Situationist outdoor education in the country of lost children

by


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I certify that the thesis entitled:

*Situationist outdoor education in the country of lost children*

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

I also certify that any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any other university or institution is identified in the text.

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Thesis Title: Situated outdoor education in the country of lost children.

This thesis is a study of outdoor education, in the deliberative tradition of curriculum inquiry. It examines the intentional generation and distribution of knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes through organised outdoor activities, both as a research interest, and as a critical perspective on outdoor education discourse.

Eight separate but interrelated research projects, originally published in 11 refereed journal articles, develop and defend the thesis statement:

The problem of determining what, if any, forms of outdoor experience should be educational priorities, and how those experiences should be distributed in communities and geographically – that is who goes where and does what – is inherently situational. The persistence of a universalist outdoor education discourse that fails to acknowledge or adequately account for social and geographic circumstances points to serious flaws in outdoor education research and theory, and impedes the development of more defensible outdoor education practices.

The introduction explains how the eight projects cohere, and illustrates how they may be linked using the example of militaristic thinking in outdoor safety standards. Chapters 1 and 2 defend and elaborate a situationist approach to outdoor education, using the examples of outdoor education in Victoria (Australia), and universalist approaches to outdoor education in textbooks respectively.

Chapters 3 and 4 expand on some epistemological implications of the thesis and examine, respectively, the cultural dimensions of outdoor experience, and the epistemology and ontology of local natural history. Chapters 5 and 6 apply a situationist epistemology to personal development based outdoor education. Traditions of outdoor education that draw on person-centred rather than situation-sensitive theories of behaviour are examined and critiqued. Alternatives to person-centred theories of outdoor education are discussed. Chapters 7 and 8 use situationist outdoor education to provide a critical reading of nature-based tourism. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 return to the theme of safety in the introduction and Chapter 1, and examine the safety implications of a situationist epistemology.

Closing comments briefly draw together the conclusions of all of the chapters, and offer some directions for future outdoor education research.

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Situationist outdoor education in the country of lost children

Preface

This thesis encompasses eleven articles arising from outdoor education research conducted between 1993 and 2003 and published between 1994 and 2004. Its substance resides almost entirely in the original articles. I discuss their coherence around critiques of, and alternatives to, universalist outdoor education discourse and practice in the first part of the introduction. In the second part of the introduction I demonstrate how the statement of my thesis can be used to link the themes of the five parts.

The original journal articles are included here unedited (other than minor technical corrections). They resulted from eight interrelated research projects, and were published in seven different refereed journals. I have not rewritten the articles as a single contribution to a particular conversation, because my intention throughout has been both to contribute to the outdoor education literature, with particular attention to following links with research and scholarship in other fields, and to contribute outdoor education perspectives to related fields. Publishing articles outside the outdoor education literature is consistent with the theoretical critiques I have advanced. I followed links between outdoor education and related fields as a deliberate move towards circumspection and moderation in a field where the literature is sometimes overly self-congratulatory and self-referential. (Overly-general and parochial\(^1\) are terms that might be as readily applied as “universalist” to some sections of the outdoor education literature discussed in this thesis).

I have clustered the eleven chapters into five parts. The chapters are numbered sequentially, but this particular sequence is somewhat arbitrary (insofar as other sensible sequences are possible). Figure 1 illustrates some of the main relationships between the chapters more clearly than the chapter sequence.

\(^1\) At the time of writing, for example, the *Journal of Experiential Education*, which tends to be regarded within the outdoor education field as the main North American outdoor education journal, was rejected for Tier 1 standing with Thompson ISI mainly because of its low number of citations in other journals (O’Connell, 2005)
Figure 1. Map of thesis showing main concepts, with Chapters 1 and 2 as a central node.
The names of the journals in which the original articles were published (see Figure 1) indicate the specific conversations to which each chapter contributes. However, attention to questions of educational aims, purposes and means, which is to say a broad “curriculum studies” perspective, links all of the chapters conceptually, as does a broad practical interest, namely, more educationally defensible outdoor education practices. Chapters 1 and 2 elaborate on these central interests by examining tensions between universalist and particularist approaches to outdoor education.

**Part I** (Chapters 1 and 2) considers the question: is outdoor education essential? This question can, as one alternative, be understood as a kind of thought experiment that is not necessarily related to any existing outdoor education programs. I argue that there are at best very limited grounds on which to mount an argument for universal forms of outdoor education and that it is only possible to argue that outdoor education is *necessary* in particular geographical, historical, social, and cultural circumstances. Alternatively, as a line of critical inquiry about outdoor education practice, I argue that the question highlights some widespread inadequacies in the educational rationales propounded (explicitly and implicitly) in the outdoor education literature. A critical examination of the educational rationales for existing forms of outdoor education, and a search for more defensible forms, link all of the chapters of this thesis.

**Part II** (Chapters 3 and 4) examines the epistemology and ontology of outdoor experiences, by further inquiring into some non-universalist dimensions of “nature” (or “place”) and experience. I argue that in examining the educational potential of outdoor education it is not necessarily helpful to separate knowledge and experience. Experience creates stories that bind knowledge to the knower. It is potentially important to consider the *distinctive content* of particular experiences or patterns of experience, as would be the case for a farmer tracking dingoes that have been attacking sheep, or descendants of a war veteran exploring the site of a battle. A casual visitor accompanying the farmer will construct different meanings from the farmer. Perhaps the former battlefield and sheep paddock are the same, seen in different ways by the farmer, the casual visitor, and the veteran’s descendent. Although many outdoor education programs provide one-off visits to a place chosen
for novelty and strangeness, to fully comprehend any potential value of outdoor education programs one must also consider alternatives, especially those involving on-going relationships with particular places or regions. A satisfactory account of outdoor education must recognise that not only can knowledge be extracted from experience, but also that knowledge can be inherent in experience, that is, experiential knowledge can be context-bound and performative.

**Part III** (Chapters 5 and 6) critically examines one distinctive form of universalist outdoor education. It critiques approaches to outdoor education, often called “adventure education”, that make little or no direct connection between aims and purposes and the experiences and settings that characterise their practice. These approaches are premised on the alleged capacity of certain outdoor experiences to change personality traits (as a specific claim) or to “build character” (as a vague but appealing claim). I draw on social psychology to argue that the literal claims of adventure education to change personality are incredible, and examine some reasons for the apparent persistence and persuasiveness of both the vague and specific “character building” claims. I approach what I term “neo-Hahnian” outdoor education in two ways: (1) by examining the credibility of the explicit claims that adventure experiences can shape personality and (2) by critiquing its lack of attention to geographical, social and cultural situations.

Parts IV and V extend the work of the first three parts in two different directions.

**Part IV** (Chapters 5 and 6) examines some examples of tourism, recreation, and land management as if they were conceived as outdoor environmental education, on the basis that all organised outdoor activity potentially contributes to the construction of knowledge and meaning, and intervenes in relationships between people and places. In particular, both in common parlance and in the specific claims of “eco-tourism”, tourism is a type of outdoor environmental education. Chapter 5 considers an apparent contradiction between the supposed profundity of “the wilderness experience” and the legendary superficiality of organised tourism. Chapter 6 critically examines some educational claims made for eco-tourism.

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2 These reasons will vary situationally, of course. For example, character education in the United States has connotations of Christian morality that I have not explored.
Part V (Chapters 7, 8 and 9) examines fatal accidents and incidents in Australian outdoor education (and related activities). Outdoor education discourses and practices, at least in Anglophone countries such as Canada, the UK, the USA, New Zealand and Australia, are interwoven with considerations of safety and risk.

Although the overall emphasis of this thesis is that outdoor education is socially constructed, the death of a teacher on a school camp, or the death of a child on an outdoor education excursion, is not merely a social construction. Within outdoor education discourses, and within the wider community, any approach to educational aims, means, or purposes that contradicts received wisdom on safety standards will find a limited audience. “Safety” is a privileged category that can and does override other considerations, including questions of curriculum quality. Thus, although Part V is cut from the same epistemological cloth as the other parts, it counterbalances the discussion of safety as a social construction by comprehensively examining fatal incidents. The chapters in this part can be read as direct contributions to safe practice, but they also demonstrate that critical attention to educational aims, means, and purposes is not necessarily antithetical to safe practice. Tensions between, on the one hand, knowing particular environments and, on the other hand, skills and techniques for encountering unfamiliar environments, are common to both safety and curriculum.
Introduction (I)
‘Australia’, Arkady said slowly, ‘is the country of lost children’


The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular


Definition and focus
This thesis is an inquiry into outdoor education. By outdoor education I mean the intentional generation and distribution of knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes through organised outdoor activities. For my purposes outdoor education as a research interest is delineated by certain kinds of educational questions that flow from this definition. As a plain English rubric, “outdoor education” describes practices that are not necessarily labelled as such in particular discourses, so my interest is not confined just to areas of discourse or practice that use the term. Where I refer to outdoor education as a labelled set of discourses/practices, I have treated it as social construction in which the meaning of the term, if it is used, must be taken from the context. What is referred to as outdoor education in some discourses would not be in others.

My position is that outdoor education research has no brief to support or justify any existing outdoor education practices or orthodoxies, and should be open to the possibility that when educational choices have to be made outdoor education will not necessarily be the most defensible choice in many circumstances.

I focus on possible aims, purposes, and means of outdoor education, which is to say that I understand outdoor education to be a matter for curriculum inquiry and deliberation. In particular, I regard curriculum questions as being not just about merit, but relative merit, in which every decision to take educational action of one kind means having to forgo various alternatives. In approaching the social construction of outdoor education curriculum I have assumed that curriculum decisions are always and necessarily contingent on who decides and under what circumstances. I take it for granted that the overall purpose of my research is to

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3 Leaving aside any connotations of “schooling” associated with the term.
improve the quality of curriculum decision-making in outdoor education.

I take the position that outdoor education research is shaped by certain questions, and by the circumstances in which they are posed and responded to. How are worldviews shaped by existing patterns of geographical experience? How is knowledge shaped by and embedded in particular experiences? What are the gaps and silences in the content and distribution of these patterns of experience? How and why might schools or other organizations take responsibility for contributing to the mix in particular ways? Although such questions link outdoor education to broader contextual issues, including military history, national identity, landscape, and population density, distribution and mobility, they also emphasize some irreducibly local dimensions of outdoor experiences. They point to the unlikelihood of determining whether or not any form of outdoor education is essential without attending to the circumstances in question. The inquiries and deliberations performed in this thesis explore the nature of these particularities in certain cases, and critically examine manifestations of universalist tendencies within Outdoor Education.

Outdoor Education has acquired special meanings in particular discourses-practices, such as North American outdoor education textbooks and Australian outdoor education conferences (exactly which of these are being referred to is made clear in each section of the thesis). I argue that the forms which outdoor education takes can often only be satisfactorily explained when non-educational social and cultural influences are considered alongside educational reasons. I also consider the possibility that in some cases established outdoor education – in any of its forms, including tourism – might owe any evident success to good marketing rather than educational merit. Outdoor education as a field has grown more from practitioner associations than from a research tradition, so it is not surprising that justificatory rhetoric is something of a hallmark of Outdoor Education discourse. It is part of the function of the interest groups from which conferences and many outdoor education publications have arisen to provide mutual support and reassurance, but the same justificatory impulse applied to research is unhelpful. I do not see this thesis as part of the justificatory tradition in Outdoor Education, but as part of a larger project to

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4 I use the term “essential” to emphasise that curriculum decisions usually entail leaving out some valuable alternatives. In other words curriculum is about separating the essential from the merely desirable (and therefore also about determining what criteria will be used).
contribute to outdoor education discourses, as much by identifying some blind spots within those discourses as by critically evaluating them.

**Thesis statement**

*The problem of determining what, if any, forms of outdoor experience should be educational priorities, and how those experiences should be distributed in communities and geographically – that is who goes where and does what – is inherently situational. The persistence of a universalist outdoor education discourse that fails to acknowledge or adequately account for social and geographic circumstances points to serious flaws in outdoor education research and theory, and impedes the development of more defensible outdoor education practices.*

**Methodological considerations**

Collectively the eleven chapters and this introduction constitute a curriculum inquiry in the deliberative tradition, albeit positioned outside the curriculum literature (with the exception of Chapter 1). A deliberative approach to curriculum regards curriculum as a matter for on-going conversation in which (1) approaches to studying curriculum – that is questions of method – have no fixed solutions, and (2) curriculum problems cannot be solved simply by the application of procedures such as philosophical analysis (Gough, 2003). There is some methodological discussion in each chapter (or chapter sequence), either integrated into the text or as a separate section, in keeping with their origins as published articles.

Noel Gough’s work, in particular, has guided my approach to curriculum inquiry – that is to questions of educational aims, means, and purposes – over the last two decades. According to Bill Green (2003), Gough is the leading Australian exponent of the deliberative approach to curriculum inquiry. He is also one of the very few curriculum theorists (in Australia and elsewhere) to take an interest in and contribute to the outdoor environmental education literature. His approach to deliberation is not that questions of method cannot be resolved, or that curriculum problems cannot be solved. Rather, he insists that resolutions and solutions are contingent and subject to criteria which are neither timeless nor universal; they are always open to revision in the light of changed circumstances, new knowledge, or better arguments, that is, they
are situated: “deliberative curriculum inquiry engages curriculum workers in the pursuit of unique understandings in/of the unique circumstances of their practice” (Gough, 2003, p. 7). Like Gough, I take methodology to refer to “an explanation of defensible ways of proceeding in relation to particular problems (rather than following ‘a’ method) … that cannot be reduced to guiding principles or procedural rules” (Gough, 2003, p. 8).

Gough is also among the few Australian scholars to engage systematically with reconceptualist initiatives and positions in curriculum. The reconceptualists turned to arts- and humanities-based approaches to understanding curriculum in practice. In particular, reconceptualist curriculum inquiry draws attention to how understanding is embedded in narratives, and how all curriculum and research practices can be read, and critiqued, as “texts” (Gough, 2003). In this thesis, for example, I argue that adventure education can be better understood when “adventure” is understood as a narrative genre. I also argue that outdoor experiences can be understood as constructing stories in which knowledge and meaning are intertwined.

I regard cautiously any approaches to outdoor education that either characterise it as special means to generic ends, or that attribute particular outcomes to it that are linked to outdoor experiences by happenstance rather than necessity. This is not to say that I have any doubts that certain outdoor activities might be an effective, even efficient, means to certain educational ends, nor that there are programs that demonstrate their effectiveness. However, I am interested in other possibilities, especially those in which the educational value is inherent in the experience, and for which no convincing educational equivalent to the actual experience can be envisaged. How to approach such possibilities is one of the concerns of the body of this thesis, but I mention it here because it introduces further methodological considerations.

My deliberations have particularly engaged with epistemological questions, especially those to do with knowledge as a social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Although not a sociological study, my work is oriented towards humanistic sociology, which, as Berger (1963) observed, shares almost identical interests with history. I have followed Gough (2003) in looking to the humanities for approaches to research that examine the contexts and meaning of human experience.
In taking into account physical environments and how they can be known, my work is informed by a post-Kuhnian sociology of science, the key postulates of which, following Mulkay (1979), are that: (1) a standard view of science – namely nature is uniform, facts and theory are separate, and knowledge claims are validated by criteria independent of human interests and interactions – does not withstand close scrutiny, and (2) the conduct of science is a practical, social activity in which “there is no clear separation between the negotiation of social meaning and the assessment of knowledge claims” (p. 119). (3) Scientific claims have cultural content, and science is never politically neutral; any claim that it was neutral, he argues, would itself be political.

A strong view of the social construction of science would attempt to explain scientific consensus without recourse to physical reality. I have taken a middle course that assumes broad consensus about what constitutes ordinary physical reality: “[f]acts are linguistic; they are not objects. For our purposes, think of truth as unconstrained consensus about what is the case” (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 180). Or, as Lakoff (1987) argues, for categories such as “in” or “up” derived from human bodily experience: “[this is] as real as our knowledge ever gets – real enough for all but the most seasoned sceptics” (p. 300). The environments in which outdoor education takes place are real, but there is no access to that reality unmediated by history and culture. Experience of “nature” is not transcendental.

The epistemological orientation of my research is also influenced by Rouse’s (1987) study of science and power: “the natural world … acquires a definite character only within a purposive configuration of practices, because this configuration determines what can count as a thing, property or relation” (p. 183). What might appear to be the universal explanatory power of western science, is a working out of local, practical possibilities in laboratories, universalised through extension of laboratory-like conditions elsewhere. The power effects characteristic of science do not originate in laboratories; rather they are capillary effects of power that “acquires what coherence it has from the way many different local projects and practices coalesce and reinforce

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5 As Cheney (1989, p. 120) put it, it may be “language all the way down” – meaning the world is made up of stories – but also “world all the way up” (p. 120).
6 I do not exempt indigenous experience from this statement.
one another, producing a situation with an overall meaning and direction that were never anyone's doing in particular” (p. 244). In these terms outdoor education (and outdoor education research) can be seen as constructing and normalising situations in which knowledge claims become both valid and meaningful.

**Outdoor education discourse and practice**

Outdoor education is characterized by a number of overlapping discourses, and marked by some disjunctures. The outdoor education defined by these discourses is not monolithic, and attempts to define it conceptually (rather than as a construction) tend to dissolve into vagueness or over-generalization. It is more generative to *map* outdoor education. Within this thesis I regard outdoor education as definable only in specific discursive situations, and less by boundaries than by prototypes. For example, without attempting to pin down exactly what the term denotes and its connotations in each case, outdoor education (American Association of Experiential Education) can be distinguished from the overlapping outdoor education (American Camping Association). In the UK it is useful to distinguish between outdoor education (Mountain Centres) and outdoor education (Field Study Centres). Within Australia, one way to separate various outdoor educations is to distinguish between different State-based organizations; another is to attend to characteristics defined by associations with formal education and commerce respectively. I have not attempted to map the entire field, but where I have examined particular aspects of outdoor education I situate the outdoor education I am referring to.

Rickinson et al. (2004), who use “outdoor education” and “outdoor learning” interchangeably in their recent literature review, provide a comprehensive summary of practices and settings that are at least sometimes viewed as outdoor education within school systems, including fieldwork and outdoor visits, outdoor adventure education, and school grounds and community-based projects, but not visits to galleries or zoos, and not sport or physical education “except those involving outdoor adventure education” (p. 16 emphasis in original). Although their review was commissioned in the UK, they examined an international (English-language)
literature, and did not confine their search to the outdoor education literature – some studies they review might be a poor fit, if not excluded, from some outdoor education forums, and were published as contributions to different discourses.

I have not assumed that outdoor education is necessarily associated with formal education, and for that reason I have taken an even wider view than Rickinson et al. (2004), who examined only outdoor education associated with schooling. It might be that when the questions that define outdoor education are examined in particular circumstances, tourism or community-based learning might emerge as more defensible or desirable than school-based learning. For example, following a study on tourism and community development in Norway (Dahle & Jäggi, 1992), Dahle (2000) examined lifelong interest in the out-of-doors in a particular region, and found, in decreasing importance: parental influence, distance from suitable areas, friends’ interests, outdoor hobbies, family access to a cabin, and owning a dog. All of the formal educational measures that may be taken, including school programs, undertaking courses, and so on, were collectively as influential as owning a dog.

Outdoor education outside of formal education includes summer camps for children (especially in North America – they have never been as popular in Australia and the UK), outdoor training for management or team development, and various forms of wilderness therapy. (I discuss some of the literature on Outdoor Management Development, OMD, in Part III). It is important to note that although all of these might be of interest to outdoor education research, boundaries can be found in particular outdoor education discourses. For example, juvenile boot camps for offenders (see, for example Klein, 1996) receive little attention in the outdoor education literature, although subject to some public debate, especially following deaths and reports of abuse (Project NoSpank, 2005). There has been little enthusiasm for boot camps in Australia (Atkinson, 1995). Boot camps are an example of a discourse/practice that falls within the scope of outdoor education research as I have defined it, but which might well be excluded from some outdoor education discourses.

Differences, and sometimes tensions, between institutionalised forms of outdoor education contribute another element to the map. Even when a part of formal education, outdoor education may be partly or wholly sub-contracted to an outside
organization, either commercial or non-profit. Examples include Outward Bound Inc., and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme (which does not actually run programs, but supports them), and in Australia the Outdoor Activities Group, which tend to construct their own definitions-in-practice of outdoor education. Outdoor education might also be defined in practice around certain activities or certain sites, in which case its institutionalisation might centre on the governing body of the activity (such as canoeing or mountaineering) or the operator of a site such as a camping facility or a ski resort. As I discuss in the second part of this introduction, norms or standards ostensibly for one purpose – such as safety – might in fact define the entire activity and determine, at least in part, its educational characteristics. The scouting movement is another example of institutionalised outdoor education that tends not to be associated with schooling. I examine some of these forms of outdoor education in the body of this thesis; the point here is that outdoor education driven by a set of curriculum considerations might not honour boundaries constructed within outdoor education discourses/practices.

It is not my intention here to map the field, but to offer a brief overview, and to illustrate why it is almost inevitable that attempts to define outdoor education as a unitary set of concepts or practices tend to fail. For example, the reasons for excluding hunting and including mountain bike riding in a particular instance of outdoor education tend to be located in particular social, historical, and cultural circumstances rather than across all situations or within a universal educational rationale.

**Being particular**

Very little has been published in major educational journals about outdoor education. Perhaps this is understandable, in the case of journals whose main focus is formal education. Formal education, almost by definition and largely by necessity, provides contexts for knowledge reproduction that are different from the contexts of knowledge production (and application). Lundgren (1983) refers to this as: “the representation problem … [which is] the eternal problem of pedagogy” (p. 11). In an education system that is free, compulsory, and secular, a tendency to favour curricula that are relevant to a wide range of contexts, and certainly not tied to the context of schooling, is inevitable. From this perspective, outdoor education can be set apart by
a focus on educational possibilities tied to specific contexts. The significance of such possibilities lies not in any denial of the value of universal aspects of education, but in acceptance and acknowledgement of the limitations of universalist education.

Curriculum discourses have long struggled with the problem of the intrinsic value of experience (such as the experience of an artistic performance), which cannot easily be defined in terms of educational outcomes (Stenhouse, 1975). Nevertheless, here too, the emphasis has been, with good reason, on experiences that stand for a general class of experiences. It remains to be considered what particular experiences might be warranted, for particular circumstances.

Discourses on the role of place in education (Orr, 1992) and western culture in the “ecological crisis” (Bowers, 1993) can be found in the environmental education literature, albeit on the margins. I discuss some links between the work of these authors and my own work in Part II. What I wish to emphasise here is that non-universalist does not equate to local. A local, place-based curriculum might be part of non-universalist outdoor education. But there are other possibilities involving non-local experience for certain populations or individuals. Australia, because of its size and concentrated population centres, abounds with possible examples, some of which I discuss in this thesis.

I have taken the view that outdoor education is inherently situational, not because outdoor education cannot easily contribute to universal education – no doubt it can do so – but because the questions I have taken as a focus for outdoor education research draw attention to certain limits to universal education: How are worldviews shaped by existing patterns of geographical experience? How is knowledge shaped by and embedded in particular experiences? What are the gaps and silences in the content and distribution of these patterns of experience? How and why might schools or other organizations take responsibility for contributing to the mix in particular ways?

Put another way, I have used the term outdoor education to describe an interest in those aspects of education that require attention to the particulars of human and physical geographical situations. I have tried to distinguish between the argument that education should not be entirely (physically) confined to schools – which is the
thrust of the recent (UK) House of Commons Education and Skills Committee inquiry into education outside the classroom (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005) and of other reviews such as the (Victorian) Ministerial Review of outdoor education (Ministry of Education, 1988) – and discussion about what form any outdoor education should take and how it should be distributed.

I have not attempted to “prove” the thesis statement. Rather, I provide examples that demonstrate the contribution the thesis statement has to make in some instances that, by induction, might apply in other situations. I have drawn mainly on Australian contexts in which some limitations of universalist approaches to outdoor education are readily apparent, and which also provide insights that might be relevant to other situations, especially the points of origin of some forms of universalist outdoor education, namely, the UK and USA.

**Australian contexts**

What significance the thesis statement might be accorded is tied to the contention that the more one delves into the details of a particular environment – geographic, historical, social, and cultural – the more educational problems and possibilities become evident that cannot be put aside as merely local instances of something more general. I have used Australian examples because they were to hand, but I am mindful that any failures of universalist outdoor education orthodoxies in Australia raise questions about those orthodoxies in their entirety, and that any insights that emerge from asking situationist questions of Australian examples should at least encourage a similar approach elsewhere. At the risk of putting it too glibly: Australian situations are unique, but the fact that they are unique is not in itself unique.

The generalization I am making is that outdoor education can be productively approached as an instance of curriculum in which inductive generalization must be tested case by case, rather than trusted. In that light, the following introductory comments about Australian contexts simply point towards the value of burrowing into situational detail, if only by touching on thoughts that call for more depth and detail. They also, by omission, highlight that there are situational dimensions that I have not considered, either in this introduction or in the body of the thesis.
One Australian consideration, which has received some attention in the outdoor education literature, and which I draw on in this thesis, is a mismatch between the intentions and pre-conceptions of the first European colonisers and the physical landscape. Carter (1988) has shown how the naming and mapping of Australia by the British in the early 19th century reflected struggles to make sense of journeys in which the landscapes encountered were discordant both with language and with hopes and expectations:

[I]t was almost a commonplace among British residents that, in Australia, the laws of association seemed to be suspended. There seemed to be nothing that could accurately be named. There was, consequently, very little purchase for the imagination … (pp. 42-43).

The early travellers, then, invented places, rather than found them. This was what naming meant … they were descriptive not of a geographic object but of place where travelling might settle down and become history (p. 51)\(^8\).

One way to read outdoor education in Australia is in terms of a struggle to negotiate ways of being, with tensions between shaping geography to suit pre-conceptions at one extreme and shaping thoughts and actions to fit the geography on the other. Another way to read outdoor education is to examine evidence of tensions between familiarity and strangeness. To mention just one example of such tensions, Rose (1993) argues that the desire and pleasure expressed in landscape is distinctively masculine:

The sensual topography of land … is mapped by a gaze which is eroticised as masculine and heterosexual. This masculine gaze sees a feminine body which requires interpreting by a cultured knowledgeable look; something to own, and something to give pleasure. (p. 197)

Seeing the landscape removes “(embodied) specificity” (Rose, 1993, p. 100); one way to consider outdoor education is to ask what relationships with certain places involving what embodied specificity are warranted. Another is to examine how

\(^8\)Carter too presents an account of male travel and settlement.
embodied specificity can be erased from outdoor education discourse, as I do, for example in Chapter 7 (although I do not use that term).

Another particular Australian consideration arises when one considers the population distribution and the size and geographical diversity of the country (Figures 2 and 3).

Source: ABS data, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

**Figure 2. Estimated resident population, Australia** (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003)
Even as a first approximation, it is evident that Australians’ collective experience of Australia, especially everyday experience, is predominantly urban; moreover, any rural areas frequented cannot be taken to “represent” the whole country. Large parts of Australia, perhaps inevitably, are known to most Australians only fleetingly or not at all. It is one thing to observe that Australians tend to be most familiar with urban environments, and certain rural areas, such as national parks, and might have experienced very little of vast areas of the country. It is quite another to consider what experiences might be most educationally defensible. At the level of individual initiatives – for example parents taking six months to “see Australia” with their children – where to go and what to do remains problematic. As a national initiative, supposing such a thing was possible, which groups should experience what places?

Population mobility, immigration, and temporary relocations through tourism, recreation and second homes add complexity to whatever can be discerned from place of residence alone. Not only are relatively large numbers not Australian-born, but migrant groups tend to cluster according to country of origin and nearly always in urban and industrial areas (Castles & Miller, 1998).
For some Australians, everyday reality is comprised of urban experience, but for others everyday reality might be shaped by sustained experience in several locations, and by visits – perhaps regular or frequent – to other locations. Population movements – such as from agricultural areas to cities, or “sea change” movements from cities to rural areas (Burnley & Murphy, 2004) – also change knowledge distributions and raise educational questions. Economic migration, such as welfare recipients seeking cheaper living in rural areas, can also be considered as raising “outdoor education” questions different from the social and economic questions more commonly considered in the literature (cf Burnley & Murphy, 2004), and different from outdoor education as it is usually conceived.

These introductory comments merely touch on some details of how Australians’ experiences of Australian places or of Australian geography might be mapped, and how one might begin to consider what educational reasons there might be to intervene in or alter that epistemological map.

**Introduction (II). An illustration: militaristic attitudes to “place” in outdoor activity safety guidelines.**

I have chosen not to include any further commentary on each chapter in this introduction, because each article was originally written as a stand-alone contribution to the literature. However, I offer instead what might be understood as an alternative introduction that exemplifies the approach I take to theorising and researching outdoor education in the remaining chapters. The example uses a critique of universalist epistemology to consider some educational implications of militaristic approaches to outdoor leading and guiding. In so doing it illustrates how safety, so often a dominant theme in outdoor education discourse, is linked to curriculum questions about aims and purposes via epistemological norms and assumptions, and also how outdoor education questions can be asked of all outdoor activities, not only those that have been labelled as educational. It proceeds on the assumption that all outdoor activities can be examined as if they were intended to be a form of outdoor

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9 An article on which this section is based is under review for the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*. 19
environmental education, including those that explicitly exclude or marginalise local or environmental knowledge.

Documented safety standards provide one indication of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that shape particular outdoor activities. Legal, medical, religious, corporate and bureaucratic pressures on organised outdoor activities are nowhere more intense than around safety questions. Documented safety guidelines entail the “objectivation, institutionalization and legitimation” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 207) of particular approaches to understanding the natural world in ways that are unlikely to be confined to safety alone.

From a broad environmental education perspective, standards or norms for outdoor activities that seem to circumvent or minimise knowledge of particular environments, particularly on the part of guides, deserve careful scrutiny. If guided outdoor activities do in fact shape knowledge of and attitudes towards outdoor environments, the idea of a guide who knows little or nothing about the place in which they offer guidance is alarming. This section of the introduction examines some origins of that idea, and its contemporary application to organized outdoor activities, examining firstly the development of alpine guiding, and secondly militaristic approaches to outdoor guiding.

In both cases it might be helpful to note that, at least in outdoor activities derived from the UK, there has been a strong distinction made between leading and guiding. Young (1920) pointed out to his readers that “[t]he average guide is a peasant, with the limitations that frame peasant virtues… The guide as we know him is hill-born, hill-bred, - that is, a child, with a child’s capacity for becoming much what we make him, – a companion, a valet, or a machine…” (Young, 1920, pp. 123-125 emphasis in original).

From trustworthy guides to reputable companies: an epistemological shift.

In the late afternoon of July 27, 1999, 45 young tourists – mostly Australians and New Zealanders – and eight guides, in four groups, entered Saxet Brook near
Interlaken, Switzerland, for a canyoning adventure. Three guides and eighteen tourists died when a wall of water caused by a thunderstorm swept them away. In December 2001 six employees of the then defunct company were found guilty of negligent manslaughter. Two surviving guides were found not guilty. The judge ruled that it was not the guides’ responsibility to cancel the trip when they saw thunderstorms upstream (The Sun-Herald, 2002, n.p.).

Civil legal proceedings tend to follow the money, and therefore to emphasize corporate responsibility. But this case was not to determine monetary compensation – it was a criminal trial. The finding that the company, but not the guides, should have known better points to a trend away from regarding the knowledge needed to negotiate wild places as primarily embodied in experienced individuals, towards locating it in corporate procedures and policies. The trend might not be general, of course, but nevertheless such an ontological shift, and its epistemological consequences, deserves some discussion.

At first glance the legendary Swiss alpine guide might be taken to be the epitome of embodied local knowledge. However, from the outset there was no straightforward relationship between local knowledge and Anglo-mountaineering. According to Lunn (1963), early Swiss guides had gained their knowledge from activities such as chamois hunting or smuggling, not recreational or scientific mountaineering. Mountaineers often wanted to go where guides had not been and do things guides had not done. As mountaineering became more established, guides tended to acquire local mountaineering knowledge, although they did not always advertise their achievements – clients paid more for unclimbed peaks or routes (Lunn, 1963). Often guides had not climbed a route they were guiding; inevitably, experienced climbers contemplated climbing without guides, implying that local knowledge was not essential for a skilled climber (Mummery, 1974 orig. 1896).

Around the 1890s, A.F. Mummery, acknowledged as one of the supreme climbers of his day, was rejected as member of the (British) Alpine Club because he advocated guideless climbing, affronting the orthodox view that a true mountaineer climbed roped between two guides (Kruszyna 1974). Mummery – who viewed his climbing as recreational, not scientific – argued that while there had been a period in which guides and clients shared an adventure, as numbers increased class distinctions
between guides and clients came to the fore – the guides being lackeys – and “[t]he constant repetition of the same ascent has … tended to make the guide into a sort of contractor… [t]he skill of the traveller counts for absolutely naught; the practised guide looks on him merely as luggage” (Mummery, 1974 orig. 1896, p. 111).

For mountaineering nominally linked to some higher purpose, such as nature study or scientific measurement, guides provided logistical support that drew on local knowledge. But for those, like Mummery, who saw mountaineering as a sport, guides provided skilled leadership. Mummery took Swiss guides to Chamonix (France), for example. First ascents were increasingly credited to British climbers, rather than Swiss, after 1850 (Lunn, 1963), although prior to the early 1900s most of those ascents would have been guided. As climbing became more technical, the first ascents of expert amateurs eclipsed those of the professionals.

Long before two New Zealanders established the Saxen Brook canyoning trips, safety in the Alps, from the visitor’s perspective, was not necessarily seen as requiring (or being about acquiring) local knowledge. The Anglophone literature from the beginning privileged the voice of the visiting mountaineer rather than the local guide. For the (mostly) upper class visiting British mountaineers, mountaineering knowledge was valued according to its usefulness on unclimbed routes, and reflected their experiences as foreign visitors. Their accounts emphasized personal qualities, such as determination or courage, and skill; knowledge, especially local knowledge, and strength, were the qualities of peasants. The objectification of first ascents as a measure of expertise was further institutionalised through mountaineering literature and the hierarchical structure of clubs. Unfamiliarity with a given climb or peak was not merely a practical consideration but also a desired condition, part of the definition of mountaineering.

Anglo-mountaineering offers insights into how particular historical ontological and epistemological assumptions might become embedded in standard practice. The worldview of a stranger with very particular, narrow interests seeking to circumvent any need to “know where they are going” with a mixture of character, skill, and resources would be a dubious foundation for environmental education. However, although the mountaineering organizations of upper-crust Britons might have disproportionately influenced outdoor activity norms, especially in outdoor
education, mountaineering was itself no doubt subject to wider influences. Commodity and globalisation of corporations are two likely sources. Anglo-militarism is also a strong contender, one less discussed in the environmental education literature. Militaristic influences on Anglo societies in the 20th century have been so extensive (Howard, 2001 orig. 1977) that it is likely that some military epistemological assumptions have seeped into many, if not most, outdoor activity standards.

**Militarism and the grammar of outdoor activities**

[W]ar… has certainly a grammar of its own, but its logic is not peculiar to itself.


To examine epistemological similarities between militarism and organized outdoor activities is not to suggest that any particular programs are militaristic in intent. According to Howard (2001 orig. 1977):

[militarism is] simply an acceptance of the values of the military subculture as the dominant values of society: a stress on hierarchy and subordination in organization, on physical courage and self-sacrifice in personal behaviour, on the need for heroic leadership in situations of extreme stress … (p. 109).

Two elements of 20th century Anglophone militarism stand out. The experiences of land war of Anglophone nations were almost entirely on foreign soil, and involved mass or total war (Bourne, 1997; Dyer, 2004). An epistemology based on irregular war, or small-scale local wars of the kind that have characterized almost all human societies (Dyer, 2004) might be more universal, but is not what has dominated 20th century Anglophone society.

Total war involved entire nations and entailed a shift in emphasis from conduct of battle to the overall coordination and integration of resources. Total war depended on industrial developments – initially the telegraph and the railway – that permitted large number of troops to be deployed (and kept supplied) relatively quickly, while command and control became more systematized and centralized. Any militaristic epistemology that can be discerned in safety guidelines owes more to this totality – control and logistics – than to the conduct of battle. Its persistence reflects Anglo-American triumphalism post World War II, rather than merit.
For troops systematically deployed in large numbers on foreign soil, local knowledge is necessarily limited, and comes in the form of intelligence. Any local knowledge that is obtained cannot necessarily be trusted; perhaps an informant is a spy, or has a grudge against the invaders (Van Creveld, 1991). European militarism was mostly territorial (Childs, 1997), and maps and map-reading skills were essential. The ability to read a military style map – that is a geometrically accurate topographic map showing strategically significant features but not necessarily cultural or locally significant features – remains an orthodox requirement for outdoor leaders in Australia. In the military, a lack of local knowledge can be partly compensated for by the provision of intelligence, such as maps and guidebooks, the application of skills, and provision of sufficient resources. With strong enough tents the need to read the local weather or know where to find shelter becomes less important.

As I discuss in Chapter 4, local knowledge might accumulate over the lifetimes of individuals, or collectively over generations. Resources, intelligence and even skills can be provided almost on demand by organizations. For the military, given enough raw recruits, training can substitute for experience. Although older warrior codes required years, if not a lifetime, of dedicated training, total war required “mass production of men” (Howard, 2001 orig. 1977, p. 121). What made this possible was mass production of weapons that could be used expertly by conscripts after a few months’ training (Howard, 2001 orig. 1977). Childs (1997) observes: “By 1550, the longbow and the crossbow, both requiring years of intensive training for effective operation, had been replaced by the musket and the field gun, which were relatively cheap to produce and could be operated after a week’s instruction” (pp. 22-23).

It was necessary for Anglo-military forces in 20th century conflicts to get by with limited local knowledge. For many forms of outdoor activity, an epistemology centred on local experience is feasible, if inconvenient, and might well offer better safety, but for writers of safety standards, there might be commercial, bureaucratic, or practical reasons to prefer the military approach. Expediency, however, seems insufficient to explain the extent to which a militaristic epistemology is evident in outdoor safety standards. An additional aspect of military training might be relevant, namely, military indoctrination.
How does the military persuade individuals to sacrifice their lives, sometimes pointlessly? In 1914 nationalistic fervour partly did the job: “[Nationalism] does something to explain the most remarkable phenomena of 1914 – excited crowds filling the boulevards of every major European city … flocking to the recruiting booths … masses of men required by military professionals came forward with super abundant goodwill … [t]hey threw their lives away” (Howard, 2001 orig. 1977, p. 111). Total war acquired a momentum that overwhelmed whatever political reasons for war that might have existed at the outset, so that in World War I “what was good for the war was considered good for the nation” (Van Creveld, 1991, p. 165).

Drasdo (1972) observed that overblown rhetoric remained popular among UK outdoor education promoters long after overtly militaristic aims were abandoned. The end of WWII did not, apparently, end an association of virtue, glory, and glamour with certain forms of outdoor activity. In Part IV, for example, I show how the mythology of adventure and its supposed character-forming action might be sufficient to sell programs irrespective of educational logic.

Military training intentionally developed unquestioning loyalty. It is not surprising that the habit of loyalty adheres to militaristic forms of thinking and organization. According to Dyer (2004):

[T]he question we rarely ask [is]… how could men do… the mechanistic and impersonal mass slaughter of civilized warfare… any traditional warrior would do the sensible thing and leave instantly… [mass armies required] a different psychology – a controlled form of mob psychology – that tends to overpower the personal identity and fears of the individuals … (p. 102).

The most important element of contemporary recruit training (according to Dyer's 2004 account of US marines training) is identification with the group\(^\text{10}\). Team building, of course, remains a frequent, if not universal, theme in outdoor education.

\(^{10}\text{Military training contains elements that outdoor education never does, and discipline in battle includes the use of violent punishments for soldiers who disobey orders.}\)
An essential element of military team building is “a steady diet of small triumphs…” The common denominator is that these activities are daunting but not really dangerous” (Dyer, 2004, p. 47). Contemporary outdoor education abounds with examples of exaggerated “challenges” that nearly everyone succeeds at. Outdoor education discourses frequently endorse practices that engender loyalty to a group or set of beliefs.

Perhaps little civilian outdoor experience conforms exactly to the kind of militarism I have outlined here. However, to the extent that it is manifest in certain approaches to the outdoors, militarist thinking works against, if not proscribes, detailed understandings of particular environments. Guiding expertise is valued not as an expression of long familiarity, but as the application of skills and procedures in unfamiliar territory. One guide can easily be replaced by another who fits the specifications. Purposes and motivations that potentially link people and places through stories of individual and collective experience are marginalised; loyalty to group objectives becomes an end itself, while overcoming logistical problems in a militaristic way is accepted as worthy, or even virtuous.

**Four indicators of militaristic epistemology in safety guidelines**

It is not the purpose of this introduction to debate outdoor activity standards as safety standards. However, there might be a reluctance to critique any hidden environmental education curriculum within safety standards for fear of compromising safety. For that reason it is worth mentioning here that critiquing the epistemological foundations of particular safety standards might enhance safety. The research in Part V shows most serious incidents in Australian outdoor education have involved environmental hazards. Incidents can be shown to cluster around environmental hazards more strongly than around particular activities, and more incidents are captured by classifications based on environmental circumstances than by activity.

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11 Exceptions include medical conditions, human violence, and motor vehicle-related incidents.
12 Activity clustering may be stronger for adults engaging in activities at more expert levels.
My own approach to safety research in outdoor education has been guided by three propositions: (1) parents who entrust their child to an outdoor education teacher want their child returned alive. This is almost universally their first priority, and there is nothing complicated about it – the teacher is expected to know any deadly hazards, and to avoid or defeat them; (2) risk management and safety are not the same, because risk management might include protecting reputations, keeping insurance premiums low, dealing with the media, avoiding legal or criminal liability and containing costs, or preventing trivial loss, and (3) assertions about safety in the outdoors – in the form of safety standards or otherwise – can be tested empirically by studying incident reports. Some written standards are more explicit about their authority – echoing military authority – than the reasons for particular inclusions.

What follows are some tests that can be applied to written safety standards, and some typical examples. I have found that a broadly militaristic epistemology, which not only marginalizes specific environmental knowledge but also to some extent de-legitimises it, is widespread, although not universal, in published outdoor activity safety standards. Many safety standards either cross reference each other, or seem to have borrowed from the same sources.

1. Do written standards refer to local environmental knowledge, and what emphasis is it given? For some environments, such as surf, local knowledge has remained central to documented safety. That a guide should know intimately the particular environment in which they guide is hardly an obscure notion. Yet in many of the safety standards that I examined local knowledge received remarkably little explicit consideration and was given little prominence. For example, Scouts Canada (2002) provides the following weak advice as one of 12 leadership dot points:

   Leaders are familiar with the program areas and type of terrain where activities are conducted, and can adapt to changing conditions. Explanation: Leaders have a general knowledge of the area and type of terrain in which the program will occur. This knowledge includes, but might not be limited to an understanding of the educational possibilities of the site. Familiarity does not necessarily imply previous experience with the specific route, program area or activity
site. It does imply that there is enough familiarity with the terrain in which activities take place so that the focus can be on the participants, and on the program goals. Leaders are prepared to address changes in weather, damaged or lost equipment, or other potential and unforeseen program changes (p. 3).

2. Standards in electronic form can be readily scanned for hedges or evasions. Standards, it might be assumed, contain categorical statements, such as: “wear an approved flotation device”. However, exhaustive specific standards are arguably difficult to write because outdoor environments are diverse and variable. Hedges or evasions might take the form of written disclaimers, in which the authors accept no responsibility for standards that, disregarding the fine print, nevertheless are plainly intended to be read as authoritative. Or, the authors might resort to evasive language. For example, the word “appropriate” appears 248 times in the Scouts Canada document. Each use of the term has to be read in context, of course, but in many cases the word is used to leave the required standard of behaviour unspecified. Only in the aftermath of an accident will it be clear that the behaviour in question was inappropriate, when it becomes “inappropriate” by definition. At the time of writing 397 uses of the word “appropriate” occurred across the published Victorian Adventure Activity Standards (AAS) (see (Adventure Victoria, 2005)).

3. How do standards define leader or guide qualifications? Militaristic standards emphasise discrete skill sets categorised around activities (or tasks) rather than environments, and no local connection. For example, although the Tasmanian adventure activity standards (TasORC, 2005), at the time of writing, contain a link to a site which explains that “Tasmania is different to any other place you have walked before” (Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania, 2005, n.p.), leader qualifications are linked to national industry qualifications frameworks based on skill sets. Although militaristic in structure, these are motivated by the idea that outdoor recreation is an industry, and that training requirements for all industries are structurally alike. In industry, standardisation makes economic sense, and can occur because built environments such as factories can be standardised. Qualification frameworks serve to ensure that labour can be easily hired or
fired to fit changing needs, and new operations interstate or offshore easily established. Outdoor environments can also be standardised in certain ways, for example by building tracks and shelters, removing trees, or grooming ski slopes. Industrial agriculture also entails standardizing environments. These are exceptions, however. Wild places are the definitive non-standard environments.

The specification for the entire outdoor recreation training standards for Australia runs to over 200 000 words, although there is a great deal of repetition. None of the bushwalking related qualifications require, or even refer to, local knowledge. Within the 20 000 or so words specifying bushwalking qualifications there is a single specific mention that might refer to local knowledge: “location knowledge” is a single dot point, one of 30 or so, for SROBWG010A Guide bushwalks in unmodified landscapes (Service Skills Australia, 2003). For the most part, places are broadly categorised (such as arid or tropical). References to the bush are sparse – there are dot point references to hazards such as crocodiles or tree roots, and broad characteristics such as steepness. At each level navigation from a map is emphasised. Even the “human resources” required to assess each module – that is the guides who teach the guides – need not know, or even be familiar with the area in which they teach and assess, although they must “be current in their knowledge and understanding of the industry” and must “avoid negative statements about own organization … [and] public bodies” (Service Skills Australia, 2003, n.p.).

4. Do standards engage with the question of how best to know and understand particular environments, or do they imply that deference is expected to organisational authority? Page, Bentley et al. (2005) assert in an article in Tourism Management that the Victorian AAS are “best practice” (p. 396) but give no reasons for their assertion. Numerous websites report the development of the Australian standards approvingly, with no discussion about why safety management should be organised around activities rather than places. Arguably, failure to imagine or accommodate epistemological debate and discussion is more significant than the actual contents of the
standards. Thinking about environments militaristically is evidently an unquestioned assumption, rather than a thought-through conclusion.

What I have described is typical of a militaristic epistemology; not all safety standards are militaristic to the same extent, or at all. All safety standards should be read in context – some are active, working documents that merely supplement practice based on advice and education embedded in specific local communities. Some written standards might be so widely ignored that any hidden environmental education curriculum would be ineffectual. What I have tried to do is link outdoor activity safety standards with necessary discussions about how knowledge of and attitudes to places and environments is generated and distributed in communities through outdoor activities.

**Respectful relations or militaristic occupation?**

The extent to which outdoor activities are organised and conceived like military occupations, and the implications for how they function as environmental education, or *mis*education, is something to be evaluated case by case. There are alternative visions, of course, such as – in Canadian literature – the work of James Raffan and Bob Henderson.

Experience connects lives and geographical details through stories that weave communities and places together. The more one understands a region, its history, and the layers of stories already in place the more thoughtful the conversation one can have about the role of education outdoors. From this perspective, outdoor education can have a particularity that most – perhaps all – ways of *residing* in or with country have always had, and that visitors, especially regular visitors, can aspire to. The Swiss chamois hunter taking his son across a particular mountain pass, the shingle cutters who worked in the forest near my home a century ago, the child investigating if the plover’s eggs have hatched yet, the farmer hunting down the fox dens in lambing season, the aboriginal visiting a burial tree – none would struggle to say clearly what they were doing and why, without needing lofty abstractions about character, loyalty, or for that matter overarching attitudes to nature.
But some – perhaps much – organised outdoor activity, at least in the Anglophone world, has acquired, or perhaps inherited, a potent mix of stirring propaganda and expeditionary grammar (in the Clausewitzian sense) from 20th century Anglo militarism. Forms of outdoor education that deploy groups in unfamiliar places, confront them with daunting but achievable physical challenges, equip them with tools and skills to overcome logistical difficulties, and provide a contradictory but appealing mixture of group conformity and self actualisation do not require a particular educational logic; as educational products they are saleable, and two world wars have already sold the idea that activities like outdoor education are linked to both citizenship and heroic achievement. In such instances the purpose of location is to provide a theatre of operations, physical objectives, and logistic challenges. \footnote{13 The intended outcomes of Outward Bound programs reported by Hattie, Marsh et al. (1997) illustrate this.}

For the military, the possibility of operating in unfamiliar territory is pragmatic. But an association of this kind of militarism with heroism and the glorification of military service has carried over into universalist outdoor education, elevating unfamiliarity from a necessary constraint to a desired condition. From this perspective, not only is ignorance something guides must learn to get around with the right techniques, intelligence, and equipment – all carefully specified in safety standards; ignorance, that is unfamiliarity, is implied to be necessary for the espoused educational benefits.

How outdoor activities generate and distribute environmental knowledge and attitudes is, of course, an empirical question. Safety standards form only part of the evidence that might be examined. What I have sought to do in this part of the introduction is indicate why such critical examination should be undertaken, and illustrate how it can be applied.
Situationist outdoor education in the country of lost children

by


Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University

March 2006
I certify that the thesis entitled:

Situationist outdoor education in the country of lost children

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

I also certify that any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any other university or institution is identified in the text.

Full Name: Andrew Roy Brookes

Signed .................................................................................................................................

Date..................................................................................................................................
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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis Title: Situated outdoor education in the country of lost children.

This thesis is a study of outdoor education, in the deliberative tradition of curriculum inquiry. It examines the intentional generation and distribution of knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes through organised outdoor activities, both as a research interest, and as a critical perspective on outdoor education discourse.

Eight separate but interrelated research projects, originally published in 11 refereed journal articles, develop and defend the thesis statement: The problem of determining what, if any, forms of outdoor experience should be educational priorities, and how those experiences should be distributed in communities and geographically – that is who goes where and does what – is inherently situational. The persistence of a universalist outdoor education discourse that fails to acknowledge or adequately account for social and geographic circumstances points to serious flaws in outdoor education research and theory, and impedes the development of more defensible outdoor education practices.

The introduction explains how the eight projects cohere, and illustrates how they may be linked using the example of militaristic thinking in outdoor safety standards. Chapters 1 and 2 defend and elaborate a situationist approach to outdoor education, using the examples of outdoor education in Victoria (Australia), and universalist approaches to outdoor education in textbooks respectively.

Chapters 3 and 4 expand on some epistemological implications of the thesis and examine, respectively, the cultural dimensions of outdoor experience, and the epistemology and ontology of local natural history. Chapters 5 and 6 apply a situationist epistemology to personal development based outdoor education. Traditions of outdoor education that draw on person-centred rather than situation-sensitive theories of behaviour are examined and critiqued. Alternatives to person-centred theories of outdoor education are discussed. Chapters 7 and 8 use situationist outdoor education to provide a critical reading of nature-based tourism. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 return to the theme of safety in the introduction and Chapter 1, and examine the safety implications of a situationist epistemology.

Closing comments briefly draw together the conclusions of all of the chapters, and offer some directions for future outdoor education research.

Full Name. Andrew Roy Brookes

Signed ................................................................. Date ..................
Situationist outdoor education in the country of lost children

Preface
This thesis encompasses eleven articles arising from outdoor education research conducted between 1993 and 2003 and published between 1994 and 2004. Its substance resides almost entirely in the original articles. I discuss their coherence around critiques of, and alternatives to, universalist outdoor education discourse and practice in the first part of the introduction. In the second part of the introduction I demonstrate how the statement of my thesis can be used to link the themes of the five parts.

The original journal articles are included here unedited (other than minor technical corrections). They resulted from eight interrelated research projects, and were published in seven different refereed journals. I have not rewritten the articles as a single contribution to a particular conversation, because my intention throughout has been both to contribute to the outdoor education literature, with particular attention to following links with research and scholarship in other fields, and to contribute outdoor education perspectives to related fields. Publishing articles outside the outdoor education literature is consistent with the theoretical critiques I have advanced. I followed links between outdoor education and related fields as a deliberate move towards circumspection and moderation in a field where the literature is sometimes overly self-congratulatory and self-referential. (Overly-general and parochial\(^1\) are terms that might be as readily applied as “universalist” to some sections of the outdoor education literature discussed in this thesis).

I have clustered the eleven chapters into five parts. The chapters are numbered sequentially, but this particular sequence is somewhat arbitrary (insofar as other sensible sequences are possible). Figure 1 illustrates some of the main relationships between the chapters more clearly than the chapter sequence.

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\(^1\) At the time of writing, for example, the *Journal of Experiential Education*, which tends to be regarded within the outdoor education field as the main North American outdoor education journal, was rejected for Tier 1 standing with Thompson ISI mainly because of its low number of citations in other journals (O’Connell, 2005)
Figure 1. Map of thesis showing main concepts, with Chapters 1 and 2 as a central node.
The names of the journals in which the original articles were published (see Figure 1) indicate the specific conversations to which each chapter contributes. However, attention to questions of educational aims, purposes and means, which is to say a broad “curriculum studies” perspective, links all of the chapters conceptually, as does a broad practical interest, namely, more educationally defensible outdoor education practices. Chapters 1 and 2 elaborate on these central interests by examining tensions between universalist and particularist approaches to outdoor education.

**Part I** (Chapters 1 and 2) considers the question: is outdoor education essential? This question can, as one alternative, be understood as a kind of thought experiment that is not necessarily related to any existing outdoor education programs. I argue that there are at best very limited grounds on which to mount an argument for universal forms of outdoor education and that it is only possible to argue that outdoor education is *necessary* in particular geographical, historical, social, and cultural circumstances. Alternatively, as a line of critical inquiry about outdoor education practice, I argue that the question highlights some widespread inadequacies in the educational rationales propounded (explicitly and implicitly) in the outdoor education literature. A critical examination of the educational rationales for existing forms of outdoor education, and a search for more defensible forms, link all of the chapters of this thesis.

**Part II** (Chapters 3 and 4) examines the epistemology and ontology of outdoor experiences, by further inquiring into some non-universalist dimensions of “nature” (or “place”) and experience. I argue that in examining the educational potential of outdoor education it is not necessarily helpful to separate knowledge and experience. Experience creates stories that bind knowledge to the knower. It is potentially important to consider the distinctive content of particular experiences or patterns of experience, as would be the case for a farmer tracking dingoes that have been attacking sheep, or descendants of a war veteran exploring the site of a battle. A casual visitor accompanying the farmer will construct different meanings from the farmer. Perhaps the former battlefield and sheep paddock are the same, seen in different ways by the farmer, the casual visitor, and the veteran’s descendent. Although many outdoor education programs provide one-off visits to a place chosen
for novelty and strangeness, to fully comprehend any potential value of outdoor education programs one must also consider alternatives, especially those involving on-going relationships with particular places or regions. A satisfactory account of outdoor education must recognise that not only can knowledge be extracted from experience, but also that knowledge can be inherent in experience, that is, experiential knowledge can be context-bound and performative.

**Part III** (Chapters 5 and 6) critically examines one distinctive form of universalist outdoor education. It critiques approaches to outdoor education, often called “adventure education”, that make little or no direct connection between aims and purposes and the experiences and settings that characterise their practice. These approaches are premised on the alleged capacity of certain outdoor experiences to change personality traits (as a specific claim) or to “build character” (as a vague but appealing claim). I draw on social psychology to argue that the literal claims of adventure education to change personality are incredible, and examine some reasons for the apparent persistence and persuasiveness of both the vague and specific “character building” claims. I approach what I term “neo-Hahnian” outdoor education in two ways: (1) by examining the credibility of the explicit claims that adventure experiences can shape personality and (2) by critiquing its lack of attention to geographical, social and cultural situations.

Parts IV and V extend the work of the first three parts in two different directions.

**Part IV** (Chapters 5 and 6) examines some examples of tourism, recreation, and land management as if they were conceived as outdoor environmental education, on the basis that all organised outdoor activity potentially contributes to the construction of knowledge and meaning, and intervenes in relationships between people and places. In particular, both in common parlance and in the specific claims of “eco-tourism”, tourism is a type of outdoor environmental education. Chapter 5 considers an apparent contradiction between the supposed profundity of “the wilderness experience” and the legendary superficiality of organised tourism. Chapter 6 critically examines some educational claims made for eco-tourism.

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These reasons will vary situationally, of course. For example, character education in the United States has connotations of Christian morality that I have not explored.
Part V (Chapters 7, 8 and 9) examines fatal accidents and incidents in Australian outdoor education (and related activities). Outdoor education discourses and practices, at least in Anglophone countries such as Canada, the UK, the USA, New Zealand and Australia, are interwoven with considerations of safety and risk.

Although the overall emphasis of this thesis is that outdoor education is socially constructed, the death of a teacher on a school camp, or the death of a child on an outdoor education excursion, is not merely a social construction. Within outdoor education discourses, and within the wider community, any approach to educational aims, means, or purposes that contradicts received wisdom on safety standards will find a limited audience. “Safety” is a privileged category that can and does override other considerations, including questions of curriculum quality. Thus, although Part V is cut from the same epistemological cloth as the other parts, it counterbalances the discussion of safety as a social construction by comprehensively examining fatal incidents. The chapters in this part can be read as direct contributions to safe practice, but they also demonstrate that critical attention to educational aims, means, and purposes is not necessarily antithetical to safe practice. Tensions between, on the one hand, knowing particular environments and, on the other hand, skills and techniques for encountering unfamiliar environments, are common to both safety and curriculum.
Introduction (I)

‘Australia’, Arkady said slowly, ‘is the country of lost children’


The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular


Definition and focus

This thesis is an inquiry into outdoor education. By outdoor education I mean the intentional generation and distribution of knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes through organised outdoor activities. For my purposes outdoor education as a *research interest* is delineated by certain kinds of educational questions that flow from this definition. As a plain English rubric, “outdoor education” describes practices that are not necessarily labelled as such in particular discourses, so my interest is not confined just to areas of discourse or practice that use the term. Where I refer to outdoor education as a labelled set of discourses/practices, I have treated it as social construction in which the meaning of the term, if it is used, must be taken from the context. What is referred to as outdoor education in some discourses would not be in others.

My position is that outdoor education research has no brief to support or justify any existing outdoor education practices or orthodoxies, and should be open to the possibility that when educational choices have to be made outdoor education will not necessarily be the most defensible choice in many circumstances.

I focus on possible aims, purposes, and means of outdoor education, which is to say that I understand outdoor education to be a matter for curriculum\(^3\) inquiry and deliberation. In particular, I regard curriculum questions as being not just about merit, but relative merit, in which every decision to take educational action of one kind means having to forgo various alternatives. In approaching the social construction of outdoor education curriculum I have assumed that curriculum decisions are always and necessarily contingent on who decides and under what circumstances. I take it for granted that the overall purpose of my research is to

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\(^3\) Leaving aside any connotations of “schooling” associated with the term.
improve the quality of curriculum decision-making in outdoor education.

I take the position that outdoor education research is shaped by certain questions, and by the circumstances in which they are posed and responded to. *How are worldviews shaped by existing patterns of geographical experience? How is knowledge shaped by and embedded in particular experiences? What are the gaps and silences in the content and distribution of these patterns of experience? How and why might schools or other organizations take responsibility for contributing to the mix in particular ways?* Although such questions link outdoor education to broader contextual issues, including military history, national identity, landscape, and population density, distribution and mobility, they also emphasize some irreducibly local dimensions of outdoor experiences. They point to the unlikelihood of determining whether or not any form of outdoor education is essential ⁴ without attending to the circumstances in question. The inquiries and deliberations performed in this thesis explore the nature of these particularities in certain cases, and critically examine manifestations of universalist tendencies within Outdoor Education.

Outdoor Education has acquired special meanings in particular discourses-practices, such as North American outdoor education textbooks and Australian outdoor education conferences (exactly which of these are being referred to is made clear in each section of the thesis). I argue that the forms which outdoor education takes can often only be satisfactorily explained when non-educational social and cultural influences are considered alongside educational reasons. I also consider the possibility that in some cases established outdoor education – in any of its forms, including tourism – might owe any evident success to good marketing rather than educational merit. Outdoor education as a field has grown more from practitioner associations than from a research tradition, so it is not surprising that justificatory rhetoric is something of a hallmark of Outdoor Education discourse. It is part of the function of the interest groups from which conferences and many outdoor education publications have arisen to provide mutual support and reassurance, but the same justificatory impulse applied to research is unhelpful. I do not see this thesis as part of the justificatory tradition in Outdoor Education, but as part of a larger project to

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⁴ I use the term “essential” to emphasise that curriculum decisions usually entail *leaving out* some valuable alternatives. In other words curriculum is about separating the essential from the merely desirable (and therefore also about determining what criteria will be used).
contribute to outdoor education discourses, as much by identifying some blind spots within those discourses as by critically evaluating them.

**Thesis statement**

The problem of determining what, if any, forms of outdoor experience should be educational priorities, and how those experiences should be distributed in communities and geographically – that is who goes where and does what – is inherently situational. The persistence of a universalist outdoor education discourse that fails to acknowledge or adequately account for social and geographic circumstances points to serious flaws in outdoor education research and theory, and impedes the development of more defensible outdoor education practices.

**Methodological considerations**

Collectively the eleven chapters and this introduction constitute a curriculum inquiry in the deliberative tradition, albeit positioned outside the curriculum literature (with the exception of Chapter 1). A deliberative approach to curriculum regards curriculum as a matter for on-going conversation in which (1) approaches to studying curriculum – that is questions of method – have no fixed solutions, and (2) curriculum problems cannot be solved simply by the application of procedures such as philosophical analysis (Gough, 2003). There is some methodological discussion in each chapter (or chapter sequence), either integrated into the text or as a separate section, in keeping with their origins as published articles.

Noel Gough’s work, in particular, has guided my approach to curriculum inquiry – that is to questions of educational aims, means, and purposes – over the last two decades. According to Bill Green (2003), Gough is the leading Australian exponent of the deliberative approach to curriculum inquiry. He is also one of the very few curriculum theorists (in Australia and elsewhere) to take an interest in and contribute to the outdoor environmental education literature. His approach to deliberation is not that questions of method cannot be resolved, or that curriculum problems cannot be solved. Rather, he insists that resolutions and solutions are contingent and subject to criteria which are neither timeless nor universal; they are always open to revision in the light of changed circumstances, new knowledge, or better arguments, that is, they
are situated: “deliberative curriculum inquiry engages curriculum workers in the pursuit of unique understandings in/of the unique circumstances of their practice” (Gough, 2003, p. 7). Like Gough, I take methodology to refer to “an explanation of defensible ways of proceeding in relation to particular problems (rather than following ‘a’ method) … that cannot be reduced to guiding principles or procedural rules” (Gough, 2003, p. 8).

Gough is also among the few Australian scholars to engage systematically with reconceptualist initiatives and positions in curriculum. The reconceptualists turned to arts- and humanities-based approaches to understanding curriculum in practice. In particular, reconceptualist curriculum inquiry draws attention to how understanding is embedded in narratives, and how all curriculum and research practices can be read, and critiqued, as “texts” (Gough, 2003). In this thesis, for example, I argue that adventure education can be better understood when “adventure” is understood as a narrative genre. I also argue that outdoor experiences can be understood as constructing stories in which knowledge and meaning are intertwined.

I regard cautiously any approaches to outdoor education that either characterise it as special means to generic ends, or that attribute particular outcomes to it that are linked to outdoor experiences by happenstance rather than necessity. This is not to say that I have any doubts that certain outdoor activities might be an effective, even efficient, means to certain educational ends, nor that there are programs that demonstrate their effectiveness. However, I am interested in other possibilities, especially those in which the educational value is inherent in the experience, and for which no convincing educational equivalent to the actual experience can be envisaged. How to approach such possibilities is one of the concerns of the body of this thesis, but I mention it here because it introduces further methodological considerations.

My deliberations have particularly engaged with epistemological questions, especially those to do with knowledge as a social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Although not a sociological study, my work is oriented towards humanistic sociology, which, as Berger (1963) observed, shares almost identical interests with history. I have followed Gough (2003) in looking to the humanities for approaches to research that examine the contexts and meaning of human experience.
In taking into account physical environments and how they can be known, my work is informed by a post-Kuhnian sociology of science, the key postulates of which, following Mulkay (1979), are that: (1) a standard view of science – namely nature is uniform, facts and theory are separate, and knowledge claims are validated by criteria independent of human interests and interactions – does not withstand close scrutiny, and (2) the conduct of science is a practical, social activity in which “there is no clear separation between the negotiation of social meaning and the assessment of knowledge claims” (p. 119). (3) Scientific claims have cultural content, and science is never politically neutral; any claim that it was neutral, he argues, would itself be political.

A strong view of the social construction of science would attempt to explain scientific consensus without recourse to physical reality. I have taken a middle course that assumes broad consensus about what constitutes ordinary physical reality: “[f]acts are linguistic; they are not objects. For our purposes, think of truth as unconstrained consensus about what is the case” (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 180). Or, as Lakoff (1987) argues, for categories such as “in” or “up” derived from human bodily experience: “[this is] as real as our knowledge ever gets – real enough for all but the most seasoned sceptics” (p. 300)⁵. The environments in which outdoor education takes place are real, but there is no access to that reality unmediated by history and culture. Experience of “nature” is not transcendent⁶.

The epistemological orientation of my research is also influenced by Rouse’s (1987) study of science and power: “the natural world … acquires a definite character only within a purposive configuration of practices, because this configuration determines what can count as a thing, property or relation” (p. 183). What might appear to be the universal explanatory power of western science, is a working out of local, practical possibilities in laboratories, universalised through extension of laboratory-like conditions elsewhere. The power effects characteristic of science do not originate in laboratories; rather they are capillary effects of power that “acquires what coherence it has from the way many different local projects and practices coalesce and reinforce

⁵ As Cheney (1989, p. 120) put it, it may be “language all the way down” – meaning the world is made up of stories – but also “world all the way up” (p. 120).
⁶ I do not exempt indigenous experience from this statement.
one another, producing a situation with an overall meaning and direction that were never anyone's doing in particular” (p. 244). In these terms outdoor education (and outdoor education research) can be seen as constructing and normalising situations in which knowledge claims become both valid and meaningful.

**Outdoor education discourse and practice**

Outdoor education is characterized by a number of overlapping discourses, and marked by some disjunctures. The outdoor education defined by these discourses is not monolithic, and attempts to define it conceptually (rather than as a construction) tend to dissolve into vagueness or over-generalization. It is more generative to map outdoor education. Within this thesis I regard outdoor education as definable only in specific discursive situations, and less by boundaries than by prototypes. For example, without attempting to pin down exactly what the term denotes and its connotations in each case, outdoor education (American Association of Experiential Education) can be distinguished from the overlapping outdoor education (American Camping Association). In the UK it is useful to distinguish between outdoor education (Mountain Centres) and outdoor education (Field Study Centres). Within Australia, one way to separate various outdoor educations is to distinguish between different State-based organizations; another is to attend to characteristics defined by associations with formal education and commerce respectively. I have not attempted to map the entire field, but where I have examined particular aspects of outdoor education I situate the outdoor education I am referring to.

Rickinson et al. (2004), who use “outdoor education” and “outdoor learning” interchangeably in their recent literature review, provide a comprehensive summary of practices and settings that are at least sometimes viewed as outdoor education within school systems, including fieldwork and outdoor visits, outdoor adventure education, and school grounds and community-based projects, but not visits to galleries or zoos, and not sport or physical education “except those involving outdoor adventure education” (p. 16 emphasis in original). Although their review was commissioned in the UK, they examined an international (English-language)

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7 Outdoor learning seems to be preferred in the UK not to distinguish learning (individual) from education (social and systemic) but rather to distinguish learning (learner-centred view) from educating (teacher-centred view).
literature, and did not confine their search to the outdoor education literature – some studies they review might be a poor fit, if not excluded, from some outdoor education forums, and were published as contributions to different discourses.

I have not assumed that outdoor education is necessarily associated with formal education, and for that reason I have taken an even wider view than Rickinson et al. (2004), who examined only outdoor education associated with schooling. It might be that when the questions that define outdoor education are examined in particular circumstances, tourism or community-based learning might emerge as more defensible or desirable than school-based learning. For example, following a study on tourism and community development in Norway (Dahle & Jäggi, 1992), Dahle (2000) examined lifelong interest in the out-of-doors in a particular region, and found, in decreasing importance: parental influence, distance from suitable areas, friends’ interests, outdoor hobbies, family access to a cabin, and owning a dog. All of the formal educational measures that may be taken, including school programs, undertaking courses, and so on, were collectively as influential as owning a dog.

Outdoor education outside of formal education includes summer camps for children (especially in North America – they have never been as popular in Australia and the UK), outdoor training for management or team development, and various forms of wilderness therapy. (I discuss some of the literature on Outdoor Management Development, OMD, in Part III). It is important to note that although all of these might be of interest to outdoor education research, boundaries can be found in particular outdoor education discourses. For example, juvenile boot camps for offenders (see, for example Klein, 1996) receive little attention in the outdoor education literature, although subject to some public debate, especially following deaths and reports of abuse (Project NoSpank, 2005). There has been little enthusiasm for boot camps in Australia (Atkinson, 1995). Boot camps are an example of a discourse/practice that falls within the scope of outdoor education research as I have defined it, but which might well be excluded from some outdoor education discourses.

Differences, and sometimes tensions, between institutionalised forms of outdoor education contribute another element to the map. Even when a part of formal education, outdoor education may be partly or wholly sub-contracted to an outside
organization, either commercial or non-profit. Examples include Outward Bound Inc., and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme (which does not actually run programs, but supports them), and in Australia the Outdoor Activities Group, which tend to construct their own definitions-in-practice of outdoor education. Outdoor education might also be defined in practice around certain activities or certain sites, in which case its institutionalisation might centre on the governing body of the activity (such as canoeing or mountaineering) or the operator of a site such as a camping facility or a ski resort. As I discuss in the second part of this introduction, norms or standards ostensibly for one purpose – such as safety – might in fact define the entire activity and determine, at least in part, its educational characteristics. The scouting movement is another example of institutionalised outdoor education that tends not to be associated with schooling. I examine some of these forms of outdoor education in the body of this thesis; the point here is that outdoor education driven by a set of curriculum considerations might not honour boundaries constructed within outdoor education discourses/practices.

It is not my intention here to map the field, but to offer a brief overview, and to illustrate why it is almost inevitable that attempts to define outdoor education as a unitary set of concepts or practices tend to fail. For example, the reasons for excluding hunting and including mountain bike riding in a particular instance of outdoor education tend to be located in particular social, historical, and cultural circumstances rather than across all situations or within a universal educational rationale.

**Being particular**

Very little has been published in major educational journals about outdoor education. Perhaps this is understandable, in the case of journals whose main focus is formal education. Formal education, almost by definition and largely by necessity, provides contexts for knowledge reproduction that are different from the contexts of knowledge production (and application). Lundgren (1983) refers to this as: “the representation problem … [which is] the eternal problem of pedagogy” (p. 11). In an education system that is free, compulsory, and secular, a tendency to favour curricula that are relevant to a wide range of contexts, and certainly not tied to the context of schooling, is inevitable. From this perspective, outdoor education can be set apart by
a focus on educational possibilities tied to specific contexts. The significance of such possibilities lies not in any denial of the value of universal aspects of education, but in acceptance and acknowledgement of the limitations of universalist education.

Curriculum discourses have long struggled with the problem of the intrinsic value of experience (such as the experience of an artistic performance), which cannot easily be defined in terms of educational outcomes (Stenhouse, 1975). Nevertheless, here too, the emphasis has been, with good reason, on experiences that stand for a general class of experiences. It remains to be considered what particular experiences might be warranted, for particular circumstances.

Discourses on the role of place in education (Orr, 1992) and western culture in the “ecological crisis” (Bowers, 1993) can be found in the environmental education literature, albeit on the margins. I discuss some links between the work of these authors and my own work in Part II. What I wish to emphasise here is that non-universalist does not equate to local. A local, place-based curriculum might be part of non-universalist outdoor education. But there are other possibilities involving non-local experience for certain populations or individuals. Australia, because of its size and concentrated population centres, abounds with possible examples, some of which I discuss in this thesis.

I have taken the view that outdoor education is inherently situational, not because outdoor education cannot easily contribute to universal education – no doubt it can do so – but because the questions I have taken as a focus for outdoor education research draw attention to certain limits to universal education: *How are worldviews shaped by existing patterns of geographical experience? How is knowledge shaped by and embedded in particular experiences? What are the gaps and silences in the content and distribution of these patterns of experience? How and why might schools or other organizations take responsibility for contributing to the mix in particular ways?*

Put another way, I have used the term outdoor education to describe an interest in those aspects of education that require attention to the *particulars* of human and physical geographical situations. I have tried to distinguish between the argument that education should *not* be entirely (physically) confined to schools – which is the
thrust of the recent (UK) House of Commons Education and Skills Committee inquiry into education outside the classroom (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005) and of other reviews such as the (Victorian) Ministerial Review of outdoor education (Ministry of Education, 1988) – and discussion about what form any outdoor education should take and how it should be distributed.

I have not attempted to “prove” the thesis statement. Rather, I provide examples that demonstrate the contribution the thesis statement has to make in some instances that, by induction, might apply in other situations. I have drawn mainly on Australian contexts in which some limitations of universalist approaches to outdoor education are readily apparent, and which also provide insights that might be relevant to other situations, especially the points of origin of some forms of universalist outdoor education, namely, the UK and USA.

**Australian contexts**

What significance the thesis statement might be accorded is tied to the contention that the more one delves into the details of a particular environment – geographic, historical, social, and cultural – the more educational problems and possibilities become evident that cannot be put aside as merely local instances of something more general. I have used Australian examples because they were to hand, but I am mindful that any failures of universalist outdoor education orthodoxies in Australia raise questions about those orthodoxies in their entirety, and that any insights that emerge from asking situationist questions of Australian examples should at least encourage a similar approach elsewhere. At the risk of putting it too glibly: Australian situations are unique, but the fact that they are unique is not in itself unique.

The generalization I am making is that outdoor education can be productively approached as an instance of curriculum in which inductive generalization must be tested case by case, rather than trusted. In that light, the following introductory comments about Australian contexts simply point towards the value of burrowing into situational detail, if only by touching on thoughts that call for more depth and detail. They also, by omission, highlight that there are situational dimensions that I have not considered, either in this introduction or in the body of the thesis.
One Australian consideration, which has received some attention in the outdoor education literature, and which I draw on in this thesis, is a mismatch between the intentions and pre-conceptions of the first European colonisers and the physical landscape. Carter (1988) has shown how the naming and mapping of Australia by the British in the early 19th century reflected struggles to make sense of journeys in which the landscapes encountered were discordant both with language and with hopes and expectations:

[I]t was almost a commonplace among British residents that, in Australia, the laws of association seemed to be suspended. There seemed to be nothing that could accurately be named. There was, consequently, very little purchase for the imagination … (pp. 42-43).

The early travellers, then, invented places, rather than found them. This was what naming meant … they were descriptive not of a geographic object but of place where travelling might settle down and become history (p. 51)\(^8\).

One way to read outdoor education in Australia is in terms of a struggle to negotiate ways of being, with tensions between shaping geography to suit pre-conceptions at one extreme and shaping thoughts and actions to fit the geography on the other. Another way to read outdoor education is to examine evidence of tensions between familiarity and strangeness. To mention just one example of such tensions, Rose (1993) argues that the desire and pleasure expressed in landscape is distinctively masculine:

The sensual topography of land … is mapped by a gaze which is eroticised as masculine and heterosexual. This masculine gaze sees a feminine body which requires interpreting by a cultured knowledgeable look; something to own, and something to give pleasure. (p. 197)

Seeing the landscape removes “(embodied) specificity” (Rose, 1993, p. 100); one way to consider outdoor education is to ask what relationships with certain places involving what embodied specificity are warranted. Another is to examine how

\(^8\)Carter too presents an account of male travel and settlement.
embodied specificity can be erased from outdoor education discourse, as I do, for example in Chapter 7 (although I do not use that term).

Another particular Australian consideration arises when one considers the population distribution and the size and geographical diversity of the country (Figures 2 and 3).

Source: ABS data, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

**Figure 2. Estimated resident population, Australia** (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003)
Even as a first approximation, it is evident that Australians’ collective experience of Australia, especially everyday experience, is predominantly urban; moreover, any rural areas frequented cannot be taken to “represent” the whole country. Large parts of Australia, perhaps inevitably, are known to most Australians only fleetingly or not at all. It is one thing to observe that Australians tend to be most familiar with urban environments, and certain rural areas, such as national parks, and might have experienced very little of vast areas of the country. It is quite another to consider what experiences might be most educationally defensible. At the level of individual initiatives – for example parents taking six months to “see Australia” with their children – where to go and what to do remains problematic. As a national initiative, supposing such a thing was possible, which groups should experience what places?

Population mobility, immigration, and temporary relocations through tourism, recreation and second homes add complexity to whatever can be discerned from place of residence alone. Not only are relatively large numbers not Australian-born, but migrant groups tend to cluster according to country of origin and nearly always in urban and industrial areas (Castles & Miller, 1998).
For some Australians, everyday reality is comprised of urban experience, but for others everyday reality might be shaped by sustained experience in several locations, and by visits – perhaps regular or frequent – to other locations. Population movements – such as from agricultural areas to cities, or “sea change” movements from cities to rural areas (Burnley & Murphy, 2004) – also change knowledge distributions and raise educational questions. Economic migration, such as welfare recipients seeking cheaper living in rural areas, can also be considered as raising “outdoor education” questions different from the social and economic questions more commonly considered in the literature (cf Burnley & Murphy, 2004), and different from outdoor education as it is usually conceived.

These introductory comments merely touch on some details of how Australians’ experiences of Australian places or of Australian geography might be mapped, and how one might begin to consider what educational reasons there might be to intervene in or alter that epistemological map.

**Introduction (II). An illustration: militaristic attitudes to “place” in outdoor activity safety guidelines.**

I have chosen not to include any further commentary on each chapter in this introduction, because each article was originally written as a stand-alone contribution to the literature. However, I offer instead what might be understood as an alternative introduction that exemplifies the approach I take to theorising and researching outdoor education in the remaining chapters. The example uses a critique of universalist epistemology to consider some educational implications of militaristic approaches to outdoor leading and guiding. In so doing it illustrates how safety, so often a dominant theme in outdoor education discourse, is linked to curriculum questions about aims and purposes via epistemological norms and assumptions, and also how outdoor education questions can be asked of all outdoor activities, not only those that have been labelled as educational. It proceeds on the assumption that all outdoor activities can be examined as if they were intended to be a form of outdoor

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9 An article on which this section is based is under review for *the Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*. 

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environmental education, including those that explicitly exclude or marginalise local or environmental knowledge.

Documented safety standards provide one indication of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that shape particular outdoor activities. Legal, medical, religious, corporate and bureaucratic pressures on organised outdoor activities are nowhere more intense than around safety questions. Documented safety guidelines entail the “objectivation, institutionalization and legitimation” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 207) of particular approaches to understanding the natural world in ways that are unlikely to be confined to safety alone.

From a broad environmental education perspective, standards or norms for outdoor activities that seem to circumvent or minimise knowledge of particular environments, particularly on the part of guides, deserve careful scrutiny. If guided outdoor activities do in fact shape knowledge of and attitudes towards outdoor environments, the idea of a guide who knows little or nothing about the place in which they offer guidance is alarming. This section of the introduction examines some origins of that idea, and its contemporary application to organized outdoor activities, examining firstly the development of alpine guiding, and secondly militaristic approaches to outdoor guiding.

In both cases it might be helpful to note that, at least in outdoor activities derived from the UK, there has been a strong distinction made between leading and guiding. Young (1920) pointed out to his readers that “[t]he average guide is a peasant, with the limitations that frame peasant virtues… The guide as we know him is hill-born, hill-bred, - that is, a child, with a child’s capacity for becoming much what we make him, – a companion, a valet, or a machine…” (Young, 1920, pp. 123-125 emphasis in original).

From trustworthy guides to reputable companies: an epistemological shift.

In the late afternoon of July 27, 1999, 45 young tourists – mostly Australians and New Zealanders – and eight guides, in four groups, entered Saxet Brook near
Interlaken, Switzerland, for a canyoning adventure. Three guides and eighteen tourists died when a wall of water caused by a thunderstorm swept them away. In December 2001 six employees of the then defunct company were found guilty of negligent manslaughter. Two surviving guides were found not guilty. The judge ruled that it was not the guides’ responsibility to cancel the trip when they saw thunderstorms upstream (The Sun-Herald, 2002, n.p.).

Civil legal proceedings tend to follow the money, and therefore to emphasize corporate responsibility. But this case was not to determine monetary compensation – it was a criminal trial. The finding that the company, but not the guides, should have known better points to a trend away from regarding the knowledge needed to negotiate wild places as primarily embodied in experienced individuals, towards locating it in corporate procedures and policies. The trend might not be general, of course, but nevertheless such an ontological shift, and its epistemological consequences, deserves some discussion.

At first glance the legendary Swiss alpine guide might be taken to be the epitome of embodied local knowledge. However, from the outset there was no straightforward relationship between local knowledge and Anglo-mountaineering. According to Lunn (1963), early Swiss guides had gained their knowledge from activities such as chamois hunting or smuggling, not recreational or scientific mountaineering. Mountaineers often wanted to go where guides had not been and do things guides had not done. As mountaineering became more established, guides tended to acquire local mountaineering knowledge, although they did not always advertise their achievements – clients paid more for unclimbed peaks or routes (Lunn, 1963). Often guides had not climbed a route they were guiding; inevitably, experienced climbers contemplated climbing without guides, implying that local knowledge was not essential for a skilled climber (Mummery, 1974 orig. 1896).

Around the 1890s, A.F. Mummery, acknowledged as one of the supreme climbers of his day, was rejected as member of the (British) Alpine Club because he advocated guideless climbing, affronting the orthodox view that a true mountaineer climbed roped between two guides (Kruszyna 1974). Mummery – who viewed his climbing as recreational, not scientific – argued that while there had been a period in which guides and clients shared an adventure, as numbers increased class distinctions
between guides and clients came to the fore – the guides being lackeys – and “[t]he constant repetition of the same ascent has … tended to make the guide into a sort of contractor… [t]he skill of the traveller counts for absolutely naught; the practised guide looks on him merely as luggage” (Mummery, 1974 orig. 1896, p. 111).

For mountaineering nominally linked to some higher purpose, such as nature study or scientific measurement, guides provided logistical support that drew on local knowledge. But for those, like Mummery, who saw mountaineering as a sport, guides provided skilled leadership. Mummery took Swiss guides to Chamonix (France), for example. First ascents were increasingly credited to British climbers, rather than Swiss, after 1850 (Lunn, 1963), although prior to the early 1900s most of those ascents would have been guided. As climbing became more technical, the first ascents of expert amateurs eclipsed those of the professionals.

Long before two New Zealanders established the Saxen Brook canyoning trips, safety in the Alps, from the visitor’s perspective, was not necessarily seen as requiring (or being about acquiring) local knowledge. The Anglophone literature from the beginning privileged the voice of the visiting mountaineer rather than the local guide. For the (mostly) upper class visiting British mountaineers, mountaineering knowledge was valued according to its usefulness on unclimbed routes, and reflected their experiences as foreign visitors. Their accounts emphasized personal qualities, such as determination or courage, and skill; knowledge, especially local knowledge, and strength, were the qualities of peasants. The objectification of first ascents as a measure of expertise was further institutionalised through mountaineering literature and the hierarchical structure of clubs. Unfamiliarity with a given climb or peak was not merely a practical consideration but also a desired condition, part of the definition of mountaineering.

Anglo-mountaineering offers insights into how particular historical ontological and epistemological assumptions might become embedded in standard practice. The worldview of a stranger with very particular, narrow interests seeking to circumvent any need to “know where they are going” with a mixture of character, skill, and resources would be a dubious foundation for environmental education. However, although the mountaineering organizations of upper-crust Britons might have disproportionately influenced outdoor activity norms, especially in outdoor
education, mountaineering was itself no doubt subject to wider influences. Commodity and globalisation of corporations are two likely sources. Anglo-militarism is also a strong contender, one less discussed in the environmental education literature. Militaristic influences on Anglo societies in the 20th century have been so extensive (Howard, 2001 orig. 1977) that it is likely that some military epistemological assumptions have seeped into many, if not most, outdoor activity standards.

**Militarism and the grammar of outdoor activities**

War... has certainly a grammar of its own, but its logic is not peculiar to itself.


To examine epistemological similarities between militarism and organized outdoor activities is not to suggest that any particular programs are militaristic in intent. According to Howard (2001 orig. 1977):

[militarism is] simply an acceptance of the values of the military subculture as the dominant values of society: a stress on hierarchy and subordination in organization, on physical courage and self-sacrifice in personal behaviour, on the need for heroic leadership in situations of extreme stress ... (p. 109).

Two elements of 20th century Anglophone militarism stand out. The experiences of land war of Anglophone nations were almost entirely on foreign soil, and involved mass or total war (Bourne, 1997; Dyer, 2004). An epistemology based on irregular war, or small-scale local wars of the kind that have characterized almost all human societies (Dyer, 2004) might be more universal, but is not what has dominated 20th century Anglophone society.

Total war involved entire nations and entailed a shift in emphasis from conduct of battle to the overall coordination and integration of resources. Total war depended on industrial developments – initially the telegraph and the railway – that permitted large number of troops to be deployed (and kept supplied) relatively quickly, while command and control became more systematized and centralized. Any militaristic epistemology that can be discerned in safety guidelines owes more to this totality – control and logistics – than to the conduct of battle. Its persistence reflects Anglo-American triumphalism post World War II, rather than merit.
For troops systematically deployed in large numbers on foreign soil, local knowledge is necessarily limited, and comes in the form of intelligence. Any local knowledge that is obtained cannot necessarily be trusted; perhaps an informant is a spy, or has a grudge against the invaders (Van Creveld, 1991). European militarism was mostly territorial (Childs, 1997), and maps and map-reading skills were essential. The ability to read a military style map – that is a geometrically accurate topographic map showing strategically significant features but not necessarily cultural or locally significant features – remains an orthodox requirement for outdoor leaders in Australia. In the military, a lack of local knowledge can be partly compensated for by the provision of intelligence, such as maps and guidebooks, the application of skills, and provision of sufficient resources. With strong enough tents the need to read the local weather or know where to find shelter becomes less important.

As I discuss in Chapter 4, local knowledge might accumulate over the lifetimes of individuals, or collectively over generations. Resources, intelligence and even skills can be provided almost on demand by organizations. For the military, given enough raw recruits, training can substitute for experience. Although older warrior codes required years, if not a lifetime, of dedicated training, total war required “mass production of men” (Howard, 2001 orig. 1977, p. 121). What made this possible was mass production of weapons that could be used expertly by conscripts after a few months’ training (Howard, 2001 orig. 1977). Childs (1997) observes: “By 1550, the longbow and the crossbow, both requiring years of intensive training for effective operation, had been replaced by the musket and the field gun, which were relatively cheap to produce and could be operated after a week’s instruction” (pp. 22-23).

It was necessary for Anglo-military forces in 20th century conflicts to get by with limited local knowledge. For many forms of outdoor activity, an epistemology centred on local experience is feasible, if inconvenient, and might well offer better safety, but for writers of safety standards, there might be commercial, bureaucratic, or practical reasons to prefer the military approach. Expediency, however, seems insufficient to explain the extent to which a militaristic epistemology is evident in outdoor safety standards. An additional aspect of military training might be relevant, namely, military indoctrination.
How does the military persuade individuals to sacrifice their lives, sometimes pointlessly? In 1914 nationalistic fervour partly did the job: “[Nationalism] does something to explain the most remarkable phenomena of 1914 – excited crowds filling the boulevards of every major European city … flocking to the recruiting booths … masses of men required by military professionals came forward with super abundant goodwill … [t]hey threw their lives away” (Howard, 2001 orig. 1977, p. 111). Total war acquired a momentum that overwhelmed whatever political reasons for war that might have existed at the outset, so that in World War I “what was good for the war was considered good for the nation” (Van Creveld, 1991, p. 165).

Drasdo (1972) observed that overblown rhetoric remained popular among UK outdoor education promoters long after overtly militaristic aims were abandoned. The end of WWII did not, apparently, end an association of virtue, glory, and glamour with certain forms of outdoor activity. In Part IV, for example, I show how the mythology of adventure and its supposed character-forming action might be sufficient to sell programs irrespective of educational logic.

Military training intentionally developed unquestioning loyalty. It is not surprising that the habit of loyalty adheres to militaristic forms of thinking and organization. According to Dyer (2004):

[T]he question we rarely ask [is]… how could men do… the mechanistic and impersonal mass slaughter of civilized warfare… any traditional warrior would do the sensible thing and leave instantly… [mass armies required] a different psychology – a controlled form of mob psychology – that tends to overpower the personal identity and fears of the individuals … (p. 102).

The most important element of contemporary recruit training (according to Dyer's 2004 account of US marines training) is identification with the group¹⁰. Team building, of course, remains a frequent, if not universal, theme in outdoor education.

¹⁰Military training contains elements that outdoor education never does, and discipline in battle includes the use of violent punishments for soldiers who disobey orders.
An essential element of military team building is “a steady diet of small triumphs… the common denominator is that these activities are daunting but not really dangerous” (Dyer, 2004, p. 47). Contemporary outdoor education abounds with examples of exaggerated “challenges” that nearly everyone succeeds at. Outdoor education discourses frequently endorse practices that engender loyalty to a group or set of beliefs.

Perhaps little civilian outdoor experience conforms exactly to the kind of militarism I have outlined here. However, to the extent that it is manifest in certain approaches to the outdoors, militarist thinking works against, if not proscribes, detailed understandings of particular environments. Guiding expertise is valued not as an expression of long familiarity, but as the application of skills and procedures in unfamiliar territory. One guide can easily be replaced by another who fits the specifications. Purposes and motivations that potentially link people and places through stories of individual and collective experience are marginalised; loyalty to group objectives becomes an end itself, while overcoming logistical problems in a militaristic way is accepted as worthy, or even virtuous.

Four indicators of militaristic epistemology in safety guidelines

It is not the purpose of this introduction to debate outdoor activity standards as safety standards. However, there might be a reluctance to critique any hidden environmental education curriculum within safety standards for fear of compromising safety. For that reason it is worth mentioning here that critiquing the epistemological foundations of particular safety standards might enhance safety. The research in Part V shows most serious incidents in Australian outdoor education have involved environmental hazards. Incidents can be shown to cluster around environmental hazards more strongly than around particular activities, and more incidents are captured by classifications based on environmental circumstances than by activity.

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11 Exceptions include medical conditions, human violence, and motor vehicle-related incidents.
12 Activity clustering may be stronger for adults engaging in activities at more expert levels.
My own approach to safety research in outdoor education has been guided by three propositions: (1) parents who entrust their child to an outdoor education teacher want their child returned alive. This is almost universally their first priority, and there is nothing complicated about it – the teacher is expected to know any deadly hazards, and to avoid or defeat them; (2) risk management and safety are not the same, because risk management might include protecting reputations, keeping insurance premiums low, dealing with the media, avoiding legal or criminal liability and containing costs, or preventing trivial loss, and (3) assertions about safety in the outdoors – in the form of safety standards or otherwise – can be tested empirically by studying incident reports. Some written standards are more explicit about their authority – echoing military authority – than the reasons for particular inclusions.

What follows are some tests that can be applied to written safety standards, and some typical examples. I have found that a broadly militaristic epistemology, which not only marginalizes specific environmental knowledge but also to some extent de-legitimises it, is widespread, although not universal, in published outdoor activity safety standards. Many safety standards either cross reference each other, or seem to have borrowed from the same sources.

1. Do written standards refer to local environmental knowledge, and what emphasis is it given? For some environments, such as surf, local knowledge has remained central to documented safety. That a guide should know intimately the particular environment in which they guide is hardly an obscure notion. Yet in many of the safety standards that I examined local knowledge received remarkably little explicit consideration and was given little prominence. For example, Scouts Canada (2002) provides the following weak advice as one of 12 leadership dot points:

   Leaders are familiar with the program areas and type of terrain where activities are conducted, and can adapt to changing conditions. Explanation: Leaders have a general knowledge of the area and type of terrain in which the program will occur. This knowledge includes, but might not be limited to an understanding of the educational possibilities of the site. Familiarity does not necessarily imply previous experience with the specific route, program area or activity
site. It does imply that there is enough familiarity with the terrain in which activities take place so that the focus can be on the participants, and on the program goals. Leaders are prepared to address changes in weather, damaged or lost equipment, or other potential and unforeseen program changes (p. 3).

2. Standards in electronic form can be readily scanned for hedges or evasions. Standards, it might be assumed, contain categorical statements, such as: “wear an approved flotation device”. However, exhaustive specific standards are arguably difficult to write because outdoor environments are diverse and variable. Hedges or evasions might take the form of written disclaimers, in which the authors accept no responsibility for standards that, disregarding the fine print, nevertheless are plainly intended to be read as authoritative. Or, the authors might resort to evasive language. For example, the word “appropriate” appears 248 times in the Scouts Canada document. Each use of the term has to be read in context, of course, but in many cases the word is used to leave the required standard of behaviour unspecified. Only in the aftermath of an accident will it be clear that the behaviour in question was inappropriate, when it becomes “inappropriate” by definition. At the time of writing 397 uses of the word “appropriate” occurred across the published Victorian Adventure Activity Standards (AAS) (see (Adventure Victoria, 2005)).

3. How do standards define leader or guide qualifications? Militaristic standards emphasise discrete skill sets categorized around activities (or tasks) rather than environments, and no local connection. For example, although the Tasmanian adventure activity standards (TasORC, 2005), at the time of writing, contain a link to a site which explains that “Tasmania is different to any other place you have walked before” (Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania, 2005, n.p.), leader qualifications are linked to national industry qualifications frameworks based on skill sets. Although militaristic in structure, these are motivated by the idea that outdoor recreation is an industry, and that training requirements for all industries are structurally alike. In industry, standardisation makes economic sense, and can occur because built environments such as factories can be standardised. Qualification frameworks serve to ensure that labour can be easily hired or
fired to fit changing needs, and new operations interstate or offshore easily established. Outdoor environments can also be standardised in certain ways, for example by building tracks and shelters, removing trees, or grooming ski slopes. Industrial agriculture also entails standardizing environments. These are exceptions, however. Wild places are the definitive *non-standard* environments.

The specification for the entire outdoor recreation training standards for Australia runs to over 200 000 words, although there is a great deal of repetition. None of the bushwalking related qualifications require, or even refer to, local knowledge. Within the 20 000 or so words specifying bushwalking qualifications there is a single specific mention that might refer to local knowledge: “location knowledge” is a single dot point, one of 30 or so, for *SROBWG010A Guide bushwalks in unmodified landscapes* (Service Skills Australia, 2003). For the most part, places are broadly categorised (such as arid or tropical). References to the bush are sparse – there are dot point references to hazards such as crocodiles or tree roots, and broad characteristics such as steepness. At each level navigation from a map is emphasised. Even the “human resources” required to assess each module – that is the guides who teach the guides – need not know, or even be familiar with the area in which they teach and assess, although they must “be current in their knowledge and understanding of the industry” and must “avoid negative statements about own organization … [and] public bodies” (Service Skills Australia, 2003, n.p.).

4. Do standards engage with the question of how best to know and understand particular environments, or do they imply that deference is expected to organisational authority? Page, Bentley et al. (2005) assert in an article in *Tourism Management* that the Victorian AAS are “best practice” (p. 396) but give no reasons for their assertion. Numerous websites report the development of the Australian standards approvingly, with no discussion about why safety management should be organised around activities rather than places. Arguably, failure to imagine or accommodate epistemological debate and discussion is more significant than the actual contents of the
standards. Thinking about environments militaristically is evidently an unquestioned assumption, rather than a thought-through conclusion.

What I have described is typical of a militaristic epistemology; not all safety standards are militaristic to the same extent, or at all. All safety standards should be read in context – some are active, working documents that merely supplement practice based on advice and education embedded in specific local communities. Some written standards might be so widely ignored that any hidden environmental education curriculum would be ineffectual. What I have tried to do is link outdoor activity safety standards with necessary discussions about how knowledge of and attitudes to places and environments is generated and distributed in communities through outdoor activities.

Respectful relations or militaristic occupation?

The extent to which outdoor activities are organised and conceived like military occupations, and the implications for how they function as environmental education, or *misc*education, is something to be evaluated case by case. There are alternative visions, of course, such as – in Canadian literature – the work of James Raffan and Bob Henderson.

Experience connects lives and geographical details through stories that weave communities and places together. The more one understands a region, its history, and the layers of stories already in place the more thoughtful the conversation one can have about the role of education outdoors. From this perspective, outdoor education can have a particularity that most – perhaps all – ways of *residing* in or with country have always had, and that visitors, especially regular visitors, can aspire to. The Swiss chamois hunter taking his son across a particular mountain pass, the shingle cutters who worked in the forest near my home a century ago, the child investigating if the plover’s eggs have hatched yet, the farmer hunting down the fox dens in lambing season, the aboriginal visiting a burial tree – none would struggle to say clearly what they were doing and why, without needing lofty abstractions about character, loyalty, or for that matter overarching attitudes to nature.
But some – perhaps much – organised outdoor activity, at least in the Anglophone world, has acquired, or perhaps inherited, a potent mix of stirring propaganda and expeditionary grammar (in the Clausewitzian sense) from 20th century Anglo militarism. Forms of outdoor education that deploy groups in unfamiliar places, confront them with daunting but achievable physical challenges, equip them with tools and skills to overcome logistical difficulties, and provide a contradictory but appealing mixture of group conformity and self actualisation do not require a particular educational logic; as educational products they are saleable, and two world wars have already sold the idea that activities like outdoor education are linked to both citizenship and heroic achievement. In such instances the purpose of location is to provide a theatre of operations, physical objectives, and logistic challenges.

For the military, the possibility of operating in unfamiliar territory is pragmatic. But an association of this kind of militarism with heroism and the glorification of military service has carried over into universalist outdoor education, elevating unfamiliarity from a necessary constraint to a desired condition. From this perspective, not only is ignorance something guides must learn to get around with the right techniques, intelligence, and equipment – all carefully specified in safety standards; ignorance, that is unfamiliarity, is implied to be necessary for the espoused educational benefits.

How outdoor activities generate and distribute environmental knowledge and attitudes is, of course, an empirical question. Safety standards form only part of the evidence that might be examined. What I have sought to do in this part of the introduction is indicate why such critical examination should be undertaken, and illustrate how it can be applied.

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13 The intended outcomes of Outward Bound programs reported by Hattie, Marsh et al. (1997) illustrate this.
Part I: Outdoor education and Australian curriculum

Preface to Part I

Thesis statement

The problem of determining what, if any, forms of outdoor experience should be educational priorities, and how those experiences should be distributed in communities and geographically – that is who goes where and does what – is inherently situational. The persistence of a universalist outdoor education discourse that fails to acknowledge or adequately account for social and geographic circumstances points to serious flaws in outdoor education research and theory, and impedes the development of more defensible outdoor education practices.

Part I is the hub of the thesis. It uses the example of outdoor education in Victoria, Australia, to argue for a situationist view of outdoor education, and examines and explains how universalist conceptions of outdoor educations occur in the international (English-language) outdoor education literature. Chapter 1 was written for a curriculum studies readership (outside the self-identified outdoor education field); Chapter 2 was written for an outdoor education readership. Both chapters draw on the assumption that curriculum is not just about determining educational merit, but the far more difficult task of making choices between numerous meritorious possibilities. Although that observation might seem self-evident to readers of the curriculum literature, much of the outdoor education literature I encountered attended more to merit than to relative merit, as if outdoor education is a product to be promoted and then chosen (or not) by a “market”. The latter, of course, is true to some extent, something that I discuss in this part and also in Part III. Chapter 1 introduces and explains the connections between the themes of the other four parts (epistemology of outdoor education; personal development themed outdoor education; outdoor education in the wider community and in non-educational social and institutional settings; safety).

Together, Chapters 1 and 2 offer a defence of and justification for the thesis statement, amplified and extended in Parts II – V.
1 Lost in the Australian bush: outdoor education as curriculum

Abstract

In Victoria, Australia, school outdoor education programmes are unusually widespread and well established. Is any form of outdoor education essential? I use this question to develop a critical reading of outdoor education discourse in Victoria. I contend that this discourse has been dominated by universalist and decontextualized understandings of outdoor education which fail to account adequately for the development of particular programmes, ignore important social, cultural, geographical and historical differences, and are flawed as a basis on which to build outdoor education theory. I show that outdoor education must be understood not only in broad national contexts, but also in local and regional contexts, and that outdoor education programmes must be understood as particular contributions to existing relationships between particular communities and particular regions. To do so requires a critical reappraisal of how experience is comprehended and geographical location accounted for in curriculum studies.

Lost in the Australian bush: outdoor education as curriculum

In Victoria, Australia, “outdoor education” has unusually wide acceptance in schools as a distinct curriculum offering. No doubt many curriculum benefits might be found amid what might appear as a confusion of different outdoor education programmes, most of which are linked in some way to visits to what Australians call “the bush”. But is any form of outdoor education essential? That is a different matter, and I unpack this question, and use it to probe some conceptual limits in outdoor education discourse. In so doing I hope to throw some light into a neglected corner of curriculum inquiry.

I begin from the assumption that any essential roles for outdoor education might be specific to particular geographical, social and cultural contexts. I suggest that the question of whether outdoor education is necessary requires a curriculum conversation that is attentive to the particulars of relationships between communities and geographic regions, and that can provide a conceptual grasp on the reality-constituting and epistemological dimensions of outdoor experience. Voices able to meet these requirements have failed to emerge in Victorian outdoor education discourse, which has been dominated by neo-colonialist understandings of “the bush” in which particular locations are seen either as empty sites on which to establish social or psychological projects, or merely as examples of more abstract realities such as “the environment”. Experiences are predominantly conceived as episodes from which insights might be quarried, or tools with which to inscribe the self, rather than as constituting relationships in which understandings are inherent.

My reading of Victorian outdoor education discourse reveals that although Victorian outdoor education has been shaped by local geography and by a tacit experiential epistemology, understandings of the curriculum significance of these factors have failed to surface in outdoor education curriculum discourse, which has been shaped by, and in turn constituted, discursive situations indifferent if not inimical to such considerations. A persistent search for universals in outdoor education discourse has drawn attention from the particulars of what are often distinctive, school-initiated programmes. This not only has left largely unexamined how distinctive outdoor education programmes have developed in particular geographic, social and cultural
contexts, but also has substantially attenuated the development of critical perspectives on outdoor education practice.

These failings have been accompanied by an uncritical acceptance of imported outdoor education theory, and point to some widespread inadequacies in outdoor education theory internationally. Although in the curriculum studies literature some attention has been paid to field trips (Nespor, 2000) and to teaching classes in outdoor spaces, there has been less attention to the question of “outdoor education” as a substantial and distinct area of curriculum. Moreover, references to curriculum theory have been difficult to find in outdoor education curriculum discourse. Attempting to bridge this gap raises questions not only about outdoor education theory but also about the nature of curriculum studies.

The bush in Australian curriculum: forgotten but not gone?

Does it matter if, and how, contemporary Australians experience the bush? Arguing for an Australian curriculum, Hannan (1989) alludes to his father’s life in the bush as emblematic of the origins of Australian democracy, but consigns such experiences to the past: “by the time I was born, my parents were living in Melbourne … Apart from train rides to Ferntree Gully, I did not know any bush, much less the bush of legend” (p. 13). The bushman14, he claims later, has vanished, with lived experience distilled into history, geography and literature classes, and the bush legend appropriated by conservative politicians. Hannan judges, no doubt astutely, that in contributing to curriculum debate, a contemporary role for bush experience need not rate a mention. However, although it is a given that a large majority of Australians live in cities, there are reasons to treat the apparent urbanization of Australian consciousness as educationally problematic.

Imperatives to improve relations between aboriginal and settler Australians provide one reason. Hannan (1989) advocates attention to aboriginal history and literature but not to the land itself, which contains the texts (Muecke, 1992) on which traditional aboriginal cultures centre. As Australians struggle to achieve reconciliation between aboriginal groups and settler Australians, it seems doubtful whether approaches to curriculum that are unable to comprehend local knowledge systems are an adequate

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14 Not to mention the bushwoman (Schaffer, 1988).
basis for understandings to develop between urban Australians and those aboriginal Australians for whom knowledge of specific “country” is profound. This is not a matter of attempting to appropriate aboriginal knowledge, but of paying attention to implicit lessons from aboriginal cultures about how to approach questions of knowledge and place.

Environmental issues provide a second reason. The colonization of Australia has been implicated in extensive, ongoing ecological disruption. Hannan’s (1989) expression, “I did not know any bush” (p. 13) is a reminder that school-based knowledge of the bush is not equivalent to personal experience. He does not pursue the point; but in what circumstances is experiential local knowledge important, and how might it be accounted for in the curriculum? Environmental issues do not boil down entirely to questions of personal or local knowledge, but at the same time abstractions and representations are always incomplete. The question is not just about knowledge, but about the experiential and narrative structures in which knowledge is comprehended; Hajer’s (1995) analysis of political discourse on issues such as acid rain has demonstrated how environmental politics can be understood in terms of contests over storylines. The imperative is to devise means to have the necessary conversations that determine if, and when, specific local knowledge and the experiences and stories in which it is embedded are important, while avoiding parochialism or mysticism.

These two imperatives locate this inquiry in the broad context of European colonization of Australia. As Carter (1988) has described it, early travellers and settlers sought holds for their imaginations on an alien and often bewildering landscape. Predominantly, colonization treated the land as an empty space on which settlers could inscribe their intentions, inevitably resulting, given profound ecological and cultural differences between Australia and Europe, in deep environmental and cultural misunderstandings. In contemporary Australia, Anzac Munnganyi, a Bilinara man from the Northern Territory, has observed “White people just came up blind, bumping into everything. And put the flag; put the flag” (Rose, 1996, p. 18). The development of universalist outdoor education can be read as the continuance of a colonizing mindset, operating not through obvious physical occupation but through seepage into everyday assumptions in what Rouse (1987) has termed, following Foucault, the capillary effects of power.
Framing outdoor education as regional curriculum

In the state of Victoria 72% of its 4,500,000 population live in Melbourne, and 80% live in either Melbourne or one of 4 regional centres. If, in some important sense, “knowing the bush” by experience is not equivalent to knowing the bush through abstractions and representations, the Victorian situation presents a striking environmental education problem: democratic responsibility for management of an extensive, vexed and complex landscape rests with a culturally diverse urban population for which experience of the bush is problematic.

Living in a city does not in itself extinguish experience of the bush; it selectively reconstructs it. In Victoria different groups – regional, ethnic, social, economic – negotiate and construct multiple realities, through travel, keeping beach houses, hobby farms and bush blocks, visits to relatives in rural areas, family traditions of camping, fishing, hunting, bushwalking, motor cycle riding, surfing and other activities. Outdoor education is located within, and intervenes in, patterns of existing relationships between communities and regions. Much of this activity is mediated by public policy (as land management, tourism policy and initiative, regional development, national park provision and management) and could be read as (de facto) curriculum.

How are worldviews shaped by existing patterns of geographical experience? How is knowledge shaped by and embedded in particular experiences? What are the gaps and silences in the content and distribution of these patterns of experience? How and why might schools take a particular responsibility for contributing to the mix? While these questions link outdoor education to broad contextual factors, such as military history, national identity, landscape, population density and population distribution, they also emphasize some irreducibly local dimensions of bush experiences. They point to the unlikelihood of determining whether or not any form of outdoor education is essential without attending to the circumstances in question. To do otherwise would be to reify the abstractions in which broad national imperatives are expressed.

15 “Tramping” in New Zealand, “hiking” in the USA, “hill walking” in the UK.
In an important sense outdoor education programmes do not take Australians to the bush; they take particular groups to specific places. Although it might be tempting to regard this as a truism, it is central to reading outdoor education as curriculum.

**A brief epistemological and ontological excursion**

Outdoor education also constructs particular experiences. Before considering the case of Victorian outdoor education in detail, it might be helpful to consider some epistemological and ontological issues that the question of bush experience as curriculum, rather than merely teaching strategy, raises.

The example compares the broad characteristics of geography field trips with recreational bushwalking. It is not my intention to imply that one side of the comparison is to be preferred, but to illustrate some of the considerations. In fact, neither a geography excursion nor recreational bushwalking as described would be regarded as typical examples of outdoor education in Victoria, and there would be resistance to considering either to be outdoor education at all.

While field trips tend to focus on single episodes of experience, to be a bushwalker suggests an on-going relationship with a region through periodic re-inhabitation. The geographer’s significant relationship is with the field of geography. Social relationships in bushwalking are linked to places; the walker accumulates social and geographical experience around which narratives and memories are constructed. Places are filled with stories of past visits, and expectations of future visits. In the same way a childhood home not only stirs memories but also contains memories, the landscape becomes meaningful partly because it contains bushwalking memories that emerge when certain sights, sounds and smells are re-encountered. For the geographer social relations during the excursion might be important, but not in the context of geographical knowledge; the epistemologically significant social relations are with academic geographers and perhaps examiners or curriculum writers.

Geographic knowledge is not personal, and knowledge is not embodied in the expectation of repeat performances, as is the case in bushwalking, but abstracted from the experience – knowledge is ultimately recorded in the classroom, the examination room or the work force. For the walker the physical and emotional
experience of the walk helps to define its meaning; for the geographer these are private and not epistemologically relevant. The bushwalker’s local knowledge – knowing where a campsite is, recognizing a particular tree that marks a waterhole, or noticing that certain flowers are out early one year – might be meaningless when the relationship with the place ceases. The relevance of experiential local knowledge to curriculum has to be considered as inherent in particular relationships; in comparison, the point of curriculum is usually to develop knowledge that will have relevance outside the (school) contexts in which it is obtained.

Perhaps the bushwalker and geographer will encounter the same fact or use the same map; there is no strict boundary between bushwalking and “geographing”. The distinctions can be overdrawn; one can be both a geographer and a bushwalker. Local experiential knowledge systems are not necessarily antithetical to abstract or disciplinary knowledge, and might overlap. In outdoor education practice the issue is how continuous dialectic tension, between abstract understandings and those inherent in on-going experience, is negotiated, and to what ends. In curriculum the issue is how patterns of “bush” experience are to be comprehended, and how the significance of particular forms and patterns of experience are to be evaluated.

**Victorian outdoor education as geographically constructed**

Victorian outdoor education has geographic origins. Melbourne, the Victorian capital, sprawls on a coastal plain. The most popular dwelling in the suburbs is a single-storey detached house on a “quarter acre” block; consequently, the city covers a large area. Rural land on the city outskirts is mostly privately owned farmland (to which there is no right of public access), or forms part of a closed catchment for the city water supply. In Australian vernacular “the bush” can mean remote rural areas, but it also refers to areas that have not been cleared of native vegetation, particularly forests and woodlands. For recreational bushwalkers the “bush” has thus centred on public land, often some hours by motor vehicle from the city, particularly the mountains and other areas seen as unsuitable for agriculture in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Hall, 1992). While some of the mountains are quite steeply dissected, they offer steep walking terrain, not mountaineering. Rivers are often unnavigable; to travel with the grain of the country for the most part is to follow the spurs, ridges and high plains, or tracks along the larger valleys. A sense of discontinuity between city
and the bush – emphasized by the need to travel through the suburbs and past the surrounding farms or water reserves – is accentuated by a discontinuity between indigenous flora and fauna in the bush, and those encountered in parks and gardens in Melbourne, which are almost entirely alien (even “native gardens” tend to mix species from widely divergent Australian ecosystems). These particular geographical features not only have influenced the forms in which outdoor education emerged in Victoria, but also have marked green politics in Victoria, local nature writing up until the 1960s, and the development of bushwalking since the 1890s.

Outdoor education influenced by UK traditions, often called “outdoor adventure education” to distinguish it from field studies (Drasdo, 1972), is structured around adventurous recreation pursuits. Although Victorian outdoor education has also been influenced by outdoor recreation, the landscape offers no mountaineering to speak of, and rock-climbing (central to outdoor education in the UK) can be considered in Victoria a separate sport on distinct crags – it is neither a necessary nor (usually) practical part of travelling in the bush. White water kayaking, also important in outdoor adventure education, is similarly a possibility but not an obvious response to the Victorian landscape, as, for example, canoe tripping is in Canada. While “outdoor adventure education” and traditions of organized summer camping (mainly from the USA and Canada) have influenced outdoor education in Victoria, it contains a distinctly Victorian tradition of bush camping and bushwalking.

“The bush” has complex resonances in Australian consciousness influenced but not wholly determined by more generalized Western understandings of nature, and more recently by contemporary environmentalism and US concepts of wilderness. These contributed to the selective appeal of outdoor education in Victoria, the forms in which it emerged, and its social distribution. It drew on and appealed to established constructs of and beliefs about the bush, but these were not ubiquitous. For example, most migrants to Australia since World War II have been from countries of high population density and have settled in the larger cities (Powell, 1988). Participation of the children of migrant families became an issue early in the development of outdoor education (Louchart, Freestone, Roberts, & Wood, 1982).

While bushwalking appealed to a relatively small proportion of the urban population (except during the hiking boom of the 1930s, Routley, 1994), the literature of
bushwalking and natural history immediately prior to and in the two decades following World War II demonstrates that urban Australian understandings of “the bush” had an experiential component, notwithstanding the literary and urban origins of the “the bush myth” in the 1890s (Davison, 1992). Early bushwalkers were mostly professional urban dwellers that maintained significant contact with the bush. While bushwalking practice was later transformed as more walkers were introduced through formal courses rather than induction into a club, bushwalking can be interpreted as a knowledge-based activity, like bird-watching, mushroom hunting (Fine, 1998) or fishing, rather than simply physical activity in pleasant scenery. Bushwalking clubs, at least to a degree, socially constructed regional geographies rendered meaningful by stories of past experiences and plans for future visits.

A review of issues of *The Melbourne Walker*, described on the title page of several issues as “Victoria’s Geographic Magazine … A Journal devoted to Walking as a Healthful and Educational Pastime” (e.g. The Melbourne Walking and Touring Club, 1961), between 1950 and the mid-1970s suggests that bushwalking was not merely an inchoate precursor of contemporary environmental consciousness (constructed around abstracted nature) or adventure travel (constructed around risk-taking). Bushwalking emerges from the pages of *The Melbourne Walker* as local and risk-averse. Threads of exploration and discovery run through many accounts, but the dominant theme is of individually and collectively building experience of the bush regions around Melbourne. Bushwalking maintained and passed on experiential knowledge through programmes of walks that formed loose patterns of repetition and geographical coverage. Narratives were woven around regional geography, local history and the social and phenomenological experience of walking.

Bushwalking provided a local template for outdoor education in Victoria. The incorporation and subsequent transformation of bushwalking in Victorian outdoor education might be read as emblematic of the struggles between local initiatives and universalist tendencies that have been evident from the outset. In Victorian outdoor education, at least until the mid-1980s, bushwalking remained the dominant activity. In 1982 60% of 2600 approved excursions for state post-primary schools used bushwalking, compared to a total of 12 rock-climbing activities (0.5%) and 59 surfing excursions (Ministry of Education, 1988, p. 3).
The contingent nature of Victorian outdoor education

Geographical aspects influenced but did not determine the shape of outdoor education – there were other influences, including some habitually cited as foundational to outdoor education internationally. Although there are evident links between Victorian outdoor education and international institutions such as Outward Bound and the scouting movement, the unusually high incidence of outdoor education in schools in Victoria owes something to public ambivalence about these and other organizations. Victorians have not delegated socialization into the outdoors entirely to organizations outside the school. Outward Bound substantially reduced operations in Victoria in the 1960s following a serious accident (Wheeler, 1991), although it continued in other states and eventually re-emerged in Victoria. Scouting has not been universally embraced; doubts about the competence of some scout leaders in the bush surfaced from time to time (Wheeler, 1991), perhaps reinforcing a more general Australian suspicion of the kind of authority and tradition perceived in scouting. In contrast to the USA and Canada, there was no significant middle-class tradition in Victoria of sending children to summer camps. In comparison to Scandinavian countries, Australia did not have compulsory military service, which in Scandinavia might have designated outdoor education as at least partly the responsibility of the military.

The extent to which outdoor education became established in Victorian schools is unusual. Outdoor education has been accredited to the final year of year of schooling since 1982. About 1700 students took outdoor education in year 11 or 12 in 1987 and by 1993 outdoor education was offered in 156 Victorian schools at year 11 and 12, and taken by over 5000 students (McArthur, 1994). While these figures represent less than 5% of students at these year-levels, many more take outdoor education in years 7 to 10. For example, in 1987 four times as many students studied outdoor education at year 10 as at year 11 (Ministry of Education, 1988). Prior to its recognition in state curricula, many schools had established programmes. In 1979 state schools owned or operated 78 campsites, although not all had resident staff or developed accommodation (Bewsher, 1981, p. 27).

Circumstances such as rural school closures contributed to this growth. Many of the camps occupied surplus rural school sites re-allocated in the early 1970s (School
Camps Branch, 1977). Most schools did not own or operate a camp, but almost 80% of secondary schools had a camping programme in 1978, and the Ministry of Education operated two fully staffed camps for year 9 students (Penhall, 1978). The impetus for camp development in the 1970s came at a time of expansive support for state schools by the federal (Labour) government (Marginson, 1993). Development of new camps tailed off as funding tightened and after the most suitable sites were taken, but in 1988 state schools still owned and operated 90 camps, many with full-time staff. By region, between 52% and 96% of state schools reported having an outdoor or camping programme (the lower figure in the western suburbs of Melbourne, with a high migrant population and economically disadvantaged) (Ministry of Education, 1988). A spot check on a single day in March 1987 revealed 163 excursions using “adventure” activities (including bushwalking and camping), involving over 2000 students (p. 4).

The growth of outdoor education programmes in the 1970s, and Department of Education sponsored curriculum projects in the early 1980s lent outdoor education in secondary schools a momentum that continued through to the 1990s, despite tighter funding and pressure on state schools to “go back to basics”. Increased retention rates in state schools assisted – outdoor education was one of a suite of Victorian Certificate of Education subjects that proved attractive to an expanded year 11 and 12 cohort.

Although few private schools offered outdoor education in years 11 and 12, outdoor education programmes for years 7 to 10 in the elite non-government schools, often compulsory, have been a mainstay of outdoor education in the state, with some programmes dating from the 1930s. Its association with elite schools elevated the status of outdoor education across the state. A relatively high proportion of students attend non-government schools in Australia, all of which receive some public funding. The elite schools offer better university entrance performance, and are seen as offering better material resources, a superior school culture, and social mobility (Marginson, 1993). A substantial outdoor education programme, or a rural campus, became almost mandatory inclusions in the list of elite private school benefits. In a joint advertising supplement in 1992, more than a third of 48 schools included their outdoor education programmes or campus when listing their key attributes in less than 100 words (The Age, 1992).
Other local factors, such as a relatively large number of young teachers employed in state schools in the 1970s, underscore the extent to which the establishment of outdoor education in Victorian schools was to some extent an accident of history as much as a product of regional geography. Significantly, outdoor education programmes were well established by the time outdoor education discourse surfaced at state, and later national, levels.

Unlike the development of fields such as geography (Goodson, 1985), Victorian outdoor education grew without a corresponding university field of study. Contributions to discourse represented an increasingly evident diversity of interests – of which education was only one – in practitioner organizations, and occurred in discursive situations with a limited appetite for academic inquiry. As outdoor education discourse increasingly reflected this diversity of interests and national orientation, universalist tendencies took root relatively uninhibited by critique, and uninformed by insights that might have emerged from a sustained academic inquiry centred on curriculum, place and experience.

**Struggles for territory in a field of practice without a field of study**

From the outset an uncritical preference for universalist accounts of outdoor education was apparent in outdoor education discourse. Universalist tendencies required only a willingness to follow the path of least resistance. Context-free accounts of outdoor education promised immediate applicability, and drew on conceptual frameworks readily to hand as globalised economic and cultural influences increased in Australia. Explanations of outdoor education in Australia as imported, or as following a maturation process that parallels, but lags, developments in the UK or the USA, became conventional wisdom. For example, Gass (1998) suggests that Australian outdoor education essentially followed “adventure programming trends in other areas of the world” (p. 14). Priest (2000) advised Australians to follow US rather than UK examples. Numerous accounts traced outdoor education to the development of Outward Bound and its originator, Kurt Hahn. Although at best partial truths, these statements were rarely challenged. Some international influences were evident in the report of the first national outdoor education conference (Anon., 1978), which contained no discussion of the Australian
or Victorian contexts as significant in themselves. Subsequent conference reports and publications of the Victorian Outdoor Education Association (VOEA) routinely mixed local and international articles without comment. Visiting experts offering activity packages became a regular feature of professional development and conferences in Victorian outdoor education. Lacking conceptual purchase on the possible curriculum significance of locality, discourse increasingly drifted away from consideration of local contexts. This transformation of outdoor education discourse was most evident in the national journal, which was dominated not by outdoor education as curriculum but outdoor education as a psychological tool (Australian Journal of Outdoor Education, 2000).

As the dominant focus of outdoor education discourse became less local, specific universalist themes emerged, often embedded in debates about qualifications. Abstractions – the outdoors, the environment, the bush, and nature – were reified. The self was seen not as multiple (e.g. parent, colleague, friend, client, patient) and always constituted in contexts (e.g. home, office, sporting club, bank, hospital) (Goffman, 1959; Kagan, 1998), but as an autonomous entity onto which meaning could be inscribed by nature or camp life, but which paradoxically could be relied on not to be reinscribed by contrary experiences, when everyday life resumed. I (Brookes, 2000a) have previously suggested that the default position for outdoor education curriculum discourse was realist and individualist:

Realism and individualism are convenient; they exempt outdoor educators from having to know much about nature (it can be perceived directly) or culture (since meaning comes from within the individual rather than from collective memory) (p. 3).

Outdoor educators were also exempted from local knowledge or experience. Accordingly, outdoor education teachers could be seen as requiring not a capacity to develop local outdoor education curriculum, but to have been trained in safety, certain outdoor pursuits and instructional techniques, and to have a repertoire of “facilitation” strategies. By the late 1990s, the staff training coordinator of Outward Bound Australia (Herbert, 1998) expressed a contested but mainstream view of outdoor education, when she insisted:
Outdoor activities themselves however, are a means to a process. This process engages participants in challenging personal and social situations, reflection, visualisation, and development of short and long term goals … Selection of staff … is based on interpersonal skills, compassion, and commitment to working with others (p. 30).

In this view it was of peripheral importance where outdoor education occurred, how those places were experienced, or by which groups or communities, provided that some logistic requirements were met, such as isolation and physical challenges. By implication, the significance of outdoor education was located not in relationships between communities and geographic regions, but in the autonomous selves of the participants.

Whereas contributions to discourse in the late 1970s predominantly focused on the particular practices of outdoor education in Victorian schools, and on sustained efforts to improve and develop outdoor education within state curriculum structures, later contributions increasingly emphasized use of the outdoors for management training, offender programmes and other areas only distantly related to education.

As the field expanded, the interests of subject teachers emerged as only one of several groups of interests represented by state and national outdoor education associations. In the early years of the VOEA (formed in December 1981, with a membership of 330 by 1984), most newsletter articles and conference papers focused on curriculum issues and teaching strategies. Early state conferences were funded by the Ministry of Education and attended mostly by teachers and curriculum specialists. Later conferences served activity leaders who worked for residential camps, organizations that provided outdoor-recreation activities to schools under contract and therapeutic programmes (for offenders, at-risk youth, drug-dependant youth), adventure travel guides, and for a time, management trainers. Corporate adventure training proliferated in Australia in the early 1990s in the wake of federal legislation mandating corporations to spend 1.5% of payroll costs on structured training. In a Melbourne newspaper supplement, Macken (1993) observed: “the Act has spawned an industry in which abseiling down a cliff is called team-building” (p. 14).
This shifting focus of professional identity further marginalized curriculum considerations. Within professional associations, diverse ideological, conceptual and cultural inheritances, geographical location, and sometimes incompatible aims and intentions were accorded less attention than the possibilities for developing a unified field around common use of outdoor recreation and camping, and standard facilitation techniques. Some who saw outdoor education not as a specialist area of curriculum but as an industry defined by outdoor activities questioned the role of teachers’ colleges. Reporting from the 6th national conference, Freakley (1990, p. 21) argued that “tertiary training in outdoor education is increasingly … irrelevant because … it persists in keeping to the traditional rôle of outdoor education in the school”. His point made pragmatic if not educational sense. Fields such as management training, substance-abuse therapy, personal or character development, youth work and school teaching suggested quite different tertiary courses and disciplinary bases, if tertiary courses were called for. While many schools, particularly in Victoria, continued to employ outdoor education staff that were graduates in outdoor education or had outdoor education as a major component of their degree, the national trend was to define outdoor education as an industry requiring vocational training.

As educational issues were displaced from the centre of outdoor education discourse, the question of an essential role for outdoor education was marginalized. Contributions to journals and newsletters routinely treated experience as decontextualized and abstracted. However, far from leaving open the curriculum contribution of outdoor education practice, struggles ostensibly over issues such as staff qualifications could predetermine how outdoor education was conceived and practiced as education.

**Risk narratives and the social construction of outdoor education curriculum**

Debates about qualifications were necessarily debates about risk and safety. Although Victorian outdoor education had mostly avoided making a fetish of risk, as is sometimes the case in adventure tourism and outdoor adventure education, safety arguments could generally be relied on to trump educational considerations. The institutionalisation of outdoor education at a state level in Victoria was initiated by
the death of a child on a bushwalk in 1972. The Ministry of Education responded by establishing a School Camps Branch (SCB), which by 1978 had eight staff. The branch conducted an extensive programme of in-service courses, developed excursion guidelines, and advised school councils on excursion applications (Penhall, 1978). In a subsequent re-organization the SCB became the Outdoor Education Section (OES). The establishment and normative influence of the SCB and OES legitimised outdoor education in state schools. Together with the Bushwalking and Mountaincraft Leadership Certificate course, to which OES staff and many school teachers both contributed and participated, the OES helped to maintain an experience-centred approach to accreditation and certification of bushwalking leaders and to keep the question of outdoor education teaching standards largely in the educational domain and centred on “the bush”. An epistemology centred on the experienced bushwalker was, at least to an extent, institutionalised in these initial responses.

As the Ministry of Education regionalized curriculum services, it appeared the baton for outdoor education training would be passed to the tertiary sector; in 1982 the Victorian Post-Secondary Education Commission approved the development of an outdoor education degree by Bendigo College of Advanced Education. When established, the course combined descriptive assessment for theory and practical subjects and other strategies to sustain an experience-based model of outdoor competence, used bushwalking as the core practical activity, and structured some core theory around curriculum considerations, rather than recreational leadership. However, the course had little influence on the field in the 1980s; very small numbers graduated and completed subsequent teacher training prior to 1990, and schools continued to draw staff from diverse sources. Meanwhile the normative influence of the OES waned until its abandonment in 1984. By 1986 conference attendance had collapsed and in-service courses offered by VOEA routinely cancelled. Graduate diplomas offered by colleges of advanced education only partially filled the gap; they were time-consuming, expensive and brought little additional recognition from the Ministry of Education to those teachers who completed them (Costermans, 1991). Subsequently, as former colleges of advanced education merged with universities as part of tertiary education reform in the 1990s, outdoor education faculty found themselves working in universities, and struggled with imperatives to reorient both their careers and the courses they taught.
Vocational-training organizations moved to occupy and reconfigure the space vacated by the former colleges, offering uniform national competency-based training for outdoor leaders, underwritten by federal funding for vocational-training initiatives. In these contexts outdoor education teachers were increasingly referred to as guides, leaders or facilitators. Students became “clients”. Outdoor education was seen as an industry that provided human capital, as embodied modular competencies (activity skills, safety skills and facilitation skills), to a range of employers of which schools were only one. Acceptance of these developments by schools and the wider community, including universities, some of which offered vocational modules within outdoor education courses, hinged on acceptance of particular risk storylines.

Risk narratives help define many outdoor recreation activities. For instance, among mushroom collectors risk is associated with accidental poisoning because of mistaken identification. The vast number of species and difficulties of identification help to maintain a network in which trust is invested in particular known individuals (Fine, 1998). In white water paddling, risk is primarily associated with misreading the river resulting in entrapment. While institutional responses to risk in paddling have tended to emphasize certification of paddling and river-reading skills, in other cases, such as Franklin River rafting, a guide is expected to have a very detailed knowledge of the particular river and the effects of different water levels (Brookes, 2001).

Risk narratives also shape how Australians understand the bush. In the Victorian bush, the climate is relatively mild, dangers posed by wild animals are slight, and dangers from terrain (falls, avalanches, dangerous torrents) are minimal or usually avoidable. The main risk is the possibility of getting lost. In 1974, prior to the formation of the SCB, 74 children were lost (temporarily) during school camps (Penhall, 1978), and reducing these numbers was a priority for the newly formed branch. The phrase “lost in the bush” captures a particularly Australian image of nature, invoking the apparent monotony of “the scrub”, and its lack of sustenance. “Lost in the bush” stories can be read as cautionary and exemplary tales through which understandings of the bush are negotiated and reproduced.

Stories of children lost in apparently endless, indifferent bush have resonated with
Australians since the early days of British occupation:

When the children failed to return Mrs Duff began to search in the scrub for them. She called and cooed [sic] but by then they had walked too far away. She hastened back to tell her husband. He saddled up and rode through the scrub calling constantly. Nothing (Blake, 1964, p. 12).

The three Duff children, lost in the west Wimmera near Mount Arapiles in Victoria in 1864, were found after nine days when an aboriginal referred to as Dicky, Dick-a-Dick, or “King Richard” joined the search and tracked them (Blake, 1964).

The very possibility of getting lost depends on an image of the bush as unfamiliar and in some sense unreadable; at the same time the role of the aboriginal guide is not entirely opposite to the role of the husband and his friends who later joined the search. The story of the Duff children retains a sense that a competent non-aboriginal bush guide is also someone who “knows the bush”; trust is embedded not in an abstract system of competence, as might have been the case a century later, but in known individuals who knew the country, albeit in a different way from the Aborigines.

At least in the early years, the bushwalker was someone who “knew the bush”. Prior to the ready availability of accurate topographic maps, bushwalking clubs offered access to the previous experience of others, in the form of written accounts of trips, contacts with local stockmen who grazed cattle in the bush under licence, sketch maps of previous trips, and above all through providing relationships with experienced and trusted individuals. New bushwalkers were not taught skills so much as inducted into a knowledge-based social network. As might be expected, with the advent of bushwalking courses came an increased emphasis on navigation as technique, rather than “knowing” particular areas of bush. Topographic map-reading and navigation became central to bushwalking instruction. Topographic maps originally developed for the military provided information that enabled the technically competent to plan a bushwalk as a strategic exercise in unknown terrain. Competence based not on familiarity with a region could thereby be substituted with its opposite; the definitive test of leadership was a navigation exercise in an unfamiliar place.
The availability of storylines in which familiarity was made redundant by technique laid down conceptual foundations on which the development of vocational-training courses seemed natural and inevitable. Competency-based training courses required the substitution of abstract for place-bound epistemologies, and of trust in systems that deliver generic professional services (such as facilitation and accurate map-reading) for trust in on-going whole-person relationships. Such changes in the nature of risk and trust were, as Giddens (1990) has pointed out, defining characteristics of modern life, and by implication part of the taken-for-granted character of urban consciousness. Acceptance of competency-based training of outdoor teachers required no stretching of the institutional imagination.

The centrality of risk narratives to outdoor education discourse and to the institutionalisation of outdoor education is common in outdoor education discourse; it is not unique to Victoria. Accidents in the outdoors periodically propel outdoor education from relative obscurity to the centre of public attention in the newspapers, electronic media and the courts. It is not a given that a professional stranger with technical competence will be a safer guide than the familiar local. However, the requirements of particular institutional settings and the dominance of particular storylines about risk might profoundly limit the terms in which outdoor education can be conceived as curriculum.

Curriculum in outdoor education discourse

Contributors to outdoor education literature who wished to develop curriculum perspectives that stayed within the conventional terms of outdoor education discourse, were inclusive of the diverse range of outdoor education practices and interests, and took account of the diverse educational backgrounds and qualifications of outdoor education teachers and instructors, faced a difficult task. Understandably in the circumstances, many resorted to mirrors or smoke.

The mirrors came in the form of demonstrations that outdoor education could reflect many of the curriculum outcomes that schools could achieve. Howell (1995), for example, provided a detailed mapping of Key Learning Areas of Victorian Curriculum Standards Frameworks onto the camping programmes offered at the
Rubicon School Camp. Much of what schools can do, camp can do, and why not? A camp could be considered a temporary boarding school. Any reasons for preferring the forms of socialization and patterns of bush experience provided by the outdoor education programme remained outside the curriculum conversation.

The smoke came in the form of over-generalization and under-specification of curriculum. Taking a recent example, Quay et al. (2000, p. 15) claim that outdoor education can “deliver outcomes in the areas of caring and community” which schooling, they assert, cannot. They attribute this capacity not just to camping, but also to a range of practices associated with outdoor education around the world, including adventure education and experiential education. Community building is a common theme in Australian outdoor education discourse, reflecting the influence of US and Canadian organized camping, in which can be seen vestiges of the utopian visions that inspired emigration to the New World. Unlike pioneering communities, however, outdoor education communities are usually temporary; there is tension between the idea of community as something to belong to and the idea of community as something from which educational benefits can be extracted. Quay et al. (2000) avoid this difficulty by reifying community, and by focusing their educational claims on the individual’s sense of community. Thus community is defined as a context-free thing, and the student is defined as autonomous. A reified view of community as free from ideological, cultural, political, religious, economic and other dimensions is almost a contradiction in terms, and leaves the troubling impression that outdoor education can be conceived in terms which leave it particularly vulnerable to capture by particular interests. Organized camps are not the sole province of outdoor education – camps and retreats are favoured by cult leaders and militia groups alike, and although it is highly unlikely that anything equivalent to these extremes would slip unnoticed into schooling through the outdoor education door, the fact that the context-free model of community is incapable of discriminating between even these two possibilities illustrates its weakness.

Martin and Thomas (2000, p. 43) suggest a framework for understanding outdoor education as “develop[ing] more intimate human-nature relationships” that they suggest can be understood, metaphorically, as interpersonal relationships. They offer this understanding as a basis on which to reconceptualize “the way in which we work in the bush with our clients … and ultimately the contribution of outdoor education
to society” (p. 39). On the premise that “Western culture does not have a history and set of words which help us understand the ways in which humans relate to non-human nature” (p. 39), they clear the way for understandings of the bush that are psychological rather than socially, culturally, geographically and historically constructed. Scholars in disciplines from literature to anthropology might want to quibble with the premise about Western culture, but read with the implicit intended audience in mind it offers the reassuring suggestion, to outdoor education practitioners of diverse backgrounds, that everyone is starting with a blank page when it comes to nature. Thus nature is reified; one place is as good as another educationally, and one part of nature equivalent to another. As in the first example, Martin and Thomas centre their educational focus on the autonomous individual. They present a context-free model of interpersonal relationships, and imply that this provides not only a conceptual basis for understanding human-nature relationships, but also a normative one for outdoor education practice. Their psychological model has two poles, with acquaintanceship on one pole, and friendship at the other, preferred pole. It is unclear either where other forms of interpersonal relationship fit the model, or where non-interpersonal relationships, such those between and with corporations or governments, fit. The model discriminates between relationships with nature that are intimate and those that are not, but is otherwise permissive with respect to where outdoor education takes place and what forms of experience it uses. The question of what knowledge might be embedded in what relationships for what reasons is avoided by construing “knowing” to be a thing in itself and a desired property of relationships with nature; the question of what kinds of interactions in or with particular regions might satisfy curriculum imperatives is avoided by construing “interaction” with nature also as a thing to be desired in itself. Likewise, the question of what specific interests or concerns curriculum should foster is avoided by construing concern (defined as attraction, commitment and caring) as an end in itself.

**Outdoor education and curriculum theory**

From a curriculum studies perspective, outdoor education appears as a confusing tangle of influences and associations, which range, at least vestigially, from evangelical Christianity through military training to communitarianism. Moreover, the Australian outdoor education literature might fail to convince anyone that there is much of curriculum significance in the mix. Considering some criticisms that have
been made of some outdoor education, silence in curriculum studies on the subject of outdoor education may be seen as appropriate or tactful.

For example, in response to the development of outdoor education at years 11 and 12 in Victoria, Craven (1990) contended that outdoor education, among other subjects, was:

devoid of serious academic content … the extraordinary subject of Outdoor Education … with its concern to ‘highlight the importance of spontaneity, innovation and inventiveness within the broad concept of adventure’… [T]he list of academically ‘Mickey Mouse’ study designs can be expanded almost indefinitely (p. 14).

Packaged outdoor education programmes derived from “character building” adventure programmes such as those offered by Outward Bound have been criticized on ideological grounds (Fullagar & Hailstone, 1996), and (in New Zealand) for needless risk-taking following participant deaths (Brett, 1994).

However, neither superficial impressions nor what might be justified criticisms of some programmes, provide sufficient grounds to dispose of outdoor education as a curriculum issue. Outdoor education discourse has failed to explore properly its curriculum potential, and perhaps failed to do justice to particular programmes, but rectifying these failings is not simply a matter of contributors to the outdoor education literature paying more attention to curriculum theory. Consideration of the possible curriculum significance of particular relationships between particular groups and particular regions of the bush entails contemplation of the nature of curriculum studies.

In the academic world rootlessness has become a virtue, according to Zencey (1998); an expectation of rootlessness is part of the taken-for-granted definition of what it means to be a successful academic, and might be taken as an ontological given in the education teachers receive. Although tendencies to define school curriculum as context-free have been contested (Simola, 1998), debate has not necessarily focused on physical location of curriculum. Attempts to locate curriculum bioregionally (Orr, 1992) are found only on the margins of curriculum studies, and are partial.
Geography classes might attend to geographical location as a curriculum study, but not to the intervention of schooling in patterns of geographic experience. There are reasons to be concerned about curriculum that is inattentive to the geographical location of curriculum practice. However, the liberatory potential of schooling arguably lies in its future-orientation and its capacity to overcome the limits of physical location. Curriculum has focused historically on the classroom (as generic learning-place), the book (as relocatable knowledge) and the timetable (as future-oriented sequence of learning). For Lundgren (1983) the eternal curriculum problem – the problem of representation – arises precisely because of the dislocation of the contexts of knowledge production from the contexts of knowledge reproduction. That is, decontextualization is an ontological given, to which schooling must respond with appropriate epistemological approaches. The word “curriculum” itself refers to the ordering of learning in time (Reid, 1994), rather than the location of learning in place.

The fact of the establishment of outdoor education in Victorian schools, if not the ways in which it has been conceived as curriculum, suggest that these ontological assumptions and epistemological consequences need not be absolutes. Outdoor education offers the possibility of transcending some limitations of schooling without abandoning some necessary foundations of curriculum. But it requires a place in curriculum discourse for patterns of geographical experience to be understood as curriculum, through the introduction of dialectic tension into what are necessary, but problematic, ontological and epistemological assumptions in curriculum studies.

**A manifesto for outdoor education curriculum?**

How are worldviews shaped by existing patterns of geographical experience? How is knowledge shaped by and embedded in particular experiences? What are the gaps and silences in the content and distribution of these patterns of experience? How and why might schools take a particular responsibility for contributing to the mix? These questions outline a framework for development of outdoor education as a curriculum study, but they also imply that outdoor education curriculum development must ultimately be local and school-based. Moreover, outdoor education curriculum requires of teachers a capacity to shape and interpret experiences in response to particular circumstances, and in accordance with a deep understanding of local
curriculum imperatives. This is a demanding requirement; it is not surprising to find it on a path largely not taken in Victorian outdoor education discourse.

The case of Victorian outdoor education shows how any such inquiry must take into account discursive situations in which adherents to particular approaches to and understandings of outdoor education are already in occupation. Outdoor education curriculum inquiry is an intervention in a contested field in which territorial struggles over qualifications, access to outdoor locations and control of school programmes, might trump curriculum considerations. Passions for particular forms of recreation, commitment to certain programmes or forms of programme, and professional and personal identities are at stake. It is clear from the literature that outdoor education adherents frequently link their practice with strongly held personal beliefs and values. Curriculum inquiry in outdoor education will not necessarily be welcomed.

How should contemporary Australians “know the bush”? How, for that matter, should contemporary Norwegians or Kosovars “know the landscape”? Such questions require regional responses that take into consideration issues such as how landscape is linked to national and local identity, militarism, regional geography and ecology, and an account of what education problems – perhaps quite local ones – seem to require particular forms of “indigenous” or local knowledge. To respond to these questions with global prescriptions for intimacy with nature or decontextualized senses of community not only is banal, but also profoundly misses the point of why particular experiences of the bush should be considered as curriculum in the first instance. If there is a single lesson from Australia’s vexed colonial history, it is surely an imperative for Australians to pay attention to where they are.

There is a further reason to develop more adequate conceptions of outdoor education curriculum. The question of how Australians should know the bush is not necessarily confined to schooling, and outdoor education curriculum inquiry might extend beyond formal education. In Australia, knowledge and worldviews mediated by tourism and recreation leave some areas and landscapes largely unknown while construing others to be destinations and venues. The forms that tourism and recreation experiences take render some dimensions of physical reality visible and meaningful, while obscuring others – the person fishing and the person canoeing see
quite different rivers. Outdoor education curriculum discourse could extend to inquiry into relations between communities and regions as shaped in the public interest by tourism policy, land and catchment management, recreation planning and other areas of public policy that all could be read as de facto curriculum. The imperatives to do so are identical to the imperatives to do so within schooling.

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2. Astride a long-dead horse. Mainstream outdoor education theory and the central curriculum problem

Abstract
In 1859 Herbert Spencer recognised that the key curriculum issue was not what to include but what to leave out. “What to leave out” marked a shift in curriculum discourse from a search for universal approaches and absolute principles towards curriculum questions understood as only resolvable relative to particular social contexts. Yet outdoor education is frequently explained and justified in universal, absolute terms that are incapable of resolving the question of outdoor education’s educational worth in any particular situation. The first part of this study outlines some necessary links between curriculum discourse and outdoor education theory. The second uses outdoor education textbooks to investigate how context-free rationales for outdoor education have been framed. It found textbooks used one or more rhetorical devices: (1) treating education as personal development, with only limited acknowledgment of the social functions and contexts of education (2) omitting the outdoors from aims and purposes, or treating the outdoors as monolithic, and (3) describing aims and purposes in broad and abstract terms. Adopting any or all of these positions drastically reduced the capacities of the proffered theories to (a) help determine if any given program was necessary or (b) help determine what programs were necessary. The article concludes that the evident flaws in textbooks indicate a more widespread failure in the outdoor education literature to comprehend curriculum questions.


**Introduction**

In what circumstances and on what grounds might outdoor education be dispensed with? Undoubtedly all kinds of educational aims and purposes might be linked plausibly to outdoor education, and some educational benefits might seem obvious. Numerous contributions to the outdoor education literature that consider processes of teaching and learning in the outdoors also consider possible aims and purposes. However, the question of whether or not outdoor experiences can or do uniquely fulfil any essential educational purpose is often treated relatively lightly. Is outdoor education the best approach to solving certain educational problems? Does it offer any exclusive educational benefits, and if so, should those benefits be preferred ahead of other possibilities? While a tendency to shy away from these more difficult questions is not ubiquitous in the outdoor education literature, I have frequently encountered it. In contrast, the question of what to leave out is central to curriculum studies, the area of educational thought concerned with the aims and purposes of education (Hamilton, 1990). In this study I explore the relationship – or lack of it, as the case might be – between outdoor education discourse and curriculum discourse, and consider what evidence there might be that outdoor education theory and research has failed to properly consider the grounds on which outdoor education could be justified educationally.

Outdoor education discourse need not necessarily be concerned with the question of indispensability, of course. It is not chiselled in granite that outdoor education must achieve unique educational benefits, although recognising outdoor education as just one of several alternatives might lend more circumspection to the promotion of outdoor education programs. Nor is it written that all outdoor education research and scholarship be concerned with the significance of the field in a wider context – outdoor education exists, and there is work to do in explaining and improving it. It is conceivable that providers and participants alike support some outdoor education programs, whose educational aims and purposes are not unique, because to do so suits their interests and inclinations – education often takes a particular form for non-educational reasons. The more grandiose the educational claims for outdoor education, the more one might suspect the real reasons for the program lie elsewhere,
but that is not to say those non-educational reasons should be summarily dismissed. Nevertheless it seems reasonable to expect that outdoor education theory be capable of helping to distinguish between circumstances in which outdoor education, in some form, is necessary, and circumstances in which outdoor education is possible but not necessary.

This study is a step towards making some stronger connections between outdoor education theory and curriculum studies. As a study of some texts – their origins, meanings, uses, and logic – I have been drawn more to humanities research traditions (history, literature, cultural studies and philosophy, respectively), than to the social science methods that are more common in the outdoor field. As befits a humanities approach, I have incorporated details of my methods into the body of the text. Much of the article is devoted to the problem of linking two largely separate discourses, and to outlining some key elements of curriculum study. In particular, I explain why curriculum practices and principles are necessarily circumstantial, and why universalist or absolutist approaches to outdoor education must be seen, from a curriculum perspective, as astride a long-dead horse. I conclude the paper with a study of several outdoor education textbooks. My interest was not in textbooks as such; rather, I used textbooks – those to hand which considered the question of aims and purposes – as a convenient way to obtain some snapshots of the means by which outdoor education theory has failed, on a basic level, to provide a framework from which outdoor education could be justified as education. Clearly the failure is substantial and extensive. How extensive remains a question for further study.

**Curriculum discourse and outdoor education discourse**

It is only necessary to skim the contemporary outdoor education literature to see that it contains multiple discourses, parallel conversations which, even on a close reading, sometimes seem to have little in common. To the extent that nearly all contributions to the literature purport to be about outdoor education, these different strands can seem at cross-purposes. Given that all of the major outdoor education scholarly journals were originally the organs of professional organizations comprised of outdoor guides, teachers, skills instructors, camp operators, corporate trainers, youth workers and others, these differences are hardly surprising, especially when the different interests of academics, researchers, practitioners and administrators are
added to the mix. Textbooks or literature reviews sometimes exaggerate the importance of outdoor education, tidy up the discourse and ignore or downplay contradictions, but this too is not surprising. Most texts impose structure on their subject matter to some extent, this article included. Moreover, professional groups with one eye on their own interests and the other on the public interest dissemble as a matter of course.

Many contributions to the outdoor education literature are plainly aimed at an audience who work within the outdoor education field. For example, Hovelynck and Peeters (2003) discuss the role of humour in “learning and facilitating”. They draw on literature from outside the outdoor education field, and present some examples of humour within outdoor therapy sessions to illustrate points drawn from the wider literature. The article makes no attempt to argue that outdoor education humour is distinctive, nor that outdoor education discourse has something new to contribute to the study of humour. The article is apparently not intended for a readership outside the outdoor education field, and assumes a readership not familiar with discourse on humour and teaching. Contributions to the outdoor education literature that, like the Hovelynck and Peeters (2003) article, assume an audience who are “in” the field, and which take the field to be defined by certain practices, are not the focus of this study, although a preponderance of such articles in any discourse would be troubling.

To consider dispensing with outdoor education is to adopt the perspective of one who has no sentimental or pragmatic attachment to any existing form of outdoor education. It is an “outside” perspective, specifically a broad educational perspective, which I explore as a way to critically read outdoor education texts. While an “outside” perspective might not be an essential within outdoor education discourse, it is, I think, essential to understanding the educational potential of outdoor education.

I began this study to investigate further my impression that what might be called “textbook” theories of outdoor education, which do consider the aims and purposes of outdoor education, have also tended to take an “insider’s” view of outdoor education. Theories I had encountered attempted to explain and in some cases rationalise outdoor education practices, but not to pursue the questions of whether existing outdoor education programs are necessary, or whether there might be better alternatives. Oversimplifying perhaps, the focus of these approaches seemed to be on
outdoor education as an established set of tools, and on finding ways to use them or justifications for their use. The proffered theory seemed steeped in the overall commitment to established outdoor education practices that defines many of the discursive situations – professional associations, courses, and conferences – from which much of the outdoor education literature emerges. Sampling some of the thousands of outdoor education programs described on the world wide web, whose language seemed to be the spawn of the textbooks I had examined, it was difficult to avoid the impression that whatever the educational problem, the solution always seemed to be some mixture or selection of ice-breaking, trust activities, ropes course, environmental awareness activities, an expedition and adventure activities.

Approaches to outdoor education that are not universal, but which begin with educational problems rather than with the programs to hand, can be found in the outdoor education literature. These are not of the mainstream and receive little attention in textbooks, although two older books Smith, Carson, Donaldson, & Masters (1963) and Parker & Meldrum (1973) (both, incidentally, titled Outdoor education) were more attentive to curriculum questions than more recent work. I have not attempted to consider the question of how extensive neglect of the “indispensability” question is. My focus was on examining some common ways in which the question is avoided, rather than establishing exactly how common any particular line of thought or rhetoric might be. Some of the textbooks I examined were decades old, but are still frequently cited, especially in literature reviews. I did not attempt to exhaustively map universalist approaches to outdoor education theory, but only to identify some repeatedly encountered features. I did not examine if and how readers have responded to various textbooks – it is possible that outdoor education practice is not much affected by textbook theories, but that is a matter for a different project. I treated the statements about the aims and purposes of outdoor education I read as if they were seriously intended to guide practice and to help decision makers choose between outdoor education and other programs, and between alternative outdoor education possibilities.

In adopting a “curriculum studies” reading of outdoor education texts, I do not mean to suggest than one need simply look to the curriculum literature to better understand the potential educational significance of outdoor experiences. On the contrary, there is room in the curriculum literature for more attention to how education is shaped by
geographical location, and how and why experiences with particular physical environments might be important (Brookes, 2002b). The curriculum literature is more extensive than the outdoor education literature, and linking it to the outdoor education literature introduces potentials for reading the curriculum literature selectively, overgeneralising or oversimplifying. Any overview of curriculum studies must be one of several alternatives, and it is not possible to turn to the curriculum literature for definitive or universal answers to curriculum dilemmas, unless one chooses to read the curriculum literature very selectively. However, some selection is unavoidable, and some kind of overview is necessary. I have relied more on monographs written as text books for post-graduate curriculum courses, than on individual papers, because while no text book is definitive, text books assume a readership unfamiliar with the curriculum literature, and present an overview that is at least widely accepted, if not universal. Texts books provide a relatively well signposted path to the curriculum literature, which is necessary, given I could find only patchy cross-referencing between outdoor education textbooks and curriculum discourse.

A curriculum perspective – curriculum as relative to time and place

The roots of curriculum study in Western Europe go back to at least the seventeenth century, which Hamilton (1990) notes might be regarded as “the golden age of curriculum” (p. 33). Scholars believed all knowledge had been mapped and the question of how to teach had been solved. Hamilton (1990) observes that belief that schooling could efficiently inculcate social discipline and intellectual deference contributed to seventeenth century theories of political absolutism. Comenius, he notes, aimed to teach all things to all men using methods that could not fail, according to divine authority. Revolutions in England, France, and America introduced more democratic and communitarian forms of politics. The industrial revolution transformed western European societies. Knowledge exploded with the emergence of science. Enlightenment traditions of critique and dissent, based on reason, empiricism, and cultural relativism challenged older sources of authority. Curriculum changed. In1859 Herbert Spencer recognised that the “question of questions” for curriculum
had become not what to include but what to leave out. It remains the case that: “it is easy to decide what might be taught; it is more difficult to decide what should be taught” (Hamilton, 1990 p. 37).

Spencer’s observation marked an end to the domination of fundamentalist or absolutist approaches to curriculum in the curriculum literature. Fundamentalist values or absolute principles are still invoked in educational debate from time to time, by religious decree, political fiat, or dogged assertion, but adherence to them is always local and circumstantial. It is this point – the point at which the answers to curriculum questions depend on who answers in what circumstances – which suggests a simple but robust indicator of outdoor education theory which is disconnected from curriculum theory.

Post-enlightenment curriculum developed in a climate of a continuous search for new knowledge, repeated attempts to develop taxonomies for knowledge that accommodated new knowledge, fragmentation in specialisations, and revisions as a consequence of the growing concept of academic freedom. Debates, that persist, emerged around the tension between the structure of knowledge, the interests of the child, and the stages of development of the child. One form of “progressive” education developed around the notion that school knowledge should be arranged according to stages of child development, while another form gave precedence to learning experiences, planned and unplanned, over any kind of pre-programmed content sequence (Hamilton, 1990).

Curriculum determined by “what to leave out” was and is, inevitably, socially relative. The choice of content and emphasis reflected, in turn, choices made about the social and cultural functions of education. Emphasis on social selection, social reform, citizenship, preparation for work, individual development, cultural reproduction, or cultural change varied not only according to differences between different societies and different historical conditions, but also were contingent on the particular processes by which such decisions were made, and even by the individuals involved. Had Margaret Thatcher not been Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, education in the UK would no doubt have had a different emphasis (Ross, 2000). Debates about education in any time and place vary according to social and economic circumstances. Such debates reflect changes in social, cultural, and
economic theory over time, in addition to the accumulation of ideas and experience in curriculum discourse itself. Education has diverse potential social functions, directed by contingent social processes (what if Margaret Thatcher had not been elected?), always determined in particular social contexts (contemporary Finland is not the same as pre-WWII USA). Curriculum theory reflects developments or shifts in social and cultural theory and research. Alongside the planned elements, curriculum in practice also contains hidden elements (Illich, 1973) that inculcate social and cultural values from the wider society.

The curriculum literature over the last three decades has not only recorded tensions between the role of education in social and cultural reproduction, and its transformative potential, but also empirical studies of the extent to which instances of curriculum practice succeeded or failed in their stated social goals (Ross, 2000). Curriculum theory, in other words, develops in response to historical contingencies, builds on accumulated experience of curriculum practices, but does not progress towards grand theories or fundamentals. If anything, it moves increasingly away from fundamentalist accounts as evidence accumulates of the extent to which curriculum questions are relative to time, place, and social circumstances. Perhaps it does not need to be said, but this move towards more careful consideration of the conditional nature of curriculum decisions is not a drift towards absolute relativism, but a move away from fundamentalist views of curriculum.

Once curriculum becomes a matter of “what to leave out”, the resolution of curriculum depends on who decides and on the circumstances in which they decide. If there are universals in educational thought (outdoor or otherwise) – derived for example from human biology or psychology - they constitute only a small contribution to the totality of educational practice, which reflects both the diversity and the changing nature of human societies and beliefs. If there are absolutes, they are confined to particular situations where alternatives have been ruled out by religious decree or some other means.
Some limitations

I have described the standpoint of this paper as “outside” the main currents of outdoor education discourse, but like outdoor education discourse its relevance is confined to particular circumstances.

The texts considered speak to audiences that are relatively well educated, and whose cultural outlooks have origins in western Europe. For the most part these texts at least imply that “the outdoors” is intended to connote something different from everyday life or normal educational settings, and requires a special effort to visit. The discussion this paper contributes to takes for granted a relatively high level of classroom education (evident, for example in the presumed literacy of the readership), and socio-economic circumstances in which it is feasible to contemplate educational choices. Outdoor education of the kind discussed here derives its meaning from life in modern industrial democracies having established mass education.

In areas of the globe where individuals struggle to obtain basic “classroom” education, or where governments or other agencies struggle to provide it, a more important question might be how to make best use of precious classroom time. There are areas in Australia and its territories where traditional indigenous culture is relatively intact; in these circumstances the provision of classroom education, and all that entails, might be considered against loss of traditional knowledge and culture. To describe traditional indigenous education in those situations as “outdoor education” would be misleading, and to introduce outdoor education of the kind implied by the texts I discuss here might be as problematic as the introduction of other forms of western education. Away from these extremes, there might be situations where there is ample opportunity for both classroom and outdoor education, in which the outdoor education option might simply be preferred, rather than essential. The “Rain or Shine” pre-schools in Sweden are an example where a choice is made for students to learn outdoors as much as possible, and indoors only when strictly necessary (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998). In these circumstances the question for teachers becomes “when is it essential to take the class indoors?”

Considering Australian outdoor education further narrows the discussion. At the time Spencer recognised that the problem for curriculum planners in Europe had become
what to leave out, each of the newly democratic colonies in Australia were struggling to provide basic elementary education, especially in rural areas. Preparatory schools were just being established to serve the relatively small middle and wealthy classes, as were universities (Sydney in 1850, Melbourne in 1851) (Barcan, 1980).

Industrialisation came late to Australia, and it tended to import skilled workers. Australia also lacked a traditional aristocracy, so demand for education beyond an elementary level was relatively small.

In the 1830s Governor Bourke of NSW had argued that the educational needs of a pioneer society were different from those of England. According to Barcan (1980) “from then on references to the special circumstances of ‘a new land’ were to be a constant theme in Australian Education” (p. 42). The division of responsibility for education between the various church denominations, the state, and individuals was a matter for more or less constant debate. Only after all four colonies became democracies by the end of the 1850s did moves for free, secular and compulsory education gain momentum. When the colony of Victoria legislated for free, compulsory and secular education in 1872 it was the first in the British Empire to do so. Contemporary outdoor education, almost always positioned as an alternative or supplement to mass education, could hardly be imagined in circumstances where as Barcan (1980) notes the state was struggling with questions of providing sufficiently qualified teachers, ensuring school attendance, deciding on how schools and the education system should be governed, the place of religion, state aid to non-government schools, and other problems.

The question of choosing between classroom based education and something resembling contemporary outdoor education could really only arise when the provision of basic classroom education was universal in the colonies. That is not to say that the tent schools on the goldfields, or the informal education received by the many children who truanted, did not sometimes involve practices with some resemblance to “outdoor education”. Perhaps they did. But the idea of outdoor experiences as part of the curriculum only emerged alongside debates about curriculum reform around 1900, and it is difficult to see how it could have come much earlier.
Textbook outdoor education theory

Outdoor education is not one set of programs and practices, as Ford (1981) clearly demonstrated, at least in the case of North America at the time she wrote. Parker & Meldrum (1973) provided a similar, more critical, discussion of diversity in the UK. McRae (1990) observed diversity in Australia, a decade later. It is clear that there is not a single outdoor education literature either. Ford (1981), for example writing in the USA, did not refer to Parker & Meldrum (1973), who wrote for a UK audience. Parker & Meldrum (1973), in turn, mentioned a major text from the USA (Smith, Carson, Donaldson, & Masters, 1963) only in a final chapter reviewing outdoor education worldwide.

These observations suggest two qualifications. First, the textbooks I examined were not written as contributions to a single discourse, although all are now available to students in the courses in which I teach. Second, in fairness to the authors, any universal language in these textbooks could be read with the intended audience in mind. While outdoor education is sometimes promoted as a kind a franchise that can be established anywhere, it seems likely that at least some authors assumed their texts would be read in fairly specific situations. To take an extreme example, “textbook” outdoor education might make little sense to Israelis or Palestinians alike on the Gaza strip, but I doubt that any of the authors expected their ideas to apply in such circumstances. Some universalist tendencies are artefacts of the reading situation (reading in Australia a textbook written forty years ago in the USA), but others are evident even when the implicit readership is taken into account.

It might be argued that given the intended audience, the general value of outdoor education is obvious. McRae (1990), for example, introduces his edited text with a few remarks about urban Australians and some generalisations about their experience of the “outdoors”. Smith et al. (1963) repeatedly made a similar point about urban Americans lacking personal experience of the outdoors. At this level, the argument might go, the onus of proof should rest on the proposition that it is defensible for Australians to grow up and complete their education without experience of non-urban environments. Accepting the latter for the sake of argument still leaves open the question of how particular educational aims and purposes might lead to particular outdoor education practices.
For example, I would expect students who attend school in Alice Springs to have significantly different prior experiences and understanding of “the outdoors” from students attending school in Sydney. Moreover to treat the “outdoors” around Alice Springs, in central Australia, as essentially the same as the “outdoors” around Sydney, hemmed by the Blue Mountains on the east coast would be to discard almost every salient feature of those environments, except some abstract ecological principals, the fact they share a continent and the social fact that both are politically part of Australia. Delving further, those who have grown up in the city of Alice Springs might be expected to have different prior outdoor experience from students who grew up on the missions in the desert. Students in Sydney whose parents regularly visited their country property and had vacations on the coast will have different understandings from those who migrated to Sydney from Asia and have never left the city. Around Bendigo, in central Victoria, one might expect to distinguish between students who live on rural farming properties and those who have recently moved to a “bush block”, and presumably neither of those groups are homogenous. Individuals who go fishing will have different understandings from those who go fox shooting, and some, no doubt, will spend little time in the outdoors. Presumably the kind of program developed for families who own properties along a particular catchment will be different from the kind of program developed for visitors to the local forests from Melbourne. Neither program might resemble the standard outdoor education offerings. General arguments in favour of some kind of outdoor education do not help decide how different kinds of programs will contribute to any of these different circumstances.

These kinds of differences are neither obscure nor trivial, which makes the question of how outdoor education textbooks have approached the question of aims and purposes without attending to circumstantial details all the more interesting. One possibility is that textbook writers have regarded the aims and purposes of outdoor education as self-evident. Smith et al (1963) cite L.B.Sharp:

That which can best be learned inside the classroom should be learned there. That which can best be learned in the out-of-doors through direct experience, dealing with native materials and life situations, should there be learned (p. 21).
as do others including (Ford, 1981), as if the quote, which to me raises a difficult question, refers to an obvious distinction. Gair (1997) makes explicit an assumption that often seems to be just beneath the surface of outdoor education discourse:

The benefits of all forms of Outdoor Education will be clearly seen by those who already participate, instruct or have experience of such activities and who will not generally need to be further convinced of the educational advantages. We must, however, convince parents and other staff how much such a programme could strengthen existing courses and relate to other subjects on the school curriculum (p. 9).

At the risk of labouring the point, from a curriculum perspective even if the benefits of “all forms” of outdoor education are obvious, before one could be in a position to advocate outdoor education as a “solution” one would have to know what educational problems were perceived by a community and what the alternatives to outdoor education (of any kind) were.

I found little direct attention to the question of whether outdoor education was indispensable. Parker and Meldrum (1973) provided one clear exception. They reviewed the stated aims of residential centres, and deftly disposed of character training, an introduction to lasting leisure time pursuits, and an experience of community living as sufficient justifications for the centres, given the costs. They continued:

The final purpose … is to offer an introduction to and appreciation of the countryside. This, we feel, could be the raison d’être of many centres … centres may need to alter their basic courses … (p. 89).

However, they did not apply the same rigour to other forms of outdoor education they reviewed.

All of the textbooks I examined discussed the history (or histories) or outdoor education, some in detail (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Ford, 1981; Gair, 1997; McRae, 1990; Parker & Meldrum, 1973; Smith, Carson, Donaldson, & Masters, 1963). The use of history in outdoor education discourse deserves a separate study,
but I will comment briefly. I did note some Whiggish historical references (it is true that outdoor education can be traced back to the Greeks, Egyptians, or early European thinkers such as Comenius, but that is true of all western education). References to ancient roots for outdoor education seem to imply that outdoor education practice represents either a return to, or the emergence of, some form of fundamental educational principle (Ford, 1981; McRae, 1990), but no authors attempted to examine the historical roots of outdoor education in any depth.

Perhaps the strongest rhetorical function of descriptive and historical passages, found in all the texts, is to tie outdoor education discourse to existing practices, rather than to a field of educational concerns from which hitherto unrealised forms of outdoor education might emerge. My reading of these sections reinforced the impression that outdoor education discourse has tended to regard educational enquiry in outdoor education as a way to find uses or justifications for established outdoor education practices, rather than as a distinctive set of educational considerations, from which practices might emerge. The authors seemed to assume that the past acceptance of outdoor education programs implied such programs were educationally sound, and not to assume education or other social constructions frequently flourish in spite of not being unambiguously sound. There were exceptions. Richards’ (1990) study of Hahnism, in Miles and Priest’s (1990) Adventure education is one. He places Hahnism in an historical and social context, and acknowledges that Hahn’s capacity to persuade, as a trained propagandist, overcame his “suspect sources and dogmatic style” (Richards, 1990, p. 68).

Three absolutist tendencies in “textbook outdoor education theory”

I read the sections of textbooks that seemed to directly address questions of aims and purposes, and looked for three possible ways in which universal aims and purposes for outdoor education could be presented:

1. Focussing exclusively on individual learning. This strategy would discount the social and cultural contexts of education, and avoid the social and cultural functions of education.

2. Leaving the outdoors out of the discussion entirely (ie as having no educational significance), or treating nature (or the outdoors) as one thing. Both strategies would diminish, if not eliminate, geographical considerations.
3. Speaking of aims and purposes in more abstract and general terms than outdoor education practices are spoken of. This strategy largely eliminates the capacity of aims and purposes to guide or determine program details.

I found all three strategies, in many cases presented in a simple, direct way. None of the texts I examined were entirely devoted to outdoor education theory or to questions of educational aims and purposes, and none of the relatively brief sections discussing aims and purposes seriously contemplated the possibility that outdoor education might be unnecessary.

**Education as personal**

Within curriculum studies education is routinely understood to have broad social functions and determinants. In Australia, education provides custody of young children and fosters individual development, but it also contributes to a democratic citizenry, passes on specific bodies of knowledge, contributes to the economy (especially through preparation for work) and provides social selection (Marginson, 1993). It is not only subject to government policy but also influenced by organized interests within the community, and by individual parents (in the case of the education of children) and students.

In everyday use the term “education” can also refer just to what an individual receives, as in “Mary was educated in Melbourne”. It is this individualistic use of the term that the outdoor education texts tended to lean towards. Some treated education as entirely a matter of individual teaching and learning; criticisms of this approach are well documented outside the outdoor education literature. Bowers (1993) provides a critique of individualism in education. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton (1986) provide a wider study of individualism in the USA. One cannot understand wars, economies, technological change, shopping, corruption, parking tickets or exams without reference to social entities and processes. Institutions and ideologies can’t be fully described in a language that can only speak of individuals, any more than humans can be properly described only in terms of cells or molecules, even if it is held that cells and molecules are all that humans are made of. Most of curriculum studies would vanish if it was not possible to speak of education at a societal level.
I found only occasional deviations from an individualistic view of education in Luckner and Nadler (1997). There is an implied social context – the photographs make clear the kinds of experiences the writers have in mind. About one third show ropes course or initiative activities, and another third show outdoor recreation activities such as rock climbing or hiking. Ten percent show some kind of nature study, with the remainder showing indoor activities or sports. It is difficult to avoid noticing that the intended audience of the book is American, educated, and in a position to regard cross-cultural issues, mentioned in one chapter, as something to be dealt with. The explicit education theory presented does not consider the social construction of education; education means individual learning. Priest (1999) proposes a narrower definition of “learning”, eliminating skills and knowledge: “a shift in the way people feel, think, or behave” (p. xiii).

To speak of individual learning does not necessarily rule out consideration of education as socially constructed, but in the aforementioned cases it tended to. Individualistic assumptions about education appeared most strongly in outdoor education associated with therapy and corporate training. The ready association of therapy, corporate training, self-improvement and formal education is a signal characteristic of some outdoor education, especially in the USA. Davis-Berman and Berman (1994) provide an account of the shared history of outdoor education and wilderness therapy. In the USA outdoor education and experiential education are to some extent interchangeable. Davis-Berman and Berman (1994) use the term experiential learning, but this does not appear to signal an intention to separate the education of individuals from a societal context. Rather, it is to emphasis a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning; explicit discussion of the societal context does not appear to be a consideration. Their descriptions of school based wilderness programs, which, “teach lessons about self-esteem, responsibility, leadership, risk-taking and respect for diversity” (p. 95), also signal an individualistic emphasis. They regard school based wilderness programs as based on the “convincing” argument that “experiential learning is superior to any other kind of learning, and that there are simply some things in this world that are better taught outside of the classroom” (p. 95). The authors don’t explain why reading is not an experience, or why wilderness trips might be necessary to learn responsibility or other traits.
Writing in the UK, Gair (1997) “aims to convince … of the tremendous value of utilizing the outdoors … for … trust, ownership, personal achievement, teamwork, leadership, determination, strategic planning and motivation” (p. ix), which he claims are needed in the workplace but not taught in the curriculum. Like other authors more oriented towards outdoor education associated with schooling, he links educational imperatives to social problems, just as the original goals of Outward Bound were linked to perceived declines in the nation’s youth (Richards, 1990). He introduces no explicit social theory, but he seems to assume that social problems are individual problems writ large, solvable by instilling in youths whatever characteristics seem to be lacking in the larger society.

Parker & Meldrum (1973) provided an approving account of Outward Bound in the UK. Like other authors they endorsed the view that specifics of the activities learned, should be submerged beneath wider aims under the broad heading of character development. Their book, however, canvasses a wide range of possible aims and programs, and links the development of particular forms of outdoor education to social and geographical factors. Their overall presentation of potential aims and purposes of outdoor education is not individualistic, although the reader is in various places invited to endorse an individualistic approach.

On a different tack, Smith et al. (1963) introduced wider society as a source of individual problems: “modern man turns to outdoor living to spend some of his newly acquired free time” (p. 3), which they argued had created psychological needs which outdoor education can fulfil. More recent texts make less confident predications about too much leisure, but the point here is not the content of the claim but the way it introduces social questions. Just as an emphasis on the psychologised, autonomous individual provides a link between outdoor education and outdoor therapy, so too it provides a link between outdoor education and outdoor recreation: “recreation and outdoor education are inseparable when the interest, appreciations, and skills acquired … find their full expression through creative living” (p. 25). Social becomes personal.

To limit the stated aims and purposes of education to those more or less under the rubric of personal development might be a good marketing strategy for outdoor education programs. But returning to the theme of this paper – can outdoor education
be dispensed with? – individualistic notions of education construe outdoor education as a unique way to achieve routine aims and purposes, dispensable almost by definition. Unless certain personal qualities can only be acquired through outdoor education, something that no author was prepared to claim, or unless for some reason outdoor education programs happen to include personal development aims that have not been included in other forms of education, outdoor education conceived in this way is not indispensable.

That in itself might be a small matter, if outdoor education programs continue regardless and nobody cares. More importantly, those who absorb the textbook message might struggle to conceive of educational aims and purposes that apply only in certain social, cultural, and geographical situations, which relate to social and environmental (not personal) aims, and which involve questions not just about the kinds of experiences needed, but how they will be distributed in the community. Education seen as purely personal, one assumes, should be spread widely and generously. But from a social, cultural and environmental perspective different individuals might need to know and experience quite different things, depending on their social roles and geographic location.

**Nature or the outdoors as either one thing, or absent**

In some textbooks, for example Luckner & Nadler (1997), outdoor settings are present in the descriptions of outdoor education, but almost absent from the discussion of aims and purposes. They include a chapter on spirituality and Mother Nature, but it is not integral to the rest of the text. The same is true of Davis-Berman & Berman (1994), who are more forthcoming on the reasons – outdoor settings have a functional role, but are not relevant to aims and purposes:

>[T]he wilderness environment is curative and healthy, especially for urban youth … meaningful behavioural and cognitive changes can occur using this environment … we seemed to ‘know’ the benefits of the wilderness in earlier decades … recent years have seen more attempts to document these philosophies (p. 63).
From the “outside” perspective I adopt here, any assumption that the purpose of research is to articulate or prove what practitioners already know is a potential source of research bias, which should lead to redoubled efforts to investigate instances where similar benefits were obtained without wilderness, and to uncover instances where wilderness failed to deliver a benefit. However, what I am concerned with here is not the soundness of the assertion, but the fact that wilderness experience is treated as one thing.

Davis-Berman & Berman (1994) acknowledge that personal benefits apparently associated with wilderness might also be associated with parks and gardens, but this leads them to expand rather than differentiate their generalisations about the therapeutic value of nature. Although the research they cite (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) discuss differences between the way individuals responded to familiar and unfamiliar area, and differences in responses between cultural groups, Davis-Berman & Berman (1994) do not introduce a differentiated view of different outdoor environments. The Kaplans (1989) spoke of their research in general terms (humans and nature), and the Bermans (1994) treat it as evidence for some strong generalisations. (Whether the Kaplans’ (1989) research, primarily investigating how individuals ranked photographs of scenery according to personal preferences, provides a sound basis for generalisations about humans and nature is another matter).

Smith et al. (1963, p. 11) had earlier claimed a generalised psychological benefit from outdoor experience, asserting that modern humans required roots in the soil for spiritual satisfaction. Other authors, as do Smith et al. (1963) elsewhere in the same text, allow for knowledge of the outdoors, but here too the outdoors is treated as monolithic. Writing in the UK, Gair (1997) also adopts a sweeping position: “environmental awareness grows through direct experience of the natural world” (p. 26). Gair’s statement is not simply the heading for a discussion aimed at elaborating what knowledge, about which environments, should be distributed in what way, but stands as his final position. Ford (1981) also treats “the environment” as monolithic in her definition of outdoor education: “education in, about and for the outdoors” (p. 12). Again, most of her discussion of aims and purposes treats the outdoors as one thing. It might be reasonable to assume that what is meant are certain preferred North American sites, but she does not introduce a discussion as to why it might be important to distinguish between those sites.
Smith et al. (1963, p. 21) do discuss conservation as an aim in relation to specific activities like hunting and angling, although here too they seem to suggest the development of generalised attitudes to conservation rather than those derived from attachments to particular places. Others authors who sought to catalogue a wider range of possible aims and purposes (Ford, 1981; McRae, 1990) also hint at the possibility of specific knowledge, while not spelling out how different environments might have different educational problems.

Parker & Meldrum (1973) clearly distinguish between the outdoors in the UK and in other parts of the world, but are less careful to distinguish between different environments within the UK. The reader looking to cherry-pick some justificatory quotes will find many references to the countryside or the environment, and the authors do not present an explicit discussion of how local geography might influence curriculum planning, but they do not, overall, treat the outdoors as “one thing”.

Lofty generalisations about nature and “the environment” might work as rationales for pre-determined outdoor activities. But from a curriculum perspectives aims and purposes that can’t distinguish one part of the Australian continent from another, let alone distinguish between the different community relationships and histories found in different regions, are badly flawed.

**Educational aims as abstract and general rationalisations**

Gair (1997) asserts that outdoor education provides a means of “personal, social and educational development” (p. 2). Later he elaborates on the aims of adventure experience as learning about the self, others, and the natural environment.

Smith et al. (1963) declare that outdoor education provides “simply a learning climate” (p. 19) that doesn’t have specific objectives. It fits goals such as self-realization, (experience in) human relationships, economic efficiency, and civic responsibility.

Ford (1981), whose approach relies heavily on earlier USA texts, states: “the purpose of outdoor education is to develop lifelong knowledge, skills, and attitudes for using,
understanding and appreciating natural resources and for developing a sense of stewardship for the land” (p. 18).

McRae (1990), citing USA sources, lists broad aims such as learning of concepts, clarification of values and attitudes, participation in whole learning processes, and use of all the senses. He also goes on to develop a comprehensive list of possible aims, although he concludes the list is incomplete. No doubt he is right about the incompleteness; there are probably very few educational aims that could not be fulfilled in the outdoors given some determination.

More clearly than other authors, McRae (1990) suggests, rather ingenuously, that readers use holistic or integrated outdoor education to cope with what might seem like a bewildering array of possibilities, many of which are surely mutually exclusive.

Miles & Priest (1990), in the introduction to Adventure education, make it clear that their use of broad, abstract aims is intended: “The defining characteristic of adventure education is that a conscious and overt goal of the adventure is to expand the self, to learn and grow and progress towards the realization of human potential. While adventure programs may teach … skills [such as] … canoeing … [that] is not the primary goal … learnings about the self and the world that come from engagement in such activities are the primary goals” (p. 1, emphasis in original).

Smith et al. (1963) include the possibility of more specific aims, although they don’t give them particular emphasis. They suggest that “local school curriculum should begin with local community problems” (p. 35), and go on to give some fairly specific examples. Elsewhere, they include learning specific skills and knowledge of professions such as forestry as possible goals. Reading subsequent textbooks suggests the pathway towards specific aims and purposes which they signposted attracted little traffic.

Anyone following Spencer’s dictum that, 

the key curriculum issue was not to decide what might be included in curriculum but, rather to decide what should be left out. It is easy to decide
what might be taught; it is more difficult to decide what should be taught
(Hamilton, 1990, p. 37, emphasis in original),

would find remarkably little guidance from the statements of aims and purposes for
outdoor education that I found in outdoor education textbooks. It is clear that outdoor
education has accumulated an array of specific practices, and has combined these
with some very general arguments in favour of some kind of outdoor education
which have gained little by being passed on from one textbook to the next. More or
less separate from the general argument in favour of some kind of outdoor
experience (urban humans are alienated from nature), potential aims and purposes
are piled up and described in the broadest terms. There is a certain ring to the
assertion that students will learn about the self, others, and environment that saying
“they will learn lots of stuff” does not have, but both statements as equally
uninformative. Those textbooks that attended most to questions of aims and purposes
concentrated on broad categories of what might be taught – Spencer’s easy part – but
failed to deal with the question of what in particular should be taught – the harder
question. There is little in textbooks to defend outdoor education theory from the
criticism that it treats educational aims and purposes as lofty rhetoric intended not to
guide practice so much as rationalise it.

Abstract aims might work as justifications for preferred forms of outdoor education
practice. Just as to describe a child playing with blocks as “practicing fine motor
skills and spatial perceptions” might be helpful in some situations, to describe the
person (playing at) rock climbing as “really learning about himself/herself and
developing positive attitudes to nature” might be useful. But it is not necessary to go
rock climbing to learn about oneself and develop a positive attitude to nature,
assuming either statement is meaningful.

Unless one is prepared to argue that there are whole classes of educational aims and
purposes that can only be achieved through outdoor education programs in all
situations, such aims provide no help in deciding why, in principle, any given
outdoor education program should not be replaced with something else. Nor do they
explain why one outdoor education program should be chosen over another.
Concluding comments

The question which we contend is of such transcendent moment, is not whether such knowledge is of worth, but what is it’s relative worth? When they have named certain advantages which a given course of study has secured them, persons are apt to assume they have justified themselves: quite forgetting that the adequateness of the advantages is the point to be judged. There is, perhaps, not a subject to which men [sic] devote attention that has not some value.


Curriculum study, since Spencer articulated the problem as “what to leave out”, turned from universal aims and purposes for education towards a diversity of possibilities, the details of which only arise and can only be determined with reference to particular social contexts. It follows that any contribution outdoor education might make can only be determined relative to particular social and cultural contexts. To the extent that “the outdoors” is relevant to the aims and purposes of outdoor education, one might add “geographic context”. Unless one invokes divine authority, or simply asserts that education must serve some absolute purpose that is beyond debate, the aims and purposes of education, and hence questions of what to include and what to leave of curriculum, only emerge from actual discussions at particular historical moments in specific material, social, and cultural circumstances.

What I have called the three absolutist tendencies overlapped somewhat, but did not necessarily appear as a set. However, any one is sufficient to severely limit the capacity of outdoor education theory to illuminate the reasons why a particular outdoor education program could be considered indispensable, or more importantly, to identify situations in which it could be argued that development of an outdoor education program was essential.

Outdoor education textbooks have attacked Spencer’s easy task vigorously. There might be textbooks, which I did not examine, that rigorously engage his more difficult task. What this study shows is that many available outdoor education textbooks clearly and prominently advocate an approach to understanding the aims

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16 Essay titled “What knowledge is of most worth” originally published in 1859
and purposes of education that fails to comprehend the nature of the curriculum problem. None of the textbooks I examined clearly pointed to an alternative theory of outdoor education in which aims and purposes can only be determined once the particular circumstances are known. One obvious implication is that any outdoor education research which derived its educational theory from the textbooks I examined might be similarly flawed.

Although a wider study of the outdoor educational literature would be helpful, I have little doubt that the inadequacies evident in textbooks would also be found elsewhere in the literature. The absolutist horse might have died 150 years ago, but outdoor education researchers seem not to have noticed. Many remain in the saddle, still hoping to be carried to a place where the educational value of outdoor education will be widely acknowledged. But the wider educational community, for the most part, knows a dead horse when it sees one.

Universalist or absolutist approaches are not helpful in Australia. If there is a lesson from Australian environmental history over the last two centuries it is surely that if there is a need for outdoor education, it can only be determined by paying careful attention to particular regions, communities, and their histories (Brookes, 2002a). In Australia at least, approaches to outdoor education theory that try to eliminate or discount differences between societies and communities, cultural differences, and geographical differences are seriously flawed.

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Part II. Epistemology of outdoor experiences

Preface to Part II

Thesis statement
The problem of determining what, if any, forms of outdoor experience should be educational priorities, and how those experiences should be distributed in communities and geographically – that is who goes where and does what – is inherently situational. The persistence of a universalist outdoor education discourse that fails to acknowledge or adequately account for social and geographic circumstances points to serious flaws in outdoor education research and theory, and impedes the development of more defensible outdoor education practices.

Part II amplifies discussion in Part I of the ontological and epistemological dimensions of outdoor experience. It rejects the extreme notions that outdoor experience provides direct access to quotidian reality unmediated by culture, and (alternatively) that outdoor experiences of certain kinds can offer a kind of transcendence that leads to foundational or essential truth or insight. It takes instead the position that experiences construct meaning and reality, from which comes a necessity for outdoor education theorizing to engage both with the details of how experiences construct relationships between knower and known, and also with the content of those relationships.

Part II supports the thesis statement by developing the premise that any debate about the educational role of particular experiences is contingent on how “outdoor experience” is understood, and on the specifics of experiences.
3. Reading between the lines. Outdoor experience as environmental “text”.

Abstract

No abstract was published with the original article. The article applied Chet Bowers’ (1993) broad critique of some cultural dimensions of major strands of educational thought to outdoor education. The article argues that outdoor experiences can be treated as performative “texts” which can be read critically in the same way written texts can. The article summarized Bowers’ (1993) critique, and uses examples to illustrate how potentially problematic cultural influences are evident in outdoor experiences.

Reading between the lines. Outdoor experience as environmental “text”.

The idea that we\textsuperscript{17} share largely unspoken habits, conventions and patterns of behaviour which are culturally specific, is, according to Bowers (1993), central to any consideration of how educators should respond to the environmental crisis. Environmental problems, he argues, cannot be solved merely by changes to personal behaviour. 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 would want.

For Bowers, current educational thought – liberal, critical, and conservative alike – offers inadequate responses to the environmental crisis. He argues that present environmental problems have their genesis in patterns of thought so habitual that environmental education itself might actually reinforce them.

If Bowers is right, then educators face a formidable task in responding credibly to the environmental crisis. Recognising one's own tacit belief structures is notoriously difficult, and demands of teachers a level of theorising many would rather avoid. However, “self-denying strategies, failure to exercise intelligence commensurate with the scope of the problem … will not displace the ecological crisis as the most pressing political and moral issue facing humankind” (Bowers, 1993, p. 32).

For those who teach in the outdoors, Bowers’ argument is doubly relevant. First, much of what he has to say about education in general applies equally to outdoor education and recreation. Second, his analysis implies new ways to understand the unique environmental education potential of activities in outdoor settings.

**Interpreting outdoor activities as performance**

The idea that outdoor activities are performances, or texts, in which we express and develop our understanding of environments, is essential to adapting Bowers’ analysis of classroom education to the outdoors.

\textsuperscript{17} I have retained the use of the word “we” because that is what appeared in the original article. I trust that readers will understand that the term was used in context to refer to an implied audience.
Settings matter in education, just as they do in fiction or drama. Behaviour or understanding of behaviour is adjusted, often unconsciously, according to where we are. Our awareness of the “rules” surfaces when a rule is breached, whereupon we interpret the incident as ignorance, rudeness, irony, rebellion, humour, or whatever. On many beaches, for example, no one will object if you remove your clothes to reveal a bathing costume; but if you do exactly the same thing in front of a classroom the reaction will be quite different. Even slight changes of clothing or demeanour might be noted as discordant in some situations. All of us are highly attuned to our cultural environment.

Ideas are embedded in design. Bendigo is a typical Australian country town in which the layout of the streets, design of buildings, location of gardens and public places, and so on, convey the priorities and values of past generations (Bolton, 1992). A visitor from another culture ought to be able to infer that automobiles and commerce are priorities because spaces for motor vehicles and shopping are evidently the prime considerations in streetscape design. Nature is valued, provided it is well behaved and ordered. Generally the streets form a grid regardless of topography and plants are grown as specimens, often in rows, usually sustained by artificial watering, fertilisation, pest-control and so on. Except for some remnant patches of vegetation, gardens do not resemble any naturally occurring ecosystem. Drainage consists of gutters, pipes, and a creek straightened and lined with bluestone and cement. Its water is nearly lifeless and is not safe to drink. Individualism is valued – most houses have a fenced yard and a definite front and back, aligned to the street rather than to the sunlight, the front being the most elaborate. At the same time, all of the houses conform to a limited set of patterns; clearly there are dominant beliefs about what activities are important and how people should interact. The architecture of a school, or the design of an advertisement (Williamson, 1984), can also betray us.

Bowers’ (1993) arguments compel us to re-consider basic assumptions shared by, and built into, the patterns and settings of everyday life. Going to another place, where the influence of the constructed world is muted (and television silenced), might provide, in a unique way, the kinds of insights he says are essential. If so, the burden of ameliorating the environmental crisis might rest disproportionately on those who teach in the outdoors.
Those who take others into the outdoors have the task of socialising participants into that environment. No participant goes innocently to the outdoors of course; even those with little prior experience will have expectations derived from television, school texts, et cetera. Outdoor leaders who perceive their task solely as guiding a rafting trip, or introducing rock climbing, will nevertheless be showing their charges how to be, or how to behave, in natural settings. What matters are the often unspoken beliefs that guide that socialisation.

**Environmentally toxic belief systems?**

According to Bowers (1993) “there is no single cause for any aspect of the ecological crisis, but there are complex and interconnected cultural patterns, beliefs, and values that collectively help to introduce perturbations into ecosystems, causing them to go into decline” (p. 19). Five themes that emerge from Bowers’ analysis of environmentally toxic beliefs seem especially pertinent to outdoor activities: the idea of progress, the ideology of individualism, excessive faith in rationalism, anthropocentricism, and a devaluing of tacit knowledge.

*Progress* is the idea that scientific or technological changes are both inevitable and lead to social improvement. The idea was first fully articulated in the late 18th century (Bury, 1987), and has subsequently soaked into the fabric of western society as a largely tacit assumption. For Bowers (1993), faith in progress has seen the expansion of human possibilities but an attendant loss of ecological possibilities.

Of course technological change often does lead to social improvement, however, the prejudice that this is necessarily so distorts our way of seeing. Apart from distracting our gaze from the costs of technological change, belief in progress pre-disposes us to discredit the value of tradition, to see time as linear, and to be blasé about non-renewable resources. Bowers (1993) argues that in ecologically sustainable cultures tradition restrains environmental degradation. Viewing time as linear denies that historical change is contingent on beliefs, preferences, specific contexts and power arrangements. We imagine a single historical path - destiny - rather than an infinity of possibilities. A commitment to linear time represses our empathy with ecological
continuities and cycles. As for “non-renewable resources” – that should be a contradiction in terms.

Progress is frequently used as a metaphor in the outdoors (“making progress”, “putting up a new rock climbing route”, “modern skiing techniques”), and is a theme of that part of the outdoor industry devoted to marketing new equipment.

*Individualism* as an ideological foundation emphasises self-realisation at the expense of understanding wider moral, historical, and cultural continuities (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1986). Bowers (1993) observes that “one consequence is that thinking of self as an autonomous individual hides the multiple dependencies upon patterns of thinking, use of technologies, and reenactment of social conventions that have been handed down from the past” (p. 26).

Language can betray hidden commitments to individualism. The assertions that a student in a debriefing session “expresses herself” (rather than re-enacts cultural patterns), or that a student on a rock-climb “self-actualises” (rather than plays a role), for example, function to reinforce the invisibility – and immunity from criticism – of the cultural component of belief and behaviour. Furthermore, “the conceptual schema … that leads to thinking of self at the same time as both self-directing and the center of an autonomous rational and moral authority, undermines the sense of being interdependent with the larger social and biotic community” (Bowers, 1993, p. 27).

This is not to say that a view of learning as self-actualisation necessarily exacerbates the environmental crisis; rather, that if entwined with other elements of an ecology of ideas, such a notion limits our ability to see that we re-enact learned patterns of behaviour every time we go to the outdoors.

*Rationalism*, the Cartesian belief that rationality can transcend culture, and that problems solving is just a matter of having the right data and techniques, also works against a full understanding of the environmental crisis:

[There is] no acknowledgment that people are essentially cultural beings, that the world is made of multiple cultures, and that culture makes the outcome of
the political process far more problematic than is recognized by people who hold a rationalistic point of view … current approaches to framing the ecological crisis are conditioning us to accept the rationalist approach to problem solving, they help to insure that the human dimensions of the crisis are never really understood at the deepest levels. The argument here is not against being rational; rather the main issue is an overly narrow view of the wellspring of human thought and behavior (Bowers, 1993, p. 15).

To the rationalist, the notions that to know a place one must live as part of a community that shares traditional knowledge of that place, that one must form an attachment to that place, and that one must demonstrate such knowledge by behaviour in particular settings, seem incomprehensible or primitive. Rationalist knowledge emphasises individual observation, detachment, and universal application. It follows that for the rationalist, truth is determined in a competitive marketplace of ideas (Bowers, 1993). Thus the knowledge of those who are not literate or not articulate (i.e. those who know “how to be” in the world rather than “how to describe” the world) is devalued.

Rationalist assumptions emerge in many forms; the debrief, icon of much outdoor education, is often based on the premise that knowledge must be made explicit to be valid. Even where forms of expression such as dance or poetry are used, the assumption might still be that humans have to “process” or “reflect on” experience to validate knowledge, and that knowledge as “being” must be translated into knowledge as “seeing”. Forms of knowledge associated with ecologically sustainable cultures – the authority of sacred texts, communal memory, and tacit ways of knowing (Bowers, 1993) – are thus de-emphasised. While we cannot simply adopt a new culture, the debrief mentality might hinder development of shared forms of understanding which emphasise interdependence, restraint, and knowledge as a way of being. Dances and stories in ecologically sustainable cultures do not represent the processing of encounters with nature by autonomous individuals; on the contrary, they re-enact tradition and reinforce its authority. The myth of the autonomous student experiencing and then processing nature leaves no room for the teacher, as authority, to question the culturally inherited responses which each student “discovers”. 
While the hallmark of the environmentally responsible outdoor recreator might be respect for wise resource management and conservation, the assumptions that nature can be corralled in reserves, managed, and controlled, or that humans can visit as non-animals who “leave no trace”, reinforce the rationalist assumptions of humans as outsiders and nature as data. Similarly, while there is an obviousness to calls for the protection of rare or endangered species, thinking in terms of species (i.e. general categories), and projecting economic values onto nature (scarcity equals value) is not necessarily ecologically sound.

Nature trails, too, might tell more about us than they do about nature. Many cater to our preference for the observer role, for knowledge that can be transformed into words by an authority, for linear sequences, and for predictability. This is not to say such trails are wrong, so much as to emphasise the difficulties faced by educators who would re-work cultural templates.

*Anthropocentrism*, the belief that “the world is to be understood and valued only from the perspective of human needs, interests, and sense of rationality” (Bowers, 1993, p. 28), allows humans to imagine they have special privileges; this belief too is implicated in environmental problems.

Anthropocentrism causes blind spots. In media reports of recent bushfires in New South Wales, commentators expressed pleasure that “few lives had been lost”, meaning, no human lives. In the outdoors, anthropocentrism surfaces in innocent-sounding phrases such as “our environmental heritage” or “our national parks”. Many guidebooks define natural areas in terms of what humans can do (describing a cliff in terms of routes, for example, or places as campsites or viewpoints), unintentionally reinforcing the view that wild places have value only if they are useful to humans. Activities designed around the themes of groups or communities (for example many outdoor therapy activities) are anthropocentric if they assume communities consist only of humans. A good deal of outdoor recreation is plainly anthropocentric, with outdoor environments viewed wholly instrumentally (Gough, 1990).

*Tacit knowledge* is knowledge derived from experience. We use tacit knowledge to ride a bicycle, recognise ourselves in the mirror, identify the taste of a banana, and to
make many of the judgments necessary to perform a scientific experiment (Mulkay, 1979; Polanyi, 1967) or lead a group in the outdoors. Tacit knowledge “is the basis of what a good cook, artist, or teacher does” (Bowers, 1993, p. 62).

Knowing how to behave in different social or physical situations draws on tacit knowledge. Outdoor experiences can impart tacit knowledge of place, including the knowledge necessary to understand an eco-centric worldview. Unlike rationalist knowledge, which is validated by universal criteria (such as measurable competencies), tacit knowledge is local knowledge. We tend to validate tacit knowledge by describing what we have done (“I have walked that area many times”), rather than what we can do.

Outdoor activities can provide experiences that allow us to interact with, and thus get to know, particular natural environments. Against this, rationalist tendencies can negate such knowing at every turn. Lesson plans, teaching methods, and guiding techniques, for example, often emphasise universal rather than local knowledge, as do student assessment requirements and teacher accreditation schemes. This emphasis prepares us to make short raids on the bush as strangers, rather than to develop a sense of place. We can see this in some of the prescriptions for remote wilderness travel. Leave no rubbish in the wilderness (leave it somewhere else); consume no firewood (bring fossil fuels from the Middle East); damage no vegetation (while consuming food produced at the expense of forests in other countries). There is a sense in all of this that we must remain the Cartesian observer, never a part of what we see. I am not saying that leaving rubbish makes us part of nature, but the traces we leave and the firewood we consume are what confronts us with our embeddedness in the world.

Perhaps the key imperative that emerges from this discussion is that what is learned in natural places ought to provide us with critical insights into everyday normality. It is how we see our lives on our return that matters most. If a stay in the wilderness can induct us into a way of life based on alternative assumptions to those which Bowers criticises (progress, rationalism, individualism, and anthropocentricism), we
might claim to have contributed to cultural change. Those we have guided should return from the outdoors with their sense of what is normal under review.

Outdoor activities will not necessarily contribute such insights, and while incorporating a wilderness ethic into practice might have short-term advantages, it certainly does not provide an adequate response to Bowers’ analysis. In trying to find new ways to imagine environmentally literate outdoor leisure or education, it might be helpful to think of outdoor experiences as performed (or oral) texts rather than written texts. Traditional (non-electronic) oral communication is non-sequential, participatory, and local; it is more closely aligned to the tacit knowledge of place we must re-discover, than to rational forms of knowledge.

The connection between the kind of knowledge stored and shared in an oral … community is an often unrecognized dimension of the ecological crisis. This is not to suggest that all oral cultures are models of good ecological citizenship … orality involves a sense of time and human relationships, as well as forms of knowledge, essential to stable communities, and that the morally and conceptually stable … human communities are more likely to exist in a sustainable balance with the environment. This recognition should not lead to eliminating literacy, but to finding a balance with oral traditions (Bowers, 1993, p. 67).

Bell (1993) has shown how dominant approaches to theorising experiential education filter out both the particulars of experience and the socially constructed nature of experience. This process of rationalisation leaves us with no way to speak of the cultural dimension of experience, nor of the embodiment of experience in particular places. For example, in observing two rock climbing sessions we might applaud both as conforming to an exemplary standard in safety, skills instruction, minimal impact technique, and group facilitation. Yet, if we were able to read the particulars of tone and emphasis, and to critique to role of cultural templates in shaping the way each activity is constructed and interpreted, we might find that each represents quite different orientations to the environmental crisis.

18 (Footnote added later) I no longer necessarily agree that it is “how we see our lives on our return that matters most”. This may be true as a response to the particular concerns Bowers raises, but it might not be sufficient rationale for an outdoor education program.
Ecologically responsive experience is negotiated with a particular place, using our bodies and all our senses, and is (necessarily) mediated by culture. We do not know in advance what nature, nor the interpretation of each participant (Gough, 1993), will contribute to the discussion. We can tell of the experience later (like a novelist), and interpret its cultural dimension (like a critic), but rational theory cannot wholly script, nor wholly explain, the experience. Rather than rely on scripts, the leader must improvise in response to each situation, guided by a critical understanding of the cultural dimensions of the ecological crisis. The following examples are intended to illustrate aspects of such a process, rather than to prescribe correct practice.

**Shaping, interpreting and critiquing outdoor activities**

The activity of orienteering (competitive cross-country navigation) might be the definitive Cartesian experience. While those from cultures predicated on a sense of place emphasise what is unique about where they live, we Cartesianists look for universals. Orienteering maps reduce places to standard - universal - sets of symbols. Topographic maps do the same, although names might be included (an anthropocentric concession). Such maps permit us to come to any place as strangers. In oral cultures, by contrast, coming to know a place is a vocation. Melanesian society is organised around the need to spend life-times building complex mental maps of island patterns, tides, currents, bird life and stars, to enable navigation over great distances on open sea (Turnbull, 1991). Australian aboriginal song-lines are a complex web of songs and stories which integrate knowledge of place with social organization (Watson & Chambers, 1989). In Apache culture, stories associated with specific sites provide moral guidance (Basso, 1989).

Grid lines and compasses permit us to go anywhere with minimal sense of place and with no necessary links to any ethos. In oral cultures the stories that tell where to go also tell how to go, how to be. In some forms of compass-based navigation, (encouraged by companies marketing protractor compasses), navigation is a geometrical exercise in which directions are calculated and followed for a paced distance. It is an activity for anywhere. The emphasis on precision, measurement, and control is amplified if checkpoints (controls) use standard markers and if the performance is timed. Competitive orienteering actually requires unfamiliarity with
place; to know the mapped area intimately would be regarded as cheating; once “used” an area is usually not re-visited by orienteers for years.

Alternatives are difficult to imagine, because a responsive activity must be guided by the particulars of time, place, and the depth of our understanding of what is at issue. Such experiences cannot be specified in advance, because the most interesting aspects depend on the unpredictability and diversity of a healthy ecosystem, and perhaps on our responses to what we learn. In a particular patch of remnant bush (forest) near Bendigo, for example, there are kangaroo paths that might be followed rather than walking on plants; the paths are neither mapped nor linear. Once a year a large family of choughs which live in the Ironbark trees raise a single chick, and for a few days the chick cannot fly and is vulnerable on the ground. That would be a time to stay away. In summer a large mob of kangaroos which inhabit the region disperse into small groups. One sometimes lies up in a patch of thick re-growth, and would be there in the heat of the day; it would be better to avoid that spot at such times. At the other end of the area a goanna resides in a hollow tree; it is active in the morning and evening; you might visit, but would not put an orienteering marker on that tree. There is a place where for a few days each year a spider orchid blooms; at those times it would be best to tread carefully there. Each of these observations depend on knowledge of particulars – they cannot form a basis for orienteering anywhere else, and they vary according to time of year, time of day, and the weather.

Perhaps a map-reading activity should be preceded by several visits with a guide who knows the proposed site. We could be carefully introduced before treating the bush as a sporting venue. Each group of navigators could sleep under tarps in the area, with an ethos of relative silence agreed, to hear and see and feel the bush come alive at dusk. Perhaps participants should make their own maps, emphasising relationships between what they encounter, rather than geometrical precision. It might be that however capable we are with map and compass, we are not really qualified to teach orienteering in a place we have no intimate knowledge of, even though we would have no technical difficulties in running “an event”.

We could envisage “courses” in which participants were guided by stories that demanded they be attentive to what lives and grows in the area. Such stories might re-create ethical links. Telling a student to go three kilometres at 40 degrees is not
the same as saying you will meet her at the place where Richard saw the brown
snake, or where Mary almost started a bushfire. These images might serve as
reminders of stories about respect for snakes and care with fire. Such examples
emphasise that what is required is not a series of techniques, nor a program, but a
sensitivity which each teacher or leader must exercise constantly. There is no easier
way.

Names and labels on a map can serve to translate strange places (and encounters)
into recognisable categories, transforming possibly unintelligible experiences to
accord with our progressive, rationalistic, individualistic tendencies. The routes,
signposts, campsites, viewpoints, names and shelter huts of popular walking trails
epitomise the paradox of individualism: we are freed by these easily understood
symbols to come and go as we please. Thus, in proportion to our release from
engagement with the land on its terms, we relinquish the opportunity to re-negotiate
the basic belief systems that shape our journey.

If our relationships to spaces tell something of our mental orientation (eco centricity
or anthropocentricity), so too does our relationship with time. In the management
plan for a coastal area in Victoria, Australia, walkers are required to book in advance
and to indicate when and where they will camp (National Parks Service, 1993).
Campsites are restricted to certain places. Like tree planting and recycling, these are
probably necessary short-term strategies. But we should not delude ourselves that
such action goes any way towards ameliorating long term environmental problems; if
anything they reinforce the cultural mindset that underlies the environmental crisis.

Ecologically responsive bushwalking might not fit the rational world of park
management. The linearity and regularity of mechanical time grates against the
complex rhythms of natural systems. If outdoor journeys are to help us rediscover a
sense of interdependence with ecosystems19, schedules must be abandoned or
modified. Daily travel ought to respond to daily cycles – the light, the temperature,
the snow-conditions, the availability of shade, the tides on the coast, or an encounter
with something interesting. Vague (or powerful) urges to satisfy a work ethic
(“getting on with the job”, “making good time”, “not wasting time”) must be

19 (Footnote added later) I would see this a possible partial aim for outdoor journeys,
rather than what they are for.
attenuated. We must say more often we do not know where we will camp, how far
we will travel and what route we will take; some of that will depend on what we
encounter. The idea of “negotiating” terrain seems appropriate here, compared with
“traversing”, “bush bashing”, “doing a trail”, “knocking off a climb”, “conquering a
summit”, or the more idiomatic “shooting a rapid”, “trashing a slope”, or “flashing a
climb”.

Responsiveness might be as simple as suspending conversation to watch while some
cockatoos fly overhead; an obvious suggestion perhaps, but the impulse of a
classroom trained teacher will often be to battle on despite the “distraction”. It is
easier to plan a “bat-moth” simulation game at a set time and place than it is to
respond at dusk when bats appear above a campsite while dinner is being served.

There are other aspects of an ecology of ideas we must learn to interpret. “Breaking
new ground” speaks of progress at the expense of environment. “Good” weather or
“poor” snow betray anthropocentricism, as do the notions of “accessing” the
outdoors and of “hostile” terrain or “difficult” water. The size of things, too, seems
to matter to many of us. The way we organise and introduce an activity tells a story
also. Emphasis on equipment and technique suggests an ethos of overcoming nature
with new tools and better ideas. Highlighting safety, while necessary, can bring with
it an image of nature as hazardous. The near hysteria of some media responses to
death in the outdoors suggests that in moving away from nature and embracing
rational progress we hoped to transcend our own biology. In teaching skiing we must
know how to respond to unplanned encounters, such as debris on the snow which
signals Gang Gangs feeding overhead, or Wombat tracks in the snow, and to
understand the difference between altering the environment to suit our intentions (ski
trails, packed slopes, snow-making) and adapting our teaching according to what we
encounter.

Difficulties await those persuaded by Bowers’ (1993) argument. The 17th and 18th
century assumptions that he questions are not only embedded in everyday life, but in
the organization of university disciplines and school syllabi, the conventions of
academic journals, and the administration of national parks. Changes might not come
easily to any of those institutions.
Neither will change come easily in the outdoors, distant as outdoor settings might be from institutions and daily routines. While the kinds of analysis outlined above are highly developed in some fields (cultural studies, literary criticism, and social studies of science, for example), it is possible to train as a teacher, guide, park manager or interpreter without ever encountering such approaches.

However, well-crafted outdoor experiences can help participants both to understand that they have an inherited worldview, and to know something of alternatives. Because the assumptions Bowers (1993) criticises (progress, individualism, rationalism and anthropocentricism) come to us from how and where we live rather than in the form of specific lessons, it is fitting that they be challenged by living differently, in a different setting, for a time. Whatever the difficulties, those involved in outdoor education, outdoor leisure, ecotourism and park interpretation must acknowledge and respond to the cultural dimension of the ecological crisis.
Gilbert White never came this far south: naturalist knowledge and the limits of universalist environmental education.

Abstract.

“Naturalist” is a complex category, which contains opposites. When understood a certain way, “naturalist” knowledge can be readily universalised into environmental education, and abstracted into formal education. But “naturalist” knowledge can also be construed as an antidote to tendencies to overgeneralise outdoor environmental education. In the reading of what it means to be a naturalist that I present here, I use the work of 18th century British naturalist Gilbert White to explore the idea of a life interwoven with the natural history of a particular place, and some implications for environmental education in Australia. I draw attention to some shortcomings of approaches to environmental education that universalise ideas developed in particular North American or European environments.

Gilbert White never came this far south: naturalist knowledge and the limits of universalist environmental education.

It is, I find, in zoology as it is in botany: all nature is so full, that that district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined.

- Gilbert White (1993 orig. 1789), letter to Pennant, October 8, 1768, in The Natural History and Antiquities of Selbourne, p. 51

In 1789 Gilbert White published The Natural History and Antiquities of Selbourne (hereafter Selbourne). White was almost 70 at the time, and Selbourne was the culmination of 20 years work. Described by the editor of my Oxford edition as artless, and by its author as parochial (not a disparaging term at the time), Selbourne was published initially by White’s relatives. Selbourne nevertheless became, according to Allen (1976), the only literary classic in the field of natural history. It has appeared subsequently in over 200 editions. It is not only “the most published scientific text”, but also, according to Foster (1993) “a literary classic rivalled only by works such as the Bible, Shakespeare’s plays, and Bunyan’s Pilgrim's Progress” (p. xxviii). Charles Darwin was influenced by Selbourne (Allen, 1976; Stewart, 1995); it was one of Thoreau’s favourite books (Stewart, 1995) and it is credited by Worster (1977) with the rise of the nature essay in the latter half of the 19th century in the US. Selbourne takes the form of a series of letters, whose contents might at first seem unstructured, and to lack a consistent literary style. Both of these impressions only add to the enigma of Selbourne’s enduring appeal, and not surprisingly Selbourne has attracted considerable scholarly attention. My intention here is to use Selbourne as a focal point for some questions about the role, or roles, of natural history knowledge in contemporary environmental education, especially in the region of Australia where I live and work. Selbourne’s enduring appeal is probably sufficient reason for this, but Selbourne’s location in time and place, and its distinctive qualities, particularly recommend it.

White’s epistemology: a path not taken?

If it is imagined that the reader has been invited to stay in White’s cottage, joining him on some rambles in the nearby countryside and sharing evening

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20 Actually late 1788; by convention the book was dated the next year (White, 1993 orig. 1789).
discussions about whether swallows hibernate or the structure of a fern-owl’s claw, the aptness of White’s approach to writing *Selbourne* is evident. Read in this way, *Selbourne* is infused with the tone and texture of experiences guided by curiosity, melded with careful observation, and premised on the expectation of a lifetime in the one area. White is a careful and systematic observer; but *Selbourne* retains the qualities of contingency and immediacy that attend observant walking. A walker’s thoughts and mental associations while walking are not neatly assembled like the topics of a syllabus, different plants are not encountered in textbook order, and creatures do not appear according to taxonomic rank. Nevertheless, White’s rambles were not disorderly, but were guided by interests and intentions. He made particular enquiries, he sought specific things, and he linked his observations with contemporary scientific debate, the works of previous authors, and his knowledge of natural history in other places. His writing unostentatiously evidences his classical education. What he did not do is take any of these as guiding his literary structure\(^{21}\). He instead retained a sense of how his local area would appear were he to unhurriedly guide you through it.

Generations of nature essayists have eclipsed White in literary refinement. Makers of nature documentaries have succeeded in creating realities, that as Siebert (1993) observes far exceed quotidian nature’s ability to entertain, in which time and space are stretched, compressed, edited and re-arranged, according to the grammar of television narrative. In televised nature, cultural tendencies to equate truthful representation with perspective drawing (Evernden, 1992) and photographic realism are taken far beyond the limits of ordinary human vision. “Nature” connotes nature *writing* and nature *documentaries*. I doubt that White’s intention was to spawn a literary genre, but to invite others to study the world around him with the same patience, interest, and empathy he did.

I suspect part of the appeal of the term “naturalist” is that it has so many connotations and invokes so many exemplary figures: Charles Darwin, Henry David Thoreau, Rachel Carson, Alexander von Humbolt, the bird expert in

\(^{21}\) Although some editors in attempting to improve his work have done so (Foster, 1993).
the local outdoor club, the primary school teacher who introduced you to caterpillars. However this polysemy, which gives the term such rich associations, might also impair discussion of the place of natural history knowledge in environmental education (see for example Van Matre, 1994). “Naturalist” contains opposites (see Mabey, 1995) and my choice of Selbourne is partly a semantic device to help avoid the mire of contradictory meanings. It is not my contention that Selbourne is an archetype for the place of natural history in environmental education, and neither do I wish to treat Selbourne (the place) as an ideal type. However, Selbourne’s ontological basis – a life in a place – and the way its epistemology blends broad intellectual interests around rambles in the countryside, reward careful consideration.

Selbourne offers an epistemology centred on a lifetime relationship with a relatively small area. Written in a particular part of England when Britain was near the height of its colonial power, and at a time when institutionalised, professional natural history was in its infancy, it also offers a truly antipodean perspective on natural history when read in Central Victoria, Australia, at the beginning of the 21st century. Selbourne is an often-cited point of departure for historical accounts of modern environmentalism (for example Worster, 1994), including the rise of American-centred views of nature (for example Nash, 1982; Nash, 1990; Shore, 1994; and Stewart, 1995)2. It appeared one year after the first British convict colony was established in Australia at Sydney Cove and five years after the loss of Britain’s American colonies. Although naturalists were active in Australia from the beginning of European settlement, for the first hundred years of settlement their role was mainly confined to contributing specimens to collections housed in Europe. Local field naturalist clubs were not established until the 1880s (Bolton, 1992). In a reversal of the order of events in Britain and the USA, the institutionalisation of natural sciences in Australia, from around the middle of the 19th century (Moyal, 1976), preceded any significant development of local, amateur natural history by decades.

22 Also see Grove (1995).
Environmentalism, the natural sciences, and environmental education in Australia did not gradually arise from collective experience of the land, as was the case in Britain and America; collective experience of the land for most non-indigenous Australians was and remains limited. When a student of environmental education in Australia reads in Orr (1992): “we can begin to reinhabit our places” (p. 131), “we” might be centred on the USA, but taken as Australian. US-centric views are so familiar as to pass unnoticed, rendering “we” universal and placeless. For Orr, “reinhabitation” refers to pastoral or Arcadian ideals articulated by Thoreau, which have some links to the past. But in Australia there was no Arcadian period, and questions arise around the appropriateness of importing environmental education from one part of the world to another without sufficient local knowledge, and without sufficient attention to biogeographical, historical and cultural differences.

Approaches to environmental education and “place” derived from experience of Australian environments could be quite different from those derived from North America or elsewhere. To what extent is it justifiable to conduct or plan environmental education in any region of Australia without first getting to know the region and its communities? (A reading of Selbourne might suggest that a lifetime’s careful observation barely qualifies one to provide some modest instruction). I am mindful here of some counsel I recalled when my wife and I came to build our house. The advice, published in a newspaper by a nature columnist who had retired to the country, was than one should spend several seasons observing the land before deciding where to build. Whatever the prospective builder might know about ecological principles, species lists for an area, environmental design, and so on, there remain details which can only come from familiarity. Where do the kangaroos come down to feed? Where are the orchid patches? Do they flower every year? Where does the water lie after a spring downpour? This turned out to be good advice for my family so far as house-building goes. It is also advice that might be offered to anyone who would build environmental education curriculum in Australia: first know your place.

If Selbourne exemplifies a once busy path now somewhat overgrown in Britain and North America, it points to a way largely untrodden in Australia.
Australians were not in a position to be influenced to any extent by *Selbourne* in the 19th century. While Thoreau was laying the foundations for American environmentalism in Concord, and the Victorian craze for natural history was flourishing in Britain, the first European settlers were entering Central Victoria seeking grazing land, shortly followed by greater numbers in gold rushes of the 1850s. White’s influence could be said to have emerged later, indirectly, through developments in natural history and environmental education. In the 20th century British and American influences in Australia have plainly shaped school nature study (especially until the 1970s), and school environmental education. The same can be said for the overall conceptual landscape from which these emerged, particularly the contributions of field naturalist clubs (from the late 1800s), nature writing, and conservation movements. Approaches to forestry and national park management, and of course the natural sciences, are broadly indebted to Anglo-American influences. Gilbert White did “come to Australia” via these routes and through the influence of writers such as Orr (1992) and Livingston (1994), who have developed the theme of “place” and personal experience in environmental education. But the fact remains that collective experiences sedimented in these influences are largely non-Australian.

White intended his project to generalize only in the sense that he considered every district would reward the same attention that he paid to Selbourne. *Selbourne*’s apparent artlessness is partly due to White’s disinclination to derive abstract conclusions which could be dis-embedded from Selbourne and re-imbedded in, say, Central Victoria; that is a more modern inclination (Giddens, 1990). But almost from the time of British colonisation what most Australians have not done is live and observe as White did. It is not too late to do so, but it is not easy to envisage how White’s particular approach to natural history could be incorporated into school or community environmental education. It is perhaps harder to contemplate the proposition that local knowledge is a pre-condition for developing environmental education curriculum in a particular region.

*Selbourne* was the culmination of a lifetime’s observation – White granted a primacy to experience and observation, and took local knowledge to be
intrinsically worthwhile. Moreover, White did not experience Selbourne alone. Just beneath the surface of Selbourne generations of herbalists, poachers, farmers and kitchen gardeners inhabit the world from which White’s understandings emerge. White was an outstanding figure, but interest in natural history was widespread in Britain, including among the lower classes (Secord, 1996; Thomas, 1984). Natural history knowledge is not just the accumulation of facts, but also the layering of stories in which personal experience, social interactions, and locality together give both order and meaning to nature. One pedagogical implication is that natural history education should be considered as constructing relationships. Moreover, the local knowledge required for environmental education planning must include knowledge of local patterns of community relationships with nature.

**Australian environments**

It might be helpful here to offer some points that illustrate the distinctiveness of the problem of environmental education in Australia. Bolton (1992, p. 23) observes “[s]eldom were so few people in possession of such power to shape the environment of so much of the earth’s surface”; moreover, in comparison to other nations, “Australians have yet had less collective opportunity of getting to know their environment and learning how to come to terms with it” (p. 23). Paradoxically in a large land (8000 square km) with a small population (20 million) almost since the time of first settlement, most Australians lived in cities. However British occupancy of the continent (apart from arid areas) was rapid. In 1815 most settlement was within 100 kilometres of Sydney; within 50 years all of the land in eastern Australia that would be taken up for economic use had been (Bolton, 1992, p. 22). This period of rapid occupation has been characterised as a search to find an imaginative hold on country conceived as an empty page (Carter, 1988). The need to occupy the country, legally, effectively and morally (Day, 1997) (and it should be added conceptually) has remained a national obsession. European colonisation of Australia has from the outset been characterised by struggles to reconcile European categories and concepts with a landscape where experience confused even the most general metaphors, such as “tree” or “river”. Trees shed bark and limbs and refused to offer shade. Rivers failed to
converge to the sea, and instead dispersed seasonal floodwaters across desert plains. Seasons failed to behave seasonally and pastures failed to sustain stock after one or two seasons – many native plants did not survive sheep grazing, and did not return even when a pasture was spelled (Bolton, 1992). (In northern latitudes ecosystems in areas covered by ice in the last ice age are characterised by relatively few species which share robust, invasive habits). Many Australian ecosystems reflect a very long evolutionary history and high levels of specialisation and diversity. The colonisation of Australia has proceeded “influenced neither by the ideals of aristocratic taste nor by the sense of familiarity and appreciation which comes from generations of experience” (Bolton, 1992, p. 23).23

The biogeographical reasons why European colonists encountered such differences are well known. One hundred million years ago, Australia, together with Antarctica, Africa, South America and India was part of the southern super-continent Gondwanaland. Around 45 million years ago, when mammals and flowering plants were beginning to evolve, Australia split away and began drifting to its present position (Smith, 1986). Settlers in Australia thus encountered very different evolutionary branches from those encountered in either Europe or the New World, and considerable diversity (Table 1). The history of early settlement is in part a story of struggles to come to terms with the incomprehensible nature of nature in Australia (Martin, 1993), often (but not always) through attempts to conceive of the land in imported terms, not to mention attempting to improve its conformity with European expectations and aesthetics (Bolton, 1992). Attitudes to hunting wildlife, for example, developed as a reaction to the restrictions of British game laws. Often Australia was found wanting in comparison to imported norms and expectations. Flannery (1994) recalls, as I do, acquiring in primary school the distinct sense that “nature” in Australia was somehow inferior to “nature” in Britain or the United States. It remains common for contemporary, successful indigenous species to be referred to as “primitive”.

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23 This is not to suggest that there was universal indifference to the Australian landscape. On the contrary, some conservation impulses were evident from the beginning of colonisation (Bonyhady, 2000), but these tended to derive from epistemologically narrow roots – aesthetic appreciation for the landscape or utilitarian concerns to preserve resources.
or for soils that support a rich and diverse indigenous flora to be described as “infertile”. Normal climatic variation – Australia is a land of “drought and flooding rains” – is treated as anomalous. The introduction of European farming practices, and non-indigenous species caused profound ecological disruption, the impacts of which continue to reverberate. Cattle and sheep, for example, compacted soil (Australia has no native hoofed animals), eliminated certain plants, and spread weeds (Bolton, 1992; Low, 1999). Rabbits when introduced multiplied in extraordinary numbers to devastating effect on native vegetation. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water</strong></td>
<td>Most freshwater of any country</td>
<td>Driest continent - half the continent has water courses which are seasonal, mostly dry, and do not reach the sea. 70% receives less than 500 mm per year. 30% less than 200 mm year. Rainfall is highly variable from year to year. Large areas have fewer than 25 days of rain annually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of flowering plants species (endemic %)</strong></td>
<td>3000 (3 %)</td>
<td>20 000 (85%)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>76 known extinctions</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1000 vulnerable or endangered</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Number of mammals (endemic %)</strong></td>
<td>194 (approx 1 or 2 species)</td>
<td>268 (84%)</td>
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<td>19 known extinctions</td>
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<td>43 endangered or vulnerable</td>
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<td>25 introduced since white colonization</td>
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<td><strong>Birds (endemic %)</strong></td>
<td>426 (?)</td>
<td>777 (45 %)</td>
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<td>20 known extinctions</td>
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<td>50 endangered or vulnerable</td>
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<td>32 introduced</td>
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<td><strong>Amphibians and reptiles (endemic %)</strong></td>
<td>84 (?)</td>
<td>973 including 770 reptiles (approx 90%)</td>
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<td>3 known extinctions</td>
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<td>80 endangered or vulnerable</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Forest cover</strong></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>5% (10% at time of white settlement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topography</strong></td>
<td>varied</td>
<td>Mostly relatively flat</td>
</tr>
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Table 1. Some comparisons between Canada (10 million km$^2$) and Australia (7.7 million km$^2$) Sources: (Government of Canada, 1996; McLennan, 1998)

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24 Interpreting the impact of introduced species on Australian ecosystems is confounded by persistent beliefs that Australian species are inferior (Flannery, 1994), and mistaken notions of evolution in terms of competition between species, rather than optimisation of ecosystems, and evolution as either a ladder of progress or cone of increasing diversity (rather than a branching tree). On the latter point see Gould (1991).
This is a short version of a very long story. However, adding more detail would simply reinforce the point that many aspects of Australian environmental experience are distinctive, and demand equally distinctive educational responses.

The problem of generalising about local knowledge

The colonisation of Australia coincided with changing realities and knowledge regimes throughout those regions of the world in which western European cultural influences prevailed. The power of organised science largely overwhelmed the importance of local, personal knowledge, while at the same time industrialisation and urbanisation transformed everyday experience. Literally and conceptually nature became more distant. The implications of these shifts are an important theme in contemporary environmental literature (see, for example Evernden, 1992; McKibben, 1990), and significant contributors to the environmental education literature, albeit not necessarily of the mainstream, have grappled with the educational consequences of these epistemological shifts (see, for example Bowers, 1993; Livingston, 1994; and Nabhan & Antoine, 1993).

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this work. But what my reading of Selbourne suggests, and what the sketch above of the particularity of Australian environmental history implies, is that not only are understandings derived in Anglo-American cultural, historical, and physical environments an incomplete basis on which to develop environmental education in Australia; in some circumstances they might be as unsuited to the Australian environment as are some imported farming practices. Undoubtedly much that is true of environmental education elsewhere will be true in Australia, but the only way to be certain of that is to attend to local circumstances.

I will use Orr’s (1992) essay Place and pedagogy to illustrate this point, not because Orr demonstrates a lack of awareness of some of the issues discussed here, but because the opposite is true, so underlining how difficult it might be to incorporate something like White’s approach to knowledge in Australian education. Beginning his essay with Thoreau, Orr remarks: “Ultimately,
Thoreau’s subject matter was Thoreau: his goal, wholeness; his tool, Walden Pond; and his methodology, simplification” (Orr, 1992, p. 125). Later, he suggests four reasons for incorporating “place” into teaching. He contends that experience combined with intellect educates the whole person; that knowledge of place is general, compared to the specialisation of disciplinary knowledge; that the experience of place allows students to apply (rather than simply comprehend) knowledge; and that learning to dwell is the heart of American community and democracy and psychological health. Later, he characterises the approach he is advocating as reinhabitation (Orr, 1992, p. 131).

Through Orr, Walden Pond becomes not so much a place as a prototype for “place”. Orr suggests that “dwelling” in a place heals the individual and provides self-knowledge (perhaps of a transcendental or spiritual kind). Individualism is a distinctively American characteristic (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1986), and is, according to Bowers (1993), one aspect of a western mindset implicated in environmental problems. Whereas White envisaged every district in Britain being accorded the same attention that he had to Selbourne, for Orr “place” becomes (paradoxically) generic and knowing the place becomes knowing the self. It is true that abstraction is to some extent an inevitable consequence of writing about place. Nevertheless Orr introduces considerable permissiveness in terms of which groups should know what about which places. It might be important, for example, that communities in areas where there are small patches of remnant native grassland learn to recognise and appreciate such areas. There is no reason to suppose this particular knowledge, linked in an important way to ameliorating the effects of past inattention to indigenous flora, will necessarily come simply from individuals developing “a” sense of place. Indeed, many Australians do attempt to reinhabit place by attempting to reconstruct European landscapes in rural Australia or in their backyards; a short walk around the rural city of Bendigo, near which I live, will convince any visitor of the truth of this.
Orr’s position is not strictly individualistic, since he also links “place” and an ideal democratic community. Considered in other parts of the globe, returning to place-bound roots does not obviously lead to democracy and Arcadia. How do migrants or refugees in any country rehabit? How should reinhabitation be interpreted in Germany, where blood-on-the-soil nationalism is so closely implicated in “place” and the roots of Nazism (Schama, 1995)? What does reinhabitation mean in Britain if one moves up or down the social scale from Gilbert White, or to Scotland or Northern Ireland? Considered in other contexts – the Balkans, the Middle East, or Australia (at least from environmental or indigenous perspectives) – the association between the past, place, and political ideals is by no means benign. Arguably in Australia the past is mostly occupied by the roots of contemporary environmental problems; there might be little to be gained by returning there.

I will make one more point. Orr offers an epistemological distinction between outdoor experiences and school knowledge. He suggests a dichotomy between fragmented, specialised, discipline-based knowledge, and natural history experiences that embody wholeness and generality. But all knowledge is selective and partial, including experiential knowledge of local natural history. Had Gilbert White different interests, had he taken different paths, on different days, *Selbourne* would have been a different book. At any given time – for example when he stopped to consider gossamer in a field – he might instead have chosen to attend to the sounds of crickets; or to investigate the roots of a plant, or to closely watch beetles on a leaf. An interest in mushrooms (Fine, 1998) constructs a different world from an interest in birds (Jardine, 1998). Local knowledge is not monolithic. Nor is it finite. As White (1993 orig. 1789) has famously put it (*letter to Pennant, October 8, 1768*): “It is, I find, in zoology as it is in botany: all nature is so full, that that district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined” (p. 51). The educational necessity is to choose how and why to shape naturalist experiences. It is also a reminder that there is no final point at which an

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25 cf Putnam’s (2000) detailed discussion of community as an urban and suburban phenomenon in 20th century America. Putnam can be read as making the case that rural life is neither necessary nor sufficient for the development and maintenance of social capital.
educator knows “enough” about the local environment to be certain how to proceed.

Naturalist study of the *Selbourne* kind must balance planning with responsiveness. Each experiential moment offers innumerable choices as to what to attend to and what to do next. Even a simple walk in the forest might be a mixture of intentions and responses. Nevertheless there are choices to be made, and those choices matter. To see the effect of sheep grazing on native herbs, one must learn to recognise certain herbs and grasses. Moreover, understanding the significance of that loss of vegetation might depend on observations (or other knowledge) to do with the effects on water tables and dry land salinity of changed vegetation structure. Alternatively, the wildflowers on a certain hill might be meaningful to an individual in a quite different way, as: “the patch of orchids where we sat that time the storm came in”. Clearly guiding such experiences educationally cannot be easy; nor will it be obvious in what direction they should be guided.

**Finding new paths for environmental education in Australia**

In Australia, history provides some guidance. Australians might not have learned how to live with the land, but know quite a lot about how not to. Australian environment history has been marked by failures to understand particular environments, often with ecologically cataclysmic results, but also by countless small acts of inattention, indifference, and ignorance. Environmental history provides one possible starting point for educators intent on “knowing their place” before presuming to teach or plan environmental curriculum (see Brookes (2002b) for a further discussion of the question of placelessness in curriculum).

1. Concentrate particularly on learning to read the story of environmental changes that have followed European colonisation. For example, it is difficult to emphasise enough how important the

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26 This does not refer to indigenous Australians, of course. I have not considered the question of indigenous knowledge here because of its complexity. There are no easy answers there.
categories “indigenous” and “exotic” are to making sense of nature in Australia.

2. Attend carefully to how taken-for granted imported cultural influences (including technologies) shape interests and form habits. For example, the concept of wilderness can make a virtue of disconnection (Brookes, 2001). Important ways of knowing such as hunting have developed around distinctively Australian attitudes to wildlife.

3. Attend carefully to how spatial history has distributed interests and knowledge. For example, the communal knowledge of place or natural history that has developed in Australia has been influenced by a distinction between public and private land, and by issues of transport and distance. Areas such as ski resorts concentrate interest and shape ways of seeing (Brookes, 1998).

How might the above three points apply in particular circumstances?

1. In the area where I live, former gold seeking and clearing for pasture has left patches of forest along the ridge tops. These forest remnants have been cut several times, and the trees are often coppiced and small. Tree hollows, which are critical for many of the small mammals and some birds, are scarce. Most of the arboreal mammals are nocturnal, and rarely seen. For most of the local community they don’t exist. I have attempted to develop a curriculum around learning to “see” the tree hollows and their occupants.

2. Because the forest fragments don’t fit a common aesthetic preference for large tracts of wild country, preferably with water, walking routes, views and other features, they have not attracted the attention of the urban-based bushwalkers, who, as a group, have been important in shaping nature conservation in Victoria. Moreover the trees seem scrappy and damaged, the vegetation dry and indistinguishable. I have tried to devise experiences that weave knowledge of the hollow trees and small mammals into stories that constitute a relationship with the forest. This is not
particularly difficult: finding the trees with signs of occupation, waiting silently in the dark for sugar gliders or tuans to emerge, and joining a project to collectively accrue the stories of many of the trees over time introduces some of the elements of natural history Selbourne demonstrates. These elements include shaping interests, a growing capacity to make distinctions, not only between species, but also between individual trees. They include constructing stories which link knowledge of wildlife with personal experience and attach memories to certain places (“the tree where we saw the seven sugar gliders and spilled the coffee”). They include treating experiences not as episodes, but as part of a relationship, in which knowledge of a place contains memories (“I haven’t notice a geebung growing in this area before”) and includes expectations of future visits (“will the tuan still be there?). Eschewing spotlighting as a “survey” technique, and instead adopting a more compliant approach (to borrow Livingston's 1981 term) in which wildlife is encountered more on their own terms is a reminder that technologies are cultural, and are not neutral.

3. It is important to consider how the forest would benefit from the education of particular groups. I teach future guides and educators. They will introduce “their” trees to a new cohort of students, but will eventually move on. Perhaps it would be best to focus on the families who live adjacent to forest areas, or perhaps the parents of young children. I suspect that the focus should be on local people, but I doubt it should be on school environmental education. Such details of how and why to intervene in the relationships between a community and its place can’t be deduced from generalisations about humans alienated from nature, or trusted to emerge from environmental education templates designed to be implemented without substantial local knowledge. Not only do regional, national, or global environmental influences emerge distinctively in particular locations, but there are also local issues that might not register at regional, national or global levels.
Is there an easier way?

To suggest that environmental educators should settle in an area (perhaps for years), before teaching, is inconvenient. To discuss whether or not schools are the best place for learning natural history might seem futile for those whose work is confined to schools. And there are other problems to which my reading of White seems to have led me. I will mention two.

First, the question of how a rural population, such as the inhabitants of Greater Bendigo, or Selbourne, should know and experience their region is not the typical Australian environmental education problem. The overall Australian problem is more difficult. Most of the small population live in a handful of large cities (of several millions) on the coast. In contemporary Australia 85% of the population of 18.3 million live in cities, 60% in just 5 capital cities. Moreover, over 4 million of the population were not born in Australia; most immigrants come to capital cities (Day, 1997; Forster, 1995). The country is vast, and even making coarse distinctions, contains many different kinds of ecosystems. There are profound discrepancies between the spatial distributions of environmental issues, and of political and economic power – large, concentrated populations influence large, ecologically diverse regions. Personal knowledge and experience of “place” for urban dwellers is by no means confined to cities (most people spend time away from cities), but its distribution is complex, largely unmapped, and shaped by influences such as the formation of national parks, the attraction of the coast, recreational preferences, distance, and the tourism industry rather than educational planning. Far more attention in research and education has been paid to individual episodes of experience, than to the question of how overall patterns of experience form knowledge-constituting relationships.

Second, since White wrote Selbourne, natural science has been largely professionalised and institutionalised. Especially when approached via formal education (including field trips), nature is encountered through epistemological structures arising from struggles between taxonomists, anatomists, field naturalists, and behaviourists (represented loosely by the museum, the laboratory, the scientific expedition, and the zoo or botanic garden) in the 19th century (Outram, 1996), not to mention subsequent re-
orderings around life (as biology), interrelationships (ecology) or evolution (genetics). These ways of ordering understandings are often internalised, and, I believe, very difficult to transcend. Such shifts since the 18th century have not only altered the structure of knowledge and the sources of authority; they have centralised knowledge, and separated the distribution of knowledge (education) from its production (science). Contemplating the development of natural history in terms of communities generating knowledge goes against the grain of some deeply embedded habits of educational thought. Future environmental educators will need not only deep personal experience of the places where they teach, but also the ability to deconstruct epistemologies and cultural influences. Hard work, the right attitude, and good intentions will not be enough; environmental education presents a substantial intellectual challenge.

“*It is too late to be pessimistic*”

Norwegian deep ecologist Nils Faarlund

Gilbert White was an optimist but my reading of *Selbourne* is a sobering one. Suggestions I have made for future practice seem unequal to problems I have raised. I don’t wish to recoil from the difficulties which environmental education in Australia presents. But any willingness to entertain critical discussion about environmental education in Australia and the magnitude of the problem it faces is itself a kind of optimism; I hope this essay will be read in that light.

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Part III. A critical analysis of “adventure education”

Preface to Part III

Thesis statement

The problem of determining what, if any, forms of outdoor experience should be educational priorities, and how those experiences should be distributed in communities and geographically – that is who goes where and does what – is inherently situational. The persistence of a universalist outdoor education discourse that fails to acknowledge or adequately account for social and geographic circumstances points to serious flaws in outdoor education research and theory, and impedes the development of more defensible outdoor education practices.

Part III takes up and examines in more detail some forms of universalist outdoor education that are derived, conceptually if not directly, from the militarism discussed in the Introduction and colonial influences introduced in Chapter 1. Forms of outdoor education premised on the idea that certain outdoor experiences can transform character or personality range from team-building for corporate employees through to boot camps for offenders. I have grouped such programs loosely under the heading “adventure education” because all seem to pay homage to the idea that a challenging experience can affect some kind of inner transformation, that is, to the idea of “adventure”. Part III provides a critical examination of the substance of adventure education, especially the underlying assumption that personality and situations can be readily separated.

Part III supports the thesis statement by developing a critique of context-free (that is universalist) approaches to personal development in outdoor education, and adds a situationist account of individual behaviour to the situationist accounts of environmental knowledge developed in Parts I and II.
A critique of neo-Hahnian outdoor education theory. Part one: challenges to the concept of “character building”.

Abstract
Within the diverse and sometimes amorphous outdoor education literature, “neo-Hahnian” (NH) approaches to adventure education are exceptional for their persistence, seeming coherence, and wide acceptance. NH approaches assume that adventure experiences “build character”, or, in modern terminology, “develop persons”, “actualise selves”, or have certain therapeutic effects associated with personal traits. In social psychological terms NH thought is “dispositional”, in that it favours explanations of behaviour in terms of consistent personal traits. In this paper I critically review NH outdoor adventure education (OAE) in an historical context, and draw on Ross and Nisbett’s (1991) seminal review of dispositional social psychology to argue that OAE programs do not “build character”, but might provide situations that elicit certain behaviours. For OAE research and theory, belief in the possibility of “character building” must be seen as a source of bias, not as a foundation. The conceptual analysis I develop provides not only a basis for critique, but also offers a way forward for OAE.

A critique of neo-Hahnian outdoor education theory. Part one: challenges to the concept of “character building”.

Introduction

When the term “character building” is used contemporarily it is as well to check for irony. “It was character building” might well refer to an experience that seemed pointlessly unpleasant or difficult. Nevertheless the idea that personal traits (character) can be acquired in one setting – the outdoor adventure – which will then persist in other settings, remains foundational to much outdoor adventure education theory (OAE), research and promotion. It is striking how enduring this idea has been in OAE. Its persistence is all the more remarkable when the weight of evidence against the possibility of “character building” or “personal trait development” is considered.

The task for this paper is to critically review the place for “character building” in contemporary OAE in the light of evidence, mostly from outside the OAE field, that the very notion of “character traits” (let alone “building” them) should be treated cautiously, if not sceptically. Character traits, by definition, are supposed to manifest themselves consistently in diverse situations: trustworthiness on the mountain implies trustworthiness at work. The lazy person can be expected to prove their indolence time and again in the outdoors, in the workplace and in the home. By the end of the 1980s a major review of decades of social psychology research, much of it attempting to prove the existence of consistent personal traits, compelled a surprising conclusion: individuals are different, but differences in their behaviour in new situations cannot be defined by or predicted from context-free “character traits” (Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Shoda & Mischel, 2000). The fact that an individual is honest in one situation tells very little about whether that person will be honest in a different situation. The person who tends to be brave on the mountain might tend to be a coward in business and exhibit a mixture of cowardice and courage in personal relations. And so on. “Character building” must be re-considered in the light of the fact that “character”, in the sense it is often used in OAE research and philosophy, is almost entirely illusory.

The main task of this research is a conceptual analysis to “join some dots” between OAE research and important but neglected research in other fields. I draw on historical studies of some OAE antecedents for insights into how “character
building” has been construed, and on an emerging convergence between social psychology and personality research (Shoda & Mischel, 2000) to provide a critique of “character building” as a researchable claim. On the crucial issue of how “the person” and “the situation” shape human behaviour, I draw heavily on Ross & Nisbett’s (1991) seminal review. For reasons of scholarly caution I have not attempted to present any original insights into the fields I have drawn on; rather I have confined myself to using reviews and syntheses that have been the subject of peer review and critique in the relevant fields. (I recommend that interested readers do not go straight to primary sources for personality or social psychology research conducted more than ten years ago, but instead first check recent review articles or texts to place such work in a contemporary context. Developments in social psychology and personality research are such that some “foundational” research must be substantially re-interpreted in the light of subsequent work.)

I also outline some ways forward for theory-building and research in the field. I contend that in many respects “character building” has been a yoke which once cast off, opens the way for more defensible theory, research, and practice in OAE.

In this, the first of two a two-part series, I establish a conceptual framework for critiquing “character building” based outdoor education, which I refer to as “neo-Hahnian”27. In the second article, I undertake the task of reviewing how “neo-Hahnism” influences contemporary OAE discourse, and examine in more detail the question of how and why the fallacy of “character building” has been so widely held.

Character building as rhetoric, and as literal claim

In understanding contemporary use of the term, it is important to consider “character building” as both a specific, literal claim, and “character building” as a vague but appealing component of OAE rhetoric. In practice clear boundaries between the two uses might be hard to identify, but it is a useful analytical distinction.

The origins of the term “character building” go back at least to Edwardian England, when Baden Powell envisaged scouting as a “character factory” (Rosenthal, 1986). It is not clear if the term was intended to be taken too literally, and it was certainly not

27 Kurt Hahn, 1886-1974, is often cited as the founder of character building oriented outdoor education.
intended as a scientific claim. Specific, researchable claims that OAE builds character appear to have emerged as OAE became linked to fields such as corporate development, therapy, or formal education. It is arguable that the roots of “character building” were never intellectual; rather, the term helped build support for the scouting movement (perhaps because it was rather vague), especially among the middle class, and resonated with contemporary hopes, beliefs and fears. To ask whether scouting actually built character might be less useful than to ask how adoption of the term helped build the scouting movement, through the term’s appeal to social networks and prevailing cultural dispositions (MacDonald, 1993; Macleod, 1983; Rosenthal, 1986).

Character building (or personal trait development) is an explicit educational aim for many contemporary programs, and seems to be an uncontested assumption in some OAE research. For example, many of the studies reviewed by Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards (1997) included personal trait development. I examine “character building’s” contemporary role in detail in the next article (Brookes, 2003b), but any doubts about the contemporary importance of the term are easily dispelled by a web search combining terms such as “outdoor, education, character, and building”. The fact that cross-situational consistency in behaviour (i.e. character traits) cannot be empirically demonstrated might have created “years of debates and crises regarding the nature of personality consistency” (Shoda & Mischel, 2000, p. 407) within the fields of social psychology and personality research, but within the OAE field even research that finds no evidence of personal trait development has tended not to dispute the possibility of such outcomes.

Tracking the idea of “character building” requires attention to its different guises, and must take into account some ambiguity in the term and its synonyms. The language might vary – terms such as “personal development” or “self actualisation” will be familiar to most readers, and often seem to at least imply character (personality) building (development). The idea of “character building” might simply be implied, as it is in “adventure”, which can be read as the personal transformation of a central figure (character) in the course of a testing journey (Zweig, 1981). Persistence of the term “adventure” in outdoor education itself invites consideration that the idea of “character building” remains as the bedrock under large parts of the
outdoor education landscape, including places where overt “character building” has long been discarded from the surface.

“Neo Hahnian” OAE defined

A convincing argument for “character building” as a specific outcome of OAE programs requires a demonstration that,

1. Personal traits (such as honesty, trust, loyalty, compassion, care for nature or for that matter, ruthlessness) can be developed in an individual in one situation (the adventure program) and
2. These traits will persist when that individual is in other, different situations (often the workplace, or everyday life).

There is an intriguing contradiction between the ideas of traits as relatively fixed (surviving the transition from the OAE program to everyday life, and persisting, perhaps for years) while also being relatively malleable (changed by a three-week expedition). OAE could thus be held to provide a “magic key” for changing personal traits that are (by definition) normally fixed. The need for a “magic key” to achieve an apparently contradictory outcome vanishes if the implications of Ross and Nisbett’s (1991) review are taken in to account. I discuss these in more detail below, but the important implications can be summarised as follows,

1. “Traits” tend to be relatively stable in given situations. This is the origin of their apparent fixity. For example, I might be relied on to respond impatiently if asked to do some menial task just when I have sat down to drink a cup of tea (I have put “traits” in quotes because traits are inferred from observed behaviour);
2. “Traits” can be changed within a given situation. I can learn to treat the drinking of tea as less sacrosanct.
3. Changed and unchanged alike, traits evident in the OAE (or any) situation are so weakly predictive of trait-related behaviour in other situations as to be practically unrelated. My newly learned tolerance for cold tea tells virtually nothing about my tolerance or lack of it in other situations or in relation to other things. Observed for long enough, I will continue to exhibit a range of patient and impatient behaviours in a way that largely
defies attribution to some consistent underlying trait. If I am more prone to impatience than average, there will be overall differences between the frequency of my impatient behaviours and those of other individuals, but these differences in averages will be relatively slight in comparison to variation most individuals exhibit over time. Most people will exhibit a range of patient and impatient behaviours, with even the most saintly exhibiting more impatience than the least saintly on some occasions or in some circumstance.

4. I might be persuaded to agree that cold tea is a metaphor for other things I should learn to tolerate; but the effect of this on my demonstrated tolerance in other situations should be treated circumspectly. Metaphoric connections might be little more than wishful thinking – I might believe I have become more tolerant, but the fly on the wall carefully monitoring my behaviour might disagree.

In this article I refer to contemporary approaches to OAE centred on personal transformation (“character building”) as neo-Hahnian (NH). I have used this term because it makes three important distinctions from the idea of character building as exemplified in earlier youth movements in Britain and the United States,

1. NH approaches largely de-couple character-building from adolescent development. For the youth movements, character was considered to be formed in adolescence (Macleod, 1983; Springhall, 1977). The idea that traits could be developed, but then persist, can be seen as reflecting the irreversibility of the processes that occur as youth matures. The persistence of such changes simply reflected the arrow of time. The extent to which experiences in childhood or adolescence are deterministic is contentious (Kagan, 1998), but the point here is that there was a certain logic to it. The youth movements sought to steer a process already happening in adolescence. NH approaches, on the other hand, assert character can be built in adulthood, and introduce into personal traits the contradictory notions – character as robust yet malleable – alluded to above.

2. NH approaches link character building with a single episode, or series of episodes, of adventure (for example attending an Outward Bound course). The earlier youth movements were, at least in conception, concerned with on-
going, regular engagement (joining a movement rather than attending a course) (Springhall, 1977).

3. NH approaches emphasise differences between the OAE context and everyday contexts (although they might attempt to draw metaphorical connections). Earlier youth movements made less of the differences between the context of the OAE experience and context in which character would be expressed. Scouting activities extended into the communities from which it drew its recruits, and in its outdoor activities attempted, at least prior to WW1, to contrive situations that were intended to resemble the military situations that it was supposed boy scouts would graduate into (MacDonald, 1993; Rosenthal, 1986)²⁸.

With the development of NH OAE came not only the idea that character building was a specific, researchable outcome of OAE, but also (as the three points above show) a stronger dependence on the idea of personal traits. Compared to earlier forms of “character building” NH OAE intensifies disconnections between the OAE situation and the “everyday life” situation. The critique of “character building” developed in this paper therefore applies particularly to NH OAE. Table I summarizes the essential features of NH OAE and the critique developed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Neo Hahnian OAE position:</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals exhibit “character traits” i.e. behavioural consistencies</td>
<td>NH OAE programs can change or develop “character traits”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the research summarised by Ross and Nisbett (1991) supports:</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals exhibit a range of trait-related behaviour, according to the situation. How an individual behaves in one situation is not a good predictor for how they will behave in a different situation.</td>
<td>So-called character traits change in OAE programs because individuals respond to the OAE situation. These responses can be changed within the program. Over the years OAE practice has been refined to achieve this.</td>
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²⁸ Putnam (2000) has collated a great deal of evidence to track the overall decline of social movements (such as scouting) in the United States; similar trends may be true in all western countries. The transition from youth movements to NH OAE can be seen as partly a consequence of community change, with less willingness to volunteer to help, or to join, a “movement”, and more willingness to pay for a specific service in the form of a course.
Table 1. NHOE and the alternative position based on situationist social psychology research

It is important here to separate “character building” from other educational claims. “Character traits” are not the only conceivable outcomes of OAE programs. (1) Knowledge and skills might be learned during OAE. If I learn to ride a bicycle as part of an OAE program, I will no doubt still be able to ride a bicycle when I return home. I might learn some strategies for dealing with conflict, and I can choose to apply the same strategies in other situations. (2) Beliefs might be shaped, especially if I am coached or persuaded. I might develop, and retain, religious or political beliefs while on an OAE program. I might believe that the program has made me more honest, or more loyal, and I will say so if asked after the program. I may decide to join a church or vote for a certain political party, and I might maintain these commitments for life.

It should be noted that a shift in emphasis from “character building” to “transfer of learning” does not necessarily put OAE on a sounder footing. Referring to the problem of transfer in education generally, Haskell (2001) observes: “research findings over the past nine decades clearly show that as individuals, and as educational institutions, we have failed to achieve transfer of learning on any significant level” (p. xiii). Nevertheless, the critique of “character building” developed here does not rule out the possibility that OAE might offer particularly effective ways to develop certain skills or knowledge, or to change beliefs.

It might be difficult to distinguish between trait-based claims for OAE and skills, knowledge, or belief claims. For example, when a program claims to develop “attitudes to nature” the first task is to establish what that claim means. “Attitudes” are no doubt inferred from behavioural tendencies (traits), but also involve knowledge, skills, aptitudes and beliefs. My contention here is that making analytical distinctions between personal traits, knowledge, skills, beliefs, and physical or mental aptitudes is useful; that is not to say that these categories correspond to clearly divided domains of human behaviour. Recognising and resolving such difficulties is one of the consequences of moving beyond NH understandings of OAE.
It should also be noted that some “traits” are not meaningful out of context. “Loyalty”, for example, is not an abstract quality but a quality of particular relationships. One person might see loyalty where another sees fanaticism. Moreover loyalty to one (the state; the employer; a spouse; a friend) often entails disloyalty to others. Thus when advocates of character building do so in the context of particular claims about certain communities, often in terms of a perceived “decline” in desired traits across a whole community (for example, Outward Bound Australia, 2002), it is necessary to attend to the ideological aspects of the norms being advocated.

Not all OAE and not all outdoor education is NH. It is possible some whole programs and approaches could be categorised as either NH or non-NH. There is a distinction to be made, for example, between a program that uses one or more episodes of outdoor experience for personal development, and a program that attempts to incorporate outdoor experience into individual and community life (for example Dahle, 2000). More commonly NH influences will be manifest in different ways and to different degrees in particular practices.

**Previous critiques of “character building” OAE**

NH OAE and its precursors have always had their critics. It is reasonable to surmise that the popularity of terms such as “personal development” has grown in response to negative baggage acquired by the nearly synonymous “character building”

Springhall (1977) noted that outside studies of youth movements had been uncommon, as some of those within the field observed: “‘Because the apologetics of youth movements are callow, their arguments crude, and their practices puerile’, wrote Leslie Paul self-depreciatingly in 1951, ‘they are dismissed or ignored by scholars’” (p. 11). Such dismissals were not without reason. Springhall (1977) noted that the scouting literature had been “flawed until recently by either excessive concern for the movement’s public image or by an over-adulation of its founder …” (p. 141).

Three previously made criticisms are important in the context of this article.
1. “Character building” is (conveniently) vague

Roberts, White, and Parker (1974), in a study of what they termed “the character training industry” in Britain had also criticised “in house” research, that purported to demonstrate the effectiveness of character building programs, on three grounds, including vagueness: “many of the key questions … were not entirely meaningful. What does it mean to have ‘gained in maturity’ …” (p. 19). Previous research, they pointed out, was open to bias because it was not conducted by researchers independent of the OAE organizations studied, and should be treated with caution because it relied too heavily on the self-reports of participants. It is one thing to believe that you have developed improved character traits; it is another for these claims to be verified.

Drasdo (1972) had earlier pointed out that the language then used by NH OAE was inflated and meaningless: “the search for meaning becomes exhausting” (p. 34).

Roberts et al. (1974) contend that the vagueness of the terms in which character building is expressed might suit both sponsors and course organisers alike, for different reasons: “[f]or course organisers, the vagueness of the aims … is useful because it conceals the extent to which their private visions differ from sponsors’ objectives. For sponsors vagueness … [meets] the need … to despatch employees for training without fully disclosing the firm’s ulterior motives” (p. 100).

Macleod (1983) also encountered vagueness: “This was no narrow mandate … definitions of balanced development were somewhat arbitrary … [s]o character builders took refuge in comprehensiveness, piling up plans and statements in muddled profusion. Indeed, they never managed a clear definition of the word ‘character’, assuming instead that everyone knew what they meant” (p. 29).

The extension of OAE to management development has attracted similar criticism. Irvine (1994), for example, observes: “When definitions [of outdoor management development (OMD)] are offered they tend to be so broad that almost any activity could be included” (p. 25).
2. “Character building” is appealing rather than convincing

It is clear that the idea of “character building” is, and has been, taken seriously and believed within OAE. But the success of youth movements, such as scouting, can be understood as having been achieved on several levels, through appeals to different constituencies, and by gaining adherents without necessarily changing individuals. MacDonald (1993) explains how the appeal of the Scout Handbook worked,

One voice in the handbook is rhetorical, the other symbolic. The first carries the social injunctions, the instruction in Scout Law, in good citizenship. It refers to the social codes; it is explicit, and announces itself in imperative voice, as orders to the reader: ‘every boy ought to learn how to shoot and to obey orders’. The other discourse works in a different way, through pictures, by association. It is essentially iconic, its meanings carried by implication: the weight of the word ‘scout’, the meaning of the campfire, the significance of the war dance. This discourse refers to the code of adventure and to its associations with the imperial frontier. The two discourses support each other, the meanings of one reinforcing the values of the other, although logically, they are often in contradiction. Together, they carry the ideology of scouting (p. 131).

Later (p. 132) he discusses the glamorisation of militarism in the early days of scouting, through the uniform and its associations, and the appealing hint of ritual and secret society, the promise of freedom and boyhood world while at the same time offering an opportunity to take an adult role.

A number of studies have looked at the appeal of youth movements, especially scouting, in Britain and the United States, both in terms of broad cultural appeal (for example through associations with adventure and the frontier) and to anxieties and beliefs specific to particular groups, especially the middle classes. The appeal of youth movements ranged from fears that masturbation would sap the virility of youth (MacDonald, 1993) to anxiety about the decline of the British Empire (Rosenthal, 1986). Youth movements contrived, or unintentionally succeeded, in appealing to different groups on different levels. On one level scouting offered “character training”, on another discipline and training in obedience. Youth movements offered
tempting images to youth, but more importantly activities, many of them originally devised by Ernest Thompson Seton, which appealed (Rosenthal, 1986).

There is evidence that the role of “character building” (and citizenship training) in the formation of the scouting movements was to put what now would be called “spin” on militaristic aspects that would have been controversial if canvassed openly. Springhall (1987) has shown that official scout positions were contradicted by private correspondence and local practice. Likewise Summers (1987) has argued that at a grass roots level both Scouting and Guiding were seen as part of war preparations.

“Character building” did not need to be factually true for the youth movements to succeed. The activities and images appealed to youth, the symbols and rhetoric appealed to adults; youth joined, adults approved. None of this depended on the idea of character building being literally true. Over time images, symbols, activities, and rhetoric could be reworked to maintain the appeal of the movements. For example, the specific image of military scouting that emerged from Britain’s experience of the Boer War was finally buried in the mud and mass slaughter of the trenches of WW1. While Baden Powell admired the Hitler Jugend, international scouting rejected it (Rosenthal, 1986). The Outward Bound movement used Kurt Hahn’s opposition to nazism to achieve further distance from militarism, but the groundwork had already been laid by the capacity of “character building” to denote activities structurally similar to military training but connote peaceful intentions.

More recent research following the migration of OAE to management development has also found that commitment to OAE approaches is driven by belief in its effectiveness, rather than evidence. Badger (1997) concluded:

[Current users’ firm beliefs in the benefits [of OMD] for personal, team and leadership development are used as justification … What was not clear was how such conclusions were arrived at other than through anecdote and intuition … adherence to the outdoors as a management development technique may be based, at least in part (as the present study suggests) on acts of faith rooted in nothing more than perceived wisdom and anecdote …” (1997, pp. 324-325).
Persuasive rhetoric, appealing images, flexible symbols, and attractive, satisfying activities might be sufficient to explain the success of NH OAE. It might not be necessary for character building to actually “work” for NH OAE to succeed as a movement, although it might be necessary that it be believed to work. It doesn’t.

3. NH OAE doesn’t work

Direct criticism of NH OAE arises from studies of OAE that point to a lack of evidence that “character building” is achieved by OAE programs, or that offer actual evidence that OAE programs do not build character. I discuss such research in the next article (Brookes, 2003b). What I contend here is that such results are to be expected; individuals can become a “different person” in certain situations, but those differences are not predictive of behaviour in other situations.

Neo-Hahnian OAE and the situationist accounts of behaviour

Character attributions are both explanatory and predictive. Ross and Nisbett’s (1991) *The person and the situation* summarises evidence from decades of research into the predictive power of personal traits; it remains the definitive work on this issue (Vaughan & Hogg, 2002). Ross and Nisbett (1991) note that previously observed individual differences correlate at best 0.3 with differences observed in a novel situation. Even in the best cases, most variation in behaviour from one situation to another cannot be explained by personal traits. It should be noted that much of the research in this area has used controlled experiments, in which behaviour has been observed. This kind of research should be distinguished from research that examines (for example by questionnaire) beliefs about behaviour. Recent work in personality psychology has accepted the empirical evidence that “cross-situational variability, rather than consistency, is in fact the norm” (Shoda & Mischel, 2000). More complex models of personality, which recognise that, in effect, personality consists of stable patterns of situation-specific behaviours (Shoda & Mischel, 2000) might have something to offer future OAE research, however I will not pursue that possibility here.

The power of situations: character or conformity?

The resistance of Kurt Hahn, the founder of the Outward Bound movement, to Nazism, is routinely invoked to symbolise a supposed distinction between the militaristic aspects of pre-WWII youth movements and OAE. Outward Bound,
according to the standard account, was developed to build the character of merchant shipmen in WWII. It would be a mistake to treat what might be little more than an attempt to “position” OAE as careful analysis. But it is reasonable to suppose that there is at least an implied assumption that “character”, in its NH form, is somehow opposite to (militaristic) conformity. Rosenthal (1986) wryly observed that six of the original nine scout laws mean obedience to authority. Read in their historical context, this obedience was not owed to just any authority, but to scout masters representing military officers and the British Empire. NH OAE, on the other hand invoked an image of shipwrecked sailors calling on inner resources to survive adversity. If anything, it was implied weakness of character that gave rise military to obedience, or for that matter acquiescence to the Nazis. Thus while in Baden Powell’s usage, “character training” is … a misnomer … [it] is the simple acceptance of the scout laws” (Rosenthal, 1986, p. 106), NH OAE might be seen to correct this emphasis, by associating “character” with individual self-reliance. But such a conclusion might be too hasty.

Ross and Nisbett’s (1991, p. 53) reinterpretation of a famous experiment, the implications of which were not fully appreciated at the time, helps explain how NH OAE might also develop conformity rather than “character”. What became known as the Milgram experiments caused controversy in the early 1960s, coming, as they did, at a time when it was widely held that moral behaviour was a matter of individual responsibility (and not partly circumstantial), and amidst widespread concerns about “conformity”. Milgram planned a series of experiments intended to help understand why Germans had what was supposed to be a particular cultural disposition towards obedience to authority. It was supposed this would help to explain why so many failed to resist Nazism. He devised an experiment to test obedience to authority, first testing his procedure on ordinary Americans “a people rich in cultural tradition of independence and distaste for authority” (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 53). The experiment involved persuading a subject to administer painful and evidently dangerous electric shocks to another person (actually a stooge), out of sight in the next room, under the guise of an experiment about the effects rewards and punishment on learning. Few if any believed that Americans would continue to cooperate with the experiment when it became clear that the procedure was distressing or harming the “victim”. The results “confounded Milgram … and everyone else” (p. 55). Nearly 70% of subjects continued past the “danger: severe
shock” level through to the “450-volt XXX” level. Many variations of the experiment were conducted to remove possible objections. The conclusion remained largely the same: in certain situations, most ordinary people could be induced, quite readily, to do evil. Obedience had little if anything to do with character traits,

I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse … And yet he continued to respond to every word of the experimenter, and obeyed to the end (Milgram, 1963, p. 377, in Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 55).

There was no need to conduct the follow up research intended to find out what made the German people particularly susceptible to Nazism. The Milgram experiments showed that no particular susceptibility was needed, just particular circumstances.

Ross and Nisbett (1991) point out that the Milgram results can be attributed to some quite specific aspects of the situation. The subjects of the experiment were not particularly “conformist” in everyday life. In the Milgram situation, important aspects of the situation included incrementally increasing the level of electric shock from an innocuous base, a lack of a channel for refusal (the experimenter kept stating “you must continue”) and a situation that defied comprehension.

**Conforming to OAE situations**

Ross and Nisbett (1991) summarise other experiments that showed strong conformity effects could be demonstrated in other situations. The Asch conformity studies showed that in certain circumstances up to a third of experimental subjects could be induced to state the opposite of what they could see (for example in matching the lengths of lines). The required conditions included a peer group who had each in turn previously made identical but false assertions (i.e. giving a clearly wrong answer to a simple visual test) and circumstances that allowed the subject no logical explanation as to why the others had said, in effect, that “black is white”.

Other studies of the power of situations cited by Ross and Nisbett (1991) include Sherif’s manipulation of the relations between separate groups of adolescents on a
summer camp through the selective use of cooperative and competitive activities. These situational factors strongly influenced inter-group relations. “Sherif also could not resist mentioning that mere informational campaigns, even those couched in appeals to moral values, were universally unsuccessful in reducing enmity” (pp. 39-40). Other studies looked at the phenomena of bystander intervention, especially those in which no member of a large group intervenes to help someone who clearly needs help. Numerous studies have confirmed that your chances of receiving help are greater if there is only one bystander than if there is a group.

One of the most remarkable demonstrations of the power of situations Ross and Nisbett (1991) review occurred in an experiment conducted by Darley and Bateson. Seminary students were asked to give a lecture (in some cases on the parable of the Good Samaritan). En route to give the talk, the experimenters had arranged that the student would pass by a person in obvious need of help. Of all the personal and motivational factors that were examined, the only factor that made a significant difference to the probability that the student would stop to help was whether the student had been told they were early or late to give their talk: 63% of those with plenty of time stopped to help; 10% of those running late stopped to help. According to Ross & Nisbett (1991) these and other studies demonstrate strong situational influences and weak character trait influences.

NH OAE seems largely to have rejected overt commitment to conformity in the form of obedience to authority so evident in the scout code (Rosenthal, 1986). However Ross and Nisbett’s (1991) conclusions (and subsequent work such as Shoda & Mischel, 2000) suggest that it is timely to examine what conformist effects might be embedded in OAE practices, and what power these situational factors have to explain what could otherwise be taken as OAE programs’ success at “changing people”. The “initiative games” widely used in programs such as Project Adventure (Rohnke, 1977) illustrate this point. In these games a facilitator provides a task to a group. The task can only be completed by the group demonstrating some desired individual traits, such as cooperation and initiative. The language of the activity invites participants to avoid treating the “facilitator” as an authority. But there might be conformist effects in the activity, in the form of group norms and the consequences of going against them, and lack of channels for dissent. For example if the person who rejects the game is seen as not being a “good sport”, or whether programs which
offer “challenge by choice” (see Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988) offer real, valued alternatives to the “challenge”. The term “challenge” itself is loaded; what kind of person would avoid a challenge?

Concluding comments

OAE is hardly alone in taking the idea of personal traits for granted. Decades of research in social psychology was premised on the assumption that each normal individual had personal traits that would manifest themselves consistently across a range of circumstances (Shoda & Mischel, 2000). The ability to test for dispositions such as honesty, assertiveness, loyalty, and so on would be useful in areas ranging from employee recruitment, through educational counselling to recruiting spies; it is not surprising that so much research sought to validate such tests. “Trait” statements (“y is a bastard” or “x is nice”) are the most common way of describing behaviour, and probably reflect how observations are perceived and remembered (Ross & Nisbett, 1991); it is understandable that the research was expected to succeed. A widely observed tendency to prefer trait-based explanations of behaviour over situation-based explanations is sometimes referred to as the fundamental attribution error (Ross & Nisbett, 1991) – see Brookes (2003b).

Situationist studies add plausibility to claims that OAE programs change how individuals behave; but they severely undermine accounts of OAE that claim such changes are dispositional, not situational. Changes observed in OAE situations are not predictive of changes observable on leaving the OAE situation. “Character building” has been a remarkably persuasive and appealing slogan, but is flawed as a basis on which to base substantive claims for OAE.

Staff and many of those who participate in NH OAE might be convinced their programs work (Roberts, White, & Parker, 1974). Undoubtedly OAE programs draw on years of accumulated knowledge about how to gain the cooperation of groups and individuals and how to change behaviour. Ross and Nisbett’s (1991) review of situationist social psychology research not only affirms that this should be so, but provides some frameworks for analysing how such programs “work”. But my reading of this research also suggests that the attribution of changes in observed behaviour should not be to “trait development”, but to the (temporary) OAE situation. OAE programs probably do “work”, at least temporarily, but not in the way
that the advocates of neo-Hahnism imagine. Conformity to expected norms is observed because certain situations elicit conformity, not because certain situations develop or bring out latent character traits.

This analysis has not attempted to exhaustively review the implications of situational social psychology for OAE. I have indicated some areas where more work could be done. I will however, make three more points.

1. Only some situations have strong effects on behaviour. Ross & Nisbett (1991) discuss the Cambridge Somerville study of delinquency, that made extensive and ambitious interventions in the circumstances of average and at-risk youth over a five-year period, including provision of summer camp experiences, and involvement with the Boy Scouts or YMCA. If anything the program slightly increased delinquency.

2. Situations might shape current behaviour, but this does not determine future behaviour, even in the case of strong events such as teenage pregnancy, P.O.W. camp indoctrination, or lottery wins (Kagan, 1998; Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Shoda & Mischel, 2000).

3. “The situation” includes social, cultural and geographical elements. Whereas “character” based schemas for understanding OAE encourage universalist applications of OAE and individualist explanations of OAE (Brookes, 2000a, 2002b); situationist research emphasises the importance of theory and research that accounts for the geographical, historical, social, and cultural location of OAE practice.

This critique of NH OAE raises serious questions for some OAE programs, some OAE theory, and some approaches to OAE research, particularly research that is “too close” to what might be called the NH OAE “movement”. Uncritical references to the legacy of Kurt Hahn and “character building” must be seen as a potential source of bias in research reports, rather than as ritual acts of homage to sound foundations. However, this critique also points to some ways forward for OAE research:

- The collapse of “character building” as a substantive claim highlights the historical effectiveness of “character building” as a rhetorical claim. Here the
way is opened for more attention to the social and cultural construction of OAE.

The collapse of the notion that single episodes of experience can change personal traits ("big bang" theories of OAE) opens the way for more careful consideration of programs that construct on-going relationships between individuals, particular groups, and particular places in the outdoors. The self that emerges in the outdoors can be reinvoked by returning to the outdoors, and in this way changes observed in the outdoors could be said to be enduring.

The collapse of dispositionist accounts of behaviour turns attention from the psychologised individual to detailed consideration of the situations that arise or are constructed in the outdoors. Some of the situations that OAE has used traditionally might be seen to be coercive or manipulative when subjected to more careful study; but there is also potential to pay more attention to how outdoor experiences construct meaning and shape knowledge.

These ways forward compensate for the loss of "character building" as an OAE foundation.

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A critique of neo-Hahnian outdoor education theory. Part two: “the fundamental attribution error” in contemporary outdoor education discourse.

Abstract
In the first of a two part series of articles I argued that “character building” in outdoor adventure education (OAE) is a flawed concept. This, the second article, examines the persistence of the idea of “character building” in OAE in the face of strong evidence that outdoor experiences cannot change personal traits. I examine how the “fundamental attribution error” can explain the paradox of (1) a shortage of evidence that adventure education “works” and (2) a widespread belief that it does “work”. I review the place of “character building” in research, and develop a critical reading of a representative adventure education text. I show how unchallenged dispositionist assumptions emerge in neo-Hahnian discourse. I explain how discarding the intuitively appealing but fallacious foundations of neo-Hahnism can clear the way for situationist approaches to outdoor education that bring much needed sensitivity to cultural, regional, historical, and social contexts.

A critique of neo-Hahnian outdoor education theory. Part two: “the fundamental attribution error” in contemporary outdoor education discourse.

Introduction

In part one of this study (Brookes, 2003a), I defined neo-Hahnian outdoor adventure education (NH OAE) as outdoor education centred on the notion that the “character” of individuals could be “built” by certain one-off outdoor experiences. I pointed to the weight of social psychology research that demolished the idea that personal traits inferred from behaviour in one situation (for example an OAE situation) could be used to predict behaviour in a different situation (for example a workplace). In short, while OAE programs might well shape behaviour for the duration, might well influence what participants believe about themselves, and might well teach certain skills or knowledge, what they do not do is build character.

Yet the idea of character building persists. At the time of writing, an internet search for documents containing all four terms “character, building, outdoor, and education” produced over 60,000 hits. Uncritical references to Kurt Hahn and “character building” abound in the OAE literature, and are almost a standard inclusion in the introductory remarks for research publications in OAE. Taking into account that different terms might be used (for example “personal” for “character” and “development” for “building) the influence of the notion of character building is immense in the outdoor field. Examining how and why this has occurred is important not only to help understand how the NH OAE field has been constructed, but also to more clearly see the way forward for more defensible “situationist” OAE theory and practice.

If “character building” is a fallacy, where did NH OAE go wrong? In one sense it did not. If “character building” is taken to mean not a literal claim but an appealing slogan, then it has been remarkably successful. Part of the appeal of “character building” has been symbolic, and its endurance might be linked to its flexibility. It is a positive term (compared to, say, “personality manipulation”) that has diverse

29 See previous chapter (Brookes, 2003a).
connotations. It can serve pacifist or bellicose ends, conservative or liberal ideologies, and be attached to notions of discipline or resistance alike.

Whatever popular appeal “character building” might have, and has had in the past, does not explain how “character building” as a specific claim could persist in OAE research and theory.

The explanation I explore in this article is that NH OAE “went wrong” for entirely understandable reasons. I will argue that “character building” conforms to a widely observed bias to prefer character-based (i.e. “dispositional”) explanations of behaviour over context-based (i.e. “situational”) explanations. I will point to evidence that overconfidence in the ability to make predictions based on observations of “character” has been widely and consistently reported in experimental situations. Simply put, OAE research and theory has been subject to, or at least not sufficiently careful to exclude, a common bias.

**NH OAE and the “fundamental attribution error”**

Within the narrow confines of a strict NH view of OAE, namely that a OAE programs change character traits, questions about causes of behaviour are crucial. The formal study of the inferences people make about the causes of behaviour spawned the development of attribution theory (Kelley, 1967). Attribution of cause is a social process. For example, in accident analysis cause (blame) might be attributed to operator error even though context or systems-related circumstances might be poorly understood (Perrow, 1999) and the mental processes of those involved might be unknown (Reason, 2001). Attribution might be cultural or ideological. As discussed in my previous article (Brookes, 2003a) the success of “character building” in building the scouting movement did not depend on the literal truth on the concept, rather, it resonated with popular beliefs and anxieties. That is not to say that discussion of attribution must be unrelated to “true” or actual causes of behaviour; but in most cases in real life there are no (accessible) “true” causes, only competing attributions. Attributions can nevertheless be evaluated – attributions based on prejudice or rage might well be put aside in favour of those based on observation and logic.
It is precisely this uncertainty about attributions that makes the literal claims of NH OAE to “build character” wrong. Introducing their seminal review of research in the field, Ross and Nisbett (1991) reflect that the most certain knowledge to emerge from social psychology is a “hard-won ignorance” (p. 1). They contend that “social psychology [at graduate level] rivals philosophy in its ability to teach people that they do not truly understand the nature of the world” (p. 1). NH OAE is fallacious not only because it over-emphasises personal traits, but because it requires adherents to believe that human behaviour can be explained and predicted with an insupportable degree of certainty and simplicity. The term “attribution error” is used in the study of unsupported beliefs about the causes and predictability of human behaviour, but it should not be inferred that in non-experimental situations “true” causes or “reliable” predictions are necessarily available.

Ross and Nisbett (1991, p. 126) use the term *fundamental attribution error* to refer to a set of persistently observed biases:

[p]eople (1) infer dispositions from behaviour that is manifestly situational, (2) overlook situational context factors of substantial importance, and (3) make overly confident predictions when given small amounts of trait-relevant information (1991, p. 1).

The term was coined (and defined somewhat more narrowly) by Ross (1977) in what became the most widely cited article in social psychology in the 1980s. There are reasons to be cautious about the term – “pervasive attribution bias” is the term I will use in what follows. “Fundamental” should not be read as implying universal or inevitable – it is common to explain behaviour is situationist terms (“I am not rude, I am in a hurry”) and common to assert that human behaviour is not easily predicted (“you can’t be sure I will mess up if you give me another chance”).

Attribution bias might not be “fundamental”, but it is pervasive. A bias towards dispositionist attributions is probably adaptive – it provides an easy way to render the world comprehensible (Ross & Nisbett, 1991) (this is true of many aspects of memory and cognition, which reduce mental effort, and work satisfactorily a lot of the time (Haskell, 2001; Reason, 2001; Schacter, 2001)). It is easier to attribute an

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30 I am grateful to one of the reviewers for pointing out the need for caution here.
angry outburst to an individual’s tendency to anger than to investigate and understand what is going on in that person’s life.

Attributing behaviour to “character” (personal traits) mostly works: “[I]n the course of ordinary experience, we rarely have a chance to observe the same people in radically different roles or situations in a way that would fairly test the cross-situational consistency of their geniality, generosity, or ability to delay gratification” (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 147). In everyday dealing with people, behavioural consistency is observed because of situational stability. It is common to be surprised by how “different” a person might seem when encountered in an unfamiliar situation (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, pp. 149-150).

Ross & Nisbett (1991) summarise an extensive literature on attribution bias studied in experimental situations. I recommend interested readers refer to the full text – here I will mention some examples. (1) Even when individuals know that in a simulation “manager” and “clerks” have been assigned randomly, they will rank the arbitrarily designated “managers” higher on management traits (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 128). (2) The Darley and Bateson experiment (see Brookes, 2003a), based on the parable of the good Samaritan, provides further evidence,

On the way to the new building, the seminary student was hailed by a man lying in a doorway, who asked for help. And did the seminary student offer their help? Did it make a difference what the nature of their religious orientation was? Did it make a difference whether or not they were in a hurry? The answers are, respectively: some, no, and a great deal (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 131).

When told the results of this experiment, subjects in another experiment still maintained that “‘altruistic people’ would help and ‘selfish people’ would not, regardless of how much time they happened to have on their hands” (p. 131).

Ross and Nisbett (1991) also summarise, (1) other evidence which shows that lay prediction is not confined to predictions about “predictable” individuals in certain situations, and (2) studies that found a general willingness to offer trait-based explanations and make predictions about future behaviour based on very little
evidence, and to ignore situational evidence even when situational evidence was the only evidence available. Strikingly, while individuals might use situational factors to explain their own behaviour (Kagan, 1998), when shown film of their behaviour they revert to trait based explanations (Ross & Nisbett, 1991, p. 141).

Attribution bias helps explain how NH OAE might seem convincing. OAE situations can change behaviour. Facilitation might have the effect of exaggerating belief that changed behaviour implies changed personal traits (attribution bias). Because trait attributions once made tend to be robust, participants continue to believe “they” have changed after leaving the OAE situation. Confirmation bias (Schacter, 2001) (a tendency to filter observations to fit existing beliefs) and consistency bias (Schacter, 2001) (a tendency to attribute false consistency to one’s own beliefs over time) might amplify this persistency – participants might become increasingly convinced that the OAE program changed them (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997). This explanation of NH OAE is summarised in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Neo Hahnian OAE position:</th>
<th>Facilitation assists participants to maintain their new traits after the program has finished</th>
<th>Participants report that their new traits persist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OAE programs change personal traits in specific directions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitation assists participants to maintain their new traits after the program has finished</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participants report that their new traits persist</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The alternative situationist position, allowing for dispositionist bias:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OAE programs change behaviour in specific ways. Certain situations can change behaviour quite reliably</strong></td>
<td><strong>Facilitation amplifies existing tendencies to attribute behaviour to traits. Participants and facilitators convince themselves behaviour changes indicate trait changes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Belief that traits have changed persists because: (a) trait attributions tend to be stable (made quickly, revised reluctantly) (b) confirmation and consistency biases reinforce beliefs formed during OAE</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. NH OAE “success” explained, and the alternative position based on social psychology research

The observation that attribution bias is so pervasive as to be expected might help resolve an apparent contradiction between widespread adherence to NH OAE, and its
flawed conceptual foundations. How academic research and theorising within OAE have responded to dispositionist bias is another matter.

**Trait versus situation in OAE research**

Conceivably, in-house OAE research could be contaminated by attribution error (for example questionnaire results might report not actual behavioural change but changed beliefs). However, one would expect some indications in the research literature that the substantive claims of NH OAE were flawed, if, as I have argued, they are. I have been unable to locate research that specifically challenged the idea of personal trait development, and I found many instances where the possibility of “character building” went unchallenged. However, there is a body of research that has raised questions about the outcomes of NH OAE programs.

**Disquiet about NH OAE: vagueness; enthusiasm exceeding evidence; biased and unconvincing research**

Researchers from outside the OAE field have commented on vagueness in the OAE literature, either about what the essential elements of OAE were, or about what it aimed to achieve. Irvine (1994) points out that this vagueness makes it difficult to conduct, or evaluate, research into OAE.

Roberts, White, and Parker (1974) and Drasdo (1972, p. 34) struggled to find meaning in claims made for Outward Bound style programs; Macleod (1983, p. 29) encountered similar difficulties with “character building” in youth movements.

If anything such criticism has intensified following a wave of enthusiasm for OAE in Outdoor Management Development (OMD). Jones and Oswick (1993) cite Wagner, Baldwin, and Roland (1991), in arguing that “[s]ome of the controversy over outdoor training stems from confusion over the different types of training available” (p. 11), and report from their own review that differences over what OMD is mean that “comparisons between outcomes are less likely to yield consistent results and conclusions” (p. 11). Criticism that they lacked clarity also applied to some aims and objectives. Reviewing more than 90 published sources Jones and Oswick (1993) found “many articles gave such broad and general aims and objectives that … any
form of management training … might be expected to contain the same or similar items” (pp. 12-13).

Researchers from outside the OAE field have encountered disparities between the enthusiasm of believers and evidence for supporting NH OAE. Irvine (1994) observed, “evidence in support of managerial and management learning through OMD regrettably is little more than anecdotal …” (p. 25).

Jones and Oswick (1993) reached a similar conclusion, noting there was little overlap between articles that claimed certain outcomes of OMD, and articles that attempted systematic evaluation, “[t]hose authors who do suggest proven outcomes are reliably derived from OMD interventions appear to be doing so in the absence of supporting evidence …” (p. 14).

Badger (1997), in a study of what users thought of OMD programs, and how they reached their conclusions, was persuaded that “current users of outdoor development feel that it is … effective … [C]urrent users [have] firm beliefs in the benefits for personal, team and leadership development … What was not clear was how such conclusions were arrived at other than through anecdote and intuition” (p. 323).

Hattie et al. (1997), in a review of research into Outward Bound style programs, commented, “we were struck by the number of research papers that read more like program advertisements than research” (p. 45).

In-house OAE research has been criticised on the grounds of apparent bias, or reliance on evidence that is less than convincing. Jones and Oswick (1993) argued that much of the research literature is open to bias because the authors are sponsors and/or providers of training, and that “[c]ommonly used methods of evaluating OMD might be systematically biased in favour of confirming that this form of training is effective in achieving its aims and goals” (Jones & Oswick, 1993, p. 16).

Badger et al.’s (1997) review concluded that information about the effects of OMD on actual organizational performance was hard to obtain, and potentially biased, while less helpful information on participants’ reactions was easy to obtain. Roberts et al. (1974) expressed reservations about research into what they called “the
character training industry” on the grounds that it was in-house. There is also a body of research that specifically rejects some or all aspects of NH OAE.

**NH OAE doesn’t work**

Rosenthal (1986) argued that although scouting in Britain was modelled on the public school system, unlike the public school system scouting did not serve an elite group, and “[n]o recognizable Scout species ever developed … nor has anyone ever been able to demonstrate that Boy Scouts as a group emerged from scouting experience significantly different from the rest of the non-Scouting world” (p. 106).

Considering OAE in corporate training, Roberts et al. (1974) stated,

Our conclusion, though open to dispute by further research but wholly consistent with all the evidence now available must therefore be that, whilst personalities might be affected, young lives are rarely re-shaped by the schemes under scrutiny. Previous commentators such as Fletcher, have been over-impressed by the evidently exaggerated influence trainees attribute to their courses and organisers are deluded by the selective feedback they receive. The character-training industry is not liable to re-shape society, and though negative conclusions are never particularly exciting, the evidence makes them inescapable (1974, p. 150).

Character training schemes do not dramatically transform people’s lives within the space of a few weeks. Course organisers have not found any secret formula that has eluded other education and youth workers for so long … but … Modest accomplishments are familiar in other branches of education, marginal changes can be worthwhile, and the achievements of character-training schemes can be realistically judged only against modest standards. Cost is the main problem … (p. 162).

Roberts et al (1974) did find one specific effect of the programs they studied, namely, that a significant number of participants felt less satisfied at work following the course. This suggests that a change of circumstances can produce a heightened awareness of circumstances (time in the mountains can make work seem less attractive).
Mand (1985) in Irvine and Wilson (1994) rejected “magical” notions that a one to four week experience can “redress emotional or behaviour problems that took 15 years to develop” (p. 30). Irvine and Wilson (1994) argue that OMD might be effective, but only if it satisfies effectiveness criteria not unique to outdoor settings or adventure, “having examined the concept of OMD, the mystique on which much of its reputation rests is seemingly illusionary. Its credibility relies almost exclusively on questionable anecdotal evidence” (p. 36).

Hamilton and Cooper (2001) proposed that OMD should improve three measures: team climate, motivation, and stress. They found “team climate” improved in only one of four measured dimensions. Intended effects in the workplace were much weaker than self-reported changes, but they stop short of concluding that OMD based on NH OAE is flawed.

“Creationist” theories and “flat-earth” research in OAE

A “creation myth” of NH OAE as the almost magical discovery of Kurt Hahn appears even in research that does not support NH OAE. Roberts et al. (1974) noted influences of traditions that pre-date Kurt Hahn (youth groups, associations between a healthy body and a healthy mind) and more recent fashions (such as encounter groups), but reported that previous research had failed to critically examine the conceptual basis for NH OAE.

Hattie et al. (1997) state that “most researchers trace the origin of modern adventure education to Kurt Hahn” (p. 44). This may be true, but only if one omits research specifically directed at the origins of the youth movements, and neglects more recent influences. Such an approach tends to remove NH OAE from the realm of critical debate over its ideological, social and cultural dimensions. Studies of Scouting too, Springhall (1977) noted, were “flawed until recently … by an over-adulation of its founder…” (p. 141).

The central premise of NH OAE – character building – is often uncontested. Research that purports to have located the ends of the earth – in the form of changed personal traits is not subject to the criticism that the earth is not flat (character building is a myth).
Many of the findings that Hattie et al. (1997) review describe traits: conscientiousness, values, self-esteem, independence, emotional stability, aggression, assertiveness, maturity, challenge (sic), and flexibility. Claims that these traits have improved are “flat earth” findings; either NH OAE has stumbled onto a means to make human behaviour more predictable than decades of social psychology research has been able to demonstrate (i.e. the earth is flat after all) or such claims must cast serious doubts on the research projects that generated them.

There is no reason to suppose that any of the studies cited by Hattie et al. (1997), many of which were “in house”, were subject to intentional bias. A more plausible speculation is that the studies failed to carefully separate observable changes in patterns of behaviour from participants’ beliefs about their own behaviour, thus producing data contaminated by the fundamental attribution error. Roberts et al.’s (1974) study, not cited by Hattie et al. (1997), identifies this problem with previous research on Outward Bound programs.

If NH OAE does not change behaviour, but does change self-concept, especially self-esteem or components of self-esteem, might not that in itself be counted as success? “Improved” self-concept might lead to behavioural changes. In the case of self-esteem, Emler (2001) studied behavioural implications in considerable detail. He concluded that low self-esteem was implicated as one of a number of factors that increased the risk of “teenage pregnancy, eating disorders, suicide attempts and suicidal thoughts, and (for males only) lower earnings and more extended periods of unemployment in early adulthood” (p. 3). However, vulnerability to negative peer-pressure, and risk-taking such as driving too fast under the influence of alcohol, was associated with high self-esteem. Moreover,

in several cases the evidence was about as clear as it could be in ruling out a causal influence of low self-esteem. These cases are crime/delinquency (including violent crime), racial prejudice, teenage smoking, and child maltreatment. What make some of these cases particularly clear is that high, not low self-esteem, is the more plausible risk factor (p. 2).
Emler’s research does not exhaust the question of NH OAE as “improving” self-concept. But it suggests that treating self-concept as a context-free trait is dubious. There might be specific cases where aspects of the self-concept of certain individuals could be changed in beneficial ways. It is likely that NH OAE programs could achieve such changes; they appear to be effective at changing self-attributions. But NH OAE cannot sidestep the critique developed in this study simply by substituting “self-concept development” for “character building”.

**Trait versus situation in OAE theory**

Every adventurer starts out as a liar, a storyteller who wants to believe his own stories, and therefore needs to act them out. In this sense, the escape from culture becomes a coy act of culture…


“Character building” remains foundational in much OAE theory. Its influence does not always appear clearly labelled, but attribution bias appears to be tightly woven into some (NH) approaches to OAE theory. To understand this requires an approach more indebted to cultural studies than social psychology. The following discussion provides an outline for such analysis.

It should be noted at the outset that “character building” is not universally accepted in OAE theory. Reservations about “character building”, including its association with the Hitler Youth, were evident at least three decades ago (Roberts, White, & Parker, 1974, p. 13), and there has been some retreat from the term. When in Australia five participants and two instructors drowned on the first, well publicised program of the Victorian Outward Bound School on Lake Hume on August 16, 1963, outdoor education in Victoria acquired a distinct ambivalence towards “character building” (Brookes, 2002b). However, it has by no means disappeared.

**NH influences in Miles and Priest Adventure programming**

“Character building” can be readily identified as an explicit foundation of contemporary OAE theory. Webb (1999), for example, in the first chapter of Miles and Priest’s (1999) *Adventure programming* presents the developmental stages of recreation benefits as a pyramid capped by “character development” (p. 4). Hirsch (1999), introducing developmental adventure in the same book, prefers the term “personal growth” to “character building”. These terms are not necessarily
synonymous (although both are so vague as to suggest the futility of seeking fine semantic differences), but it is clear Hirsch means by “personal growth” not just behavioural change within the OAE program, or gaining skills and knowledge that might or might not be applied in other settings, but an expectation of “change at the intrapersonal or interpersonal level” (p. 25). Hirsch’s chapter illustrates two mutations that might disguise “character building” if allowed to pass without comment. (1) “Character” is reformulated into behaviourist terms. Instead of “character” being explicitly inferred from patterns of behaviour, in NH OAE behavioural change is explicit, and “character” left implicit. (2) “Learning” replaces “building”. Here it is necessary to understand that NH OAE tends to adopt a special definition of “learning”. Rather than referring to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, or insight, it instead refers to “a shift in the way people feel, think, or behave” (Priest, 1999, p. xiii). This more psychologically deterministic view of “learning” slots neatly into the notion of “character” as determining behaviour, effectively blurring the distinction between what one has learned and whether or not one will act on, or be influenced by, that learning.

“Character building” might be alive and well, but the depth and extent of its influence is difficult to determine. In some accounts of OAE it might be obscure, embraced ambivalently, or simply absent. Bailey (1999), in the fifth of the introductory chapters in Adventure programming, avoids “character building”. Gillis Jr. and Ringer (1999) seem to repudiate character building when they specifically advocate continuity between the social context of the OAE situation and the “everyday” situation requiring therapeutic intervention, “persons who comprise the client’s social system are involved so that the changes in the clients persist after the adventure therapy program has ended …” (p. 31). At the same time, they appear to endorse the use of therapeutic OAE to “target … personality” (p. 30), and uncritically refer to the foundational status of Kurt Hahn and Outward Bound. Although apparently unable to quite step outside the NH mindset, they are circumspect about research evidence for the efficacy of OAE therapy. Not coincidentally, they are also among the few contributors who refer extensively to recent non-OAE literature. Horwood (1999) too, in the remaining introductory chapter, offers a ritual nod of approval in the direction of Kurt Hahn and “character building” in his closing paragraphs. But his contribution for the most part gently pulls the rug from under NH OAE, firstly by providing a context-based schema for
understanding OAE, and then by deconstructing the notion that outdoor adventure is educationally unique.

*Adventure programming* has more than 60 chapters; rather than discuss each, I will let the discussion of the five introductory chapters exemplify how explicit and implicit “character building” claims appear throughout the text. While those contributors most concerned with defining “character building” in precise terms tend to be most circumspect about its proven existence, many contributors seem unwilling to abandon at least a *symbolic* commitment to neo-Hahnism. This might be seen as a matter of necessity; OAE contains diversity and contradictions that tend to defeat attempts at logical definition, but can be *explained* in terms of common origins and common symbols. Nevertheless, if *Adventure programming* can be taken to loosely represent a “school of thought” in OAE (primarily centred in the United States), its defining characteristic is a literal-mindedness with respect to “adventure”. It is as if someone has mistaken the advertising imagery around a particular consumer product with its technical specification, or confused an actor in a supermarket with a character they play. In short, notwithstanding the number of studies (MacDonald, 1993; Macleod, 1983; Roberts, White, & Parker, 1974; Rosenthal, 1986; Springhall, 1977) that have analysed how “character building” movements have succeeded because of what they appealed to rather than what they actually achieved, a significant cohort of OAE theorists have not considered the symbolic aspects of OAE.

**Symbolic associations of Neo Hahnism**

It is to this symbolism, and the frameworks that support it, I now turn. My purpose here is not to attempt an exhaustive analysis of *Adventure programming*, but to outline a critique of three elements of NH OAE that warrant further enquiry, and that introduce some social and cultural analysis absent from many accounts of OAE.

1. *The idea of adventure*: Priest (1999, p. xiii) could be read as disingenuous in defining adventurous experiences as “activities with uncertain outcomes (due to the presence of situational risks) that necessitate people applying their personal competence to meet the challenge and resolve the uncertainty”. Adventure, of course, is nothing of the sort. Adventure is a way of *construing* certain experiences, the main prototypes for which in western culture are mythical. An adventure is *a kind of story*. OAE is
“adventure education” and not “uncertainty education” precisely because the term “adventure” conjures up desired images and associations. At the heart of the prototypical adventure story, particularly as represented in popular culture post WWII (Zweig, 1981), is the psychological transformation of a central character, the hero, on his or her return. The connotations of the term “adventure” contribute to OAE’s credibility and attractiveness, and help to explain how neo-Hahnism could succeed while failing to deliver “character building”. The possible disingenuousness is in treating “adventure” as a literal truth while neglecting its literary origins and connotations. If the term “adventure” itself is not code for “character building”, it whispers “character building” to those who like the idea but sense the term has acquired some negative connotations.

2. Kurt Hahn as a symbol: Hahn is so closely associated with the idea of “character building” that it is reasonable to take every approving invocation of his name as a tacit endorsement of “character building”, not as an intellectual claim so much as a taken-for-granted assumption (attribution bias). As the editors of Adventure programming point out, Hahn has “disciple[s]” (Miles & Priest, 1999, p. 43). The issue here is not what is or is not true about Hahn the person, but about how his name is used. Hahn seems particularly important as a pivot around which character building movements could turn from their militaristic, nationalistic, and imperialistic roots. But OAE’s connections with its past are not so easily discarded.

3. Disconnection from contemporary research and scholarship in other fields: this paper has attempted to link some important social psychology with OAE, but the conditions that have permitted the field of OAE to take the mythology of adventure as literal truth owes something to a more general lack of intellectual curiosity and scholarly attention. Some sense at least of this can be encountered by scanning the lists of works cited by each contributor to Adventure programming. While there are exceptions, it seems fair to observe of many contributions that: (a) while there are some references to non OAE scholarship and research from the 1970s or earlier, there is much less attention to more recent work, and (b) many of the distinctive claims made for OAE are floated in OAE publications rather than submitted to less partisan scrutiny in the broader educational,
therapeutic, or human development literature. Samdahl and Kelly (1999) found a similar pattern of intellectual isolation in a detailed citation analysis of two leisure studies journals.

As recent work in cultural studies (for example During, 1993) has shown, terms such as “adventure” might have multiple meanings that require attention to how a term is actually interpreted in different situations. These are questions of detail; that NH influences remain strong in OAE is indisputable. Even where claims to develop personal traits are not made explicitly, deferential invocations of Kurt Hahn as originator, and references to “adventure” suggest in images what is not said in words. Many commentators from within “the movement” seem not to have considered that the field has been historically constructed around some appealing myths, combined with enjoyable activities that owe more to the immediate responses they elicit than any lasting transformative effects. Qualities of ambiguity, immediate appeal, and vague outcomes have probably contributed to NH OAE’s endurance, and have allowed it to take many forms.

A note of caution on situationist OAE

Situationist accounts of OAE have to take into account how individuals understand the situation. How a group of individuals respond when (for instance) I appear brandishing a pistol depends on how each construes the situation (“he means us harm”; “he is making a poor joke”; “it is a water pistol”; “he is demonstrating a point about construal”; “he is deranged”; “he is an actor in a film”; etc.). Construal is a function of the situation and the individual, and might be subtle (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). When “soil” moves onto the floor of a tent or onto clothing it becomes “dirt”. Knowing a flower is not indigenous might change how it is perceived.

The language of OAE might influence construal of OAE situations. This is true of terms such as wilderness and adventure, but also of terms such as self-esteem, honesty, and cooperation – one could use, respectively, conceit, tactlessness, and conformity. Ross and Nisbett (1991) point out that individuals will interpret the same phrase in opposite ways depending on whether it has been attributed to Lenin or Jefferson. Flew (1975) observes that most individuals will recognise the conjugation of this irregular verb: “I am firm, you are obstinate, he is pig-headed” (p. 79). The
term “character” is itself not neutral; it implies both certain behaviours and norms. Norms might be subject to different ideological, cultural, or religious beliefs. Taking an extreme example, where some see a heroic martyr, others see a cowardly dupe.

These comments are sufficient, I hope, to signal that while there is a case for developing more situationist accounts of OAE, the subtlety and complexity of the task should be acknowledged. Although certain situations have been shown to be quite deterministic, the same is not true for most situations. Shoda and Mischel (2000), in arguing for a contextual view of personality that accommodates hermeneutic and narrative understandings of human behaviour, point out that “[as] every good novelist knows, both the subtle texture of personality and its underlying dynamics might be seen in the seeming inconsistencies evident in a person even more clearly than in his [sic] consistencies” (p. 425). They contend that, “[a]lthough the personality system is intrinsically contextualized and interactive with the social world, the individual selects, constructs, and transforms situations rather than being victimized by them” (p. 408).

**Future directions for OAE research – reclaiming the geographical, historical, cultural, and social**

We must remember that critique is always limited, fragmented and unsure. Anything else is utopian fantasy… [t]oo often, critical educators have brought the whole of the life-world under a general rhetoric of criticism, causing an unspecified and free floating fear to permeate even the most innocent aspects of life…


Notwithstanding its fallacious underpinnings, I expect that parts at least of the “character training industry” will survive for another century, and that clients, participants, and trainers will continue to be happy with the way things are.

However I can see little room to continue tolerating flat earth theory (“character building”) in outdoor education research and theory (I have omitted the “adventure” intentionally). There are risks of harmful interventions in other lives based on false (albeit sincere) premises (it is not safe to assume that OAE can do no harm), and lost opportunities to solve educational problems using more defensible theories.
Facilitation that endorses personal trait development both denies that to maintain your “expeditionary self” you must continue to undertake expeditions, and offers false hope – that your “expeditionary self” can be reinvoked if you can learn to see taking the 8.30 train as an expedition.

“Character building” diverts attention from better, situationist accounts of what outdoor experiences can achieve:

1 Attention to *situations* introduces to outdoor education an imperative to pay attention to specific geographical, social, political, cultural and personal circumstances. While it is unsafe to generalise about such a loosely defined field, OAE theory has tended to lean on psychology (albeit selectively) at the expense of attention to the social sciences and the humanities.

2 Outdoor education programs that aim to develop *on-going relationships* between particular groups or individuals and specific outdoor environments do not need attribution error to “work”. People *can* “change” in changed circumstances, and it is possible that individuals can by some criteria become a “better person” in the outdoors. To maintain those changes depends on maintaining, or at least periodically returning to, the changed circumstances. Perhaps it is too neat, but here the contention that “character building” is linked to colonialism, and the educational issues that can arise in its wake (Brookes, 2002a), comes full circle; in many aboriginal cultures identity and relationship with place are regarded as inseparable (Brookes, 1998).

I have argued previously that, at least in southeastern Australia, there is an educational imperative to take seriously the problem of understanding and reshaping how communities experience and understand their regions (Brookes, 2002b). Here at least, neo-Hahnism is just one more imported “solution” that turns out to be, if anything, part of the problem facing outdoor environmental educators.
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Part IV. Critiques of “educational” nature based tourism

Preface to Part IV

Thesis statement
The problem of determining what, if any, forms of outdoor experience should be educational priorities, and how those experiences should be distributed in communities and geographically – that is who goes where and does what – is inherently situational. The persistence of a universalist outdoor education discourse that fails to acknowledge or adequately account for social and geographic circumstances points to serious flaws in outdoor education research and theory, and impedes the development of more defensible outdoor education practices.

Conceiving outdoor education as “the intentional generation and distribution of knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes through organised outdoor activities”, as I have in this thesis, invites attention to the totality of knowledge-producing and knowledge-distributing outdoor activities across any given community and across any given landscape. Part IV amplifies and extends the discussion of the relationship between outdoor education and tourism in earlier chapters, particularly Chapter 1.

Tourism both constitutes part of the existing situation that outdoor education might intervene in, in many cases, but also is a possible organisational and institutional site for such intervention. It is not given that organized outdoor education should be provided by educational organizations, associated with schooling or otherwise. It might be more defensible to locate a particular outdoor education program in some other community organization.

Part IV is by no means an exhaustive examination of tourism and outdoor education, but it demonstrates the necessity and value of such examination through a critical study of how a commercial wilderness rafting trip is seen as “educational” by participants – written for the tourism literature – and an examination of educational claims in ecotourism discourse. It demonstrates that the thesis statement is supportable not only in recognized “outdoor education”, but across the field of “intentional generation and distribution of knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes through organised outdoor activities”.

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Abstract

The contemporary idea of wilderness is intertwined with the ideal wilderness experience. In the case of the Franklin River, rafting expeditions were central to the images used by conservationists to save the river from a proposed dam in the 1980s. This paper illustrates how “wilderness” shapes not only how tourism is conducted on the river, but also the understandings and values attributed to the experience. Acknowledgment of the political effectiveness of the idea of wilderness, it is argued, must be tempered by the observation that the contribution of “wilderness experience” to communal environmental understanding is at best ambiguous.

Doing the Franklin. Wilderness tourism and the construction of nature.

The fight to “save the Franklin River” from a proposed hydroelectric scheme made the Franklin River an icon for Australian conservationists. The intention of the Tasmanian government to build a series of dams, and thereby inundate much of the Franklin and Lower Gordon Rivers was thwarted after the Federal Parliament passed the World Heritage Properties Conservation Act, following an intensively reported campaign, which culminated in the jailing of protesters for blockading the construction site (Hall, 1992). The ultimate conservationist victory was seen by many as a demonstration of the effectiveness of World Heritage listing, and (perhaps prematurely), as a turning point for Australian environmental politics.

Much of the anti-dams rhetoric revolved around the twin themes of the Franklin as wild and untouched, and the Franklin as a place of almost sacred beauty and restorative qualities. Contradictory sub-texts – a moral duty to keep humans away on the one hand, and an impulse, almost imperative, to visit on the other – have been manifest in subsequent tension between tourism and conservation. The photographic images that came to stand for the Franklin depict sites accessible only by multi-day rafting expeditions, in areas where any development other than basic maintenance of portaging tracks or existing campsites would be widely condemned.

The paradox of wilderness management – to allow immersion in nature while seeing no sign of previous human presence – is inherent in the idea of wilderness itself. To conceive of wilderness is to imagine a wilderness journey. The idea of an authentic wilderness experience has both shaped and limited how tourists experience, and understand the Franklin. Tourist offerings have either conformed to the prototypical wilderness trips of the few who rafted the river in the 1970s, or have been confined to the Lower Gordon River. Moreover, the ideals of wilderness shape the moral, aesthetic, and cognitive frameworks on which the meaningfulness of rafting trips is constructed. Understanding how these ideals negotiate the apparent contradiction at the heart of the idea of wilderness is essential to evaluating the elevated claims made for the wilderness experience.
Cruising the Gordon River

Below its junction with the Franklin, the Gordon River continues for approximately 30 kilometres to Macquarie Harbour. Tourism to the Gordon River and the township on the harbour, Strahan, grew from around 25000 to 70000 in the early 1990s (Parks and Wildlife Service, 1994). In 1994 the Gordon River, which is navigable by motor boats upstream for some 30 kilometres (depending on the craft) was the second most visited area in the Tasmanian World Heritage region, with around 102000 visitors representing 22.4% of all visitors to Tasmania (Strategic Research Section, 1999) in 1994. However, visitor numbers to the Gordon River have been steadily declining and by 1998 had fallen over 9% to less than 93000 (18.4% of all visitors to Tasmania). Over the same period, total visitor numbers to Tasmania increased 11%, and visitors to Cradle Mountain (also in the World Heritage area) increased by 17%.
to over 152000. As memory fades of the Franklin controversy the appeal of cruising the Gordon appears to be slipping.

Most visitors don't actually see the Franklin. There is limited seaplane access to a point on the Gordon River near the confluence with the Franklin, and some small vessels take passengers to that point. By far the greater number of visitors cruise the length of Macquarie Harbour, then ten kilometres up the Gordon River on half or full day trips, stopping at a landing and boardwalk some twenty kilometres short of the Franklin River confluence, on vessels of up to 250 passengers. The brochure from one of the two cruise companies fudges the issue by relocating the controversy to the Gordon River:

How could any visit to Tasmania be complete without a cruise on the world-famous Gordon River? The fight to save this natural treasure in the early 1980s attracted international support. The ancient, mirror-like waters meander down from their source in the central highlands, through a breathtaking riverscape … (Gordon River Cruises, no date).

While the lower Gordon River would undoubtedly have been affected by access roads and dam works upstream, it was not part of the planned inundation. Moreover, the “wildness” of the Franklin River is supplanted by the “mirror-like” waters of the Lower Gordon. This image too might be out of reach for many; the larger vessels create a wake, and embark mid-morning, when still conditions are unlikely.

Citing several studies, Bingham (1994) found that few of those taking a cruise on the Gordon River were returning visitors. Visitor comments included a desire for more on-shore time and interpretation at the heritage landing where the vessels turn to go back downstream. On board interpretation was described as rudimentary, and one in five visitors found the cruise too long and tedious. Higher speeds are not possible, speed limits being necessary to protect the banks, which have suffered severe erosion due to motor vessel since the 1980s (Parks and Wildlife Service, 1996). These observations raise questions about how such tourism products might be refined, and whether the world heritage qualities of the Franklin-Gordon region are incompatible with mass tourism. Further north in the World Heritage Area, the Cradle Mountain region that has a range of accommodation and walking options, including one-day
walks, has experienced sustained growth in numbers. There the most tangible of wilderness qualities – diverse scenic beauty – is relatively accessible.

**Constructing the Franklin wilderness**

The “Western Tasmanian Wilderness National Parks” World Heritage Area is unmatched in meeting 7 of 10 world heritage criteria. It is characterised by the idea of nature unsullied by human presence. At the same time, the prototypes of contemporary wilderness experience are of immersion in nature, through stories of extended bushwalking or canoeing journeys, often entailing physical difficulty, and imbued with a sense of moral worth, or, as Garnett (1991) puts it, premised on the assumption that “only middle-class bushwalking Americans hold the key to spiritual satisfaction” (p. 45). Speaking of the Franklin campaign, Flanagan (1985) argued:

> [A]bove all else conservationists have failed to put their often adolescent infatuation with wilderness into any historical perspective, content instead to manipulate the enduring myth of a terrible land in such a way as to allow them to view their underlying motivation - love of the wilds - as a novelty of their own making (p. 69).

Personal testimonies illustrate how the meaning of the Franklin for particular individuals, and ultimately for the no dams movement, was constructed through stories of particular river journeys (Connolly, 1981) and later, the experience of peaceful protest. Many rafters encountered difficulties; a few drowned. Politicians were escorted down the river, and a film was made. Peter Dombrovskis’ large format photographs became famous. Ordinarily law-abiding citizens experienced jail. Future marriage partners met (Brown & Dombrovskis, 1983; Brown & Duncan, 1979; Griffiths & Baxter, 1997; Himmelhoch-Mutton, 1999; Tasmanian Wilderness Society, 1983). The stories of river journeys, maps and notes on obstacles, campsites, and river features became rafting notes circulated among those who would make the journey, and were institutionalised as the more or less standard Franklin expedition offered by the various companies including named points of interest, procedures for each rapid or obstacle, established campsites and portages.

Basso (1996) drawing on his study of western Apaches, observes:
[S]ense of place … is neither biological imperative, aid to emotional stability, nor means to group cohesiveness … [it] is a kind of imaginative experience, a species of involvement with the natural and social environment, a way of appropriating portions of the earth … [it] also represents a culling of experience … rarely brought forth for conscious scrutiny (pp. 143-144).

However, the Franklin wilderness is rarely treated as the product of particular experiences. Carlington's (1988) study of Franklin River rafters, which presumes rafters were motivated by personal traits, failed to recognise the circumstantial nature of their interests. Almost 2000 rafters annually made the journey in the early 1980s (prior to 1978 fewer than a dozen parties had made the journey). Numbers collapsed after the conservationist victory (Figure 2). By 1989, dozens of campsites shown on maps in use in 1983 had overgrown due to disuse (Marsden-Smedley, 1999 pers. com.).

![Franklin River Rafters](image)

**Figure 2. Franklin River Rafters (Rundle, 1997)**

The peak around 1988/89 probably reflects a particularly fine Summer (Rundle, 1999).

However, demand for commercial rafting expeditions rose. The packaged “wilderness experience” has, apparently, an appeal not dependant on fading
memories of the controversy. Conservationists had always maintained that wilderness experience was timeless:

> our minds and bodies were adapted for a wilderness existence. Then came the industrial and technological revolution. The face of the globe has been drastically altered … the fight to save the last of the wilds … is part of the struggle to ensure human survival itself … who would live in an entirely synthetic landscape without ever the chance to wander free in the wilds? (Brown & Dombrovskis, 1983, pp. 28-29).

Just how tightly the belief in wilderness is tied to the “original” Franklin rafting trip, is illustrated by an on-going argument over a road through the wilderness, built in 1971 by the Hydro-Electric Commission, over Mt McCall to the middle Franklin. Those arguing that the road should be rehabilitated, in line with the Tasmanian World Heritage Area Management Plan, claimed that it compromised the value of the region for tourism:

> [T]he very concept of ecotourism is about environmentally sensitive and responsible tourism, in terms of minimum impact … To raft the full length from the Collingwood River to the Lower Gordon is the most powerful experience many have ever had in a lifetime … The Mt McCall track is an intrusive impact that often dismays international travellers … (Gee, 1991, p. 2).

The road has remained open (Gee, 1991), partly because it enables some rafting operators to offer shorter trips on the Franklin. All rafting expeditions use the Lyell Highway, which bisects the world heritage area, crossing the upper Franklin, so the objection is not to road access as such, but to the use of a road linked to dam proposals; the shorter trips thus deviate ideologically as well as materially from the “true” Franklin trip.

While sustained demand for rafting expeditions might suggest that the definitive wilderness experience can be packaged as tourism, important differences remain to be considered. Tourism does not reproduce the social context in which the early rafting trips took place. The pleasure principle inherent in tourism might be at odds
with the elevated sentiments and moral values attached to wilderness. Continuities which give meaning to either socially organised recreation (see, for example Fine's, 1998 study of mushroomers), or to indigenous understandings of place (Basso, 1996; Chatwin, 1988; Watson & Chambers, 1989), might be lacking in tourism – indeed as escape, tourism can be defined in terms of discontinuities (Cohen & Taylor, 1992).

Paying attention to such distinctions might illuminate how particular forms of tourism come to be, and how they might be otherwise. Moreover, such considerations are central to any claim that wilderness experience is a kind of environmental education (Brookes, 2000b).

The summer of 1997/98

Over the summer of 1997/98 all 39 clients on ten rafting expeditions conducted by Rafting Tasmania agreed to participate in a qualitative study of responses to the Franklin. A short questionnaire was completed prior to each trip (except the first), and taped interviews were conducted as each trip neared completion. A guide/research assistant kept taped notes of observations during the trip, and recorded some ad hoc interviews.

Most of the participants had not met prior to the trip, and none had previously rafted the Franklin. In questionnaire responses, references to both the dams issue and world heritage were few. Two mentioned the dams controversy as reason for booking the trip, while five others gave reasons which related specifically to the Franklin: “read an article in an outdoor magazine about the Franklin River 10 years ago”; “heard it was great”; “read about it years ago … Wild Rivers National Park”; “World Heritage Area; reputation…”; “always wanted to … one of the few untouched rivers”.

Motivations were characterised by diversity and universality; there were many motives, and many of the reasons given might have just as easily motivated a different holiday. Several participants mentioned adventure or excitement: “learn a new adrenalin skill”; “the thrill of rafting”; “excitement”, and many mentioned previous rafting experiences. Others expected peace and tranquillity. Several spoke of scenery and beauty, and some of wilderness and isolation. One participant stated simply: “looked fun”. Said another “[it] fitted with holiday plans”.

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While one storyline ultimately prevailed in the politics of the dam, there have always been diverse expectations of and responses to the river. Apart from hydro engineers, piners, convicts, and so on, those rafting the river have responded in different ways from the outset. Writing of the experience of making a film, Connolly (1981) observes:

[O]ur guides … were serious minded bushwalkers who found their greatest peace out in the wilderness, preferably by themselves. To them the wilderness was a source of spiritual self-renewal … [the] film crew … would rather have been somewhere else. They did not care for camping or for wilderness travelling; certainly not this dangerous form of travel … the crew’s version of relaxation – cigarettes, jokes, mock complaints and the contemplation of what they would rather be doing – did not tally at all with the ‘wilderness experience’ of peaceful contemplation so valued by [the guides] (p. 95).

According to Connolly (1981), Mckay, the first European to sight the Great Ravine described it as “a sterile wilderness and scenes of frightful desolation … I twice got to the bottom of this hideous defile … ” (p. 26).

While the river imposes some physical constraints on travelling, each journey is different. The river changes as it rises or falls – every trip is tinged with anxiety about the water levels. Contemporary guided trips use larger craft than the first rafters, and guides embody a refined collective wisdom about how to safely negotiate the river that brings more predictability to the trip compared to earlier expeditions. However, a commercial Franklin rafting trip retains an expedition quality, involving commitment and some degrees of hardship and discomfort.

“Rafting” suggests a clichéd image of foaming carefree adventure. On the Franklin, however, many of the rapids are unsafe, and must be by-passed (portaged), sometimes with great effort. On quieter water rafters have to paddle to maintain speed. Rafters are in their craft for long periods, and might be cold and uncomfortable. Campsites are sometimes cramped. Coming to terms with this potential mismatch between expectation and reality was a recurring theme: “rapids
were fairly average – not as exciting as other rivers I have been on” (Warren)

“white water rafting … probably wasn’t as exciting as I had expected” (Alice); “was a bit disappointed that I didn’t get (the adrenalin rushes” (Roland); “Didn’t expect it to be so tiring, but it was still enjoyable … also I didn’t expect it to be so cold” (Janice).

Hardship and discomfort, which are unavoidable once committed to the river, are potentially at odds with holiday expectations of relaxation, discretionary time, and comfort. The unavoidable physicality of the trip was a recurring theme in participant comments: “I wasn’t really prepared for the cold, I was quite cold at night. Getting into a wet wetsuit in the morning …” (Maurice); “we had to carry stuff down the pitch … like it was really hard and even portaging was [hard]” (Jennifer).

Almost without exception these potential disappointments were not a source of dissatisfaction. On the contrary, framing the trip as a wilderness expedition transformed the hardships into signifiers of authenticity, and thus testaments to the virtuousness of the wilderness experience. Connolly (1981) recounts his own experience:

[S]omeone had tied a piece of cloth on a branch to indicate the correct path, and Cantle had contemptuously pulled it off … there must be no signposts in the wilderness. It seemed to me there was something distinctly elitist about putting the solitude of the few above the enjoyment of the many … later … I regained my sense of perspective … Difficulty of access was an essential characteristic of true wilderness. I tried to imagine the Franklin with a road running beside it … (p. 118).

Kagan (1998) argues: “the affirmation of virtue takes precedence over the search for sensory pleasure most of every day” (p. 153). On the Franklin, virtuous privation trumps pleasure, and satisfaction is not simply an index of enjoyment.

Moral values were attributed to the experience were diverse:

31 Names are pseudonyms.
Pushing yourself … it was physically tiring, a test … good to avoid impact on the place … There is value in not being comfortable – in hindsight! I am going to go home and think about something that I am really passionate about. Learnt to work in a group, everyone pitched in to help each other … found out I have more strength, tolerance, perseverance and stamina than I thought. (Janice);

… the serenity, the moss, the lichen – I thought it was very spiritual, loved the place … and to have enough time to enjoy it … the whole thing was a lot more rugged than I expected, which for me is not a bad thing … it was less touristy than I expected which I liked … there is nothing commercial about it. (Christopher);

I have learned a bit about my self, bit inadequate, sometimes a bit lazy I should be doing more … I would like to take more challenges … so many things … why don’t we do things? … Got a lot out of it in that personal regard … I wanted to do something that others hadn’t … mates … have done so many things, when they sit down and tell a yarn they tell story after story after story and I think what the hell have I done for the last 10 - 20 years? (Tony).

Recurring themes in the interviews, of wilderness as site of personal transformation, as a place to find the true self, as healing, as spiritual, or as a setting for idealised communal relations, resonate not only with wilderness ideals, but also with oral traditions of the hero's journey and the web of western constructs of nature (Harrison, 1992). Furthermore, as Cocker (1993) has pointed out, “river journeys have supplied some of the most enduring legends in all European travel…” (p. 147). There are resonances too with the appeal of anti-tourism (Buzard, 1993) and the Protestant belief in the virtue of labour. The meaningfulness of the expedition is not so much derived from the river as projected onto it, with “wilderness” providing a copious stock of symbols and associations.

The Franklin River expedition is not simply a line drawn randomly on the map and then followed; rather it has a carefully chosen narrative form, with a distinct beginning, finely judged difficulties along the way, conventionally picturesque
scenery, activities which demand of the rafters no special knowledge, and a conclusion which is never in doubt. When Australians have entered wild country in the past, with different intentions (to escape from penal settlements, to find a place to settle, to search for gold or timber and so on) more complex, less romantic sentiments have been expressed, and the outcomes have been more complex and diverse than wilderness preservation. Often rivers failed to converge and reach the sea, dispersing instead into multiple channels in the arid interior. Scenery failed to match the picturesque. Reality failed to fit categorisations and expectations (Carter, 1988). The Franklin expedition typifies none of this (“you don't even think you're in Australia” – Marcus), offering instead an experience crafted to suit culturally specific, and ultimately problematic, idealisations of nature.

The wilderness ideal makes a virtue of disengagement. Wilderness is defined as pristine and untouched; many of the rafters described the river as clean: “The foam on top of the water … it was naturally clean, you could drink the water … it was great to escape the industrial, evil [name of Australian city]” (Janice); “It is just constant forest, you can't even see the campsites from the river – I really like that. It's just so clean …” (Roland); “… you can drink the water anywhere along … the pristineness of the whole trip …” (Justin); “being aware of the garbage, leaving the sites untouched … you use it and then leave it … and just wearing the same clothes for seven days is amazing” (Jennifer). Here dirtiness refers not to nature out of place (soil on a kitchen floor, mould in a bathroom) but to humans out of place; either way humans and nature are seen as separate. The complexities of an environmentalism which must deal with human habitation and interaction is replaced by an image of nature as revered but distant. Keeping a distance, limiting engagement, and not overstaying are therefore proper behaviour, codified as “minimal impact camping”. What eventually happens to the rubbish and human waste so meticulous rafted out, or the role of discretionary air travel in a broader environmental problematic, simply do not emerge as issues. Criticising the narrow focus of wilderness protection, Sauer (1999) argues that the first Earth Day (in 1970) marked the beginning of a brand of environmentalism which defined nature as isolated and distinct from every day life, thus diminishing the focus on more complex, difficult, everyday environmental issues.
From the outset participant interpretations of the experience were shaped by the expectation that their Franklin expedition was an isolated episode, rather than part of an on-going relationship. None of the rafters (other than the guides) had “done” the Franklin previously, and only a few mentioned vague thoughts of returning. The trips themselves were governed by imperatives to reach each day's campsite, and complete the journey. The trip was seen as “once in a lifetime”, and the river itself was experienced as a succession of mostly unrepeatable events and passing scenery. Participants commented: “you can't think I'll see that next time I’m here or things like that” (Marcus); “although it still is very memorable the feelings are mixed with disappointment, I would like to have the opportunity to go back” (Luigi, speaking of the Irynabyss); “I will remember that for a long time I’m kicking myself that I didn’t get a photo” (Maurice).

Participants located meaning in the “real” world of everyday life, not only through the use of literary abstractions, but also by seeing the trip as a kind of reference point or remembered source of inspiration. The abstract insights and values attributed to the trip need not have come from the Franklin – any similarly accessible and scenic wilderness would do. The environmentalism that emerges here is not so much a timeless rediscovery of nature, as a benign reworking of some of the same attitudes and beliefs that shaped the last two centuries of Australian environmental history. As in the early exploration of Australia, the Franklin becomes a kind of blank space on which travellers can project beliefs and values in accordance with their intentions (Carter, 1988).

The vision of nature inherent in the expedition is nevertheless distinctly contemporary. Controversy over logging of New South Wales rainforest in the early 1980s focussed on scenic values and depended on a literate, abstract view of nature only possible for those who do not have to earn their living from nature (Watson, 1990, xix). Having a guide on the Franklin removes the necessity for rafters to read the water or to have particular knowledge of the river. Having no intention of returning renders many details transitory, many distinctions irrelevant. Scenery, sensations, and the immediate details of travelling, social interactions and camping fill the experience with transitory details which require no special knowledge, and the no-trace camping ethic discourages more detailed engagement with the place. Speaking of knowledge developed through fishing, Hughes (1999) remarked:
To fish at all, even on a humble level, you must notice things … learning to see is a more gradual business … The sign that it is happening is the fact that you are not bored by the absence of the spectacular (pp. 1-4).

Knowledge of place and experience are intertwined; there is nothing remarkable about the observation that passing through the Franklin just once, with a guide, requires little knowledge. But the question of what understandings shape and are shaped by recreation experience throws light on differences between different forms of tourism and recreation, and between recreation and indigenous ways of being and knowing. This is not a matter of passing on more information to tourists, in the form of conventional interpretation, but of the understandings inherent in experience. Experience is a performance of understanding, and this, it emerges, is a telling observation to make of Franklin River rafting, and highlights the question of how communal understandings of nature or place are shaped by tourism.

**Conclusion**

The case of Franklin River rafting illustrates how the idea of wilderness and wilderness experience are mutually constitutive. The expeditions are shaped by, and in turn reproduce, a concept of nature as distant and revered. Understanding nature is reduced to aesthetic and bodily sensations, and to abstractions that circulate in literature and popular culture. Wilderness experience makes a virtue of estrangement, and in so doing effectively bridges the contradiction between tourism and nature preservation.

Undoubtedly the idea of wilderness has been extraordinarily effective both in ensuring the protection of the Franklin River, and in providing a template for a form of tourism which re-focuses tourist expectations and delivers an experience which is both profound and satisfying, without compromising the ideal of preservation.

However, the price of this success is high. Far more is attributed to the experience than is warranted; the sincerity of rafter responses to the experience does not diminish the observation that what was encountered was not nature unencumbered by presuppositions and culture, but the opposite. Tourism of this kind is not an
antidote to the estrangement from nature of modern life, but something much more ambiguous which contains much of the estrangement it purports to transcend. Moreover, the powerful connection between wilderness and the idea of wilderness experience functions as an ideological blinder, making it hard to even imagine what other forms tourism might take.

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Abstract

In what sense might nature based tourism be considered education for sustainability? “Educational” confers an implied worthiness that might seem to offset the environmental costs of tourism. Moreover, nature-based tourism might indeed have an important educational role to play. This paper examines the role of “education” in ecotourism discourse, and argues that there is a predominance of an overly simplified set of educational concepts. These fail to convince that “educational” nature based tourism provides a significant contribution to education for sustainability, and equally fail to establish the necessity for tourism as a means to those educational ends that are achieved. The paper concludes with a discussion of some of the considerations that a more serious consideration of nature based tourism as education would have to take into account.

Nature-based tourism as education for sustainability: possibilities, limitations, contradictions.

In what sense might nature-based tourism be considered education for sustainability? Within the contested terrain of sustainable development, travel less, holiday closer to home would be an uncontroversial inclusion in most prescriptions (see, for example Gatersleben & Vlek, 1998). Within the lexicon of sustainability, “tourism” seems a good candidate for inclusion in the category “things consumers will have to do without, or do much less of”. In this broader context, a focus on “sustainable tourism” seems to beg the question of sustainability.

At the level of the consumer, sustainable tourism might be seen as part of a larger pattern of what Luke (1993) calls “green consumerism … which … revalorizes the basic premises of material consumption and massive waste … providing the symbolic and substantive means to rationalize resource use and cloak consumerism in the appearance of ecological activism …” (p. 170). At the level of tourism development, the notion of sustainable tourism seems to function as a trope, deflecting critical observations of tourism practice away from the conclusion that tourism might be inherently antithetical to sustainable development, and towards the milder observation that tourism is not sustainable yet (cf McKercher, 1993; Wheeller, 1993). These observations are unsurprising corollaries of more general criticisms of how the meaning of sustainable development is transformed in different contexts (see, for example Beder, 1993).

The importance of the question of tourism as a kind of education for sustainability is amplified by such doubts about the place of tourism in sustainable development. Could environmentally detrimental aspects of nature-based tourism be offset by indirect contributions to sustainable development, through education? Direct environmental costs of (some) nature-based tourism might be justifiable, if it could be argued that nature tourism offered educational experiences that were both unique and necessary. While it is possible to conceive of tourism in such terms, I argue that the existing notions of “education” which circulate in nature tourism are unequal to such a project, and that a more careful and robust consideration of tourism as education is required.
**Education and the ecotourism debate**

The idea that travel broadens the mind has been a central, disputed, theme of tourism discourse since the beginning of mass tourism in the nineteenth century, reflecting, in part, earlier ideals of (and reservations about) the Grand Tour of Europe. Buzard (1993) quotes Lassel's 17th century recommendation: “no man understands Livy and Caesar … like him who hath made exactly the Grand Tour of France …” (p. 109). This sentiment persisted, as did its opposite. Johnson told Boswell “time might be employed to more advantage from nineteen to twenty-four almost in any way than travelling” (cited in Buzard, 1993, p. 99) and Cowper jibed: “How much a dunce, that has been sent to roam, Excels a dunce, that has been kept at home” (cited in Buzard, 1993, p. 99).

Tensions about the educative value of cultural tourism were one thread of a broader anti-tourism rhetoric in late 19th century Britain, in which images of uncultured masses on packaged tours were contrasted with an idealised “authentic” traveller. With the rise of environmentalism in the last three decades of the 20th century, the high ground of “authentic traveller” versus “mere tourist” debates has expanded to accommodate environmental as well as cultural concerns. The “eco” prefix appears to have driven an explosion of tourism marketing initiatives, while at the same time feeding proliferating critical discussion in the academic literature. However, debate about ecotourism has focussed mainly on its direct environmental and economic implications, rather than on the educational claims that routinely appear in ecotourism rhetoric.

The standard pro-ecotourism argument is economic rather than educational; ecotourism is claimed to deliver economic incentives (or imperatives) for (local) nature conservation. Boo's (1990) frequently-cited study makes this claim, lightly qualified, while quarantining consideration of sustainability issues to National Parks and other protected areas (the negative impacts of air travel, for example, are not considered).

Criticisms of economic rationalist approaches to conservation through tourism have been well rehearsed. (1) Tourism might fail to reliably deliver the needed economic incentive. Craik (1991) points out that tourism income can fluctuate or collapse, for many reasons including changing fashion, exchange rates, social unrest, crime, and
so on, or because of tourism consequences such as inflation, social or cultural disruption and external costs. (2) Political, social, and economic structures might not be perfectly rational, or might function imperfectly, and thus can fail to deliver the protection to natural areas necessary to sustain tourism in those regions. Boo's (1990) recommendations for government and administration might be read as a list of all that has to go right for ecotourism to deliver nature conservation. (3) Environmental politics, according to Hajer (1995) necessarily involves simplification and persuasion, rather than entirely rational calculation. Environmental decision making proceeds with knowledge that is partial, might be indeterminate, and which is at the same time too copious for any individual to comprehend. Furthermore, it might be decided that loss of wildlife is inevitable, or worth sacrificing for other benefits (such as a large resort); rationality does not lead inevitably to conservation. (4) Rationalism (not rationality) might itself be one of several broad cultural tendencies that contribute to an “environmental crisis”. For example Bowers (1993) has argued that excessive faith in human reason leads to flawed understandings of human environment relationships, through failing to account for the cultural dimensions of human dreams, desires and beliefs (or not recognising dreams, desires and beliefs at all) and by privileging a world view based on individualism, faith in progress and technology, and anthropocentricism.

Even where successful local conservation is achieved temporarily through ecotourism, the wisdom of linking conservation outcomes to the success or failure of competing ecotourism ventures, in perpetuity, is moot. Of course, a similar point applies to education for sustainability through tourism; such a project would have to be developed so as not to leave educational outcomes entirely dependant on the success or failure of particular tourism ventures.

**Concepts of education**

One of the difficulties in attempting to dissect “education” from ecotourism discourse is that “education” means many things. Prior to elaborating on these differences, I want to position myself more clearly on the question of meaning and definition.

While little attention has been paid in the ecotourism discourse to what is meant by education, the same cannot be said for “ecotourism”. Definition-seeking has become
almost a field in itself, with all of the cross-referencing, circularity, and normative struggles this implies. Examples from the recent academic literature alone include: *Ecotourism: the search for an operational definition* (Blamey, 1997); *Ecotourism: towards a key elements approach to operationalising the concept* (Bottril & Pearce, 1995); *Defining Canadian ecotourists* (Ballantine & Eagles, 1994); *Ecotourism and nature conservation: a definition with some recent developments in Micronesia* (Valentine, 1991). In papers and publications not specifically devoted to the question of definition, an introductory discussion of definitions has become almost standard (for example Nelson, 1994). These discussions are framed, and limited, by what linguist George Lakoff (1987) calls classical categorisation theory.

According to classical theory (in both formal linguistics and folk theory), categories are understood as containers in which things are placed or excluded according to sets of shared properties (Lakoff, 1987). However empirical studies of categorisation reveal that few categories fit the classical definition. Lakoff (1987) argues that the classical theory of categorisation, by failing to account for more common categorisation forms, fundamentally misunderstands human reason and cognition. Categories are better understood as defined by central prototypes, rather than boundary conditions. Things may be good or weak examples of a category. Categories may be structured as clusters, and may have fuzzy or graded boundaries. Clusters may be chains, radial, or more complex. Furthermore, categorisation is demonstrably an artefact of human neurophysiology, embodiment, capacities for mental imagery, perception, and culture; in other words, categorisation is influenced by, or reflects in some way, the experiences of those doing the categorising, rather than just the things categorised (Lakoff, 1987).

Difficulties in pinning down “ecotourism” may therefore be seen not as a problem or anomaly, but as a signal to pay attention to how particular meanings arise, and in what contexts. Recent work in cultural studies, in which multiple meanings of signs or texts (polysemy) is taken as central to understanding how meaning is made, communicated, and transformed, is helpful here. Hall (1993) argues (particularly in relation to television programs) that polysemous signs are neither pluralistic nor strictly determined. Preferred or dominant meanings may be reproduced, transformed, or contested – within limits – at key moments in production, circulation, use and reproduction. The process whereby ecotourism is encoded (as
ecotourism meaning one thing) and decoded (as ecotourism meaning, or perhaps implying, another) throws some light on struggles to appropriate ecotourism to serve different, sometimes contradictory interests. Ecotourism is associated with a constellation of difficult, complex terms: “sustainable development”, “place, “nature” (Cartmill, 1993, citing Lovejoy suggests nature has 66 distinct meanings), “culture” (the second or third most complex word in the English language, after "nature", according to Raymond Williams, 1983), and “environment”. Perhaps the real puzzle would be if “ecotourism” did signify a set of practices with clear, consistent and unique characteristics.

For Hajer (1995) contradictions and ambiguities are pointers to the essentially discursive nature of environmental politics. He criticises a predominance in the environmental literature of a (largely futile) quest for consistent paradigms and deeply held internal beliefs. It is precisely the adaptability of the ecotourism storyline to divergent, often contradictory purposes that suggests its discursive function – as a site for contestation. Whose interests and what epistemological commitments are at play in struggles to appropriate and transform the ecotourism storyline, and how is the question of education bound up in this?

**Tourism as education**

Education is not always explicitly included in ecotourism definitions. For example, of 17 definitions of ecotourism recorded in a survey of all states and provinces in the USA and Canada (Edwards, McLaughlin, & Ham, 1998), several make no mention of education or related terms. But tourism and education are overlapping categories; “tourism” itself may be taken to mean “education” in some contexts. It is no accident that a search by title in a library catalogue using terms like “discovery” “adventure” or “exploring” will come up with titles such as “Discovering mathematics”, “Adventures in science” or “Exploring Unix” (these examples are apocryphal). The Latin educere “to lead forth” is closely related to educare “to bring up children” (Williams, 1983), the latter being the root of “educate”.

Tourism and education share common metaphors. To “see” is the dominant western metaphor for “to understand”. In some contexts, travel experience and knowledge are synonymous (“yes I know China – I lived there for three months in 1993”). At the
same time, tourism has connotations that position it as education's opposite. Tourism is associated with the end of schooling (travel as something done after finishing university) or holiday breaks. In a further twist, travel in the tradition of the Grand Tour can be said to present the reality that formal education can only represent – tourism thus is education, while formal education is mere schooling.

The extent to which such folk perceptions infiltrate tourism discourse is something to be determined, as is the extent to which they can be taken at face value. But the point remains that identifying the role of education in tourism discourse is complicated by the possibility that tourism may have educational connotations which remain unstated, and more importantly, that “education” and “tourism” are neither clearly bounded nor neatly overlapping, but are engaged in a shifting and sometimes contradictory dialectic.

In tourism practice there is no clear line between tourism and education either. In his handbook for park interpreters, Lewis (1989), for example, suggests that a visitor asking for the location of a hot dog stand might be invited to discuss historical food preferences by an interpreter. While defining images of tourism and education (adults relaxing on a beach/children completing book work in a classroom) are clearly different, in the case of school tours, outdoor education, educational field trips, academic conferences, study tours, study abroad programs, overseas conservation volunteer programs, student and staff exchanges and scientific expeditions, tourism and education overlap. Interpretation centres, zoos and museums, similarly, offer something ambiguously between classroom representations of nature and direct experience. Tourism guides instruct (educate?) tourists in language, culture, skiing skills and so on.

Education and tourism rarely intersect in academic discourse. Tribe (1997) recognises the problem of constructing university tourism studies as a curriculum problem. He cites Jafari’s (Tribe, 1997, p. 648) model of tourism studies’ relationship to the disciplines, which has education as relevant to tourism education, but not to tourism as such. Drawing on curriculum literature from the 1960s and 1970s he structures an argument on concepts that have been problematised by two decades of further curriculum discourse and practice. He neglects to attend to the
constructedness of disciplinary knowledge, and to the contingency of forms of curriculum organization on social, cultural and political factors.

Education barely rates a mention in Dann's (1996) extensive review of tourism theory; education is implied in some discussions of tourism as “seeing”, “discovering” or “exploring”, and some comparisons with schooling are drawn in his discussion of tour guiding (here again is the problem that “education” may be meant when nothing is stated). While there are exceptions (Leslie, 1998; Russell, 1994), the general observation that tourism and educational theory rarely intersect applies also to the specific case of ecotourism, in spite of the prominence of education in ecotourism definitions.

The complex and unreflexive relationship between education and ecotourism places “education” at a key node in discursive struggles over sustainability and ecotourism. The capacity of “education” to denote something quite narrow, such as passing on information, while connoting something more profound, provides camouflage for contradictions between ecotourism practice and sustainability, and also provides a means whereby contradictions can be resolved in favour of particular interests, often meaning business as usual. The following discussion focuses on some of these “business as usual” aspects of nature tourism, rather than on special purpose educational travel (cf Hall, Springett, & Springett, 1993; Kalinowski & Weiler, 1992).

**Recurrent educational themes in ecotourism discourse**

The most developed educational theme in environmental tourism discourse is national park interpretation and derivative forms of environmental education. A defining image here is the United States National Parks Service ranger, stimulating interest and translating information and experience into digestible knowledge. The object of the ranger's attention is a member of a vaguely defined general public, part enigmatic stranger (by virtue of their status as visitors or tourists), part predictably behaving stereotype. For park interpreters, “interpretation” means primarily “translation” and “communication” (Cohen, 1985; Lewis, 1989; Tilden, 1977); communication is understood as a neutral conduit (cf Bowers & Flinders, 1990). Epistemologically, park interpretation sees nature understood by experts (usually
scientists) whose knowledge is translated into terms the person in the street can relate to. Ontologically, park interpretation sees nature as unproblematically real and preserved exemplarily in national parks, where it can be experienced or viewed directly.

The term “interpretation” was adopted by the Parks Service in the late 1930s (Brockman, 1978), apparently in a deliberate attempt to disassociate environmental education for the public in national parks from perceived negative aspects of formal schooling (Everhart, 1983). Bryant and Atwood (1932), mention interpretation, but only in the context of education, not as an alternative term. Tilden (1977), in what has been regarded as a standard work on park interpretation since its first appearance in 1957, contrasts a straw version of institutional education with the interest and stimulation provided by park interpretation:

> Instruction takes place where the primary purpose of the message between teacher and pupil is education. The classroom is the outstanding example of this … [i]n the field of Interpretation … the activity is not instruction so much as what we may call provocation … the purpose of interpretation is to stimulate the reader or hearer towards a desire to widen his horizon of interests and knowledge, and to gain an understanding of the greater truths that lie behind any statement of fact (pp. 32-33).

The claim that interpretation is not “education” is something of an exception, and contemporary interpretation is not always positioned rhetorically against supposed dry and uninteresting schooling (and in any case might more reasonably be compared to nature documentaries or computer simulations). Far more commonly, interpretation is implied to be a kind of education, albeit simply conceived and conducted on limited terms. Farrell (1999), for example, defines interpretation as: “a communication process, which aims to translate ideas and customs into terms an audience can understand. Interpretation should stimulate (rather than satisfy) curiosity and, most importantly should encourage visitors to internalise the message and revise their attitudes and behaviour accordingly” (p. 19).

Farrell's (1999) inclusion of behavioural objectives (less apparent in the earliest definitions of park interpretation) reflects views of education which reached their
zenith in mainstream educational discourse in the early 1960s (Stenhouse, 1975). These too have become routine; on their return to the everyday, tourists are supposed to do something such as recycle their garbage or become environmental activists (for example Leslie, 1998). The preferred outcomes are often minor, if not trivial; conforming to park regulations, such as care with fire, or sticking to marked trails, or simple environmental action, such as preventing pets from roaming (Farrell, 1999) or persuading tourists not to touch dolphins while feeding them (Orams & Hill, 1998). The role of interpretation in garnering support for the sponsoring organization and its practices is a notable exception (cf Foresta, 1984).

Educational images or metaphors are consistently used to help clarify ecotourism definitions; “education”, by implication, is not seen as problematic. Table 1 illustrates some of the constellation of usages of “education” in ecotourism definitions. It can be seen that ecotourism creates understanding of natural history; enlightens; involves experience and learning; increases knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of nature; provides access to information; integrates into the bosom of nature; involves appreciation, connects to nature, and so on (Edwards, McLaughlin, & Ham, 1998).

These, of course, are everyday terms invoking common metaphors for education, and no doubt help clarify what is meant by “ecotourism”, to a degree. While the term education itself may imply a constellation of possible meanings (potentially confusing rather than clarifying the ecotourism picture), the overall pattern in which practices are defined as education, metaphors are invoked, and terms such as learning, enlightenment, and communication are used interchangeably, suggests a predominance in ecotourism of an overly simplified set of educational concepts. These fail to convince that “educational” nature based tourism provides a significant contribution to education for sustainability, and equally fail to establish the necessity for tourism as a means to those educational ends that are achieved.
“purposeful travel that creates an understanding of cultural and natural history … with a high level of interpretation”

“enlightening nature-based or cultural travel experience … [with] the requirement that … some degree of purposeful environmental or cultural education be present within the ecotourism experience”

“Nature tourism … travel to a specific area to experience and learn about the natural environment of the area … not including … purely recreational adventure … [or] consumptive activities like hunting and fishing”

“Nature tourism products meet two objectives: Experience … Education - something to learn (i.e. to increase one's knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the natural environment)”

“[ecotourism needs] access … to obtain educational and scientific information of good quality …”
[mentions activities and observation]

“ecotourism attempts to reintegrate the traveller into the bosom of nature and ecosystems”

“has to do with appreciating nature and environment and how it uniquely relates to Alabama”

marketing plan refers to “Eco-Education Itinerary”

“promotes environmental conservation”

“… an enlightening, nature-oriented travel experience …”

“travel to natural areas which … [provides] a quality experience that connects the visitor to nature”

“… nature-based travel to Hawaii's natural attractions to experience and study Hawaii’s unique flora, fauna, and culture … infused with the spirit of aloha aina (love of the land)”

“Three types of experience fall under the general heading of ecotourism … viewing … [especially] endangered and unusual species …; … experience the physical challenges [ of nature] …; … accompany a guide or expert to learn about nature and the outdoors (a learning experience)”

“Ecotourism is … authentic, intimate, meaningful, and educational encounters between visitors and local natural and cultural phenomena …”

“… ecotourism.. provides first hand, participatory experiences … has an element of education … promotes environmental responsibility”

Table 1. References to education in ecotourism definitions

Education and sustainable development

To take seriously the possibility that nature based tourism could make an important contribution to education for sustainability requires a critique of aphoristic notions of education in tourism discourse, and attention to important omissions. What follows is intended as a first step in that direction.
(1) **Social, cultural, and political dimensions of educational aims and goal settings.**

Individualism dominates the construction of education in ecotourism. The tourist is a consumer of knowledge, vulnerable to persuasion but ultimately free to pick and choose. Tourism lacks a conception of education as a public good, and of the educated democratic citizenry central to much education discourse (for example Marginson, 1993); it is therefore difficult to find purchase for discussions about the social, economic, or political implications of how tourism experiences, and knowledge derived from tourism, are distributed. Yet sustainable development is inherently political (Hajer, 1995); who decides what understandings and realities will dominate in ecotourism offerings, and by what process? The point here is not so much that these questions are not answered in practice – ecotourism happens, so something has been decided – but that education discourse in ecotourism lacks a place for the depth of reflexivity demanded by these considerations, and is therefore inherently conservative. Ryan (1998) comments: “tourists do learn through the modes of play offered by contemporary tourism. They learn the signs of modern tourism” (p. 192).

While tourism discourse is attentive to social, cultural, and political dimensions of tourism, the role of tourism in educating populations (of tourists) with a view to (possibly) radical social, cultural, or political transformation receives superficial acknowledgment at best. There are important differences here between local tourism, intra-national tourism, and international tourism. The latter might be a particularly hard case; exactly what environmental educational problems (and according to whose definitions) would require international travel by particular groups?

(2) **Epistemological and ontological dimensions of experience**

According to Lundgren (1983) the representation problem is a (he says “the”) central curriculum problem. By this he refers to the reproduction, through systematic education, of knowledge produced elsewhere. Notwithstanding the evident ontological dimensions of schooling, education is centrally engaged with a literate epistemology, in which knowledge can be taken out of context, disembodied in some cases, and re-embedded. This almost self-evident observation appears, not surprisingly, to underlie a widespread understanding of education in ecotourism.
Knowledge is something that can be passed on to the tourist by the interpreter. But once knowledge has been processed and represented, what is the role of “direct” experience? If equivalent knowledge or sense of reality could be obtained by watching a film, for example, then ecotourism becomes educationally redundant; the particular form of experience is substitutable, and the location, in many cases, is arbitrary (“nature” and “the environment” are universal).

Epistemological tension between tourism experiences as temporary, local, and embodied, and tourist knowledge as something abstracted from experience, is matched by ontological tension. Tourism experiences are partly defined by difference, or escape from everyday reality (Cohen & Taylor, 1992). In so far as nature tourists do develop embodied, perhaps tacit knowledge of the natural worlds encountered, what is the relevance of such performative knowledge once tourists have gone home? At a community level, what patterns of experience, particularly within a bioregion, might be important? Tourism discourse generally is unhelpful on this point; while attention to the constructedness of tourism experiences is routine (Harkin, 1995; Urry, 1990), there is little detailed attention to the role of physical encounters with nature.

The term “interpretation” contains a neglected clue to how such an inquiry might proceed - interpretation can mean “performance” as well as translation. Indeed, knowledge considered as “performative grasp of the world” (Rouse, 1987, p. 63) is suggested in the quote from John Muir often cited in park interpretation literature:

> I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of the flood, storm and avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can (cited in Everhart, 1983, p. 51).

There might be reasons to take seriously the ways in which particular communities relate experientially to nature, particularly within their respective bioregions, or geographic areas which they control politically (Brookes, 1998). The dialectics between the reality of tourist experiences and paramount reality (Cohen & Taylor, 1992), and between representational knowledge and embodied, performative knowledge are central to understanding educational possibilities. Such possibilities are undoubtedly fewer in tourism based on the temporary visitor who “takes away”
knowledge from a one-off experience than in tourism which constructs on-going, if episodic relationships with particular places.

Some of the epistemological and ontological groundwork for developing and evaluating outdoor experience in these terms can be found in environmental education theory derived from the aboriginal concept of singing the world into existence (Brookes, 1998; Gough, 1991).

(3) Social and cultural construction of knowledge

Tourism experiences and the social and cultural settings from which tourists come and to which they return are mutually constitutive. Nature experiences are shaped and constrained by social and cultural influences, but at the same time, collective experience of nature becomes encoded in common beliefs, understandings, and social arrangements (such as sustainable development codes). Deconstructing the distinction between knowledge production and reproduction in (2) above likewise emphasises a role for tourism experiences in constructing, rather than just reproducing, knowledge and shared senses of reality.

These observations underline the inadequacy of individualism and behaviourism, so prominent in environmental interpretation discourse, as a basis for a theory of education in nature tourism (Bowers, 1993). Individualism fails to account for the intertextual (Gough, 1993) nature of meaning-making; the terms under which individuals negotiate the meaning of experiences are neither free, nor arbitrary. At the same time, behaviourism fails to account both for the extent to which meaningfulness is embedded in contexts and experience, and for the extent to which it is negotiated individually. As Hall (1993) has observed, cultural patterns dominate but do not determine how cultural productions (such as a tourist experience) are understood.

Alternative accounts are available in the curriculum and environmental education literature. Bowers and Flinders (1990), for example, contribute insights into how particular social and cultural influences are manifest in language, use of space, and non-verbal communication. Gough (1993) has elaborated on the intertextual nature of meaning-making. Bowers (1993) provides an analysis of how particular cultural
pre-dispositions, which he argues are implicated in the environmental crisis
(rationalism, anthropocentricism, the idea of progress, and individualism) can form a
hidden curriculum in educational materials, programs and settings. While there is
little reason to suppose ecotourism practice could not in principle be refined to
reflect these more complex accounts of educational practice, to do so would disrupt,
and contradict, dominant understandings of education in ecotourism discourse.

**Concluding remarks**

Ecotourism discourse is sustained, in part, by its association with a constellation of
flexible terms and concepts which allow the ecotourism storyline to be reconfigured
to suit many purposes and beliefs, and which disguise deep contradictions. The role
of education plays a distinctive part in this, hinting at a sense of the public good and
processes of agreed social and cultural transformation, while denoting a far more
limited project of passing on information and relatively mundane behaviour
modification.

Perhaps the collective experiences of place (or nature) of ecotourists have a profound
contribution to make to the meanings and senses of reality that ultimately shape
environmental politics. What I have tried to show here is that there is a considerable
gulf between the concept of tourism-as-education that such a program would require,
and the simplistic and undemanding notions of education which predominate in
ecotourism discourse. A project of education for sustainable development through
nature tourism would substantially disrupt some tourism conventions, and also pose
some challenges for environmental education.
Part V. In safe hands, or on familiar ground? Outdoor education epistemology and the safety imperative.

Preface to Part V

Thesis statement

The problem of determining what, if any, forms of outdoor experience should be educational priorities, and how those experiences should be distributed in communities and geographically – that is who goes where and does what – is inherently situational. The persistence of a universalist outdoor education discourse that fails to acknowledge or adequately account for social and geographic circumstances points to serious flaws in outdoor education research and theory, and impedes the development of more defensible outdoor education practices.

Safety is a constant theme and a privileged category in outdoor education discourse. Major accidents nearly always spark widespread public debate and interest in outdoor education, and sometimes trigger strong intervention in outdoor education organization and administration. Raffan (2002) provides one account of how a tragedy on Lake Témiscamingue influenced outdoor education in Canada. The overall intermingling of safety and curriculum discourses in Victoria, Australia, is examined in Chapter 1. In the UK, a recent parliamentary report (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005) identified risk as a main deterrent for school trips, and reported that the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) advised members not to participate in school excursions.

At the heart of such debate and behind such interventions is a curriculum question – what are (were) the educational benefits of the program in question? Some links between the epistemology of outdoor education and safety are examined in the Introduction, and Chapter 1 examines links between safety and the institutionalisation of outdoor education curriculum. Legitimate safety concerns fuel these debates, and may be at the forefront of interventions in outdoor education governance. Part V examines those safety concerns directly and in detail.

A thesis built on the proposition that outdoor education curriculum required a situationist approach would have limited currency if it could be shown that safety
required a universalist approach. The critique in previous chapters of universalist approaches to safety requires empirical support, which is not as straightforward a task as might first be supposed. Serious accidents are very rare in outdoor education; it is much easier to link safety practices and orthodoxies to sources of authority than to evidence. Part V reports on a large project to collect, collate, and examine details of every outdoor education-related fatal incident in Australia since 1960. I examined fatal incidents because, firstly, they are the most serious and secondly, in most cases the details become a matter of public record.

Part V supports the thesis statement by showing that, at least in Australia, there are limits to universalist approaches to safety, and safety is enhanced by a situational understanding of outdoor education incidents.

Abstract
This paper presents a summary of outdoor education fatalities in Australia since 1960-2002. It discusses the importance of incident analysis in fatality prevention. Major sources of systematic bias in reviewing cases are discussed, and a distinction made between risk management, safety management, and fatality prevention. The paper is the first in a series presenting the findings of a research project that sought to examine all available information from public records, mainly newspaper reports and coronial documents, on outdoor education fatalities since 1960, with a view to (a) ensuring cases for study were more consistently available to teachers and teacher educators and (b) examining past incidents for common elements or patterns.


Introduction

Accidental death is a major contributor to what is a low death rate for young people in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000). As would be expected, deaths from accidents and other causes have occurred on camps and excursions organised by schools or youth groups. This study, based on publicly available information, presents a compilation of fatalities occurring on school and youth group camps and excursions since 1960. Most involve deaths from external causes. With hindsight, many were preventable. I hope that this research will help to ensure that, as a mother who lost her 13-year-old daughter at Lal Lal Falls put it, “something positive” (Smith, 1990, p. 3) comes from these tragedies.

The research, of which this article is part, has two main threads:

1. To provide a compilation of fatalities that will assist outdoor teachers, leaders, guides, and those who train outdoor educators, and to develop case studies from newspaper reports and inquests. No such compilation previously existed. I have provided sufficient information for readers to locate newspaper articles relating to most incidents. Usually newspaper reports will contain the names and dates necessary to request the findings of an inquest, if one was held. Inquest reports are usually public documents, although access is not automatic, because the public interest must be weighed against the privacy of those named in the reports.

2. To consider what can be learned by taking an overview of many fatalities, and the contexts in which they occurred, over four decades. There are lessons to be learned from the set of fatalities. “Freak” events in the life or career or any one individual or institution might be seen to fit patterns only evident from this wider perspective. I will examine some of these patterns in more detail in later articles, but some are clearly evident in the summary of incidents presented here.
The role of studying incidents in safety management

Reviewing and circulating incident reports, including informal “story-telling”, is an essential part of safety management. I am not aware of any safety-oriented culture that does not include cautionary tales or example-based safety analyses.

Reviewing cases is essential because experience and common sense alone will not prevent all fatalities:

- Fatalities (on camps and excursions) are rare. Most of those who conduct camps or excursions, even if they do so full-time, will never experience a fatality under their care.
- Lessons accumulated from “near misses” or non-fatal injuries are essential to safe practice, but are not sufficient - not all fatalities are preceded by, or associated with, warnings in the form of recognisable near-misses (cf Brackenreg, 1997).
- Lessons accumulated from everyday experience of outdoor education are essential to program quality. But fatalities can arise from specific circumstances that might be absent in otherwise poorly run programs, and present in otherwise exemplary programs. Recognising these circumstances is not a matter of common sense.

Fatality prevention requires a specific effort to enquire beyond the experience of individuals and the record of individual programs to learn from fatalities in programs sharing some common elements. The detail and specificity to be found in incident reports provide vicarious salutary experiences, without which certain fatality prevention measures could seem unnecessary. For those whose job it is to convince others of the necessity of specific precautions, examples of incidents might be persuasive where assertion is not.

It was not the intention of this research to examine the aftermath of any tragedy. But I will note that many of these tragedies were attended by a sense of disbelief, and sometimes by specific claims that “nothing like this has happened before”. The fact that a program has been running for years without incident is not proof that fatality prevention strategies are adequate. Outdoor education fatalities nearly always occur in circumstances where those responsible can truthfully say “nothing like this has
happened before in this program”. Such reactions are understandable; but it must also be understood that the average probability of accidental death on any given day for a 5-14 year-old in Australia is around 1 in 5 000 000\(^{32}\) (around 8 times less than the risk for 15-24 year-olds). Even if it was accepted that participation in outdoor education increased that average risk (say) tenfold – something I would regard as unacceptable – only programs with experience of hundreds of thousands of participant-days could legitimately point to a record of zero fatalities as evidence of good prevention strategies. It is conceivable that teachers could run dozens of camps in circumstances that make a fatality 1000 times more likely than in everyday life, without necessarily experiencing a fatality.

I will elaborate on some of the circumstances that are implicated in these tragedies in other papers, but even the limited detail provided below should allow readers to identify some patterns. At the risk of labouring the point, many of these circumstances – certain activities or supervision arrangements, certain locations or environments – 99.9% of the time will not result in a fatality. As Perrow (1999) points out, cutting corners works most of the time. Studying cases might help to offset complacency entrenched by experience of successful corner cutting.

Risk management, safety management, and preventing fatalities

It is helpful to distinguish fatality prevention from two related areas: safety management and risk management.

Safety management combines fatality prevention with prevention of relatively common non-life-threatening injuries. Fatality prevention warrants specific consideration because a fatality is the most serious incident that can occur and, as Hogan (2002) observes, consideration of rare but serious incidents can be overlooked by planners concentrating on a multitude of less serious possibilities.

Existing safety guidelines might contain the distilled experience of many fatal incidents. Brisbane Grammar introduced swimming lessons after the Quetta sank in Torres Strait in 1890, drowning passengers connected with both (girls and boys)

\(^{32}\) Death rate per year is 14 per 100 000 in this age group, half due to accidents (Trewin, 2001). Half of 14 divided by 365 gives around 2 in 10 000 000.
schools. In 1912 two Brisbane Grammar boys drowned in the surf at Southport trying to rescue two Brisbane Girls Grammar girls, following which life-saving was introduced at both schools (P. Barnett, pers. com.). However it cannot be assumed that all that could be learned from previous incidents has been incorporated into guidelines or practice, or that insights from incidents have been widely disseminated. Although I did not systematically examine what lessons had been learned by whom from each tragedy, it is clear that the salutary effects of fatalities are unevenly and inconsistently distributed. The impact of a fatality might be relatively local and might diminish over time.

Institutional practices or guidelines might have been based on mistaken conclusions or lessons learned imperfectly (see Perrow, 1999). Moreover, institutional responses might have been shaped by considerations other than fatality prevention, such as risk management.

Risk management, originally developed as a means of limiting litigation (Vincent, 2001), bundles safety management with other considerations, such as loss of reputation or financial loss. Although one way to limit litigation is to prevent accidents, another is to become skilful at avoiding liability. Risk management, in other words, may only be about acting in the best interests of those in an institution’s care while it is in the institution’s interests to do so. It can mean actively working against the interests of an injured person, for example in attempting to deny them compensation for loss. Moreover, liability protection can sometimes work against fatality prevention. For example, it was reported that the beach in the Sandbar Beach 1998 incident was unsigned because the local council believed that a sign warning of the known dangers would have made it liable for any injuries. Thus, “risk management” might confuse some safety issues: “keeping young people safe” might be muddled with “covering legal bases” and “taking responsibility” might be confused with “avoiding potential liability”. Hogan (2002) provides some examples of such confusion.

Critical comments by the coroner investigating the Yarrunga Creek (1999) incident, that staff involved did not understand risk management (read “safety” in this case) could be applied to many programs, if safety discourse steeped in ersatz legal jargon, and which treats insurance companies as a source of wisdom and ethical guidance, is
anything to go by. Studying incident reports might help outdoor education teachers ensure they have not “lost the plot” on safety management.

**Accepting the past, avoiding fatalism**

The focus of this research was on preventing future fatalities. The hindsight-based analyses it developed should not be interpreted as implying anything about whether or not any individual or institution could have or should have prevented a particular fatality in the past. All of the teachers, leaders, and organisers involved in these incidents can be counted among the victims, and many have been found to be blameless. I have not clearly identified all such cases because to do so would imply that others had been allocated some blame by an inquest or other court action, which would contribute little, if anything to this research, and possibly cause unnecessary distress.

Only a few of the cases discussed here involved recklessness or criminal intent. Many involved human error, but human fallibility is unavoidable. With hindsight some fatalities might seem preventable, but what is foreseeable now might not have been reasonably foreseeable at the time of the accident. It might be tempting to conclude that an incident should have been prevented, but it is hard to know that. No re-telling of an incident can reconstruct what are often complex, distracting, or confusing circumstances; neither is it possible to reliably reconstruct the mental state or mental processes of those involved. Reason (2001) points out that the psychology of human error remains relatively poorly understood.

I have not included names of victims, nor of any individuals involved with any of these incidents. However, anyone developing case studies to inform their own practice, or for teaching purposes, will soon encounter names and personal details. It is incumbent on all who use these incidents as “cases” to recognise the trauma that each incident has already occasioned, and to be mindful of the potential distress that uncovering the details of incidents might trigger.

Fatality analysis must, like Janus, the Roman god of the past and future, have two faces, one looking back with fair-mindedness, one looking ahead with vigilance.
The study

This study aimed to examine outdoor education fatalities in Australia since 1960. I focussed primarily on school outdoor education, and have included some incidents that many teachers would regard as school excursions rather than outdoor education. I included incidents involving youth groups, such as scouts, to the extent of my knowledge, but I did not resolutely seek out youth group incidents.

I excluded outdoor recreation fatalities not associated with an organised group, fatalities involving organizations that were not youth oriented, and fatalities outside Australia. Outdoor recreation and outdoor education overlap, of course, but outdoor education is distinctive because of its focus on youth, its institutional relationships and constraints, and because it has different aims (Horwood & Raffan, 1988). These differences warrant a specific study of fatalities in outdoor education.

Fatality prevention in outdoor education has considerable overlap with areas such as road safety, drowning prevention, school safety, and outdoor recreation safety. This study emphasises aspects of fatality prevention particular to outdoor education.

Limitations

Scope and omissions

I cannot claim that this study was exhaustive. The fact that I more or less stumbled onto some incidents suggests I failed to stumble onto others. My search for information was limited by time and money. I searched newspaper archives electronically where such archives existed (mostly 1990 or later), but might have missed some incidents because of my choice of search terms. I searched newspapers on microfilm only in order to find particular incidents I already had some knowledge of, such as the years in which they occurred; a more comprehensive search of 30 years of unindexed newspaper microfilms would be a massive undertaking.

I learned more about some incidents than others. Access to information is usually a problem for accident research (Perrow, 1999). Where there was no inquest and no newspaper report, very little information might have entered the public domain. I
have included only basic information about incidents known in outdoor education circles for which I could not locate publicly available documents.

Certain conceivable incidents are absent from this study because I didn’t find any. There are no “lost in the bush” incidents, none from bush-fires, none associated with heat, hunger or thirst in arid areas. I found a number of instances of students attacking and killing animals (not included), but I found no fatal animal attacks or bites on land or sea. All of these are possible, and should be regarded as such.

It should be borne in mind that the cases presented here were selected using necessarily loose criteria (outdoor education is not a precise term), and that I have presented no data on participation rates. This study does not, therefore, provide a basis for drawing conclusions about fatality rates, although the proportion of deaths by drowning, gravity, and motor vehicles is probably about right. However, while it might be tempting to observe that more deaths seem have occurred from drowning than from falls, it is more useful to observe that there is a risk of drowning around water and a separate and independent risk of falls and falling rocks around cliffs.

Similarly, in the absence of participation rates, little can be concluded about different numbers of fatalities in different states, or in different decades. It is more useful to observe that some risks are geographic – for example hypothermia is a risk in the waters and high country of the southeastern states.

There will be future fatalities – misfortune and human fallibility will see to that – and those working in the field must stand ready to provide compassion and understanding for those involved or affected. But I contend, as a researcher, outdoor educator, and parent, that fatality prevention must be approached from the standpoint that there is no acceptable rate of accidental deaths in outdoor education.

**Sources**

I sought information about the existence of incidents widely, short of contacting relatives of the deceased directly or indirectly. I approached teachers or supervisors close to an incident only as a last resort, and only if I had reason to think that my request for a name and date would cause no distress (for example if I knew that a
person had given a presentation about the incident). In each case I requested assistance in locating information already in the public domain. The sources I used once I knew of the existence of an incident were mainly newspaper reports and documents from coroners or inquests.

There were important differences between press and coronial sources. Newspaper reports tended to present what the reporter had learned as a “story”, sometimes using non-eye witness accounts, for example a rescuer who has spoken to those present. Newspaper reports may contain information not in inquests, for example personal information about victims, or reactions of parents and others. In a small number of cases (for example Growling Swallet 1990, Thomson River 1976) newspapers took an “investigative” approach to an incident. Multiple fatalities (for example Lake Hume 1963, Lake Alexandrina 1987) or clusters of fatalities (for example Morley 2000, Bayswater 2000) received more press attention, which sometimes included canvassing various interpretations of the incident. Most of the latter reported views emerging from the community rather than editorialised, although the effect of usurping the coroner might be the same. The Hobart Mercury’s different treatments of the Cradle Mountain (1964), Cradle Mountain (1965), and Cradle Mountain (1971) incidents illustrates how newspapers can take different “lines” on incidents which were in many ways similar. In the first two instances, reports emphasised good planning, heroism and bad luck. In the third, perhaps partly influenced by the fact the group were “mainlanders” one headline referred to a lack of “nous”. I did not seek newspaper reports of most inquests, but it is clear that some inquests attracted more press attention than others.

Information from inquests or coroners came in several forms. I have indicated where there has been no inquest. Usually this fact has been communicated to me by a coroner’s office, but in some cases I have relied on personal communication from individuals close to an incident. Some “no inquest” findings include a summary of the incident prepared by the coroner, or a police report. Some inquests have been transcribed. Transcriptions provide the most detailed record. Some inquest files, especially older ones, contain depositions from witnesses and the police, with comments added in response to questions asked at the inquest. These also provide a fairly detailed record, although they give less information about the tone and emphasis of the proceedings. In a number of cases I saw only the coroner’s findings.
These vary in the amount of detail they include, and are, of course, one step removed from the actual evidence presented at the inquest. Some coronial investigations are relatively brief, especially if the facts are simple and uncontested. Others are more extensive. My impression is that to some extent coroners have responded to the community on this. If various parties are clamouring for an investigation, or making assertions about an incident, then the coroner will try to ensure that any questions are aired and answered. Inquests help the community to deal with a death; my impression is that coroners often very skilfully balance a responsibility to uncover the facts in the public interest with a process that helps all of those involved in a death to come to terms with their loss.

**Systematic errors in reviewing case studies**

Cases are open to interpretation. Two individuals may disagree on the extent to which a particular event – say a tree falling on a tent – was preventable. Such differences might be distributed randomly, and would therefore be neutral with respect to any overall understanding of fatality prevention. There are, however, potential *systematic* sources of error in interpreting case studies.

**Hindsight bias**

Hindsight bias is a well-documented psychological phenomenon (Hoffrage, Hertwig, & Gigerenzer, 2000; Roese & Maniar, 1997; Williams, Lees-Haley, & Brown, 1993). Knowing how things turn out provides a framework for making distinctions and seeing connections that are difficult to unlearn or suspend. Hindsight bias is usually considered in the context of a subject “rewriting the history” of what they thought before an event, once they know the outcome. Arguably, this “I knew that was going to happen” phenomenon is a by-product of a necessary ability to learn from experience (Lundberg & Svenson, 2000). Surprisingly perhaps, analysis of an incident, or consideration of counter-factuals (“if onlys”) reinforce hindsight bias.

Hindsight bias encourages belief that “I would have seen that coming”, or belief that “I knew that was going to happen”. It can torment those involved in incidents (“I should have foreseen that”). An accident, which nobody foresaw, becomes, with hindsight, plainly foreseeable. Hindsight bias can tempt unfair judgements about
those involved in accidents. It might breed complacency (“there is no way I would have missed that”). Hindsight bias is insidious – those making judgements swayed by hindsight might be quite certain that they are not influenced by hindsight.

**Attribution error – focussing on the person not the situation**

At one time social psychology promised to provide reliable predictive tests of individual behaviour, based on measured character attributes (I could be relied on to help the needy, because of my measurable moral fibre. You could be expected to pocket some change from the till because of your measured dishonesty). What decades of research revealed was something different; circumstances, not character attributes, provide the best predictors of individual behaviour in different or novel circumstances (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). But individuals tend not to believe this, except perhaps when explaining their own behaviour (“I am not rude – I am just late for an important meeting” – see Kagan, 1998). This is the fundamental attribution error: a widely observed and persistent belief that behaviour in one set of circumstances can be predicted based on character attributes inferred from another set of circumstances (“I know Mary. She will be great for that job.”). Attribution error is hard on those involved in accidents; it tempts unfair inferences about the personal and professional traits of those involved, and like hindsight might tempt complacency (“of course I would not behave in such a way – I am careful / observant / conscientious”).

Associated with the fundamental attribution error is what seems to be a widespread tendency to emphasise actors rather than circumstances. This includes cultural preferences for “character-driven” drama, and ideological beliefs about individual responsibility (see, for example Ross & Nisbett, 1991). To limit the possibility of attribution error, it is important to avoid inferences about the personal or professional characteristics of those involved in particular incidents, unless there is multiple evidence based on more than one instance. It is also important to pay attention to contextual information, including consideration of whether one has access to sufficient contextual information to form an opinion.

Attribution error probably biases accident analysis towards human error and away from situational factors. The circumstances of an incident include the institutional
and managerial contexts in which it occurs. Although there can be a tendency in accident analysis to focus on operator error (Perrow, 1999), errors can and do occur at all levels, including management and accreditation systems. Moreover, while social psychology has largely failed to identify personal characteristics that can be used to predict behaviour, certain situational factors are strongly predictive. Examples include being in a hurry, and the behaviour of others, especially peers.

**Confirmation bias**

In at least three of the drowning cases discussed here (Anglesea 1979; Eppalock 1981; Hampton Pool 2000) other group members who saw the deceased in trouble thought the person was “mucking around” or joking. That is, the other participants were (understandably) not easily able to shift from a “playing” frame to a “life-is-threatened” frame. Confirmation bias arises from the relative robustness of the frames that help individuals make sense of what is going on – frames help form a mindset around which information or observations are arranged and interpreted. Perrow (1999) describes an instance of a ship suddenly turning from a non collision-course to a collision-course because the master had formed a “mental model” that the other ship was travelling in the same direction as his ship (it was not).

Reason (2001) contends that confirmation bias is the most universal systematic bias in analysing accidents: “We ‘pattern match’ a possible cause to the available signs and symptoms and then seek out only that evidence that supports this particular hunch, ignoring or rationalising away contradictory facts” (p. 13). Confirmation bias affects not only how those involved in an incident understand it at the time but might also influence subsequent analysis. Confirmation bias may be reduced by (a) seeking information on fatalities from the original public sources, rather than relying on brief summaries or pre-digested conclusions or recommendations, and (b) paying careful attention to the explicit or tacit theories that shape how individuals interpret and explain incidents.
Representational limits – the map is not the territory

It is important to remember that all accounts are necessarily partial, moulded by particular interpretations or worldviews, and potentially influenced by particular interests (for example self-justification, or protection of the good name of a school).

Accounts will be limited according to what those involved understood at the time. Important details might have been observed by no one. Those involved might not have been conscious of their own mental processes. Reason (2001, p. 18) points out that “inattention, distraction, preoccupation, forgetting, fatigue, and stress are probably the last and least manageable links in the chain of events leading to an error”. Circumstantial details might not have consciously registered with anyone present at the time (Ross & Nisbett, 1991).

Human memory is fallible. Schacter (2001) classifies memory limitations as: transience (fading over time); absent-mindedness (not remembering actions performed automatically); blocking (inability to recall known information); misattribution (confusing sources, for example, what you have read or heard with what you saw); suggestibility (memories influenced by the context of remembering, for example by the way a question is put); bias (some sources of bias are discussed above; there are others); and persistence (inability to forget troubling images or memories). These limitations are inherent in human memory. Misattribution, suggestibility and bias are particularly important because they produce clear, sincere, but false memories.

Some accounts might be untruthful.

The forms in which evidence appears (written depositions; transcripts; photographs; news reports; collections of physical evidence) have their own grammar and conventions, conveying some aspects of reality better than others.

False comparisons / overgeneralisation / oversimplification

Although one purpose of this research was to identify patterns and common elements across the set of fatalities, every accident is unique. What constitutes a condition for
an increased fatality risk in one geographical, organisational, or institutional context might not in another.

It is important not to confuse the circumstances of a fatality with the cause of the fatality. In some deep sense each tragedy was *caused* by the convergence of many factors, which considered individually, would not be sufficient to cause a fatality. At the same time, removing any one of a number of circumstantial factors might have been sufficient to prevent the tragedy. In seeking to develop insights that apply equally to scouting groups and school groups, or in Queensland and Victoria, one risks losing sight of the uniqueness of each situation.

The language of blame can lead to oversimplification, and complacency. Perrow (1999) points out that the “cause” of accidents is often identified without sufficient study of circumstances in which the nominated cause was present but there was no accident (this is not a reference to the causes of death, such as drowning or head injury, determined at autopsy, but to the events which lead to the death). Causes are *attributed* to accidents. For example, this study contains four instances of teenage boys, not directly supervised (or apparently not, in two cases), deciding to cross a river (Crooked River 1978, Shoalhaven River 1990, Forth River 1998, Yarrunga Creek 1999). It is possible to consider whether each of these fatalities was caused by the supervision arrangements, by the river conditions (dam releases or heavy rain), by the decision to cross the river, or by something else. In most cases there were dozens of independent “if only” factors that would have prevented the death. I want to suggest that while there might be psychological, social, or legal imperatives to resolve these factors and nominate a “cause”, one can better understand these tragedies if “causation” is largely avoided – it might be sufficient to identify the set of conditions which contributed to each fatality.

### Summary of fatalities

The tables summarise the fatalities identified. I have named each incident for ease of reference.

I have indicated sources as a guide to the level of detail I had access to. The comments above about sources of information should be taken as qualifying the
discussion in this study. I have not listed every newspaper report I had access to. I made no attempt to find every newspaper reference, because reporting of some incidents continued for days, often in several newspapers. Where an incident received national coverage there might be dozens of articles in different editions of various newspapers. In some cases, so far as I could tell, an incident was reported in only one newspaper, sometimes as part of a report on something else. Rather than provide a bibliography that would have run for pages and still have been incomplete, I have provided a reference for one article from a major newspaper for each incident (except where I did not use newspaper reports). I have tried to select comprehensive articles, but in some cases my choice was somewhat arbitrary, and I advise checking for other reports. Those compiling case studies will find some articles easier to access than others according to the holdings in their local library, in which case the most useful detail will be the dates I have provided. Articles post-1990 can often be obtained electronically from newspaper websites for a small fee.

I have not provided inquest details, nor referenced specific inquest documents in the text. Some inquest reports contain dozens of different documents with different authors (mainly depositions). To refer to each specifically would not only produce a bibliography of unpublishable length, but also would also entail naming individuals and in the process unnecessarily intruding on privacy.

Incidents are listed in sufficient detail to identify each incident unambiguously. I have grouped them according to the immediate (medical) cause of death and loosely according to environmental circumstances.

I have not identified any individuals. I have named the institution associated with each fatality. It is the institutional involvement that makes the details of these fatalities relevant to this study. The nature of the institutional involvement varies – in some cases an incident arose from an informal, or non-official activity. All of the named institutions can be regarded as having suffered an incident, but no inference should be drawn as to whether or not an institution contributed to a fatality. In many cases a coroner has specifically found that the institution did not contribute to the death in question.
Reading incident reports

The descriptions provided here are necessarily brief. I recommend caution in attempting to conclude too much solely on the basis of the descriptions provided below. I will provide more detailed discussion in subsequent paper.

However I will make some overall observations, based on my study of all of these incidents.

There is an element of misfortune in nearly all of these incidents. Even where equipment was clearly faulty, supervision inadequate, or expertise lacking, a fatality was by no means inevitable. Taking the compassionate face of Janus that looks to the past, one aim in studying incidents should be to understand how the situation arose from which a tragedy ensured. Very few of these instances involve glaring errors or gross negligence. On the contrary, it should be understood just how ordinary the circumstances must have seemed, in many cases, prior to the tragedy. I suspect that, had a rock not fallen, the weather not changed, the current not swept someone away, or a supervisor not been distracted, many of these incidents would not even have been remembered as “near misses”. “Errors” that might have tormented bereaved loved ones and teachers for years only became errors in the light of subsequent events. Errors similar to those implicated in many of these tragedies are made all the time, usually without tragic results.

However, very few of these incidents were unpreventable. (Steavenson Falls 1968 is an example of an unpreventable incident, in my opinion). Taking the vigilant face of Janus, even the limited detail provided in the tables should make it plain that fatalities have mostly been associated with specific circumstances. There is little evidence of a generalised fatality risk associated with outdoor education. Fatality prevention need not entail “wrapping children in cotton wool” or abandoning the whole notion of taking children into the outdoors.

For reasons discussed earlier, safety management at every level – individual teaching, program planning, accreditation schemes, training and qualifications, guidelines, and institutional approval processes – might have failed to fully

33 The word ‘not’ disappeared in the published version of this paper – I have added “even” to make this counter-intuitive point clearer.
comprehend lessons from previous tragedies. Safety planning can be mired in trivial detail, distorted by institutional practicalities, diverted by the requirements of insurance claim managers, confused by optimistic jargon (“best practice”, “quality assurance”, “legally covered”) and captured by the promoters of particular training or accreditation schemes. It might be based on theories that have paid insufficient attention to the available empirical evidence from the outdoor education field and the wider literature on safety management. I hope this paper will assist readers improve current beliefs and practices.

In the second paper in this series I will examine the incidents in terms of supervision, first aid, and rescue considerations. In the third paper I will examine motor vehicle related fatalities, non-accidental fatalities, and the environmental circumstances in which fatalities have occurred. In the fourth paper I will discuss broader “system” considerations that extend beyond the immediate circumstances of any incident\(^{34}\).

\(^{34}\) This work is still in progress. The discussion in the second part of the introduction about safety standards is part of this work.
## Incidents studied

### Drowning - open water

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>News ref.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lake Hume 1963</td>
<td>M21 M19 M19 M22 M29* M25*</td>
<td>15/8 1963</td>
<td>Lake Hume (Talgamo Bight) NSW</td>
<td>Outward Bound Victoria</td>
<td>12 participants 2 night canoe trip. 2nd morning, 1 canoe swamped, party beached canoes. Resumed journey, hit by severe squall, water temp 9°C. Boats swamped. Two craft made shore, another’s occupants climbed into a tree. Of six remaining in water, one survived after 4 hours in water clinging to a tree. 2 instructors arrived after the capsizes, also perished attempting rescue after assisting 2 in tree. Severe conditions - wind, waves, rain. Cold water drowning.</td>
<td>(D) Herald</td>
<td>16/8/63 p. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Alexandrina 1987</td>
<td>M40* M12 M36* M16</td>
<td>22/8 1987</td>
<td>Lake Alexandrina SA</td>
<td>Scouts. Willunga Venturers</td>
<td>11 scouts and venturers including 1 leader and 1 other adult, 2 night canoe trip. 2nd day hit by severe squall 1km from land, water temp 10°C. 1 boat swamped, capsized, then others. 2 craft made it to shore, 1 survivor clung to craft for 2 hours before landing, 2 swam/waded to shore. Other 4 drowned. Two survivors raised alarm, others rescued in the night, very cold.</td>
<td>(C) Advertiser</td>
<td>25/8/87 p. 1, 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Deaths:** *=leader or supervisor  
**Inquests:** (T)=transcript  (D)=depositions  (C)=findings only  NI=no inquest held  
**Newspaper reports:** of incident=News of inquest=News (I)
## Drowning - moving water

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<th>Institution</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stony Creek</td>
<td>F18</td>
<td>19/7/1974</td>
<td>Stony Creek, Mt Feathertop, Vic.</td>
<td>Gordon Institute of Technology</td>
<td>Party of 8, bushwalk, fast flowing water waist deep. Crossing one by one, rope hand rail. 1 lost her footing, held underwater, released rope, swept away, drowned.</td>
<td>I (D)</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson R. 1976</td>
<td>M16</td>
<td>10/10/1976</td>
<td>Thomson R., (Coopers Ck.), Vic.</td>
<td>Prahran High School</td>
<td>30 students, 6 staff, canoeing with life jackets, activity ceased, 2 escaped supervision to repeat rapid, capsized, no life jackets, 1 drowned</td>
<td>I (D)</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglesea 1976</td>
<td>M28*</td>
<td>1/11/1976</td>
<td>2km E. of Anglesea R. Vic.</td>
<td>Geelong West Primary School</td>
<td>45 students on beach, 3 in difficulty, 5 staff, 1 drowned while assisting rescue.</td>
<td>I (T)</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglesea 1979</td>
<td>M13</td>
<td>15/6/1979</td>
<td>2km E. of Anglesea R. Vic.</td>
<td>Scouts, Sunshine District</td>
<td>2 leaders, 2 helpers, 30 scouts on beach, several in difficulty, 1 drowned.</td>
<td>I (T)</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stokes Bay 1980</td>
<td>F15</td>
<td>23/5/1980</td>
<td>Stokes Bay, Kangaroo Island SA</td>
<td>Guest Tours; Port Broughton Area School</td>
<td>3 students, clothed, wading, signed hazardous beach, swept out to sea. Two rescued, one drowned.</td>
<td>I (C)</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growling Swallet 1990</td>
<td>F14 F14 F23*</td>
<td>3/7/1990</td>
<td>Growling Swallet cave, Tas.</td>
<td>Taroona High School</td>
<td>3 teachers, 8 students, caving. Crossing thigh-deep creek with “human chain”. 1 girl slipped, carried away, 2nd girl went to assist. Teacher went to assist both. All 3 drowned. Survivors trapped for 7 hours, leader for 12. Leader later died in fall from hotel, apparent suicide.</td>
<td>I (C)</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoalhaven R. 1990</td>
<td>M15</td>
<td>29/10/1990</td>
<td>Shoalhaven R. 700 meters south of Tallowa Dam NSW</td>
<td>Scots College, Sydney</td>
<td>Canoeing, numbers unclear, father/son trip (unclear if teachers were with the group). Foot entrapment under snag while wading or swimming rapid, drowned.</td>
<td>I (C)</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan R. 1990</td>
<td>F16</td>
<td>6/11/1990</td>
<td>Logan R., Waterford, Qld.</td>
<td>Loganlea State High School</td>
<td>1 teacher 9 students 5 canoes, first canoe swept past pylon, pinned, student tangled in painter failed to surface drowned.</td>
<td>I (C)</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandbar Beach 1999</td>
<td>F14 M16 M25*</td>
<td>15/12/1998</td>
<td>Sandbar Beach, Pacific Palms, NSW</td>
<td>a Cabaratta Christian group</td>
<td>Group of 30 at unsigned hazardous beach; 1 participant, 1 counsellor went to aid of participant in trouble; all drowned. Several others rescued.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarrunga Ck 1999</td>
<td>M15</td>
<td>24/10/1999</td>
<td>Tributary of Yarrunga Ck, Kangaroo Valley, NSW</td>
<td>Scots College, Sydney</td>
<td>1 adult (non supervising) 3 students on father/son bushwalk. Older brother (substituting for his father) swept away while attempting to cross flooded creek. Drowned.</td>
<td>I (C)</td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Deaths:** *=leader or supervisor

**Inquests:** I(T)=transcript I(D)=depositions I(C)=findings only

**News** reports: of incident=News of inquest=News l
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Falls Creek 1961</td>
<td>M15</td>
<td>15/7 1961</td>
<td>Falls Creek, Vic.</td>
<td>Trinity Grammar</td>
<td>1 teacher, 27 boys, some skinning some tobogganing for 1 hour, 1 failed to return. Found drowned in vertical concrete pipe. Tobogganed over drop, hit head on pipe, then fell in (3 meters deep, half filled with water).</td>
<td>(D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moogerah Dam 1976</td>
<td>M17</td>
<td>13/11 1976</td>
<td>Moogerah Dam, Boonah Qld.</td>
<td>Brisbane Grammar</td>
<td>Several boys with teacher canoed to rockface. Student climbing rock face unable to proceed, jumped off sideways to avoid student climbing below, landed in deep, turbulent pool, failed to surface. Rain, flood conditions.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Courier-Mail 15/11/76 p. 1 Late City ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Eppalock 1980</td>
<td>M14</td>
<td>17/12 1980</td>
<td>Lake Eppalock, Vic.</td>
<td>Kyreneton Secondary College</td>
<td>20 students (approx) swimming in muddy lake, around 200 other students and 30 teachers on shore. End of year activity. No one in particular supervising swimming, 1 student drowned.</td>
<td>(D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal Lake 1990</td>
<td>M11</td>
<td>7/11 1990</td>
<td>Crystal Lake Camp, Macclesfield, SA</td>
<td>Salisbury South East Primary School</td>
<td>Drowned, circumstances unknown. 4 supervisors, 24 (?) swimming in muddy water, absence of 1 noticed at dinner time.</td>
<td>(I) News</td>
<td>Advertiser 13/4/91 p. 10 ed.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibra Lake 1994</td>
<td>M14</td>
<td>16/12 1994</td>
<td>Adventure World Bibra Lake WA</td>
<td>Collie Senior High School</td>
<td>Large adventure facility, 3680 patrons including 2536 school children and 269 school supervisors. End of year activity. Approx 350 people in swimming pool, two life guards. Boy dragged from pool by attendants, resuscitation unsuccessful. Took 2 hours to discover which school had lost a student because some had gone home.</td>
<td>(C) News</td>
<td>West Australian 17/12/1994 p. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avon Valley 1997</td>
<td>F15</td>
<td>1/12 1997</td>
<td>&quot;Sappers Crossing&quot; Avon Valley National Park, WA</td>
<td>Duncraig Senior High School</td>
<td>2 teachers, 12 students, overnight bushwalk. A small group swam out of sight of teachers; others joined them. 1 collapsed (early pneumonia) drowned.</td>
<td>(C) News</td>
<td>West Aust. 3/12/97, p. ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murgon 2000</td>
<td>M13</td>
<td>21/11 2000</td>
<td>Bjelke-Petersen Dam, near Murgon Qld.</td>
<td>South Burnett Regional Cadet Unit</td>
<td>2 supervisors, 22 cadets, clothed, exercise in weedy, muddy, dam. 1 drowned.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Courier Mail 13/12/00 p.5 ed. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morley 2000</td>
<td>M12</td>
<td>6/12 2000</td>
<td>Hampton Senior High School, Morley, WA</td>
<td>West Beechboro Primary School</td>
<td>3 staff, 38 students, 1 found on bottom of pool, (drowned? inquest pending).</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>West Aust. 8/12/00 p.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayswater 2000</td>
<td>M10</td>
<td>11/12 2000</td>
<td>Bayswater Waves Aquatic Centre, WA</td>
<td>Boyane Primary School, Mirrabooka, WA</td>
<td>54 students 1 teacher, 1 substitute teacher, 4 parents at public pool complex. Lifeguards on duty. Weak swimmer drowned in diving pool; no adults watching at the time. Drowned. Coroner found parents not qualified to supervise.</td>
<td>(C) News</td>
<td>West Aust. 12/12/00 p. 6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<td>Tatachilla 1976</td>
<td>M11</td>
<td>7/7 1976</td>
<td>Tatachilla Camp, McLaren Vale SA</td>
<td>Sacred Heart College Brighton</td>
<td>4 teachers, 65 students at camp (old winery). One noticed missing (bed check). Found unconscious, died next day, severe head injuries. Extensive police interviews eventually established he fell while using a 1st floor window sill to get from one room to another during unsupervised play.</td>
<td>NI (Police report, coroner’s file) News</td>
<td>Advertiser (Adelaide) 9/7/76 p. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barkly River 1979</td>
<td>M16</td>
<td>24/2 1979</td>
<td>Lyndon Flat, Barkly River Vic.</td>
<td>Tralagon Technical College Victoria Lourdes College Tralagon</td>
<td>School club o/night bushwalk, 2 teachers, 2 ex-students 9 students 1 student from another school. (Sat.) 2 teachers and 6 students on day walk. In steep gully, camp in sight, 1 student allowed to take a different route alone, failed to reach camp. (Sun.) Search with own resources failed, (Mon.) police found body (dead) below 20m cliff (spinal injuries).</td>
<td>I (D) News State Emergency Service report</td>
<td>Age 27/2/79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grampians 1979</td>
<td>M15</td>
<td>23/11 1979</td>
<td>Grampians Vic.</td>
<td>Monivae College Hamilton</td>
<td>1 staff, 12 students (cadets) abseiling. Activity ceased due to rain. 1 student climbed unsupervised up 8m unroped to use walkie talkie, large rock fell followed by the student, struck head (4.30 pm) Evacuation began, suspended (condition worsened). Breathing failed, ambulance arrived 6.30pm.</td>
<td>I (D)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathedrals 1983</td>
<td>M15</td>
<td>3/5 1983</td>
<td>Cathedral ranges Vic.</td>
<td>Nunawading High School</td>
<td>3 teachers, 21 students walking as a group along “Razorback” track. Girl fell 1m, uninjured. Boy fell from same spot 1.5 m. Head injuries (around 3pm). Evacuation began, 6pm, suspended 8pm (breathing failed), died 3.00am on mountain.</td>
<td>I (T) Judgement N… versus O…</td>
<td>Age 16/11/85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawkesbury River 1986</td>
<td>M15</td>
<td>10/8 1986</td>
<td>Fisherman’s point Hawkesbury River NSW</td>
<td>Knox Grammar Sydney City Mission Tallong Wilderness Centre</td>
<td>30 students on orienteering exercise. 1 student stepped on or over a loose rock, fell 1.5 meters, rock landed on top of him. Attended by doctor, died at scene.</td>
<td>NI News Sydney Morning Herald 11/8/86 p. 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bungonia 1991</td>
<td>M15</td>
<td>2/11 1991</td>
<td>Bungonia Gorge 40 km E of Goulburn NSW</td>
<td>Sydney City Mission Tallong Wilderness Centre</td>
<td>2 leaders, 4 juvenile offenders, canyoning. 1 fell 75m during lunch break. Local police and homicide detectives investigated as possible suspicious death. Coroner unable to determine what caused the fall.</td>
<td>I (D) News Daily Telegraph 4/11/91 p. 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bungonia 1994</td>
<td>M15</td>
<td>14/10 1995</td>
<td>Bungonia area (“Kirrikee”) NSW</td>
<td>St Andrews Cathedral School Sydney</td>
<td>2 leaders and senior student, 15 students, 5 day bushwalk. Students leading, not directly supervised, attempted to find a way down a cliff. 1 fell 20m, died at scene.</td>
<td>I (C) Sydney Morning Herald 15/10/1995 p. 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Falling objects

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<tr>
<td>Steavenson Falls 1968</td>
<td>M19 M18 F15 F13</td>
<td>9/1 1968</td>
<td>Steavenson Falls, Marysville Vic.</td>
<td>Group of seven teenagers</td>
<td>Party of 7 teenagers bushwalking on well-used track on steep slope. Top of Mountain Ash snapped off (no wind) 12m up. Broken section, 1m in diameter, broke on impact and rolled down the hill, killing 4 and injuring 3.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Herald 9/1/68 p.1 final ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Scouts Track 1975</td>
<td>M16 M16</td>
<td>19/9 1975</td>
<td>Towimbuk State Forest, Bunyip Vic.</td>
<td>Scouts</td>
<td>Group of 6 Venturer scouts bushwalking (Armstrong 500 competition). Light wind. Tree (23m 2.2 girth) fell across a tent. killed both occupants.</td>
<td>I (D) News</td>
<td>Sun 22/9/75 p. 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lai Lai Falls 1990</td>
<td>F12 F13</td>
<td>28/3 1990</td>
<td>Lai Lai Falls Vic.</td>
<td>Mowbray College</td>
<td>15 students, 2 senior students (belaying), 1 teacher 1 aide (top of cliff), rock climbing, top roped. 1 climbing acc. dislodged large rocks which struck 1 student climbing an adjacent climb and a second student waiting below, with about 9 other students. Both died.</td>
<td>I (T) News</td>
<td>Herald Sun 4/10/90 p. 1 ed.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serpentine Gorge 1990</td>
<td>M16</td>
<td>5/7 1990</td>
<td>Serpentine Gorge NT (died in Adelaide hospital)</td>
<td>Eltham College (V IC)</td>
<td>11 teachers 98 students, visit to Serpentine Gorge. Some climbed gorge walls. 1 dislodged 2 rocks 0.5 metre dia., called warning, student climbing below unable to evade. Rocks struck head, fell 4m. Died next day head injuries, complications.</td>
<td>I (C)</td>
<td>Sunday Age 15/7/90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt Edwards 1993</td>
<td>F13</td>
<td>31/3 1993</td>
<td>Mt Edwards near Moogerah Dam, Qld.</td>
<td>Somerset College, Mudgeeraba</td>
<td>2 teachers, 32 students, bushwalk. Victim struck (pelvis area - unconfirmed) by rock dislodged by student higher up. Died at scene, blood loss.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Courier-Mail 1/4/93 p. 3 ed.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremmer Bay 1997</td>
<td>F15</td>
<td>16/1 1997</td>
<td>Fishenes Beach, Bremmer Bay WA</td>
<td>Scripture Union</td>
<td>18 participants 2 instructors, abseiling activity on youth camp (deceased joined abseiling but not on camp). 12.30pm large rock fell from above, dislodging other rocks. hit 1 participant (belaying). Died during flight local hospital to Perth (app. 8pm).</td>
<td>I (C) News</td>
<td>West Aust. 17/1/97 p. 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowallan 1998</td>
<td>M12</td>
<td>11/9 1998</td>
<td>Rowallan Camp, Riddells Creek, Vic.</td>
<td>Scouts</td>
<td>7 scouts asleep in tents (150 at camp). 3m Stringybark branch fell on tent, 1 killed, 1 injured (broken leg).</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Sunday Herald Sun 13/9/98 p. 3 ed.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crosslands Reserve 2001</td>
<td>F15 F15</td>
<td>3/12 2001</td>
<td>Crosslands Reserve, Hornsby Heights NSW</td>
<td>William Clarke College</td>
<td>10 adults, 39 students. Camping, severe storm. 15 m branch fell from 5m onto tent. 2 occupants killed, 2 survived. D of E expedition. Unclear if adults present at the time.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Daily telegraph 5/12/01 p. 9 ed.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnarvon Gorge 2002</td>
<td>F7*</td>
<td>23/10 2002</td>
<td>Carnarvon Gorge, QLD</td>
<td>Urangan State High School</td>
<td>3 teachers 52 students on music camp. Large eucalyptus tree fell on group swimming. 1 teacher killed, 2 students injured.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Age 24/10/02 p. 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Deaths:** *leader or supervisor  
**Inquests:** [I (T)=transcript] [I (D)=depositions] [I (C)=findings only]  
**News ref.:** of incident=News of inquest=News (I) 

### Hypothermia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>News ref.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cradle Mountain 1964</td>
<td>M15</td>
<td>5/12 1964</td>
<td>Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair NP Tas.</td>
<td>Parklands High School</td>
<td>2 teachers, 3 other adults, 15 students on day trip. Party became separated into several groups. Blizzard conditions. 1 died.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Mercury 7/12/64 p. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cradle Mountain 1965</td>
<td>M25 M14</td>
<td>20/5 1965</td>
<td>Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair NP Tas.</td>
<td>Riverside High School</td>
<td>16 students, 2 teachers, 1 student teacher on 5 day bushwalk, Caught by blizzard between Waterfall Hut and Waldheim day 5. Student teacher apparently died attempting to carry hypothermic student to safety. Survivors found in several places after boy raised alarm.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Mercury 22/5/65 p. 1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cradle Mountain 1971</td>
<td>M15</td>
<td>23/11 1971</td>
<td>Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair NP Tas. (Vic. school)</td>
<td>Footscray Institute of Technology</td>
<td>2 teachers, 19 students. 3rd day of bushwalk, reached hut- full 4pm continued to next hut. Snow on ground, weather deteriorated. Both teachers and 5 students hypothermic, failed to reach hut by dark. During the night hut occupants worked to get all 7 to hut. 1 student died in the hut.</td>
<td>I (C) News</td>
<td>Mercury 26/11/71 p. 1,2,7,14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Inquests:** [I (T)=transcript] [I (D)=depositions] [I (C)=findings only]  
**News ref.:** of incident=News of inquest=News (I)
### Fire, lightning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
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<th>Brief description</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>News ref.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nooee Park 1984</td>
<td>M12</td>
<td>2/10</td>
<td>Nayook Vic.</td>
<td>Churchill Primary School</td>
<td>25 students, 3 teachers, 2 parents at camp with on-site tents on platforms. Children settled and apparently asleep. 15 minutes after checking students teachers alerted to tent on fire. Student badly burned, 1 dead. Fire caused by gas lamp placed near tent; conflicting evidence as to who moved the lamp.</td>
<td>I (T) News</td>
<td>Herald 3/10/84 p. 3 Final Extra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutton 1994</td>
<td>M11</td>
<td>17/11</td>
<td>Sutton, NSW</td>
<td>Kew East Primary (Vic.)</td>
<td>School excursion, 6 students in caravan park cabin. Air con. caught fire 12.30am; 4 escaped, teacher from another school rescued 1 (85% burns), 1 died.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Inquest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamington 1992</td>
<td>F12</td>
<td>25/11</td>
<td>Coomera circuit, Lamington NP Qld.</td>
<td>Upper Mount Gravatt State School</td>
<td>41 students, ? teachers on day walk in rainforest. 5 minute storm 2 girls sheltering under large tree (on rise, near escarpment) killed by lightning which struck tree.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Sunday Mail 14/2/93 p. 67 ed.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Natural causes

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<tr>
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<th>Institution</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>News ref.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coastal NSW 1991</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Coastal NSW camp</td>
<td>school group</td>
<td>Group including 14 asthmatics camping in tents. 1 died from asthma. Details unconfirmed.</td>
<td>pers. com.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renmark 1991</td>
<td>F14</td>
<td>19/5</td>
<td>Murray River, near Renmark SA</td>
<td>Westminster College</td>
<td>6 staff, 30 students. Caneoeing, 8pm. Mild asthmatic suffered severe attack.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Hill 1999</td>
<td>F14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Samuel Hill Army Camp at Shoalwater Bay on Queensland's central coast Qld.</td>
<td>School not stated, cadet School</td>
<td>Girl collapsed (natural causes), unable to be revived (inhaled vomit).</td>
<td>News NI (C)</td>
<td>Counter-Mail, 67/99, p. 6 ed.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret River 2001</td>
<td>M50*</td>
<td>8/5</td>
<td>Margaret River WA</td>
<td>Penrhos College</td>
<td>Teacher died of natural causes during school camp.</td>
<td>News NI</td>
<td>Sunday Times 20/5/01 p. 51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Homicide, suicide

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<th>Source</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loofa Park 1977</td>
<td>M7</td>
<td>12/1</td>
<td>Loofa Park Camp, SA</td>
<td>Adelaide YMCA</td>
<td>Student died, head injuries, struck several times on head with a brick, in retaliation for the deceased telling other children he had seen his assailant defecate near a car. 12 year-old convicted of murder 4/7/77, appeal dismissed 7/10/77. Suppression order on his name.</td>
<td>News Supreme court</td>
<td>Supreme court 7/10/77. Advertiser 5/7/77 p.3 Advertiser 14/11/77 p. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coogee Beach 1993</td>
<td>M21*</td>
<td>3/11</td>
<td>Coogee Beach NSW</td>
<td>Joseph Varga Centre</td>
<td>Student on school excursion allegedly stole property from a fisherman. Fisherman chased and caught student; teacher came to aid of student, was stabbed by fisherman, died in hospital.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald 5/11/93 p. 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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## Motor vehicle

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<tr>
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<th>News ref.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglesea 1980</td>
<td>M14, M15, F43</td>
<td>10/1 1980</td>
<td>Anglesea Vic.</td>
<td>Dept. Youth Sport Rec.</td>
<td>Camp for diabetic children. Station wagon transporting campers driven by DYSR employee, head on collision with another vehicle. 3 fatalities 1 from DYSR vehicle. 4 injured;</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Herald 11/1/80 p. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathedrals 1983</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Cathedrals VIC</td>
<td>Rusden College</td>
<td>Private car transporting students to field trip, student driving, passenger killed.</td>
<td>pers. com.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordonvale 1987</td>
<td>F16 F16 F16 M15 M16 F17 F16 F17</td>
<td>4/2 1987</td>
<td>Gilies Highway, 8km SW of Gordonvale Qld.</td>
<td>Cairns State High School</td>
<td>Bus carrying 43 students and 2 teachers returning from camp left road, rollover. Driver (professional) blamed initially, found not to be at fault. Faulty brakes. 12 seriously injured, 8 died (7 at scene. 1 in hospital).</td>
<td>News News (I) (note: there were 2 inquests and a court case)</td>
<td>Courier-Mail 5/2/87 p. 1 ed.2 Courier-Mail 3/7/92 p. 1 ed.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Hill 1990</td>
<td>M14</td>
<td>26/10 1990</td>
<td>Catherine Hill, Hume Highway near Bowral NSW</td>
<td>Sydney Adventist College</td>
<td>Victim wheeling cycle on breakdown lane (D of E expedition). Hit by truck - driver swerved off road while trying to retrieve dropped cigarette.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Sunday Telegraph 29/10/90 p. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coober Pedy 1993</td>
<td>F16</td>
<td>18/9 1993</td>
<td>Coober Pedy/William Creek SA (Vic. school)</td>
<td>Mt Lilydale Catholic College</td>
<td>Bus carrying 40 students and 5 tonne trailer, professional driver, lost control on bend, rollover, 16 injured, some serious, 1 fatality.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Herald Sun 27/4/94 p. 3 ed.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chillagoe 1997</td>
<td>F18</td>
<td>20/6 1997</td>
<td>Chillagoe Qld.</td>
<td>Cadets</td>
<td>After travelling for 12 hours 16 cadets loaded into tray of a utility (Landcruiser) to travel to a campsite on private property. Rollover, victim killed instantly. Vehicle found to be unroadworthy.</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Sunday Mail (Qld.) 17/1/99 p. 8 ed.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omeo 2000</td>
<td>F17 F16</td>
<td>14/8 2000</td>
<td>Joker's Flat, Omeo Vic.</td>
<td>Woodleigh School</td>
<td>4wd teacher driving, left road, rollover. 2 students died at scene.</td>
<td>News NI</td>
<td>Herald Sun 15/8/00 p. 2 ed.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Deaths: *header or supervisor**  
**Inquests: I(T)=transcript I(D)=depositions I(C)=findings only  
**NI=no inquest held  
**Newspaper reports: of incident=News of inquest=News (I)**

## Acknowledgements

This research was supported and partly funded by the Department of Outdoor Education and Nature Tourism, La Trobe University Bendigo. Bert Horwood made helpful comments on a draft of this paper. Rob Hogan helped greatly. A great many organizations and individuals helped me to locate or obtain information. I am especially grateful to: Gary Behrens, Murray Brookes, Terry Brown, Peter Carter, Roy Farrance, Rob Hales, John Hutchison, Jim Johnson, Peter Kalmud, Rod Lingard, Timothy Looker, Dean Marshall, Peter Martin, Alistair McArthur, Scott Polley, Des Sinnott, Glyn Thomas, Roger Trowbridge, Peter Vaughan, Neil Weatherill.

Abstract

This paper, the second in a series, presents a partial analysis of outdoor education fatalities in Australia. It examines outdoor education related fatalities in Australia in the period 1960-2002 with a view to understanding how fatality prevention measures can be improved. The fatal incidents are reviewed from the perspectives of supervision, first aid, and rescue. The paper draws attention to particular supervision considerations around water, to the special case of unsupervised teenage boys around moving water or cliffs, and to the importance of planning for the possibility of the death of one or more supervisors. The analysis found evidence that underlines the importance of frequent cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) practice, but little to suggest that inadequate first aid had been a factor in any death. The study emphasises the importance of planning to ensure that medical aid can be obtained promptly, and presents a number of imperatives relating to rescue using a group’s own resources, or with outside assistance.

Contributing circumstances: supervision, first aid, and rescue.

In a previous paper (Brookes, 2003c) I discussed the role of case studies in developing fatality prevention strategies in outdoor education, and provided a summary of outdoor education related fatalities in Australia since 1960. I provided a brief description of each incident, grouped by immediate circumstance. Drawing on information on public record (mainly Coroners’ reports and newspaper reports) I examined 114 fatalities. Two were homicides and seven were from natural causes. The accidental deaths were grouped as followed: Drowning in lakes or pools (12); drowning in moving water (18); drowning in open water (11); falls (8); falling objects (24); fire/lightning (4); hypothermia (5); motor vehicle related (23). In the current paper I extend the consideration of circumstances to supervision, first aid, and rescue.

I have used the term “supervision” to emphasise a particular responsibility of teachers to care for students in the outdoors, which is not necessarily identical to the responsibility that outdoor recreation instructors or leaders might have. Some (but not all) of the incidents studied are best understood in a broad context of care for students in the outdoors rather than in the narrower context of the conduct or management of specific outdoor recreation activities. A number of the incidents occurred around the edges of structured recreational activities.

Lay attribution of cause to outdoor education fatalities tends to emphasise either “freak” accidents or human error, especially on the part of supervisors. “Operator error” figures prominently in accident analysis in many fields, for several reasons:

1. A common bias towards perceiving and emphasising actors rather than situations. The sources of the bias are probably cultural and psychological (Ross & Nisbett, 1991).
2. There is often better evidence describing the actions of individuals than there is evidence that would permit one to reconstruct physical environments, dynamic social situations, or the psychology of the actors.
3. Attributing cause to human error on the part of someone directly involved in an incident is simpler than reviewing and understanding a wider set of circumstances (Perrow, 1999).
I have attempted to separate supervision from other duties or expectations of supervisors (for example special knowledge of particular environments). In practice it might be hard to separate supervision from other considerations, such as the knowledge and expertise a supervisor might have as teacher, leader, or instructor. I will consider the environmental circumstances of fatal incidents in a separate paper, along with consideration of broader organisational and conceptual aspects of fatality prevention.

First aid and rescue relate to the immediate aftermath of an incident. I have considered first aid specifically because it is an area in which the outdoor education profession has invested considerable time and effort. Nothing in this study suggests that first aid is not important, and there have been incidents that reinforce the importance of basic first aid skills. But it is clear that not many, if any, fatal outcomes were contingent on the quality of first aid provision. Rescue is another matter. Rescue and first aid are linked to the extent that “seek qualified medical assistance promptly” is a first aid imperative, but rescue also includes retrieving a situation before it becomes a first aid matter or worse. I found evidence to support the view that better planning for a possible rescue could have saved lives.

I have not attempted to develop elaborate advice or guidelines based on this analysis. Rather, it has been my intention to draw out specific lessons that may be used in a range of circumstances to test existing policy and practice. Any approach to safety management drawing only on these incidents would be incomplete.

In what follows I refer to specific incidents by the location and year, as listed in the previous paper (Brookes, 2003c). The limitations of this study should be borne in mind: more information is available on the public record about some incidents than others, and I had access to more of the available information on some incidents than others. I provided sufficient information in the previous paper to enable readers to locate newspaper reports or coroner’s report for each incident. Brookes (2003e) provides some additional discussion of the implications of this research.
Supervision

At an administrative level supervision might sometimes boil down to supervisor/student ratios. For supervisors, “supervision” can sometimes be taken to mean a more or less alert adult presence, not necessarily having a specific focus or requiring particular organization. I have not attempted to catalogue the implied understandings (or misunderstandings, with hindsight) of “supervision” that emerge from the material I examined. I have instead focussed on what the fatalities studied have to teach about supervision. My intention is provide a basis for understanding how specific supervision structures and practices might contribute to fatality prevention.

Supervision as a circumstance

In this section I consider the role of direct supervision, or its absence, in the cases examined. I am distinguishing for the sake of analysis, so far as possible, between supervision (opportunity to see and intervene in a dangerous situation) and expertise (capacity to recognise and ability to intervene in a dangerous situation).

Supervision is not necessarily a relevant circumstance in fatal incidents. For example, while supervisors could be responsible in an overall sense for the circumstance surrounding a motor vehicle accident (even if only by choosing a particular bus company), in none of the motor vehicle related deaths examined could I see supervision as itself a consideration, apart from the fact that supervisors might be victims. There were incidents where the deceased persons had been allowed to travel in the trays of utilities (Morgan, 1988; Chillagoe 1997); I have treated those as serious errors of judgement rather than incidents that have much to teach about supervision in outdoor education as such.

Fatalities have occurred under close supervision. At Renmark (1991) a student had an unexpectedly severe asthma attack during supervised canoeing; at Lamington (1992) two supervised girls were killed by lightning that struck a tree they were sheltering under; at Lal Lal Falls (1990) and Bremmer Bay (1997) students were killed by rocks dislodged during supervised climbing or abseiling; at Logan River (1990) the first canoe to take a planned course past a bridge was swept against a pylon, entrapping a girl.
Such incidents inevitably raise the very sensitive question of whether there has been an error or lapse on the part of supervisors, bearing in mind that in many cases this will not be true. This requires a more extended discussion, however it is important to make some brief points about perceived supervision failure. Reason (2001) makes the following distinctions:

1. It can be helpful to distinguish slips or lapses (execution failures, due to inattention, not recognising danger, choosing a wrong strategy) from mistakes (planning failures, due to lack of knowledge, misconceptions, lack of information).

2. It can be helpful to distinguish errors (slips, lapses, and mistakes), which are unintentional, from violations, which are intentional. Violations might be more or less forced by circumstances, might arise from optimising something other than fatality prevention, might arise from non-task related reasons, or from routine corner cutting.

(It should be borne in mind that these categories might overlap or be indistinct; they might help to explain the facts, but it is important not to force the facts to fit the analytical categories).

Supervision might collapse as a consequence of conditions contributing to the incident. In all three Cradle Mountain incidents parties became separated. Individuals who could maintain body heat by activity (i.e. who are not exhausted) and who expected to be able to reach shelter understandably did so, unsupervised. In Cradle Mountain (1971), the party had spread out as conditions deteriorated, but it was the students who successfully reached the hut who assisted with the rescue of those who had not. In both open water incidents (Lake Hume, 1963, Lake Alexandrina, 1987) it is clear that the capacity of supervisors to effect rescues was overwhelmed by the conditions and by multiple capsizes; most of those who survived did so by making their own way to shore, helping others where they could but not attempting futile rescues. In both instances the alarm was raised by those who made it to shore. At

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35 The deaths of nine on Mt. Hood USA in 1986 is an example of a situation in which there was good reason to keep a group together in cold conditions. A party of 4 adults and 14 students from Oregon Episcopal School encountered a blizzard during an easy ascent on May 12. Five turned back early; of the remaining 13, 11 sheltered in a snow cave while two went for help. The two seeking help encountered
Yarrunga Creek (1999) heavy rain led a group of students and teachers to abandon a rendezvous point before a group that had been delayed got there. The delayed group, which was unsupervised, on finding no teachers at the rendezvous, continued on, with tragic results. At Anglesea (1976 and 1979) a current took several participants into deeper water near rocks. In both cases someone drowned while supervisors were occupied rescuing others.

*Supervision has been a specific factor in swimming and wading fatalities.* At Lake Eppalock (1980) supervision of swimming had been overlooked in organising an end of year excursion to a lakeside park. Some staff assumed that the physical education teachers would supervise swimming; the physical education teachers regarded themselves as having other duties; only one of five was present at the park. Two turned up at the scene in a speedboat, one water-skiing, after the ambulance had left. Earlier, when students in the water had realised a student was drowning, there was a delay while they tried to attract the attention of someone on the bank. Two students on the bank went to get a teacher, who in turn sought another teacher competent to effect a rescue. Students seeking help reported at first being disbelieved. At Stokes Bay (1980) three fully clothed students had been swept out to sea before teachers, who regarded themselves as accompanying an excursion run by a tour company, were aware of a problem. At Crystal Lake (1990) it is unclear when or how the drowning occurred; but the supervision arrangements were such that a student could have gone under and not resurfaced without anyone noticing. There were several supervisors watching a relatively large group of students in muddy water; each supervisor had, in effect, to watch the whole group. The deceased’s absence was not noticed until dinnertime. Several of the incidents demonstrate that obvious signs or signals will not necessarily precede a drowning. In three cases: Anglesea (1979), Lake Eppalock (1980), and Morley (2000), students nearby thought the deceased was pretending or mucking around. At Conto Springs (1998) one of two teachers supervising 25 students at a surf beach was lying down with her eyes closed at the time of the incident. The student closest to the deceased heard him call out but did not think he was in difficulty. Media reports of Galston (1991) suggest that no one saw the deceased in difficulties; I believe no one saw the Maroon (1981) drowning, although that is unclear. At Bibra Lake (1994) two lifeguards were specifically difficulties, and rescuers had great difficulty finding the cave under 1.2 meters of fresh snow. They were found on May 15; remarkably, two survived.
supervising a pool with an estimated 350 people in it; the lifeguard who first spotted
a body on the bottom was at first uncertain if the person was playing or not, and went
to get a colleague before initiating a rescue. At Bayswater (2000) more than one
student thought they saw a body on the bottom, but were unsure. The coroner found
that lifeguards who claimed to be watching the pool were not. As at Eppalock (1980)
and Morley (2000), at Murgon (2000) children struggled unsuccessfully to raise the
victim to the surface before supervisors swam to the scene. At Avon Valley (1997),
teachers accompanied a group of students to a swimming place around a bend in the
river from where they had camped. Some students swam back around the bend, at
which point some other students, including the deceased, entered the water. The
drowning occurred about 50 metres from the teachers, out of their sight; other
students struggled to assist the victim before teachers arrived on the scene.

It is possible that a trained, experienced lifeguard, in an elevated position with a good
view of a whole pool, with no distractions, operating in short shifts and having the
means to immediately summon assistance could satisfactorily supervise a large
number of swimmers by systematically scanning the pool for signs of anyone in
difficulty (clearly that number is considerably less than 350). By the time someone is
seen lying on the bottom it might be too late (Galston, 1991; Bibra Lake 1994;
Bayswater 2000). In several of the cases discussed here, it is my impression that
“supervision” has been seen by teachers as comparable to what a teacher is expected
to do on yard duty rather than what a professional lifeguard is expected to do. For
non-professional lifeguards supervising organised activities (i.e. activities in which
discrepant events will be relatively obvious because of the defined pattern of
expected activity) the ratio of students to supervisors should also correspond to the
maximum group size – two teachers watching 20 students is not the same as two
separate groups of ten students each watched by a teacher. If students are engaged in
free play the teacher must be in a position to notice an absence immediately, because
distress will be difficult to distinguish from play; five is probably the largest number
most people can keep track of without counting. (If, for example, there are four with
red caps and four with yellow caps it is probably possible to count a larger number at
a glance). In muddy water it is not sufficient to be in a position to notice an absence
immediately. Once someone has disappeared in muddy water delay while a rescuer
swims out and attempts to locate the body might be fatal (Lake Eppalock, 1980;
Murgon, 2000); buoyancy vests might be necessary in turbid water.
Fatalities due to falling objects are not consistently linked to supervision. While the general potential for something to fall exists wherever there is steep ground, tall trees, or for that matter tall buildings (every tree falls eventually), it is not reasonable to expect supervisors to avoid all such situations. The question of supervision (as distinct from special knowledge of particular environments) hinges on how readily specific dangers can be discerned. At Lal Lal Falls (1990), Serpentine Gorge (1990), Mt Edwards (1993), and Bremmer Bay (1997) the deceased were below others who were in a position to accidentally dislodge rocks (it is unclear what dislodged the rocks in the latter case). Eliminating or avoiding situations where one participant is liable to be struck by any rocks dislodged by another participant would prevent such incidents. There are implications here for where those belaying climbing or abseiling activities are positioned. The Cowaramup Bay (1996) incident in which nine died suggests an imperative to avoid the base of unstable cliffs as much as possible, but here the boundary between supervision and expert judgement becomes blurred. Some evidence that a cliff is unstable might be obvious – loose rocks, or material at the base of the cliff that has clearly fallen recently; but some cliffs are more stable than others and the difference is not necessarily obvious. Similarly, the extent to which supervision can extend to minimising risks from falling trees or branches is unclear. This study includes 10 fatalities from falling trees or branches; falling trees or branches qualifies as a distinct risk associated with outdoor education. In principle that risk might be: (a) obvious, and avoidable with supervision, (b) evident to someone with expert knowledge, and possibly avoidable or (c) essentially unavoidable short of avoiding all trees. I could not determine if any of the tree cases studied were other than (c).

Loose or absent supervision of teenage boys around moving water or steep drops has been associated with many fatalities. The number of instances of teenage boys (15), not closely or directly supervised, making a fatal error on steep ground or around moving water is one of the most striking patterns to emerge from this study, accounting for about one in six of the non motor-vehicle related fatalities. In some instances the boys were unsupervised as part of a deliberate program aim, in one or other variation of the “boys taking an adult role” theme that has entered some forms of outdoor education from the early twentieth century youth movements. At Crooked River (1978) and Yarrunga Creek (1999), unsupervised teenagers were attempting to
cross a river or creek after heavy rain. Shoalhaven River (1990) was a similar incident, although I had access to insufficient detail to be certain that teachers were not present. At Bungonia (1994) adult supervisors permitted boys to navigate and route-find down an unfamiliar creek. The adults were apparently intentionally not with the boys at the front of the group when one fell to his death attempting to find a route down a cliff. At Tatachilla (1976) boys were playing unsupervised in an area at the back of a stage, where it was possible to climb from one room to another via a windowsill, past a room divider; an 11-year-old apparently doing so fell to his death. At the Barkly River (1979) the leader permitted a 16-year-old boy to take a different route back to the camp, which could be seen on the river flats below. He apparently attempted to descend a cliff he encountered, and fell to his death. At Falls Creek (1961) the deceased had apparently tobogganed over a drop during a period of unsupervised tobogganing and hit his head on a large vertical pipe buried to its lip in the snow; he was knocked out, fell in, and drowned. At Anglesea (1979) scouts who entered the water were at best loosely supervised; the group was spread out, some instructions had been disregarded or not passed on, and supervising adults were not all clear on the supervision arrangements for swimming. On Barrington River (1995) a 19-year-old ex-student leading a kayaking group was pinned in a rapid. Hawkesbury River (1986) also involved an unsupervised teenager, although, like the Cathedrals (1983) incident, the deceased fell only a short distance; it is not clear there was danger a supervisor could have seen.

In some cases boys escaped supervision, or supervision lapsed, briefly. At Bungonia (1991) one of four participants fell or was pushed during a lunch break when the two supervisors were momentarily not looking. Supervisors saw him falling, but did not see him start to fall. On the Thomson River (1976), canoeing had finished for the day and gear was being carried back to the vehicles when two students decided to put a canoe in and paddle a grade one rapid without life jackets. A teacher noticed them attempting to ferry glide incorrectly, called advice, and seeing one let go of the canoe after it capsized swam after him, getting to within a metre or so of him before he disappeared. On the Forth River (1998) a student attempted to cross a section of river to join another spectator on a rock; canoeing supervisors came to his aid after he became entrapped, but the partial river crossing was apparently neither a planned part of the program nor supervised directly. Similarly, at the Grampians (1979) an abseiling activity had ceased due to rain when a student attempted to climb a cliff
unrope to obtain better radio reception, without the knowledge of the teacher. At the Cathedrals (1983) a boy fell a short distance, receiving a fatal blow to the head, while teachers attended to a student who had fallen a metre or so.

I did not find similar incidents in which teenage girls died. At Stony Creek (1974) the victim was an 18-year-old woman. She was an inexperienced bushwalker, but it is unclear the extent to which the more experienced youths in the party could be regarded as supervisors. The Avon Valley (1997) incident, in which a 15-year-old girl entered the water away from the supervised area, might also be considered on the edge of this category (she was ill, and current was not a factor). I would be reluctant to conclude that teenage girls are safer unsupervised around steep ground or moving water – the cases examined might reflect historically greater exposure of boys to risk, or my failure to discover relevant cases in which girls died – but I would not rule it out.

Several strong considerations for fatality prevention emerge:

1. “Indirectly supervised” (i.e. not directly supervised) expeditions for teenagers present a clear fatality risk if there is a possibility of the group encountering moving water or steep ground.
2. In common with a good deal of safety analysis (Reason, 2001), the psychology of error (“what were they thinking?”) remains unclear in most cases. However it seems reasonable to speculate that bravado, and peer effects, might be important in cases where an obvious risk has been taken.
3. The tight supervision that organised instruction necessitates (in activities such as abseiling or canoeing) should be in place while students are near steep ground or moving water, i.e. not only while the activity is in progress. The fact that students might actively escape supervision or take advantage of a supervisor’s inattention should be considered.
4. Specialised supervision (“lifeguard standard”) is impossible to maintain during the entirety of a camp or excursion, especially when teachers have other duties. It might also be undesirable educationally. Necessary periods of general supervision (“yard duty standard”) should be planned to take place in locations where there is no moving water and no steep ground.
**Supervisor fatality**

Eighteen of the 114 fatalities were adult supervisors or accompanying adults. At Lake Hume (1963) both instructors died attempting to rescue participants already in the water; at Lake Alexandrina (1987) the leader’s canoe overturned after attempting to tow a swamped canoe and failed attempts by others to untie it. He was last heard to say that he could swim better without his life jacket. Another accompanying adult also died in that incident. A student teacher died at Cradle Mountain (1965) apparently attempting to evacuate a hypothermic student who also died. At Anglesea (1976) a teacher successfully rescued two students who had been carried out of their depth by the current, but was himself drowned. At Growling Swallet (1990) and Coogee Beach (1993) supervisors drowned attempting to rescue participants who had been swept away by a current. At Barrington River (1995) the leader of a kayaking group died attempting a rapid. At Coogee Beach (1993) a supervising teacher intervening in a dispute between a man fishing and a student was fatally stabbed by the man, who had accused the student of theft. At Carnarvon Gorge (2002) and Cowaramup Bay (1996) supervisors died when a tree and a cliff collapsed respectively. At Christmas Creek (1979) a teacher driving a 22-seater bus and another adult, together with two students, were killed when the bus left the road and rolled. At the Bogong High Plains (1979) an adult accompanying a group died of natural causes.

In this study the overall ratio of accompanying adult fatalities to participant fatalities is about 1:6, broadly comparable to the overall ratio of teachers to students in outdoor education. If the Cowaramup Bay (1996) incident is excluded the ratio is about 1:8.

The pattern of fatalities for supervisors is not the same as for participants. In about half of the incidents the act of exercising supervisory responsibilities was itself relevant factor:

1. In all incidents involving cold water or cold weather, there is reason to think that supervisors could not optimise their own chances of survival because they were attempting to help participants. (At Cradle Mountain, 1971, one of the teachers also suffered severe hypothermia, but survived).
2. Three moving water incidents were characterised by the sudden onset of a crisis, and a supervisor making an immediate (fatal) decision to enter a current to attempt a rescue.

Supervisor fatalities covered the spectrum of supervision roles, from teacher-in-charge to onlooker, and a range of experience, from a 19-year-old teacher on her first day at work and a 19-year-old ex-student helping out his old school, to instructors with considerable experience and qualifications. (Supervision roles can be ambiguous; teachers who at the time regarded themselves as not supervising swimming might be later held by others to have been responsible for swimming supervision).

Three considerations emerge:

1. Planning should include the possibility that supervisors could be victims. What does the safety plan look like if one or more supervisors are out of the picture? A single-vehicle bus accident, for example, might leave teachers dead or injured and surviving students having to seek assistance and assist the injured (Christmas Creek, 1979).

2. Particular consideration should be given to circumstances that might overwhelm the whole group, such as cold weather, fatally exhausting a supervisor’s personal capacity to cope.

3. Planned alternatives to entering a current unassisted to attempt a rescue are necessary.

First aid and rescue

First aid

The study definition excluded instances where first aid saved a life; there will have been a number of such instances in the study period. However, a review of fatal incidents might help to identify instances or patterns in which improved or modified first aid training might have prevented fatalities.

There were many cases in which first aid was not a consideration because a body was found some time after death. In other cases first aid was not a consideration
because injuries were so severe that the victim was plainly dead. Details are unnecessary.

The most prominent application of first aid was CPR applied where victims had evidently drowned or had stopped breathing after a head injury. In the case of severe head injury the quality of CPR applied is unlikely to have been a factor (Rosemurgy, Norris, Olson, Hurst, & Albrink, 1993). In the case of apparent drowning it is quite possible that lay CPR could be administered poorly, but whether that was so in any particular case is purely a matter of speculation. I found very little reference to the quality of first aid. In the Lake Eppalock (1980) incident a teacher took over CPR from another whose efforts were observed to be ineffectual. In the Conto Springs (1998) incident a teacher went for help only when she believed a pulse had returned, although the coroner found the victim would have been dead at that time. Notwithstanding the limited evidence about the quality of CPR provided in particular cases, there are sufficient instances in which CPR has been applied to conclude that maintaining and frequently testing the capacity to perform effective CPR is important for outdoor education supervisors, when the literature on retention of CPR skills is taken into account (Berden et al., 1994; Weaver, Ramirez, Dorfman, & Raizner, 1979).

There is some reason to think that treatment of some hypothermia victims (Cradle Mountain 1964, 1965, 1971) was less than optimal according to present knowledge. Prevention and treatment of hypothermia received considerable attention in southeastern Australian bushwalking and outdoor education circles in the 1970s, due in part to the 1971 incident.

There was some newspaper discussion about asthma treatment following the death of a previously mild sufferer from a severe attack while canoeing (Haran, 1991), with no suggestion that the actual treatment in the particular case was inadequate.

I did not find any examples where a coroner investigated the possibility that better first aid could have prevented a death, although that might have happened. My impression is that coroners, and the community generally, regard first aid as lay treatment pending medical attention and are realistic about what first aid can and
cannot achieve. However, the speed and effectiveness of efforts to obtain qualified medical assistance are another matter.

Rescue

There have been many instances of successful rescue that are not discussed here, this being a study of fatal incidents.

Rescue by party members

The window of opportunity for party members to effect a rescue might be a matter of seconds in some moving water incidents. At Crooked River (1978) all members of a human chain were swept off their feet towards the opposite bank. The deceased was seen holding a branch and struggling to keep his head above water. Another student turned to take off his pack before assisting, but the deceased was swept away before he could do so. At Stony Creek (1974) a girl crossing with the aid of a nylon rope handrail was swept off her feet. She was seen clinging to the rope and struggling to keep her head above water, but was swept away before another party member could reach her. At Yarrunga Creek (1999) the victim’s younger brother was restrained from entering the torrent after him. At Growling Swallet (1990) and Sandbar Beach (1998) rescuers followed a victim into a current and also drowned. In the latter case a bystander successfully rescued several individuals (who happened to be a teacher). A rescuer almost reached the victim at Thomson River (1976).

In none of the moving water fatalities, except those involving canoes, were supervisors or others prepared for a possible rescue, for example by positioning a person or a line downstream, or by having flotation aids on hand to assist rescue in the sea. This is not to suggest that such preparations would have saved a life in any particular incident, but to emphasise that planning for situations involving moving water should contemplate the possibility that someone will be taken by the current. The bystander who rescued several at Sandbar Beach (1998) commandeered a boogie board.
At Stony Creek (1974), Crooked River (1978), and Yarrunga Creek (1999) streamside vegetation made it difficult for party members to search downstream. In each case search parties found the bodies later.

Except for the Thomson River (1976) incident, in which the victim was not wearing a life jacket, all of the deaths associated with canoeing in moving water were entrapments in which rescuers were unable to free the victims, who were all wearing buoyancy vests, before they drowned (Shoalhaven River, 1990; Logan River, 1990; Barrington River, 1995; Forth River, 1998). Based on the information available to me, these incidents appear to involve situations in which rescue was impossible.

Split second decisions might face rescuers confronted by a fire. A bystander (who happened to be a teacher from another school) pulled one badly burned student from the Sutton (1994) fire in which another student died (I was denied access to the Coroner’s report, and so do not know whether or not smoke detectors were operating). In that incident teachers were not actually present at the time the fire broke out, as was the case at Noojee (1984), and the cabin and tent respectively were well alight when teachers were alerted.

The window of opportunity for rescue in cold-related incidents is longer. On both open water incidents (Lake Hume, 1963; Lake Alexandrina, 1987) those craft not initially swamped were subsequently swamped attempting rescues; this, rather than time, partially defeated rescue attempts. One Lake Hume survivor was partially in water at 9°C for four or five hours (he reached a submerged branch, where he attempted to hold another youth out of the water). One survivor at Lake Alexandrina clung to an upturned canoe for about two hours before beaching. At Kanangra Walls (1981), party members were unable to assist the victim, who had become stuck on a knot in a long abseil rope in cold conditions. Rescuers did not reach him until about 17 hours after the incident, by which time he had died. In the 1965 and 1971 Cradle Mountain incident there were, in addition to fatalities, successful rescues of additional hypothermia victims by party members and others. Two students walked out to seek assistance in the 1965 incident, which led to the rescue of eight who had sheltered in boatshed overnight, and four others who had spent a night in the open. Both teachers and five students suffered hypothermia in the 1971 incident; the remaining group members and other walkers brought them to a hut during the night.
To summarise:

1. In moving-water incidents time is short, and rescue attempts might fail if a rescue has not been anticipated, with rescuers in place beforehand. Equipment such as throw-lines or flotation devices are important, but time to deploy them is critical.

2. In cold-related incidents there tends to be (relatively) more time to think and act; however rescue requires substantial additional resources (sea-worthy rescue craft on water, clothing and equipment to keep several unconscious individuals warm on land). In cold conditions, resources make the difference between successful self-rescue and needing outside help, and time makes the difference between successful outside rescue and body retrieval.

**Missing person rescue**

At least eight incidents first manifested themselves to supervisors as missing person incidents: Falls Creek (1961), Tatachilla (1976), Loftia Park (1977), Anglesea, (1979), Barkly River (1979), possibly Maroon (1981), Crystal Lake (1990), Yarrunga Creek (1999). In the Tatachilla and Falls Creek cases, the deceased was found within a few hours. At Anglesea (1979) it was more a matter of an absence being noted, and after it emerged he was not at the car park and not with another group the possibility that he had drowned became a reality for the supervisors. In the case of the Loftia Park, Barkly River, Crystal Lake (and possible Maroon) incidents the deceased was missing overnight. In the Barkly River incident, the fact that the boy was missing was not reported to police until he had been missing for 24 hours and a search by the group members had failed. As in the Loftia Park and Crystal Lake incident, the deceased was found after assistance had been sought from outside.

In each of these cases the victim would have been dead at the time their absence was discovered, except in the Yarrunga Creek incident, in which the victim was swept away around 11.30 am on the day after the missing group had failed to meet the main group at a planned campsite. The school had a policy of waiting 24 hours before calling for assistance. In the Barkly River incident the deceased had fallen down a cliff, and died instantly; however, it is easy to envisage a similar fall leaving a victim

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Whole group missing.
in need of urgent medical attention. There is a strong case for calling for assistance sooner rather than later. There have been many successful searches for school students lost in the bush (see Wheeler, 1991). The potential search area for a possibly mobile person increases exponentially with time. It is true that seeking assistance sooner rather than later will lead to more false alarms involving individuals who turn up within a short time, however it takes time to organise a search, and the more advance warning police or other organization have of a possible search the better. The police (or other rescuers) will make their own decision about whether or not to give the missing person more time to turn up; but in the meantime they can be making preparations. While “risk management” might suggest calls for assistance be delayed until other options have been exhausted (to contain costs and save face), fatality prevention requires that outside rescuers be alerted as soon as it is evident that help might be needed.

**Rescue assisted by others**

There were no cases in which it was clear-cut that a particular victim could have survived an injury had medical treatment been available sooner. However, the Grampians (1979), Cathedral Ranges (1983), Hawkesbury (1986), Serpentine Gorge (1990), Mt. Edwards (1993), Bremmer Bay (1997) and Thredbo (2000) incidents involved severe injury that was not immediately fatal, as was the case in at least one of the motor vehicle related incidents (Gordonvale, 1987). These incidents raise the possibility that the time to receive medical treatment might be critical.

In the Cathedrals (1983) incident, the victim fell mid afternoon and died around 12 hours later. Local police were alerted around 4.30, with two hours of daylight remaining. Local rescuers decided to attempt to bring the injured boy out themselves, rather than contact the Police Search and Rescue Squad or request a helicopter. In the Grampians incident an ambulance had to come about 60 kilometres. It was about two hours before ambulance officers reached the scene. Those at the scene had first had to contact a teacher near the vehicles; he then had to go to a homestead to seek assistance. In the Kanangra Walls (1981) incident, party members went for help after the victim had apparently lost consciousness, about five hours after becoming stuck on an abseil knot. It took three hours to walk out to request assistance, and most of the night for rescuers to reach the area. In the Avon Valley (1997) incident, although
a vehicle was parked close by it took one and a half hours to contact an ambulance (while teachers performed CPR on the victim) because the phone at a nearby house was found to be disconnected.

Sydney bushwalkers publicly criticised the Kanangra rescue, claiming they could have reached the victim more quickly, had their assistance been requested (Sydney Morning Herald, 1981). The rescue attempt in the Yarrunga Creek (1999) incident attracted considerable scrutiny. Police were not contacted when an unsupervised group failed to make a planned rendezvous at a campsite. Staff found the missing group the next day, and were told a boy had been swept away in a flooded creek, “000” was dialled about an hour and a half later. The call was directed to the fire brigade, and then a message passed on to police. Police did not ring the school back, but instead went to, and waited at, a ford on the creek, thinking that was the accident site, and expecting to be met. The police eventually proceeded to the school about three hours after the emergency call. Once on the scene police requested immediate assistance from search and rescue police. However, the information conveyed to the search and rescue police by the communications officer was inaccurate, and understated the urgency of the request. Meanwhile, a pair of the deceased’s shorts was found by a school search party, but the location was not marked and the fact the shorts had been found was not passed on to police. The inquest considered whether the deceased drowned almost immediately on being swept away, or had escaped the torrent and died from hypothermia, in which case the delayed search might have made a material difference. As in the Crooked River (1978) incident, the force of the water removed some clothing from the body; some had speculated that the deceased had left the water, removed his clothing, and re-entered the water in a state of confusion. The coroner found this had not happened.

After the Lake Hume (1963) incident, farmers owning properties which abutted the part of the lake where the incident occurred criticised the fact that rescuers had not contacted them to help search for those missing (The Age, 1963). They said they had boats, and knew the area better than anyone. After the Lake Alexandrina (1987) incident, the South Australian Sea Rescue Squadron criticised police for not alerting them. They had two boats stationed within half an hour of the incident site (Hunt, 1987).
In the Bungonia (1994) incident attempts to radio for assistance failed, and contact with local police was made difficult because the police radio was “out” (an earlier rescue would not have saved the life of the deceased). Questions were raised at the inquest into the Bungonia (1991) incident about the time taken to inform police of the death (the deceased had died instantly in that case also).

Criticisms of rescue efforts can be unwarranted (Hallenstein, 1988). However, it would be naïve to assume that rescue will be performed optimally on every occasion. Fatality prevention planning by outdoor educators should take this into account.

Five considerations emerge:

1. There have been several cases in which outside assistance could have been sought sooner, and more than one case where the seriousness of an incident was initially underestimated, or downplayed. Fatality prevention requires a precautionary view of any potentially serious incident (such as a missing person around cliffs or water, or a head injury), and a mindset that accepts the possibility that outside assistance might have to be sought at any time. It is possible there are psychological factors that get in the way of teachers seeking assistance or acknowledging the potential seriousness of some situations.

2. Fatality prevention requires emergency communication to be planned and tested, including contingency arrangements should the preferred method fail. The question of radio communication arose in newspaper discussion of the Cradle Mountain (1971) incident, and in the court cases following the Cathedrals (1983) incident. At the time of those discussions community expectations were probably unrealistic. There are more options available now, and I found a consistent willingness in the community to be critical of delays in seeking medical or other assistance.

3. A rescue obtained via a “000” call might be some time in coming, and in some cases might not be a sufficiently specialised response to a particular situation. It might not be reasonable to assume that whoever the call is forwarded to (for example a police officer on duty) will necessarily understand just what is needed for a particular rescue, and will know what resources and expertise are available.
4. Some situations will warrant a plan to call on immediate local assistance from individuals or agencies, who might be in a position to understand the situation and respond very quickly, to assist during the sometimes crucial interval between assistance being requested from the police or other authority, and assistance arriving.

5. Elaborating on points three and four, emergency response can be seen to entail not only technical or procedural competence, but specific local knowledge, including knowledge of who or what organizations in the local community can be called on. Likewise, it is likely to be helpful if potential rescuers are already aware of a group’s activities when they receive a call for assistance.

**Conclusions**

Consideration of supervision arrangements and practices, examination of rescue provisions, and careful attention to what can and cannot be expected of first aid provide insights into fatal incidents with implications for fatality prevention.

The need to emphasise supervision that takes into account the environment, participants’ ages, and perhaps sex of the participants, draws a distinction (albeit blurred) between outdoor education and outdoor recreation instruction or leadership. From a fatality prevention perspective, outdoor education requires a special emphasis on supervision structures and practices both during planned activities and in the spaces in-between.

Rescue situations involve what is often a sudden “change of state” from normal operations. Teachers or supervisors can find themselves transported from a situation that is well planned and comfortably within their experience to a situation that is unplanned, unplanned for, and outside their experience in a matter of minutes. Rescue planning requires specific, deliberate attention in any fatality prevention process; it cannot be assumed that because a program runs smoothly and has a good record it will not descend into chaos in a rescue situation.
I hope this analysis contributes to the prevention of future fatalities. In the third paper in this series I will examine motor vehicle related fatalities, non-accidental fatalities, and the environmental circumstances in which fatalities have occurred.
Abstract

This article, the third in a series, examines 114 outdoor education related fatalities in Australia in the period 1960-2002. It reviews the environmental circumstances in which fatalities have occurred, and the extent to which environmental circumstances contributed to fatal incidents. All of the accidental deaths (104) could be linked to particular environmental circumstances. The paper reviews the patterns of environmental circumstances that have been associated with fatal incidents. It concludes that in outdoor education knowledge of particular environments is more important for fatality prevention than knowledge of outdoor recreation activities (although the latter might imply the former in some cases). At least one third of the accidental (non motor-vehicle) deaths appeared preventable given specific local knowledge. The study shows that there is a geography of fatality risk, and that improved prevention requires more attention to regional or local considerations. The study provides no support for the contention that more general approaches to fatality prevention (national rather than state or regional) would be intrinsically more effective than more local approaches; the opposite appears true.


**Introduction**

In the first article in this series (Brookes, 2003c) I discussed the role of case studies in developing fatality prevention strategies in outdoor education, and provided a summary of 72 outdoor education related incidents in Australia since 1960, involving 114 deaths. I provided a brief description of each incident, grouped by immediate circumstance.

In the second article in this series (Brookes, 2003d) I considered the role of adult supervisors and examined first aid and rescue considerations. I examined “supervision” rather than alternatives such as “leadership” or “instruction” because supervision is not confined to the periods in which students are undertaking specific activities in the outdoors. A number of fatalities have occurred on the fringes of the organised program of activities. I found no incidents in which it could be said that inadequate first aid contributed to a fatal outcome, although clearly supervisors should be proficient in basic first aid, especially CPR. Rescue time, on the other hand, was potentially critical in a number of incidents. Training in first aid beyond the basics would apparently not have prevented any of the deaths in this study; more planning devoted to potential rescue might have prevented a number of deaths.

In this article I consider if and how particular environmental circumstances have contributed to fatal incidents. Most of the deaths in this study were accidental (104), and can be grouped according to environmental circumstances: Drowning in lakes or pools (12); drowning in moving water (18); drowning in open water (11); falls (8); falling objects (24); fire/lightning (4); hypothermia (5); motor vehicle related (23). Two deaths in this study were homicides, one was undetermined (possibly accidental) and seven were from natural causes. Death sometimes occurs in the outdoors – one can die anywhere – however deaths in which the outdoor education situation was not a factor accounted for less than one in ten of those studied. Even allowing for the fact that there were deaths from natural causes or other reasons such as suicide that I did not discover, outdoor environments have contributed to most outdoor education fatalities.
Understanding environmental hazards in therefore central to fatality prevention in outdoor education.

(1) While some hazards are diffuse and unpredictable – a tree might fall on a windless day as someone walks underneath, a swimmer might have a seizure and drown at any time – most hazards occur in specific, recognisable circumstances.

(2) Given sufficient expertise – particularly, but not exclusively on the part of supervisors – most environmental dangers can be avoided or neutralised.

**Some limitations**

This study used public records relating to fatal incidents. Some of the material I examined attempted to describe or quantify environmental conditions, sometimes in detail. Some material provided only limited descriptions. In a few cases I sought additional information on particular environmental factors, for example by consulting guidebooks or maps. I did not examine any accident sites. A hypothetical observer at any one of these incidents might have noticed environmental factors that did not come to my attention.

Deaths involving poisonous bites or stings, animal attacks of other kinds, hot weather, arid environments, or bushfire are possible, and might have occurred in outdoor education or related activities, but are not in this study because I found no such instances.

See Brookes (2003c) for a more detailed discussion of the limitations of this study, and for a list describing the nature of the sources I had access to for each incident.

**Incidents in which environmental circumstance were not directly relevant**

The study included seven deaths from natural causes. There have probably been more – deaths from natural causes will not necessarily attract publicity, in which case they might not have been discovered by this research. Such deaths might occur on a component of a program that is not directly supervised (Mt. Stirling 1996) and the deceased might be one of the supervisors (Bogong High Plains 1979, Margaret River
Suicides might have occurred on school camps and excursions – there have certainly been attempted suicides.

There were two homicides. The outdoor education settings were happenstance. At Loftia Park (1977) both the motive and the opportunity for the murder arose incidentally in the course of a youth camp. At Coogee Beach (1993) a teacher was stabbed after intervening in a dispute between a student and a fisherman, who had accused the student of theft. In neither case was outdoor education as such a contributing factor, but more generally outdoor education situations could provide an opportunity for a serious assault to be disguised as an accident. In a letter to the editor of major newspaper, one writer alleged he was systematically bullied at school, including: “[t]here was an occasion of a primary level school excursion in 1965, when several students, the ringleader now prominent, attempted to take my life by pushing me from a high cliff at Kangaroo Valley” (Tan, 2000, p. 14). In the Bungonia (1991) incident, homicide detectives investigated the possibility that the victim, one of four juvenile offenders on the trip, had been pushed. Allegations were made that the victim, who fell to his death, had earlier been threatened by the participant closest to him when he fell. The coroner was unable to determine what caused the fall.

Sleepwalking deaths are a possibility. I found no deaths attributed to sleepwalking. A near miss demonstrates the possibility. On October 18 2000 a 14-year-old boy on a school trip to Bundaleer in the Grampians (Victoria), fell four meters and suffered serious injuries while sleepwalking (Cullen & Gardiner, 2000).

Activity-related fatality analysis and prevention?

Safety planning in outdoor education is sometimes organised around outdoor recreation activities, particularly those seen as “high risk”. However, this study indicates that outdoor education fatality prevention, at least in principle, should focus primarily on environmental hazards. While all of the accidental deaths in this study could be linked to environmental dangers, only some could be linked to so-called adventurous activities.
Some incidents related to outdoor “adventure” activities occurred after the organised activity had ceased, or involved victims not engaged in the activity. Some drowning victims had entered the water at a time or place other than what the supervising staff intended. Examples included Thomson River (1976), Stokes Bay (1980), Avon Valley (1997), Forth River (1998), and Yarrunga Creek (1999). In the Forth River case, the intended activity was canoeing, but the victim was observing the canoeing, and drowned while attempting an impromptu river crossing to join another student on a rock. In other cases it is unclear if the victim drowned during supervised swimming or entered the water at another time (Woorabinda 1980, Maroon 1981, Crystal Lake 1990, and Galston 1991). Fatal falls occurred during breaks from rock climbing or abseiling at Grampians (1979), and Bungonia (1991). In neither the Barkly River (1979) incident (victim fell) nor Serpentine Gorge (1990) incident (victim killed by a rock dislodged by another student) was rock climbing a planned activity. At Cowaramup Bay (1996) and Lal Lal Falls (1990) all but one of the victims were spectators or waiting their turn. At Barkly River (1979), Cathedrals (1983), Hawkesbury River (1986), and Bungonia (1994) fatal falls occurred during bushwalking or orienteering, and the student killed by a falling boulder at Mt Edwards (1993) was bushwalking. I found no fatal falls that occurred during supervised rock-climbing or abseiling (cf recreational rock-climbing, Brown, 1997).

Arguably fatality prevention should not rely on the technical skills of participants. Some incidents might have been avoided, hypothetically, had participants been more skilful. For example Thomson River (1976) and Logan River (1990) incidents involved avoidable capsizes. Fatal river crossings at Stony Creek (1974) and Crooked River (1978) involved rivers that experts possibly could have crossed safely. The Bungonia (1994) incident (victim fell) and Yarrunga Creek (1999) incident (victim swept off a log by water while crossing a creek) followed navigation errors on the part of teenage boys. Several drownings might not have occurred had the victims been stronger swimmers. (More speculatively, in other cases a weaker swimmer might have been more cautious). However, outdoor education involves novices; fatality prevention can hardly be based on presumptions of expertise. All students make mistakes, and most students learn only some of what they are taught. Students might become ill and unable to exercise skills they have. Participants in some forms of outdoor recreation might seek out situations in which there is little
margin for error, but outdoor education, like all education, requires situations in which it is safe to make mistakes.

Arguably the technical skills of supervisors are significant only to the extent that they relate to avoiding or overcoming environmental dangers:

1. Most incidents in this study presented no opportunity for a skilful supervisor to “save the day”. Few, if any, would have been prevented even had the supervisors been elite swimmers, rally drivers, canoeists, orienteers or rock-climbers.

2. It is reasonable to surmise that once a situation has reached a point where heroic intervention seems the only option, supervisors of any skill level might be tempted to take on a situation beyond their ability. Some supervisors died attempting to rescue swimmers (Anglesea 1976, Growling Swallet 1990, Sandbar Beach 1990), and at Cradle Mountain (1965) a student teacher died while evidently attempting to carry a student to safety. Both instructors died in the Lake Hume (1963) incident while trying to rescue participants.

It is, of course, desirable that swimming supervisors be strong swimmers, bushwalking leaders be physically fit, those driving mini-buses be skilful and so on. There were several instances in which lives were saved when an individual walked out to seek help, or swam with a flotation aid to rescue a person in difficulty.

Activity expertise is not sufficient to ensure fatality prevention. For fatality prevention, supervisors must have the knowledge and experience to recognise, and avoid or neutralise hazardous environmental conditions. It is possible that a supervisor could be expert at an activity (for example canoeing) but not have sufficient knowledge of the environmental hazards at a particular site.

In most cases it would not be possible to develop the expertise to avoid or neutralise environmental hazards, and would not be possible to act as a supervisor, without some activity expertise. However, in principle at least activity expertise is not in itself necessary to prevent fatal incidents associated with particular environments. I have included this statement because it follows logically from the above discussion, and might help emphasise the findings of this study. It should be understood that where a supervisor did not have rock climbing expertise, but did understand the
environmental hazards around cliffs, then they would avoid climbing activities. The
option of neutralizing the hazard of falling requires expert knowledge of rope work.

The conclusion that activity expertise is not sufficient, and in principle not necessary
for fatality prevention should not be extended to outdoor recreation with experienced
adult groups, or to teenage groups engaging in outdoor recreation at an expert level.
The Kanangra Walls (1981) incident, which I have included in this study although
the trip was apparently a recreation trip (party of three) loosely associated with a
school, illustrates this point. Unequal length ropes were joined to abseil a long drop
near a waterfall. The deceased became caught on the knot, and lacked the means to
self-rescue. His companions lacked the means to rescue him. While hypothermia
undoubtedly contributed to his death, clearly technical errors or failures also
contributed. However this incident was exceptional. Most incidents in this study
involved ordinary activities, or specialised activities conducted at a novice level.

**Local and generic environmental knowledge and fatality prevention**

On January 9 1968, the top section of a large Mountain Ash snapped off 12 meters
above the ground. A length of the trunk one meter in diameter fell down the hill and
shattered, killing four of a group of seven teenagers walking on a popular tourist
track, missing the others by centimetres (Steavenson Falls 1968). In the words of the
father of one of those killed: “It was a windless day. For that particular tree to fall …
at that particular time must have been fate” (The Sun, 1968, p. 3). Most incidents in
this study were more avoidable than this. Even avoiding forests would not eliminate
danger from falling trees or branches – there are trees in urban areas, and trees along
many roadsides.

However, most accidents in this study were avoidable, given sufficient
environmental knowledge, especially on the part of supervisors. The knowledge
required to recognise environmental dangers might be generic, for example a
knowledge of rips and tides, but might need to be more local, for example knowing
exactly where the rips, bars, and other hazards are at a particular beach on a given
day, and knowing from experience the likely effects of weather, swell, and tides. I
did not attempt to determine if inadequate local knowledge was a factor in any motor
vehicle related deaths, but of the remaining accidental deaths, inadequate local knowledge was clearly a consideration in more than a third.

At Barkly River (1979) and Bungonia (1994) teenage boys died after falling down cliffs that adult leaders did not know were there, and were not marked on maps. If supervisors do not know the location of cliffs they might not be in a position to provide the close supervision teenage boys require around cliffs (Brookes, 2003d). At Sandbar Beach 1998 three members of a visiting Christian group drowned, and others were rescued, at a beach that the local council had reportedly not signed as hazardous for fear of litigation (Miranda & Lalor, 1998). According to a local life guard, the rip which caught the victims had sandbars on either side, and would have carried them 15 meters to another sandbar where the water was knee-deep, had they not panicked. There was a bridge several kilometres downstream from the site where a teenage boy drowned while crossing the Crooked River in 1978, and according to police a safe crossing 500 meters upstream. At Anglesea (1979) a teenage boy scout drowned at the same location and in very similar circumstances to those in which a teacher drowned in 1976. An Army enquiry into the Murgon (2000) incident, in which a fully clothed cadet drowned in weedy, muddy water during an exercise, found the supervising staff failed to check the water for depth and weeds prior to the exercise (Nolan, 2001). In the event of a rescue, knowing in advance where phone and radio reception is possible might be important (Bungonia 1994, Avon Valley 1997).

In the aftermaths of both the Lal Lal Falls (1990) and Cowaramup Bay (1996) incidents evidence emerged that at least some individuals with local knowledge regarded the fatal cliffs as unstable. Both open water incidents – Lake Hume (1963) and Lake Alexandrina (1987) – involved stretches of water that were regarded as hazardous by those with extensive experience of them.

Consulting a person with local knowledge might not be a satisfactory substitute for supervisors having personal local experience (Conto Springs 1998, Stokes Bay 1980). Even a broad understanding of the circumstances in which fatalities have occurred in the past might contribute to reducing future fatalities. However, many of the incidents in this study could have been prevented if supervisors or others close to the incident had specific local knowledge. Obtaining that knowledge might be a
matter of relatively simple checking, but might also require extensive relevant local experience.

**The geography of safety**

Certain hazards are regional. Those associated with snow or cold water are confined to southeastern Australia, thunderstorms are far more prevalent in the north, crocodile attack is confined to the far north, and so on. Steep ground and moving water incidents have occurred in all states (these are preferred environments for some forms of outdoor education) but Melbourne-based programs can more easily avoid cliffs than Sydney-based programs. Environmental hazards are neither evenly distributed, nor uniformly encountered. The incidents in this study are indicative of the dangers only in those regions most frequently used for outdoor education, reflecting not only patterns such as the concentration of population in certain parts of the continent, but also differences in the extent to which outdoor education is available and how outdoor education is conceived.

Outdoor education has tended to be organised at either local or state levels in Australia – most of the relevant legal and administrative frameworks, including education and land management, are state responsibilities, and formal expertise has tended to cluster in state or regional organizations such as bushwalking clubs, rescue groups, or outdoor education associations. Can safety be improved by shifting the organisational centre of outdoor education safety to a national (or international) level? If anything the evidence suggests that prevention of serious incidents in outdoor education requires approaches geared more, not less, to specific regions and localities. Unlike industrial production, office work, or even sport – activities that take place in more or less standardised, controllable environments, and that might benefit from national or international standardisation – outdoor education is inherently tied to local physical environments and embedded in local educational structures, local land use practices, and state legal frameworks.

I now discuss the categories of environmental circumstance evident in the overall summary of fatal incidents (Brookes, 2003c) in more detail, concentrating on safety aspects particular to outdoor education.
Gravity related fatalities - Falling objects

Twenty-four deaths, almost one in four of the accidental deaths in this study, were from falling objects. Additionally, two of the eight deaths I categorised as falls, Grampians (1979) and Hawkesbury River (1986), (Brookes, 2003c) involved loose rock, making a total of 26 deaths from 12 incidents.

Lal Lal Falls (1990) attracted considerable publicity (in S.E. Australia) and a vigorous inquest. Large rocks dislodged by a student on a rock climb killed a student on an adjacent climb and another waiting below. A QC representing the school argued that the event should be seen as a unique and freak accident. However, the coroner made a number of findings including some critical of both the selection of the site and the management of the climbing, while acknowledging that the slab of rock that fell was unusually large. The death of another Victorian student on an excursion to central Australia a few months after the Lal Lal incident attracted far less attention. Students from a party of 98 were scrambling or climbing on the walls of Serpentine Gorge (1990). A large rock was dislodged by one, fatally injuring another student below. At Mt. Edwards (1993) the deceased was bushwalking when struck by a rock dislodged by another student. At Bremmer Bay (1997) the victim was belaying an abseil when struck by a rock, dislodged by an unknown agency. At Cowaramup Bay (1996) nine parents, teachers and children attending a school surfing competition died when the limestone cliff under which they were sheltering from rain collapsed.

Several aspects of these incidents point to prevention strategies:

(1) Rock-climbing or abseiling set-ups should aim to place the belayer and others out of range of falling or ricocheting rocks. Walkers should avoid steep ground if others are moving higher on the slope; alternatively, groups should move diagonally so no walker is directly below another, with individuals closely spaced to ensure dislodged material has passed the group by the time it gains sufficient momentum to ricochet.

(2) The risk can be eliminated by avoiding the bases of cliffs, and reduced by minimising time there.

(3) Cliffs should be regarded as unstable unless they have been inspected for signs of instability and found to be sound. Loose material might be evident on inspection, there might be evidence of material that has fallen previously, or
there might be individuals who know of previous incidents. (Stability is relative, of course. All cliffs erode). Questions of liability from the Cowaramup Bay (1996) incident, were still before the courts seven years after the nine deaths (King & Hickman, 2003). However these proceedings appear to hinge more on the question of whether particular organizations (WA state Government, Education Minister, Conservation and Land Management department and local shire) are liable, than on the whether the hazard from the cliffs was foreseeable. Following the tragedy newspapers reported claims that locals had warned about the cliffs, and quoted a local cave guide who explained the cliffs were relatively youthful, and therefore unconsolidated, limestone – “halfway between sand and rock” (The Australian, 1996, p. 2) – that had been loosened by recent rain. Immediately after the incident, the Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr Bruce Brennan said the cliffs “were highly unstable and had been made even more precarious by recent heavy weather and erosion” (Walker, Irving, & Hughes, 1996, p. 1).

(4) Well-designed helmets provide some protection against small rocks striking the head, and are therefore important. However so far as I can determine none of the victims killed by falling objects in this study would have been saved by a helmet of any description (some were wearing helmets).

**Trees or branches**

Many Australian tree species shed branches and every tree eventually falls over. Except in forests where deadfall has been scavenged for firewood and mature trees are harvested before they fall, the signs are everywhere in most Australian forests and woodlands, in the form of limbs on the ground or caught in the canopy.

In the absence of wind branches usually fall directly below the tree, if anything pivoting closer to the trunk. When a whole tree falls the danger extends to anywhere within reach of the topmost branches, bearing in mind that most trees have at least a slight lean and are most likely to fall in the direction of the lean. It might be possible to completely avoid hazardous areas in woodland, but not in tall forests. Some deaths in this study were of individuals who were momentarily passing the fatal area (Steavenson Falls 1968). However, most deaths occurred in circumstances where a
group was not moving. At Carnarvon Gorge (2002) a large tree fell on a group swimming, killing one teacher. The other three incidents – Two Scouts Track (1975), Rowallan (1998), and Crosslands Reserve (2001) – all involved a tree or branch landing on a tent, killing one and injuring one at Rowallan, killing two in the other two incidents. The longer a group is lingering in a particular spot, the more important it is to check for danger, and to choose a location that minimises or eliminates it.

In severe weather it might be necessary to abandon activities in treed areas. High winds increase the risk of falling material, as does a build up of snow or ice, however, in only one of the incidents in this study was the weather clearly a factor. At Crosslands Reserve (2001) two students were killed when a branch fell on their tent during a severe storm that brought down many trees and branches. Heavy rain might have contributed to the Rowallan (1998) incident (inquest not sighted).

The degree to which such incidents are preventable might be moot, but there are reasons to think the risk can be reduced. Using sub-alpine areas in Victoria as an example:

1. Risk is proportional to time spent in any danger zone. It would be safer not to linger (for example camping, or stopping for a meal) immediately under trees with heavy branches.
2. Broken or loose heavy branches (so called widow-makers) should be avoided completely.
3. The possibility of falling trees should be assessed when selecting campsites or resting places. For example, in Alpine Ash forests, some trees have a forked trunk. These trees tend to split down the fork. It is safer in front or behind such trees (facing the fork) than on either side. Some trees have a pronounced lean – such trees are more likely to fall, and will fall in the direction of the lean. Alpine Ash adjacent to tracks or clearings tend to grow unevenly towards the clearing. Such trees will fall towards the clearing; moreover, the additional branches over the clearing exert a twisting force that can snap the tree when wind is funnelled along the track or across the clearing. In Snow Gum woodland branches tend not to fall except when loaded with ice. Moreover, because Snow Gums are relatively small it is
easier to find a clearing out of reach of falling trees than in the adjacent Ash forests.

4. Some tent sites are protected. For example, a tent placed below an embankment, in a hollow, or next to a large log will be partly protected. Large trees near a tent that lean away from the tent provide some protection against other trees.

5. Danger increases during windstorms, unless trees are sheltered. During storms it would be safer to remain in the most protected area available (see above) than to move.

Some risk from falling trees or branches is unavoidable. Many roads in Australia are tree-lined, for example, and while it might be prudent not to travel these roads during high winds, there remains a chance that in fine weather a tree will happen to fall at the moment a vehicle is passing.

**Falls**

Ten incidents involved falls including two – Falls Creek (1961) and Moogerah Dam (1976) – where the ultimate cause of death was drowning. In the Falls Creek incident the deceased was tobogganing unsupervised. He apparently went over a bank, and struck his head on the edge of a large concrete pipe buried vertically in the snow. He was evidently knocked out, fell into the pipe, and drowned in shallow water. In the Moogerah Dam incident the deceased was climbing unroped on a wet rock-face above water. He fell into turbulent water, possibly striking his head, and did not resurface. All of the incidents involved a single victim.

*Teenage males are at risk of death or serious injury around steep ground.* All of the victims were male, ages as follows: 15, 17, 11, 16, 15, 15, 16, 15, 16. In comparison deaths from falling objects involved males and females in about equal proportion with more varied ages, including six adults.

*The common feature of the incidents was the presence of a steep drop, not any particular activity. I found no deaths from falls while roped climbing or abseiling.* Two of the deaths (Falls Creek 1961 and Thredbo 2000) involved tobogganing and snowboarding respectively. The 11-year-old victim (Tatachilla 1976) fell from a
building at a school camp. Two victims fell a relatively short distance during a bushwalk (Cathedrals 1983) and orienteering activity (Hawkesbury River 1986), the latter involving a loose rock that landed on the victim. Two incidents involved boys who had been allowed to find their own way on a bushwalk attempting to descend a cliff, the existence of which was not known to the adult supervisors (Barkly River 1979, Bungonia 1994). Two incidents occurred during breaks in organised rock-climbing or abseiling activities (Grampians 1979, Bungonia 1991).

Drowning

There are close to 300 deaths due to drowning or immersion in Australia annually, although the number appears to be steadily falling. Drowning is a major cause of death for toddlers (0-5), decreases for the primary school years, and then increases as teenagers approach adulthood.

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<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
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* figure is for 6-14 age group Source: (Royal Life Saving Society of Australia, 2001)

Drownings have been a problem for organized outdoor youth activities at least since the origins of scouting. In the United States:

[D]rownings forced better supervision. Lives were lost because Scoutmasters stood lifeguard fully dressed or went in with the boys. When the number reached twelve in 1916, headquarters named L. L. McDonald … to be national camp director … safety improved (Macleod, 1983, p.242).

More than one third of the accidental deaths in this study were due to drowning or immersion. There is a risk of drowning wherever there is water (see Falls Creek 1961 above). However the incidents that lead to drowning are strongly related to particular environmental circumstances. There is an extensive literature on water safety, which should be consulted by anyone concerned with fatality prevention. My intention here
is to consider what, if anything, characterizes outdoor education related drowning incidents in particular.

**Pools, Dams, Lakes**

Four incidents in this study involved school excursions to a swimming pool. Pools might be considered constructed and therefore relatively simple and controllable environments. The Galston (1991), Bayswater (2000), and possibly Morley (2000) (inquest pending) incidents involved weak swimmers out of their depths in pools. However, it cannot be assumed that pool environments are simple and controlled.

*Bystanders might help, but crowds might make an environment more hazardous.*

Bystanders might initiate or assist rescue, as was the case at Sandbar Beach in (1998). In that incident a bystander grabbed a boogie board and saved several people. At Bayswater (2000) the deceased was pulled from the water and resuscitation begun by teachers from another school, after a student from a different school raised the alarm. However there is not necessarily safety in numbers; at Anglesea (1979), Lake Eppalock (1980), and Morley (2000) nearby swimmers at first thought the victim was joking, and at Bayswater (2000) two or more students thought they saw a body on the bottom of a pool prior to a third student raising the alarm. In both Anglesea incidents several individuals were in difficulty at once, possibly distracting attention from the deceased at the crucial time. The Bayswater aquatic centre had seven pools, both indoor and outdoor, a jumping castle, and a live radio broadcast booth (it is unclear if the latter was operating at the time of deceased got into difficulties). At Bibra Lake (1994) a pool, part of a large adventure complex, had around 350 swimmers in it. The deceased was thought to have been pushed or knocked underwater, then struck by another swimmer entering the water; evidently none of the other swimmers noticed him in difficulty. Lifeguards did not see the victim go under, and later had difficulty deciding whether or not there was a body on the bottom of the pool. Both the Bibra Lake and Bayswater incidents illustrate that certain pool environments should be regarded, like outdoor environments, as complex and relatively uncontrolled.

*In environments other than pools access to water is harder to manage and rescue might be more complicated.* In the Avon Valley (1997) incident the deceased entered a river away from a supervised swimming area. She became ill while swimming,
something that could have happened anywhere. However, once the victim was in distress, the location made rescue difficult – students attempting to rescue her failed to get her out of the water on one bank, and then took her to the other. The Thomson River (1976) incident began with the victim and another boy taking a canoe without the supervising teachers’ knowledge for one last paddle on the river. Once the victim, who contrary to instructions was not wearing a flotation device, had released his grip on the swamped canoe, the situation became one of a weak swimmer out of his depth. A teacher swam to his aid and almost reached him, but once the victim was underwater the current defeated the attempted rescue.

In dams or lakes the depth of water might vary less consistently than in a pool, and turbidity greatly adds to the problem of rescuing a distressed swimmer who has gone under. At Lake Eppalock (1980) and Murgon (2000) rescue and attempted resuscitation were delayed because rescuers took some minutes to locate the victim in muddy water. At Crystal Lake (1990) the body was not recovered for some time, as was the case (I believe) at Maroon (1981). It is possible, but not certain, that the deceased went underwater unnoticed at Crystal Lake during supervised swimming (the water was anything but “crystal”, the coroner noted). It is clear to me that personal flotation devices (PFDs), normally associated with canoeing rather than swimming, should be worn during swimming in muddy water.

Open water

Open water incidents have been rare but are not freak events. Overseas, the “Sheppey disaster” occurred on August 4 1912 of the Kent coast in the UK. Nine boy scouts died when a cutter capsized in a squall. On June 12 1978 12 boys and one leader died on Lake Témiscamingue, Canada, when all four (large) canoes carrying a party of 27 boys and 4 leaders capsized in a squall. On March 22 1993 at Lyme Bay, England, four school students died when eight students and one leader were swept out to sea in their canoes.

Open water incidents in outdoor education tend to be catastrophes, because they occur when most or all of a party are capsized by rough conditions in cold water with no immediate prospect of rescue. Cold water reduces the rescue window. Rescue is complicated by difficulties in locating individuals on large areas of open
water, and by the fact that individuals in choppy water might be difficult to see, especially if there is windblown spray, fog, rain, or darkness. Moreover once it is obvious that the group has disintegrated individual craft tend to disperse. Apart from avoiding open stretches of cold water completely, prevention should focus on keeping warm (wet suits or dry suits), visibility, and on-call rescue (for example having a rescue craft shadow a group of canoeists).

This study included two open water catastrophes, Lake Alexandrina (1987, 4 died) and Lake Hume (1963, 7 died). Both cases involved water of around 10°C, a sudden squall that produced severe chop in shallow water that swamped boats and defeated attempts at self-rescue. In both cases none of the adult leaders survived. In both cases some participants struggled to shore and raised the alarm. In both cases police had to mount difficult rescue operations, without which there would have been more deaths. Neither party involved individuals with extensive local knowledge; both groups encountered conditions that locals expected to occur from time to time.

**Moving water – coastal beaches**

All ocean beach incidents involved individuals unfamiliar with a particular beach carried out of their depths by currents that were known to locals. I found five incidents. Three of the seven who drowned were attempting to rescue others. All but one incident involved several individuals in difficulty.

At Stokes Bay (1980) 3 clothed primary school students, who had evidently not intended to go swimming, were swept out to sea before the teachers had reached the beach, which was signed as hazardous. The organization of the trip had been left to a tour company; the driver had selected the beach. At Conto Springs (1998) a trip to the beach was a more or less ad hoc addition to the planned program. The beach was signed as hazardous, and the teacher in charge had sought advice from someone with local knowledge. As discussed above, Anglesea (1979) was a repeat, in many respects, of Anglesea (1976) (those involved in 1979 were probably unaware of the earlier incident). Sandbar Beach (1998) involved a hazard well-known to locals.

The extent to which surf expertise transfers from one beach to another is debateable, as is the extent to which local knowledge can be communicated effectively to a non-
local. Local knowledge must be specific to the group and its intended activity, and the fact that an individual is a local does not necessarily imply sufficient local knowledge to manage outdoor education safety, or even that their knowledge is sound. It is clearly preferable, and perhaps essential, to have a supervisor with extensive local experience who has checked the conditions on the day, and is in a position to relate their knowledge to the specific group and planned activity.

**Moving water – rivers**

I found eleven deaths (nine incidents) involving immersion in river currents. Five of the incidents were associated with canoeing or kayaking (Thomson River 1976, Shoalhaven River 1990, Logan River 1990, Barrington River 1995, and Forth River 1998). In the Shoalhaven and Forth River cases, the deceased were swimming or wading when they encountered difficulties. The fact the victims were paddling a craft was more directly relevant in the other three cases. Of the six deaths not associated with paddling, three died while attempting to cross a river in the Growling Swallet cave (1990). The Stony Creek (1974), Crooked River (1978) and Yarrunga Creek (1999) incidents also involved attempted river crossings.

*PFDs might not prevent fatalities in river currents.* In the Thomson River incident the deceased was a weak swimmer not wearing a PFD. The victims in the other canoeing or kayaking related incidents were wearing PFDs; all were trapped by the current on snags or other obstacles. The body of the deceased in the Crooked River incident (swept away while attempting a river crossing) was found entrapped on a log, the current having removed most clothing. Most clothing was absent from the body in the Yarrunga Creek incident (swept away by a flash flood while attempting to cross a creek on a log), also suggesting entrapment. Similarly, the body of the deceased in the Stony Creek incident (swept away while attempting a river crossing) was found caught on flood debris. In the Logan River incident, the deceased’s life jacket surfaced but the deceased remained submerged against a bridge pylon, tangled in a canoe painter.

*Arguably substantial river currents should be regarded as having an unavoidable fatality risk if there is the possibility of someone entering the water,* although some river crossing sites might be relatively safe, for example if the current would carry a
person into deep, quiet water. All of the river crossing incidents in this study involved rescuers unable to reach the victim, either because of difficulty in getting along the bank, or in the case of the Growling Swallet incident, having entered the water two rescuers found themselves in difficulty and subsequently died. In the Shoalhaven River and Forth River incidents (both were canoeing/kayaking related river crossings) supervisors had local canoeing experience but were unaware of the particular snags that trapped the victims.

**Lightning**
Lighting at Lamington National Park in 1992 killed two girls. They were on high ground near the edge of an escarpment in an area prone to thunderstorms. It might not have been possible to move away from the escarpment or off the high ground. However, they were sheltering against the trunk of a particularly large tree. Lightning struck the tree and jumped from the trunk to the girls. Keeping two meters from the tree trunk would have prevented this (Davies, 1993).

**Fire**
*Two fatal incidents both involved primary school children in semi-permanent sleeping quarters, teachers not in the immediate vicinity.* At Noojee 1984 a 12-year-old died, and a second boy received very serious burns. At Sutton 1994 an 11-year-old boy, also from a Victorian school, died, and a second boy received very serious burns. In the Noojee incident a gas lamp, that had apparently been moved from where the teacher said he placed it, ignited a large ex-army tent on a platform. It was a very windy night. The victims had gone to bed for the night. At Sutton six students were sharing a cabin in a caravan park on a warm humid night. Apparently a student switched on an air-conditioner, which started the fire around 12.20 am. In both cases teachers were not present in the tent or cabin at the time. In both cases the fire was well alight when teachers were alerted. My request to see the findings from the Sutton inquest was refused; however newspaper reports made no mention of a smoke alarm.

*Rustic or temporary accommodation might be particularly vulnerable to fire.* I am aware of some huts used by groups in the snow, for example, where escape in the

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event of fire would be problematic. (Moreover survival in cold conditions might be problematic for those who did successfully escape).

Hypothermia

*Three hypothermia incidents involved school bushwalking parties that encountered blizzard conditions.* All occurred at the Cradle Mountain end of the Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair National Park (Tas) in the space of six years (1964, 1965 and 1971). The common location is probably not coincidental; risk of hypothermia is a function of both weather and terrain. Each of the incidents had the potential for more deaths. In the 1964 incident a party of 20 including 5 adults became separated in a blizzard. A 15-year-old student died. In the 1965 incident a student teacher died in an attempt to get a student, who also died, to shelter. In both cases most of the survivors were rescued after the alarm was raised by individuals who walked to safety. In the 1971 incident in which a student died, a teacher also became unconscious from hypothermia but was rescued. In all three cases parties separated as conditions deteriorated (this is not to imply the outcome would have been better had they stayed together – it might have been worse). In the two open water incidents, in which immersion hypothermia almost certainly contributed to the deaths (seven at Lake Hume 1963 and four at Lake Alexandrina 1987) there was a point at which the group was no longer functioning, and individuals or pairs sought to survive as best they could. Individuals who reached the shore were able to raise the alarm in both cases, resulting in some lives saved. The Mt. Hood (USA) disaster provides some insights into the difficulties that face a stationary party that does not have the resources to keep the whole group warm. Ten students and three adults from the Oregon Episcopal School descending from a failed attempt to reach the summit, on May 12 1986, sought shelter by constructing a small snow cave when caught in severe weather. Two of five who set out to seek help after the first night survived. Rescuers had great difficulty locating the cave, in which the remaining eight spent a total of three days and nights. Two of the eight survived (Anon., 1998).

The Cradle Mountain deaths occurred more than 30 years ago. There were several near misses in Victoria in the 1980s (Ministry of Education, 1988), in which tragedy was avoided at least partly because, unlike the gravity-related or drowning incidents, hypothermia creeps up relatively slowly, allowing time for rescue. It is possible that
extensive efforts to educate outdoor leaders and teachers about hypothermia in S.E. Australia following the Cradle Mountain (1971) incident were relatively successful. If so, it remains to be seen if these efforts persist as memories fade and “national” approaches to bushwalking focus attention away from strictly regional issues such as hypothermia.

**Weather and climate**
Weather was a consideration in almost every accidental death in this study, even if only to the extent of determining (at least in part) what activities were undertaken at the time of an incident. I have not included a separate discussion of weather here, because in almost every case in which weather was a circumstance, it was in the context of how weather conditions affected a particular location and activity. The fact of variable weather, more than anything else, determines the need for knowledge of particular locales to be accumulated over years; only some of the knowledge needed to prevent fatal incidents can be acquired in a single reconnaissance. Many of the incidents here occurred when weather conditions transformed a planned activity into something completely different.

**Motor vehicle related fatalities**
I have included motor vehicle related incidents in this study because, based on the number of motor vehicle related incidents relative to other incidents, travel to and from outdoor education sites is a relatively high-risk activity. Although much of what is true about road safety in general will be true of outdoor education related road safety, and is therefore already the subject of an extensive literature, I also wanted to consider whether the motor vehicle incidents in outdoor education had any particular characteristics.

I found 23 deaths (including eight in a single incident) that could be related to outdoor education excursions, amounting to around one quarter of the accidental deaths in this study. Limiting travel in motor vehicles is an obvious and simple way to reduce the chance of such incidents.

Five of the incidents (16 of 25 deaths) involved rollovers. The average proportion of rollover fatalities Australia wide is about 20 percent (Richardson, Rechnitzer,
Grzebieta, & Hoareau, 2002). Even allowing for the fact that the incidents I found could not be considered a valid statistical sample, this is a relatively high proportion, exceeding figures for outback Western Australia and Northern Territory (Richardson, Rechnitzer, Grzebieta, & Hoareau, 2002). Issues that require further discussion include the rollover propensity of certain vehicles (for example troop carrier style vehicles and mini buses); passenger safety in the event of a rollover (poor in some vehicles); and whether the nature of the roads used to get to outdoor education sites is a factor.

Most incidents I found were single-vehicle. At Anglesea (1980) a car carrying campers collided with another vehicle, and at Catherine Hill (1990) a truck driver who swerved off the road while trying to retrieve a dropped cigarette, killing a student wheeling his bicycle up a hill. Road conditions, driver error, vehicle characteristics and mechanical failure (Gordonvale 1987 – faulty brakes) might all be implicated in single vehicle incidents.

In two incidents (Morgan 1988 and Chillagoe 1997) the deceased had been travelling in the trays of utilities. One incident (Omeo 2000) involved a troop carrier style vehicle (although I am unclear where the deceased were sitting). It is now well-known in the outdoor education field that side-ways facing seats are potentially lethal, and should not be used in any circumstances (Brookes, 2002c, 2002d). The fact that such seating arrangements are legal, at least in some states, and used extensively (for example in ski resort shuttles) does not change the fact that passengers in sideways facing seats will almost certainly be killed in even a low speed collision.

Fatigue and “production pressure” might contribute to driver error. Professional drivers are required to maintain logbooks and comply with regulations limiting driving hours. Logbooks might help to limit fatigue caused by production pressure in the long haul transport industry, although there is some evidence that they are ineffective. Fatigue, for example, can only be combated by sleep (Hartley, Penna, Corry, & Feyer, nd), and log books do not record sleep. Recording driving hours alone is even less likely to help limit fatigue in outdoor education, where driving distances tend not to be “long haul” and where the sources of fatigue, and the origins of production pressure that might lead to mistakes, will not be due to driving
commitments alone. There is a need for further investigation into the circumstances that lead to fatigue and into any pressures that might lead to driver error, particularly in the light of attempts to treat all bus drivers, private and commercial, as if they are part of the transport industry.

**Further study**
Questions to do with the sources of human error, and the broader administrative, regulatory, and organisational frameworks in which outdoor education occurs extend beyond motor vehicle incidents.

1. The origins of mistakes and errors in outdoor education requires further consideration. For example fatigue might be an issue across outdoor education programs, not just in relation to driving. Fatigue affects judgement in a similar way to alcohol (Hartley, Penna, Corry, & Feyer, nd).

2. Errors can occur due to individuals being overwhelmed (temporarily or chronically), or because of production pressures. To take the example of a hospital emergency department, if the number of serious cases exceeds staffing capacity on a given night, staff will have too much to do. If one is a patient in such circumstances, one hopes the overwhelmed staff will do what they need to do to keep you alive, and forget about the paperwork, for example. But one also hopes the person who takes your details does not miss something crucial because of pressure to deal with the backlog. In reviewing adverse incidents with the benefit of hindsight, it can be easy to make the mistake of noting what individuals “should have done” without noticing what the circumstances were that explain why they didn’t do it. If staff are overwhelmed, admonitions or requirements to “try harder” can make matters worse.

3. Outdoor activities occur in wider organisational and institutional frameworks, including qualification and accreditation schemes, organisational norms and expectations, educational imperatives, and widely held beliefs and expectations. These wider frameworks might or might not be sound, or they might fail to operate properly, or they might introduce the risk of “normal accidents” that occur because of inherent characteristics of the system rather than failure as such (Perrow, 1999; Sagan, 1993). There has been little
research into the nature of these “system” considerations in outdoor education, which should include questions about the theories, evidence and assumptions on which they are based.

Perhaps the most important of the wider considerations is the question of how outdoor education is justified. Broad-brush justifications for outdoor education as “adventure education” sometimes assert or imply that benefits to many participants justify a certain number of individual tragedies, perhaps echoing the justifications for wartime sacrifice. Such statements are so common that it would be unfair to single out any example here.

Rationales (or rationalisations) for outdoor education based on accepting an elevated risk of fatalities are unnecessary. If the avoidable risks are put aside, the “residual” fatality risk associated with outdoor education in Australia is comparable to or less than the residual risk at home or school. Most of the fatal incidents studied were avoidable.

I can see no loss of educational benefits in putting a tent in a safe rather than a unsafe location, moving belayers away from the danger zone at the base of a cliff, ensuring students enter the water at safe locations on surf beaches, choosing an alternative activity to an open water crossing in canoes, insisting that leaders who would guide students in an area are very familiar with that area, and so on. Outdoor education premised on understanding the bush well enough to see and avoid its particular dangers might have educational benefits. There are reasons to think that the notion of the bush as a strange and dangerous place in which individuals test themselves, bond into military style groups, and emerge with changed personalities is outdated (Brookes, 2002b), educationally suspect (Brookes, 2002a), and based on unwarranted assumptions (Brookes, 2003a, 2003b).

In the fourth article in this series I will examine some of these wider considerations37.

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37 In this thesis some of this discussion occurs in earlier sections, including the second part of the introduction.
**Conclusion**

In outdoor education knowledge of particular environments is more important for fatality prevention than knowledge of outdoor recreation activities. At least one third of the accidental (non motor vehicle) deaths in this study appeared preventable with specific local knowledge. The study shows that there is a geography of fatality risk, and that improved prevention requires more attention to regional or local considerations. The study provides no support for the contention that more general approaches to fatality prevention (national rather than state or regional) would be intrinsically more effective than more local approaches; the opposite appears true.

The intention of this article, and the preceding article, was to provide a detailed analysis of the circumstances associated with fatal incidents in the past. I have tried to present the findings in a form that would allow those responsible for safety in the outdoors to check their current thinking and practices against what can be learned from past tragedies. Readers familiar with risk and safety management in Australian outdoor education will recognise that some of the detailed conclusions I have presented are at odds with some commonly encountered perceptions and practices.38

It is clear that safety management in Australian outdoor education has not consistently and comprehensively absorbed the lessons of past fatalities. This article, together with the second article in this series, gives those responsible for safety management the means to check their thinking and practices against the knowledge of fatality prevention that can be derived from the study of actual incidents. In my opinion it is imperative that this be done.

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38 See the second part of the introduction to this thesis.
Conclusion: an end and a beginning

The working title of this thesis was “a contribution to outdoor environmental education theory”. Considered separately (or as sequences in Parts III and V), the original articles make what I hope are several contributions, which together demonstrate the value of the thesis statement for informing curriculum deliberation, across what I see as five important constituents of outdoor education theory.

- To link outdoor education research and practice to broader educational research and debate.
- To provide a means to help discriminate between different forms and patterns of outdoor experience.
- To assist the critical evaluation of outdoor education orthodoxies and practices, such as character building.
- To link formal outdoor education with wider patterns of outdoor experience, such as tourism.
- To accommodate legitimate safety concerns while also integrating safety considerations into outdoor education theory.

I adopted the term situationist outdoor education not only because it refers to outdoor education defined by attention to situations, but also because it alludes to how debate about the intentional generation and distribution of knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes through organised outdoor activities should be located in particular discourses.

Perhaps the journals, textbooks, conferences and courses that identify themselves as outdoor education are the proper location for outdoor education discourse. However, it seems likely that questions such as how (and which) Australians should experience the immense areas remote from the major cities, what forms of education should introduce new immigrants to (what regions of) Australia or what role collective patterns of experience might play in helping Australians understand and resolve the problems of sustaining the vast Murray-Darling basin, require a wider discussion than one confined to “outdoor education” discourse. Whatever contribution outdoor education discourse may make to such wider discussion will depend, in turn, on how well outdoor educators attend to wider debates, scholarship, and research. I trust this thesis contributes to linking outdoor education discourse to wider discussions.
It is my position that the argument for a situationist approach to outdoor education and the critique of universalist approaches, which I have centred on Anglophone discourse in Australia, applies more widely. That universalist approaches to outdoor education in Australia have failed to generate a defensible theory of outdoor education is itself sufficient reason to reject strictly universalist attempts to define, theorise, research and implement outdoor education. Perhaps there are limited universals that can be safely applied across North America, across the UK, or in large areas of the non English-speaking world. This thesis demonstrates that a convincing defence of any such (limited) universals could only arise from careful attention to situational details, and always would be subject to revision in the light of previously neglected situational details.

The paradox of situationist outdoor education is that any educational significance of outdoor education can only be determined situationally. I trust that I have demonstrated that it would at the very least be unwise, even foolhardy, in any unstudied situation, to assume that outdoor education can safely be constructed on purported universals. That being the case, outdoor education emerges as an ongoing process of examining and appraising if (and how) to intervene in existing patterns of knowing and experiencing, place by place, community by community.
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