting techniques...say that. If you collected data from many subjects about the same topic, say that. In short, describe what you did rather than using the imprecise and abstract term triangulation (1998, p. 104)

As the intention of this project is to gain insight into the experiences and learning of a number of people in different places at different times, the use of journals emerged as the most suitable technique to record these encounters. Upon reflection on the divergent positions on developing trustworthiness it became apparent that in this style of data collection careful note-taking and description of the processes used was important to ensure that participants' experiences were accurately represented. To

this end, the description of the research process that is included here is an attempt to present the findings accurately while minimizing any bias that I may have.

As already outlined, the nature of the experience, at times, placed substantial physical demands on the participants. This raises two related issues. The first is that the structure of the trip is likely to have played a role in shaping when and in what depth the participants responded to the research questions. While I was unable to change this situation without changing the nature of the experience, it is important that it be acknowledged. The second issue relates to the way in which the data was collected. As discussed earlier in this chapter, considerable thought was devoted to the most appropriate technique to be employed in the collection of the data.

Interviewing participants at different times throughout the experience was considered but discounted as financial and logistical constraints prevented me from being in different places in a short space of time. This method also had the potential to interrupt the flow of the experience and impact on the data. As participants were already keeping a journal for the requirements of the subject, asking them to answer a few questions at different times seemed to be more appropriate. As already discussed, post-trip interviews were conducted but the data was set aside as the material in participant journals was rich and detailed.

A further two related issues that need to be considered are the number of respondents in my group and myself being the primary person responsible for the subject, the leader of one group, and the researcher. Of the 19 respondents to the research questions, ten travelled in my group (five female and five male). This is likely to be a consequence of me reminding the participants at the relevant times during the walk to answer the research questions if they had chosen to participate in the project. The second issue here is not resolvable, and need not be resolved, but rather acknowledged: that I was a part of the experience for all of the participants on one level or another. I was the subject coordinator, responsible for planning and implementing the trip, preparing staff and participants, leading a group and conducting the post-trip debriefing sessions for all groups. While there is the potential for the data to reflect my involvement, I believe that the participant responses to the experience, the environments and their learning throughout the 18 days are likely to be the dominant material found in their journals.

Despite the limitations raised here, participant journals, both in terms of responses to the research questions and general entries, proved to be a rich source of material for this project.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the methods employed in this research project. The research approach and study participants were discussed, the physical setting of the study and the structure of the experience were detailed, the research method and personal assumptions were described, and the data collection and analysis and the limitations were examined. Chapters four, five and six report on the findings that flow from the process outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Four

Research Findings Part 1:

The environment providing a context for learning and experience

Introduction

This chapter, and the following two, present the findings that are drawn from participant journals kept during the experience, as outlined in chapter three. Journal entries addressing the research questions and daily entries provide insights into how the different environments shaped participants' experience and learning outcomes. These journal entries reveal the multiple realities experienced by respondents on the walk.

Upon review of the data in relation to how the environments shaped the learning outcomes, the following themes were developed to structure the findings: (1) the environment providing a context for learning and experience, (2) factors that impacted on the experience of place, and (3) critical reflection and thought as a consequence of experience. Each of these themes is a focus of this and the following two chapters.

In order to understand the impact of each setting, the responses have been recorded for each of the southern, middle and northern sections of the walk. The responses are from all groups, travelling from both north to south, and south to north. Where there are differences in the responses relative to the direction of travel they are noted at that point. The spelling errors in the responses have been corrected whilst maintaining the intention of the entry.

Each environment traversed during the walk provided a different set of experiences and potentially different learning outcomes. That the environment provided a context for the learning and experiences of the walk is the subject of this chapter. Within this theme, sub-themes were developed to structure the data; these are: (1) responses to place, (2) observation and understanding of the environment, (3) stories told by the

place, (4) relationship with others, and (5) learning and insights. These sub-themes constitute the headings of this chapter of the findings.

Responses to place

The responses to each of the areas encountered are quite varied, as would be expected when travelling through three relatively different environments. The diversity of responses highlights the range of experiences and learning that may be encountered in each of the settings.

Southern section

The southern, or Snowy River, section of the trip offers experiences such as sleeping on sandy beaches beside the river, following brumby tracks through thick riverside vegetation and traversing dry open hills of White Box and White Cypress-pines.

Participant responses to this area are quite varied. For John, 'the hills felt rugged and harsh walking over them, but looked strong and gentle from the river' (p. 18). He goes on to describe the feelings he has developed toward the area:

The Snowy has drawn awe and respect from me because of her persistence to flow despite the dry terrain she flows through and the human interference in her flow rate and patterns. I have also held respect for the heat and harshness of the climate in this area and the vegetation that lives here. I've enjoyed experiencing the life the river sustains, including mine to a degree, and the relief she offers as a swimming pool at the end of the day (p. 19).

Sam describes the strength he has drawn from the place:

I feel a little bit like I am being tested by this place, and even though I am tired I feel that I am physically and mentally getting stronger. I think that this place is helping me to become stronger. I am also becoming more trusting – this area has provided me with all I need to survive (apart from food). Around every corner is great beauty, and a clear path, and great places to rest and/or sleep (p. 24).

Kelly articulates reverence for the area yet feels out of place:

I feel a certain reverence for this place when I sit back and look at it. At other times I feel awkward and uneasy – difficult terrain or my physical tired state have an effect here. I find this place very sensual. Some of the plants give off smells at different times of the day. The water is very refreshing, cleansing and beautiful. This place makes me feel free, more human and less a product of my society. I feel exposed and I like it. I'm challenged and rewarded by the same thing. I wish I didn't feel a stranger and 'out of place' here, but I do (p. 11b-c).

Responses to an area can vary, even from the same person, as Kelly, on another occasion, demonstrates by responding to the place in an excited manner:

I'm loving this place. The rolling hills of today's walk. Cypress pines and wildflowers. When the sun came out after the overcast and drizzly rain, our

spirits were lifted and the heat continued so we were hot by the time we reached the Snowy. Jumping in, boots, gaiters, soaking wet (p. 5).

Jason too, expresses excitement at reaching the Snowy River. He describes a challenging day spent traversing the hills to the east of the river in order to reach it as 'exceptionally moving' (p. 6) because of the river. He goes on to say:

...it was so special because it felt like we'd reached our destination and the adventure begun although the journey already had. Plus, with so much history behind it, the "Snowy River" was seen by many in the group for the first time. It was all it had been made out to be and more, it was an instant feeling of remoteness and freedom (p. 8).

Jason's elation at reaching the river prompts him to discuss the effort and reward involved in getting there:

It's moments like this that we live for, a short time in the scheme of things (life), but a long time in our memories and significance. You live your life, well I do anyway, for the short periods of bliss, of such immense pleasure that it makes every other moment and hard times worthwhile. For example, the walking down the fire trail was difficult, and strenuous on the body and mind, but reaching the water of the Snowy River and seeing the spectacular waterfall was worth striving for (p. 8-9).

In attempting to understand what they are experiencing, some participants relate to experiences of other environments. For Jason, a sense of isolation is significant in shaping his experience:

...this river environment is so special to be amongst, surrounded by giant hills on either side of the river makes the whole group feel isolated from the rest of the world. The remoteness separates it from other environment of similar nature, and the slow walking pace is more pleasurable than walking in other environment. There was almost a surprise around every corner, from high cliffs, glistening water and wildlife (amazing Wedge Tail Eagles gliding above the ridge line). It really does feel incredibly special to be in this unique environment that few people see (p. 10-11).

Sadness and disappointment were recurring themes in responses to this area, but for different reasons. Meg makes the comment that 'it's difficult not to become entirely sad when you know it takes a lot of time to feel so normal here, like it's a way of life now and to change that is going to be hard' (p. 55). She also expressed disappointment for the state of the river:

The Snowy told me a story. In every steep bank of a Gorge, or dry and wide inlet, I hear the story of human intervention. Here it is not a story of survival but of strangulation, of a sad, sad struggle and hopeless warm hope. The story doesn't have a clear end, but the beautiful Cypress Pines smiled at me today (p. 63).

Peter found the river was not what he had expected:

It's strange how your expectations of an environment can be so different to what it is. The Snowy is nowhere near as pristine as I was expecting & has been a bit of a disappointment (p. 105).

A few days later Peter goes into more detail, describing why it was not the experience he had anticipated:

It's an interesting place the Snowy. It's not what I imagined it would be. I had pictured this large clear water that ran over all these large boulders, and the banks to be all natural & the way a remote wilderness setting should be. Instead I have been confronted by a silty flat river with large sandy beaches, weed infested banks, brumby trails & a feeling that this place doesn't do it for me. I don't feel the same connection that I did with the higher altitudes of the walk. The weeds and lack of water in the Snowy are the main things that affect me. Every time I look at the river I think "I wonder what it would be like if it had its original flow". Wouldn't that be a fantastic thing. To see the environment live the way nature intended it to live (p. 116-117).

A sense of excitement surrounding the opportunity to meet the 'mighty Snowy' was often replaced by sadness for the condition of the river. Nathan, as does Peter, holds some hope that things might change:

This is the first experience I've had in this environment. I was excited at the least with the prospect of meeting the Snowy for the first time. The river was spectacular, but as we spent more time by its side, it became apparent that it looked sad. There wasn't as much water as there should be. It wasn't flowing fast. Looking at it from Milligans, it was clear that it look[ed] lethargic and tired. I hope to see it with more water in it some time soon (p. 22-23).

The structure of the walk and the attributes of a new environment in some cases put participants in challenging circumstances. Ben, reflecting on his first day, contemplates the impact on his experience of the new environment, and the preparation and organisation prior to departure:

I feel like there is a lot of distance between me and this environment, it's so dry and barren and I think because it's new I don't understand a great deal about the area. I guess it's like meeting a new friend, it can take a long time for the relationship to become something of substance. I feel almost nervous and unwilling to begin to understand this area. I can't view it as a place of beauty. But maybe it's not even because it's a new area because I remember looking back to my first experience on the high plains and it was absolutely incredible and I was just blown away by the area. This is far different here because I guess there are many other factors involved. There's been a lot of preparation and organisation for the walk which has been going on since before the holidays and I feel its just a bit weird that we are now actually living this thing which we have been planning for a couple of months. I didn't expect the first area to be this dry despite what I had heard. It will be interesting to see if it changes much when we get onto the Snowy and into a river environment (p. 5-7).

Several days later Ben describes his feelings toward the area being shaped by the condition of the river and the influence of time in getting to know an area:

When initially seeing the Snowy it immediately induced a sense of sadness because it barely flowed and seemed greatly affected by its damming. This made it difficult for me to begin to appreciate the area because it didn't seem so natural to me. But over seven days of travelling through the area it allowed me to explore a lot and to observe things like bird life which gave me a greater understanding of the area and brought me much closer to it (p. 55-57).

Sam, reflecting on his journey down the Snowy, highlights that experiences of an area can vary substantially:

My experiences of this place have been varied. At times the heat has been almost unbearable, but at the same time positive because it enhances the influence of the river. I have found it a bit sad to see the river in a state which I find unhealthy. It is also disappointing to not be able to drink the water without treating it. But at the same time I found it relaxing and easy following the wide, slow bends in the river – walking, resting, and camping on sandy beaches – taking time to watch the water and its movements is so relaxing. Walking in and out of steep gorges has been very challenging and also provided valuable perspective and contrast to the river, I think. This was very important to me to have a greater understanding of the place I had been in (p. 22-23).

Tanya, too, articulates tension within herself over how she felt toward the place and the experience she had:

My experiences with this area bring out very pessimistic views of the Snowy River. Knowing that it is impacted upon so much makes me feel bad about being here and in some way contributing to it. The fact that we have to purify the water has sort of impacted on my experience here because I had thought it would be more wilderness like. But if you compare these feelings to how beautiful the scenery is in this area I would say that I had a quite positive experience here (p. 63-64).

The following sequence of entries from Alex demonstrate how one person's perspective of a place can change within a week:

This place is well and truly stunning, I've never seen anything like it before. This place is so full of life, so wild, even at night time (p. 2).

As my walking progresses I can see the beauty of the area clearer than on previous walks. I'm beginning to feel more at ease with it. Everything here is so peaceful and quiet, I think I'm falling in love (p. 6).

I think you need to be born here or at least lived here most of your life to feel at home in the bush. I love the bush and I'm passionate about it, but I don't feel at home (p. 26).

The Snowy River section made me feel remote, very remote actually. I had no visual pictures of how it would be nor how the group and I was going to look like in this visualization. I couldn't picture it (partly because I didn't want to, in case of expecting it to be different, or being let down). I've realized the actual remoteness of this place after running mad between outdoor shops and supermarkets, and continuously drying food for days. I've finely reached something that pays for the effort of getting ready for such an environment. I wish I could take my close family here and show them the beauty I've experienced (p. 41-42).

The Snowy section of the walk evoked a diverse range of responses from participants. While these responses vary they share a common thread of the attributes of the landscape playing a role in determining the routes taken, and in turn, the experience.

Middle section

While the middle section of the walk also elicits a variety of responses to the environment they are nonetheless different to those encountered in the southern area.

For John, the area and structure of the journey provide time to reflect:

My experiences in the last week have been quite awe-some. I've found the area to be peacefully inspirational. It hasn't been physically spectacular, but there's a safety about the area we're been walking in. It's been very relaxing too. We're had lots of rest time and no huge days the way we did on the Snowy. More time to reflect inwardly to which has played a big part in my experiences. So we've had lovely relaxing walking in a very beautiful gentle place (p. 38).

Yet John also expresses not being as excited by the area as he did along the Snowy:

Whilst I have loved it, as a comparison to the Snowy section, it hasn't grabbed me as much. Maybe the Snowy grabbed me because of my enthusiasm and excitement for this trip...I don't know. I will certainly re-visit this last section though, because certain aspects have grabbed me. Tin Mine Falls, brumbies, the Cascades and I'd love to walk up the Pilot (p. 38).

Yet a few days later John's perspective has shifted:

I feel thoughtful, analytical and at peace. The last one is definitely to do with where we are. I feel more in tune with the greater natural world and her cycles, knowing where north is, where the sun will rise where it will set, how warm it is...I feel relaxed and peaceful living with this close and complete relationship with the natural world (p. 41).

Travelling from north to south Meg makes comparisons between the open space of the Main Range and the enclosed forests of the middle section of the walk:

I've dropped down a lot since I last wrote. There are some amazing tall trees around here – so old! I feel like I'm a little enclosed compared to the big plains I described previously. There are a lot more animal tracks, bird noises and understory shrubs here – this all makes for a lot busier environment. The flies are much more apparent too, they buzz about making a bit of racket when combined with the wind, birds and occasional water. The area is much more dry, even though it feels dense, water courses are dried up here which look the same on the map as the high flowing creeks up on the plains. The light is also different, it's filtered through the leaves which leaves it more orange and stronger. We're all pretty hot when walking but it's a good temperature to sit in... I feel small among the trees and like being quiet to listen to the birds. The dry creeks make it feel harsh but not as difficult as the cold up high. The light is welcoming and pleasant, this makes me enjoy the area because it's visually pleasing (p. 38).

For Peter this area seems largely unaltered except for the old fire trails:

The only modification which seems evident to me is the 4WD track running up the hill. The rest seems like the way it's always been. There is no evidence of forestry through the area, nor does there seem to be many humans come through the area. The small track that does lead through this stage of the walk seems very removed from the environment. I get the feeling that if you stepped off the track you would feel as though you were in the environment the way it has always been. Not much attention seems to be paid to this particular area. So in that respect it isn't a highly modified environment due to human intervention (p. 88-89).

Kelly describes the landscape through her experience in a poetic style:

When you can see out over the country there are wonderful blue ranges, varying in shades as they disappear into the far off horizon. Their ridge lines crawl across the sky; overlapping one another as the closer ones shed their spur lines like fingers toward you. There are eucalyptus trees everywhere and at times I feel it closing in around me. The humidity of the air mixed with all the scents is, at times, almost overwhelming. From these tunnels of creamy bark and green spectrum – shrubs, bushes, and sky reaching leaves – you are spat out into open grasslands with flowers, butterflies, meandering creeks and a plethora of insects. The horse shit is everywhere, as well as the ants, and the brumbies are never far from eye or ear. With a wet, misty morning, the forest almost becomes rainforest – the variation in stands of trees from Candlebark to Black Sallee conjure a new chapter in this area's discovery. The romantic stories of my childhood come to life with the ruins of stockyards, native grasses and the wooden huts which sneak into view (p. 22a).

Kelly goes on to articulate mixed emotions toward the country she has been travelling through for the last five days:

My experiences have been varied depending on the place and my mood. At times I've imagined I'm in a fairyland. Soft grasses, sun sprinkled butterflies kissing flowers. Spider webs hugging the morning dew as cloud wafts in and out of valleys. Other times I've felt claustrophobic and engulfed in a strange place that I know very little of. Mostly it's felt good and has been a pleasurable journey (p. 22b).

Yet in the next entry:

Excited, sad and a little disappointed, all because I'm about to leave the sub-alpine and go into the Main Range and although I'm really looking forward to this, I wish I had more time to get to know the places I have just travelled through. I've only had a taste (Kelly, p. 22c).

The responses to the middle section of the walk, while varied, have a poetic and introspective aspect to them. As with the Southern section of the walk, these responses suggest that the attributes of this landscape played a role in shaping the experience.

Northern section

The response to the northern landscapes are largely of a positive, excited or uplifted nature. Meg, for example, was extremely content with where she was:

I'm so glad to be here – each day I feel more and more comfortable and although it's pissing down rain outside I'd rather be here than anywhere else in the world. I love this environment! Rocky outcrops, drifting fogs, cold rain, beautiful flowers (Alpine Gentians?). It's all so grand! (p. 27).

In another entry Meg goes into more detail:

I am in the most amazing place. It's like a whole other world – an island in the sky. There have been only snowgums to show us we're in a normal place – though for the last two days we've been travelling above the altitude trees can grow at. There is still hills and valleys but they're covered in 1/2 metre shrubs, spiky grasses and soggy moss beds. It all feels strange because you can see for ages ahead exactly where you'll be travelling, and though awkward it's pretty amazing and so real (I have to keep reminding myself). The moss is fragile and I feel so big to be walking over it. There is water in the strangest places making

not creeks like at home but pockets of water running slowly and SO CLEARLY! beneath you. It's very strange and very, very grand. I think only the flowers remind me it's a real environment, the millions of rocks scattered [on] every hill would seem more at place in a star trek movie. My experiences in this new world have made me acknowledge there is more variety in the way life can exist than a human living in a house can contemplate – "life is harsh" seems to be screaming from the plants as loudly as the rain hitting my tent (LOUD!) (p. 29).

Upon encountering Valentine Falls Meg is moved to write a poem:

Valentine Falls

Wall gushing loudly
Seep, water seep
Fall flushing round me
Creep, water creep
All texture ground me
Sooth, water sooth
Small body release me
Move me water (p. 18).

The scale and attributes of the landscape can evoke spiritual connection with the area. For Paul:

The place makes me feel very small and unimportant. The huge massive peaks of the Rolling Ground make me feel special and when the clouds give in to the views I can feel as if I have a spiritual connection to the land (p. 20).

For Sam this was also the case:

I love this place. I find mountains very spiritual – very wild, especially with the weather we have had. Beautiful calm, sunrise, sunset, then really wild, untamed. Despite the large human impact through grazing and hydro it still seems untouched by comparison to most other places (p. 40).

While not specifically articulating a spiritual association with the area, Kelly is inspired and uplifted by her experiences of the area:

I have felt mystified by this place. The snow gums are full of expression for me. They twist and writhe against the intense weather which is a feature of these higher places. They remind me of beautiful spirits, trapped in time slowly etching out an existence in a hostile environment. Having said this – I don't really believe the weather is hostile – it is a feature of the land and although I've been wet and almost blown off my feet, these weather systems provide water for a vast amount of life. If you don't like 'intense' weather then my advice would be to not camp here. If you don't mind the reality of storms then this place could offer you an exciting visit full of rapidly changing conditions. The night sky – when clear without the moon – can send your mind to places only the stars can inspire. I've wanted to walk slower in this environment because I'm a very visual person and there are always blissful views to breathe in and imagine flying into (p. 26b).

Peter, too, recounts being excited by the area and wanting to go back:

I've had this most amazing experience over the last 6 days. I'm currently camped at a river, which when you look down the valley you can see the Main Range which we just came down. However only the top sticks out as the rest is covered by cloud. Its quite metaphoric in placing it in a different world to where I am now. The footprints left behind me are some that I will never forget. Pictures of range after range on a 360° scale. It was an uplifting feeling. Such a positive experience is leaving me with these euphoric dreams of returning to the same environment over and over again all in different seasons. I feel some un-

explainable bond with this high country. Maybe it's the skiability [sic] of it, maybe it's the factor of being so high, maybe its being in a place where water is no issue, maybe it's the snowgums, heaths, granite, flowers, snowpatches. It's probably all of them. If only I had my past 6 days eyesight on video tape, I'd watch it over and over again. My respect for this place is very special and I'll be back (p. 53-54).

In the following entry Kelly describes being comfortable and content:

I'm sitting outside Pretty Plain Hut. The mist is rising out of the valley and the blue sky is slowly appearing above me. I feel good and relaxed. Yesterday, the rain drenched this place and I was a wet soggy rat. Today I get to walk in sunshine. My boots were dried in front of the fire and I had a good night's sleep with the fresh chill air moving under the fly (p. 26c).

Though Sally expresses appreciation for the area, she was not at home:

I love the Alps but can't help thinking of myself as a visitor and not a dweller – the alps are not a place to live, but a place to visit. Like a sunset – if it was there all day it wouldn't be as special, but to see it sometimes is amazing (p. 17).

The responses to the northern landscape, while diverse, are nonetheless different to those of the southern and middle stages. The responses have tended to articulate a sense of being inspired, uplifted and excited about the place.

Each of the areas visited produced different responses. The southern area produced expressions of remoteness, freedom, respect, being challenged and strengthened by the landscape and disappointed and concern at the state of the health of the Snowy River. In the middle section of the walk respondents were introspective and poetic about their experiences, but also sad and disappointed at not having had the time and opportunity to get to know the areas better. In the northern area the responses were of a positive nature, uplifted, inspired, and excited about being in the area. While diverse, these responses suggest that each landscape, and in particular the attributes and characteristics of each place, played a strong role in shaping the routes taken, and in turn, the experience.

Observation and understanding of the environment

The respondents made a variety of observations of the environment through which they travelled. These observations illustrate the learning and understanding gained through experience.

Southern section

The southern area of the walk is dominated by the Snowy River and the dry conditions of the area. Kim, for example, comments on not expecting the vegetation encountered:

Travelling from Box Lodge to here I had no idea that the vegetation would look like it did. There were grassy plains and a lot of Box trees. I didn't really have an idea what it would be like but I find myself in unfamiliar terrain. Of course I have seen grassy plains before and lots of Box trees but I just didn't think today would have looked like it did! I reckon the whole walk is going to surprise me with interesting terrain and things that I just wouldn't have thought of! Can't wait but I wish that this weather would clear up (p. 7).

Jeff discusses how the river is a focal point in the area:

The Snowy River is the centre of all movement for the last week. Its warm waters are a relief to hot weary travellers. You spend the day crossing its banks, looking for wildlife, brumby tracks in the scrub. By side her banks the Snowy looks brown and unclean, due to my perception that water is clear or blue. We are situated in a rain shadow which means that this area doesn't get a lot of water, so the ground is dry and crispy (p. 41).

Although not discussed in the same manner, Kelly, too, implies that the river is central to her experience of the area:

For the past 5 days I have been walking through the Snowy River country. It is a majestic place. The Rangés are steep and proud with various coloured cliffs and outcrops crowning the peaks or sides. Amongst these rugged hillsides is the Snowy River itself, which winds its way through the country rock. Moving rocks, sand and debris along the way. At various intervals you can see evidence of crystal movements in times gone by. Seams of quartz are exposed as well as granite intrusions. Blazing blue skies cause the water to sparkle as it laughs its ways over rock cascades – or silently passes through a deeper stretch. Many plants and animals depend on the river for water in this otherwise dry country. You can see weeds growing on the shore line and the scats of anything from wombat to brumby on the sandy river banks. There is much life here in many forms. It is a magical place (p. 11b).

For Ben, the learning that came through experiencing the area allowed him to clear his mind:

I guess I've learnt quite a bit about the natural environment because I have never visited a natural area quite like this one before. I've gained experience of early explorers, trees, geology, info on the hydro scheme and many other areas. I think as a group it has brought us much closer because we have had to all work closely together to make it through this area because we [have had] many long exhausting days because of the heat and terrain. For me it has allowed me to reconnect with nature and helped me understand myself better through understanding how little I can survive off and clear my mind of thoughts that generally only come about by being in the urbanized world (p. 59-61).

While the observations and understanding of the environment that come from experiencing this area are diverse there is a common thread of the river and the dryness of the surrounding country. For these respondents the river in particular appears to have played a central role in shaping their experiences of the area.

Middle section

For one respondent the transition from the high ground of the Main Range to the tall forests to the south was quite significant:

At the start of the day we were travelling through the heathy Snowgum territory with very distinct cold air drainage basins. However further on into the day we came out into more of an open forest with huge big old trees. Bird calls were a lot more prominent. It was as though we were out of the danger zone. We had had lapsed into an environment that was a lot more friendly on its human inhabitants. The atmosphere was relaxed (Peter, p. 57).

And further down in the same section of the walk:

I like to be observant of the environment when descending such an altitude like the Nine Mile Pinch. As we descended I noticed Spreading Wattle, Silky Hakea, Cherry Ballart, Cypress Pine, White Box, the soil type changed from exposed granite to sedimentary covered with freshly eroded feldspar out of the old overlying granite layer, Silver and Black Wattles, Blue Gums, larger Cypress and White Box down the bottom, the change in colour from the lush green of the top to a whitish bluey green (Peter, p. 84-85).

For this respondent, the transition from the alpine to the subalpine environment of the middle section of the walk brought with it observations of the changes in the broad landscape but also of the species that inhabited these areas.

Northern section

Contrastingly, for those travelling from south to north, the transition from the middle area into the alpine environment of the north was significant, as Mary recounts:

Now the area has surely changed! I can't believe the difference. It's amazing. One moment we were in inverted tree lines, cold air drainage, and now, up above the tree line, in a very rock area. The wind is very strong and quite cold. It's a good test for Tom's new little orange tent... You can also see for so far up here. We're about 2040 plus metres above sea level. It goes on and on, mountains and valleys, valleys and mountains. It's so very beautiful. The grasses aren't just grasses any more, but an array of beautiful alpine herbs. They all have very small leaves and grow close to the ground. They're also dense and very elastic. They are well adapted to this cold environment (p. 80).

For Judy, the environment has lessons humans can learn if they should take the time to learn:

I love it so much up here – it is such awe-inspiring country. This morning, moving through the Rams Head alone was great and being on top of Mt Kosi again was fantastic. It is all so beautiful you just don't know where to look first. The harshness of the terrain and the wind (even today when the weather is perfect) makes you wonder how the plants and animals survive up here. It is just incredible. We also saw some windswept feldmark today – I think it is just amazing how the plants migrate away from the weather as they grow to stay alive – it makes you realise the intelligence, if you like, of the natural world and what we can learn from it, if only we let ourselves (p. 49-50).

The observations of this environment differ from the previous two sections in that in observing the alpine environment, these respondents note the challenging living

conditions that exist in the area for humans and express admiration at the plants that are able to live there.

In each of the areas the respondents have articulated different observations and understanding as a product of their experiences. The southern section of the walk produced descriptions of the unfamiliar nature of the terrain, the dry conditions of the area and the importance of the Snowy River to travel and living in the area. In the middle area the transition from one area to another was noted on a broad landscape level but also on a smaller scale of where particular species live. The northern landscape produced observation on what is required to live in such an environment and admiration for the plants that are able to live under such conditions. The observations and understanding of the environment are particular to the individual and his or her experiences. Understanding of the area might develop with the aid of further information, for example from the leader or other participants, but in each case it is tied to, and comes out of, the experience of the place. Understanding of an environment is cultivated by being in the place and experiencing it in a particular way.

Stories told by the place

The question of what story the place might tell one elicits a variety of responses. In some cases the story provides an insight into how participants experienced the area or some of the learning he or she may have undergone.

Southern section

For two respondents commenting on the southern section of the walk, the human influence on the landscape is a significant aspect of the story:

If the Snowy River and surrounding region was to tell a story it would begin back when aboriginals lived in the area. It would talk about how it helped the aboriginals to survive because they were part of it just like the other animals. But when Europeans inhabited the area it lost its respect for them very quickly because they stopped the area from being what it really is by introducing weeds like blackberries and the slow flowing murky water which can't even be drank without treatment...it sort of induces a sadness on to us which is our punishment for not leaving the area untouched (Ben p. 57-59).

Tanya felt the area had two stories to tell her, one of the geological timescale of the landscape and the other of human disturbance:

This place would tell me a story more ancient than any length of time us humans can comprehend. The rocks of the Snowy are metamorphosed sedimentary rock at the water falls. It would tell me of the time that it formed, by heat and volcanic activity. The sandy beaches tell a story when I look at pebble beaches and see what they used to be, crushed pebbles. The gorge told me a different story about its life.

The River has told me another story of more recent times about what has made it so fragile. The hydro electric schemes, the Man from Snowy River story. All the weeds show me just how fragile this environment really is to impacts and disturbances. I feel that it has been told me its had enough of being used just because its there. I think it needs a holiday, and I really feel this might happen when the flow changes from 1% to 28% (p. 65-66).

The stories told here are of the difference between geological and human time scales and the impact of humans on the river in recent times. They suggest that the impact on the Snowy River by humans since European settlement was significant to the experience of these respondents.

Middle section

In the middle stage of the walk, people again feature in the stories but in different ways. Peter describes a transition from Aboriginal occupation to European settlement:

If this place was to tell me a story it would be of the people who lived here, and its life as an ecosystem. Aborigines must have thrived on this place. The Ingeegoodbee River and the surrounding habitat seem like the ideal place for a nomadic community to live in the summer months. The Aborigines would have walked and camped up and down the Ingeegoodbee eating flowers roots, berries, animals and moths. That is until their decimation. Which would have coincided with the arrival of the alpine graziers. The area would tell of how they came and brought these large foreign creatures in which ripped through the vegetation and scarred the land. Until finally they started to fade away, only leaving a few of the beasts which now run wild through the bush like hunted down fugitives.

The last 100-150 years would be a very sad story for the area to tell. The amount of scarring and stress it has been under what with the building of roads/huts/fences, introduction of cattle/horses, removal of Aborigines. It would either be very angry or too sad to talk about it. Despite all this though it is forced to go on. To still let its rivers and plants grow. For it is an "Environment" and they never give up. Live till the last. The emus, the kangaroos, the bees, the insects, the ants, the butterflies all creep, crawl, fly, hop, run and sing just as the same way they used to. So in that respect it still has a reason to have a smile on its face (p. 77-80).

Kelly, too, speaks of the settlers, hardship and survival of the environment:

The story would be one of two. One being the story of an Australian High Country – The Man from Snowy River Country. Horses, wild and tame, stock whips – bogged cattle, hardship and gain. A place of men and cattle battling against nature. The other story would be one of wind, rain and swaying trees. A gentle lullaby with sunrays and grasses like pillows. Colour in many forms. The undulations like a melody (p. 22b).

John uses the metaphor of a 'misunderstood sibling' to describe some aspects of the area that are little known or undiscovered:

The story would be that of the misunderstood younger sibling. The Suggan Buggan Range has spent its life in the shadow of the Main Range and these days is somewhat left out in the attention it receives from humans. But if people would take the time and energy to get to know the area, they would find she has many hidden and unknown treasures. She guides much precipitation down to the Murray, the largest river in this land, but divides the watershed and sends much water the way of the Snowy. Other treasures of Tin Mine Falls, the Rough's Creek Gorge, the Cascades and Pilot are largely undiscovered, but she likes it that way. She misses the attention but doesn't want the destruction that would come with it (p. 39-40).

Like the southern section of the walk, the stories of the middle area also make reference to the impact of European settlers, but that of the graziers. Respondents have mentioned the 'decimation' and 'removal' of the Aboriginal people and the detrimental impact of 'men and cattle battling against nature', but also of a place known only by a few, in the shadow of the surrounding areas.

Northern section

Again, the way in which participants articulate the story varies markedly. For John the story is that of the landscape and the processes that have shaped it:

...the story [would be] of how it came to be here, of hundreds of millions of years of sediment deposition, uplift, receding oceans, tilting, folding, of molten rock trying to burst its way through the surface, of gentle weathering and erosion to sculpt the shapes we see now and of glacial action carving gullies and smoothing off peaks. The story would go on to explain the delicate balance of life at such an altitude. What grows where and why and how all the vegetation interacts with the physical form of the land to regulate the release of precipitation that falls up here (p. 69).

Sally uses the metaphor of an old person to articulate the story of the area:

If the Alps were to tell me a story, it would be the story of the water, the people that have lived dependent on those beautiful big beds of sphagnum moss. A history told in a quiet and wise voice, an old person, wrinkled and brown, in a rocking chair (Sally, p. 17).

Kelly, too, uses metaphor, but of music:

It would be a story told in classical music. A composition by Bach where there are many moods which flow over your senses ~ one feeling blending into another or lifting you to soaring emotions (p. 26b).

In the northern area of the walk respondents tell of the processes that have shaped the landscape and the importance of the area as a catchment to many others, but also of the capacity of the area to alter moods and emotions.

Each of the areas traversed elicited a different set of stories from the respondents. In the southern area respondents articulated the difference between geological and human time and the impact of damming the Snowy River on the river health. In the middle section of the walk, stories referred to the impact of European settlers and their livestock on the landscape, including the removal and decimation of the aboriginal people. In the Northern area landscape processes, the importance of the area as a catchment and the capacity of the area to alter moods and emotions were described by respondents. As with the responses to place, the stories here are diverse, yet they suggest that the landscape was a significant aspect in the experience, that the experience was to some extent shaped by the characteristics particular to each place.

Relationship with others

The environment can provide a context for gaining further understanding of relationships with other people. While the responses are diverse, they have the common threads of the need for good communication and of the environment playing a role in shaping relationships with others.

Southern section

In the Snowy section of the walk Alex discusses the impact of the environment on his relationship with other members of the group:

The Snowy River environment has had an affect shaping my relationship with others. Due to the remoteness of the river we all have had to fully commit at different times. Commit to each other physically by making river crossings safe and possible, lifting packs and mastering rough terrain. Emotionally – cognitive thinking towards place and group members, conflicts, confrontations, smiles and tears. All this plus much more has been caused by the environment we are in. It has also helped us being more open to each other in order to communicate effectively. To have made this journey a safe and enjoying one, our level of communication needed a boost so that we wouldn't go crazy at each other and ignore the intrinsic wonder of the bush. The bush here made us bond closer together because everything around us was new and we experienced it at the same time (p. 43-44).

In a further entry he goes into more detail:

The great thing about it [travelling in a small group in a remote setting] is we really got to know each other through a remote natural environment, and not in a school uniform, afraid of not being accepted by class mates. In the school yard you can run away, you can leave and go home if don't live too far away. But out here you are stuck with the group members the whole time because there is nowhere to run. You have to deal with your mates and they have to deal with you. By accepting the way we are and how we do things, we need to know and get used to each other's personalities and behaviour in order to perform

effectively as a community. Without the environment I'm not so sure we would reach this intimate bonding (p. 45-46).

Tanya, too, relates evolving relationships with other group members to the hardship encountered as a function of the experience:

I have learnt that despite all the hardships the whole group has felt about the Snowy River as well as time limits and the terrain we were walking on we are still a great bunch of people. We know each other really well and are communicating and understanding each other on levels I didn't think were possible. Also I have found that the bonding we have had because of these hardships will change our lives and the way we act around each other even after the walk (p. 67).

Toward the end of the experience Alex reflects on how his relationships were shaped by the setting:

The Snowy River section was new to us all and it affected us differently than the Main Range. We bonded together really well because the remote Snowy River environment and the river itself was something special, something totally wild. We were all strangers to this place and I think we hugged each other as well as the spectacular environment along the way. I also believe our close bonding was due to the beginning of the walk... The first couple of days were sort of catch up days I reckon. The good thing about these days was that we experienced one type of unfamiliar wilderness together. We then bonded via this astounding place. It meant a lot to me this section. I became closer to my group members' personalities and limitations. It was one of the better places to intermingle with such fine people. The people in my group in an environment like this made my day every day (p. 71-72).

Remoteness, an unfamiliar environment, the nature of the terrain and challenging walking conditions were of significance to these respondents in increasing communication, openness and bonding between members of the group.

Middle section

The subalpine area elicits a different set of responses to that of the other stages:

I have spent some time on this section thinking about myself and my place in this group of people and the place I often take in a group. Amongst my peers at Uni, I tend to be the wise experienced big brother with lots of advice. That's partly because of how others perceive me and partly because of how I perceive them. It makes me quite dark to realise that because it's not the person I'd like to be. I do value everyone's experience and I'd never be so arrogant as to think that there's someone I can learn nothing from... That's been my major learning from this section – more to do with circumstance than environment (John, p. 40).

Meg felt the change in walking conditions from the Main Range to the thick forest of the middle section impacted on the behaviour of the group:

I found that moving through the almost impassable scrub coming down from the high plains into the valleys had an effect on the chaotic group. By removing the attention from conflict... to a group challenge with the gully, the group was able to put into perspective what stage we were going through. The taller

environment gave me a reality bite in that I really feel like I'm "bush" walking now (p. 39).

And later, Meg ponders the connection between relationships within the group and the experience:

How relationships within the group affects the experience

The relationships between group members have been more commonly within pairs. These were well established in the first few days of our journey. As they changed with group development the experience of the trip had an effect on individuals. For example, some pairs split while others developed, leaving the "left overs" in limbo of the interchange. The feeling of loneliness impacted the way those individuals experience the environment we were travelling through, and how.

If a participant were thinking about this abandonment when navigating off-track the experience of off-track may be perceived as negative. After interchanging the possibilities through and sorting out the differences, I now feel comfortable in a state of continuous evolution into one we may thankfully reflect on like family. This new state will probably have an impact on the way we take in this campsite (Jacobs River) (p. 47).

While these responses appear quite different they highlight the potential connection between the nature of the environment, the walking conditions and the group interactions that may occur.

Northern section

The alpine region, with different experiences and therefore potentially different issues, produced different responses:

In retrospect, I can appreciate the differences we all have and that some are more developed than others – in various ways. We are all at different stages in our maturity and experience of life. Sometimes you just have to let people alone because you are not the best person for them to communicate with. I would love to develop the skill or craft, of communicating with anyone! But I realise that this will take time, effort and experience. In fact, its quite probable that I will never reach a point of being able to communicate and therefore help or understand every person I come across in my professional and personal life – but it is something to strive for (Kelly, p. 34).

Participants learn from each other as a function of the experience:

Today we climbed Mt Kosciuszko. Yeah. We've now climbed the highest mountain in Australia, but it just wasn't what it seemed to be. The hundreds of tourists, boardwalks and ambition to be on top of Aust. wasn't what I expected to come across. The beautiful scenery and signs of land formations from millions of years ago, fell into the background as I was feeling my way through my thoughts why we do these activities and where I'm heading in this world. However, a talk with Ben on the way down from Koscy, he reminded me that living is for the moment and that unless you live for that moment then there is no way you can get the most out of all your experiences (Jason, p. 59).

These responses here highlight the different approaches respondents have to the experience, the need for good communication between group members and the capacity to learn from one another.

That the environment may provide a context for learning about relationships with other people was highlighted in the responses recorded in each of the southern, middle and northern sections of the walk. In the southern section of the walk, respondents commented on the environment being unfamiliar, the remoteness and challenging walking conditions contributing to the group needing to commit to each other, to be open, and for increasing levels of communication in order to cope with the experience. Comments from the middle area were thoughtful with respondents wanting to learn from each other and noticing the way in which different walking conditions impacted on the relationships between members of the group. In the northern landscapes, comments referred to the need to recognize the differences between people, including the different levels of communication, the need for good communication and the capacity of group members to learn from each other. While the responses did not indicate how specific aspects of each landscape impacted on the relationships between group members they do suggest that the setting and the structure of the experience were a contributing factor.

Learning and insights

The learning and insights respondents gained from their experiences are quite varied yet there is a common element of the landscape shaping walking conditions and the development of outdoor living and travelling skills.

Southern section

Experience of the Snowy River area produced a variety of learning and insights for participants. When describing the environment, respondents frequently do so through their experiences. John, discussing this section, comments on there being few signs of human impact other than rubbish washed down the river, that there were few signs that others had passed that way, and that he didn't really know how to find signs of Aboriginal activity in the area (p. 14). He goes on to remark that:

It has become really obvious to me that humans have an impact (a large one) no matter what they try to do. Such is the nature of our relationship with the rest of the world. I have also learned a lot about how different people react to different situations or places depending on what they are doing. I have learned lots about leadership styles and facets of leadership I hadn't considered before (leading peers, the influence of pre-existing relationships on the relationship between participants and leaders) (p. 22).

The nature of the terrain often dictates how to travel, as Meg testifies:

After lunch there was dispute on which way to go the 4km to our night's camp. I thought the right side of the River would be better and when we encountered cliffs there I wasn't too keen on getting my boots wet to cross. I'm glad now we did though because the arvo [sic] was fantastic with a combo of River walking and Brumby trail following. We were even in camp well before sun down which made us all even happier. The River is great, seeing views of it from the mountain then the mountains and clouds rising from it makes for a pretty special place. The stars are amazingly bright tonight, it's a great place and I'm finding it hard to believe we've only got three days left despite my craving for rest and food I love it here soo [sic] much I don't want to leave. My pack feels like it's natural and I can't even smell myself anymore. The thing I don't like here is having to treat the water. Iodine tastes like shit and I'm scared of Giardia. Last night I felt sick and Tim got pretty sick last night and this morning. It makes the place feel contaminated and takes away from its beauty (p. 53-54).

Observations of the landscape appear again in Meg's entries. She makes the comment that:

...it is interesting to observe the way the valleys had been carved by prior flow of a once untamed river. Some spurs were cliff like, whilst the more downstream edges could be low valley inlets or flood plains for 50metres or so (p. 57).

Nathan notes how the sedimentary rock of the river valley shapes the walking experience:

The going is quite slow along this section of the river. The well defined sections of sedimentary rock that have obviously been tilted make distinct terraces. It is easy to travel with the grain along the terraces but they run at an angle (~30°) to the river so it is impossible to avoid scrambling up & down across the rocky outcrops (p. 4-5).

For Paul the landscape of the Snowy River plays a significant role in shaping the travel, and therefore the experience:

The Snowy River is the key to our route over the last 4 days. We have been following it upstream since the Jacobs. It is a dryer environment with dried up river beds and crackly leaves. The Snowy is dark & murky and around 28°. There are huge sand banks along the river providing ideal campsites for the groups. Along the Snowy the tea trees are very thick making walking nearly impossible. Mixed with Blackberries & thistles you get a bit scratched. Up high along the steep slopes, native pines grow among the eucalypt forests. Native cherries are also found here (p. 44).

Kelly, too, highlights the focal point of the river in discussion of her learning that has occurred during her experiences in the area:

The importance of route planning and sufficient breaks from walking. The Snowy can be very hot and the terrain challenging. Without forethought to river crossings and the group's physical state, time could be wasted (as well as energy) and the risk of injury heightened. The fact that animals need water and frequent rivers has become clearer to me having all the scats & tracks through the river banks. As we climbed over Milligans Mt I thought again about where the animals would live most readily and wondered why they would move out of the river and gully systems to travel on the ridges and spur lines. Water and the opportunity to swim or just cool down are real motivations for a hard walk, as well as rewards. The group's spirits were lifted (it seemed to me) by the rivers

presence when it provided not only relief from heat but also water to drink & beauty to drink in (p. 11d).

The capacity to swim and drink from the river was also important to Tanya's learning and relating to the area:

...being able to wash in water and drink it so readily available makes my learning this place on a higher level because I feel like I know the river really well now. I have had good and bad times here and I will love all that it is regardless and will always treat it with love and respect because of my experiences and knowledge I have gained (p. 67-68).

The learning that comes from experience of the place can be very subtle. While it may not appear to be 'earth-shattering', Nathan recounts how group discussion and decision-making resulted from a slow walking rate, largely a product of the terrain:

When we started walking we soon discovered that we weren't traveling as quickly as we had expected. This resulted in us missing our set campsite. This didn't cause a lot of difficulties but it prompted a lengthy discussion on the issues of deadlines, & how we structured the day. Basically, the group decided that we needed to get up earlier, giving us more time to use during the day (p. 8-9).

The learning and insights that come from travelling through the Snowy River environment are quite diverse. Respondents have mentioned there being few signs of human activity in the area other than weeds and rubbish coming down the river, that they learned about leadership (though they do not comment on specifics), that people respond differently in different circumstances, and that the quality and accessibility of the water was important to their experiences. A recurring theme has been that of how the nature or attributes of the landscape played a significant role in shaping the experience.

Middle section

The middle stage of the walk produced different responses, as John highlights:

I feel thoughtful, analytical and at peace. The last one is defiantly to do with where we are. I feel more in tune with the greater natural world and her cycles. Knowing where north is, where the sun will rise, when it will set, how warm it is... I feel relaxed and peaceful living with this close and complete relationship with the natural world (p. 41).

For Kelly, some of her learning was about the practicalities of being in the outdoors:

Like a walk, people go through stages and you have to let them (or yourself) be. Just because you are cold and wet it doesn't have to be a miserable experience. Eucalyptus trees can be very difficult to distinguish. Leeches aren't that bad. Be aware of where you take your water – washing in the water and disposing of washing water far away from the source (upstream – down stream considerations) (p. 22c).

The nature of these responses suggests that further practice in or refinement of bush living and travelling skills in order to be comfortable and at peace in the bush were a significant aspect of the experience of this area for these two respondents.

Northern section

The northern part of the trip elicited yet another set of responses, some related to the area and others to living in the outdoors:

I feel like I'm awakening some deep purpose within my existence – as if land is talking to me in whispers between the cracking heath beneath my sorry boots. I feel experiencing the heat and extreme cold/wind/rain in one week has enhanced my appreciation of life – this make me motivated to let others in on the earth's wisdom (Meg, p. 30).

Sally, too, comments on her learning at different levels:

I learned some practical things – gear to take, navigation, weather patterns – and some personal things – how I react to weather change, an extended journey, etc. I learned a lot about the alpine environment in terms of geology, vegetation, animal life, geography and human modification... I feel like I'm in transition, a time of change that my mind will eventually catch up with. This relates to the stage of the food drop, transition from one environment to another – but also reflects that the trip itself is a rite of passage, a transition from first to second year, and in some ways from inexperience to experience (p. 18).

Paul articulates learning about group function, weather and living in alpine conditions:

I have learnt about groups and how they form in longer walks. Our group has formed 2 inner groups which is hard to handle because I'm kind of not taking sides and some people are able to walk fast and some aren't on the 4WD track so it causes issues. I have learnt about alpine weather and cloud patterns and how bad weather can come in fast. I have learnt how to handle situations at higher altitudes with patience and calmness in high windy and cold rainy situations (Paul, p. 21).

Observation of the environment through experience can lead to more responsible approaches to route choice and greater emphasis on being:

Today was absolutely awesome. We ended up doing about 8km instead of about 5km to avoid off track walking. We began to recognize where places like sphagnum bogs and fragile ecosystems were and from previous experience it was a group decision to stick to the 4WD track because we figure that we being leaders [in] the outdoors should be pretty good role models in order to preserve beautiful areas like this (Ben, p. 120).

The northern section of the walk produced responses that detailed enhanced appreciation of life and a desire to 'let others in on the Earth's wisdom', learning and refinement of skills for living and travelling in the outdoors, about different aspects of the environment, groups and their development, and of reading the environment to make informed decisions about appropriate routes to follow to minimize impact.

In each of the settings, the environment shaped the experience in different ways, relative to the characteristics of the area. In the southern section of the walk respondents report there being few signs of human activity in the area other than weeds and rubbish coming down the river, that they learned about leadership, (while not giving specifics), and that the quality and accessibility of drinking water was significant to their experiences. In the middle stage of the journey the responses suggested that being comfortable and at peace in the bush is assisted by further practice or refinement of bush living and travelling skills. While the specific learning and insights gained by these respondents is varied, they draw attention to the landscapes and the structure of the journey shaping the experience, that is, the experience was given form by the nature of the journey and the attributes of the place.

Conclusion

This chapter of the findings has reported on the *environment providing a context for learning and experience*. The responses to each of the five sub-themes are diverse, yet collectively they demonstrate that the landscape played a significant role in shaping the experience and learning of these respondents. The attributes and characteristics of each place are too numerous to list, but that landscapes played a part in shaping the experience and learning of respondents is significant. These findings will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven. The next chapter reports on the second aspect of the findings: *factors that impacted on the experience of place*.

Chapter Five

Research Findings Part 2:

Factors that impacted on the experience of place

Introduction

In reviewing respondents' journals, it became apparent that there were several factors that impacted on the experience of the places visited. This chapter of the findings reviews the factors that impacted on the experience of the place that respondents reported on in their journals. While collating these factors the following sub-themes were developed to structure the data: (1) prior knowledge of a place, (2) attitude toward the experience prior to departure, (3) aspects of the place, (4) structure of the experience, (5) issues relating to leadership, and (6) concepts of time. These sub-themes form the headings within this chapter of findings.

Prior knowledge of a place

Prior knowledge of a place may shape the experience of the area in a variety of ways. In each area, the respondents' knowledge of the place appears to be focused on particular aspects of the place, that is, their knowledge tends to be about certain aspects of the place, or of a similar place they know.

Southern section

The attributes of the landscape of the southern section of the walk are numerous. The hydro scheme on the upper Snowy River, for example, frequently played a role in shaping participants' responses to the place and their experience. For Paul, the low river level, turbid water, and weeds have changed a once beautiful river to an ugly one. Yet despite this, he still refers to the area as a 'wonderful place' (p. 45). For Sam, his prior knowledge of reduced flows in the river didn't prepare him for the encounter:

It was quite strange to arrive on the Snowy River today. With so many stories of this famous river, and even with the knowledge of its reduced flows, it was a bit of a shock to see it so shallow – especially in such a mighty valley – I guess somewhere in my mind I was still expecting a raging torrent – nevertheless it is still great to be here and I am looking forward to spending several days getting

to know the Snowy better. It is sad to see something that has been so affected by human needs/wants (p. 13).

Expectations and preconceptions of a place can play a role in shaping an encounter with the area. For Paul, his preconceptions were challenged by what he experienced:

I came to the Snowy with low morale because it sounded shit but that has picked up and I'm enjoying the low km and the relaxing by the shallow rocky rapids – enjoy (p. 46).

Conversely, Peter's expectations were not met:

Its strange how your expectations of an environment can be so different to what it is. The Snowy is nowhere near as pristine as I was expecting and has been a bit of a disappointment (p. 105).

The research undertaken prior to the trip as part of the subject requirements helped lift the enthusiasm of participants in some cases. Geology for Kelly provided a different perspective of the area:

Having geology as my focus, I have really noticed the rocks and soils. On the hills there were hard and rich coloured sedimentary rocks which appeared to have undergone some heating and compression. Metamorphosed country rock. Down in the River the rocks are mainly sedimentary but very different as they've been worn down with water. At times you can see whole murals of folded layers, like oil patterns on water. There are other types of rocks in the pebbles and stones which have washed down the Snowy. Granites, quartz, many different colours and crystal types. Water is a powerful eroding force (p. 5).

The responses here articulate that prior knowledge of the area impacted on participant experiences in different ways. For some, their expectations were challenged; one participant expected to have a poor experience and was surprised when he did not, for another the opposite was true, and yet another expected the river to be a 'raging torrent' even though he knew it wasn't. Another respondent emphasised that research into a particular aspect of the place prior to departure helped her read the landscape and lifted her enthusiasm for experiencing and learning about the area.

Middle section

Again, the research topic of participants sometimes helped focus their attention on an aspect of the environment, as John reports:

We've just climbed over 1000m this morning to move from the Snowy to the Snow Gums (well almost!). The thing that I've enjoyed most about this morning was watching the vegetation change almost hour by hour. I was actually expecting different changes but at 800-900m we still had Bendigo-like bush dominated by Box. It wasn't until about 1100m that we entered into the Candlebark and Peppermint country (Peppermints actually started a bit earlier). I've been fascinated to get to know the Candlebark with its pink streaks on gum-like 2-tone grey bark. And we're just had lunch amongst a tall stand of Black

Sallee. Al pointed it out to me – I've never really been able to recognize it before (p. 26).

Similarly, connection with previous study can contribute to the experience:

The place we have been travelling through the last five days has really shown what changes can occur in vegetation, rock, soil and weather as you increase in altitude. It has really enforced to me all that I have learnt from lectures given by Deirdre Slattery last year about the Alps. To have read her book and now be here I can really notice changes in all these areas (Tanya, p. 117).

For others, the familiarity that comes from being in an environment that is similar to others previously experienced is significant. Judy, for example, refers to her experiences in the Victorian alps:

I'm feeling really excited at the moment about heading up to the Main Range and I'm really enjoying being in the sub-alpine and alpine region as it holds strong memories of being in the Vic. Alps as a child with my family (p. 37).

For Jeff, connection with the area comes from remembering his home environment:

Being once again in the high country I feel like I belong. It feels so much like my home, the mountains, the trees, the plants and endless rolling hills, spanning huge gullies with springs year round supplying water to the greater population. This feels like home to me (p. 69).

As with responses to the southern area, respondents here mentioned how research or study about the area prior to departure helped inform their observations and experience of the area. The other aspect that came from this section of the responses was that of participants relating to the area, enjoying being there or feeling at home, because of experiences in similar environments.

Northern section

As mentioned in the previous two sections, the requirement to research an aspect of the natural or cultural history prior to the trip helped focus participant observations and learning. For John, his research helped direct his already existing interest in trees:

I was quite astonished with the sudden transition from Snow Gums to Candlebarks as we walked down into Pretty Plain. It was as sudden as the change when we walked up into the Suggan Buggan Range. We have dropped down to about 1300m now and I'm quite surprised that we haven't seen many Peppermints. Maybe they are lower down still. I've found it really interesting to research trees for this trip and then see it for real. Its pretty much been as I expected, but I really thought there would be less Candlebarks and more Peppermints. Having looked into trees, I find I pay more attention to them. I looked out for the treeline as we walked on the Main Range and I've been taking note of where frost hollows occur and the trees can't grow. It's fascinating how clear the line can be between no trees, trees and different trees. I have always taken an interest in trees (more so than other vegetation) but it was good to have the stimulation to research the topic more (p. 62-63).

Peter comments on his connection with the area being enhanced by his research enquiries:

I'm really looking forward to going over the Main Range and noticing and investigating its unique and diverse geological features. I already feel a connection with the place just knowing about one of the components. I couldn't however say the same thing if I had researched the history or the NP [national park]. Those topics are too removed from the place itself. The 3 broad characteristics of a place are: (1) flora/fauna, (2) weather, (3) geology. I will have a better appreciation of the area having an in depth knowledge of the geological characteristics of the area (p. 9-10).

Previous experience with the area helped Peter with his connection with it:

The environment and my sense of place! Having skied Perisher/Blue Cow/Guthega/Thredbo I can already establish that I have to a certain degree a sense of place here. I can remember times sitting in Guthega kiosk looking out at the far white hills thinking wow, imagine being over there. And today I was. Sitting on Mt Tate looking straight down at Guthega, except this time it's summer. It's a good way of advancing my sense of place, through a different skill/season and focus (p. 42).

Sam considers his connections with the area, and those of others in his group, having spent time in a similar environment:

Most of us saw the Main Range and Mt Jagungal as the best part (or one of) the trip. Shane was the exception, he found the section along the Snowy to be his favourite. He said that it reminded him of experiences in the N.T. It was interesting that the rest of the group were Victorians with most of our bush walking experiences being in the Victorian Alps and sub-Alp zone. I think that this shows a huge link between prior experience and the potential enjoyment of an area or experience. I feel far more comfortable and at home in mountain regions because I have a lot of experience in them. Perhaps next time (and the time after that) I will begin to love the Snowy River as I do the mountains (Sam, p. 46).

Respondents here have mentioned that prior research into an aspect of the area contributed to their experience overall, and that previous experience of the same, or a similar, environment was significant in enjoying and feeling comfortable in the area.

Different types of prior knowledge have the potential to impact on experience in different ways. In the southern section of the walk respondents mention how their expectations of the area were challenged and that prior research assisted in reading the landscape and in lifting enthusiasm for it. The middle stage of the walk also produced comments on the impact of prior research on participant experience and that of experience in a similar environment contributing to enjoyment of the area and feeling at home. The responses from each of these areas suggest that research into an aspect of the place prior to the encounter can assist in focusing learning, connecting participants with the area and lifting enthusiasm for the experience. This perhaps should be tempered with the possibility that participants may develop expectations of

the area that are inconsistent with what they are likely to encounter on the experience. The other issue raised by respondents was that of previous experiences in the same or a similar environment. This would appear to contribute toward participants feeling at home, comfortable and enjoying the area.

Attitude toward the experience prior to departure

In the early stage of the journey a few respondents commented on how their pre-trip attitudes were impacting on their experience. These responses have been included to demonstrate the potential connection between the pre-trip preparation and the experience itself. Participants did not express pre-departure attitudes toward the experience in the middle and latter sections of the walk. While not in a position to make definitive comments on why this was the case, several possibilities come to mind. In the middle stage of the walk participants have completed a week of walking and tend to dwell less on their expectations and how they are coping and focus more on issues that are at hand. In the last section of the walk the end of the trip is in sight and contemplation tends to focus on what has been experienced and achieved.

Southern section

Kelly highlights the impact of pre-departure ‘attitude’ toward an experience:

We’ve been walking for over a week!! That’s a strange concept for me, especially as it hasn’t seemed that long or hard. The transition to simple life with a pack in the bush, has been an easy one. Perhaps this is due to my enthusiasm prior to the trip. I was so excited about this journey & opportunity that my mind refused to be anything but positive. This has really worked so far because only one day did I experience the kind of negative hole I can dig for myself. I’m pretty happy with that (p. 16).

Jason, at the end of day one, contemplates how his attitude shapes his experience:

There was so (much) time and effort put into this trip, through preparation, thought and hype. Well, now that it’s finally underway is almost a relief, and instead of being full of excitement and pleasure for being in a remote environment I was taken over by a feeling of exhaustion and felt like I was going through the motions for most of the day. I had to remind myself of how lucky I am to be doing an activity such as this, attempting to get rid of my selfish mind set I had put myself in. I’d tried to blame it on external factors, such as a long bus ride, and not beginning in as scenic environment as the alpine region, but understood (as the day went on) as it is only the environment you make it. It can be as beautiful or as dull as you let it be. That if I don’t begin to enjoy getting as much from being in this environment as I can, this opportunity/experience could quite easily slip me by. Basically, its attitude, so it has got to improve (p. 2-3).

That attitudes toward the experience prior to departure were not expressed in all sections of the walk does not reduce the significance of those articulated in the first stage of the trip. Here we have seen two different approaches: the first respondent records being so enthusiastic and excited prior to departure she refused to be anything but positive about the journey. The second respondent reports the pre-trip preparation, thought and hype being replaced by exhaustion and a lackadaisical approach. The responses demonstrate the potential connection between the pre-trip preparation and the experience itself, that is, that relating to, understanding and experience of a place may be connected to other experiences in other places.

Aspects of the place

A multitude of aspects of each place contributed to shaping the experience of the area. The responses detailed here highlight the variety of realities encountered by participants.

Southern section

The southern area of the walk provides a very particular set of responses to the aspects of the place that impacted on the experience. For Paul, the nature of the terrain played a significant role in determining the approach to travelling through the area:

The Snowy River is the key to our route over the last 4 days. We have been following it upstream since the Jacobs. It is a dryer environment with dried up river beds and crackly leaves. The Snowy is dark and murky and around 28°. There are huge sand banks along the river producing ideal campsites for the groups. Along the Snowy the tea trees are very thick making walking nearly impossible. Mixed with blackberries and thistles you get a bit scratched. Up higher along the steep slopes, native pines grow among the eucalypt forests. Native cherries are also found here...my experiences here would be good. I haven't had any "40° days" or "snakes" yet which I wasn't looking forward to. If I was doing a private trip with mates I wouldn't come here to hike. I don't like the taste of iodine but I can manage. I like it how there isn't any tracks and that each group has to get from A-B any way possible (p. 44).

Jeff also highlights several aspects of the place that impact on the experience:

Our distance each day depends on our ability to move on sand banks, rock and dirt, crossing from side to side looking for the best route possible. The land gives you a feeling of age and time – the angle of the rock and time it must have taken to carve the creeks (p. 42).

An aspect of the place that can shape the interaction with the place, or reflection on relationships with it, is meeting other people. Nathan describes meeting some horsemen at the junction of the Pinch and Snowy Rivers:

A couple of horsemen rode into camp. We had a bit of a chat about where they had come from & where they were going. The two fellows made some interesting comments about the laws governing who uses the park. They suggested that 4WD vehicles should not be permitted in the park due to the sheer damage they cause to the environment. They argued that the horsemen take care of the park because they have a respect for the area. I assume they thought that 4WD people are able to come from far & wide and did not have the same respect for the area (p. 26-27).

Meeting one of the other groups prompts Ben to reflect on his relationship with others in his group and the place:

When I saw the other group today (the first people since the beginning of the walk) it made me realize how close our small community had come. It felt foreign to see other people. I felt like our group was like a nomadic tribe and I felt no reason at all to talk to the others. It felt like they were treading in our territory – and I was happy to see them go. This feeling came about because of how I now feel in the area. It's now a real comfortable feeling to be sitting on the edge of the river, like it's home and everything seems very familiar (p. 31-33).

The weather is also discussed by participants as an impact on the experience of the area. Ben, for example, contemplates the impact of weather on the experience, highlighting that there are several issues to take into account:

I began to think today how much the weather can alter a trip experience. It's been raining for most of the afternoon and it always seems to put a little downer on the group. If it's a bright and sunny day people seem to be that little more happier. I think it makes a huge difference waking up to a beautiful sunrise as compared to a gloomy day. From my experience people seem far more energized for the entire day with a magnificent sunrise. Although I'm sort of glad it rained this afternoon just for a change because we wouldn't appreciate fine weather if it didn't rain (p. 39).

The responses here highlight the diversity of aspects of a place that may contribute toward an experience of the area. The respondents have noted the river and its many attributes, the vegetation and dryness of the surrounding environment, thick streamside vegetation, there being no tracks in the area, needing to treat the water before drinking it, travelling through the area being determined by their ability to move on sand, rock and dirt, that the place feels old, the impact of meeting other people in such a place and how the weather might shape the experience of the area.

Middle section

Again, as the terrain changes so to does the nature of the experience. For Nathan, the easier walking that came after climbing up on to the Great Divide from the Snowy River provided the opportunity for some personal reflection. Referring to the section just travelled he comments:

The experience was predominately positive. Once the big climb was out of the way, the week was significantly easier than that of the Snowy section. This

allowed me to relax and undertake some inward reflection. The peace and beauty of the place assisted with my reflection (p. 48).

Jason comments on the different aspects of the area that shaped his experience:

Following the fire trail enabled a more in depth focus on the surrounding environment. It was fascinating to view the changes that have happened in the environment from the Snowy to this the sub-alpine environment – the density of the trees on the undulating spurs was incredible, comparing it to the vastly open gullies that spread for up to 500m. The predominately Candlebarks were immensely thick in areas that they almost looked too dense to walk through. They were relatively juvenile looking and far from reaching their mature status. However, occasionally there were some extremely mature trees (est. 400-500yrs old). They stood there looking proud to have been there for such an intensive long time, they showed the scars (hollows) of fires and some times even human interference. It was an environment that I hadn't experienced travelling through before, and although wasn't proactive in learning more, there was something very special about this environment (p. 36).

Comments on how the weather might shape the experience are again raised in this section of the walk. It having rained for half a day, John makes the following comments on how it impacted on the group:

It is remarkable how weather can affect our moods so much. People weren't in bad moods as such in the rain, but definitely more inward. It prompted Al to ask last night, why everyone had been so glum during the day! (p. 43).

Jason, commenting on the same incident, notes how 'moods' change with the weather:

Today we climbed from a lonely camp site on the road, to reach the foot hills of the beginning of the alpine section. It rained and rained all morning, and it was a relief to reach Cascade Hut for lunch. Moods waned during the dampening weather conditions. However, the finer conditions after lunch provided us with some of the most spectacular scenery along the climb into the alps, to our campsite, one of the most beautiful I've ever seen [beside the Thredbo River] (p. 53).

Wet conditions prompt Judy to reflect on how comfortable she is in the bush:

I feel so comfortable living out here at the moment, even with the rain we've had. I'm pleased with this as it means I'm comfortable in the bush for an extended period, which will enable me to be a better leader as I will be able to focus more on the group instead of having to deal with living in the bush (p. 26).

For these respondents, walking along a fire trail and the weather were significant in shaping their experiences of this area. Having climbed onto the Divide from the Snowy River the walking became easier and following a fire trail allowed for inward reflection or a closer look at different aspects of the area. For other respondents, changes in the weather prompted thoughts on the connection between wet conditions and waning or increasingly introspective moods of members of the group, and of being comfortable living in the outdoors regardless of the conditions.

Northern section

The alpine region provides quite different experiences and the descriptions of the encounters highlight some of the aspects of the place that were significant to the respondents:

It's the Alps! We've been at 1500m+ for most of the week and 80% has been either above the treeline altogether or through frost hollows etc where trees don't grow. Lots of broad open rolling plains in the latter half of the week, but in the first half, there were steep, craggy peaks mixed up with the rolling plains. It has been cool for February due to the altitude and it feels like we've had the full gambit of weather except snow. On the Main Range we were blessed with sunshine but buffeted by strong winds. Fair enough too – there's nothing to block them up there! We also had white-out fog, teeming rain, low cloud, cold windy nights, cold clear frosty nights, mild overcast days, and we've returned to mild, clear sunny weather for the end of the walk. I would describe the area as unforgiving, unpredictable, harsh, lush, spectacular, safe, homely and beautiful (John, p. 67).

Peter, too, comments on particular aspects of how the terrain shaped his experience:

Before coming on this trip I had no idea what sort of environment I would be walking through, I had an idea what the Main Range would be like but not lower down. Places like Pretty Plain blew me away, I never imagined such a wide flat long valley of tussocks with a substantial river through it. I love being out here and exploring these new environments. I can understand why people want to keep on going when they finish the long walk (p. 30).

For Tanya, the transition from the sub-alpine to the alpine region was 'overwhelming':

My experiences in this area have been overwhelming. I thought I found coming up into the Alpine Ash and Snowgum forests was amazing. To go even higher than that and see so much more that you can't see when you're in the treeline still coming down to an elevation of 1400m, where the vegetation mixed again into Alpine Ash and Snowgum. Seeing these changes and being up high has been beautiful and what I feel to be very spiritual and romantic experience. Also knowing this whole area has snow on it for quite a few months of the year makes my feelings deeper for this place. It is so magical and tranquil yet so powerful and engrossing that I feel so insignificant, yet my presence here has so much impact that I am significant. I have felt a lot of compassion for this area, the main range, as it stands so high over all the other mountains, valleys, towns, rivers and animals – even birds and I hope continues to inspire me as I have decided I want to return many more times in my lifetime. I can see the potential for a wonderful relationship of shared experiences down a path that change so often (p. 196-197).

Like the previous sections, the weather of the northern area was a significant factor in the experience of participants. In the northern alpine section of the walk the weather conditions can be very changeable:

It was extremely windy along the Main Range and that made it hard to communicate ideas or even have any sort of conversation! We had to wait until we were sheltered by some rocks or something before we could have a decent discussion about anything (Kim, p. 59-61).

Although wet, Ben was not put off by the weather conditions:

It rained for the entire morning and some of the arvo but it didn't dampen our spirits. Basically it would for me on a shorter trip but I was just loving it and I

guess I appreciated the pouring rain as much as the warm sunshine. I think in society today we are always trying to escape or hide from the weather like the rain. If you're walking along the street and it begins to rain everyone madly dashes for shelter like it is going to harm them. I think this indicates how detracted from nature some people are (p. 113).

Kelly considers how the weather encountered is an aspect of the place:

I have felt mystified by this place. The snowgums are full of expression for me. They twist and writhe against the intense weather which is a feature of these higher places. They remind me of beautiful spirits, trapped in time slowly etching out an existence in a hostile environment. Having said this ~ I don't really believe the weather is hostile ~ it is feature of the land and although I've been wet and almost blown off my feet, these weather systems provide water for a vast amount of life. If you don't like 'intense' weather then my advice would be to not camp here. If you don't mind the reality of storms then this place could offer you an exciting visit full of rapidly changing conditions (p. 26b).

In the alpine section of the walk the respondents mention a diverse range of place attributes that contributed to their experiences. The respondents discuss being above the treeline and the associated views; steep, craggy peaks mixed with rolling plains; long flat wide valleys; the transition from the sub-alpine into the alpine area; the Snowgum forests; the Main Range standing high over the others mountains, valleys, towns, rivers and animals; and how the particular weather conditions of the alpine area contributed to the experiencing of the place.

In each of the areas visited, the respondents have detailed aspects of the place that have contributed to their experience. In the southern section of the walk respondents mentioned place attributes such as the river and its sandy beaches, thick streamside vegetation, the unusual vegetation and dryness of the surrounding environment, that there were no tracks, that they had to treat the river water before drinking it, that the place felt old, that their capacity to travel was determined by their ability to move over rock, sand and dirt, and the impact of meeting other people in such an area. In the middle stage of the walk the respondents raised the impact of walking along an old fire trail; that it was easier than travelling along the Snowy, allowing them time for personal reflection or to look more closely at the surrounding environment. In each of the stages the weather was mentioned as an aspect of the place that contributed to the experience. While these records are by no means exhaustive of the attributes of each environment traversed, they highlight the significance of the landscape in shaping the experience; that the landscape was not merely a backdrop to the walk.

Structure of the experience

While in one sense the experience is defined by the landscape, the structure of the experience can contribute to the way the place is encountered and what might be observed, understood or learned. As each stage of the journey traversed a different landscape, the experience was shaped and defined by different sets of issues that arose out of different walking and living conditions, and learning opportunities.

Southern section

In the Snowy section of the walk the heat and terrain can combine to make challenging walking conditions. As Sam describes it, 'the route was quite difficult today, especially with the heat that we had. It was good that we were up so early to start the day and then rest in the middle of the day' (p. 19). In cases like this it can be essential to structure the experience around the conditions imposed by the place. For Kelly the long days of 'head down & bum up' made it 'hard to be in the place' (p. 8). Yet, on another day she 'enjoyed place more today. Took time to feel & smell and soak in this glorious river & the ranges' (p. 10), demonstrating that perspectives on place change with experience and from day to day.

Early in the experience participants may struggle with the challenge. Kerry, at the end of day one, is conscious of how she is travelling: 'stop being so self-absorbed. Forget the feet, back, weight and start to take in what surrounds me' (p. 2-3). People develop coping strategies to deal with the experience at hand. Kerry observes: 'it is interesting to note that conversations diverge from the environment to popular culture in order to cope with terrain/weather/people' (p. 18).

Frequently the structure of the experience is determined by the terrain and different travelling conditions may provide different experiences. Kerry recounts walking along a dirt road and the opportunity it provided her to observe her surroundings:

After a good night's sleep, we rose to walk the 8km, along the Barry Way, to the food drop at Pinch River. I enjoyed walking along the marked track, enabling me to take in the breathtakingly beautiful views, the Snowy and its surrounding valley, under the cover of a light mist. A steady light rain has been over us for the last 18 hours (p. 25).

Judy too, comments on walking along the road and what it offered:

We had a fairly easy walk this morning from Jacobs Creek [River] to Pinch River along the road. I actually really enjoyed the walk as it enabled me to take

in what was around me without falling over what was in front of me. I also was able to have a good chat to various people about a variety of things (p. 21-22).

For Jason, leaving the river to cut off a bend provided a different perspective:

Cutting off a large meander in the river yesterday, the different views of the river enabled us to see it [sic] a more intrinsic view. To see the mountains that surrounded the river, and look at where we'd come from (ie, camp site) was magical and made the physical exhaustion a lot easier to cope with (p. 18-19).

Ben also comments on the contrast provided by leaving the river for a day:

It was nice to have a break from walking along the river today. It offered a better chance to explore some of the surrounding environment of the Snowy. I'm seeing a bit more bird life as we move further down stream, although it's difficult to see a lot of them because we are just pushing to reach our food drop on time (p. 29).

In a later entry Ben expresses disappointment at the prospect of leaving the river:

It's sort of weird because I've begun to feel really connected to the Snowy and its dry environment and this time tomorrow I'll be in a totally different environment. It really feels like we have finished one trip and now we're beginning another (p. 45).

And later, in another entry, Ben discusses the time needed to become comfortable in an area:

I found that it was the type of environment which took me a long time to feel comfortable in compared to other areas...if we only spent 4 days on the Snowy as compared to 7 I definitely wouldn't appreciate it nearly as much because my relationship with the area was still quite shallow then compared to now (p. 53).

Comments on how the structure of the journey impacted on the experience of the place are quite diverse. Respondents have described how the experience was structured to cope with particular environmental conditions, such as walking early in the day to avoid the heat, and cutting off a large loop in the river by crossing over a range. One respondent notices the shift in conversations from that of the environment to other aspects of life when the walking conditions became challenging.

Respondents also mention the easier walking conditions along a dirt road that allowed them time to take in their surroundings and more freely chat with others. Of note are several comments on the structure of the experience having the capacity to hinder getting to know the place. Firstly, challenging walking conditions, sore feet, back and a heavy pack made it 'hard to be in the place' and take in the surroundings, while easier walk conditions made it possible to enjoy and soak in the environment. Secondly, it took one respondent a long time to feel comfortable in the place compared to other areas. Spending seven days in the area was significant in his developing a more in-depth relationship with the area.

Middle section

Travelling from south to north, groups leaving the Snowy River climb quickly up onto the Great Dividing Range. For those departing the Snowy at its junction with the Pinch River the climb covers approximately 1100 metres in a day and with it comes a substantial change in vegetation and climate:

We've just climbed over 1000m this morning to move from the Snowy to the Snow Gums (well almost!). The thing that I've enjoyed most about this morning was watching the vegetation change almost hour by hour. I was actually expecting different changes but at 800-900m we still had Bendigo-like bush dominated by Box. It wasn't until about 1100m that we entered into the Candlebark and Peppermint country (Peppermints actually started a bit earlier). I've been fascinated to get to know the Candlebark with its Pink streaks and gum-like 2-tone grey bark. And we've just had lunch amongst a tall stand of Black Sallee. Al pointed it out to me – I've never really been able to recognise it before (John, p. 26)

Paul comments on how different walking conditions offer different experiences:

I've had changing experiences with this place. Firstly, when we were walking down Wombat Gully the small foot pad made me feel close to the bush as if it was natural. We didn't know it was here and took us in the right direction. When we were bush bashing our way down the next gully, it was hard and I was more destination orientated. This was the same feeling as on a big dirt highway like the Barry Way. On a 4WD track I felt like it was natural because I noticed more stuff around me without concentrating on my footing (p. 32).

Sam makes similar observations:

I have noticed a big difference in the past couple of days in the way that I interact with other people in the group. I think this has a lot to do with walking on a track. I think that track walking has a lot of pro's and con's. At times, when I was by myself I found myself really interested in my surroundings – trees, birds, and other landscape and vegetation changes. And I took the time that I needed to look closely and take out a field guide to identify something. But at other times when I was walking alongside others (most of today) I found that conversation tended to drift further away from where we are and what we are doing. The presence of a track/road can make my thoughts return to things more common at home. Walking off track I think I tend to learn more implicitly, just by spending more time in direct contact with the bush. Not necessarily learning the names of things as much, but knowing that a particular shrub has fruit at this time or that it is very scratchy or the flowers come out at this time of year – I think this is all just as valid as knowing the name of something. So I guess that the environment can either allow me to chat freely with others, and my thoughts to roam well away from where I am if it is easy going and on track. It can also take me into a place where I feel alone with the bush and contained to the place when trying to pick a route or following others through thick scrub, but when it is like this I don't always feel I have time to stop and look closely because catching up is not so easy (p. 27-28).

Sam also draws attention to the interruption to the experience the food drops provide:

We left the Snowy behind today. It felt a bit sad when the food drop arrived. We had been totally reliant on ourselves for a week in an area that is quite remote and very much unused and developed, and to arrive in a camping area and see cars and buses, and other people was depressing for me. Obviously we need the food, but from my point of view it would be better (and a logistical nightmare) if the food was placed in the bush somewhere to avoid contact with the rest of the life. It is difficult to put the fast paced, clock watching society out of your

mind completely if you keep seeing it. However, I understand the reasons behind the food drop locations and methods (p. 26).

Meg discusses the overall structure of the experience, being tired yet feeling content and comfortable in the bush:

There has been a bit of talk about considering the “end” and “destination” orientation. However, I have felt good about getting further into our journey. I’ve been pretty tired because of late group discussion and I have been feeling like I need rest though this hasn’t provided me with the feeling of missing normal life. At times I’ve even felt that I’ve had too many treats like good food and warmth. The trip is challenging in many respects but the lifestyle is fantastic. I feel so at ease here – there is inspiration in every image, the essence of life in every aspect of our surroundings. It’s difficult to image “normal” life, living indoors and missing so much of the days beauty. I feel dirty, and sore and good about it. I’m missing the Alpine zone as it is so dry here it makes me feel exhausted more so than the fresh Alpine streams and cool air (p. 40).

Sally articulates being comfortable in the bush that has come as a function of the experience:

I dreamed about bushwalking last night – usually I dream about home things on trips, so I know I’ve been in the bush a while. I feel like I could stay here forever right now – I’m not a student, not a city girl, not in the Aussie culture – I’m just a walker now. This trip has filled up the day to day parts of my life, the bush is my home (p. 23).

The opportunity for some solo time had an impact on Shane’s experience of the area:

It is awesome to be out here by myself, following the setting sun into the Thredbo River valley, no one in front of me, no one behind me, no chatting, no one to chat to – just me “and my own two feet” and the beautiful mountains. This is a glen, the hill sides sweep down dramatically, the sun sets over the western mountains and I follow a brumby trail. I love it, I love the solitude, the quiet, the challenge of it, it gives a deep, ancient feeling – I am the ancient traveller of old, making my way through the mountains (p. 41).

The respondents have provided a diverse account of how the structure of the walk impacted on the experience of the place. As with the southern section, respondents mention challenging conditions reducing their ability to take in their surroundings, but here we have been provided with more detail. For one respondent, following a footpad made him feel close to the bush, while ‘bush bashing’ was hard and he became more destination orientated. For the same respondent, following a big dirt road also resulted in him becoming destination focused, while on a smaller 4WD track he noticed more of the environment around him without having to concentrate on his footing. Another respondent made the observation that walking on a track by himself allowed him to notice more of his surroundings, yet walking with others along a track the conversation drifted away from where they were. For this respondent, walking off track, he learned about the bush more ‘implicitly’ by being in direct contact with it, and this style of walking made him feel alone with the bush and contained to the place. Yet this respondent also noted that walking off track with

a group he didn't always have the time to stop and look more closely at the environment through needing to catch up. Other aspects mentioned by respondents included the food drop being an interruption to the experience, the overall structure of the experience contributed toward feelings of being tired and needing a rest, yet also of feeling fantastic, at ease, comfortable and at home. And finally, some solo time for one respondent provided solitude, quiet, a challenge and a 'deep, ancient' feeling. The structures discussed here by respondents are diverse. Some are a function of the aims of the subject and the particular approach of the leader and group, while others are more directly related to the aspects of the landscape shaping the structure of the experience. In all cases the structure of the journey impacted on the experience of the place.

Northern section

For those in the last stage of the walk, the opportunity to walk in a small group of four or five without the leader present for a few days, shaped the encounters with the area:

It seems that because we get along so well it takes another factor away from the equation and allows us to focus on other things like looking at vegetation changes as we declined altitude of the alpine area into subalpine and onto Pretty Plain. This small community has had the flexibility to just become so much more comfortable out here, comfortable with rain, winds, the hot sun and with myself. I love it out here. I think the journey that us boys have shared with each other over the last few days has just made the journey of this long walk just that little more special (Ben, p. 121).

Also in a smaller group, and with a different structure to the day prompt reflection from Kerry:

Rose at 5:30 of a 6'o'clock departure...sat just below Mt Twynam to watch the sun rise together in [our] new pseudo community. While we sat in silence I thought about the impact the sun rise/set can have on the unification process. Instead of a national anthem, a sunrise can bring together a whole hemisphere at the same point in time. How would [our] lives operate if we allowed ourselves to be dictated by dawn and dusk. Our social structure and artificial light has thrown our lives out of kilter (p. 77-78).

The route chosen up and over Mt Jagungal by another group provides an insight into the interaction between the structure of the experience and attributes of the landscape:

Navigation was difficult about a km away from Mt Jagungal, I was following on my map well until the tree line was a shrub line and the creeks became erratic. Jim [leader] says it's a black hole area and that he found it difficult too. The group was weary from off-track walking but I had a great end of day – mussels [sic] are warning into it! Up to the summit at 4am to start 2.3km climb – great in the dark as we moved at a great pace and only realized how far we'd come when first light appeared...Inner conflict arises when we walk off-track, especially

through sphagnum moss beds – which are quite prominent in this area but extremely fragile. The heath is so thick we have to really bash through it and I'm sorry to the plants for our destruction (Meg, p. 17).

James, from the same group, also comments on this experience:

Beware of black-holes and aliens when naving [sic] from Mt Jagungal through to Geehi River. This area is hard to nav [sic] threw due to its similar features and lack of distinctive features. Jim had trouble naving [sic] this area yesterday afternoon and Peter and Troy did very well to eventually establish where we were. Jim was good to admit when he was having/when he had trouble. However, this trouble is external as the black-holes and aliens were to blame (p. 10).

This section has produced comments of a less diverse nature regarding how the structure of the walk impacted on the experience of place. Respondents commented on the challenge of walking off track through subtle topographical terrain and the impact of walking in smaller groups without the leader present.

The responses from each section highlight the multitude of structural changes that may be made and the potential impact they may have on the experience of the place. In the southern stage of the walk respondents comment on how the experience was structured to cope with particular environmental conditions, that conversations in a group may shift from those about the environment to other aspects of life when walking conditions are challenging, that challenging walking conditions may make it difficult to 'be in the place' and take in the surroundings, conversely, that easier walking conditions made it possible to enjoy and soak in the environment, and finally that it took a long time for a respondent to feel comfortable in the place when compared to other places. No clarification is given as to what constitutes challenging or easy walking conditions. In the middle section of the walk respondents again mention that challenging walking conditions reduced their capacity to take in and learn about their surroundings. Respondents gave a variety of perspectives on how the walking conditions may be manipulated to change the experience of the area. Other issues that were raised in this section include the food drop being an interruption to the experience, the overall structure of the journey contributed toward one respondent feeling tired and in need of a rest, yet it also produced feelings of being fantastic, at ease, comfortable and at home, and lastly, that an opportunity for some solo time for one respondent provided a sense of solitude, quiet, a challenge and a 'deep, ancient' feeling. While not all the structural issues of the journey discussed by the respondents are related to the landscape, they do highlight the connection between particular aspects of each place, the structure of the journey and

the experience of the place. That is, the attributes of each landscape and the structure of the journey have a direct impact upon the experience of the place.

Issues relating to leadership

There are many aspects of leadership that can impact on the experience, as the following responses testify. As developing leaders the respondents have noted aspects of leadership that are related to the place but also of a general nature.

Southern section

In the southern section of the walk my leadership appeared to have an impact on the experience and learning of the respondents. Kim, for example, comments on the progress of the group:

I was so glad that Al took over and basically just walked until the campsite! Although he was tired he managed to put his head down and pull the group along behind him until we found our campsite. This is one characteristic which I feel is very important to have when you're a leader. If Al hadn't done that we would probably still be walking and stumbling over rocks and trying to find our way in the dark. There would be huge risks involved possibly and the safety of the group (physically and mentally) would be jeopardized. I don't know that if I could have done that today. I was just so exhausted! I guess though having the responsibility of the group almost instinctively tells your body to do those sorts of things (p. 15).

In a later entry Kim discusses her attempt to lead the group with a partner:

In comparison to yesterday's leading...I found that the terrain, weather and other 'natural' factors contribute immensely to how the day goes with the amount of leading that happens. Also how the group is travelling (p. 32).

Ben comments on learning how to read the landscape through watching the leader:

Although other things are starting to put me more in touch with the river, I am beginning to understand the river far easier than a few days ago. Through talking and observing Al I can pick where we have to cross and where the larger beaches are and using the map to compare the steepness of the sides etc. River navigation is much different to ordinary navigation and provides just another dimension to it all (p. 23).

Nathan, reflecting on his observations, discusses his learning in relation to leadership:

I feel as though Al is leading us in a manner which provokes thought as to how we would manage similar situations we encounter now, when we are leading participants. I feel now that I have been, and will continue to be able to draw distinctions between the important and not so important decisions. I like to think that upon leaving school I had a better than average insight to leadership as a result of the positions of responsibility I held. Within the last 5 days I recognize that I have had a constant class in what else there is to know about leadership. I feel myself beginning to be more critical or analytical of

myself and others. I see this time as an extension & growth of my leadership qualities. I am enjoying the lesson (p. 15-16).

Jason, too, highlights the impact of leadership style on his learning:

Leadership by Al so far has changed on a very subtle level. From checking the river for a safe place to cross whilst everyone else rested, to leading the group at a constant rate this afternoon to get to camp down stream, even though everyone was tired. He's controlled the group balance in very subtle ways, and tonight's discussion he raised points that very few in the group had considered. Apart from this he allows us as the participants to make a lot of the decisions (p. 12).

As experience is shaped by the context of the setting, leadership, which guides the experience, can be determined by the attributes of the place. In the examples provided by Nathan and Jason above, my leadership was framed by the place and in relation to the objectives of the trip.

The responses here draw attention to the potential of leaders to act as role models for participants. The respondents have mentioned the leader managing group safety, adjusting the approach taken for different terrain and weather conditions, reading the landscape and the involvement of the group in the decision making process. The approach taken by the respective leaders is in part shaped by the landscape yet also impacts on how the participants will experience the area.

Middle section

In the middle stages of the walk participants typically take on more responsibility for the day to day leadership of the group while the staff member observes, provides guidance, support and maintains the overall safety of the group. This may prompt reflection from participants upon the attributes of leadership and their personal leadership style:

When I'm tired or struggling with pain, I find it difficult to appreciate what is happening in my surroundings. I become engrossed in my personal endeavour. This doesn't help to extend my knowledge of the non-human world. I'm really impressed with Al's knowledge and passion for the places (and their inhabitants) we have been in. I almost feel that I have been lazy on this trip because it's easier (and I'm more likely to discover the answer) if I ask Al. Knowledge of the environment, whether it be rocks or insects or fauna, is a skill like navigation and walking ability. You have to work on it to attain a level of proficiency. On the other hand, how important is it to know the name of every (or most) plants? I guess our culture is one which uses language therefore it is important to know what you're looking at in order to educate, or instil interest in others. If you are continually saying 'I don't know', the participants may soon come to think that you don't care about where you are; only caring about the activity (Kelly, p. 17).

A lack of effective leadership can have substantial impacts on the group:

We have had a pretty interesting day. We have had a stormy feeling sitting over the group all day. This feeling lifted somewhat this afternoon when we had to move threw [sic] hard country doing 1/2 to 1km an hour. After dinner a group discussion brought out the stormy feelings. Everone brought out their bad feelings. Dean and Fred dove in telling each other off, and others brought out stuff. It was a good start and a needed step to becoming a group. I spoke of my fears of being ridiculed (picked on), which is why I don't speak much. Jim [leader] didn't get involved much in the discussion (James, p. 24).

In another group, Ben comments on the leadership style of another participant:

John and Judy led today. I know that Johns' led quite a bit already so I think he stood back a lot and left many things up to Judy, so I don't fell like it would be accurate to comment on John's leadership. Judy's style was very ordinary. I really didn't enjoy the day that much because of her idea of going about things. I didn't find that Judy had a very distinct style, she was very bossy and seemed to enjoy the sense of power that the position gave her, in a negative sense... Although it made me have a negative day I guess I always try to learn from experiences like these and now I know what it is like to be led like that and I know that myself and a few others disliked it so I wouldn't use that particular style myself (p. 75-77).

Kim highlights how different weather conditions may necessitate an alternative approach to leadership:

The weather yesterday had an impact on our feelings. In the morning while it was raining we were pretty comfortable I thought but we were all so happy to be inside a shelter [hut] and appreciated hot drinks/food. When the sun came out and dried our things out a bit, I felt more of a positive and more energetic attitude from the group. Changing your leadership style to suite the attitude/general feelings of the group in regard to situational features, eg weather, significant incidents and so on is very important (p. 53).

In this stage of the walk respondents provide accounts of how leadership impacted on their experience. Responses include the importance of environmental knowledge in a leader, the impact on the group of a perception of ineffective leadership, that a variety of leadership approaches are needed in different circumstances, and that different styles of leadership can impact on participant experiences both positively and negatively. As with the responses to the southern section of the walk, these responses highlight the potential for leaders to be role models for participants on many levels, from how to relate to other people through to knowing about the surrounding environment.

Northern section

For those in the last stage of the trip the leadership displayed in closing the experience can be significant. In the last few days of the walk John comments on the leadership that guided him through the experience:

Al has steered this journey to an exciting completion point. He told a story last night of a very funny experience he had whilst walking alone over the last few days. He read a poem (this was all last night around the fire) he'd written about

this trip and he gave us all some chocolate he'd saved very steadfastly to share with the whole group. And he'd brought us together again at a beautiful hut where we could relax with a fire and enjoy a leisurely last day's walk. Its been very well done, and his design, companionship, gentle advice, strong example and careful leadership have had lots to do with my enjoyment of this journey (p. 66).

For Kim, time to consider her learning from the walk was important:

Winding down for departure from the trip and the group: I feel that the structure of today has been complementary to the closure of our long walk. It has given us time to think back over the last 17 days and consider and contemplate what we have done. We had an excellent debrief last night about some leadership and community characteristics and explained what we had each learned about them. This of course helped us to reflect on what we have accomplished (p. 75).

Kelly highlights how even a simple matter of looking after one another can carry messages:

Al has an injury – we shared out his pack. I'm quite impressed with his lack of stubborn pride. I think I would find it difficult to admit any weakness as a leader. This is an important note Kelly. Leaders are only human and you may set yourself up for a big fall if you think any different (p. 32).

For Peter, in the first stage of the walk, the perception of ineffective leadership can have an impacting on the experience:

In reflection [on] the feelings I had, although mild, show the need for effective leadership. Being such a big day the attentive level and overall experience of the day diminished. We all walked straight over Twynam without even stopping, and I regret not stopping and looking around. In terms of an effective leader, the leader would stop the group at such a spot, re-group, discuss how everyone is, discuss the surroundings, e.g. geology, then proceed to the camp 1-2 km away (p. 36-37).

While not wanting to diminish Peter's perspective, it is important to be mindful of the context of the given situation. From this reading we are not aware of any of the other issues that may have been present at that moment in time, such as changing weather conditions, an injury or illness in the group. That the respondent recognized an appropriate moment to interpret or learn about an aspect of the place is worthy of note.

In the northern stage of the walk respondents raise issues similar to those in the previous two sections. Entries in this section refer to aspects of facilitation and closure of the experience, group management and safety, and recognizing appropriate moments to educate about an aspect of the place.

Each stage of the walk has produced discussion of different aspects of leadership that guided or determined the nature of the experience. In the southern area responses referred to issues of safety and group management, adjustments in leadership style

for different environmental conditions, skills needed to read the landscape, and involvement of the group in the decision making process. In middle stage of the walk respondents discuss the importance of a leader having environmental knowledge, the impact of a perception of ineffective leadership, the need for a leader to adjust his or her style for different groups and circumstances and that different approaches to leadership can impact on a group in both positive and negative ways. While the respondents discuss a variety of aspects of leadership in each stage of the walk the issue of the leader as role model, and their capacity to shape and influence the experience, are recurring themes.

Concepts of time

Another factor that impacted on the experience of place was the concept of time being somehow different in the bush, or its hourly measurement being unnecessary.

Southern section

For Ben, conventional measurement of time and associated technology impacted on his experience in an unwanted manner:

I brought up the issue of time today. I feel that people have been using their watches more on this trip than any other. I fail to understand their reasoning for having to eat at say 12:30pm rather than when everyone is feeling a little hungry. Looking at Pete Martin's human-nature relationship continuum, view[ing] nature as part-of-self is right as the end of the scale. At this end it is suggested that a relationship of that depth is similar to that of indigenous tribes such as the aboriginals. These people didn't have time but would have used things like the sun, stars and the moon. This begs me to ask the question that if we are striving to achieve a close relationship with the Snowy River environment we should try to minimize the use of technology such as watches when we could just as easily be using the sun. Having so many people looking at their watches constantly is definitely hindering my relationship development with the area (p. 21-23).

For this respondent, the conventional measurement of time using watches was an unwanted intrusion on his experience of the area, that it hindered his relationship development with the area.

Middle section

Sally discusses the concept of time, or its passage, being different in the bush:

Time on trips is a very strange thing. On the one hand, the last two weeks have flown by, and I'm comfortable and don't want to go home. On the other hand, the first week seemed long at the time, a day is still 24 hours and there's showers and seafood and pineapple juice in six days time! I think it would be

even more weird if it wasn't for the food drops. This contact with the urbanized world, weather forecasts, shortbread biscuits, talk about the other groups – it makes you realise you're "on a uni trip" not that this is just life. Rest days make you feel that this is just life – because you relax in the bush, unlike on a learning trip (p. 28).

Judy too, comments on perceptions of time in the bush:

Today I've been really quiet, mainly I think because I'm a bit tired, but also thinking about last year [Judy began the walk the previous year but was ill and had to be evacuated] but at the same time thinking about the end of the walk and going to Tassie. In one sense the walk is flying by, but in another it feels like it will never end because I miss Cam so much (p. 26).

For these respondents, the passing of time appeared different in the bush compared to that of everyday life. The responses suggest that thoughts of home or when family might be seen again act as markers for the passage of time, one respondent appearing to be content where she was, and the other seeming to be in a hurry to get home.

Northern section

In the northern section of the walk Ben again comments on how the measurement of time impacted on his experience:

Some of the girls seem so regimented by timetables and watches like on Saturday when Kelly goes "we're 20 min late". Late for what? Time is pretty unnecessary out here and it feels a lot nicer to go without anyhow. I mean why can't people just enjoy it out here instead of looking at their watches all the time. I felt really good being away from that today and things happen much more freely as opposed to when the watch says (p. 107-109).

This respondent, having mentioned in the Southern stage of the walk that frequent use of watches to mark the passage of time was an unwanted impact on his experience of the area, again comments on this issue. He goes so far as to suggest that others in the group were not enjoying being in the place because of their reliance on watches to mark the passing of time.

In this section of the findings we have heard from three respondents commenting on either the excessive use of watches to mark the passing of time detracting from the experience or the passage of time being somehow different in the bush. Ben has mentioned in the southern and northern stages of the walk that the use of watches to observe time, when in the bush, was an unwanted and unnecessary influence on his experience of the area. This would suggest that this was a significant influence on his experience of these areas, particular given that in the northern and last stage of the trip, when walking in a smaller group, he felt 'really good' when walking without the impact of excessive watch use. In the case of the other two respondents, their entries

suggest that the daily and weekly icons that mark the passage of time were somehow different. This is not surprising given that the structure and nature of the experience was considerably different to that of everyday life.

Conclusion

This chapter of the findings has reviewed the *factors that impacted on the experience of place*. The factors are many and diverse and highlight the complex interconnections between the experience of place and (1) prior knowledge of a place, (2) attitude toward the experience prior to departure, (3) aspects of the place, (4) structure of the experience, (5) issues relating to leadership, and (6) concepts of time. The significance of these findings will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven. The next chapter reports on the third and final aspect of the findings: *critical reflection and thought as a consequence of experience*.

Chapter Six

Research Findings Part 3:

Critical reflection and thought as a consequence of experience

Introduction

Reflecting on experience can lead to thinking about environmental issues that relate to the place, for example travelling along the Snowy River may prompt thought on the merits of damming the river. This style of critical reflection and thought as a consequence of the experience are the focus of this chapter of findings. As responses were collated under this theme the sub-themes of (1) reflection on relationships with the natural world, and (2) developing relationships with place were developed. These sub-themes are used as headings to structure this chapter of the findings.

Reflection on relationships with the natural world

When reflecting on their experiences, some respondents comment on their relationship with other people or with the natural world. While the focus of this reflection varied, it was frequently related to the environment the respondent was in.

Southern section

Traversing the southern area of the walk provides very particular experiences. John, reflection on the damming of the Snowy River, states that he felt privileged to have visited the Snowy area:

...but [it] has also made me think about how others regard it. Many don't know it exists, but for those who do, how do they feel about this area? I've spent quite a bit of time trying to imagine the river before it was dammed – where the level would be; what the flow would be like, and what it would be like in flood if all that Main Range snow really did still melt into this river. Although there are no fire scars, power lines, camper's rubbish etc..., the human impact on this section of the river is obvious (knowing its been dammed). You can see where the river used to flood and now there are 40-50 y.r. growth on the sand flats and bars. In some cases in the gorgy [sic] section of the first couple of days there were sand deposits and flood detritus 20-30m above the current level of the river. At that height at that point, the river would have gone from a 5m wide stream to a 40-50m wide torrent. Just mind blowing to picture it! There probably isn't a river in S-E Australia that has ever flowed the way the Snowy used to. It has prompted me to think about the issue of restoring 28% of the natural flow to the Snowy. Is the 40mx30m river a thing of the past? Can we un-do the damage or will

restoring the flow create a different set of problems...on the Snowy...[or] somewhere else?' (p. 14-16).

For Sam, the Snowy section of the walk gave him the opportunity to reflect on his personal habits and impact on the Earth:

I think that this section of the walk has given me some greater perspective on my own life... It has given me motivation to learn more about environmentally damaging practices and to take action, or at least to think more seriously about ways that I can be pro-active about stopping enviro-damaging practices (p. 24).

Contemplation of the time taken for the landscape to change can lead to consideration of human time and relationships with place. For Tanya, sitting beside the Snowy River and thinking about the time needed to carve boulders in a gorge led to questions of human time:

There was a rock in this gorge that [had] fallen out and into the River. You could see where the block had come from, it had cracked. We were trying to imagine the amount of time it would take for this to have fallen. I reckon it would have slowly happened over many hundreds of thousands of years. It makes me feel very small as a human being when I think back to this kind of time period that not one person would have seen this in their lifetime. We truly are an inferior race when I compare these two time scales. I admire this place for its wisdom and experiential knowledge like a tribal elder that has watched over the area and changed over time, but also doesn't show easily the evidence of its age – you really have to be aware and gather some knowledge and build on that knowledge whilst you're in a certain place! (p. 59-60).

Meg, reflecting on her experience, sets herself some goals:

- In terms of personal aims for life which have resulted from this journey:
- Spend more extended periods of time in the bush, and put in effort to make them challenging.
 - Visit people you like and don't put up so often with those you don't. You become a better person when you admire your surroundings.
 - Be brave in everyday confrontations, it feels great and broadens horizons (p. 55).

Meg's critical reflection also expressed concern for, and a desire to change, her personal consumption habits upon return to home:

I've learnt that even in remote areas humans have had a massive impact. And that Outdoor Ed plays a role in even this because there is hope for the environment here. I've learned that like the Snowy I won't give up hope of a future of flow and it inspired me to consider my impact on this planet via electricity use and what goes down my drain (p. 63-64).

Toward the end of the trip Meg talks of her sadness for the end of the journey: 'I'm so sad about leaving. I don't want to go back to a house and many people. I want to be strong back there and remember what the bush has told me' (p. 67).

Several participants comment on becoming comfortable in the bush as a product of the experience. Sally, referring to her objectives for the trip, makes the following observation:

The one that was in contention was getting to know a place – “focussing and reflecting on the environment”, because we’ve had to move through fairly quickly and haven’t had much time to explore, so we haven’t felt that “sense of place” in an area. For myself though, I’ve felt a general sense of place in the bush. I thought to myself the other day – “I’m a bush girl now”. I think that’s one of those big steps that is so gradual you don’t notice until you’ve passed it, then you realize how major it was (p. 38).

At the end of the trip Peter records similar feelings:

It’d be very fair to say that the success for me was the journey not the destination. That’s probably why it startled me when I looked how far we’d come. Because the thought of walking that far didn’t seem to bother me, where as in the past (say before the course) I would have considered that distance as an accomplishment not a journey. It’s a strange feeling, “the journey”. Cause I’d love just to keep walking, I had no urgent reason to go back to a so called “civilized world”. I don’t think I’ve ever been on a journey before. I’ve never had the feeling of being so comfortable in an environment, such as this, that I could stay there for a lot more extended stay (p. 156-157).

Conversely, some struggle with being in the bush, being comfortable but also wanting some ‘simple comforts’. For Kelly this internal tension is documented on a wet day:

The rain has become annoying. Never had to deal with days of rain & wet clothes. I can see how it could make you miserable. Feel like sitting down in a chair. Simple comforts (p. 13).

This section of the walk has produced a diverse set of reflections on relationships with the natural world. These reflections are relative to the place but are also of a general nature. Respondents have discussed the impact of the damming of the Snowy on the river’s health, raised concerns about the restoration of the river through increasing flows, referred to changing personal perspectives and increased motivation for learning about environmentally damaging practice. They also expressed a desire to be more proactive, made comparisons between the landscape and human time scales and described a sense of being small and inferior in such an evaluation, expressed a desire to change personal relationships with the environment and other people, described being sad at leaving the bush and not wanting to go home, described being comfortable in the bush as a product of having a ‘general sense of place’ and the journey as a whole, but also wanting some ‘simple comforts’. While these reflections are diverse they highlight the connection between the place, the experience and the learning of participants.

Middle section

As the middle stage of the walk traversed a new landscape and provided different experiences, it also produced different reflections. For John, encountering some brumbies prompts thought on his understanding of their cultural significance:

We had quite a climb up a spur from Cascade Creek over the ridge and down onto the Thredbo where we camped. There was a group of 12 brumbies making their way down the open grass of the gentle sloping valley. A couple of them were pretty inquisitive and un-perturbed by humans and came over to investigate. One approached Kelly cautiously and sniffed at her, and then went on to lick Nathan's feet! We got some great photos. I was quite captivated by them and I challenged myself as to why I was more fascinated by an introduced animal who is doing so much damage to such a delicate place and not so fascinated with several native and very important members of this environment. Our cultural association with horses is really very powerful and I would rather see them tamed and "used" by humans than at large in this place where they do so much harm (p. 43-44).

Kim, too, comments on the brumbies, their impact and how the landscape is being changed:

The Brumbies: I know they aren't native or anything but they are so beautiful! There is a black stallion with a star-shaped white patch on its forehead standing bolt upright on the other side of the creek watching over the other 10 horses. The wind is flowing through its mane and tail so it looks even more knightly! The thought of the brumbies as a part is a bit unsettling. If they aren't allowed to be up here, then why are we? It seems unfair that we should be so selfish and only really think of them (and other animals) not being allowed here. But now it appears that we aren't doing much about the brumbies (except immorally shooting them in some high plains) although we are trying to kill other pests eg foxes and rabbits. We were talking about brumbies a bit when we were walking and it seems that the Australian culture and history of 'white' society are strongly associated with the use of horses. It is almost unbelievable that within 200 years or so we could bring so many non native animals here and degrade different environments of Australia especially the more fragile ones like this area. I was trying to imagine what all of the area around here would look like without our interaction. I feel that with each generation we create a new, warped sense of the world. I don't believe that we could even say that it had an original state of being because it is ever-changing (p. 50-51).

Kerry, however, reflects on how the experience provided space for her to contemplate her relationship with family and friends and affirm her personal history:

Being in the bush certainly encourages one to clear their mind of unnecessary worries. Questions posed to me, that were once difficult to construct an answer for, are now more straight forward. In the last 9 days I have: voiced my respect for my family, friends and a love for a new boyfriend in my life, I am proud to have been brought up in a rural environment, which has given me a broader perspective on life matters...It all makes me smile. The answers that I give my peers/leader are not contrived, but genuine, and are indicative of where I see myself at the moment. The long walk has provided the framework to make new discoveries and confirm my future directions (p. 52-53).

The reflections on relationships with the natural world in this section of the walk have covered encounters with brumbies, consideration of their cultural importance and impact on the environment, and the capacity of the experience to provide space

for participants to contemplate relationships with family, friends and their personal history.

Northern section

As with the other stages of the walk, the northern section produced some reflection that was connected to the place and some that was of a general nature. For Kelly, being in the bush environment is rewarding in itself:

Discussion on the environment. I didn't contribute to this one because I'm as yet unclear how the places we're been in have affected me or how my relationship to non-human life is going. I felt that I had reached most of the realizations other group members voiced – last year or even many years ago. I know I've felt very comfortable for my lack of experience and I gather many amazing feelings from being amongst the more balanced environment of the bush (p. 32).

Paul, however, articulates feelings and thoughts that are product of the place:

The place makes me feel very small and unimportant. The huge massive peaks of the Rolling Ground make me feel special and when the clouds give in to the views I can feel as I have a spiritual connection to the land (p. 20).

For James, an encounter with a butterfly, the route followed and the impact of the group stimulates a discussion on the forces of life:

Yesterday at the waterfall I found a butterfly which had damaged wings and was drowning in a puddle. I bent down and squashed the butterfly between my fingers thinking it's dieing [sic] slowly, it is more humane to kill it. Today as I've walked along I've thought should I have killed it or left it to its own path. It would have died anyway, this way it would be in less pain. But by fluttering around in the water it might have attracted a bird or a fish which may have eaten it. Thus continuing its life. What effects do we have on the areas we visit. We have in the last couple of days been walking off track, stomping, crushing and forcing our way threw [sic] a range of areas. Everyone following the person ahead of them. The last people have little trouble spotting the trail blazed by the leaders. Shrubs broken, sphagnum moss beds trodden and a new path forged. The type of impact is always spoken about and I'm sure the group knows we are causing it but we don't seem to be able to avoid it. There is a theory that everything is just a reaction, that you don't choose what you do it was already planned at the molecular level. Everything is made up of atoms which bounce off each other, when an atom bounces off another atom it will head off in a direction until it hits another. So if that is the case we should be able to calculate which way the atom will move which means we can predict the future. You might say that I can place something where the atoms were going to hit and change its path! But you changing the path is a predetermined reaction of other atoms that made you do it, which therefore means that nothing is random. That everything happens because it is affected by other atoms, which make up everything. Which means we can't change the future as what ever we do or don't do is determined, that I was meant to kill that butterfly because all the atoms before me bounced off each other resulting in the predetermined killing of the butterfly. I don't think I can agree with that because it's depressing to think we have no choices even when it seems we do, that life is just a by product of some atoms bouncing around (p. 13-14).

This stage of the walk has produced reflection on being comfortable in the bush, confirmation from one respondent that prior to the experience she already had a

relationship with the natural world that others in the group have only developed through the experience, from another respondent that the place made him feel small and unimportant, yet the features of one area made him feel special, and that under certain circumstances he feels he had a spiritual connection with the land. And finally, for one respondent, the place and experience prompted metaphysical thoughts on the forces and processes of life.

This aspect of the findings has reported on the reflections of respondents on their relationships with the natural world, including people. The southern section produced reflections on the impact of the hydro scheme on the Snowy River, a desire to be more informed, motivated and proactive about environmentally damaging activities, contemplation of landscape and human time scales, and the sense of being small and inferior as a result of such comparisons, feelings of being sad at leaving the bush, not wanting to go home and being comfortable in the bush through gaining a 'general sense of place' as a product of the journey and in spite of wanting some 'simple comforts'. In the middle stage of the walk reflections addressed encounters with brumbies and their cultural importance and impact on the environment, and the potential for participants to find space during the experience to contemplate relationships with family and friends and on their personal history. These reflections are diverse and contain issues that relate to specific issues of a place and the environment on a general level. While varied, these reflections highlight the connection between the place, the experience and the learning of participants, that is, the learning is shaped by the context provided by the experience of the place.

Developing relationships with place

Another aspect of reflection on the experience that respondents referred to was developing relationships with place. This related to both the place the respondent was in and place(s) generally.

Southern section

The Snowy stage of the walk, providing challenging walking conditions, provokes thought on what it takes to get to know a place. For Ben, getting to know a place can be determined by the way the landscape is engaged:

Although other things are starting to put me in touch with the river, I am beginning to understand how to read the river far easier than a few days ago. Through talking and observing Al I can pick where we have to cross the river and where the larger beaches are and using the map to compare the steepness of the sides etc. River navigation is much different to ordinary navigation and provides just another dimension to it all (p. 23).

Once he has adjusted to and is comfortable in a place, Alex articulates a reluctance to leave:

I think I'm acclimatizing at the moment. It takes a couple of days to truly adapt physically to a new environment. I have to adjust to heat, treated water, rough terrain and a heavy pack. So I blame it more or less on that [not sleeping well the night before]. When I've first adapted to a new environment and feel comfortable in it, I find it difficult to leave. I want to spend more time there, get to know the place in different ways rather than rushing through it because a time limit is set. Even though we follow the river's ripples for 7 days, I could without any hassles spend four weeks here. This place is what I call wilderness (p. 8-9).

At different stages in this section of the walk Ben discusses his feelings toward the area:

My first sight of the Snowy this morning was stagnant pools of greenish brown water which battled against all odds to maintain some movement. It was a sight which I knew was only like that because of white Australians' development of the Snowy scheme to produce power and aid irrigation to grow crops like cotton and rice in the driest inhabited continent on earth. The river seems to induce a sense of sadness into me because it is easy to imagine what such a beautiful river it used to be in its natural flow. I feel that this is hindering my relationship development with the area because it feels really unnatural (p. 9).

And in a later entry:

Saw three Wedgies today, which was wicked. I thought I would have observed more bird life so far. It makes it difficult to further your relationships with areas if you can't begin to understand the place through my research topic on birds. The more you begin to understand something or someone the easier that relationship is to develop. It seems like from the research I did on birds that it is going to be difficult to develop strong relationships on the walk because for most of us we are visiting new areas and in that fact three very distinct areas. When we finally leave the Snowy and head up into the subalpine area it's going to be a totally different environment, different birds, trees, reptiles etc and hence we will have to start from scratch again. It would be different if for instance we walked along the Snowy for 18 days we would develop a very comprehensive understanding of the area and hence our relationship would be furthered dramatically (Ben, p. 15-17).

And again, Ben contemplates what it takes to get to know the area:

I guess everyone is different but from this experience and past experiences it seems to take at least 5-6 days to begin feeling connected with an area, but this will change depending on whether you are revisiting an area (p. 33).

Late in the trip, Shane discusses been comfortable in the area and relates it to other areas he knows:

...it is interesting to see that I'm the only one who related strongly to the Snowy River: all the others, who are all Victorians, raved about the Alps and the Mountain Ash and the big hills, and the cooler weather, etc. I alone expressed kinship and affection to the hot and dry Snowy: to me, the shallow, winding river, sandy beaches, warm water, rocky banks, animal tracks following the

river (brumbies, wallabies, wombats) remind me of a lot of the rivers and gorges in the Northern Territory...I loved it and felt very much at home (p. 77-78).

Kim draws attention to an aspect she feels is important in getting to know a place:

Escaping = coping? We had a lot of conversations today when we were walking and more so when resting and Al pointed out that most of what we were talking about had nothing to do with what we are doing out here. I was thinking that maybe that is one way we cope with our tiredness and having to walk up big hills etc. Maybe it has to do with group interactions/socialization as well. I think in terms of developing a sense of place with somewhere, it's those few moments or a period of time that you spend by yourself during the day with your own thoughts and your only interaction or main one is with your surroundings (p. 27).

The respondents, too, struggle with the notion that the environment plays a role in shaping experience. Nathan tries to clarify his understanding of how place shapes experience:

... emphasis is being placed on the way the environment dictates the nature/outcome of the trip. By virtue of the fact that we are travelling through a 'place' means that this 'place' is going to shape or form the basis of the experience. Perhaps what we are being asked is 'what makes us interact differently to different places'.

- our mood
- what one knows about a place
- previous visits
- comfortable with the activity

Previous train of thought assumed that I/we always relate to the same place in the same manner. Wrong. So the question has evolved. Why do we relate to the same place in a different manner? My initial thoughts are that it has a lot to do with me, or the person, as the place remains (essentially) the same (p. 2-3).

The reflections from this section of the walk on developing relationships with place are diverse. Respondents have commented on the influence of the approach to travel in understanding the landscape, that having become acclimatised, adjusted to and comfortable in a place, one respondent was reluctant to leave, that knowledge of the hydro scheme on the Snowy River was a hindrance to developing a relationship with the area because it felt unnatural, and that it took at least 5-6 days to begin feeling connected with an area (the same respondent observed). It was also noted that the structure of the walk, moving into a new environment each week, makes it difficult to develop strong relationships with the area, that experiences in similar environments contributed to a sense of kinship and affection for the area and feeling at home, and finally, for another respondent, that spending time on her own was the main way she connected with her surroundings. The diverse nature of these responses draws attention to the very personal nature of developing relationships with place.

Middle section

In the middle stage of the walk Peter discusses the notion that a place has a gender:

Sometimes when you are in a place you can feel its gender. Like the Main Range to me is female because of its accentuated curves, its soft beauty, its dazzling flowering smell. However this place evokes neither masculine nor feminine. It's more like a transition between the two (p. 80).

For Kelly, the challenging walking conditions detract from getting to know a place:

We made our way up the Nine Mile Pinch today. When I'm tired or struggling with pain, I find it difficult to appreciate what is happening in my surroundings. I become engrossed in my personal endeavour. This doesn't help to extend my knowledge of the non-human world. I'm really impressed with Al's knowledge and passion for the places (and their inhabitants) we have been in. I almost feel that I have been lazy on this trip because it's easier (and I'm more likely to discover the answer) if I ask Al. Knowledge of the environment, whether it be rocks or insects or fauna, is a skill like navigation and walking ability. You have to work on it to attain a level of proficiency (p. 17).

Jason highlights the difficulty of getting to know a place in a short space of time:

There is so much to every environment that exists right around the World, merely meandering through one of them doesn't sufficiently mean you know the environment. You may know its locality and how to get there, but there is a lot more to a book than its cover. Significantly, I learnt that to get to know the sub-alpine (region) I would have to spend some quality time learning more in-depthly the happenings of the environment before it could become known as a place for me. Right now I feel as if I've laid the foundations for a more intimate understanding of the environment and its up to me whether I choose to understand it as a place (Jason, p. 51-52).

The respondents here have suggested that places have a gender, yet this place evokes neither masculine nor feminine qualities, that challenging walking conditions make it difficult to get to know a place, and that merely meandering through a place doesn't mean you know the environment and that it takes 'some quality time learning more in depth' about an environment before it can become known as a place.

Northern section

Travelling in the alpine area, Meg contemplates what it is to be in place:

Awareness of body is art, close your eyes – where is your body? Which part of you is touching what? Bodily awareness and position is a reflection of place and as the body becomes a part of this place there is resignation between the affect of space on body and body on space. It is the resin I am interested here – the dynamic energy allowed inside, swallowed as by space, bodily awareness passes into an essence of art and dissipates until the mind is space itself and in that moment there is only place in an entire awareness of the concept. This is how I experience place at my highest ability to "be" as yet. I find rock dancing particularly effective when the landscape beckons such (p. 15).

Peter gives voice to the idea that getting to know a place, and appreciation of it, is enhanced through researching an aspect of the area prior to departure:

I'm really looking forward to going over the Main Range and noticing and investigating its unique and divers geological features. I really feel a connection

with the place just knowing about one of its components. I couldn't however say the same thing if I had researched the history or the NP [National Park]. Those topics are too removed from the place itself. The 3 broad characteristics of a place are

1. Flora/fauna
2. Weather
3. Geology

I will have a better appreciation for the area having an in depth knowledge of the geological characteristics of the area (p. 9-10).

The relatively untouched nature of the area is of significance to Sam:

I love this place: I find mountains very spiritual, very wild, especially with the weather we have had, beautiful calm, sunrise, sunset, then really wild, untamed. Despite the large human impact through grazing and hydro, it still seems untouched by comparison to most other places. I feel alone with this place despite being part of a group and seeing other people (p. 40).

And in a later entry Sam describes being more comfortable in an environment that is similar to others he has experienced:

Most of us saw the Main Range and Mt Jagungal as the best part (or one of) the trip. Shane was the exception, he found the section along the Snowy to be his favourite. He said that it reminded him of experiences in the N.T. It was interesting that the rest of the group were Victorians with most of our bush walking experiences being in the Victorian Alps and sub-Alp zone. I think that this shows a huge link between prior experience and the potential enjoyment of an area or experience. I feel far more comfortable and at home in mountain regions because I have a lot of experience in them. Perhaps next time (and the time after that) I will begin to love the Snowy River as I do the mountains (p. 46).

John, too, articulates how connection with other places helps shape a relationship with the place he is in:

I've loved being up here. I have a special relationship with mountains in S. Australia and whilst the Main Range is very different to the Victoria Alps, there are enough familiar aspects for me to feel at home up here. The snow grass plains, the snow gum woodlands, giant Alpine Ash stands, rainforest gullies, high valleys that attract the cold air and the cool summer weather. So I've had a very peaceful time up here feeling very content and fulfilled and at the same time amazed at the discoveries in this new place. The steep crags of the glacial formed Main Range, the nuggety punch of the feldmark communities and the might of the Candlebark Forests. It has been exciting, invigorating, awe-inspiring and comforting to be here (p. 68).

Contemplating the time taken to get to know a place, Tanya discusses her desire to spend more time in the outdoors:

I have come to the realisation that I don't feel like I'm really in a place – absorbing all it has to offer when I'm in a 4 or 2 day trip – I want to spend more time in places I visit all at once, eg I want to be climbing for a week, I want to go walking for 3-6 weeks again from NSW down to Victoria. I feel like these places deserve more of my time and that I'm entitled to it (p. 220).

In this section of the walk, respondents have reflected on what it means to be in a place and the importance of mind and bodily awareness, that a sense of connection with the area was assisted through researching an aspect of the place, the perception.

of a place being relatively 'untouched' contributed to getting to know the area, connection and experience with a similar environment assisted two respondents in feeling content, at home and comfortable, and that it takes time to get to know a place well, longer than the trip allowed.

Developing relationships with place is a very personal, but also culturally specific, process. The diverse nature of these responses highlights the variety of issues that one small group of people found important in developing a relationship with a place. Respondents in the southern section mentioned the impact of the approach to travel in shaping understanding of the area, that once adjusted to a place it can be difficult to leave, that knowledge of a local environmental issue may hinder the development of a relationship with the area, that it takes time to connect with an area and the structure of the walk was a hindrance, that experience in a similar environment may contribute to developing a connection with an area, and that spending time by oneself may assist in connecting with the surroundings. In the middle stage of the walk respondents suggested that places may have a gender though that area did not, that challenging walking conditions made it difficult to get to know a place, and that merely passing through is not sufficient time to know an area well. While an earlier aspect of the findings suggested that the respondents learned about the environment from the experience, these responses, though diverse, suggest that in developing a relationship with place, the structure of the trip was at a minimum unsupportive, and possibly a hindrance.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings reporting on *critical reflection and thought as a consequence of experience*. The response were collated under the sub-themes of (1) reflection on relationships with the natural world, and (2) developing relationships with place. While the reflections of respondents were diverse they draw attention to the experience and the learning opportunities being shaped by the context provided by the environment. The journal entries, reproduced here and in the previous two chapters, highlight the multiple and diverse experiences and learning of the participants on the long walk. The next chapter discusses these findings and their significance to the project.

Chapter Seven

Discussion and Conclusion

...although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock (Schama 1995, p. 6-7).

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to gain a better understanding of the way in which the physical environment of an outdoor education experience provides a context for participants' experience and learning. In particular, it was an enquiry into how the relatively different environments on an 18-day bushwalk in the KNP impact on participants' experience and learning. This chapter discusses the findings detailed in chapters four, five and six. It is divided into (1) summary of findings, (2) implications of research findings, and (3) directions for future research.

Summary of findings

What follows is a discussion of the findings of this project as reported in chapters four, five and six. Journal entries have provided a rich source of information, allowing insight into the multiple realities encountered by participants. The responses are diverse; 19 research participants had potentially 19 different perspectives on the experience.

The environment providing a context for learning and experience

The environments of the long walk provided a multitude of contexts for learning and experience. The data of chapter four, collated under the headings (1) responses to place, (2) observation and understanding of the environment, (3) stories told by the place, (4) relationships with others, and (5) learning and insights, draw attention to the diverse nature of respondents' experiences and learning. While diverse, the data also highlight the connections between the context provided by the environment, the structure of the journey and the conditional nature of the learning opportunities.

The *responses to place* were diverse with each section of the walk producing a different set of reactions. Particular aspects of the experience of each area were noted as significant in shaping the responses to place. In the southern section of the walk responses included expressions of remoteness, freedom, respect, being challenged and strengthened by the landscape, and disappointment and concern at the state of the health of the Snowy River. The middle stage of the journey produced responses of an introspective and poetic nature, but also of a sad and disappointed one at not having had the time and opportunity to get to know the area better. The responses to the northern area contrasted with the other sections in that they were of a positive nature, with respondents reporting feeling uplifted, inspired, and excited about being in the area.

A number of factors appear to have played a role in shaping the *responses to place* for these respondents. These include: personal knowledge and understanding of the area, previous experiences, the attributes and characteristics of place, particular environmental issues associated with the place, and the structure of the journey, route taken and the model of travel. The diverse nature of the *responses to place* highlight the impact of each landscape on the respondents' experience. Of particular note are the attributes and characteristics of each place playing a strong role in shaping the routes taken, and in turn, the experience.

The *observation and understanding of environment* are also of a diverse nature. The southern section produced observations detailing the unfamiliar nature of the terrain and the dry surroundings, and the importance of the river to travel and living in the area. The middle stage of the walk elicited observations regarding changes in the landscape at a macro and micro scale, while the northern area produced a sense of respect and admiration for the alpine plants as a result of observing the weather and living conditions of the area.

It is important to note that these observations and understandings are particular to the individual and his or her experiences. Understanding of the area, or of a particular aspect of the place, may develop with the aid of further information, such as that provided by the leader, but is tied to, and comes out of, the experience of the place. The observations and understanding of the environment are limited by, and a product of, the particular way of experiencing the area.

The *stories told by place* offer a different perspective on the experience of respondents, with each section of the walk producing a different set of stories. The southern area prompted discussion of the differences between geological and human time and the impact of European settlers on the health of the Snowy River. The middle stage also elicited stories of the impact of European settlers on the area, but focused on graziers and their livestock. This section also produced discussion of the area being little known, sitting as it does between the Main Range and the Snowy River. The northern stage provoked stories discussing landscape processes and history, the importance of the Alps as a catchment, and the capacity of place to alter moods and emotions.

The stories articulated are diverse yet they draw attention to the landscape, and particular aspects of it to shape experience. The stories possibly reflect the impact of different aspects of the place on each respondents' experience. If this is the case then the influence of human activity on the landscape, particularly that of European settlers, was a significant aspect of the experience for these respondents.

Responses detailing *relationships with others* draw attention to the environment of the walk providing a context for learning about interpersonal relationships. However, the link between a particular environment and learning about interpersonal relationships is less clear than the impact of the landscape on other aspects of the respondents' learning. During the southern section of the journey, respondents report the unfamiliar nature of the environment; the sense of remoteness and challenging walking conditions the required the group to be committed to each other; and being open and increasing levels of communication in order to cope with the experience. The middle stage of the journey elicited from respondents desires of wanting to learn from each other and observations of the impact of different walking conditions on interpersonal relationships. In the northern area respondents commented on a personal need to recognize the differences between people, including different levels of communication, the necessity for good communication and the capacity of group members to learn from one another.

In some of these cases respondents report the nature of the journey, and being in a particular place and time, providing an opportunity to learn about relationships

between people. Yet in other cases they report learning about relationships between people as a function of the journey and the challenges it presented. While it is difficult to determine from these responses how a particular place facilitated the development of interpersonal relationships, the responses highlight the connection between the setting and the structure of the journey in providing a context for learning about relationships with others.

The *learning and insights* from each section of the walk, while varied, carry a similar thread of the landscapes and the structure of the journey shaping the experiences and learning opportunities. The southern stage of the journey elicited comments on there being few signs of human activity in the area other than the weeds and rubbish coming down the river; that respondents learned about leadership but did not give specific details; and that the accessibility and quality of drinking water was significant to their experiences. The middle section brought forth responses that further practice and refinement of bush living and travelling skills contributed toward feeling comfortable and at peace in the bush. The northern area responses commented on an enhanced appreciation for life and a desire to 'let others in on the Earth's wisdom', learning and refining skills necessary for living and travelling in the outdoors, learning about various aspects of the environment, groups and development, and reading the landscape to make informed decisions about appropriate routes in order to minimise impact on the environment.

The learning and insights gained by respondents is both of a general nature, being a function of the experience as a whole, but is also relative to the attributes of each place. The experience provides learning opportunities as a product of being, living and travelling in the bush for an extended period of time, yet these opportunities come out of, or are shaped by, the landscape, or particular aspects of a place. The learning opportunities are therefore not context free but rather context dependent. That is not to say that some of the learning may not be achieved in another place, or in another manner, but that the *opportunities* are conditional on the context provided by the place.

Factors that impacted on the experience of place

Many factors may have an impact on the experience of place. The data of chapter five, structured under the headings (1) prior knowledge of a place, (2) attitude toward the experience prior to departure, (3) aspects of the place, (4) structure of the experience, (5) issues relating to leadership, and (6) concepts of time, highlight that the experience of place is not universal or restricted to the time and the location, but that it may be influenced by a number of agents.

Prior knowledge of a place can take on many forms. The knowledge respondents referred to generally relates to particular aspects of the place, or a similar place they know. Responses demonstrate the influence of expectations and preconceptions in shaping the experience of a place, the impact of prior research or knowledge on an experience, and the benefit of relating the experience of an area to that of a similar environment. Some knowledge of the area detracted from the experience of the place, for example, the hydro scheme on the upper Snowy and its impact on the river's health detracted from the experience of several respondents. While aware of these environmental issues, respondents paradoxically also reported enjoying their time in the area and developing a connection with the place. Researching an aspect of the cultural or natural history of an area prior to departure helped some respondents lift enthusiasm for experiencing and learning about the area and provided a focus for reading the landscape or directing an existing interest. Previous experience in the area or a similar environment assisted respondents in feeling comfortable or at home.

Prior knowledge of an area can impact on the experience of a place in many ways, yet for the respondents here much of their prior knowledge made a positive contribution to their experiences. Even those that reported having their preconceptions challenged still give accounts of enjoying the area and learning from their experiences.

In the early stages of the walk several respondents made reference to *attitudes toward the experience prior to departure*. One respondent reported being so enthusiastic and excited prior to departure she refused to be anything but positive about the trip. A second respondent provided a contrasting account of the

considerable effort devoted to pre-trip preparation and feelings of exhaustion and apathy as a consequence. These responses draw attention to the potential connection between the experience of a place and that of other places.

The experience of an area can be influenced by the *aspects of the place*. These aspects are diverse and potentially infinite. The diversity of responses illustrate that the nature of experience is contingent upon place, and that aspects of a place may determine the experience of the area. In the southern section of the walk respondents detailed the nature of the terrain and weather conditions restricting or determining the approach to travel, and the influence of meeting other people. In the middle area responses again referred to the impact of the weather conditions, but also to the influence of different walking conditions on personal reflection and the capacity to observe the surroundings. In the northern alpine landscapes respondents also commented on the impact of the weather on their experience of the place, and that of particular attributes of the landscape, such as treeless frost hollows, and being above the treeline with its associated views, craggy peaks, and rolling plains.

The accounts given by respondents are not a comprehensive list of all the attributes of the places visited. Attempting to list all attributes of a place would be to overlook the impact of direct experience. Yet particular aspects of each place may be significant to shaping the experience of an area. Assessing the particulars of each place or landscape and the impact on the experience of an individual is difficult to determine from these findings. However, the responses do emphasize that as the terrain and the landscape changes so, too, does the nature of the experience. That is, the place is not merely a backdrop to the experience but rather shapes the experience in ways particular to the individual.

The relationship between a place and an experience of it is conditional; understanding place is, in part, dependent upon the experience, while the experience of place is shaped by the place itself. A place may exist without one's experience of it, yet experience does not occur without the context provided by a place. As experience is not universal, the *structure of the experience* may have a significant impact on the experience of place.

Each of the landscapes of the long walk provided a different set of walking and living conditions, and therefore different experiences and learning opportunities. The diverse nature of the responses from each stage of the walk highlight the potential impact on the experience of place caused by structural changes to the journey. The southern area saw respondents describe aspects of the experience being structured to cope with the particular environmental conditions, the focus of conversations within a group shifting from that of the environment to other topics of life as the walking conditions became increasingly challenging, that demanding walking conditions making it difficult to 'be in the place' and take in the surroundings, whilst easier travelling conditions made it possible to soak in and enjoy the environment, and lastly that it took a long time for a respondent to feel comfortable in the place when compared to other places. What constituted challenging or easy walking conditions was not discussed. Responses from the middle stage of the walk also made reference to challenging walking conditions restricting respondents' capacity to take in and learn about the environment. Respondents articulated a range of perspectives on adjustments to the journey and the impacts on their experiences of the area. Like the southern section of the walk these included the differences between walking off track, on track, and through different types of bush. Respondents also raised other issues including the food drop being an interruption to the experience; the overall structure of the journey contributing toward one respondent feeling tired and in need of a rest, whilst it also produced feelings of being fantastic, at ease, comfortable and at home; and finally, that an opportunity for some solo time for one respondent provided a sense of solitude, quiet, a challenge and a 'deep, ancient' feeling. The northern area of the walk produced responses of a less diverse nature. They again included discussion of the challenge of walking off track, but in this case through subtle topographical terrain, and the impact of walking in smaller groups without the leader present:

Not all the structural issues raised by the respondents relate directly to the landscape or attributes of the place; some issues are associated with the aims of the subject or the particular approach taken by the leader, an individual or the group. However, the issues draw attention to the connection between particular aspects of each place, the structure of the journey and the experience of the place; namely, that the experience of a place is conditional upon the attributes of the landscape and structure of the journey.

There are many *issues relating to leadership* that may impact on the experience of a place. The southern area of the walk produced responses discussing issues of safety and group management, modifications to leadership style for different environmental conditions, skills needed to read the landscape, and involvement of the group in the decision-making process. The middle section of the walk saw discussion of different approaches to leadership impacting on the group in both positive and negative ways, the need for a leader to adjust his or her style for different groups and circumstances, the importance of a leader having environmental knowledge, and the impact of a perception of ineffective leadership. The northern stage produced discussion similar to that raised in the other sections with respondents referring to group management and safety, aspects of facilitation and closure of the experience and the skill needed to recognize appropriate moments to educate about an aspect of a place.

Like the discussion of the structure of the experience, some aspects of the leadership raised by respondents are of a general nature, for example, related to the aims of the subject or the approach of an individual, while other aspects come out of a context provided by the landscape. These responses also highlight the capacity of the leadership approach to shape and influence the experience of the place.

For three respondents the *concept of time* appeared to be a significant influence on their experience of the area. One individual refers to the excessive use of watches to observe the passage of time as an unwanted and unnecessary impact on his experience of the area. For the other two respondents, the passage of time, or the daily and weekly landmarks that denote time, was somehow different while on the journey. In one sense, the issues raised in these entries are not tied to particular places, yet they illustrate the capacity for particular constructs of our 'modern' world to impact on experience of place. That is, the reality of living in the outdoors may be shaped by cultural understandings, such as time, that are not readily observable.

The factors that impact on the experience of place discussed here demonstrate the non-universal, contextual nature of experience. The discussion has illustrated that these influencing factors are not limited to those immediately visible at the time and location. For example, particular cultural constructions of reality, such as knowledge of an area or leadership, can develop and shape understandings of a place, how to

live and travel in the outdoors or manage a group long before an experience may occur. Other factors, such as aspects of the place or structure of the journey, can play a role in shaping the experience at the time. The factors discussed here do not form an exhaustive list, but rather report those found in the data. While of interest as a research question, an enquiry into all the factors that may impact on the experience of place is beyond the scope of this project.

Critical reflection and thought as a consequence of experience

The nature and structure of the long walk encourages participants to undertake critical reflection about their experiences and their lives generally. In chapter six the data were structured using the headings (1) reflection on relationships with the natural world, and (2) developing relationships with place. Responses highlight the landscape shaping reflections and experience, and that the structure of the journey in some ways limited the capacity of respondents to get to know the places well.

Respondents' *reflections on relationships with the natural world* were varied, yet collectively they highlight the impact of the landscapes on their experiences and learning. Reflections discussed learning about relationships with other people, general environmental issues, and specific environmental issues relating to the landscape a respondent happened to be in at the time. The southern area, for example, elicited reflections on the hydro scheme on the upper Snowy and its impact on the river's health, a desire from one respondent to be more informed, motivated and proactive about environmentally damaging activities, deliberation on the difference between landscape and human time scales, and consequently, thoughts of being small and inferior when compared with the landscape, sadness at leaving the bush, not wanting to go home, being comfortable in the bush as a result of gaining a 'general sense of place' as a result of the journey and despite wanting some 'simple comforts'. During the middle section of the walk reflections included encounters with brumbies, their cultural significance and impact on the environment, and contemplation of personal history and relationships with friends and family. The northern landscapes of the walk produced reflection on feeling small and unimportant relative to the landscape, yet also of feeling special and spiritually connected with the land, being comfortable in the bush, confirmation of the validity of a respondent's relationship with the natural world as a consequence of the

experience, and finally, metaphysical contemplation of the forces and processes of life.

These responses are diverse, yet they draw attention to the landscape shaping reflections, experience and learning. Of particular note is the capacity for the experience and learning opportunities to be shaped by the environmental issues specific to a place or region. Issues such as the poor health of the Snowy River as a result of its damming appear to be a significant force in shaping the experience of the area. In this case, learning through experience is a process of contextualizing knowledge. The experience and learning are not just in and about the environment in an abstract sense, but rather are concerned with specific issues associated with the place.

Reflections on *developing relationships with place* illustrate the personal and culturally specific nature of the process. Responses refer to getting to know place on a general level as well as specific locations. During the southern section of the journey respondents discussed the approach to travel impacting upon their understanding of the area, that once familiar with the place respondents found it difficult to leave, that knowledge of a local environmental was an obstacle to developing a relationship with the area, that it takes time to develop a connection with an area and that the structure of the walk was a hindrance, that experience in and knowledge of a similar environment may contribute to developing a connection with an area; and that spending time by oneself may assist in connecting with the surroundings. The middle stage of the walk saw respondents comment on some places having a gender (though that area did not), that challenging walking conditions made it difficult to get to know a place, and that merely passing through did not provide sufficient time to get to know the area well. While articulated differently, the reflections of the northern area are similar to those of the other two sections with respondents discussing that it takes time to get know a place well, longer than the trip allowed, that connection and experience with a similar environment helped respondents feel contented, at home and comfortable in this area, and that a perception of the place being relatively 'untouched' contributed to getting to know the area. Other reflections referred to what it means to be in a place and the importance of mind and bodily awareness, and that a sense of connection with the area was assisted through researching an aspect of the place.

These findings draw attention to the complex nature of a 'relationship with place'. Earlier aspects of the findings suggested that respondents learned about the environment through the experience of travelling through the area, yet the entries from this section of the findings highlight that the structure of the journey was unsupportive, and possibly a hindrance, of developing a relationship with place. Respondents did not discuss in detail what a relationship with a place actually meant to them, yet several of them refer to their capacity to develop a connection with the area, or just getting to know an area well as being limited by the structure of the journey. In particular, the challenging walking conditions, such as terrain, a heavy pack, and the need to keep moving to meet the next food drop or finish in the allocated time were a significant hindrance to knowing an area well. While knowledge of a place does not necessarily equate to a relationship with place, particular *types of experience* would appear to be critical. That is, time to explore, 'to take in' a place and simply to be in a place, in the context of an experience such as this, would appear to be important to the development of a connection with the area.

The long walk of 2001 didn't happen just 'anywhere', or in a vacuum; it occurred in the KNP. The journey traversed three relatively different environments, each shaping the experience and the learning opportunities relative to the attributes of the landscape. *The experience and learning of these respondents, on this journey were shaped by each of the landscapes.* The findings gathered for this project strongly suggest that participants of the long walk did in fact encounter different and distinctive experiences and learning in each of the environments. Experience of place was made possible by the place but was also shaped, determined or defined by the nature of the experience (intentionality, structure, route, mode of travel), aspects of the place (attributes and character), the responses of an individual (observation, reflection, understanding, learning), cultural understanding of environment (including prior knowledge of place, concepts of time), leadership, and relationships with other people. These contributing factors were shaped by, and in some case contingent upon, each other.

Implications of research findings

The findings of this project are a reflection of the experiences of 19 people on an extended outdoor education journey through the KNP in February 2001. While there was never an intention to generalise the findings, they may be of interest to those associated with the long walk and the subject Field Experience 2A and to leaders and program operators in the broader outdoor education community. The points raised are in part recommendations that come out of the findings, but are also intended to raise issues regarding the nature of experience and capacity of places to shape experience and learning in an outdoor education context.

- The essential ingredient of outdoor education, experience, is contingent upon the place in which it occurs, not free of it. That is, place(s) provide a context for experience. While discussing the notion of 'experience', Bell supports this finding, arguing:

...experience 'exists' through interpretation. It is produced through the meaning given it. Interpretations of lived experience are always contextual and specific... There is no generic clone for "the experience" which applies to everyone. This could only happen if experience was an absolute principle, or if people were clones of each other, without personal situations, social contexts, or historical places in time (1993, p. 20).

While an experience of a place is conditional or influenced by many other factors, the capacity of the place to shape the experience is foundational. Without the place, and all that is associated with it, there would be no experience.

- Each environment provides a different set of experiences; different living conditions, different sets of limitations on travel, and therefore different learning opportunities. Brookes notes that 'ecologically responsive experience is negotiated with a particular place, using our bodies and all our senses, and is (necessarily) mediated by culture' (1994, p. 8). The intended learning outcomes of an experience ought reflect the learning opportunities of a place.
- The mode of engagement, intentionality and structure of experience will play a significant role in determining the experience of place and the learning opportunities. Relph suggests that 'space is never empty but has content and substance that derive both from human intention and imagination and from the character of the space' (1976, p. 10), and that '...existential space [lived-space] is not merely a passive space waiting to be experienced, but is constantly being

created and remade by human activities' (1976, p. 12). The understanding of a place that may develop through an experience has its foundations in the intentions, means of exploring and moving, and overall structure of the experience. This should not be seen as hindrance in the construction of experience but rather as an exciting challenge. Relph adds 'that what we know as places changes as our intentions shift should not be considered a source of confusion, rather it is a source of richness in our geographical experience with each type of place complementing the others' (1976, p. 28).

- How the particulars of a place shape the experience for a participant is relative to the life experiences and cultural background of the individual. However, a leader modelling knowledge, understanding, and consideration of the environment is important to the experience of participants. Knowledge of a leader should include general information on aspects of the region but also particular aspects of specific places. Brookes highlights that generalist knowledge, as opposed to local knowledge, '...prepares us to make short raids on the bush as strangers, rather than develop a sense of place' (1994, p. 7). A leader ought to know a place personally!
- Where a leader may make decisions based on particular environmental knowledge or issues, they ought bring these to the attention of participants so that the latter might increase their awareness of the connection between people, place and experience. Orr argues:

...much of the pathology of contemporary civilization [is] related to the disintegration of the small community... The study of place, then, has... significance in reeducating people in the art of living well where they are... Good inhabitation is an art requiring detailed knowledge of a place, the capacity for observation, and a sense of care and rootedness (1992, p. 129-130).

While educators may have pre-existing relationships with place(s), modelling knowledge, understanding and connection with place(s) is important to the experience of participants.

- The specifics of environmental issues of an area, for example the impact of the hydro scheme on the Snowy River or cattle grazing in the Alps, ought to be included into the curriculum of a trip such as this. This should include investigation into issues prior to departure but also discussion and exploration of

the issues from an experiential perspective (whilst on the journey). This is supported by Orr who asserts:

...the study of place is relevant to the problems of overspecialization, which has been called the terminal disease of contemporary civilization...A place cannot be understood from the vantage point of a single discipline or specialization. It can be understood only on its terms as a complex mosaic of phenomena and problems (1992, p. 129).

Place associated knowledge may be developed through experience but should also be informed by cultural – environmental issues that surround an area.

- Payne draws attention to the diverse meanings that may be ascribed to a term such as 'nature':

Nature can be characterized in many ways such as a sanctuary, quarry, cathedral, gymnasium, laboratory, archive, women, spaceship, escape, zoo, resource, lifeboat, 'other', sublime, wild, frontier, conquered, place, home, property (1998, p. 19).

Cultural constructions of concepts such as 'environment', 'experience', 'knowledge', or 'time', ought to be consciously negotiated. That is, assumptions of meaning need to be considered and, where necessary, discussed and agreed upon. Overlooked, these concepts have the capacity to undermine the intention of an experience.

- Australians are predominately urban people yet commonly their understanding of the land is based more on myths and images than on an 'authentic bush tradition' (Brookes 1998, p. 2). These cultural understandings provide a framework for interpreting outdoor experiences. Many places will also have a variety of culturally specific understandings associated with the environment. Stories, such as 'The Man from Snowy River', can have a positive or a negative impact on the experience of place. The frameworks provided by general cultural understandings of 'the bush' and of particular environments or places ought not to be overlooked.
- Outdoor education experiences can foster the development of interpersonal relationships but it should not be overlooked that they are dependent on the place and the experience. Interpersonal relationships are cultural constructions and as such are contingent upon experience (Bell 1993), and therefore place.
- The findings suggest that an appropriate match of experience and participant readiness and competency in the outdoors is significant to the learning and knowledge that may be developed. Brookes asserts:

Outdoor experiences can impart tacit knowledge of place, including the knowledge necessary to understand an ecocentric world view. Unlike rationalist knowledge, which is validated by universal criteria (such as measurable competencies) tacit knowledge is local knowledge... Outdoor activities can provide experiences that allow us to interact with, and thus get to know, particular environments. Against this, rationalist tendencies can negate such knowing at every turn (1994, p. 7).

Participant feelings of being safe and competent in the outdoors appear to contribute to being comfortable and to enjoying the experience, and therefore to enhancing the learning opportunities. The concepts of safety and competence are not fixed or universal but rather relative to the experience being undertaken. These concepts cannot be assumed but instead are built through the nature of the experience. Conversely, an inappropriate match of skill level and experience can lead participants to feel overwhelmed and out of their 'comfort zones'. When in such a position participants are likely to find it difficult to maximise their learning opportunities regarding the environment.

- The findings of this project suggest that experience of the same or a similar environment may assist participants to feel comfortable and 'at home', helping participants to maximise their learning opportunities. This would appear to contrast with other models of outdoor education which suggest that a new or unfamiliar environment may contribute to the outcomes of a program. McKenzie (2000), for example, suggests that an unfamiliar environment is favoured for the contrast it provides participants, enabling them to gain new perspectives on the environments with which they are familiar. While this may be the case in some circumstances, there is also the possibility that a *different* experience of a familiar environment may provide new perspectives on the place.
- Orr, asserting the educational importance of place, suggests that enquiry into place:
...requires the combination of intellect with experience...The study of place involves complementary dimensions of intellect: direct observation, investigation, experimentation, and skill in the application of knowledge (1992, p. 128).

The findings from this project suggest that research into an aspect of cultural or natural history of the area, prior to departure, can lift participants' interest and enthusiasm for the experience. This would appear to be particularly true where the research has given direction to an already existing interest. Such preparation would appear to provide the participant with conceptual tools and language for understanding the landscape and experience.

- If developing a relationship with the natural world is a general foci of being in the outdoors then the trip structure needs to be supportive of this endeavour.

Martin argues:

Learning from outdoor adventure, outdoor recreation and outdoor education needs to go beyond consideration of the superficial aspects of minimizing impact. What I like to call *critical* outdoor education can contribute distinctively to education for the planet, by focusing on the cultural beliefs and practices that may be contributing to the ecological crisis (1999a, p. 464).

That is not to say that a journey is inappropriate but rather that time needs to be built into the experience to explore and be in places without the burden of a heavy pack or the need to move on to keep to a schedule. Casey supports this finding, suggesting: 'More than a mere backdrop, places provide the changing but indispensable material medium of journeys, furnishing way stations as well as origins and destinations of these journeys' (1993, p. 274).

- If building relationships with a place is a focus of being in the outdoors then the findings of this project suggest that the journey-based model of this trip may not be appropriate. Consideration needs to be given to the relationship between the structure of the experience and the experience of place, as Haluza-Delay argues:

Leaders need to consider carefully how the program structure and their leadership sends messages to participants... Due to the experience and role, leaders have a responsibility to help form or constrain the possible constructions that may be developing... Leaders can watch that counterproductive norms, for example the generalization that the natural world is the adversary or enemy of the individuals on the program, do not form. They should be aware of an overemphasis on the activities of the program. Leaders could act to ensure that the time together is not just a social or group experience, to the exclusion of other benefits, by planning opportunities for interaction with the natural world as carefully as they plan opportunities for group sharing, challenging activities or other program elements (1999, p. 450).

Several respondents reported the structure of this experience being a hindrance to them getting to know places well. Wattchow has devote considerable thought to the engagement with place through outdoor education and observes:

...place is consistently dealt with as a theme, as though the answer to connecting identity with place lies somehow in the idea of place, and not the place itself. How we Australians relate to 'the coast' or 'the bush' as an idea may be very different to how we relate to the local bush or coastal place near where we live. We strive to understand the iconic and symbolic 'bush', but not that local bush near home. We strive to comprehend the significance of 'the coast' to our perception of ourselves as a nation, but have few examples of careful and intimate writing of specific coastal places. We seem to be big on heady ideas and abstract conclusion – but low on lengthy, intimate, careful observation and recording of what it means to live in specific local places (2001, p. 131).

Getting to know places well requires time, patience, interest, and an approach to the structure of the experience different to the one described here.

The connection between places, experience, learning and understanding is complicated and difficult to unpack. There are many factors at work in shaping the experience of place. While this project has sought to uncover some of the connections between the various aspects of experience much work remains to be done.

Directions for future research

As chapter two discussed, there is a significant void in the outdoor education literature addressing research questions of this nature. Much remains to be investigated as this project has raised more questions than it set out to address. The following questions address lines of enquiry that are yet to be thoroughly worked through:

- What is the capacity of experience of particular places to promote environmental consideration (relationship) within an individual over a long term?
- How does the mode of engagement with a place impact on the experience and learning?
- Can the same learning outcomes be achieved, in the same location, using a variety of modes of travel?
- Are the modes of engagement with the outdoors, used by outdoor education, conducive to the development of an environmental awareness?
- Do outdoor education experiences reproduce or challenge assumptions of 'popular' culture regarding human relationships with the natural environment?
- Is there a connection between the dominant cultural understanding of a place and the types of experiences participants have?
- What are the attributes or characteristics of a particular place that are 'significant' to shaping the experience of the area?

Conclusion

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the role the physical environment played in shaping the experience and learning of an outdoor education

context. Chapter one introduced and provided an overview of the project. Chapter two reviewed the literature related to the project and reported on the key themes of understandings of 'environment', experience, place, educational importance of place, and experience of place. Chapter three discussed the methods and procedures that were employed in undertaking the project. Chapters four, five, and six described the data detailing the environment providing a context for learning and experience, factors that impacted on the experience of place, and critical reflection and thought as a consequence of experience. And finally, chapter seven has discussed the findings, implications and directions for future research.

The project has drawn on the journals of 19 participants to gain a better understanding of the influence of place on experience and learning during an extended journey through three relatively different environments of the KNP. Respondents' interpretations of their experiences and encounters with places were diverse and complex. The findings have revealed that, for these respondents, undertaking this journey, the places were not just a backdrop to experience but, rather, played a significant role in shaping the context and the learning opportunities. The findings also draw attention to the complex and dynamic web of factors that may impact upon the experience of a place. This study suggests that being in the outdoors, in an educational context, is not the same regardless of where one might happen to be, as the experience of place is contingent upon the place, each having a unique set of attributes, characteristics and history that shape the context.

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Appendix A

Information sheet and consent form

An exploration of environment specific experience and learning on an extended journey.

Information Sheet

Chief Investigator: Dr Peter Hay, University of Tasmania.

Researcher Responsible for the Project: Alistair Stewart, La Trobe University, Bendigo.

This letter is to inform you about a research project, I, Alistair, am conducting this year on the long walk and to invite you to participate. I'm interested in finding out about your experiences and learning particularly as it relates to the places visited on the long walk. The intent of the study is to describe the experiences of students in order to better understand how places provide a context for learning. This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements of a Masters of Science degree with the University of Tasmania. Please read the following information, and if you are willing to participate, sign the attached consent form.

As a contributor to the study you will be asked to answer specific questions in your long walk journal. These questions are particular to the research and will not form a component of your assessment in Field Experience 2A. Photocopied extracts may be taken to allow analysis and enable prompt return of journals.

Upon return from the walk I will conduct interviews with 5 people from each group (who I will interview will be determined after the trip). Interviewees will be asked about their experiences and learning in each stage of the walk, how the places affected them, what about the places was significant for them and whether the duration of the trip was significant. Each interview will take approximately one hour and will be recorded on audio tape for purposes of transcription and data analysis.

During the trip leaders will keep a journal detailing daily distances traveled, places visited, weather conditions, group dynamics, and any incidents of note. As part of this process you may be mentioned in these journal entries. When drawn upon for research student names will not be used.

I do not anticipate any emotional distress to you as a result of participation in this project.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and will in no way impact on your assessment in Field Experience 2A. You are free to withdraw from this project at any time without prejudice. You will not be remunerated for your involvement.

The information you provide will be strictly confidential and any reporting or publication coming from this project will use pseudonyms when describing participants' responses. Results will be presented in a Masters thesis and in professional publications.

For further information regarding this project:

Alistair Stewart, Department of Outdoor Education and Nature Tourism, La Trobe University, Bendigo, phone (03) 5444 7493, or contact my supervisor Dr Peter Hay, School of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania, phone (03) 6226 2836.

This project has the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Tasmania and the Head of Department of Outdoor Education and Nature Tourism at La Trobe University, Bendigo. If you have any concerns or complaints about the way in which you were treated during the study or questions research staff have been unable to answer to your satisfaction please feel free to contact either:

- Executive Officer of Human Research Ethics Committee, University of Tasmania, GPO Box 252-01, Hobart, Tasmania, 7001, phone (03) 62 262763.
- Mary-Faeth Chenery, Head of Department of Outdoor Education and Nature Tourism at La Trobe University, Bendigo, PO Box 199, Bendigo, 3552, phone (03) 5444 7801.

This 'Information Sheet' and the copy of the 'Consent Form' on the back are yours to keep. If agreeing to participate, please sign the attached Consent Form and return to me.

Thanks!

Alistair Stewart.

**An exploration of environment specific experience
and learning on an extended journey.**

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

Researcher Responsible for the Project: Alistair Stewart, La Trobe University,
Bendigo.

Chief Investigator: Dr Peter Hay, University of Tasmania.

I,(the participant) have read and
understand the Information Sheet and any questions I have asked have been
answered to my satisfaction.

The nature of the project has been explained to me and I understand that all research
data will be treated as confidential.

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided that I
cannot be identified as a subject.

I understand that the study involves the following procedures:

.....
.....

I understand that (describe any risks or possible discomfort):

.....
.....

I agree to participate in this investigation and understand that I may withdraw at any
time without prejudice (withdrawal from Alistair's research project will not impact
on my academic standing).

Name of participant.....

Signature of participantDate

The investigator:

I have explained this 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.

Name of investigator Alistair Stewart

Signature of investigator Date

Appendix B

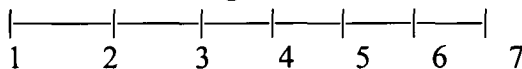
Journal questions

**An exploration of environment specific experience
and learning on an extended journey.
- Journal Questions -**

These questions are concerned with the research project you have decided to participate in. While they do not form part of your journal assessment, please be as comprehensive and reflective as possible. The more thought you put into your responses the better!! There are no “right” answers, but rather different perspectives; your perspective is valid! Please number your responses to each question so they are easier for me to find.

At three different times during the walk (3-4, 8-9, 14-15 February) please take some time out to answer the following questions...

1. Briefly describe the place you have been travelling through for the last 4-5 days. (If you were writing a letter, or on the phone for 10 minutes to a friend, how would you describe the place to them?)
2. How would you describe your experiences with this place? (Again, if writing or talking to a friend, how do you feel about the place or relate to it?)
3. If the place were to tell you a story, what would it be?
4. On a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being untouched pristine wilderness and 7 being highly modified/degraded environment, where would you put the environment visited on this stage of the walk?



Pristine
Wilderness environment

Highly modified
(eg urban area)

Please explain why you circled the number you have.

5. What insights or learning of significance do you take away with you from this section of the walk? (This can relate to learning about the environment, self, the group, OE, etc).
6. Describe what is happening to you and how you feel at the moment. How is it related to where you are?

Thanks again for your help!!!

Alistair.

Appendix C

Subject outline

BACHELOR OF ARTS (OUTDOOR EDUCATION)

FIELD EXPERIENCE 2A 2001

Subject Outline and Requirements

...the profound elevation of the spirit in a wild place, rejuvenation, does not always require a rush of adrenaline. Sometimes lingering in a country's unpretentious hills and waters offers all one might wish of wisdom.

Barry Lopez

Lecturer

Alistair Stewart; ph: 03 5444 7493

Email: a.stewart@bendigo.latrobe.edu.au

Introduction

With the restructuring of the course, Field Experience 2A in 2001 will consist of an 18 day bushwalk and 8 hours of lectures devoted to preparation and follow-up. The walk is sometimes described as a "rite of passage" from first year to second year. The subject seeks to build on the knowledge and experience gained in first year and begin the transition from participant to leader. The walk is an opportunity for extended critical reflection on leadership, group development and our relationships with the natural world.

The journey traverses 3 different environment types: the alpine areas of Mt Jagungal and the Main Range, the sub-alpine areas of the Pilot and the Chimneys, and the hot, dry rain shadow of the Snowy River. The unique cultural and natural history of these different environments allow the development of subtly different bush living and travelling skills essential to becoming a competent outdoor education leader.

Subject Objectives:

- To further develop students' bush living and travelling skills through participation in a continuous extended journey in a relatively remote natural setting;
- To further develop students' understanding of cultural and natural history and how these relate to land management;
- To further develop environmental knowledge and experience in alpine, sub-alpine, river and hot, dry environments;
- To provide an extended opportunity to focus on and practice outdoor education leadership.

Skills developed in this subject:

- research, writing and presenting findings to group on chosen topic (cultural/natural history, land management, ecology);
- keeping a professional journal as a reflective tool for learning;

- safety skills specific to bushwalking, such as navigation, river crossings, drinking water procurement, group management, minimal impact practices, health and hygiene in remote settings, communications, weather interpretation;
- preparing and participating in an extended journey.

Assessment

The subject will be assessed with a mark of pass or fail (P/NC). Satisfactory participation is determined by completion of the following:

- Major assignment: Journal (50%) and experience summary (50%).
- Practical work – hurdle (compulsory). Satisfactory completion to exit standards.

The *major assignment* consists of 2 components: the journal and an experience summary.

Journal

The journal follows a format similar to first year requiring you to document your observations, reflections and analysis on a daily basis. It consists of two components: the journal itself and summary of research findings (discussed below). Your first journal entry should state the leader's name, the group, and your starting point. Each journal entry should begin with the date, area/place/route, comments about campsites and availability of water. Additionally, you need to address the following issues in your journal (not all at once!):

Leadership, such as,

- How are ethical issues, confrontations, communication and group management difficulties dealt with by the leader?
- Is your understanding of leadership changing over time? How/why?
- What attributes of the leader's 'style' will you take on in developing your own style of leadership? Why?

Community/social interactions, such as,

- What processes of group development can you observe in the group over time?
- Does the level of communication change during the trip; what &/or who helps or hinders this; how does this impact on the group and the sense of 'community'?
- How might you facilitate effective group communication?
- How do group size, and relationships within the group, impact on the experience and learning outcomes?

Natural Environment

- How does the environment you are in affect and/or shape your thoughts and relationships with others?
- How do you feel toward the place you are in?
- How would you go about introducing this place to others?
- How has your research topic contributed to your understanding of the place?

The questions under each heading are meant to be guidelines or prompts, please feel free to write about other aspects of these issues related to the walk.

Research summary and presentation

The intention of the research project and seminar is to provide you with the opportunity to further develop your understanding of some of the complexities involved in collecting and presenting material to a group in a bushwalking context. You are required to report on one of the following topics in 2 ways: a minimum one page summary of your research findings and, present your findings to the rest of the

group in a 10 minute seminar (please bring copies of your research summary for the leader and group).

Topics include the following (if you wish to do something different you need to negotiate with Alistair ASAP):

The Snowy Hydro Scheme (what is the history of construction of the Scheme; the environmental impacts of the Scheme on the Alpine environment, Snowy, Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers; how has the construction of the Scheme influenced the cultural development of the Snowy Mountains; what are the current issues and how might they influence the future of the scheme and the Snowy River?)

Kosciuszko National Park (what is the history of the Park, how has its status changed over time and who was involved in its development; what are the attributes/characteristics that lead to the development of the Park; what are the main management issues facing the governing bodies; what are the main climatic conditions that shape the alpine, sub-alpine and dry environment of the Snowy River?)

Aboriginal history (which tribal groups accessed the Kosciuszko area, which routes and meeting grounds did they use; what role did the alpine area play in the lives of aborigines of south-eastern Australia; what impact did the aborigines have on the alpine landscape; what evidence of aborigine occupation remains today and what does it tell us of their lives?)

Early European history (what is the history of European exploration of the area defined by the Kosciuszko National Park, including reference to who, when, where and why; what is the history of pastoral settlement in the area and what role did the alps play in this settlement; what are the cultural and environmental impacts of pastoral and mining activities on the area?)

Geomorphology/geology (what geological processes resulted in the Australian alps as we know them today, include reference to the forces which have shaped the landscape; what rock types and landforms are you likely to encounter at Mt Jagungal, Mt Twynam, The Pilot and the Snowy River at its junction with Pinch River; how does landform impact on local weather conditions?)

Introduced species (what are the main 'weed' species of plants which have invaded the Kosciuszko National Park in the past 200 years, include reference to at least 3 species, when, how, why they were introduced, their impact and the management practices utilized to control them; what are the main feral animal species which have invaded the Kosciuszko National Park in the past 200 years, include reference to at least 3 species, when, how, why they were introduced, their impact and the management practices utilized to control them?)

Flora (having chosen to focus on one of: a) trees, b) shrubs, or c) herbs/grasses, outline the species likely to be encountered in the 3 different environment types to be visited on the long walk (i.e. alpine, sub-alpine and dry environment of the Snowy River). Include details on habit, distribution, flowering season, climatic influences, response to fire, impact of European settlement of at least 2 species for each of the 3 environments; what role do sphagnum bogs play in the alps and what is the cause and result of damage to them?)

Fauna (having chosen to focus on one of: a) birds, b) mammals, c) reptiles and frogs or e) insects, outline the species likely to be encountered in the 3 different environment types to be visited on the long walk (i.e. alpine, sub-alpine and dry environment of the Snowy River). Include details on habits, food, breeding season, climatic influences, impact of European settlement of at least 2 species for each of the 3 environments).

Experience Summary

Upon completion of the walk write a detailed summary of your walking. Drawing on your journal entries (provide examples for each to substantiate your claims) discuss the following:

Leadership

How was your understanding of leadership affected by the trip experience?

What did you learn about leadership?

Group development

How did social interactions/group dynamics influence the experience and learning outcomes?

What do you feel you learned about group dynamics that will influence your future practice?

Environment

How has this experience contributed to your relationship with the natural environment?

How did knowledge of the environment (cultural and natural history, etc, developed through your research project) shape/influence the experience and learning outcomes?

How ethically defensible (educationally and environmentally) do you believe this trip is given all the factors involved (time, cost, resource use, learning values, etc)?

Submission date: 4pm Thursday 22 March 2001.

Your journal, one page research summary and experience summary must be submitted in order to complete the subject.

Practical work

Satisfactory completion of the trip will be determined by the student's capacity to participate throughout the trip at the level of a competent party member. To merely finish the trip and safely make it to the bus will not necessarily mean that the student has met the minimum requirements for the trip. The minimum requirements at the beginning of the trip are commensurate with the expectations of an experienced person undertaking an extended walk in an alpine environment in summer. Students will be provided with written feedback on: preparation, fitness, participation, judgement and activity skills. The following descriptions may help clarify what might be involved in satisfactory participation:

Preparation

The student is on time for classes and the trip, attends briefing sessions, and is aware of the logistical constraints and implications. This is demonstrated by students' having the correct food drop packages organised, and having appropriately dealt with other logistical aspects of an extended journey in the bush. Appropriate selection of gear and clothing in suitable condition for the activity, terrain and conditions likely to be encountered. Food is appropriate in quality and quantity, suited to the demands of the trip. Research on given topic completed for presentation to group. Attention to detail in preparation will largely become evident as the trip proceeds. Given students

have not done a trip of this length before, some leeway may be given with regard to catering for an extended journey. Opting to ignore specific pretrip advice, re equipment, gear, conditions, would be clearly unsatisfactory performance. Personal health needs will be considered here.

Participation

The students' participate in the trip appropriately for their experience level and the subject/trip objectives, tending toward maximizing their opportunity to learn. They contribute to the conduct of the trip, demonstrate commitment and behave appropriately toward other group members, the public and the environment. This involves participating in group processes, debriefs, discussions, contributing to the group wellbeing, and accepting responsibility.

Fitness

Physical preparation for a journey of this nature is essential. A student who has not undertaken fitness preparation and clearly struggles with the physical and mental demands of the trip would be unsatisfactory. Lack of concern and knowledge of appropriate long trip hygiene and health considerations would be similarly unsatisfactory. Injuries would not normally be considered here, but some injuries (such as severe blisters) are a function of poor performance.

Activity skills

Technical skill levels are appropriate to the trip and course expectations. Practical knowledge is to be demonstrated. The following are important to consider: navigation, route finding, gear selection and use, minimum environment impact, river crossings and other safety skills.

Judgement

Judgement clearly applies to all of the above criteria. The main issues to report on here are significant judgmental aspects such as: demonstration of functional self appraisal, ethical/environmental behavior suited to the context of the trip, maintenance of self and group safety, and actions reflecting appropriate contextual considerations. A student could show unsatisfactory judgement overall through actions such as using alcohol on the trip, smoking dope, offensive language or inappropriate actions to others, or neglecting to report important group impact issues.