THE EXPERIENCE OF RIVER PLACES IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY.

Brian James Wattchow

B.Ed., Dip. T (South Australian College of Advanced Education), M.Ed (Calgary)

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
MONASH UNIVERSITY

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January, 2006
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my girls, Katrina (my wife) and Bess and Kate (our daughters): Thankyou for your love, support and patience.

To the participants in this inquiry: Thankyou for your many stories and generously giving me access to your writings and ideas about your river experiences.

To Associate Professor Tony Taylor and Associate Professor Phillip Payne: Thankyou for your thoughtful guidance, many supportive acts and instructive feedback along the way.

To Monash University, Faculty of Education: Thankyou for supporting my research and for continuing to support a culture of inquiry.

To the researchers, writers and poets whose words I have cited in this dissertation: Thankyou for your insights.

To the rivers that have been such a large part of my life: Thankyou for your energy and endurance.

Thankyou all for your inspiration.
STATEMENT OF SOURCES

To the best of my knowledge and belief, I declare that the work presented in this thesis is original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for a degree at this or any other university.

____________________________________
Brian Wattchow
In this dissertation the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (Fifth Edition)* was used as a guide to presentation and style. It was employed to provide consistency and quality in presentation, rather than slavishly as a set of rules. There were times in the study when conventions had to be stretched and even broken in the effort to represent participants’ ‘lived’ experiences of outdoor places and to provide a text that flows for the reader. This mainly concerns the appearance and presentation of the text on the page in the section of the dissertation titled “Moving on an effortless journey”. The *Macquarie Dictionary (Revised Third Edition)* was used as a guide to spelling, as this provided the most accurate guidance on spelling and usage of the English language in the Australian context. The spelling of some words in quotations have been changed to reflect spelling from the Macquarie, to provide consistency throughout the dissertation, where there has been no risk of changing the interpretation of what was being stated by the writer.
## CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** 9

**CHAPTER ONE: “THE RIVER SPEAKS IN THE SILENCE”** 11
- An overview of the inquiry 18
- The guiding research question 21

**CHAPTER TWO: “RIVERS SPEAK TO HIM IN A LANGUAGE HE LIVES TO TRANSLATE”** 24
- Home from the Franklin River 26
- The river dreams 28
- Elaborate ritual 36

**CHAPTER THREE: “WE HAVE A FICTION WE LIVE BY, IT IS THE RIVER”** 41
- Outdoor education: Broad in scope and difficult to define 42
- A short history of outdoor education in Australia 44
- The emergence of a rhetorical interest in nature-relations 47
- The outdoor arena 48
- A socially critical discourse for sustainable relations with nature 50
- The divergence of rhetoric and practice 52
- The denial of place in outdoor education 60
- The return to Romantic ‘wild’ nature as the denial of place 61
- The experiential education paradigm as denial of the corporeal bodily experience of place 68
- The adventure education paradigm as colonisation of space and the denial of place 73
- Summary: Outdoor education as placeless pedagogy 77

**CHAPTER FOUR: “MEDITATION IS A STANDING WAVE”** 78
- The origins and orientation of phenomenology 80
- Literatures of place 83
- The lived experience of spatiality and outdoor places 86
- The lived experience of temporality and outdoor places 95
- The lived experience of corporeality and outdoor places 103
- The lived experience of relationality in outdoor places 112
- Nascent research into place in outdoor education 114

**CHAPTER FIVE: “WORDS OF THE RIVER, SWARMING HERE”** 126
- Hermeneutic phenomenology 129
- Language severs 133
- Poetic language speaks ‘earth’ 136
- (Re)placing the empathetic reader as listener 140

**CHAPTER SIX: METHODOLOGY FOR THE INQUIRY** 142
- The research sequence 142
- Recruitment of participants and access to ‘experiential texts’ 145
- Data, sampling and more data 146
- Drafting of single case interpretations 153
- Thematic development of “Moving on an effortless journey” 154
Table 1: An inquiry matrix for lived experience of outdoor places through outdoor education

Table 2: A comparative analysis of outdoor education place research

Table 3: Towards a place-responsive data gathering and interpretation sequence

Table 4: Participants’ codes and demographic details

Table 5: Frequency of coded responses for subgroups

Table 6: Summary interpretation of “Moving on an effortless journey”
ABSTRACT

This phenomenological and interpretive study elucidates participants’ lived experiences of river places in outdoor education. Although ‘place’ is an increasingly prominent ‘theoretical’ term used by outdoor educators there has been little empirical research into the lived experiences of participants involved in educative encounters with remote outdoor places. It has largely remained assumed that outdoor learning experiences will lead to learning outcomes that result in participants caring for those remote places. No pedagogy for remote places based on empirical evidence has yet been proposed. Therefore, this study was guided by the following research question:

How do the lived experience of particular outdoor places contribute to a place-responsive outdoor education?

The study was conducted in two parts. First, it critiques the outdoor education discourse of human-nature relations and demonstrates how theoretically, and therefore by implication practically, outdoor education serves as a denial of place in three ways: (1) Through a Romantic return to ‘wild’ nature; (2) through a denial of the place of embodied learning within a professed experiential education paradigm; and, (3) through an erasure of the importance of local outdoor places due to the promotion of a universalised adventure education paradigm. Subsequently, the transdisciplinary literatures of ‘place’ were critiqued through an examination of the existential ground (van Manen, 1997) upon which human experiences are unavoidably ‘lived’ - spatially, temporally, corporeally and relationally. This theoretical critique was coupled with a focused review of outdoor education research into place experiences and “the land as teacher” (Raffan, 1992, p. 388), to produce a conceptual matrix that guided data collection and interpretation in the second phase of the study.

Here, the writings of 64 undergraduate outdoor education students from two Australian universities were reviewed in a reconnaissance of their reflections about their experiences of rivers. Twenty-one of these participants were selected and interviewed. Written and oral data was then interpreted to produce 21 biographical case studies of participants’ responses to river places. These cases were then combined and thematised, as guided by the conceptual matrix, to represent the participants’ collective lived experiences of river places in a hermeneutic and poetising project (van Manen, 1997). The resulting
text, “Moving on an effortless journey”, is presented in the dissertation and reveals the “meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience[s]” (Patton, 2002, p. 132) of the river places encountered by the participants.

It was found that the majority of the participants’ lived experiences were oriented to a technical and cultural encounter of the river. In addition, although to a lesser extent, participants’ lived experiences included the river as a place of social and environmental encounters. Each of these four interpretative river lifeworlds was found to be problematic for the possibilities of being fully responsive to the river as ‘place’. It was also found that certain experiences of particular river-places, specifically where the river was perceived as non-technical and non-threatening, involved an embodied layer of experiencing the river. These experiences formed the basis of an experiential connection with the river and provide a foundation for knowing and being with the river as ‘place’. As such, this study provides an empirical basis to understanding the limitations and possibilities of a place-responsive pedagogy of outdoor places as they are encountered through outdoor education.
CHAPTER ONE: “The river speaks in the silence”

Three representations of the river set the initial mood for this interpretive study of the lived experiences of the river places travelled through in the pedagogical practices of outdoor education. They are respectively extracts from a poem, a section of prose, and a personal river journal entry:

When summer days grow harsh
my thoughts return to my river,
fed by white mountain springs,
beloved of the shy bird, the bellbird,
whose cry is like falling water.
O knighted with the green vine,
lit with the rock-lilies,
the river speaks in the silence,
and my heart will also be quiet.

Where your valley grows wide in the plains
they have felled the trees, wild river.
Your course they have checked, and altered
your sweet Alcaic metre.
Not the grey kangaroo, deer-eyed, timorous,
will come to your pools at dawn;
but their tamed and humbled herds
will muddy the watering places.
Passing their roads an cities
you will not escape unspoiled.

(extract from Judith Wright’s poem Northern River, 1971, p. 6)

The song of the waters is audible to every ear, but there is other music in these hills, by no means audible to all. To hear even a few notes of it you must first live here for a long time, and you must know the speech of hills and rivers. Then on a still night, when the campfire is low and the Pleiades have climbed over rimrocks, sit quietly and listen for a wolf to howl, and think hard of everything you have seen and tried to understand. Then you may hear it - a vast pulsing harmony - its score inscribed on a thousand hills, its notes the lives and deaths of plants and animals, its rhythms spanning the seconds and the centuries.

The life of every river sings its own song, but in most the song is long since marred by the discords of misuse. Overgrazing first mars the plants and then the
soil. Rifle, trap, and poison next deplete the larger birds and mammals; then comes a park or forest with roads and tourists. Parks are made to bring the music to many, but by the time many are attuned to hear it there is little left but noise.

(extract from Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*, 1987 edition, p. 149-150)

February, 27, 2005: Day one of Murray River Journey.

Here, at the very beginning, I am standing in a place where I have stood many times before, in the very headwaters of two iconic Australian rivers, the Snowy and the Murray. Waters are shed from the ridgeline beneath my feet, some flowing south and west into the Murray via Lake Cootapatamba and the Swampy Plains and Leatherbasket creeks, to commence its long meandering journey to meet the pounding surf of the Southern Ocean near the township of Goolwa, two and a half thousand kilometres downstream. On the other side the waters find their way into the 500km long Snowy running north before commencing a giant loop back to the south, where it empties into Bass Strait at Marlo. This place is a place of beginnings. Even though it is late summer and the brown grasses scrunch beneath my step, I can still find places where the low vegetation of alpine swamps and bogs are saturated with snow melt. It is a landscape of water, vegetation, stone and vast sky. Everywhere water is beginning its long downward journey. It drips quietly from mosses; it pools into small rivulets. It whispers as it flows out of its first curve and then chuckles across a small bar of stones, their sharp edges already blunted by the work of the water. It is becoming a river.

Yet all is not as it seems. Beneath and across the bedrock and soil I am now walking upon are a series of tubes and tunnels that circulate these waters between dams and storages to generate hydro eclectic power and to provide irrigation waters for inland Australia – that vast interior of haze and flatness beyond the last folding ridgeline I see in the west. Even as I ponder the high cirrus that brushes the blue sky, I know that somewhere deep beneath, the power turbines are spinning and a false summer flood of water is rushing down the Murray to meet the irrigator’s pumps, and that much of it is the dammed and redirected waters of the Snowy. Out there, amongst the hills in the east, snakes the dry and thirsty riverbed of the upper Snowy.

I have experienced sections of these rivers, and many others in south-eastern Australia, with students as their outdoor education teacher and lecturer over the last twenty years. In roughly the same time span outdoor education in Australia, as a collective profession, has begun to promote an environmental rhetoric spun around the concepts of building relationships with nature as an addition to its more traditional aims of personal and social development. Relationships with nature? What lies within the structure and character of student encounters with remote outdoor places that might count as building a relationship with nature? How does the kayaker’s experience of looping their boat in a white water rapid help them relate to nature through their experience of shortness of air, tumbling white froth, and desperation to break the surface skin of the river to snatch another breath? How might the solitary canoeist drifting quietly beneath an overhanging redgum, who is momentarily captured within the dark eyed stare of a night heron, recall
across the span of years to follow the significance of that moment? And, what connection between people and place is made by the effervescent group of neoprene clad rafters as they laugh and bounce themselves and their craft down between time worn rounded granite river boulders on a long journey from the mountains to the sea?

As I am beginning to weave words around these questions a slight wind shift brings a change in tone of water falling on stone. My senses seem to turn outwards from my thoughts to the gargling, bubbling voice of the nascent river and the hollowed out ring of rock and water. In the same moment that I begin to empty of thoughts, I also begin to fill. I begin to slide into my own journey with gravity, time and water flowing across the land. Other than the soft voices of breeze and water, around me there is silence. Just for a moment there is no motor humming in the distance, no jet arcing overhead. Even my talking mind falls quiet. I am stilled and silenced to the point of listening and there, beyond, I begin to remember …

(Personal journal extract, from my Murray River Expedition, Day 1, February 27th, 2005).

Outdoor education has always privileged the role of experience in the way that learners learn and, because of the elusive nature of the meanings that can be attached to the term ‘experience’, requires an appropriate research design and an adequate research methodology (Payne, 2005). This is necessary so that we can make sense of the outdoor experience, particularly as those experiences occur on, in, with, by and for rivers, and because the development of outdoor education has largely been inattentive to the local meanings of outdoor places. Phenomenology, with its interest in lived experience, is a strong candidate.

Adopting a phenomenological orientation towards empirical inquiry represents a certain way of being as a researcher. It is an attempt to re-discover the meaning and significance of experiences that have become obscured by inappropriate approaches to research and practice. It has been suggested that “phenomenology begins in silence” (Seamon, 1979, p.20). That is to say that listening, the type of listening called for in the three extracts above, begins in silence. This listening is “not trivially but deeply subversive”, and constantly must strive “to give a voice to the living text and texture of human life that underlies our idealisms, our objectification, and our plentiful fantasies” (Jardine, 1998, p. 19). Its desire is not to rationalise an experience of the world, “but to give a voice to it just as it is” (Jardine, 1998, p. 19).

Rather than a technique or system that might be deployed by the researcher, phenomenology is a method that must be ‘lived’ through. It may be found in everyday
life as well as in professional research, amongst anyone reflecting deeply upon the meaning of the events and phenomena that are their experiences. The American writer Barry Lopez, in his influential book *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* (1986), tells a wonderful story of an Inuit man’s response to encountering a new landscape for the first time:

“I listen.” That’s all. I listen he meant, to what the land was saying. “I walk around it and strain my senses in appreciation of it for a long time before I, myself, ever speak a word.” (Lopez, 1986, p. 257)

Phenomenologically speaking, the Inuit man’s response expresses a profoundly philosophical orientation to his world, and to place. He strives to set aside any preconceptions, theory, and expectations about the encounter with place as he listens to the land. His intention is to be obedient to the land before he can ever be ready to speak. He must first allow himself to hear the voices that come from the land before he is ready to put words to his experience. Then, when he speaks, the land has become meaningful to him as ‘place’. But it is no easy task to adopt such a phenomenological orientation as the dominant modes of thinking about experience and inquiry in Western culture have led us away from such an orientation to the world.

The term ‘phenomenology’ comes from the Greek word *phainomenon*, meaning “that which shows itself” (Matthews, 2002, p. 27). Broadly speaking, a phenomenological orientation to research intends to reveal aspects of human experiences that cannot be fully revealed through other, usually dominant, methodological approaches. It invites the researcher to re-enter and reconsider “the deep ambiguities of life as it is actually lived” (Jardine, 1998, p. 10) so that we might restore “life to its original difficulty” (Jardine, 1998, p. 11). It allows the researcher to listen through a cacophony of layers of voices to certain voices that “have become silent and [in] hesitating to reveal themselves, [have] conceal[ed] themselves” (Aoki, 1992, pp. 17-18).

But, perhaps, the greatest silence of all, the silence that reigns in our daily lives, is that we now seem to know our experiences only through our minds, particular vocabularies and the modern usage of language (Abram, 1996a). We are told that we ‘construct’ the places we experience through our individual and social intellectual activity, inscribing them as texts, and that outdoor places are little more than the product of our desires (Cronon, 1996). This is a silencing of the senses, a silencing of the body, even a silencing of silence, and our ability to participate in the expressiveness of the
world. This is a silence of profound magnitude (Abram, 1996a; Aoki, 1992; Jardine, 1998; Payne, 2003).

The phenomenological orientation of this study was committed to examining the lived experience of people’s encounters with particular river places in the outdoors, in all of its original difficulty, ambiguity and complexity. This dissertation considers how participants embody and reflect upon experiences of paddling programs and river journeys through outdoor education trips in south-eastern Australia. Why is such a study necessary?

Despite a growing discourse in outdoor education of environmental awareness and a pedagogy that professes to be aimed at developing relationships with nature (see, for example, Cooper, 1994; Martin, 1993, 1995, 2005; Miles, 1986/87, 1990; Priest, 1996) many assumptions remain about outdoor places and the nature of experiences encountered there. ‘Nature’, ‘the outdoor environment’, ‘the outdoor classroom’, ‘wilderness’, even ‘place’ are often presented through language and texts about experience as unproblematic phenomena for participants to learn ‘in’, ‘about’, and sometimes ‘for’. Although ‘place’ is an increasingly prominent term used by outdoor educators (Birrell, 2005; Brookes, 1993, 2002; Martin, 2003; Sanger, 1997; Stewart, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004a, 2004b; Wattchow, 2001a, 2003, 2005) there has been little empirical research into the lived experiences of participants involved in educative encounters with remote outdoor places.

These simplified and unexamined conceptions of outdoor ‘natures’ and ‘places’ continue despite the emergence within critical approaches to environmental discourse of arguments suggesting that the human experiences of relations with these places are far more complex and ambiguous (see, for example, the works of Meinig, 1979; Chambers, 1984; Cronon, 1996; Heller, 1999; Soper, 1995; Soule and Lease, 1995). As outdoor educators, Meisner (1993) argues, we go “out into Nature”, where we “reproduce a particular idea of Nature … that It is a thing and that It is separate from humanity” (p. 6). Many outdoor educators and researchers can be accused of using terms such as ‘nature’, ‘wilderness’ and ‘place’ loosely and interchangeably. There is a danger that ‘place’ becomes just the latest textual version of an outdoor phenomenon that remains unexamined, its fuller meanings and implications obscured or concealed by the slippery use of rhetoric. As a result of these assumptions the lived experiences of outdoor education participants in outdoor places tend to slide beneath our attention as practitioners and researchers. Unless we attempt to carefully reveal the structures and meanings of these lived experiences the rhetoric of outdoor education risks ringing
hollow by not listening to those silences, including that of nature (Russell, 2005). Worse still, textual descriptions of what we believe is being experienced by participants acts potentially as a kind of deception that serves a rhetoric that is not reflected, or has any source, in practice (Payne, 2005).

For many outdoor educators ‘natural’ areas have become idealized as learning places that challenge participants physically, mentally, emotionally and socially (Ewert, 1989; Miles and Priest, 1990; Mortlock, 1987). They are legitimated as learning sites where, according to Miles (1986/87), the “physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual faculties are all engaged” and “attention to one part of our being waxes and wanes, but there is connectedness, a continuum throughout the experience” (p. 36). Miles (1990) argues that the rare gift of teaching in these places carries an ethical responsibility for ‘wilderness educators’ (his term):

[They] must teach responsibly for nature and wild land values ... must help their clients learn the special lessons about nature and human nature which may be revealed in wild places, lessons which may help them back home to do their part to assure sustainability of nature and civilization. (p. 43)

Miles’ approach here is characteristic of a wider rhetoric whose legacy reflects a prevailing orthodoxy within the discourses of outdoor education. For example:

For the outdoor educator the out-of-doors provides ‘reality itself” and, crucially, an arena where many of the relationships (between self, others, environment and workplace) which occur in day-to-day life can be modelled and explored and the message taken home. (Higgins, 2003, p. 135)

Cronon (1996) argues convincingly that the arena we homogenise and reduce linguistically to ‘nature’ is always a complex and contradictory relationship between “the material nature we inhabit and the ideal nature we carry in our heads” (p. 22). If we continue to perceive the outdoors as an “ideological space” to be occupied (Humberstone, Brown and Richards, 2003, p. 7), we fail to acknowledge that the outdoors we strive to relate to is far more than an intellectual terrain of our own invention. As educators and leaders we become culpable through projecting our own desires upon a place we consider appropriate to the learning goals of our programs, claiming that it is only the learner’s experience that matters, and that our role is to facilitate their construction of worthwhile knowledge and a sense of personal development, whilst simultaneously silencing an experience of place that is rawer, deeper and more sensuous. There is rich ground here for inquiry.
With these doubts and questions about experience and its practices in outdoor education in mind, this research into participants’ experiences of river places via outdoor education was conceived as occurring in two distinct phases. These phases have been maintained in the presentation of this dissertation. The first phase of the research concerned a sustained consideration of the basis of claims that current outdoor education practices can promote positive relationships with nature. It sought to discover the origins of these claims, whether they have been substantiated by empirical evidence and how educators have subsequently shaped and controlled the lived experiences of participants encounters with remote outdoor places as a result of assumptions within this professional theory and discourse.

In this introductory chapter I outline the study and present the guiding research question and aims. In addition, I signpost the development of a unique methodological response to the challenge of representing the lived experiences of participants in outdoor places.

In Chapter Two: “Rivers speak to him in a language he lives to translate” I discuss my position as researcher in relation to the research conducted in this study. I trace the genesis of the research question from my encounters with rivers and through my professional development as an outdoor educator. This chapter also introduces the sites, programs, participants and practices that are the subjects of this research study.

In Chapter Three: “We have a fiction we live by, it is the river” I present a critical review of the discourses of outdoor education as they relate to this study. The aim here was to expose many of the assumptions and beliefs that inform the rhetorical or textual claims made by outdoor educators about teaching nature-relations. In particular, I focus on how the rhetoric reflects a ‘slippage’ between certain social constructions of outdoor nature, and how this slippage may be problematic for the possibility of a place-responsive outdoor education pedagogy. I discuss three fundamental assumptions in outdoor education that potentially serve as denials of place. They are as follows: the Romantic return to ‘wild’ nature; the denial of the corporeal body in an experiential education paradigm, and; an erasure of place meanings through the promotion of an adventure paradigm which serves as a colonisation of local places. This lengthy and detailed critique is necessary as it examines and challenges some of the most entrenched assumptions in outdoor education theory that have, by implication, limited the possibility of more place-responsive pedagogy.

In Chapter Four: “Meditation is a standing wave”, I continue to develop the phenomenological orientation of the study and present a discussion of the lived
experience of outdoor places through the four existential structures of spatiality, temporality, corporeality and relationality (van Manen, 1997). Four diverse literatures of place are drawn upon in this discussion. They are: (1) phenomenological investigations into the experience of place; (2) the place essays of nature writers; (3) a place-responsive Australian poetry; and (4) Australian scholarship into place, identity, culture and land.

There has been very little research into the lived experiences of participant encounters with remote outdoor places. Most reported or documented encounters can be argued as representative of the types of temporary and itinerant experiences that have become typical in outdoor recreation and some forms of adventure/nature tourism. It has largely been assumed that experiences in outdoor places will somehow lead ‘magically’ to learning outcomes that will see participants caring for and conserving those remote places. No pedagogy for remote places based on empirical evidence has yet been proposed. A small number of research studies completed in Canada (Cuthbertson, 1999; Henderson, 1995; Raffan, 1992), and in Australia (Stewart, 2003a), have begun to address this gap, and this study strives to build upon this emerging, but nascent response to ‘place’ in outdoor education, and does so with a particular focus on river places.

Collectively the critiques in chapters Three and Four provided a conceptual grounding for the development of an inquiry matrix that was needed to undertake this interpretive study. This matrix raised significant questions concerning how outdoor places are ‘lived’ by participants in outdoor education and provided structure and consistency for data collection and interpretation. This guided the second phase of the research that involved an inquiry into the lived experiences of tertiary outdoor education students on kayaking, canoeing and rafting river journeys. Hence I use the terms ‘study’ and ‘inquiry’ quite deliberately from this point forwards. The ‘study’ refers to the entirety of the research from the formation of the research question, the critiques of various literatures of outdoor education and place, the presentation of findings and their discussion, through to the study’s conclusions and recommendations. The ‘inquiry’ into the lived experiences of specific participants with specific river places, is nested within, and reflexively is informed by and informs, the overall study.

**An overview of the inquiry**

The reflective writings on river and paddling experiences of 64 undergraduate outdoor education students were collected. These ‘experiential texts’ were written not long after
The participants in this inquiry were all past students of mine whilst I worked in outdoor education at two Australian universities. I was able to bring my own empathetic observations and reflections of these programs to the inquiry, as their lecturer in the classroom and guide in the field and now as a reflexive researcher, as recommended by Payne (2005). The close relations between myself as researcher, and the participants in this study raised concerns of potential bias and loyalty that might have adversely influenced data collection and its interpretation and this is discussed in Chapter Six. However, it also created rich possibilities for an empathetic understanding of the participants’ experiences, the places where those experiences occurred, and the ability to interpret and write the hermeneutic narratives of experience distilled from the data. These narratives were constructed around the experiences of specific place locations; selected sections of rivers in south-eastern Australia (primarily on the Murray, the Snowy, the Mitchell and to a lesser extent the Big, Macalister, Thomson, and Mitta Mitta rivers).

In Chapter Five: “Words of the river swarming here” I specifically discuss hermeneutic phenomenology. This is necessary due to the textual nature of the inquiry and issues relating to the representation of the lived experiences of participants. I justify its use in the inquiry, presenting both its possibilities and limitations as a research methodology, and how it was adapted to the needs of this research. I explore the paradox that language simultaneously traps us in the world of interpretation, severing us from embodied experience, and that the power of a poetic language to speak ‘earth’ (Bate, 2000) can return us to our experiences as they are lived (Jardine, 1992). In this chapter I present an argument for a unique methodological approach, a poetising project (van Manen, 1997) matched with an empathetic reading as listening (Bachelard, 1969), to the difficulties of representing the lived experiences of outdoor places in textual description (McKenzie, 2005; Payne, 2005; Russell, 2005).

Chapter Six: Methodology for the inquiry presents the methodological detail of the conduct of the inquiry phase of the study. This includes information on the recruitment
and demographics of participants, the research sequence, how interviews were conducted, limitations and ethical considerations of the inquiry. Although the presentation of the this chapter appears to break stride with the more poetic and phenomenological style of writing in the rest of the dissertation, it serves as a necessary declaration to the readers of this research about the scope, conduct and parameters of the inquiry.

The critiques of outdoor education discourse and literatures of place, the conceptual development of the matrix, the consideration of hermeneutic phenomenology and the declaration of the conduct of the inquiry, lead to the presentation of “Moving on an effortless journey”. “Moving on an effortless journey” re-represents the interpretive texts of participants’ experiences of river places as distilled from the research data. It is presented in Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight. Six interrelated themes emerged from the data and collectively reveal the “meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience[s]” (Patton, 2002, p. 132) of the river places encountered by participants. “Moving on an effortless journey” balances the poeticising project of lived experience description with plausible insights (van Manen, 1997) that elaborate the significance of what has been revealed for the possibility of a place-responsive pedagogy in outdoor education.

In Chapter Nine: ‘O shining and winding water, winding in me’, I conclude the study with a final summarisation of “Moving on an effortless journey”, including its consequences for outdoor education pedagogy. I offer a speculative consideration of what will be required for outdoor educators to take the next step towards a place-responsive pedagogy and a final reflection upon methodology. These are important contributions to what remains an understudied and under theorised, but crucially important field if there are to be some reparations of human-place relations, body-mind meaning making and between theory and practice in outdoor education.

As an overall study with a phenomenological orientation this dissertation has attempted to reveal various layers of theoretical, textual and professional assumptions (and silences) that have obscured the learning that outdoor educators claim on behalf of participants’ experiences of outdoor places. The ultimate purpose of such research is for outdoor education teachers and inevitably, other researchers, to know “how to act tactfully in pedagogic situations on the basis of a carefully edified thoughtfulness” (van
Manen, 1997, p. 8). Such research needs to be carefully guided, and presented, if it is to hope to achieve such an ambitious aim.

**The guiding research question**

The Canadian educational researcher Max van Manen (1997) believes that the researcher who embraces a phenomenological orientation cannot simply write down their research question at the start of a study and call out; ‘There it is!’ Not only is it important, he believes, that any written account of the research should “‘pull’ the reader into the question in such away that the reader cannot help but wonder about the nature of the phenomenon in the way that the human scientist does” (p. 44). Inspired by van Manen, the research in this study drew upon an interdisciplinary research literature base to guide the empirical inquiry into the human experiencing of outdoor places through outdoor education. This provided the conceptual means for gathering and interpreting research data with a view to answering the guiding research question:

> How do the lived experience of particular outdoor places contribute to a place-responsive outdoor education?

It seems that I am saying ‘Here it is! The research question stated clearly and unequivocally.’ Yet it is intended only as a point of departure and as a guide to return to again and again to maintain focus on the phenomena being studied (van Manen, 1997). The question will be revisited throughout the dissertation, and further qualified as the study advances.

As I expose in chapters Three and Four, very few studies exist in the research literature of outdoor education that carefully and diligently consider the lived experiences of participants in specific outdoor places to be equally significant to the personal and social learning outcomes of those programs. As such this dissertation rectifies a significant gap in the research literature of outdoor education. The places where outdoor education is practiced have largely been taken-for-granted. They have been made invisible and have been silenced. Therefore, the overarching aim of this study is:

> To consider the meaning, structure and significance of the lived experiences of outdoor places through outdoor education. If this meaning, structure and significance can be interpreted and represented via appropriate and adequate
methodological means, then recommendations concerning the pedagogy of an outdoor education that may be more responsive to remote places can be proposed.

Further, this study aimed to sustain a commitment to the research question, research methodology and to do justice to the stories offered by participants for interpretation and re-telling (Payne, 2005). As Paul Hart (2005), neatly paraphrasing Lather and Smithies (1997), writes: “the idea is to both get out of the way and in the way; to juxtapose researcher theory/interpretation base with participant text in a manner that draws attention to the politics of knowing and of being known” (p. 393). These aims and purposes, and their legitimacy and politics (McKenzie, 2005) may be further understood as follows:

1. To reinvigorate a focus on the nature of human lived experience in outdoor education inquiry.
2. To examine how we might best re-represent accounts of human experience in outdoor education.
3. To recognise that researchers and participants can co-produce a descriptive text that is reflective of experience, but that this text can never be complete. It must remain an ongoing gesture towards comprehension, recognising that it cannot encompass all possibilities. It can however represent an acceptable level of consensus for the researcher and participants in the study at that time and for that place.
4. To investigate how descriptive research texts can lead to plausible insights that will make us more careful, thoughtful and knowing in our practice as educators and as researchers.
5. To highlight an approach to research that is best understood as a sustained meditation, a combined active experience and reflective consideration, where the researcher comes to live within the research question with both the participants and places of that research.

and research is concern about the cumulative affects of modernity upon our ability to respect and care for the local places we call ‘home’ and the remote places we encounter. These literatures of place often echo Judith Wright’s and Aldo Leopold’s grief for the despoiled and vanishing places they experienced and wrote about. David Abram (1996a) suggests this loss is profound:

Today we participate almost exclusively with other humans and with our own human-made technologies. It is a precarious situation, given our age-old reciprocity with the many-voiced landscape. We still need that which is other than our own creation and ourselves. … we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human. (p. ix)

Our experiences of places are fundamental to our experience of the world. Even more than this, argues Relph (1976, p. 6), places “are sources of security and identity”. We are constantly recreating ourselves, and learning our place in the world, through recreating our place. Place then is participatory. It is inherently experiential: “The word ‘place’ is best applied to those fragments of human environments where meanings, activities and a specific landscape are all implicated and enfolded by each other” (Relph, 1992, p. 37).

For outdoor education then, with its stated commitment to experiential pedagogies (Priest, 1996; Wattchow, 2001a, 2005), research into the experience of outdoor places has the potential to reveal fresh insights about experience, engagement and participation. Tying the study to the scholarship and literature of place also anticipates a sensitivity to a broader discourse of resistance to the damage and destruction being done to local places, whether they be in urban, rural or remote locations.

The presentation of this dissertation promises to make a distinctive contribution to the discovery of knowledge relating to how places are ‘lived’ through the pedagogical activities of outdoor education. The theoretical critiques of outdoor education and place, the consideration and adaptation of hermeneutic phenomenology as an appropriate methodological approach, the re-representation of the lived experiences of river places, and the subsequent discussion of the implications for the potential of a place-responsive outdoor education pedagogy is likely to of interest to practitioners and researchers of outdoor and environmental education, and to all who value experiential approaches to teaching and learning.
CHAPTER TWO: “Rivers speak to him in a language he lives to translate”

I think of so and so, a person of many parts, who is drawn to water and finds rivers speak to him in languages he lives to translate over and over. Their syllables roll like stones, consonants catch and tip like slivers of rock flickering in the deeps...

A river is never silent. Even its deepest pools thrive with dark or dreamy utterance. They shelter more than we can say we know.

(Extract from *Listening to the River*, 1983, Brian Turner)

In the introductory chapter I wrote of the importance in a study such as this, of the need for a methodology that is adequate to the task of representing lived experience. The congruence of aims, methods and outcomes of research in view of the politics and representation of ‘truth’ claims has preoccupied researchers in environmental education, if not outdoor education, for the past decade (Hart, 2005). One relevant contribution of the movement in thought known as post structuralism has been to highlight the ‘positioning’ of the researcher in that which is being researched. In this chapter I (the researcher) describe my positioning in relation to the hermeneutical task of inquiring into, and representing, the lived experiences by the outdoor education participants of river places.

Phenomenology, as an approach to inquiry, is said to be neither biographical nor autobiographical (van Manen, 1997), yet the researcher must live through the research with the participants. In this way of thinking about the methods of research, the researcher is not a disembodied and detached third person narrator. Rather she or he is as intimately involved with the experiences of the study participants and can justifiably
aid in interpreting and crafting a description that “reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller and deeper manner” (van Manen, cited in Patton, 2002, p. 106). Clandinin and Connelly (1998) argue that “it is the researcher’s intentionality that defines the starting and stopping points” (p. 157) of inquiry. Payne (2005) highlights the experiential importance to phenomenological and ethnographic inquiry of inter-corporeal and inter-subjective empathetic understanding between the researcher and the researched. Hence there are good reasons for including in this study a carefully written account of how I, as the researcher, came to the study and am well placed to empathetically appreciate, interpret, and represent the experiences of participants.

More than this, as Anne Bell (2003) elaborates, it is important that we do not neglect,

to attend to ways that the more-than-human world spoke through participants’ stories. There is a danger … when focussing on the metaphors and storylines that structure human experience, to forget that our words, as David Abram (1996) puts it, emerge ‘from our ongoing reciprocity with the world’. (p. 101)

Only when the personal presence of the researcher is made more visible and their experience of particular places is clarified, can their words hope to be representative of the meanings of those places; a major undertaking of the way in which the inquiry phase of this study was planned. Mark Tredinnick (2003) elaborates this point:

The reality of a place, a piece of country, is what it tries to give us, transcribed through language, its currents of connection and disjunction transposed into the kind of music words, articulated thoughts and observations, make. Mostly this literature of nature is framed by the author’s own experience and geography. Without a personal presence nothing may be witnessed. (p. 33)

In this study my role as researcher, interpreter and writer was both made possible and complicated by the fact that I was also the lecturer of the participants during their tertiary education and river experiences. This included the roles of paddling instructor and river guide on field trips. This chapter therefore includes some descriptions of my formative experiences on rivers, and my professional development as an outdoor educator. It is not intended to be complete, or necessarily autobiographical. Rather it aims to highlight some of those experiences that raised important personal and professional questions and doubts I posed after many years involvement in outdoor education. It is these doubts that ultimately led me towards this study. The following
three narratives: *Home from the Franklin River*, *The River Dreams* and, *Elaborate Ritual*, attempt to provide enough detail so that the reader can gain sufficient empathetic insight into my past in order to judge both the personal intentions I brought to the study and my later efforts to interpret and represent the data gathered from the participants.

**Home from the Franklin River**

This first narrative highlights my earliest recollection of an inner conflict and confusion about my experience of river places. I had only been kayaking for three years when I first paddled the Franklin River in South West Tasmania, an island state of Australia, with my brother and a small group of friends. The Franklin had been ‘saved’ from being dammed under the voracious development imperatives of the state’s Hydro Electric Commission only months earlier on July 1, 1983, as a result of a decision in the High Court of Australia. The High Court ruled that Bob Hawke’s Federal Labour government legislation to protect the region on the basis that it had been listed as ‘world heritage’ overrode state legislation to build the dam. Many argued that Hawke’s labour government had won office on the back of the ‘green vote’ at the 1982 federal election, and that this victory for the environment not only attested to the efficacy of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society who ran a well orchestrated anti-dam campaign and the thousands of ‘blockaders’ who impeded construction of the dam through non-violent protest, but also to a profound shift in public opinion in relation to preservation of wilderness in Australia (Brown, R., 2004).

Most of our expedition party had prepared themselves for this remote, wild river trip by training in their one-person rubber rafts in the surf at the local beach! There is a sense on a long wilderness journey that every traveller is exploring a wild place for the first time. We had a rudimentary set of river-notes produced by the Tasmanian Wilderness Society. The notes, compiled by wilderness campaigners Bob Brown and Fred Duncan (1980), provided little knowledge of the river’s history. We gleaned no insights into the original indigenous inhabitants, or what the lives or the early timber cutting ‘piners’ who worked the lower reaches of the river, might have been like. We did not even know who had made the ‘first descent’ of the river. Perhaps this absence, or erasure, of historical knowledge was an important ingredient in the quality of our wilderness adventure at that particular time. We had been lured by the river’s endangered status and the prospect of adventure:
Rafting on the Franklin is one of the world’s great outdoor adventures. It requires you to be fit, adventurous and self-reliant in the bush. …Rafters should be aware that the remoteness of the area – so much a part of its attraction – means help in the event of an emergency can be several days distant. If an accident occurs in the Middle Franklin gorges, or if floodwaters force a retreat from this area, considerable bushwalking skill and endurance would be required before civilisation is reached. (Brown & Duncan, 1980, pp. 3-4)

The sun shone and the river levels stayed low on that first 11-day trip. We completed the expedition without significant incident. The closest we came to harm was in the streets of Strahan, the small west coast town where paddlers finished their journey. We were easily spotted as ‘greenies’ and abused by pro-dam locals. The community of Strahan had split down pro-development and pro-preservation lines, with the latter still in the minority.

Two years later I returned as a paid guide on a rafting expedition, and experienced a very different river. On this 16-day expedition it rained for 15 days. On the other day, it snowed! We encountered high floods and were ‘trapped’ in campsites for several days. We lost and later recovered equipment. In the Great Ravine section of the river, we completed high and risky portages around long sections of boulder choked rapids that were too dangerous to paddle. The trip involved exposure to many risks and there was an element of good fortune in our survival. It is one of the few experiences of working with people in my care in the outdoors that left me with bad dreams for some years to follow. Here perhaps, beneath the wilderness ideals that were broadcast as a political slogan ‘to save the river’ - the quiet solitude, the pristine remoteness, the evocative renaming of river features, and the stories of reconnection to the natural world - was a far more visceral or embodied experience. Here was intuition and fear, movement as habituated reaction, and here was nightmare, a dark and swirling abyss of water sliding beneath the popular images of Australia’s most celebrated wilderness river. It was a stark lesson about the ‘nature’ and ‘place’ of river experiences quite different to the ‘boy’s own’ adventure that Brown and Duncan’s (1980) text, and my first encounter, seemed to promote.

My combined Franklin River experiences left me with an inner tension, a conflict between the Romantic images of a pristine river and the harsh realities of losing control to the wild river in flood. Coming home from the river for the second time, I would carry the vision of the magnificent wild river, like a wilderness ‘template’, forward with me to other places and into my teaching. Yet in my body, my flesh, I also sensed that I
carried something else; an embodied feeling of a wild force I could not articulate. It was knowledge of something deeper, something darker.

The river dreams

Not long after the second Franklin River expedition, my wife and I left Australia so that I could study for a Master of Education degree at the University of Calgary in Canada. I majored in experiential education and outdoor pursuits and was introduced to new and very different outdoor places. I became familiar with the emerging professional discourses of experiential education and adventure education, and to the history of the North American preservation movement. Here I would read John Muir’s My First Summer in the Sierra (1911) whilst backpacking in the Rockies, Henry David Thoreau’s classic Walden (1854), whilst watching the Canada geese foraging along the edges of the Bow River, and Aldo Leopold’s (1987 edition) A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There as the winter snows built their layers, like sedimentary stone, on the window sill of our university apartment. This introduction to the genre of North American nature writing provided inspirational, although not entirely compatible, Romantic, transcendental and ecological interpretations of the outdoor experience.

When we returned to Australia in 1990 I took up a position lecturing with the Department of Outdoor Education in environmental studies and outdoor education at La Trobe University’s Bendigo campus in central Victoria. During my time in Bendigo the department offered two degree programs; a three year Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education) and a one-year Graduate Diploma of Outdoor Education. I had a heavy fieldwork load and considered myself an ‘all-rounder’ in outdoor pursuits. But the gaps in staffing saw me become the coordinator of paddling programs, and I spent almost all of my time in the field, on and around rivers. All students in both programs completed flat water canoeing instruction and a journey on the Murray River. Groups of students from the Bachelor of Arts degree could also take a paddling elective, which mainly involved white-water kayaking, in the last two years of their degree.

When I started at La Trobe University, Bendigo I inherited a fleet of plastic kayaks and a very worn set of poorly-designed semi-enclosed plastic canoes. Amongst the canoes, however, were two even older and much repaired, traditional style fibreglass open canoes (often called Canadian canoes). I began experimenting with paddling techniques in these craft. In Australia the open canoe was considered an anachronism, and a dangerous one at that, as there had been several notable fatalities in school groups.
attempting open water crossings using these craft. The practical ‘push’ for adventure with ‘controllable’ risk was for new plastic kayaks. Canoes tended to be either fully decked competition style craft for the elite paddler, or cheaply built and poorly designed craft for the ‘average’ member of the public or school groups. These canoes were considered only suitable for flat-water instruction or perhaps a modest journey on a sheltered inland waterway.

The degree courses espoused philosophical values and ideals not dissimilar to those I had been reading in Thoreau, Muir and Leopold’s writings. Yet these concepts did not seem to be well matched to an outdoor practice of encountering the slow moving waters of the inland in the fleet of cumbersome and uncomfortable canoes, nor the faster and more violent rivers of the mountains in the plastic kayaks. I began to recognise significant gaps between outdoor education theory, particular in relation to the presentation of environmental values, and what seemed to be accepted as practice in the field.

I continued to develop my ‘self’ taught solo canoeing skills, based largely upon the series of photographs in Bill Mason’s book *Path of the Paddle* (1984) and was delighted to discover a well articulated philosophy of canoe travel in Mason’s sequel, *Song of the Paddle* (1988). I also began a search for a fibreglass canoe mould with more aesthetic lines than the craft I had access to in the equipment shed. It took nearly two years to find what I was after, a canoe mould with lines close to that of a Chestnut Prospector. The fibre glass hulls that I had layered in the mould, were finished with the gunwales, seats, thwarts and decks being made from timbers and fittings bought from the local hardware store, using the tools my grandfather had left me in his will and the rudimentary skills I found my body somehow remembered from the many informal woodworking lessons he gave me in his backyard shed. After a summer of canoe building, we had a sleek new fleet of canoes for the program. They opened up many new possibilities. All students were then taught to paddle solo, with a range of ‘traditional’ (Canadian) techniques. Fifteen years later I am still trying to perfect the single handed cross bow draw and the silent Indian hunting strokes.

I developed a five-day canoe journey for students along a stretch of the Murray River a few hours drive north of Bendigo. This section of the Murray is one of the sites described by participants in the inquiry phase of this study. The Murray is known simply as ‘The River’ by those that live within its catchment, and the section we paddled flows a meandering path through the Barmah State Forest. This redgum forest extends across almost 30,000 hectares of natural floodplain, the result of a geological uplift known as
the Cadell Tilt Block. An extensive network of anabranches leave and return to the river and in times of high water they flood the forest completely, triggering its regeneration. The canoe journey began by driving to the old timber-milling site of Morgan’s Mill. We would arrive at night so that students would first get to know the river through the slivers of moonlight reflecting from its surface and its gentle sounds in the darkness. As students awoke on the first morning ‘The River’ would slowly materialise in the dawn light – first a silvery thread, then an emerging scene in the heavy, fragrant eucalyptus air.

The trips attempted to shake off some of the conventions of the ‘normal’ outdoor education experience. No tents were taken and students shared their shelter under a large tarpaulin, slept around the campfire embers if the weather was fine, or made a simple shelter for themselves out of a groundsheet and a canoe. No stoves were taken as cooking was done on redgum campfires using the plentiful fallen timber. Students were also required to purchase and prepare all food communally. Food purchased had to have minimal processing and no individual food was brought along. If students wanted bread it would have to be baked in camp ovens on the fires (three to four loaves would be needed for the group each day – requiring two to three hours of preparation). Like David Orr (1992) we were trying to rediscover the “art of living well in place” (p. 126).1

Over time this trip developed as a kind of signature experience within the Bachelor of Arts and Graduate Diploma degrees, a small but distinctive part of a comprehensive academic and practical program. Part of the experience included drifting slowly along sections of the river either solo or with a partner in a canoe. At other times multiple canoes would be tied together to form a raft and I would introduce stories of how, despite appearances, the Barmah was a fiercely contested place. The indigenous Yorta Yorta peoples had entered a native title claim for the region at the time, and the media was used variously by timber cutters, cattle graziers, bee keepers, horseback tour operators and to a lesser extent by recreators. All voiced their own allegiances and perceived rights of access to the forest and the river.

Whilst the Barmah trips continued I also coordinated and taught in many other aspects of the paddling program in a more conventional skill and leadership training style. Many other rivers were utilised and the emphasis on skill development and safety

1 Accounts of these programs have been published by both myself (Wattchow, 2001) and a graduate from the program who has gone on to an academic career (Stewart, 2004a, 2004b). Stewart’s recollection of the experience, and his own work as an outdoor educator on the river has challenged and extended some aspects of the original program. Collectively these papers provide a comprehensive description of the style of these river journeys.
was often paramount. Some of these rivers are also sites of participants’ memories used in the inquiry phase of this study. I had been working on a series of poems that collected aspects of these river experiences for several years. I wanted to blend them together into one narrative and worked on this, often writing a little, editing a little, when I found a few quiet moments on a riverbank somewhere. The result was a poem titled *The River Dreams*.


My evening fire builds a blue ceiling of smoke across the river. Billy water bubbles above a bed of hot coals, I throw in a handful of tea leaves, stir it with a redgum twig. The water stains to tannin, Circles and eddies, as my thoughts are drawn down into its vortex.

A fern frond unwinds before me, springs into an acceptance of future rain. A rough edged boulder is worn round, tumbled, chipped and polished by the river. Right before my eyes a whole mountainside collapses, slides into the water messmate gums, stringybarks and all, and the lot is drawn away by the current. I stare open mouthed.

I stand and stretch, on my rocky ledge. I see the river, extend and plunge into the swirling current, bone cold I head back to the surface. My clothes dissolve and are carried off. Naked I float away, away downriver.

Two kookaburras are laughing from their tree as I am swept past a wombat tunnels beneath a tall eucalypt, hits a tree root, gives it away, trundles off placing back foot on the print of front foot, he leaves the prints of a little man.
It is morning on The River
when the sacred ibis fly overhead,
a single skein of twenty birds
soaring at two thousand feet.
I’m searching for them,
squinting into the low sun
and when they come,
their backlit wings shine, and
each bird a bird of light.

Launching the canoe
I drift away, float away, leaving
reflections of tree and sky
spreading in the ripples of my wake.

When the sun comes hard into the land
it warms the spaces in the forest,
solidifying tree trunks, as
a billion redgum leaves
start pumping up the river.

The canoe rides like a shadow,
a second presence.
As the day heats
the redgum trunks file past
wax blue green
through a vaporising
eucalyptus breath.
I hear their thin xylem skins
sucking hard at The River.

Now the sacred ibis are long gone,
drawn away by the horizon, and
the shadows lengthen.
How I wish to be up there with them
all hollow boned
pinions outstretched
at the tip of that westward skein,
heading downstream,

‘The River’ snaking its green path below,
not hurrying to meet
its great blue ocean, somewhere
beyond the vast dome of dry brown land.

Re-reading the poem now raises many questions about the ‘absences’ (silences) in my
text. Where is the ecologically damaged river? Where is the indigenous river? Where is
the contested river? Does the poem suggest I discovered only a sublime landscape – a
place populated by a nature waiting contact with the attentive, individual human
consciousness? Was the romanticism of the nature writing I had begun to read while
studying in Canada shaping my interpretation of the river? Was I a teacher and river
guide trapped within a discourse that I would later reflexively challenge as an ingredient
in the purpose of this study? And, perhaps most importantly, was this the river I
presented to my students? This final question is crucial to the aims, methods and politics
of the research conducted and presented in this dissertation.

It took me some years to realise that The River Dreams, although written in the
first person and largely for myself at the time, is really a pedagogic poem. It embodied a
hope I held for each student to discover a passion so strong for canoeing and rivers that
they would feel compelled to return again and again.

At this crucial stage of this chapter’s narrative, I do recall I was beginning to
reflect more seriously and critically upon the connections that existed between people,
place and pedagogy in these river experiences. Using Aldo Leopold’s Sand County
Almanac: And Sketches Here and There (1987 edition) as a guide and a teaching text, I
sensed the importance of combining both a rational story of the experience (as often
found in historical, geographical and ecological accounts of places, as well as in
students’ own retelling of events in essays and field trip logs), with a more poetic
sensibility. I have used Leopold’s book as a text throughout my university teaching
career. Leopold’s seminal contribution to the development of environmental ethics, his
eloquent modelling of descriptive prose for outdoor encounters, and his analysis of
much that is taken for granted in the outdoor experience, continues to raise questions for
both students and myself about the ecological integrity of human values and actions.²

Subsequently, both students and I often wrote and shared poetic responses to
experiences, although this happened more on the slow flowing encounters with the
Murray, than the technical and athletic experiences of the ‘whitewater’ rivers. During
these years at Bendigo I employed one of the pedagogic practices I had experienced as a
postgraduate student at the University of Calgary in a subject taught by Jean Clandinin.
At the end of the sequence of paddling experiences, I asked each student to write me a
letter that reflected upon some personally significant learning discoveries or issues that
arose as a result of their paddling and river experiences. The letters were not an

² Leopold’s book, first published posthumously in 1949, is presented in three distinct sections. In the first
Leopold describes in intricate and intimate detail his observations of nature made on weekend visits to on his
farm property in the derelict ‘sand counties’ of Wisconsin. In the second section, he recounts a number of
stories and insights about nature experiences gathered through a range of outdoor journeys. In the final
section Leopold draws his professional conclusions on topics such as ecological consciousness, land as
community, perception, wilderness and recreation and, famously, the land ethic. Leopold’s poetic and
allegorical style makes his writing both readable and searchingly provocative. Daniel Berthold-Bond (2000),
reflecting upon the lasting legacy of Leopold’s writing as a bioregional poetics, suggests that his ‘essays
attempt to ‘rebuild … what we are losing elsewhere,’ which is precisely a love and respect for place’ (p. 20).
assessment task and I wrote back to each student. These letters served as ‘experiential
texts’. They provided highly useful insights into the complexity of student experiences
and provided some of the data for this inquiry. Reading them, and responding to them
at the time provided important feedback about student experiences and responses to the
various paddling programs. But the greatest value of the letters for me as a young
academic were the questions they posed about the ‘match’ or ‘mismatch’ of outdoor
education theory and practice. Students from the same trip would tell dramatically
different stories of their river experiences. These ranged from fear to exaltation,
accelerated or stalled learning and, perhaps tellingly, they presented anecdotes that
seemed to portray either an connection or ambivalence to the river. Similarly, it was
possible to interpret from the letters how individual students would respond very
differently from one paddling or river experience to another. In 1997 one student
proffered:

The best trips I’ve been on during the duration of the course have been canoeing
up and down rivers where there’s no pressure to perform. Perhaps kayaking allows
one to become intimate with a river in a different way than canoeing does, but I
find that I don’t have much of a chance to take in my surroundings like I do when
I’m in a canoe. (Participant#32.F, letter lines 19-23)

Sometimes ‘successes’ on the river were retold in such detail that it was possible to
interpret many aspects of the experience: risk taking, skill development, peer pressure,
ego tripping, and the development of a river running language:

There we were at the top of the Amphitheatre [a long and difficult rapid] on the
Mitchell, stories of carnage from the other group still fresh in our minds. But we
weren’t going to become better paddlers by portaging around: in fact you were
going to gain nothing more than a lot of ‘shit hang’ from the rest of the group. So
we checked our lines, we prepared for carnage, we were quite prepared to swim
most of this one… and we had a deadeast crack!…And we there we were coming
backwards through a monster hole, water up to our waists, but we kept upright and
worked our way into the top eddy….Then came the last section, a small drop and
sweeping bend. It doesn’t look as hard as the rest, but many a great paddler has
come unstuck here….We watched a couple of boats go down, pounding into the
rock on the far bank, a couple of swims. Then we went, adrenaline flowing, we
could do this … and we did … We were the best paddlers in the world!
(Participant#43.M, 1998, letter lines 47-62)

3 How these letters were accessed, their usefulness and limitations as data in the inquiry and ethical
considerations in their use as data are discussed in Chapter Six.
Another student recalled the vivid memory of a cold dawn paddle on the Murray River. Leaving camp in the dark before the other students, he experienced the gradual awakening of the river, yet wondered what the experience might mean if he could not describe it:

The problem that I’ve been contemplating revolves around the fact that because I can’t define the good in what I feel, I find I can’t therefore trust in it. I’ve stumbled across a range of experiences that have felt intrinsically special. In reflection though, doubt creeps in, undermining their importance, leaving me hollow inside. (Participant#33.M, 1997, letter lines 23-27).

Another student would turn to a poetic description in an attempt to reconcile the experience with thoughts and feelings after the Murray River trip:

I think of and feel
Gravity, Slope, Time and Energy,
Life around.

Moon shadow
Moon reflection,
On the boat,
On the water,
On the forest,
On the bow wave

Stars pass behind treetops
I feel the speed of the river
I travel at the river’s pace.

…

the bow gurgles, a frog sings
gently, the bow nudges the shore,
all I heard now is the forest, river and me
the life I surround and am
( Participant#52.M, 1996, letter lines 55-79)

Even this small sample of examples from the letters begins to indicate the array of responses that students were expressing in relation to the paddling programs. Different river places and different styles of paddling seemed to result in dramatically different student responses. The thrill and fear of the whitewater rapid seemed so utterly different to the calm reflections evoked on the Murray River journey. Yet my own experience at that time, as indicated in The River Dreams, was of a continuity of experience from the river in its headwaters to the river meandering across its floodplain. What could explain
such clear differences between one student and another, one place and another, and between my experience and interpretation of rivers and that of many of the students? And, what might such differences require in terms of a methodological response in the research of such subjectivities?

Whilst I was still wrestling with pedagogic approaches to teaching paddling that might better accommodate the range of responses I was reading in the letters, I took up a position at Monash University, in Victoria’s Gippsland region, late in 1998. I had previously lived in Gippsland early in my secondary school teaching career and was happy to return to its greener, moister hills on the southern flanks of the Great Dividing Range. The Bachelor of Sport and Outdoor Recreation / Bachelor of Education (BSOR/BEd) double-degree program provided opportunities to contribute to the establishment of a tertiary program for physical and outdoor education teachers, and to teach in a more diverse range of subjects, activities and environments.

**Elaborate ritual**

This phase of my professional development was an exciting time. The program soon expanded to include a suite of undergraduate degrees, postgraduate supervision opportunities, and a stronger emphasis on research. I commenced my doctoral candidature early in 2000 whilst continuing to write new subjects for the program as the first group of students progressed through the degree. My reading and research focus had progressively highlighted ‘sense of place’ and ‘place experiences’ as a potential experiential and theoretical foundation for outdoor education. Like the Canadian, James Raffan (1992), I was beginning to accept that ‘land’ (or ‘river’) could be a teacher in its own right, and that there was ‘a good fit’ between ‘place’ and the experiential approaches of outdoor education. My teaching focus was wider at Monash, encompassing both sport and outdoor recreation subject offerings, and also teaching methods subjects in outdoor education.

We had written a subject for third year students titled *EDF3603 Wilderness Expedition*, which involved students studying the historical origins of both the concepts of wilderness and the outdoor expedition, including the possibility that they may be environmentally problematic. The unit included a 10 to 13 day experiential component where students would apply skills and knowledge acquired earlier in the degree to an expedition in south-eastern Australia. A rafting or canoeing expedition, following the Snowy River from the evocatively named campsite at ‘Running Waters’, just upstream
from Willis in New South Wales, to the coast at Marlo became a popular choice. The third pool of participants for this inquiry were drawn from these Snowy River expeditions (2001-2003). Students were required to plan all aspects of the expedition collectively and then complete the expedition with a mentor leader. I had taken this role on all bar one of these expeditions. Written assessment work combined the planning logistics of the expedition with individual chapters, each person interpreting their own account of the experience via a theoretical study, to collectively produce a book.

Students were required to conduct their field inquiry during the expedition and time was given to writing, photography, side trips and so on. The following extract from my river journal for day two of the expedition in 2002, gives a sense of the country, and includes a poem I drafted that day, based on my observations in camp that morning:

(Day 2 – Gattamurh Ford to Suggan Buggan / Snowy confluence)

The river leaves the Barry Way after Gattamurh Ford and runs south – large open valley with the high ranges on the left.
A clear blue sky most of the day with patches of high cirrus later … a stiff headwind up the valley in late afternoon.
About 1 km above Willis is a nasty willow in the main current – could be a hazard at higher river level.
The river runs south – changing character several times
open, granite – carved
wide, shallow, orange sand
brown, black river stones
black basalt – narrow channel.

Wide valley – dry, covered in cypress pine. This timber dominates the driftwood, along with regeneration wattles on the river flats. Burns well in the campfire – spits and crackles.

ELABORATE RITUAL

The canoeists
rig themselves against the river,
wetsuit, thermal and cag,
helmet, PFD, orange throwbag,
slings, ’biners, whistles, and cream against the sun.

They load the waterproof barrels,
food, shelter and clothes, into bright yellow boats,
circling each other with banter.
Behind them,
in the camp they have just struck,
two crimson rosellas
carve silently in
through the wattles, that
grow in the riverflat sands, and
land upon a granite boulder.

Each stands, a mirror of the other,
atop a rock cleft,
a lichen crusted pool of water.

One shuffles in and drinks three times,
the other reflects precisely,
in turn, its mate.
Then the first bird drinks again,
as its mate climbs the boulder,
and descends to shoulder its partner.
The first bird flies off,
the second drinks again, then
flies away, wings loping.
Blue tail feathers fan
where it lands
upon a distant wattle branch.

The canoeists strap themselves
into their boats, and
drift away from the camp
at Guttamurh Ford.

The river carves further down
into the granite load.
High cirrus washes
across the sky.

Elaborate ritual.

Read together, the journal entry and the poem tell only a partial story of people and place. The student canoeists have rejoined the scene, which was populated only by nature and the solitary Romantic observer in *The River Dreams*. Although surrounded by the world unfolding into its everyday routines, they are preoccupied with the task of gearing themselves against the river. The extract and the poem encapsulates much of the spirit of this inquiry, as it compelled me to formalise my questioning of the significance of the learning that emerged for participants through there paddling encounters with river places. How did the full life of the river, including the human stories and histories that collect around and within it, relate to the lived experience of the students? Many of them had prepared for these journeys by reading cultural and environmental histories of
the Snowy, but how did the images and stories they brought to the river interact with the embodied learning they achieved in their days descending the river through its remote gorges and out onto the floodplain downstream? How was this learning useful to them in their future work as outdoor educators and guides? Could a specific river-pedagogy be discerned that would serve as a better guide to the structuring of river experiences? The books of these expeditions, and the individual chapters in particular, were also considered as experiential texts that could be interpreted to gain insights into the nature and structure of the student experiences of these journeys, like the reflective letters from the La Trobe students.

One student who completed the Snowy River journey noted how the group would respond to the river in different ways at different times: “when at a rapid the energy would consume us and we yelled and shouted, delighting in the challenge. But when travelling along stretches of flat water we sat back and relaxed into the rhythm of the life around us” (Participant#59.M, 2003, report lines 222-224). Another student blurred the boundaries between thinking, doing and landscape:

In a wild and remote landscape there is no mind numbing activities to sweep thoughts and actions away. In the wilderness there is only one’s mind, and the setting before them. What power this has is unique to each individual, but for me there is no escape and I must face thoughts and emotions usually hidden and locked away. There is almost an involuntary need to reflect as one paddle stroke leads to another and the landscape flows, one ridge folding before another. (Participant#54.M, 2001, report lines 94-101)

The letters and reports from students contain such diversity and contradictory messages about the experience of rivers that I felt, yet again, compelled to more fully understand those experiences from the perspective of the participants. It is dangerous for outdoor education professionals and practitioners to assume that these types of encounters are ineffable, that they are beyond description, yet simultaneously claim that they are inherently worthwhile and defensible. I discuss this problem in Chapter Three and elaborate it further again in Chapter Five. Collectively the students experiential texts provided an opening for the inquiry phase of this study to re-call, re-visit and re-interpret the river experiences of participants, from both the La Trobe University and Monash University programs, to gauge their meaning and worth and, in particular, to consider how those experiences did, or did not, serve as a pedagogic response to the rivers as places.
Ironically, much of my own personal, professional and narrative journey with rivers has paralleled that of the students who were the participants in this study. Moments of fear contrast moments of joy, and deep questions about life and place have been reflected back from the dark mirror of the river’s surface. None more so than questions about the seeming divide between rhetoric and reality, or gaps in theory and practice, in the burgeoning discourse of outdoor education.

This chapter has provided a narrative of my professional development and experiential association with rivers, paddling activities and outdoor education. It demonstrates how two decades of experiences and thought relating to questions about wilderness, place, lived experience and outdoor education, gathered momentum to the point where they could be conceptualised into a doctoral research study, as outlined in the previous introduction chapter. Therefore, this study proceeds with a clear commitment to critique existing assumptions within outdoor education that may serve to limit or silence the lived experiences of participants in outdoor places.

In addition, I feel compelled to argue the case for a methodological approach that provides the best ‘fit’ possible for the researcher, the researched, and the outdoor places implicated in the research. If these aims can be satisfied, then the textual re-representation of the lived experiences of participants can be drawn upon for the development of plausible insights (van Manen, 1997) that allow for a careful consideration of the limitations and possibilities of a place-responsive pedagogy for outdoor education. As such, this study represents the first doctoral research in outdoor education that specifically aims to propose a place-responsive pedagogy based on the collection, interpretation and re-representation of empirical data. Studies like this one, and others with similar aims and intentions, are badly needed in a field that has, for far too long, relied upon unsubstantiated claims about the legitimacy of knowledge and experience that result from its pedagogical practices.
CHAPTER THREE: “We have a fiction we live by, it is the river”

We have a fiction that we live by: it is the river that steps down, always down. From the pale lake to the open jaws of land where the sea receives it, where the great body of the sea sucks the river on, absorbs it, where the river ceases as a river, joins the past of rivers

...

We have a fiction and the fiction itself is a river, it has upstream, lake, sea, current, much as this. We say taniwha rau – ‘a spirit at every bend.’ We open and close our fists on the edge of the bridge, raise and lower our eyes to the black water, its sandbar and sacred mountain, reflected cliffs, the narrows. We have a fiction to live by, talking of rivers.

(Extract from Waikato-Taniwha-Rau, 1982, Vincent O’Sullivan)

In Chapter One, I outlined the focus, aims and methodological approach of this research. In Chapter Two I discussed how nearly twenty years of experience in outdoor education led me to seriously question my practices in the field in relation to some of the literature I had been exposed to in my studies and early parts of a professional career in the university sector. My resulting turn towards the literatures and scholarship of place appeared to provide some guidance, yet much of my ‘lived’ practice seemed chained to inappropriate textual or discursive theoretical representations of outdoor education. This discourse celebrated risk and adventure and seemed to romanticise wilderness, whilst simultaneously purporting to promote the possibility that participants would develop positive relationships with nature.

The rhetorical slippage - equating the experience of ‘wilderness’, ‘nature’ and ‘place’ in outdoor education discourse - now requires a deeper critical analysis if this study is to work towards offering empirically qualified theoretical conclusions. This then is the task of this chapter; to critically examine these rhetorical claims, or
textualized and discursive constructions, of nature-relations in outdoor education. I begin this task by posing two questions:

1. In the recent rhetorical speculations about positive human-nature relations within outdoor education discourse, how and on what ‘lived’ and empirically informed basis might a place-responsive pedagogy be interpreted, if at all?
2. Does the emphasis on nature-relations within this discourse represent an authentic desire and appropriate practices for attachment to place in outdoor education? And, if not, what does it represent?

The main purpose here is not to provide a comprehensive curriculum history of Australian outdoor education discourses as Payne (2002) has called for (although the profession would surely benefit from a study dedicated to this task). Rather, it is to elaborate the textual representations and cultural constructions of nature-relations and place in which the participants in this study have been ‘schooled’, ‘trained’ and ‘educated’. In other words, this chapter aims through a reflexive and scholarly critique, to provide the contextual detail within which the representations of lived experiences in “Moving on an effortless journey” (presented in two parts as Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight) might critically and reflexively be read. To do this it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the emergence of outdoor education, internationally and in Australia, and then to focus upon a number of influential developments in outdoor education discourses with regard to nature-relations, and by implication ‘place’. Specific consideration is given to the Australian state of Victoria, which is the setting for the inquiry component of this study.

**Outdoor education: Broad in scope and difficult to define**

Typically outdoor education has been presented in the literature as “all-round personal and social development in areas such as self-awareness, teamwork, decision-making, environmental awareness, spiritual and aesthetic awareness, relationship-building, taking responsibility, communication skills and physical awareness” (Gair, 1997, p. 27). From diverse international backgrounds both Mortlock (1987) in the UK and Schoel, Prouty and Radcliffe (1988) in the USA, claim that the aim of outdoor education is to facilitate the achievement of human potential through outdoor adventure experiences.

Gair (1997) credits the Dartington Conference in Outdoor Education, held in the UK in October, 1975, with introducing the three commonly accepted components of the outdoor adventure experience - self, others and nature - to the discourse of professional
practice. Outdoor places have been utilised as settings for programs that claim universal appeal. In the broader discourses of outdoor education, confusion and contradiction reign about aims, purposes and the existence of any foundational body of knowledge in the field (Brookes, 2004).

In very general terms, part of this confusion surrounds attempts to define outdoor education as characterised by Ford’s (1981) attempt to provide and overarching concept for the nexus (or tension) that exists between outdoor education and environmental education. Ford’s (1981) “in, for and about the outdoors” (p. 12) definition of practice is characteristically broad in scope and ambition, and preceded several attempts to establish universal definitions that, in summary, claim outdoor education as an experiential process, located in outdoor places, and that the subject matter is ‘relationships’ (Priest, 1996). Priest’s (1996) definition provides a good summary of the attempt to encapsulate both the aims and pedagogies of outdoor education. Similarly there is no shortage of lists of the benefits claimed to flow from the outdoor education experience: psychological, sociological, educational, and physical outcomes that all fall under the broad banner of personal development (Ewert, 1989; Meier, Morash and Welton, 1987; Mortlock, 1987).

Lugg (1999) claims a shift in the discourse out of the UK and Australia, led by Brookes (1993), Cooper (1994), Higgins (1996) and Martin (1992), has more recently presented an alternative “that sees the primary purpose of outdoor education as educating for an environmentally sustainable future” (p. 26). Loynes (2002) provided a paradigmatic overview that brings some order to an otherwise broad and sometimes confusing professional discourse. He juxtaposes the influence of military, modernist and

---

4 Gair (1997) draws upon the work of David Hopkins and Roger Putman’s book *Personal Growth Through Adventure* (2000, 2nd edition) first published in 1993, where these characteristics are further elaborated:

- **Self**: For the individual participant there is the prospect that increased self-awareness and enhanced self-concept may stem from a positive response to experiences of a challenging and adventurous nature.
- **Others**: An expedition is a powerful medium for maximizing the potential for group development and cohesion. Indeed, successful responses to physical challenges of the venture will depend on the group’s ability to forge effective underlying social structures.
- **The Natural Environment**: The environment provides adventure education with an arena for challenge in a physical sense, but it also has a more subtle and powerful influence. Environmental awareness grows through direct experience of the natural world and its pervading influence enlivens all that is best in Outdoor Education. (p. 26)

5 Priest’s (1996) definition was founded on six major points: (1) Outdoor education is a method of learning; (2) The process of learning is experiential (and pedagogically draws upon Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Dewey); (3) Learning in outdoor education takes place primarily, but not exclusively in the outdoor setting; (4) Experiential learning requires the full use of the six senses and involves the three domains (cognitive, affective, and motoric) of learning; (5) Learning in Outdoor Education is based upon interdisciplinary curriculum matter; (6) Learning in Outdoor Education is a matter of many relationships (interpersonal, intrapersonal, ecosystemic, ekistic). (Priest, 1996, pp. 13-14).
algorithmic paradigms with alternative moral, ecological and generative paradigms for outdoor education.6

In Australia a vigorous debate continues in professional journals and conference proceedings, that attempts to address how outdoor education is perceived by the public (Thomas, 1999). This debate includes an unresolved attempt to establish a motive of service (Bowles, Brookes, Martin, Neill, & Quay, 2001), to define a body of knowledge that is unique to outdoor education (Published conference discussion notes, no author indicated, Journeys, 5(11), 2000), and an attempt to signpost key issues in the emergence of outdoor education as a profession (Martin, 2000). However, what is clear is that outdoor education is a term attached to activities and pedagogic approaches as disparate as adventure therapy, corporate training, recreational camping, and elements of formal schooling. Amongst this diversity outdoor places potentially become clinical sites, training courses, venues, or curriculum resources. Payne (2002) provides a useful summary:

Undoubtedly, outdoor education in Australia is a ‘set’ of social and cultural constructions, whose activity base borrows from diverse histories and has numerous aims that now tend to stress the development of adventure recreation skills, personal therapy and spiritual growth, social or ‘community’ development, profit-making or, more recently, environmental relations. (p. 5)

Outdoor education and its discourses, particularly in Australia, is in its relative infancy. Attempts by theorists, writers and researchers to define and qualify the profession’s ambitions and scope are made increasingly difficult by the proliferation of forms of practice, each with their own agenda, yet each claiming an allegiance to outdoor education and the ‘outdoors’ itself.

A short history of outdoor education in Australia

In his book *Outdoor and Environmental Education: Diverse Purposes and Objectives*, Keith McRae (1990) traces the rapid development of outdoor camping programs in the

---

6 Loynes (2002) focuses largely on paradigmatic differences between outdoor education’s origins in the United Kingdom and the United States. He is critical of the masculine and hierarchical tendencies of militaristic and expedition based programs in Britain and of ‘production line’ approaches to experience in the United States. He contrasts these with the Scandinavian tradition of ‘Friluftsliv’ (a cultural approach to outdoor living) and a local ‘generative approach’, where he defines outdoor experiential learning as radical practice; “a journey of discovery of a personal ontology and epistemology for the participant. It incorporates actions based on the experiences inspired by learners choosing for themselves how to make a difference. The individual moves through the role of participant and narrator, and becomes an agent in their world” (Loynes, 2002, p. 121).
post-WWII period in Australia, where concerns for fitness, robustness and physical wellbeing prevailed. The author discusses the influence of the Rural School Camps movement from early in the twentieth century, and the establishment of the National Fitness Centres from 1941 onwards. McRae summarises the National Fitness camping policy developed by the Director of Physical Education in New South Wales as follows:

Although the promotion of physical fitness was seen as being central to the camps, an original intention was for the camps to be based on the American and English models and to use an ‘outdoor camping environment’ to provide appropriate learning experiences in all subject areas. (p. 21)

Brookes (2002) details the emergence of organised school camping amongst the elite private schools from as far back as the 1930s and traces the institutionalisation of outdoor education in state schooling in Victoria to a student fatality on a school organised bushwalk in 1972. This, along with a number of other factors (including governmental support, the employment of large numbers of young teachers, the existence of private school camping programs, and access to a number of rural camp properties) resulted in the establishment of a considerable outdoor education presence in Victorian schooling prior to the development of a corresponding set of university studies. Brookes (2002) concludes:

Contributions to discourse represented an increasingly evident diversity of interests – of which education was only one. … universalist tendencies took root relatively uninhibited by critique, and uniformed by insights that might have emerged from a sustained academic inquiry centred on curriculum, place and experience. (p. 413)

Brookes (2002) argues that this resulted in the adoption of “context-free accounts of outdoor education … [which] drew on conceptual frameworks readily to hand as globalised economic and cultural influences increased in Australia” (p. 413). Outdoor programming was well established in schools throughout south-eastern Australia prior to the emergence of academic interest and, as such, was practitioner-led with deference to approaches from the adventure and camping traditions from the UK and the USA.

The first Australian university degree program in outdoor education enrolled students in 1984. There can be little doubt that the Bendigo College of Advanced Education’s (BCAE) Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education) initiative marked a significant turning point in the development of outdoor education in Australia. BCAE had already conducted a two-year Associate Diploma in Outdoor Education since 1975,
having established that program largely as a result of another school outdoor program
fatality, this time in Tasmania’s Cradle Mountain National Park (Payne, 1984).

Phillip Payne was largely responsible for developing the degree program and its
initial accreditation in 1983. From the outset the program questioned British and North
American influences, and presented some distinctively Australian and local
perspectives, not the least of which was the significance of the location of experiences, a
focus on natural history and the sociology of recreation. The Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor
Education) degree was constructed on the following premise:

Outdoor education encompasses a balance of environmental knowledge,
understanding, appreciation and stewardship with the development of skills
required to travel in the natural environment (bush walking, skiing, canoeing etc.).
It also promotes the view that outdoor education and outdoor recreation although
often considered interchangeably, are in fact quite different. (Payne, 1984, p. 13)

Out of this beginning emerged the La Trobe University, Bendigo’s Department of
Outdoor Education and Nature Tourism (BCAE having been amalgamated with La
Trobe University as a result of federal government policy developments in higher
education), and it remains the largest program (in terms of enrolments and academic
staff numbers) that prepares outdoor education graduates in Australia. A strong
environmental education orientation throughout the degree provided an ideological and
philosophical stance quite different to the prevailing discourses of the time, with an
underlying focus of study on Australian social and cultural conditions, where the role of
outdoor education and recreation would be critically evaluated (Payne, 1983).

It is apparent that the initial development of outdoor adventure programming in
Australia, both in community and school programs, was practitioner-led and utilised
imported approaches to practice that emphasised personal and social development.
Outdoor places where largely conceptualised as arenas for physical performance. The
formal institutionalisation of outdoor education, at both secondary and tertiary levels, in
both cases responded to outdoor fatalities. It is little wonder that narratives of risk (Zink,
2003) and character building adventure (Brookes, 2003) persist, given these
foundational stories. Equally, the socially and environmentally critical agenda of the La
Trobe University degree launched a line of academic inquiry and justification for
outdoor education that provided a possible alternative future for outdoor education in
Australia. But it would seem that it is a future that has not yet been fully realised in
terms of the significance of experiential learning, interdisciplinary studies,
environmental ethics and politics, and the role of ‘place’ considerations and practices.
This may be explained, in part at least, by the paucity of research in outdoor education in this country.

In Australia, Neill (1997) suggested, “the field [of outdoor education] is still characterized by a potted history of studies of varying quality and has yet to build a comprehensive and rigorous body of research-based knowledge” (p. 194). Most recently, Martin (2003) surveyed research-based papers published in outdoor education conference proceedings and journals in Australia between 1991-2003. To qualify as research in Martin’s survey, papers had to clearly involve “the collection and analysis of data”, or “drew upon data previously collected” (p. 214). Sixty-six studies met these guidelines, with less than ten percent related to ‘environment’ topics. Martin’s survey indicates overwhelmingly that “personal and group development” (p. 222) remains the main focus of researchers. Even amongst practitioners, resistance to the establishment of a more socially critical and environmentally orientated curriculum for outdoor education continues (Freakly, 1990; Bennetts, 2001), with claims that the interests of academics and universities do not always articulate well with those of programs, practitioners or their ‘clients’.

The emergence of a rhetorical interest in nature-relations

Several examples serve to mark the emergence of a rhetorical interest in nature-relations in Australian outdoor education. These examples are concentrated in the state of Victoria, which is not surprising given the development of the specialist tertiary degree programs that prepare graduates for careers in teaching outdoor education, and the subsequent interaction with secondary school curricula. The examples discussed here include: (1) The Outdoor Education Statement within the Personal Development Framework document (Ministry of Education, 1989), which covers schooling from the preparatory year to year ten, and presents an inherently conservative and amenity value for outdoor places; (2) The Victorian Certificate of Education (The VCE) Outdoor Education Study Design7 accredited initially in 1990, which promotes a socially critical examination of human-nature relations; and, (3) key contributions to scholarly debate via professional journals and conferences which represent a divergence within the discourse for ‘sustainable’ relations with nature and a reluctance, or inability, to adapt

---

7 The VCE represents the final two years of secondary education in Victoria, and is often considered to be a preparation for tertiary study. VCE Outdoor Education was reviewed by the Victorian Board of Studies in 1998 and merged with the humanities elements of VCE Environmental Studies to become VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies (Gleeson, 2000). This revised curriculum was delivered for the first time in 1999.
practice to meet such aims. The critique of each of these examples highlights how ongoing assumptions about nature-relations continue to limit theoretically, and by implication through the practices such discourses recommend, the possibility of a more place-responsive pedagogy. In addition, it is possible to discern how the gap between discourse and practice continues to widen.

**The outdoor arena**

According to the *Outdoor Education Statement* (Ministry of Education, 1989), the document that most directly informed curriculum development in primary and secondary education:

> Outdoor education focuses on personal development through interaction with others and responsible use of the natural environment. It involves the acquisition of knowledge, values and skills that enhance safe access, understanding and aesthetic appreciation of the outdoors, often through adventure activities. (p. 131)

Amongst a plethora of personal development justifications for teaching outdoor education it is acknowledged in this 1989 curriculum document, that “outdoor settings provide opportunities for experiencing affinity with natural environments” (p. 131). Further it is claimed that outdoor education “increases awareness of the place of humans in the natural world, emphasising the interrelationships with natural systems” (p. 131). Within a section of the document that outlines the scope of outdoor education, people in the outdoors are considered to be interested in self-concept, social relationships, safety, recreation and leisure and resource management. The outdoors is objectified as climate, landforms and flora and fauna, and it is found in natural and modified settings (1989, p. 133). Adventure activities are promoted and are balanced with the need for minimal impact skills and safety considerations, and experiential approaches to teaching and learning.

The 1989 curriculum statement expresses values for personal development in “aquatic, bushland … alpine” settings, but provides no guidance or recommendations that relate to local knowledge, contexts or practices. In other words, there is little recognition in this influential statement about outdoor education that local, social and environmental contexts require attention, study or even prior experience by the teacher, for the curriculum to be enacted effectively. A river and a mountain or one river and another, for example, are assumed to be arenas that provide precisely the same
pedagogic potential, and there is minimal guidance about how teaching and learning might be influenced by differences in the ‘naturalness’ of particular settings. There is no sense here that outdoor educators should approach the outdoors with the kind of localising questions proposed by Wendell Berry (1987): “What is here? What will nature permit us to do here? What will nature help us do here?” (p. 146).

Yet by 1995 course advice materials stated:

Outdoor Education has as its ultimate goal the creation and maintenance of healthy, positive, sustainable relationships between people and the natural environment. (Directorate of School Education, 1995, p. G1)

Were such rhetorical shifts in the discourse of outdoor education reflected in practice? Lugg and Martin (2001) conducted a collaborative project between the Victorian Outdoor Education Association (VOEA) and the Department of Outdoor Education and Nature Tourism, La Trobe University, Bendigo in 1999 to assess the nature and scope of Outdoor Education in Victorian secondary schools. Four hundred and sixty one surveys were mailed out to secondary school teachers and principals. A 31 percent response rate indicated the following:

Group cooperation, improved self esteem and increased responsibility were considered the most important outcomes of Outdoor Education. Fitness, survival skills and recreation / leisure skills were considered the least important. Interestingly environmental appreciation and knowledge were considered quite important while understanding of human-nature relationships was considered less important. (Lugg & Martin, 2001, p. 44)

The authors concluded that; “this finding comes as a disappointment to some who have argued for outdoor education to develop a more distinctive role in education” (Lugg & Martin, 2001, p. 44). Interestingly, despite the availability of specialist tertiary programs producing graduates in outdoor education, the dominant tertiary qualification of teachers responsible for outdoor education in schools remained a physical education degree. The difficulties associated with outdoor education being positioned within a human development/physical education curriculum framework from the preparatory year to year ten continue to raise challenges for the field (Lugg, 1999; Wattchow and O’Connor, 2003).

Lugg (1999) claims that outdoor education curriculum development in Victoria over the last decade has shifted its emphasis from personal development towards an understanding of the “ecological concept of interconnectedness and the social and
cultural influences on human-nature relationships”, and that the individual is reconceptualized here “as a member of communities rather than as an autonomous being” (p. 27). This claim is difficult to accept given the findings of the study outlined above, of which Lugg was a co-author. At the very least the evidence points to a widening gap between curriculum developers and those teachers entrusted with enacting that curriculum. Outdoor education has remained in most practices, by and large, about the individual adventure encounter set in an outdoor ‘arena’, where an experiential learning pedagogy is employed for the purposes of personal and social development. Lugg’s recognition of a shift in emphasis marks yet another rhetorical move, but it is not one reflected in practice.

In summary, such shifts in the discourse are problematic for the possibility of a place-responsive pedagogy for two reasons. First, if nature-relations remains a universalised construct, as appears to be the case, then it is antithetical to the possibility of local knowledge(s) and practice(s) that would be required in a more place-responsive pedagogy. Practitioners simply consider nature to be an unproblematic arena for human action. Second, the widening gap between theory and practice means that no amount of rhetorical positioning, or shifting, in the discourse will equate to the place-responsive pedagogy that, by very definition, must be experiential, and possibly should emerge locally.

A further potential barrier to the possibility of an alternative place-responsive pedagogy in outdoor education has been the dominance in the discourse through the 1990s, of what purports to be a ‘critical’ agenda for outdoor education. It is exemplified in the development of, and debates about, the VCE Outdoor Education curriculum.

**A socially critical discourse for sustainable relations with nature**

Building upon the legacy of the development of outdoor education at BCAE in 1983, VCE studies in Outdoor Education has proved popular in Victoria at year 11 and 12, with student numbers increasingly steadily from 1700 in 1993 to nearly 6000 in 1999 (McArthur, 1994; Gleeson, 1999). It is possible to discern in the Study Design a socially critical orientation to human-nature relationships. One practitioner (Bennetts, 2001) however, felt that this represented a “quest for legitimacy” (p. 18) on the part of a newly emerging curriculum field that lacked a tradition and body of knowledge it could call its own. In a provocative statement, Bennetts (2001) regretted the demise of the traditional focus on outdoor activity and its replacement with a curriculum that imitated “the social
critique model in some university courses” (p. 18). He was also critical of the ways in which an institutionalised curriculum, “hijacked by the Establishment (sic) universities” (p. 18), presents a limited approach to land use, experience and relationships. In short, Bennetts argued that as a result of the VCE serving as an entrance examination for universities, students become coached to ‘get the right answer’ rather than experience a more student-centred and adventure-based program.

Phillip Payne, the Principal Writer of the original VCE Outdoor Education Study Design in 1988/89, responded to Bennetts by acknowledging the “double dilemma of institutionalising and legitimising Outdoor Education” (2001, p. 17), whilst highlighting the “socially critical greening process” (p. 17) that had reshaped the curriculum since its first accreditation in 1990. Payne (2001) reminded the profession that “there is a need for Outdoor Education to critically and reflexively monitor itself as an educational practice and discourse; to track its evolution, myths, achievements, problems, outcomes and consequences; and to archive such memories for future reference” (p. 16).

These examples are indicative of the ever-widening gap between practice, where the outdoors remains a site for adventurous activity, and a discourse that claims to be critical of that activity. Practice has not responded to a theorising of human-nature relations evident in the discourse, but neither have Australian outdoor education theorists and researchers, if we accept the findings of Martin’s (2003) survey, shown much interest in what is actually happening in the environmental (or place) encounters of outdoor education participants. In terms of nature-relations and place this leaves the outdoor education community of researchers, practitioners and participants in a classic double-bind. Discourses concerning nature-relations and place develops in a research void about the actual experiences of practitioners and participants and therefore, perhaps understandably, practitioners resist and reject the overtures of that discourse. As a result, outdoor education discourses and curriculum documentation continues a rhetorical shift from nature as arena, to nature-relations, to sustainable nature-relations, and even to place. Throughout these rhetorical moves an ‘empirical silence’ hangs over how such a changes might need to be negotiated, or indeed may even be initiated locally in a sustainable place-based practices. It is the task of studies such as this one to begin to bring into that void the voices of the participants and the places they experience.
The divergence of rhetoric and practice

This rhetorical shift towards a socially and environmentally critical orientation in outdoor education is evident not only within the VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies curriculum, but also within the professional outdoor education literature in Australia (academic journals and conference proceedings), and can be traced through a series of papers dating from the early 1990s. This discourse has developed amidst a growing awareness, outside of outdoor education, of the diversity of meanings that Western industrial cultures have for ‘nature’ and its social construction (Chambers, 1984; Marshall, 1992; Heller, 1999; Schama, 1995; Soper, 1995; Soule and Lease, 1995). This list of possible ‘natures’ is a long one and seemingly inexhaustible: nature as unknowable universe, wild kingdom, Gaia, pristine wilderness, picturesque landscape, gymnasium, temple, sunship, spaceship, ecological process, environment and so on.

Soper (1995) considers such constructions as representative of one of two basic views. On the one hand there are those who promote a ‘nature endorsing’ discourse of ecological reality. Alternatively, there are the postmodernists whose ‘nature-scepticism’ doubts that any such reality can exist beyond its cultural inscriptions. Both perspectives, Soper (1995) argues, “need to be more conscious of what their respective discourses on nature may be ignoring or politically repressing” (p. 8). Lease (1995) offers a slightly different perspective:

Western thought had culminated in an impasse regarding nature. Was it the material world of experience, experiences that could be shared, repeated, and tested; or was it the ineffable, invisible, and transcendent world of divine origins, available only to acts of faith. … After wrestling with the notion of nature for well over two thousand years, Western tradition had come up dry: neither an identification of the human species with nature nor a strict dichotomy between the two proved ultimately successful. (pp. 8-9)

In broader terms this impasse has been described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as a standoff between two central myths of Western philosophy; the myths of objectivism and subjectivism. In the first ‘myth’ humans believe that objective reality can be proven if the human errors of illusion, perception, judgement, emotion and personal and cultural bias can be avoided. Words and language, it is believed, can have fixed meanings if metaphor, poetic, fanciful, rhetorical and figurative language is avoided. Alternatively, the myth of subjectivism, exemplified by the Romantic poets, proposes that in our everyday, practical activities “we rely upon our senses to develop intuitions we can
trust” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 188). Activities like poetry and art are seen to transcend rationality, taking us to a new level of awareness, a “more important reality of imagination and feelings” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 188). Both myths are wrong, Lakoff and Johnson argue, but need each other. They are a binary pair that defines their position in opposition to the other. The impasse occurs when we cling to the belief system of one and reject the other as a possibility.

Within the space of this impasse nature has become a contested ground upon which opposed ideological interests fight for the ascendancy of particular cultural and social meanings over others (Soule and Lease, 1995). Already we have seen that outdoor educators in Australia have privileged certain interpretations of nature: nature as a arena where students experience personal development through challenging activity; nature as a venue that is appreciated and encountered aesthetically and for which we should develop some affinity, and; nature as an environment in need of sustainable management practices by humans.

Brookes (1993) argues that outdoor education practices uncritically treat the ‘bush’ (another vernacular construction of nature which immediately reduces nature to land and excludes rivers, bays and oceans) as a resource:

Seen against an emerging backdrop of environmental degradation as the unintended outcome of subconscious attitudes, any outdoor education practices might appear to be just another form of assault on the bush. What hunting, grazing, mining, clearing, harvesting and the introduction of exotic plants and animals began, outdoor education and its cousin tourism will finish off. (p. 11)

Whilst each student in outdoor education is seen by Brookes (1993) as extracting his or her experiences from the ‘bush’, he asks: “What’s in it for the bush? What’s in it for the community?” (p. 11). Later, Brookes (1994) characterises such approaches as “short raids on the ‘bush’ as strangers, rather than [as experiences that] develop a sense of place” (p. 31). That Australian nature has been perceived as a stranger to European settlers and their descendants, and the negative consequences for both the environment and traditional cultures that followed as a result, has been well documented by environmental historians and anthropologists (Bolton, 1981; Lines, 1991, McKenna, 2002; Read, 1996, 2000; Rose, 1996, 2002, 2004; Seddon, 1994; Sharp, 2002; Sinclair, 2001). David Tacey, a scholar of Jungian psychology, argues that the psychic estrangement from nature remains a major source of dislocation from place for settler Australians (1995, 2000, 2003).
In searching for a way to discursively encourage and reconnect outdoor educators with nature Brian Nettleton (1993) suggested that the relationship between humans and nature should be based on friendship. Nettleton highlights how friendship requires a reciprocal, diffuse and multifaceted relationship very different to a relationship of exploitation or distanced otherness:

The natural world is seen as a friend and from the immediacy of daily interaction, and not seen by modernity as from afar, as an object or as an inanimate other; as a whole and not as a composite of clever fragmentary insights painstakingly gleaned from the measurable aspects of nature. (p. 19)

Although Nettleton’s message should be admired for its sentiment, my memories of a decidedly dispassionate flooding Franklin River leave me somewhat guarded about the nature-as-friend metaphor. “It is perhaps corrective for a society that has seen nature as the enemy to be told to see it as a friend,” writes Seddon (1997), “but it is neither” (p. 20). Martin and Thomas (2000) attempted to further elaborate a model for human-nature relationships that extends Nettleton’s nature-as-friend metaphor to one of interpersonal relationships. They construct their model based on the theoretical understandings of the constructs of human relationships (skills, concern, interaction, trust, knowing), and present it as a pedagogic tool to be considered by other educators who would like their students to move from a level of ‘acquaintanceship’ with nature to one of more ‘intimate friendship’. Barriers to developing intimate friendship are seen to occur when participants experience fear and uncertainty. The authors conclude:

For programs with a clear intent of initiating human-nature relationships, the activities and places selected need to be those which enable participants to easily develop a sense of safety, comfort and well being – this may contrast with the high adventure goals and practices of more traditional outdoor programs. (Martin and Thomas, 2000, p. 41)

Martin and Thomas’ ‘constructs of relationships’ seems disturbingly anthropomorphic, a point the authors concede. The textual construction would benefit from a greater exploration of the role of reciprocity in relationships, particularly those with non-human others, and how relationships themselves are tied to places. The nature writer Barry Lopez (1986, 1988, 2003), for example, has explored this theme extensively. There is also little discussion of sensuousness of intimate relationships and, as a result, Martin and Thomas’ commentary assume that a high level of rationality governs the
development of relationships. They fail to acknowledge that ‘friendship’ with nature might require more than increased competence and attention:

We contend that developing more intimate friendships with nature will also require communication competence. In this sense, nature communication skills revolve around improved observation and interpretation. … noticing links and interconnections, and seeing details that untrained eyes miss. (Martin and Thomas, 2000, p. 41)

Martin and Thomas (2000) highlight the “power of language in shaping behaviour and the way in which hidden assumptions are perpetuated or reproduced” (p. 39), and in so doing disclose the post structural vantage point from which they propose to textually deconstruct and then rename the outdoor education experience. Martin (1994, 1995, 1998, 1999) has repeatedly argued that outdoor education in Australia should promote critical reflection upon human-nature relationships: “I am a critical outdoor educator. For me, developing sustainable relationships with nature is the ultimate good” (Martin, 1999, p. 14).

Thomas and Thomas (2000) also advocate a thoughtful, critical outdoor education for moving water paddling. They highlight dilemmas faced with attempting to teach paddling skills in what many would be tempted to name a distinctly unfriendly environment. According to the authors, language used by participants about paddling manoeuvres (such as shoot, punch through, break out, carve etc), sees the river become an adversary and encourages an “arrogant perception” (p. 50). They encourage participants to “listen to the river’s story” (p. 52) and to consider naming practices both in relation to paddling activity and place-names on the river. However, the authors are not clear about how one history, story or group of names would be differentiated from others, with the exception of a broad division between indigenous stories and the naming practices of European settlers.

Payne’s (2002) critique of Thomas and Thomas’ renaming of ‘kayaking’ as ‘moving water paddling’ begins to address the gap between the naming and practice of the activity of paddling on rivers and its claims to be a form of ‘critical’ outdoor education. Payne argues diligently for a reform, or reconstruction, within outdoor education where the resistance to changing adventurous activities must be overcome by a careful critique of the historical, cultural and most significantly, the embodied qualities of human-nature relations that result from such activities. Such a critical awareness of the consequences of de-naming and renaming practices remains largely unexplored in Thomas and Thomas’ work and thus risks expanding the gap between discourse and
practice even further, but is central to Payne’s critique. Stewart, another Australian outdoor educator who takes his students to river places, also appears to have begun to grapple with this challenging question:

Its name, the ‘Murray,’ inscribed on each map is also misleading. While it is possible to travel downstream on the same continuous stretch of water, a river of such prodigious length, traversing so many different environments, cannot be one river, but rather many. The aboriginal practice of naming a section of a river relative to how it behaves and is understood seems more appropriate. (Stewart, 2004b, p. 49)

Stewart is cautious of the rhetorical moves of other outdoor educators to develop human-nature relations which he fears, although well intended, might be “just another form of colonialism” (2004b, p. 49). Whilst I tend to agree with Stewart, I remain guarded about the solution of reverting to a consideration of the river as many different rivers. We cannot now forget our knowledge of the whole river as a physical/material reality from its headwaters to its mouth, and that our actions in one place on the river will inevitably have environmental consequences both there and downstream. It is for this reason that I employed the phrase for a river as ‘one-and-many’ (Wattchow, 2004), to remind us that a river need not be only a singular and prodigious reality to us, nor a set of our cultural constructions and textual inscriptions, but is both simultaneously.

Setting aside for a moment the cultural differences of the name for a river, and who may rightly be in a position to propose ‘new’ or ‘old’ names, many tantalising questions are skimmed over or missed when it comes to naming the activities of moving water paddling in Thomas and Thomas’ work. For example, precisely what language is used by moving water paddlers and in what scenarios; on the banks, on flat water, before, during and after encountering a white water rapid, and so on? Is the language used by paddlers inevitably negative, arrogant and against the river, or are there times when they use language that is more responsive to the river? Does the paddler sitting in the large rubber raft well above the water’s surface tell of their experience of the river in the same way as the kayaker sitting alone in their craft and much closer to, and quite often beneath, the surface of the river? How does language shift between modes of threat, play and rest? How are such vocabularies for paddling activity developed? What ‘natures’ emerge and what does this tell us about responsiveness to the river as place? The alternative to seeking answers to these questions is to “languish in semantic prisons of neither your making nor your choosing” (Seddon, 1997, p. 27).
There are several reasons why such proposals for a ‘critical’ outdoor education for sustainable nature-relations should be approached with a great degree of caution. Critical social theory is summarised by Macauley (1996) as being characterised by a “critical perspective on technology, power, scientism, and instrumental reason along with an opposition to exploitative capitalist social relations” (p. 2), none of which are considered by Martin and Thomas (2000) or Thomas and Thomas (2000). The enacting of social critical theory into practice according to Carr and Kemmis (1986) requires, a social process that combines collaboration in the process of critique with the political determination to act to overcome contradictions in the rationality and justice of social action and social institutions. A critical social science will be one that goes beyond critique to critical praxis; that is, a form of practice in which the ‘enlightenment’ of actors comes to bear directly in the transformed social action. (p. 144)

It is the ‘everyday’ encounter with, and the transmission of social inequity in all its forms, and the cultural mechanisms that make this process persistent, that social critics of education want to interrogate, challenge and change. It has been used effectively, for example, to highlight the hidden social curriculum in physical education for some decades now.8 Whilst it is clear that social justice issues (gender, sexuality, race, access) are gathering momentum in outdoor education discourses (see for example, Humberstone, Brown and Richards, 2003, Spencer, 2003; Warren, 1999), it is not clear that a socially critical agenda can be readily extended to include a critical pedagogy of nature-relations. Gruenewald (2003) warns:

Critical pedagogy can work to reinforce cultural beliefs … that underlie ecological problems and that are reproduced throughout conventional education: namely, individualism, the belief in the progressive nature of change, and anthropocentrism. (p. 4)

---

8 Tinning (2002) and McDonald (2002) draw upon a discourse spanning the last three decades (by Giroux, Bain, Kirk and Fernandez-Balboa, to name a few) in examining issues of power, privilege and oppression in the hidden curriculum of physical education. Interestingly the ascendancy of a critical theory inspired social justice agenda in physical education, Tinning argues, “now behoves university teacher education programs in Australia to actually set about teaching student teachers how to implement a HPE curriculum that is coherent with social justice principles that are inscribed in contemporary policy and curriculum documents” (2002, p. 229). Yet Tinning notes difficulties that should be of great interest to critical outdoor educators. He describes the resistance of undergraduate physical education students to the critical agenda (Tinning, 2002) suggesting that their desire for technical competence and certainty rather than ambiguity, even if that certainty is illusory, were significant points of resistance. Physical education undergraduate students, by and large, rejected the overtures of the socially critical agenda in their teacher education training, as they confronted the seemingly more immediate demands of developing the knowledge(s) and technical and pedagogic competence they felt their profession required.
A critical outdoor education pedagogy for sustainable relations with nature, particularly one that highlights issues of language, naming and power, suggests a Freireian approach to an assumed pedagogic problem. In the examples above the critique begins from the assumption that humans have an unsustainable relationship with nature, and that outdoor education practice can contribute to a more ecologically just human-nature relations in the future. Yet the examples discussed above propose a shift in discourses (for example, in naming practices) without any direct challenge to those activities that constitute the unsustainable outdoor education practice itself. Such an approach avoids the more difficult task of negotiating practical solutions locally from a socio-ecological orientation (Mulligan and Hill, 2001), or through a critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003), which would appear to hold greater potential for a place-responsive pedagogy. As Payne (2002) states:

Activities like kayaking, rock climbing, bushwalking/tramping and cross country skiing all have disparate ‘roots’ and are a stable feature of outdoor education in South East Australia. … These core activities have not received the critical attention they demand for their environmental appropriateness if, in fact, they are significant ‘experiential’ contributors to the very ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ the new wave of critics in outdoor education are concerned about. (2002, pp. 5-6)

The belief that humans transform the world through naming is central to Freire’s arguments in *Pedagogy for the Oppressed* (1972): “to exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turns reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming” (p. 61). There are substantial difficulties and pitfalls in a practice of naming (colonising), de-naming (de-colonising) and re-naming (re-inhabiting) places (Adams and Mulligan, 2003; Carter, 1988; Gruenewald, 2003; Seddon, 1997, 2005). More needs to be known about the nature, effects and consequences of naming practices and language usage relating to river places in outdoor education, for example, before outdoor educators can proceed with an appropriate consideration of an alternative naming practices. Without such work we risk yet another “cultural invasion” (Freire, 1972, p. 121) of place through language. At the very least, any re-naming of local places, and perhaps even activities that go on there, should require a degree of local negotiation (Plumwood, 2003).

What is required for outdoor education to be an effective form of cultural criticism, according to Payne (2002), is a more earnest “‘reflexive turn’ about its ‘own’ activities and constructions of experience, learning, education and nature” (p. 17). This reflexive journey should be taken by critical outdoor educators prior to the provision of
practical advice. Brookes (1994), however, remains cautious about the limits of a critical approach:

> Ecologically responsive experience is negotiated with a particular place, using our bodies and all our senses, and is (necessarily) mediated by culture. … 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. (p. 32).

In summary then, serious concerns about the emergence of a discourse for nature-relations in Australian outdoor education must be raised via the three levels that have been outlined in this chapter: ‘nature’ as an unproblematic arena; a ‘critically’ derived perception of the need for sustainable human-nature relations; and perhaps most tellingly, an ever widening gap between theoretical discourse and pedagogical practice. The construct of nature-relations appears increasingly in a discourse that is decontextualised and universalised. It remains greatly limited by the strong orientation to ‘traditional’ notions of certain adventure activities, personal growth and social development, and to an ongoing acceptance of risk. Practice has not been empirically researched to assess the environmental/place conditions and relations that are experienced by outdoor education participants. Stewart (2004b) neatly articulates how problematic this may yet prove to be:

> While the idea [of relationships with nature] is commendable, without consideration or acknowledgment of the place, culture, context or situation of an experience it could be argued that this is another form of colonialism, or neo-colonialism perhaps. I am fearful that our colonial history has produced a blind-spot in how we seek to relate to ‘nature,’ for ‘nature’ is again subjected to our desire for ‘mastery’ in our attempt to connect to it. (p. 47)

Although there has been some reference to place in outdoor education in Australian discourse in recent years, this has largely failed to acknowledge scholarship into place, which has largely arisen in philosophical and geographical inquiry. This continues despite the 12th National Outdoor Education Conference adopting a theme of ‘Education Outdoors – Our Sense of Place’. John Cameron, a leading Australian scholar of place and a keynote speaker at the conference, challenged the audience to move beyond the dualistic separation of wilderness and everyday places (2001). Some of the delegate’s presentations played upon the “broad currency” (Cameron, 2001, p. 28) of the place theme, but few drew upon place research and scholarship to any significant extent. There are only a handful of examples in Australian outdoor education literature which raise questions about outdoor
pedagogy and look beyond outdoor education’s own discourses, to those of ‘place’ for inspiration (Birrell, 2001; Wattchow, 2001a, 2004a; Stewart, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004a, 2004b; Preston and Griffiths, 2004). Perhaps the ongoing works of these writers will be more attentive to local places, recognizing that place demands our participation and negotiation, in addition to our theorization.

This brief critical analysis of certain contradictory and contested theoretical commentary on outdoor education in Australia raises a series of important questions for the purposes of this study. How is it possible that outdoor educators, having made such a marked rhetorical move towards sustainable nature-relations, seem to remain blind to the very places they work in? How have these writers largely failed to connect with established scholarly inquiry into the significance of place experiences?

According to David Orr (1992), educators have failed to see much significance in understanding, or attempting to teach, place. He explains that “place is nebulous to educators because to a great extent we are deplaced people for whom immediate places are no longer sources of food, water, livelihood, energy, materials, friends, recreation or sacred inspiration” (p. 126). The typical curriculum, according to Orr is based upon abstraction, which disconnects people from “tangible experience, real problems, and the places where we live and work” (p. 126). Is outdoor education then, just another example this typically placeless curriculum? Is outdoor education, despite its rhetoric, a denial of place?

The denial of place in outdoor education

As a result of the preceding critical review of the development of a discourse of nature-relations the denial of place in outdoor education can be traced to three fundamental assumptions about nature, experience and adventure. In this section I discuss how these assumptions continue to limit the possibilities of an alternative, local and place-responsive outdoor education pedagogy. The three denials of place I now scrutinize more carefully are:

1. The return to a Romantic ‘wild’ nature in outdoor education discourse as the denial of place.
2. The experiential education paradigm as denial of the corporeal bodily experience of place.
3. The adventure education paradigm as an ideological colonisation of space and the denial of place.
Collectively, I will argue that this heritage of ideas and ideals continues to deeply (mis)guide outdoor education away from the possibility of a distinctively local form of pedagogical practice. In the following discussion I intend to analyse each of these denials of place, continuing to expose how they have served to inform and promote a hegemonic discourse of outdoor education that silences alternative possibilities. The purpose here is to provide the clearest possible elaboration of the context within which the inquiry phase of this study must be considered, and to continue to clarify the struggle I have undergone personally and professionally in relation to ‘positioning’ myself within this inquiry. The need for empirical qualification of a largely rhetorical and perhaps immature discourse of outdoor education becomes clear.

**The return to Romantic ‘wild’ nature as the denial of place**

How can such a narrow preference for a ‘wild’ nature in outdoor education discourse be explained? How is place denied, for example, in Cooper’s (1994) popular paper *The Role of Outdoor Education in Education for the 21st Century*, when he declares:

> We have become removed from the rhythms of nature, from the seasons, from day and night, and from land and sea, from other life. These are poor compensations for feeling part of the planet, for having a spiritual belonging, a kinship with the Earth. (9-10)

Why should outdoor educators expect to find special lessons, those that would seem to contain the salvation of the future, only in ‘natural’ and ‘remote’ outdoor places? Part of the answer, based on the preceding review of outdoor education discourse, is that outdoor education clings both knowingly and unknowingly to a conceptualisation of a romanticised nature. Peter Hay (2002) argues that Romanticism, “a nineteenth century movement of reaction against the values, tastes ideas of the preceding century” (p. 4), has been particularly influential in the development of subsequent environmental philosophies, and in the ‘greening’ of an alternative worldview in Western culture.

Romanticism has proved an elusive social movement to define. It is generally accepted that it began as a reaction against the Enlightenment triumph of humanism over spiritualism and the state over the church (Marshall, 1992; Hay, 2002). As the great “turning point” (Marshall, 1992, p. 214) in Western cultural history The Enlightenment launched modernity through a transformation in cultural assumptions about the control and domination of nature and the victory of reason over intuition and myth. It
established a dualistic separation of the human mind and body, an unfailing belief in cultural and technological progress, the promotion of the authority of science and the autonomy of the rational individual. As a result of Enlightenment values we distrust and reject “the ‘counsel’ of nature” (Soper, 1995, p. 25).

There exists a wide range of opinions amongst historians and environmental philosophers regarding the “fall from grace of the West” (Schama, 1995, p. 13), the historical moment of disenchantment when Western culture turned away from living amidst nature to a perception of itself as separate and wholly other than nature. These views range from the Neolithic transition of hunter-gatherers to settled communities as the Pleistocene glaciers retreated northwards (Wright, 1980), to the rise to prominence of the Judeo-Christian religions with their transcendental God and spirit-world separated from the corporeality of life on earth (White, 1967).

The phenomenologist David Abram (1996a) argues that the development of the phonetic alphabet and the demise of an oral culture based upon an animate language deluded humans into distrusting their sensuous and reciprocal relation to the world. Others blame the development of particular technologies that resulted in a mechanisation of the human experience (Mumford, 1963), or the rise of a machine paradigm (Fox, 2002). For others, nature was severed from culture during the scientific and intellectual revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the ideas of “Bacon, Descartes and Newton began to dominate the culture of the elite. They began a process of disconnection and universalisation which is still in progress and still spreading across the world” (Hawthorne, 2002, pp. 168-169).

It is more likely that the West’s disenchantment with nature is a complex mix and accumulation of these events and influences and many others, and that the totality of this story will continue to elude narration by historians and philosophers. Even so, there are two points worth reinforcing here. First, according to Schama (1995), whatever the origins of a culture-nature division, environmental histories inevitably tell the same tragic story, “of land taken, exploited, exhausted; of traditional cultures said to have lived in a relation of sacred reverence with the soil displaced by the reckless individualist, the capitalist aggressor” (p. 13). Second, even though the beginnings of a turning away from nature may have been in the past they do not belong only to the past. The experience of fragmentation between culture and nature continues to accelerate and we live with its consequences everywhere and everyday. Many now refer to these consequences as the ‘ecological crisis’.
Whatever the source of a Western separation of culture from nature, we can say with a good degree of confidence that the 18th and 19th century Romantics challenged the objectification of humanity and nature and were the first to articulate a radical and alternative philosophy to the prevailing industrial capitalism of the day. This philosophy included a celebration of the senses in nature - a return to ‘wild’ nature. They proposed to counter science and reason with aesthetic sensibility demonstrated in works of art, poetry and literature (Marshall, 1992). Collectively, this group of reactionaries began a 200-year tradition whose legacy includes careful and intimate reflection upon the human-nature relationship.

Jonathan Bate (2000) argues that Romanticism envisaged three pathways along which society might travel in a return to an idealised nature. First, citizens might dream of a transformation for all humankind, an overthrow of industrial despotism. Second, the small group, small-scale republic of “free men living amidst the untamed forms of nature” (p. 40) was envisaged as an ideal that society should strive towards. Finally, the self-imposed exclusion from society provides the solitude necessary where the human spirit could be fulfilled, preferably walking through a storm on the mountainside. When the Romantic poet or artist viewed the storm they were seeking to witness the “clearest medium through which God showed His power and excellency” (Nash, 1982, p. 46). In the vast and grand expanses of outdoor places, “where one could not help feeling insignificant and being reminded of one’s own mortality. … God was on the mountaintop, in the chasm, in the waterfall, in the thundercloud, in the rainbow, in the sunset” (Cronon, 1996, p. 73).

Here we see how Cooper’s (1994) outdoor education rhetoric, which is emblematic of the way that nature has been presented in the discourse critiqued to this point, reinvigorates a Romantic return to ‘wild’ nature, and its assumed sublime and transcendental qualities. It encapsulates the primitivism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), a forerunner to romanticism, who expressed his displeasure with society by discarding the shackles of civilized life, periodically at least, to live a more simplified life closer to nature. Rousseau argued in Emile (1762), his treatise on education, that it was necessary to incorporate primitive qualities into the already distorted civilized life and suggested: “Send your children out to renew themselves; send them to regain in the open field the strength lost in the foul air of our crowded cities” (cited in Welton, 1987, p.61).

Whilst Rousseau might be considered a “proto Green thinker” (Bate, 2000, p. 32) he was also a paradox: “a product of The Enlightenment and yet one of its principal
critics” (Marshall, 1992, p. 238). He clothed himself simply to reject the artifice of fashion. He unbuckled his sword to refuse the cruelty of war, and broke his watch despite being the son of a watchmaker, to renounce the “time conscious and mechanical culture he found himself in” (Marshall, 1992, p. 243). Primitivists were committed to a ‘natural freedom’, which was to be found in periodic journeys into nature. For the first time experience in ‘wild’ nature was imagined as a direct antidote, and a desirable remedy in education, for the dehumanising aspects of society. Importantly the journey to nature was not a complete rejection of society, but a remedy for many of its modern ailments. One was expected to return refreshed, rejuvenated and inspired to challenge oppression and strive for a better society.

However, by the time the Romantics had begun popularising nature through their literature and art, it seemed that it was either vanishing or being despoiled before their very eyes. Hand in hand with the destruction of nature was the loss of possibility that the human spirit could be fulfilled. Yet the colonisation and settlement of New World in North America and Australia⁹ provided the one thing that Europe had lost, an apparently limitless wilderness frontier. It is against this backdrop that the New World American transcendentalists, epitomised in the writings of Emerson, Thoreau and Muir, laid the foundations upon which the wilderness preservation movement would be built. It represented the most fundamental shift in cultural attitudes towards outdoor nature, a shift from regret at the loss of a vanishing world, to one of taking action on its behalf. This great wealth of seemingly wild land, which had no counterpart in the Old World and was seized upon, argues Nash (1982), and by adding primitivist and Romantic assumptions of the antidote and sublime values of wild country, nationalists argued that far from being a liability, wilderness was already an asset.

Thus at its very inception a nostalgia for the end of the untamed wilderness was felt by transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Nature was the proper source of religion, not society, and the fall of the remaining unmarred tracts of wilderness at the hands of civilisation was a threat to knowing God. For Emerson, nature was the symbol of the spirit (Nash, 1982, p.85), whilst for Thoreau, in “wildness

⁹ I mention North America and Australia here as the two most relevant settings to this study. But equally the influence of European colonisation impacted in other countries such as New Zealand, Scotland, and areas of southern Africa and America. Adams (2003) suggests that “there is no consistent ‘colonial mind’, and no simple account to be given of colonial ideologies of nature” (p. 18). Romanticism, colonialism and outdoor education are inextricably intertwined. It is immediately obvious for example, that the countries where outdoor education flourishes today (Britain, Scotland, Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia) are all connected by British imperialism. A full analysis of the legacy of Romanticism and colonialism upon outdoor education warrants attention if outdoor education is to develop a fuller appreciation of its past.
was the preservation of the world” (cited in Nash, 1982, p.84). Such a view of wild, outdoor nature is Arcadian, argues Russell (1994), a place of solitude and simplicity. Here we see the historical line that runs from primitivism, through American transcendentalism to the twentieth century preservationists.

There is an important distinction to be made between preservationism and conservationism. In countries such as the USA and Australia, preservationists oppose the ideology that underlays arguments of wise-use conservation, the imperialist belief in the planned use and management of natural resources (Russell, 1994). Recognition of this schism between preservation and conservation (Nash, 1982) has important implications for outdoor education’s version of sustainable nature-relations, as I will demonstrate shortly.

The ascendency of a mass desire for a romanticised wilderness, an American ‘wilderness cult’ (Nash, 1982), must have been breathtaking. Within the space of a few short decades wilderness seemed all but gone for Leopold (1987 edition) when he wrote: “Perhaps our grandsons, having never seen a wild river, will never miss the chance to set a canoe in singing waters” (p. 116). Leopold could already see the diminution of wilderness and culture were part of the same story:

For the first time in the history of the human species, two changes are now impending. One is the exhaustion of wilderness in the more habitable portions of the globe. The other is the world-wide hybridisation of cultures through modern transport and industrialization. Neither can be prevented, and perhaps should not be, but the question arises whether by some slight amelioration of the impending changes, certain values can be preserved that would otherwise be lost. (p. 188)

Surely, the final irony for the American wilderness preservationists is the loss of the philosophical ideals of freedom, solitude, reverie, and the sublime encounter, that they had promoted through their writings in the first place. All were washed away amidst a flood of mass-market commodification and consumerism of the wilderness ideal (Sax, 1980). Yet the concept of wilderness, and its new breed of marketeers, is nothing if not adaptable and capable, it seems, of continual renewal. It has become one of the keystones of modern middle-class culture (Price, 1996). Nature as wilderness is now “harvested for a psychic yield” (p. 190). In so doing,

we graft meanings onto nature to make sense out of modern middle-class life, and then define ourselves by what we think nature means. Authenticity, simplicity, reality, uniqueness, purity, health, beauty, the primitive, the autochthonous,
adventure, the exotic, innocence, solitude, freedom, leisure, peace. (Price, 1996, p. 190)

In Australia the Romantic vision played its part from the first moments of European colonisation (Frawley, 1992; Hall, 1992). It was part of a contradictory mix of motivations for wilderness preservation drawn from a range of sources, such as ‘wise use’ conservationism, national identity, colonial tourism, scientific inquiry, and later by highly influential individuals such as Myles Dunphy, a devotee of the American John Muir (Frawley, 1992; Hall, 1992; Mulligan and Hill, 2001). By the mid nineteenth century, argues Julia Horne (2005), a colonial tourism of the outdoors was already well established in the eastern states of Australia. Travellers pursued their predilection for Australian landscapes that fitted the Romantic ideals of the grand and the sublime that they had carted with them from Europe. The mountaintops and waterways of the more verdant east coast fringe met the cultural expectations of these travellers, and established a legacy of responses to particular scenic places that we still live with today.

Even so, when the art historian Tim Bonyhardy (2000) traced early conservation efforts in colonial Australia, he noted that utilitarian pressures almost always won out:

By the late nineteenth century, it was commonplace that colonial governments were incapable of implementing their environmental ideals because of their vulnerability to electoral pressure from colonists concerned with short-term advantage rather than their long-term collective interests. (Bonyhardy, 2000, pp. 10-11)

It would take until the rainforest campaigns of northern New South Wales, which are well documented in Ian Watson’s book Fighting over the Forests (1990), and the Lake Pedder and Franklin River campaigns in Tasmania in the 1970s to early 1980s (Brown, B., 2004; Connolly, 1981; Southwell, 1983), to dramatically reshape national attitudes to wild places in Australia. Peter Read (1996) quotes many passages from the 1973 Burton Committee Report, an ill-fated attempt to reverse the destruction of Lake Pedder in South West Tasmania. “For the first and possibly the last time in Australia’s history,” writes Read (1996), “poets and landscape artists were accorded the status of expert witnesses, equivalent to scientists as ‘professionals in aesthetics’” (p. 127). Read blends a “few dozen of the encapsulations” (p. 127) from the report, and the passage is worth re-quoting here in full to demonstrate the shifting sentiments towards ‘wild’ nature in Australia at the time:
A beautiful golden world all of its own, a masterpiece of nature, a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, awe-inspiring, in the presence of something beyond myself, some essential quality of tranquillity, the enormous dynamic of the place, the combination of grandeur and intimacy, the white-man’s dreamtime, a resting place, a healing place, a sanctuary, a holy grail feeling, a place of profound beauty, a rich blue magnet, of very deep spiritual significance, an intensity of experience, an enchanted shore, the crown jewel, a compelling presence, like coming face to face with Jesus Christ for the first time, of biblical stillness, a profound and awesome silence, the cradle of my adult life, the mystique is not yielded up easily, midnight blue water, a sense of mystery and power, an eerie tug at the throat, enriching and fulfilling, a mixture of discovering beauty and a trial of strength, magnificent for its light, its depth of tone, its reflections on so many surfaces, another language beyond the reach of maps or words, to land there on a calm morning is unforgettable. (cited in Read, 1996, p. 128)

It is instructive to recognise that the La Trobe University degree in outdoor education, with its early commitment to social and environmental criticism, arose within the cultural ferment of the rainforest, Lake Pedder and Franklin River controversies. The original submission for course accreditation for the undergraduate degree program clearly highlights the shifts in public perception of ‘natural areas’, the political acts that promoted their preservation and the strong resonance this had with the emergence of a “distinctive flavor regarding outdoor recreation, and hence outdoor education (Payne, 1983, p. 6) in the Australian context.

The hard lessons of the preservationist campaigns had been learned. It is this that led Read (1996) to conclude that, “since the 1980s, most special places threatened with destruction must, to be saved, be capable of being universalised” (p. 142). “That is the cost,” Read continues, “the Outsiders – the decision makers [whether they be corporations, politicians or curriculum writers – my addition] – no longer understand specific localities in relation to their specific meanings” (p. 143). Martin Thomas (2003) argues that the term ‘wilderness’ has even begun to replace the vernacular ‘bush’ in Australia. The ‘bush’ was a place that needed to be peopled and tamed as the nation of Australia moved from its convict origins towards respectability (Seddon, 1997). But wilderness is emptied of people and their narratives. Wilderness, as placeless and universalised ‘wild’ nature, then comes to stand outside of time and space (Gill, 1999) through celebrating its two principal themes: remoteness and naturalness (Robertson, Vang and Brown, 1992). Alternative landscapes and histories are erased, argues Gill (1999), as wilderness becomes hyper-separated, “founded on a logic of otherness” … ‘defined’ by the absence of humanity” (p. 55).

In many New World countries such as the USA and Australia the greater Romantic complex, from primitivism to preservationism, provided a potent cultural
template for many of the values of environmentalism and green thinking to follow. The return to nature was a return to a “source of heightened imaginative sensitivity” that was “individualistic rather than collective, and expressive of intuitive or mystical modes of knowing rather than rational” (Hay, 2002, p. 9). It is here, amongst the literature and ideals of the primitivists, poets and publicists of wilderness, that we find the well-spring of much of the contemporary outdoor education discourse for a placeless ‘wild’ nature. We see it in the call for a search for solitude, the spiritual encounter and the episodic brush with a wild world through a (seemingly) technologically simplified experience. It is there in the belief that ‘wild’ nature, rather than culture, provides the more authentic version of experience and, most significantly, that the journey into nature would contain lessons worthy of bringing home for the betterment of the individual and society.

This discussion has exposed a central contradiction at the heart of outdoor education discourse. On the one hand there lurks the desire to preserve and return to a ‘wild’ nature that is seen to stand apart from the corrupting influences of civilisation (Soper, 1995). On the other hand, there is a desire to manage and conserve that nature through sustainable (though solely human inspired) relations. Two opposing ideological views of nature-relations are bled together into a contradiction, and both are opposed to the localised and particular possibilities of place. Romanticism may have provided an “ecological impulse” (Hay, 2002, p. 1) for a greening of philosophy, and later activism by preservationists, but it is also an impulse that leaves us arrested within a contradiction, where contrary values of wilderness preservation and wise-use conservation prevail in outdoor education. In recent years such interpretations of nature are increasingly being criticised as continuing the work of the colonisers (Langton, 2003; Rose, 1996), and opposing the possibilities for a more indigenous and localised response to place (Cameron, 2001).

The experiential education paradigm as denial of the corporeal bodily experience of place

When Rousseau sent us out into the woods and fields with our students, as he suggested in *Emile*, he was calling for a practical and ‘fresh-air’ educative experience. Outdoor education, as has been seen in the examples of school and university curriculum, is often promoted in terms of its capacity to engage students in ‘direct’, ‘first hand’, ‘immediate’, ‘authentic’ experiences as a contrast to much of the education that students experience in the more conventional classroom. Already we have seen that place is
denied by universalising the outdoors as ‘wild’ nature, a cultural construct that makes it
difficult for us to imagine the country we travel into and through as ‘local’ places.

But what of the role of the body, which we would anticipate is of central concern
to experiential outdoor pedagogy? “My body continually takes me into place. It is at
once agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being-in-place,” writes Casey (1993,
p. 48). How then can an experiential outdoor education displace us? The answer lies in
examining the role of experience, and in particular the ironical silencing of the body in
an educational paradigm that claims to be authentically experiential.

John Dewey (1859-1952) is often cited as one of the principal founders of the
progressive and experiential education movements. Dewey’s main concern in education
was for learners to engage in an emancipatory, democratic learning experience rather
than to be passive and disengaged in a learning environment that was controlled by
others. ‘Primary experience’, for Dewey, initially involved an encounter with “the
immediate, tangible, and moving world which presents itself to the senses … the raw
materials from which knowledge can begin” (Hunt, 1995, p. 26).

The real educational significance of experience for Dewey came through
‘secondary experience’. This reflective experience would take the “gross, macroscopic,
and crude materials furnished by primary experience and seek to make them precise,
microscopic and refined” (Hunt, 1995, p. 27). For Dewey, this was where knowledge,
reconstructed as ‘growth’, was forged. He elaborated a scientific method for experience
in education, which was controlled and sequential and included the learner finding
themselves in ‘felt difficulty’, articulating a problem that required a solution by
generating a hypothesis which would then be confirmed or disconfirmed (Crosby, 1995,
p. 11). The result was knowledge that could be called upon in later applications. For

Education in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and for
the society must be based upon experience – which is always the actual life-
experience of some individual … The education system must move one way or
another, either backward to the intellectual and moral standards of a pre-scientific
age or forward to ever greater utilization of scientific method in development of
the possibilities of growing, expanding experience. (pp. 89-90)

Dewey’s faith in science and an unlimited view of human growth and progress is clear.
His methods have been adapted and its application in outdoor education (amongst other
areas of experiential learning) has become commonplace. His vision for education was
as an experimental science, which provided the “best tool for understanding the world in
which we live” (Hutchinson, 1998, p. 41). Dewey’s work has been popularised and institutionalised under the umbrella term ‘experiential education’ which now has applicability to wide range of educational endeavours that require a so called ‘hands on’ pedagogic approach (Wurdinger, 1997).

Both Kolb (1984) and Joplin (1995) proposed experiential learning cycles based on Dewey’s work. Kolb’s model has already been sufficiently critiqued by outdoor educators (Gair, 1997; Brown, 2002), so I will focus here on Joplin’s model, primarily due to its popularity in current practice, and because it reveals particularly interesting assumptions in relation to embodiment and learning. Joplin’s Experiential Learning Cycle re-works Dewey’s scientific method, and involves a process of leading individuals and groups through challenging activities in a series of predictable stages. They are:

1. A Focus stage: This stage presents the challenge and “isolates the attention of the learner for concentration” (Joplin, 1995, p. 17).
2. An Action stage: This stage places the learner in a “stressful or jeopardy-like situation where he (sic) is unable to avoid the problem presented, often in an unfamiliar environment requiring new skills and knowledge” (p. 17). It becomes “mandatory that the student and his (sic) brain be given responsibility for the learning process” (p. 17). Calling upon brain research to justify this stage Joplin argues that the “brain is ‘on’ when it is actively choosing, ordering, making decisions” (p. 17). Presumably the brain is ‘off’ at all other times.
3. A Support / Feedback Stage: Support and encouragement assist the learner in persisting with the challenging task. Joplin expects that “adequate feedback will ensure that the student has the necessary information to be able to move ahead” (p. 18).
4. The Debrief Stage: “Here, the learning is recognized, articulated, and evaluated” (p. 19). In this process it is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that the actions previously taken are not left to “drift along unquestioned, unrealised, unintegrated, or unorganised” (p. 19).

Joplin (1995) draws a distinction between experiential learning, where the “debrief may occur within [my emphasis] the individual” (p. 19), as opposed to experiential education where learning must be articulated and made public. She goes on to argue that it is through the process of this public verification of learning that experience and experiential learning becomes experiential education, and thus becomes acceptable to educational institutions. What then counts as experience in Joplin’s pedagogy, is cognition and the public acknowledgment of experience, rather than the experience within. Crosby (1995) argues that the goal of experiential education is that learners will understand and be able to use their experience:
In this model, the teacher aids the student in developing an approach to his (sic) own experience by structuring the student’s experience so that he (sic) may move from a challenge to a resolution. The educational process is based on the human experience of movement from difficulty to resolution. After resolution comes reflection on the movement so that what is learned may be generalized and used again. (Crosby, 1995, pp. 12-13)

The commonly accepted approach of the teacher / facilitator designing a program where predictable lessons may emerge for the learner is akin to “setting a trap” (Hovelynck, 2001, p. 10). It extends Dewey’s allegiance to rationalism and, although it may be argued that it is a form of active teaching that “adds visual, tactile, kinesthetic and socio-emotional qualities to the conceptual ones that prevail in conventional classroom teaching, it is not primarily concerned with students’ experiencing” (Hovelynck, 2001, p. 8). The distinction made here by Hovelynck is crucial for an experiential outdoor education, and ultimately for the ability to respond to place, which I have already introduced and defined as a participatory phenomenon. ‘Experience’, the noun, for experiential educators like Kolb, Joplin and Crosby is considered as an object. It must be objectified, verified and accounted for in public. They work from within the myth of objectivism (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) ‘Experiencing’, the verb, has wholly different connotations:

The verb implies that experiences cannot be programmed. Facilitators may program activities, but the experience will necessarily be co-constructed by all involved in the activity, and the facilitation of this process requires a focus on what participants bring to this activity rather than on the activity itself. (Hovelynck, 2001, pp. 8-9)

Much of the neo-industrial and technical language of facilitation; such as ‘front loading’, ‘framing’, ‘funnelling’ (Priest and Gass, 1997), and ‘tooling’ ourselves up for facilitation (Boyle and Cotton, 1999), are derivative of Luckner and Nadler’s (1992) *Processing the Adventure Experience*. The inherent danger in these approaches is that they potentially draw us away from recognising what is essential to the phenomena of experiential learning. They continue to prioritise cognition over embodied experience, the dualistic separation of mind over body, and maintain a steady commitment to Deweyian scientific logic. The corporeal body, the phenomenon most fundamental to experiencing, is marginalised and silenced.

The body is de-legitimised in the hierarchical structuring of facilitation techniques outlined by Priest and Gass (1997, pp. 181-184). “Letting the experience speak for
itself” (p. 181), the experience within as Joplin called it, is considered the least sophisticated of approaches. At this level, according to the authors, learners are considered to potentially “have a good time and possibly become proficient at new skills, but they are less likely to have learned anything about themselves, how to relate to others, or how to resolve certain issues confronting them in their lives” (Priest and Gass, 1997, p. 181). Priest and Gass (1997) prefer “directly frontloading the experience” (p. 182), a process of questioning, focusing and predicting the nature of learning that may be encountered in an experience.

This industrialisation and rationalisation of experience in outdoor education has become entrenched, but critics continue to emerge. Martha Bell argues that Dewey’s “promotion of scientific logic can be seen to reinforce linear, cause-effect, ‘either-or’ terms of facts and knowledge” that gives “a false sense of the unity of knowledge, its objective nature and the ability to ‘discover reality’” (Bell, M., 1993, p. 21). Loynes (2002) has called it ‘the algorithmic paradigm’ of experiential outdoor education. He argues it is epitomized by its commitment to a modernist tradition that promotes a scientific rationale, a production line metaphor and renders learning a product and thus a marketable commodity:

The production line approach tempts the provider and the client to consider participants as objects, resource or labour, manufactured to fulfil their potential as a cog in a machine rather than as a human being. The positivist approach reinforces the idea that this object can be manipulated to a formula. Likewise it tempts the facilitator to focus on certain learning objectives to the exclusion of others. The result, pushed to the extreme, is a participant who is oppressed rather than empowered by their managed experience. (Loynes, 2002, p. 116)

Such criticism might seem excessively damning of a pedagogic approach in outdoor education that is commonly practiced and accepted, anecdotally at least, as effective and worthwhile. But it is warranted on two counts. Firstly, despite regularly calling upon Dewey’s work and reputation (as evident, for example, in the authoritative text on experiential education by Warren, Sakofs & Hunt, 1995) contemporary practice is no longer consistent with Dewey’s social and democratic vision of the role of experience in education. Secondly, Mike Brown’s (2002, 2004) recent research clearly demonstrates how facilitators manage, control and ‘correct’ the learner’s reflection on experience through facilitation sessions. They serve as ‘gatekeepers’ for the validation of what is authenticated as learning. Brown (2002) concludes:
I have argued that verbal facilitation sessions provide opportunities for the establishment of asymmetrical distributions of knowledge and power which may undermine the very foundations of the experiential approach to learning which emphasises the role of the learner’s understanding of the meaning of their direct experience. (p. 290)

Thus in an experiential education paradigm, experience does not count unless it can be articulated and publicly validated. This dismisses and silences the role of the body, that “agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being-in-place” (Casey, 1993, p. 48). Unless, as educators, we can accept that we may lead learners towards experiences, but that parts of their experiences will forever escape our attempts to articulate and ‘correct’ them, our experiential pedagogies will continue to serve as a denial of the corporeal qualities of place. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the role that embodiment plays in place experiences, and the relation between objective and subjective meaning making, becomes central to the possibility of a place-responsive education. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have proposed an alternative to the myths of objectivism (portrayed here in the paradigm of experiential education) and subjectivism (portrayed within the previous discussion of romanticism). Their ‘experientialist’ approach rejects both an unrestrained Romantic subjectivity and the belief that rationalism can deliver absolute and universal truths. Instead, they argue, both scientific practice and subjective response must become “more responsible” (p. 227), each tempering the extremes of the other. This position is examined within the next chapter.

The adventure education paradigm as colonisation of space and the denial of place

The last of the three assumptions in outdoor education that serve to deny the possibilities of place is the persistence of an adventure education paradigm which has been commented upon in part already through the discussion of an ongoing pedagogical commitment to ‘traditional’ outdoor adventure activities. There are many accounts of the historical foundations of adventure programming (Miles and Priest, 1999; Raiola and O’Keefe, 1999), including the significant influence of Kurt Hahn and the Outward Bound movement (James, 1999a,b; Miner, 1999; Richards, 1999). Adventurous activity has been, and remains, the most enduring and least critically analysed feature of outdoor education practice. This is surprising given that adventure programming has been, and continues to be, heavily researched.
Paradigms of adventure education (Mortlock, 1984; Priest and Martin, 1990) invariably attempt to balance risk, opportunity and competence (skill) against educational benefits, which are typically articulated as growth in self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-actualisation, flow experiences and quasi-spiritual values. Too little risk, or perceived risk, and the participant is considered to be under aroused and unlikely to engage in the adventure activity at a meaningful level. Too much risk and the participant is likely to be over aroused resulting in unacceptable distress and/or injury. Such programs represent classic assumptions about risk and reward where the participant is expected to risk something of personal value to attain a prize (personal development).

Why is it that such narratives of risk and challenge are so ingrained in practice and what are the consequences of this for place? Part of the answer can be found by examining the body of research into adventure programming and by contesting the ideology inherent in a quintessential example of this risk ideology - Luckner and Nadler’s (1997) metaphor of adventure education as a pioneering journey.

A considerable body of research concerning the effectiveness of adventure programming, has been summarised in two recent meta-analyses (Cason & Gillis, 1994; Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, G, 1997). These meta-analyses have been cited as authoritative sources within the profession yet the Hattie et al (1997) meta-analysis explicitly excluded school based outdoor education programs as they were considered too short in duration or not ‘challenging’ enough. Interestingly, the authors state that earlier research studies in adventure programming had been “plagued with … ‘soft’ forms of evaluation, such as narrative accounts and case studies” (Hattie et al, 1997, p. 46). Of the 79 studies collected by the Cason and Gillis (1994) meta-analysis, 36 were excluded on the basis that they lacked sufficient statistical information, were not empirically based or did not involve the ‘target population’. The authors noted that “difficulties arose where some studies utilized unique, self designed outcome measurements. These studies were excluded from the meta-analysis” (Cason & Gillis, 1994, p. 42). Neither of these meta-analyses considered the location or site of programs worthy of comment.

Invariably, the studies analysed in these meta-analyses adopted a pre-test / post-test quantitative methodology that demonstrated some correlation between the intervention (the adventure program) and increases in self-esteem, self-efficacy and so on. In their desire to reduce human experience to statistically based findings that may be generalised to other populations, these meta-analyses have drawn exclusively upon studies that conform to a preconceived set of ‘rigorous’ criteria. It could be argued that there is a disturbing tendency evident here to sanction and silence alternative research methodologies and to
dismiss studies (and thus other researchers and participants) which do not conform to the controlling measures of the meta-analyst. We might accept that quantitative research of this nature indicates some useful trends worthy of our attention, despite its inability to examine the detail and richness of the participants’ experiences, or we might reject them completely, as many phenomenologists would, on the basis that the methodology is inappropriate for the investigation of human experience as it is ‘lived’. Every researcher of human experience faces such moral dilemmas and choices. It does seem fair to say, however, that the approaches and assumptions of the meta-analysts parallels rather than challenges the ideology that sustains the adventure education paradigm. Both support a rational and technical view of human experience.

The adventure education paradigm is based upon a neo-positivist and progressive ideology that can, at times, project a deep and insidious colonising agenda. It enlists the learner and the teacher and sweeps aside considerations of any peoples or ecologies that stand in their way. Take, for example, the following quotation from Luckner and Nadler (1992):

[The learners] leave their safe, familiar, comfortable and predictable world for uncomfortable new territory. Like the pioneers and explorers who travelled to the “Old West” in search of fortune we hope that the learning adventures of participants also will lead then to “gold” …What is gained from the struggle can lead to learning that can be applied in the future. At the “edge” is where many explorers turned back because of the lack of water or food, battles with Native American Indians, or an inability to endure and tolerate the continual fears and apprehension. Breaking through the edge into the realm of possibilities and the land of gold was thereby suppressed. It is the journey between the two worlds, where processing the experience is most important. (Luckner & Nadler, 1997, pp. 28-29)

These educational experiences then, tend to “‘act’ as a type of decontextualised and disembodied dress rehearsal” (Payne, 2000, p. 188) for what the ‘facilitator’ (who has metaphorically replaced the ‘teacher’ or ‘educator’ in Luckner and Nadler’s writing) thinks the learner needs to know. The learner’s body is colonised by the intentions of the facilitator. Local stories, legends, myths, the subtle tone of water on stone, the languages of insects and the wind - the “interpenetrating webwork of perceptions and sensations” (Abram, 1996a, p. 65) - are erased. Thus the most fundamental assumption, one that covertly guides how outdoor places are explored by participants, requires those places to be rendered as abstract and emptied spaces in order that they may be colonised by those achievements of the learner that are predicted and later validated by the facilitator.
The extraordinary quotation above from Luckner and Nadler (1997) reveals the extent of ‘amnesia’ of technocratic outdoor education theorists. It presents a monological narrative wholly out of step with attempts to reconcile with people and places invaded and colonised by those who continue to champion the ideals of The Enlightenment. For Rose (2004), “the consequence of unmaking [such] narcissistic singularity is that we embrace noisy and unruly processes capable of finding dialogue with other people and with the world itself” (p. 21). Luckner and Nadler’s colonising, rugged pioneer persists as a dangerous and damaging anachronism. But is it a metaphor that is widespread in outdoor education discourse?

In a recent review of the aims and purposes represented in outdoor education ‘text books’, Brookes (2004) recognised three ‘absolutist tendencies’. First, they focused almost exclusively on individual learning. Second, the outdoors and its geographical considerations were either absent or treated as one thing. Finally, educational aims were abstract and based upon general rationalisations (Brookes, 2004). He also noted the lack of any serious attempts to connect with wider relevant discourses. There is a disturbing insularity in outdoor education discourse and in the ways that it continues to draw upon paradigms and approaches that are not only displaced from their original cultural contexts in the United Kingdom and the United States, but also assume and rely upon a placeless, disembodied, modernist ideology.

Higgins (2003), for example, believes that there has been an increase in debate amongst academics of the impact of globalisation and modernity upon outdoor education practice but that, ‘unsurprisingly’, there has been little representation of this within practitioner focused journals and associations. In Higgins view, practitioners may be dangerously unaware of how their practices may be inadvertently subject to these wider forces. As Humberstone, Brown and Richards (2003) point out, “‘old’ romanticised ideals of outdoor leisure are becoming reconstructed through the demands of ‘mass market’ consumers for ‘authentic’ adventure” (p. 7). In a perverse replacement of the mystery and sensuality of the Romantic and transcendentalist traditions, the modern outdoor adventure educator sees and seeks nature as “an assault course, gymnasium or puzzle to be resolved and controlled. It is a resource to be commodified instead of a home to which to relate” (Loynes, 2002, p. 114).
Summary: Outdoor education as placeless pedagogy

An outdoor education that appears to deny place through the romanticisation of ‘wild’ nature, an ignorance of the corporeal nature of embodied experience and the ideological erasure of local meanings to form adventure spaces, maintains universalist assumptions about knowledge, values and practices that are held throughout education and wider Western culture (Orr, 1992, 1994; Bowers, 1993). The educational system, of which outdoor education is a part, has become crucial in the initiation of young people into modern views of knowledge, experience and forms of rationality. Teachers, leaders and guides, through their education and training, may themselves have become authorities in this system and perpetuate its establishment, whether it be in the classroom or the field. Such a system silences and erases more basic questions about particular places. To borrow again from Wendell Berry, outdoor educators might begin to resist this erasure by asking: What is here in this place? What will this place permit us to do? What will this place help us to do?

To answer these self-imposed questions the next step in a study such as this one, is to consider how place experiences have been represented and researched beyond outdoor education, and how reflection upon findings from this work might serve as an inspiration for the inquiry phase of this study. This is the focus of the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: “Meditation is a standing wave”

- Meditation is a standing wave, though, on the black-green inclines of pouring and cascading, slate-dark rush and timber worker’s tea bullying pebble fans; if we were sketched first at this speed, sheaths, buttocks, wings, it is mother and history and swank here till our wave is drained of water. And as such it includes the writhing down in the trench, knees, bellies, the struggling, the slack bleeding remote enough perhaps, within its close clean film, to make the observer a god; do we come here to be gods? or to watch an alien pouring down the slants of our anomaly and be hypnotized to rest by it?

(Extract from Bent Water in Tasmanian Highlands, Les Murray, 1990a, p. 148)

In the first chapter of this dissertation I introduced the guiding research question and the methodological approaches most likely to permit a plausible interpretation and representation of participants’ lived experiences of river places. In the second chapter I traced the development of my ‘positioning’ within the research question as a result of my own practice as an outdoor educator. And, in the previous chapter I discussed how the discourses of outdoor education not only represent a widening gap between theory and practice but how they, and the paradigmatic approaches to pedagogy they endorse, deny and discourage a pedagogic response to local places. In this chapter, therefore, it is necessary to critique the “transdisciplinary” (Norton, 2003, p. 346) literatures of place, including the small amount of research literature into place experiences in outdoor education. This critique informed the development of a conceptual inquiry matrix that illustrates the convergence of a phenomenological orientation with questions regarding place and outdoor education: Table 1: An inquiry matrix for the lived experience of outdoor places through outdoor education (p. 79). The matrix is not intended as a model to explain notions of participants’ place experiences, but rather as a methodological guide to assist in gathering and interpreting data in the inquiry phase of the study.
Table 1: An inquiry matrix for lived experience of outdoor places through outdoor education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of experiencing outdoor education</th>
<th>Dimensions of experiencing outdoor places (adapted from Raffan, 1992).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experiential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Questions of the self as experiencer of outdoor places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor activity</td>
<td>Questions of experiences of outdoor places as mediated by the techniques and technologies outdoor activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The matrix was constructed in two layers. First, a ground layer that employed the four existential structures of lived experience - spatiality, temporality, corporeality and relationality (van Manen, 1997). Second, resting upon the ground layer is the professional orientation of the study that combines the discursive, social construction of outdoor education (with its characterisations of self, community, outdoor nature and outdoor activity) with the qualities of “the land as teacher” (experiential, toponymic, numinous, narrative) (Raffan, 1992, 1993). The purpose of this theoretical chapter therefore is to describe, explain and justify the development of this inquiry matrix as a methodological tool, whilst continuing to tease out the gaps and possibilities inherent in the guiding research question as informed by the critique of the transdisciplinary literatures of place. Precisely how the inquiry matrix was practically deployed in data gathering and interpretation is described in the next chapter.

The origins and orientation of phenomenology

Phenomenology developed as a European philosophical tradition in the twentieth century, and it has gained some favour in education only recently in North America. It has developed a significant following in Canada, due largely to the influence the Dutch émigré Max van Manen, who brought the ideals and practices of European phenomenology, especially that of the Utrecht School in the Netherlands, with him (Pinar & Reynolds, 1992). Yet, it has had limited application in outdoor education research, particularly in Australia. This is surprising given outdoor education’s expressed commitment to experiential learning and phenomenology’s interest in a human science of ‘lived experience’ and, therefore, its potential appropriateness as a methodological approach. Its absence from outdoor education literature is perhaps explained through the ongoing positivist legacy of the adventure paradigm with its interest in identifiable and measurable ‘outcomes’, the paradigm of experience (as object) rather than experiencing (as participation), and an uncritical acceptance of a romanticised nature. All of which have been discussed in the previous chapter. Given this, a phenomenological orientation to the lived experience of participants in outdoor places that utilises a defensible, structured, and rigorous methodological approach provides a plausible avenue for generating new knowledge(s), meanings and interpretations of the phenomena being studied.
Phenomenologists challenge the dominance of positivism, progressivism, and the ‘grand narrative’ of The Enlightenment (Pring, 2000), rejecting both claims that human experience can be objectified into a set of universal ‘facts’ and the privileged status of solely rational-based inquiry into human experiences. Instead, it has “sought to develop a philosophy that would give credence to ordinary conscious experience and would not dichotomise appearance from reality” (Ehrich, 2003, p. 48). For Patton (2002), the phenomenological researcher must always begin by asking the fundamental question: “what is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (p. 104). In regard to this study of the experiences of river places, the notion of lived experience and its genesis in the social/human sciences, requires detailed explanation in advancing the use of this methodology to develop interpretations and plausible insights (van Manen, 1997).

Early in the twentieth century Husserl developed a transcendental phenomenology of the everyday, a series of investigations into the experience of life as it is lived. His body of work formed the basis of contemporary phenomenology “conceived as a science of the essential structures of pure consciousness” (Moran, 2000, p. 60). Husserl’s work was an attempt to “bring philosophy back from abstract metaphysical speculation” (Moran, 2000, p. xiii), to the essences of taken-for-granted experiences, which includes both subjective and an “intersubjective communal grounding of the knowing activity” (Moran, 2000, p. 61). This could only be achieved, Husserl argued, via a temporary suspension (bracketing) of our scientific, philosophical and cultural assumptions of the phenomenon being studied. Thus phenomenology proposed to reveal and describe experience as it was ‘lived’ in its most essential form.

Perhaps the greatest legacy of Husserl was his conceptualisation of the lifeworld. According to Abram (1996a) the lifeworld “is the world of our immediately lived experience” in its “enigmatic multiplicity and open-endedness, prior to conceptually freezing it into a static space of ‘facts’” (Abram, 1996a, p. 40). Instead, it hoped to reveal “the taken-for-granted pattern and context of everyday living through which the person conducts his or her day-to-day life without having to make it an object of conscious attention” and in so doing, “unmask the lifeworld’s concealment” (Seamon, 2004, p. 1).

According to van Manen (1997), whose work on the human science of lived experience is clearly indebted to Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, there are
four fundamental existentials that “belong to the existential ground by way of which all human beings experience the world” (p. 101). Van Manen believes that it is through these lifeworld existentials that we can reveal the lived quality of human experiencing. They are: (1) lived space (spatiality) as felt space; (2) lived body (corporeality) as the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world; (3) lived time (temporality) as the subjective experience of time, and (4) lived other (relationality) as the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them. As van Manen (1997) observes; “these four existentials … can be differentiated but not separated. They all form an intricate unity which we call the lifeworld – our lived world” (p. 105). Whilst van Manen may be criticised for being overly anthropocentric – he presents corporeality as limited to human-human meetings for example, rather than as a body-world (or body-place) meeting - the existential structures he describes provide a useful means for reviewing the diverse and transdisciplinary literatures of place. In addition, questions of space, time, body and relation have been at the heart of phenomenological inquiry into place experience, particularly in the influential investigations of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and those who have used their works as inspiration in further studies into the experience of place (such as, Tuan, 1974, 1977; Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1979, 2004, Seamon and Mugerauer, 1985; Mugerauer, 1995; Abram, 1996a, 1996b).

Each of the four existential structures requires elaboration, unfortunately separately, thus creating the illusion that they can be considered apart from each other. A short, personal anecdote here may help create an image that guards against this error. I sometimes introduce students to a playful game if we have some ‘spare’ time on a river beach. We collect a small number of river pebbles in one hand and we see how many of them we can get airborne, throwing them one at a time, before the first one hits the surface of the water. The trick is to make each subsequent throw a little lower, and thus a little faster, than the previous throw. Let us say then, that three pebbles are in the air at the moment the first one pierces the water’s surface, producing a set of expanding concentric rings. Almost immediately the purity of the form of the rings is disrupted by the second, third and fourth stones. Within the space of a breath, four sets of water rings are intersecting. With this image in mind, I now

---

10 Brown, R. (1992) suggests that the major themes in van Manen’s work include the decentering and isolating of the child, the misunderstanding of theory, pedagogic tact, the place of the child in pedagogy, and the teacher’s orientation. As a scholar who promotes a Heideggerian hermeneutics in the investigation of lived experiences within education, van Manen’s omission of the ‘places’ where education occurs, provides another interesting example of how the role of ‘place’ continues to be silenced even in educational research that takes a phenomenological orientation.
pause, in that fleeting moment before the first stone disrupts the surface of the pool, to set the scene for the discussion of these four existential structures, by introducing the literatures of place drawn upon in this discussion.

**Literatures of place**

‘Place’ remains an elusive conceptual construct largely because the meanings and experiences of places to individuals and groups are never stable, they are always emerging and becoming (Relph, 1976). In general, place has to do “with the relationship between people and their local setting for their experience and activity” (Cameron, 2003b, p. 3). As such, there are four diverse but often overlapping literatures of place that I intend to draw upon in this discussion. They are: (1) phenomenological investigations into the experience of place; (2) the place essays of nature writers; (3) a place-responsive Australian poetry; and (4) Australian scholarship into place identity, culture and land. Drawing upon these literatures brings an interdisciplinary potential to the understanding of the lived experience of outdoor places through outdoor education and, in so doing, assists the interpretive process utilised in this inquiry. I will rely largely on the first and last of these literatures as they have a basis in academic scholarship, but I do not dismiss the work of poets and nature writers. I will draw upon their writings from time to time both for examples and when they present aspects of the lived experience of place that academic scholarship may have missed. In particular, I will develop the contribution of poetics to the study of place in the next chapter.

Many of these writers now seem to view place as a ‘loss’ in society. Within the incessant motion of life in late-capitalist societies, according to Casey (1993), we rush from place to place, rarely getting to know the subtleties of local places and their histories: “We pay a heavy price for capitalizing on our basic animal mobility. The price is a loss of place experience that can serve as lasting scenes of experience and reflection and memory” (p. xiii). Relph (1976) believes that, for many, the experience of place has been replaced by that of one of a homogenous ‘placelessness’. As we rush from one place to another, along freeways, railways or between airport terminals that are all much the same, we encounter supermarkets, architecture, streetscapes, suburbs and even landscapes that appear and feel remarkably similar to the ones we left behind. Thus local places are erased by modern development and may be grieved for by those who once lived there (Read, 1996). But they cannot be recovered. “We
mourn places as well as people,” writes Casey (1993, p. 198). The rich mosaic of land, people, community and local history is either swept aside and replaced by the homogenised experience and landscape (epitomised by the shopping plaza, the freeway, the massive dam, the monolithic sporting stadium and the mono-crop), or it shifts before our gaze and beneath our feet into a different place which somehow maintains some continuity with the past. The fate of each place is finely balanced between these futures.

In a further note of caution, Seddon (1997) asks us to consider “whose place” (p. 107) is it in the first place? He believes that the concept - sense of place - should be applied “with caution, because it is a form of appropriation” (p. 106). Its popularity has made the concept problematic, “championed by outsiders” (Bonyhady and Griffiths, 2002, p. 9), a catch-all phrase just as likely to be deployed in tourism promotion and real estate development, as it is in scholarly study of people-place relationships.

When people become aware of their intense connection to place, it is possible that contradictions emerge to directly challenge the basis of their connection. When Read (2000) refers to ‘proper country’ in his book Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership, he is referring to the Gai-mariagal country, the deep sandstone region just north of Sydney. ‘Proper country’ is formed out of his “deep memory and experience” (p. 7), gathered through growth from childhood to adulthood, and in particular through fresh insights from his friend Dennis Foley, an indigenous (Gai-mariagal) custodian of the region. Read (2000) writes that his memory-map of the area would “take a day to draw” (p. 8). For Read there is a significant dilemma with his attachment to this country. The place he loves and is tempted to call his ‘soul country’, has already been “wrested from Indigenous people who loved them, lost them and grieve for them still” (p. 2). Read asks: “Do I have the right to belong to this soul-country?” (2000, p. 9). He personifies Seddon’s question: Whose place is it to love in the first place? A cautionary approach to this inquiry into the lived experience of outdoor places may be well summarised by reinscribing ‘place’ for ‘nature’ in Lease’s (1995) searching set of questions:

“What then is [place]? Where is it to be found? Who controls it? Should it be controlled at all? What is the relationship of humans to that [place]: are they in it, out of it, or somewhere in between? There is a war over [place] in progress and [place] itself is in the middle – caught in a crossfire of competing interests” (p. 5).
In the tradition of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, I take a phenomenological orientation to reveal the essential qualities of experiences that will “put us subjectivity in touch with the knowledge of what it is to be-in-the-world instead of separating and alienating us from it by objectification” (Brown, R., 1992, p. 48). According to Mugerauer (1995), Heidegger insisted that we reflect upon what is nearest, “on what is so close that we do not see or think it” (p. 118). Heidegger’s many legacies for later inquiry into the nature of lived experiences include: his depictions of what it means to dwell authentically in place (Hay, 2002); his conception of ‘sparking’ as a “tolerance for places in their own essence” (Relph, 1976, p. 39); his descriptions of ‘fields of care’ as a “taking responsibility for place” (see Hay, 2002, p. 161), and; his investigations into the ways that technology mediates all human experiences (in Knell, 1977). For Heidegger, “man’s (sic) essential relation to places … consists in dwelling … the essential property of human experience” (cited in Relph, 1976, p. 28).

In addition, Merleau-Ponty compels us to consider the role of perception and the body in experience and how we are irrevocably connected to the world in which we live. Together, the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have inspired much of the scholarly development of ‘place’ that followed. Much of that work is drawn upon here, most notably, the phenomenological geographies of Tuan, Relph, Seamon, Mugerauer and the philosophical investigations of Casey and Abram.

Paralleling the scholarship of place is the genre of nature writing, largely inspired by Emerson and Thoreau in North America, which continues into contemporary times. In this critique I pay particular attention to Leopold and Lopez’s writings. The best nature writing can be considered phenomenological in character and style as it seeks to reveal, and then engage the reader, with the reciprocal relation between people and places. Tredinnick (2003) argues that a particular genre, the place-essay, has emerged which yields insights into the human experience of outdoor places. He notes the ‘triumph’ of the place-essay in America and laments the fact that such a tradition did not emerge in Australia. He notes the timing of European colonisation in relation to the Enlightenment, the secularism of Australian culture and the fact that, whereas America was settled with a view to idealism, the Australian experience was “utterly pragmatic” (p. 41).

Yet it is possible to discern from colonial times onwards a literature that has strived to be responsive to the uniqueness of local places in Australia (Falkiner, 1992; Mulligan and Hill, 2001) – although it has to be said that this is largely implicit in these early works and it would take until the mid-twentieth century before poets such
as the ‘Jindyworobaks’ group and Judith Wright would bring a more obvious indigenous and ecological voice to their work. They were followed by the likes of Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Nunukul) and Les Murray, and novelists such as Tim Winton, whose poems and stories began to capture more authentically the influence of local places upon language and narrative. Tredinnick (2003) notes that we “have had poets who have sung Australian places … and we have novelists in whose work the vernacular of places speaks authentically” (p. 44).

Tredinnick (2003) also recognises that within the last ten years a land-oriented writing has emerged, largely from academic sources, and he suggests that our “literature is opening to Australian geographies, their cities and wilds” (p. 45). Much of this writing has been deeply attentive to themes such as environmental responsiveness, landscape, identity and sense of place (Seddon, 1972, 1994, 1997, 2005), place attachment and belonging (Read, 1996), indigenous attachment and responsibility for ‘country’ (Rose, 1996, 2002, 2004; Sharp, 2002) and its influence upon settler responses to place (Benterrak, Muecke & Roe, 1984; Cowan, 1991; Read, 2000; Rose, 2004), the psychic and spiritual qualities of Australian places (Read, 2003; Tacey, 1995, 2000), their spatial qualities (Carter, 1987; Drew, 1994), their colonisation and decolonisation (Adams and Mulligan, 2003), the interactions of landscape and language (Bonyhady and Griffiths, 2002; Seddon, 1997), and even how ‘place’ itself may need to be re-imagined in the contemporary Australian setting (Cameron, 2003b).

With these diverse literatures in mind, I commence the examination of the four lifeworld existentials that van Manen (1997) argues have the potential to reveal the essence of human lived experiences.

Now the first pebble pierces the surface of the river pool …

**The lived experience of spatiality and outdoor places**

The relationship between space and place remains one of the most difficult challenges facing phenomenologists and others interested in studying the human experience of place. The implications for outdoor education and this study are significant. In this section I elaborate how we experience space, paying particular
reference to the Australian context. On the one hand there are those who consider that place is ‘made’ through the accumulation of human experience (see for example, Carter, 1987; Meinig, 1979; Relph, 1976; Schama, 1995; Walter, 1998; Watson, 1990). On the other there are those who propose that place has its own inherent spirit and meaning, waiting to be discovered (see for example, Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Park, 1995; Read, 2003; Tacey, 1995, 2000). Differences between place as culturally constructed or place as a site of intrinsic meaning are important to understand because they bear on the ways in which outdoor education participants confront, locate themselves within, move through, and/or identify themselves in outdoor spaces/places. This difference, therefore is a significant dimension of the inquiry phase of this study.

**Space or Place**

The question therefore arises; which comes first, space or place? This question is of more than theoretical interest. As already discussed in the previous chapter, the adventure and experiential education paradigms of outdoor education practice are largely premised upon an assumption that outdoor places are empty spaces upon which certain desires and ideologies can be projected. Walter’s (1998) quotation below provides a typical interpretation of the first position, that space precedes place and that place is solely a cultural construction:

> A place has no feelings apart from the human experience there. But a place is a location of experience. It evokes and organizes memories, images, feelings, meanings, and the work of imagination. The feelings of a place are indeed the mental projections of individuals, but they come from collective experience and they do not happen anywhere else. They belong to the place. (p. 21)

Many scholars of place share this culturally and historically constructed view. Relph (1976) believes that “existential or lived-space is the inner structure of space as it appears to us in our concrete experiences of the world as members of a cultural group” (p. 12). For Relph, our experience of space is culturally defined. Watson (1990) assumed that “people inhabit cultural worlds” (p. xix), which are summations of a diverse range of elements (work, family, gender, local environment, entertainment and so on). Tuan (1977) hints at the primordial qualities of space and how, as humans, we fashion from space, a place for ourselves:
Space is a common symbol of freedom in the Western world. Space lies open; it suggests the future and invites action. … Open space has no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern of established human meaning; it is a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed. Enclosed and humanised space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm centre of established values. Human beings require both space and place. Human lives are a dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom. (p. 54)

European explorers of the Australian continent filled the blank sheets of their expedition journals with narratives in which we can now “discern the process of transforming space into place” (Carter, 1987, p. xxiii), or so it seems. But the preference of space over place makes it possible to erase one place and rewrite it with another. “The left hand creates the tabula rasa upon which the right hand will inscribe its civilisation,” writes Rose (2004, p. 62). We recall Seddon’s question; whose place was it in the first place? Thus the orientation we assume to the relationship between space and place is fundamental for indigenous and settler Australians alike as we struggle towards reconciliation not just between peoples but also with places:

The historical space of the white settlers emerged through the medium of language. But the language that brought it into cultural circulation was not the language of the dictionary: on the contrary it was the language of naming, the language of travelling. What was named was not something out there rather it represented a mental orientation, and intention to travel. Naming words were forms of spatial punctuation, transforming space into an object of knowledge, something that could be explored and read. (Carter, 1987, p. 67)

A terra nullius11 seemed to wait to be filled with meaning by the colonisers, and this was only possible because they first imagined “the world as story-less object … having no meaning of its own” (Rose, 2004, p. 62). But Australia was never such a space argues Rose (1996):

there is no place where the feet of Aboriginal humanity have not preceded those of the settler. Nor is there any place where the country was not once fashioned

11 “No lies are as potent as the lies we tell about land and people”, writes Tim Flannery (2003, p. 4). Terra nullius, “the myth of the empty land” (p. 4), was projected by British law upon Australian country, thus dispossessing the Aboriginal inhabitants of any rights to land tenure in the eyes of the invaders. Flannery calls it the ‘founding lie’ upon which the colonisers occupied Australia, both physically and ideologically. It would be more than 200 years before the law of terra nullius would be challenged in the High Court of Australia through Koiki (Eddie) Mabo’s land rights claim and the establishment of Native Title. More recently, European conceptions of space have been further challenged as sea tenure claims arise by indigenous peoples in Northern Australia (Sharp, 2002). The sea remains one of the great universalised and abstracted spaces for Europeans, but many indigenous peoples around the world know and experience it with the same levels of intimacy, law and tradition that they do with land.
and kept productive by Aboriginal people’s land management practices. There is no place without a history; there is no place that has not been imaginatively grasped through song, dance and design, no place where traditional owners cannot see the imprint of sacred creation. (p. 18)

Casey (1996) argues that it was the abstract physics of Newton and the critical philosophy of Kant that has resulted in places becoming “the mere apportionings of space, its compartmentalisations” (p. 14). In his argument for a return to place, Casey (1996) asks us to avoid the “the high road of modernism … to reoccupy the lowland of place” (p. 20). Place can then be considered both premodern and postmodern: “it serves to connect these two far sides of modernity” (Casey, 1996, p. 20).

**Genius Loci – spirit of place**

In such a re-occupancy, argues Norberg-Schulz (1980), we must accept a *genius loci*, a local spirit-of-place. Place then becomes something more than an abstraction:

> We mean a totality made up of concrete things having material substance, shape, texture and colour. Together these things determine an ‘environmental character’, which is the essence of place. In general a place is given as such a character or ‘atmosphere’. A place is therefore a qualitative, ‘total’ phenomenon, which we cannot reduce to any of its properties, such as spatial relationships, without losing its concrete nature out of sight. (pp. 6-7)

In an acceptance of a local spirit-of-place the river in Judith Wright’s poem *Northern River* literally can speak in the silence, and perhaps in a language that we can learn to listen to. Yet it is difficult to loosen the grip of rationalism. Seddon (1997) considers that “it would be dangerous to assume that there really is a genius loci” (p. 106). It is a useful concept, he argues, but it remains culture-bound. Even so, Seddon (1977) would have us learn the geology, respect landform, native vegetation and cultural landscape. Perhaps then most Australian landscapes will not remain “unlimned and unsung” (p. 118). Relph (1976) is less hopeful. He sees an irreconcilable gulf between “the existential space of a culture like that of the aborigines and most technological and industrial cultures – the former is ‘sacred’ and symbolic, while the latter are ‘geographical’ and significant mainly for functional and utilitarian purposes” (p. 15). It is just such a gulf that Tacey (1995, 2000) suggests settler

---

12 In Norberg-Schulz’s (1980) classic work *Genius loci: Towards a phenomenology of architecture*, he reactivates (or re-animates) the ancient Roman belief that every ‘independent’ being has its *genius*, its guardian spirit: “this spirit gives life to people and places, accompanies them from birth to death, and determines their character or essence” (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p. 18).
Australians must cross if they are to have any hope of reconciliation. Yet he warns us that the “‘spirit of place’ is by now a cliché of journalism and a cash-cow of tourism, but ‘spirit place’ is altogether different, a powerful visionary claim that smashes almost everything we know” (Tacey, 2003, p. 243).

Can we identify such a spirit-place? It is upon just such a quest, to seek out the ‘inspired earth’, that Read (2003) embarks upon in *Haunted Earth*, the third book in his study of relationships between people and places in Australia.\(^\text{13}\) After conducting many interviews and a great deal of ethnographic fieldwork, Read concludes:

> Almost everyone … has pointed me to the indivisible continuum, which starts at superstitious, flows to supernatural, spiritual, unexplainable, intuitive, weird, poetic, strange, odd, coincidental, probably coincidental, fairly explainable, testable, rational, repeatable, verifiable, scientifically exact. (p. 252)

**Space, place and landscape**

One of the greatest barriers to a more sensuous and perhaps spiritual experience of place is the Western concept of landscape. ‘Landscape’ entered the English vocabulary at the end of the sixteenth century from the Dutch *landschap*, making it a younger concept than ‘wilderness’ in English language by several centuries. It “signified a unit of occupation, indeed a jurisdiction … that might be a pleasing object of depiction” (Schama, 1995, p. 10). Landscape has become, perhaps, the quintessential appropriation of space by Western culture that stands in the way of knowing the particulars of local places. American landscape scholar J. B. Jackson (1984) believes that we have come to use the word *landscape* carelessly. For Jackson, the old fashioned definition of *landscape* as “a portion of the earth’s surface that can be understood at a glance” (1984, p. 8) has begun to change and evolve. The geographer D. W. Meinig (1979) presents a simple exercise worthy of consideration. He writes of a group of people from a similar cultural background standing in the countryside, viewing the same scene. Independently they ‘see’ the same landscape differently as nature, habitat, artefact, system, problem, ideology, wealth, history, aesthetic, and place. Meinig recognises that each may construct the same landscape in multiple combinations of these interpretations – often internalising complex and contradictory meanings. From this perspective we are now more likely to accept

\(^\text{13}\) Read’s three books; *Returning to Nothing* (1996), *Belonging* (2000) and *Haunted Earth* (2003) represent a sustained investigation into the attachment to place and significance of place experiences in Australia. Read has explored in depth, attachment to place and the grief that results when people become displaced, the complexities of indigenous and settler attachment to the same places, and the possibility of a spirit of place that resides independent of humans.
Schama’s (1995) suggestion that landscape has more to do with the intellect than it does with the body: “Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock” (pp. 6-7). For Relph (1985), landscapes “cannot be embraced, nor touched, nor walked around. As we move, so the landscape moves, always there, in sight but out of reach” (p. 23).

Raffan explains (1992) that “although land exists, the *scape is a projection of the human consciousness … [the] land – the thing you can walk on, measure, map, paint, buy, sell and assay – is transformed in the human mind into landscape, a much broader, far reaching, and illusive entity” (p. 6). Therefore, the landscape is always shaped and arranged by the modern viewer, and not by the land itself. The picturesque landscape is “seen from a ‘station’, a raised promontory in which the spectator stands above the earth, looking down over it in an attitude of Enlightenment mastery” (Bate, 2000, p. 13). In colonial times in Australia trees were cleared from chosen vantage points in order that the artist could ‘see’ the scene properly and thus render it onto canvas (Bonyhardy, 2000). The equivalent, in contemporary times, are the endless proliferation of viewing platforms built in national parks, at which tourists are expected to pause and view the scene already selected and arranged before them by park management.

There are several dangers in these definitions of landscape and their uses. Yes, a material earth is acknowledged as existing, but it is always and everywhere valued as secondary to human socially constructed interpretations. This leads to the belief that ‘nature’, ‘wilderness’, ‘landscape’, ‘place’ are just more of a vast range of our intellectual inventions that can readily be re-invented, re-imagined and re-projected to fill or modify the empty space before us. Such landscapes make places available for our expropriation (Seddon, 1997). In such a process the sensing body is always sidelined, and particular historical-cultural interpretations are considered to precede experience. “Cartesian skulduggery”, claims Cowan (1991, p. 3), in rejecting the now common postmodern belief that thought (and even discourse) precedes existence, and that in our experience of the ‘wild’ we remain forever captive to our collective cultural heritage and imagination.

**Space, place and Australian rivers**

Such a view, that we ‘make’ our place from space, has resulted in an Australian sense of dislocation writes Drew (1994): “The imagination is detached, it drifts, untethered to anything solid or substantial, between the great wheel of European civilisation” (p. 38).
It is no wonder that European settlers and visitors in Australia could not fathom the rivers that they encountered away from the verdant coastal fringe, as they simply did not behave in spatial ways expected of ‘real’ rivers. Griffiths (2003) tells the story of an encounter between Francis Ratcliffe, a visiting British biologist in the late 1920s and 1930s, and an inland Australian river:

He called Cooper’s Creek a dead river not only because it did not have water in it when he first saw it in 1935 – it had not flowed in its lower reaches for seventeen years – but also because it could never know the sea. It seemed that it did not have water and never reached the sea. Even when it did run, it could not fulfil the destiny of a river and release into the ocean. It was landlocked and frustrated. It was a parody of a river. It epitomised the irony, the menace, the waywardness of Australian nature. (p. 87)

Carter (1987) interprets a similar response within the expedition journals of early European explorers of inland Australia. What they were searching for were ‘purposeful rivers’ that would serve trade and commerce. Instead, they frequently encountered dry watercourses with no flow at all, and when it did rain “the tendency was for flood water to spread out, to disperse through a lacework of temporary channels, which, far from concentrating the water, fanned it out to cover huge areas of normally waterless desert. Instead of contributing to rivers, watercourses acted as dis-tributaries” (Carter, 1987, p. 55). Carter concluded that it became near impossible for the explorer to “invest the space of his journey with meaning” (p. 56) as a result of his experience with these ‘unthinkable’ rivers.

The inland rivers of Australia did not match the ‘fluvial mythology’ (Schama, 1995) of the Old World, that stretches back beyond the times of the ancient Egyptian settlement along the Nile, and has left us with a legacy of expectations about not only how rivers should behave, but about their function and sacredness. This mismatch between expectation and reality had dire consequences for rivers in Australia. These rivers and streams would often dry to a series of pools for several years and then be followed by a significant flood. In Newell’s (2003) personal story of fighting to conserve the Pages River, a tributary of the Hunter River in New South Wales, she found how immediate were the consequences of inappropriate European settlement and vegetation clearing:

When it did rain, it was clear that the settlers’ rape and pillage [of the land] had changed the valley forever. In particular, river-bank erosion was horrific. In March 1832, just two years after the breaking of the drought, floodwaters gushed...
to the mouth of the Hunter, where Alexander Livingston, Newcastle’s Harbour Master, feared his port would soon be closed by silt. The changing channels and shoals at the entrance made navigation so difficult it was becoming unsafe for seamen. And this was after just twelve years of white settlement in the Hunter – and six years at the head of the Pages. (Newell, 2003, p. 25)

This story has been repeated throughout inland Australia since European settlement and continues today. Rivers ‘refused’ to maintain regular flows during dry periods or stay within their banks when the rains came. These lines from Dorothea Mackellar’s famous nationalistic poem My Country, first published in 1908, capture the mood: “A land of sweeping plains / Of ragged mountain ranges / Of droughts and flooding rains … Her beauty and her terror” (Mackellar, 1987 edition). Stories of drought and flood are legend, none more so than on the major waterways of the Murray (Hill, 1965 edition) and the Darling (Bonyhady, 2002) rivers. It was not long before systems of locks, weirs and dams were built to force the rivers to conform to settler expectations. The story of environmental degradation that has resulted from both inappropriate early settler farming practices (particularly sheep grazing), the damming of the rivers, and inappropriate irrigation agriculture, is too extensive to tell here. Fullerton (2001) does a particularly good job of summarising this history and representing current debates about the competing demands for water from Australia’s river systems. Interestingly, it is the view of water as a placeless commodity that dominates these current debates, and the pre-regulation stories of the river have largely been forgotten in the modern discourses of water and river management (Sinclair, 2001).

Even the mountain and coastal rivers in Australia seem to pose problems for the inquiring mind with its Western heritage of language and ideas. In Seddon’s (1994) environmental history of the Snowy River he finds that, despite its mythic stature, the river had “no historical, social or political reality…. There is not even an accepted name for the area” (p. xxi) through which it flows. Australia is a nation that has been careless not only in its attempts to manage river environments but also in keeping stories of them for future generations. For example, the journals of the first Europeans to canoe the Snowy, Arthur Hunt and Stanley Hanson, who did so on a two-month journey in 1937, have been lost. Hunt wrote three articles for The Sydney Mail at the time, and

14 Seddon (1994) credits Patterson’s iconic poem The Man from Snowy River as the source of the river’s mythic stature. In the poem an unnamed man, as wild and as untamed as the mountainous Snowy River country from which comes, outrides the horseman of the plains as he recaptures an expensive colt that has escaped to run with the mountain brumbies (wild horses). The opening ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympics commenced with a lone rider entering the stadium, galloping to centre stage and cracking his stockwhip astride his rearing horse in front of a television audience countless millions. Clad in his akubra hat and ‘drizabone’ coat, he was the man from Snowy River reborn for the global stage. He remains, it seems, an evocative and quintessential image in the Australian consciousness.
Seddon (1994) retells part of their story in a few brief pages. Hogan (2003) also has recently published a short account of the journey in a popular outdoors magazine, but the full story is lost, and with it the possibility to consider their ‘first hand’ observations of flow levels, wildlife, the navigability of sections of the river, canoeing technology of the time, and so on. Of course, now people paddle a very different river, with miniscule river flows, as virtually all of the water has been redirected into the Murrumbidgee and Murray rivers via the Snowy Mountain Hydro Scheme.  

It says something for the flexibility of our sense of national identity that many people seem capable of maintaining both sets of values simultaneously regarding the Snowy: they can be proud of our great engineering achievement, and be thrilled by the grandeur of a wild river. (Seddon, 1994, p. xxx)

A similar tale can be told of the Murray River. Tourism promotes the achievements of the river regulators who brought the river under human control, whilst simultaneously championing the natural and wild river as a splendid landscape for visitors (Sinclair, 2001; Stone and Stone, 1996). Such paradoxical views of rivers are only possible to maintain when we continue to consider these places as blank spaces upon which individuals and culture can inscribe the values they desire. Unless we can take a step away from the apparent authority of the Enlightenment mind over the possibility of a local spirit-of-place, place can only remain a human intellectual invention.

In this section of the discussion we have seen that fundamental, and opposed, beliefs about the relation between space and place have significant consequences for both human experiences of places and for those places themselves. River places are considered in the literature either as spaces that are colonised with human intellectual projections and interpretations or as inspirited sites of inherent meaning that await human discovery and participation. Of key interest for this study is how these beliefs influence the lived encounters of river places by outdoor education participants. There

15 George Seddon’s (1994) Searching for the Snowy details the environmental history of the river from its source in the Australian Alps to the sea. Seddon acknowledges that telling the story of the river is a near impossible task. In searching for the river he finds that there have “been almost as many rivers as there have been observers, and that is in the end why the river is ‘incoherent’. There can be no single view of it” (p. xxxii). The widest gaps perhaps are between our collective imagination of the river as wild and remote and the ecological reality of a dammed, diminished and irrevocably changed river. Claire Miller’s (2005) recently published book, Snowy River Story: The Grassroots Campaign to Save a National Icon, tells for the first time the story of the demise of the river and the fight by local communities to save it. It details the huge ecological and community price that was paid by locals in the wake of the Snowy Mountains Hydro Scheme. It is a timely addition to Seddon’s work and tells not only the sad story of catastrophic loss of place, but also our first efforts to rehabilitate the river.
are several clear implications of this tension between space and place for the inquiry phase of this study:

1. The riverscape is a product of historical and social construction and, inevitably, textualization and discursive development. It may be assumed to play an influential role in shaping the experiences of the participants in this inquiry. It will be necessary to reveal precisely how this cultural and discursive legacy influences the lived experience of the participants in the river places encountered.
2. The influences of this riverscape upon experience is likely persistent and subtle. It may mask our bodily actions and interactions such as, the spatial arrangement and orientation of the participant to and on the river, their actions/movements and even the places they choose to rest.
3. Finally, we must add the complication that the places encountered have already been profoundly modified and physically re-arranged through time, especially as a result of European settlement.

With this in mind, we proceed to a consideration of how time, as it is ‘lived,’ is also likely to be implicated in the inquiry.

**The lived experience of temporality and outdoor places**

The second existential structure I wish to discuss is the lived experience of time in outdoor places. In doing so I pay particular attention to how attachment to place may or may not be a result of time ‘spent’ in a place, how time is experienced subjectively, and what these temporal experiences mean for this inquiry. Clearly, these are significant considerations for outdoor education experiences, which typically venture into different outdoor places for relatively short periods of time. Tuan (1975) believes that “experience takes time. Sense of place is rarely acquired in passing. To know a place well requires long residence and deep involvement” (cited in Cuthbertson, 1999, p. 12). How much time is required to gain this sense of place? Perhaps a lifetime!

It is easy to underestimate the power of a long-term association with the land, not just with a specific spot but with the span of it in memory and imagination, how it fills, for example, one’s dreams. For some people, what they are is not finished at the skin, but continues with the reach of the senses into the land. If the land is summarily disfigured or reorganised, it causes them psychological pain. Again, such people are attached to the land as if by luminous fibres; and they live in a kind of time that is not of the moment but, in concert with memory, extensive,
measured by a lifetime. To cut these fibres causes no only pain but a sense of dislocation. (Lopez, 1986, p. 279)

Orr (1992) contrasts those who reside as temporary occupants with those who inhabit places. According to Orr the temporary resident puts down few roots, invests little, knows little and cares little for their immediate place beyond its ability to gratify. In contrast is the inhabitant who develops a “mutually nurturing relationship with place. … an art requiring detailed knowledge of place, the capacity for observation, and a sense of care and rootedness” (p. 130). If we accept the views of Tuan, Lopez and Orr, that we may need the best part of a lifetime in order that we can come to ‘dwell’ in a place, what then of the experience of remote places that we may encounter for relatively short, but possibly intense, periods of time? How is the passage of time experienced in these remote places? What of the future of remote places where it is no longer possible, practically or legally, to put down roots and stay? An understanding of these questions is critical to the development of this study.

Cuthbertson (1999), whose research in outdoor education into critical approaches to developing a sense of place I critique later in the chapter, is concerned about “the privileging of locale and length of residence in the construction of place” (Cuthbertson, 1999, p. 12). It may seem self-evident that length of time equates to a greater sense of attachment to place but this assumption should be suspended temporarily in a phenomenological inquiry and the role of lived-time must be examined if we are to gain an insight into the role it plays in the experience of outdoor places.

**Lived time**

Melucci’s (1996) phenomenology of time considers three metaphors in Western culture that shape our experience of time; the ‘circle’, the ‘arrow’ and the ‘point’. His description, with my addition of some examples, is briefly summarised as follows:

**Time as circle**: The circle represents mythic time where “time is perceived and lived as the cyclical renewal of all things, unfolding according to a law laid down by a primordial and a temporal event which repeats itself in visible events governing their regular appearance and disappearance” (p. 8). For example, the repeating pattern of seasonal change that calls for specific acts on behalf of human inhabitants (such as grass burning, crop planting and harvesting, or even football season coming around again).
Time as arrow: Traced from the Judeo-Christian tradition (time as linear progression between genesis and the day of judgement): “the linear pattern of the arrow has penetrated to the deep roots of Western culture. … We remain looking forward to a … secularised salvation entrusted to the powers of technoscientific rationality, to development, to economic growth – in every case something which projects the meaning of the present into the future” (p. 8-9). For example, we might think of the scientific predictions of the declining ecological health of rivers the technical/political solutions that are proposed to ameliorate such a devastating future.

Time as point: With a postmodern loss of certainty in the future, “linear time yields to an experience of transition without development, to a movement between disconnected points, a sequence of fleeting moments whose meaning is entirely grounded in the present point of time” (p. 9). For example, I now witness some of my students on river trips ‘capturing’ their ‘run through a rapid’ using the video feature of their digital cameras, and then reviewing it with their peers in the bottom eddy. The camera then gets stowed away on the next ‘flat’ section of the river. In digitally reviewing their river journey later it becomes a set of condensed, but disconnected, points; rapid after rapid after rapid.

How might we anticipate the different ways that time is ‘felt’ on the outdoor education experience? The journey itself with its linearity from start to finish, the diurnal/nocturnal passage of days, the evidence of seasonal cycles or the ebb and flow of the elements, the moment when ‘time stands still’ as an osprey glides overhead – these seem obvious temporal experiences, and perhaps they are. But this inquiry seeks to understand the significance of the subjective responses of participants to these phenomena, and the role they play in an encounter with place.

Outdoor programs, for example, regularly have participants remove their watches so that they will ‘feel’ time flow more ‘naturally’, yet what does this mean in terms of the encounter with a place? This practice is intended to contrast Western culture’s increasing attempts to objectify and quantify time (Nettleton, 1999). The intimate observation of daily rhythms and seasonal change, the burning candle, and the sundial have all fallen to the linear time of the mechanical ticking clock and ultimately to the abstraction and seemingly absolute character of digital time. In digital time, time becomes an endless series of ‘pin-points’ (to borrow from Melucci) where the passage of one hundredth of a second, an humanly imperceptible passing of time, separates the winner from a field of losers. We live in a world where time dictates the patterns of life. We fly or drive between time zones, ‘freeze’ or ‘capture’ time in the digital image, slow time in the sporting replay, review time in the six o’clock news, and are ‘clocked’ on the highway by the ‘speed gun’, as we try to get to work ‘on time.’ Yet we also feel time drag or accelerate as we await an anticipated
event (a celebration or a deadline), we take time-out to reflect upon our past and contemplate the future, and we feel time slipping away as an outdoor journey nears its conclusion. Our experience of time is, at times, ‘enigmatic’ and ‘intensified’ (Payne, 2003), and wholly ambiguous:

We thus live all the patterns of time simultaneously: the recurring circle of memory and project, the linear projection of the arrow as an intention and a goal, the exalted condensation of the point, or the experience of losing ourselves in disconnected fragments. It is often difficult to reconcile these patterns, since each one brings us to the borders of the others. (Melucci, 1996, p. 12).

According to Abram (1996a) it was Newton’s absolute formulation of separate ‘time’ and ‘space’ that provides the necessary frame for the clockwork universe (p. 199). Abram (1996a) argues that such a belief in absolute time and space, completely independent of perception, results in people becoming oblivious to the “sensuous presence of the world” (p. 201) as they cling to the past and worry about the future. The conceptions of time as arrow and point, and the enigmatic quality of the experience of time would seem to stand in contrast to traditional indigenous attunement to ecological time, where “the communicative system of country embraces rhythms and beats, as well as cycles and returns” (Rose, 2002, p. 45). The Dreamtime of aboriginal Australia, when the Ancestors sung the world into existence, provides a deep challenge to Western rational views of time.16

These insights about the relation of time and experience, and its consequences for place, make it possible to recall the important contributions of Heidegger’s conceptualisation of ‘dwelling’ and Relph’s description of identification of place as a continuum between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’. Both privilege long-term inhabitation where the interpreting human occupant/community comes to ‘dwell’ in their place. There are crucial implications here for the possibility of experiencing outdoor places, where participants are destined to be temporary visitors rather than inhabitants.

16 “What then is the Dreamtime?”, asks Abram (1996a). “It is a kind of time out of time, a time hidden beyond or even within the evident, manifest presence of the land, a magical temporality wherein the powers of the surrounding world first took up their current orientation with regard to one another, and hence acquired the evident shapes and forms by which we now know them” (p. 164).
Dweller or temporary visitor

Heidegger’s most significant contribution, according to Hay (2002), remains “his insistence upon the need to live authentically, to be at home, and to take responsibility for the defence of that home in all its aspects – human, natural, and the intangible particulars that constitute a place’s essence” (p. 161). In order to understand what it means to be at home, we must first understand what human dwelling on earth is and how this makes it possible to have a home at all (Seamon and Mugerauer, 1985). Until we can understand this fully, “we cannot expect that the planned spaces we construct will be successful human or ecological environments (Seamon, 1979, p. 93) or, we might also add, pedagogical environments.

In Heideggerian terms, “to dwell authentically is to dwell in place” (Hay, 2002, p. 160). This is the characteristic reciprocity between person and place – to be at home is to care for and maintain that place as home. One is able to conserve home because it is known fully from the inside. This is not to say that humans cannot cultivate or change places over time. Heidegger’s notion of caring was “primarily a matter of letting things be manifest in terms of their most appropriate possibilities, rather than in terms of expectations of the objectifying subject” (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 69). Humans, for Heidegger, become ‘shepherds’ (Zimmerman, 1996) working in ‘fields of care’, and this ‘dwelling’ is “the essence of human existence and the basic character of Being” (Relph, 1976, p. 39).

In his seminal work, Place and Placelessness, much of which was clearly inspired by Heidegger, Relph (1976) sought to understand not just the identity of a place, “but also the identity that a person or group has with that place, in particular whether they are experiencing it as an insider or as an outsider” (p. 45). To be inside is to be safe and secure in the world, to have a centre of meaning and existence. To be outside is to be adrift, to be constantly homeless – an alien:

To have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular … the places to which we are most attached are literally field of care, settings in which we have had a multiplicity of experiences and which call forth an entire complex of affections and responses. (Relph, 1976, p. 38)

Relph’s greatest contribution to the discourse of place remain his characterisations of insider and outsider. They offer this inquiry a way of considering how such difficult
concepts such as space and time may be influential in the encounter of outdoor places, and how we might make a pedagogic response to them. When Tuan (1977) writes that modern humans rarely establish roots and that the “experience of place is superficial” (p. 183) he is suggesting that lack of sufficient time in one place, as a result of mobility and lifestyle, ultimately makes it near impossible for a member of modern society to experience place authentically. What hope is there then for the outdoor education participant? To begin answering this question we turn to Relph’s experiential continuum between the outsider and insider.

The outsider is one who has a “largely unselfconscious attitude in which places are experienced as little more than a background or setting for activities” (Relph, 1976, p. 52). Much outdoor recreation and education that uses places as an arena for human development clearly risks this lack of identification with place and results in a short-term raid mentality where the experience of the activity is what matters and participants are considered to be self-sufficient, requiring no dependence upon the local community or setting for information or resources. In Relph’s continuum, there are only two levels of insidedness that depict a much deeper attachment to local place. The first of these is the empathetic insider:

[who] demands a willingness to be open to significances of a place, to feel it, to know and respect its symbols – much as a person might experience a holy place as sacred without necessarily believing in that particular region. This involves not merely looking at a place, but seeing into and appreciating the essential elements of its identity. Such empathetic insideness is possible for anyone not constricted by rigid patterns of thought and who possesses some awareness of environment…. To be inside a place empathetically is to understand that place as rich in meaning, and hence to identity with it, for these meanings are not only linked to the experiences and symbols of those whose place it is, but also stem from one’s own experiences. (Relph, 1976, pp. 54-55)

According to Relph (1976), empathetic insideness can be achieved through “training ourselves to see and understand places in themselves” (p. 55). For Relph, the final and most advanced level of emplacement is the existential insider who equates with Heidegger’s inhabitant that dwells and cares for place through their very being. For the existential insider place is full of significance which is experienced without the need for conscious reflective effort. It is “knowing implicitly that this place is where you belong” (p. 55). Only in these final two levels of identification with place, if I interpret Relph correctly, is an authentic response to place possible:
An authentic attitude to place is thus understood to be a direct and genuine experience of the entire complex of the identity of places – not mediated and distorted through a series of quite arbitrary social and intellectual fashions about how that experience should be, nor following stereotyped conventions. It comes from a full awareness of places for what they are as products of man’s intentions and the meaningful settings for human activities, or from a profound and unselfconscious identity with place. (1976, p. 64)

Relph’s (1976) authentic experience of place relies upon a singular modality of time experience. The existential insider is an indigene; the lifetime or long-time inhabitant. It is depth or length of time that matters. The empathetic insider can recognise this deep attachment to place, but never experience it fully as the existential insider does. Ultimately for Relph, it is in these final two categories of insidedness that people seek to be ‘at-home’, which becomes “an irreplaceable centre of significance” (p. 39). Such an ‘at-homeness’ represents a sense of “absoluteness of place, of ‘time immemorial’ and of a mutual belonging between a place and a people” (Massey, 1995, p. 51). Yet by Relph’s own argument the emphathetic insider, the person who searches for a sense of home, is destined to be frustrated. They can never ‘live’ a place as home in the same way that the indigenous inhabitant can.

**Searching for a home in space and time**

Massey (1994), however, argues the alternative view, that “there can be no authentic place” (p. 121). Rather the ‘place’ that emerges is that of the dominant social group of the time. And Tuan suggests that “‘home’ is a meaningless word without ‘journey’” (Tuan, 1974, p. 102), for humans are not trees, destined into immobility through ‘rootedness’ in one place. The metaphor may be a poor one for humans, who have always moved across the boundaries between places, both aware of and subconsciously responding to similarities and differences. Additionally, Heidegger seemed to privilege a folk-culture that is hard to imagine survives in late and post-industrial society as anything other than a nostalgic desire. For Heidegger at least, it was a dangerously short distance between an authentic idealisation of place and Nazi Germany’s nationalistic vision for the Fatherland (Berthold-Bond, 2000; Hay, 2002). “The search for homeplace” writes Lippard (1997), is the mythical search for the *axis mundi*, for a centre, for some place to stand, for something to hang onto” (p. 27), but the “centre doesn’t hold forever” (Lippard, 1997, p. 23). Pinn (2003) is also wary of becoming caught up in “the ‘one true place’ syndrome by idealising a particular place and its people, and burdening them (and me) with special meaning” (p. 40).
Relph’s structures of place experience remain useful sensitisers for an inquiry into the temporal experience of remote places. It alerts us to likely differences between local and visitor, but does not discount the possibility that the attentive and responsive visitor may see and experience place in great richness and depth in a relatively short passage of time. The lesson for outdoor educators, it would seem, is to stay alert to the possibility that place experience, as it relates to lived-time, may still be meaningful. Intensity of experience may produce its own manifestations of the place experience, particularly as the ‘live on’ in memory. The journeys of participants through the outdoors may constitute their own subjectivities of place-time, not considered by Relph and Heidegger who maintained a focus on residency, inhabitation and dwelling.

In summary, this discussion of the temporal qualities of experience prepares the inquiry into the lived experiences of participants in outdoor places in several important ways:

1. How and in what circumstances are participants aware of experiencing time in different ways? When and where is time felt to accelerate, decelerate, intensify or be suspended?
2. There are likely to be pedagogic implications concerning time as it is ‘lived’ in enigmatically, ambiguously and in intensified ways by outdoor education participants. As a fundamental structure of experience a sensitivity to time in outdoor places is likely to yield insights into the ways that participants do or do not experience those places.
3. Is it possible to qualify a sense of time, as it is lived, that may be required for participants to establish certain kinds of connection to outdoor places?
4. Finally, particularly for methodological considerations, how are experiences with outdoor places remembered, called upon over the passage of time between the past and the present, the ‘then’ and the ‘now’?

In his phenomenology of place experience Casey (1993) is prepared to match a Heideggerian dwelling-as-residing with a dwelling-as-wandering in wild-places:

If we are about to walk into this place, we need to know what sort of terrain our body will experience, how its surface is organized, and how it would feel to traverse it. At this preliminary moment, we learn a great deal from merely from gazing at the surface texture arrayed before us, or from lightly touching or stroking it, or from simply stepping on it. Palpation and vision and kinesthesia often combine synesthetically, to be joined, perhaps, by audition and olfaction: we sense sounds as emanating from certain surfaces, and odours clinging to them. Only by means of surface texture can the full sensuousness of a wildscape, its abundant changing-environing appearing, come into our ken. (p, 210)
Indeed, for Casey, and embodied implacement as a wanderer is possible if we become attuned to the sensing body and its fundamental significance in the place experience. Such a belief leads us to the consideration of corporeality and the role it plays in the lived experience of outdoor places.

**The lived experience of corporeality and outdoor places**

I have already discussed how outdoor education discourse has largely remained oblivious to the central role of the sensing and perceiving human body in experience. The same claim may also be levelled at much of the literature of place. As place becomes a subject of scholarly study it becomes increasingly intellectualised. Is it possible, however, that we get to know places first through our bodies, or even via a body-mind mutualism? This possibility would return outdoor education pedagogy to experience, and require us to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the ways that participants embody their learning of outdoor places. With this possibility in mind the following discussion of the existential structure of corporeality proceeds by exploring the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception and embodiment. We might begin by asking the most basic question of all. How does our body place us in place?

**The body in place**

In their book *Places Through the Body* (1998) Nast and Pile argue that a consideration of place immediately implicates the body, and vice versa:

> Both bodies and places need to be freed from the logic that says that they are either universal or unique. Instead, it would be better to think of the ways in which bodies and places are understood, how they are made and how they are interrelated, one to the other – because this is how we live our lives – through places, through the body. (p. 1)

“Mobility is in my bones”, writes Pinn (2003, p. 41), as she seeks to conceptualise a nomadic sense of place from her childhood family experience of regularly relocating from town to town in country New South Wales, an eastern state of Australia. She had, perhaps, already developed in childhood that innate sense to explore her world through the sensuous margins of her own body. Lines, (2001) recalling his childhood from the far side of the continent in Western Australia, wrote:
My body linked me to the material. I ached fiercely with attachment and love for the wild. I walked barefoot through the swamp and felt water and algae close on my legs and mud ooze through my toes; I walked barefoot through the sandy scrublands of the coastal plain and felt needles and barbs prick the soles of my meet and cut my shins; I walked barefoot through the rocky forest of the Darling Scarp and felt the pressure of the stone underfoot. (p. 14).

Lines (2001) argues that we develop an everyday metaphysics for what we sense is real through our bodily interactions with the world. “I learnt about Australia through my body”, he writes, “through what I could sit on, touch, taste, see, breath, smell, and move within. My surroundings gave me my reality. My corporeality incorporated the world’s corporeality” (p. 65). Lines sounds a fierce note of resistance to the postmodern belief that our experience, indeed the world, is only a matter of our enculturation, and to the deconstructionist belief that there is nothing beyond text (Lines, 2001). The corporeal experience of place is not something necessarily lost as the child matures, but rather it becomes suppressed in the adult world of the mind. Casey (1993) believes that it is only through the body that we can have any place at all when he reminds us that “my body continually takes me into place. It is at once agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being-in-place” (p. 48). We can only be in place, says Casey, “by means of our own bodies” (1993, p. xvi); an embodied implacement.

Casey’s notion of an embodied implacement is a vital addition and to Heidegger and Relph’s theories of place. Together they provide a valuable insight into our potential work as educators in the outdoors. Our bodies remain the ultimate centre of our learning, yet cannot be considered separate from their embodied connections to their place(s). Thus there is the possibility of a mutualism of embodied and interpretive learning which establishes the pedagogical boundaries of an educational practice that occurs within place. How can an understanding of this phenomenon be approached?

**Body, place and perception**

Seamon (1979) believes that “traditional philosophies and their psychological offshoots have ignored the central role of the body in human experience and thus misrepresent the nature of man (sic) and his (sic) place in the world” (p. 46). We experience and dwell in place largely due to our pre-reflective sense and perception.
of the world. “We never cease living in the world of perception” (Merleau-Ponty, cited in Moran, 2000, p. 418), writes Merleau-Ponty, which is “not a detached awareness of objects, but [an] active involvement with our world” (Matthews, 2002, p. 7). In Merleau-Ponty’s principal doctoral thesis *Phenomenology of Perception*, published in book form in 1945, he argues for the centrality of the role of perception in experience:

I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out towards them and sustains them, for I alone bring it into being for myself. … Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world’s, are always both naïve and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted, without explicitly mentioning, it, the other point of view, namely that of consciousness, through which from the outset a world forms itself round me and begins to exist for me. To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematisation is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002 edition, pp ix-x)

There are several points worth elaborating here in relation to this study into participants’ experiences of outdoor places through outdoor education. Merleau-Ponty suggests that there is a rich vein of experience that we may tap that exists beneath all of our social and cultural layers of interpretation and representation. As a result of Merleau-Ponty’s insights it is no longer possible to conceive of a disembodied, transcendental phenomenology of experience: “since our ordinary experience of ourselves is of a body-mind unity actively engaged with the world around us” (Matthews, 2002, p. 29). Merleau-Ponty’s description is neither individualistic nor anthropocentric. ‘I am the absolute source’ needs to be interpreted with some care. I am the absolute source, of my own experience. You are the absolute source of yours. The crucial step is to accept that these sources can only exist in an inter-subjective and inter-corporeal relation. There can be no individualistic, disembodied, detachable consciousness from the world. This does not deny that we also exist in a social world, as “our perspective is determined not only by space and time, but by history and culture” (Matthews, 2002, p. 21). The influence of society upon our perspective places a limitation on us, but this limitation does not extend to the world itself. Merleau-Ponty does not want to dismiss science, geography, philosophy or any other knowledgeable system about the world. Rather,
he corrects us by placing the world of experience prior to our worlds of abstracted meanings. Matthews (2002) summarises Merleau-Ponty’s views on this point:

Because we are active within the world, that world must present itself to us as meaningful; but because we are also finite and within the world, those meanings must always also be ambiguous and the world must transcend our capacity to know and understand it. Reality is ‘inexhaustible’, and there can be no possibility of the philosopher, or any other human being, arriving at a final ‘system’ that will make ultimate sense of it all. (pp. 20-21)

Outdoor education practice exists, therefore, in the balance between the pre-discursive and pre-conceptual sensual experiencing of the participants’ bodies in outdoor places, and their ability to reflect rationally upon their experiences. The interdependency of each is vital. For Merleau-Ponty:

It is not a question of reducing human knowledge to sensation, but of assisting at the birth of this knowledge, to make it as sensible as the sensible, to recover the consciousness of rationality. This experience of rationality is lost when we take it for granted as self-evident, but is, on the contrary rediscovered when it is made to appear against the background of non-human nature. (cited in Moran, 2000, p. 418)

To borrow from Leopold, “to promote perception may be the only truly creative part of [outdoor education]” (1949, p. 173). For Leopold, an ethical relationship with the ‘land’ is impossible without first an intimate and deeply personal perception and appreciation, that results from an “intense consciousness of land”. If there is a weakness in Leopold’s development of a ‘land ethic’\(^\text{17}\) that depends upon our ability to perceive the land fully, it is that he failed to recognise the crucial role of the body. “The sharp eye and an ecological mind” (p. 175), will not be enough. What is required is a mutualism of place-body-mind. We may then see “the embodied self as standing in essential opposition to ‘objective’ body naturalism defined by biomedical science” (Sellers, 1999, p. 487). Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on an inter-subjective, participatory embodiment of the world is the other half of a mutual balancing act with our rational attempts to interpret our experiences.

\(^{17}\) Leopold’s land ethic famously extended a system of ethics beyond the boundaries of human community “to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (1949, p. 204). It shifted the role of humans from conqueror of the land to co-inhabitant. Perhaps the most original feature of Leopold’s writing is that he continually worked between scientific and philosophical viewpoints. Nash (1990), in reference to Leopold’s work suggested that “when science lost sight of the broad picture in a welter of detail, philosophy adjusted the focus” (p. 66).
As experiential outdoor educators it is at once both sobering and liberating to realise that we cannot ‘teach’ an embodied implacement. We can shape the opportunity and guide our students towards the possibility of their learning, but we cannot instruct them in it. We have seen that a mind-body dualism is destructive to learning relationships in place and that “the body subordinated to the mind is effectively disabled in its action” (Payne, 2000, p. 196). Payne (2000) asks us to consider “a pedagogical return to the silences of the corporeal body” (p. 200). How might we consider a phenomenology of this silent corporeality in a way that will assist inquiry into place and outdoor education practice?

**Place and the body-subject**

An answer can be found by turning again to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment and how it provides a necessary partner to Heideggerian hermeneutics. It has been said that Merleau-Ponty “returned Heidegger’s head to his body and inscribed on the body a phenomenology of gesture and sensuality” (Pinar and Richards, 1992, p. 2). We turn from Heidegger’s hermeneutics of experience as always mediated through language and technology, to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the embodied experiencer. More than any other of the phenomenological philosophers Merleau-Ponty established that the essence of our experiences in the world is one of an embodied-relatedness:

> We witness every minute the miracle of related experience, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships. (p. xxiii)

The Western philosophical tradition of an incorporeal intellect, which persisted still in Heidegger’s hermeneutics, becomes transformed into “the possibility of a truly authentic phenomenology, a philosophy which would strive, not to explain the world as if from outside, but to give voice to the world from our experienced situation within it” (Abram, 1996a, p. 47). According to Abram (1996a) it is within Merleau-Ponty’s investigations into the human experience of perception as a reciprocal relationship between the “body, and the entities that surround it” that we discover that we are in a “silent conversation that [we] carry on with things, a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below [our] verbal awareness” (p. 52).
Thus it is for Merleau-Ponty that subjectivity shifts from its centre in the human intellect to the ‘body-subject’. In doing so Merleau-Ponty uncovered the radical extent to which “all subjectivity, or awareness, presupposes our inherence in a sensuous, corporeal world” (Abram, 1996b, p. 84). As Seamon (1979) suggests, “movements are learned when the body has understood them, and this understanding can be described as a set of invisible threads which run out between the body and the world with which the body is familiar” (p. 47). Without the ability for the body to learn and move in this way, we would not be able to function in day-to-day life. Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualisation of the ‘body-subject’ raises a serious concern for the outdoor education practice of taking participants to ‘novel’ terrains. If we accept Merleau-Ponty’s view that our lived experience is one of an inter-subjective embodiment with the world, it becomes vital that we have a better understanding of how participants respond to the unfamiliar and make it familiar. There may be more at stake here than the simple need for skill acquisition to cope with challenges posed by the new situation. Rather, it may be essential to understanding a person’s ability to respond to, and be comfortable, in a place at all.

The flesh of the world

According to Stephen Priest, for Merleau-Ponty the body-subject can never be viewed as an object. It exists only in relation to the world in “complex relations of mutual dependence” (Priest, 1998, p. 73). As Merleau-Ponty explains:

My body is made of the same flesh of the world (it is perceived), and moreover … this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world (the felt at the same time the culmination of subjectivity and the culmination of materiality). They are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping. (cited in Priest, 1998, p. 73)

From Merleau-Ponty we learn that our flesh is the same flesh as that of the world, that our subjectivity is indeed an inter-subjectivity between humans and the world. This is why, perhaps, so much of what is called nature writing (or at least when this writing is deeply phenomenological in character) removes us from the objective gaze, and seems to return us to an embodied reliance upon the earth. As Abram (1996a) says:
Our bodies have formed themselves in the delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth – our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with other eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and the honking of geese. To shut ourselves off from these other voices, to continue by our lifestyles to condemn these other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction, is to rob our own senses of their integrity, and to rob our minds of their coherence. We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human. (p. 22)

There are shades of Cooper’s (1994) ‘wild’ nature romanticism here. The crucial difference is that we are neither for an objectified nature, nor against an objectified culture. Instead, as humans, we find ourselves existing only in the inter-subjective relation between our primordial, animate sensing body and our reflective attempts to ‘make sense’ of our experiences through our cultured thinking. As phenomenological researchers we are always fleshing-out this dynamic between pre-reflective experience and interpretation. As Casey (1993) says, such “flesh is neither matter alone nor mind alone but something running between both. … the fibres of culture and nature compose one continuous fabric” (pp. 255-256). In experience these fibres are inseparable, “even if they are distinguishable upon analysis or reflection” (Casey, 1993, p. 256).

It is necessary to insert a cautionary note here. We are reminded by Heidegger, in his famous essay The Question of Technology (In Knell, 1978), that technology mediates human experience of the world. Heidegger argued for the need to seek, through the act of questioning, the ‘essence’ of technology and that the ‘technological’ is central to being. It may mediate our experience as either a ‘bringing forth’, an act of poesis (becoming through the act of creating). Alternatively, technology can mediate our experience as a ‘challenging forth’, which endangers both nature and Being. Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, Heidegger argues, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. Furthermore, he argued, “we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral” (In Knell, 1978, pp. 287-288).

Questions relating to technology and technique in outdoor education, and its influence upon embodied learning, have largely gone unasked in the professional literature. Again, it is testimony to the ‘invisibility’ of the technologies of outdoor adventure activities, and assumptions of their neutrality, that so little has been examined or written about this most fundamental aspect of participants’ experiences with outdoor activities and in outdoor places. Both Payne (1996, 2002, 2003) and Wattchow (1999, 2001b) have raised and discussed ways that paddling technologies
and techniques mediates “simultaneously human experience and the immediate environment (Payne, 1996, p. 81). Watchow (2001b) comments that, “we have become so immersed, so indebted to the invisible technics of our time that the question [of the role of technology in outdoor education experiences] is not asked, or rejected as foolish” (p. 25). Beyond the concerns of these authors, little had been written, and even less has been researched empirically, of the embodied technics of outdoor activities.

Gaining a greater understanding of embodied-relations, to place and to others, may go along way in helping outdoor educators re-consider the fundamental, experiential basis of outdoor pedagogies. Yet we must humbly admit that reflection upon embodied experience can never fully capture that experience in verbal or textual description. As educators and researchers we can only proceed through acknowledgment of this limitation. But in our acceptance of this limitation we become, in turn, liberated. As Jardine (1992) suggests we are returned, re-placed if you like, into a world with which we can engage more fully:

But if life dwells in an original difficulty, an original ambiguity that cannot be mastered but only lived with well, the pursuit of such mastery can only lead to immobility or exhaustion – it does not lead to understanding human life-as-lived in a deep way. Life as something to be mastered seems to deny what we already know about being alive. A hermeneutic notion of understanding is centred on the dispossession of understanding from its methodical, prepared self-security. It returns inquiry in education to the original, serious, and difficult interpretative play in which we live our lives together with children; it returns inquiry to the need and possibility of true conversation. (p. 122)

And only part of this conversation is represented and recognisable in language – the rest we may witness as gesture, movement, pause – and the presence of silence. We know more than we can say, and we are more than we can know. With these insights we can press on in the study with a renewed sense of determination and humility. We can seek to understand experience to the very margins of our ability to comprehend and articulate it, whilst realising that a full description of it is always beyond us:

To know a physical place you must become intimate with it. You must open yourself up to its textures, its colours in varying day and night lights, its sonic dimensions. You must in some way become vulnerable to it. … You learn, with regard to the land, the ways in which it is dependable. Where it has no strength to offer you, you do not insist on its support. When you yourself do not understand something, you trust that the land might, and you defer. (Lopez, 2003, p. 162)
In rescuing for us a way to acknowledge our most fundamental dependence upon and connection with the earth, Merleau-Ponty restores the possibility that we can acknowledge a sensuous, embodied feeling for place. Descarte’s mind-body dualism and the authority granted to it through The Enlightenment is defeated. The fleshy perimeters of the body become osmotic with the flesh of the world. This brings us close indeed, to an ancient and indigenous way of experiencing place:

Listen carefully, careful
and this spirit e come in your feeling
and you will feel it … anyone that.
I feel it … my body same as you.
I telling you this because the land for us,
ever change round, never change.
Places for us, earth for us,
star, moon, tree, animal,
no-matter what sort of a animal, bird or snake …
all that animal same like us. Our friend that.

This story e can listen careful
and how you want to feel on your feeling.
This story e coming through you body,
e go right down foot and head, fingernail and blood …
through the heart.
And e can feel it because e’ll come right through.18

In summary then, in consideration of the existential significance of the body in the experience of place, it is possible to say the following:

1. Our bodies are the primordial source of our experiences, but these experiences occur always in relation with the world. Without embodied-relations we could never be in place. Place then, is far more than an intellectual projection or social construction. We are inevitably emplaced in the world, whether it be the supermarket or the river. The future of those places, and thus ourselves, exists in the nature of our ongoing and reciprocal relationship with those places.
2. An embodied technics inevitably influences this reciprocal relationship, and requires consideration and examination to reveal how place experiences are ‘lived’ by human inhabitants or visitors.
3. We see also that the embodied experience of place occurs always and everywhere beneath language and can never be fully expressed through language. Yet our language, and vocabulary for places also influences how we

18 Neidjie, B. (1989, p. 19). The book Story About Feeling, from which this extract is drawn, resulted from a remarkable collaboration between Bill Neidjie, an aboriginal elder from the Bunitj Clan, and Keith Taylor. Taylor audio taped many of Neidjie’s stories, and later arranged them into themes to produce the book. The spoken quality of language in the stories maintains a commitment to orality that is so often lost. It requires the reader to commit themselves to participate with the written text, preferably reading it aloud, to engage with its full poetic quality.
interpret those experiences. Thus body, technology, word and world are inextricably linked.

As stated early in this chapter, it is in some degree an illusion to discuss these existential structures of lived experience separately. The fourth and final existential structure, relationality, begins to allow us to draw them back together.

**The lived experience of relationality in outdoor places**

In this last section of the discussion it is possible to see how the four existential structures of lived experience work collectively as a whole. I intend to discuss this through the crucial concept, accepted by both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, of *being-in-the-world*. It is impossible to keep the existential structures of lived experience apart for long. In this section the artifice of separation can no longer be sustained and space, time and body all rush into the foreground. The four pebbles thrown into the air have descended to pierce the still, mirror-like surface of the river pool. The reflected ripple rings intersect and interlace. What we see now looking into the river is not the deceptively clear reflection of the world, but a shimmering play of light. Sky, stone, tree and wave – space, time, body and relation.

**Connection**

If place experiences can be approached more responsively through an embodied-relation, it becomes the structure of that encounter, as to how we connect and relate with place, that provides a key to this study. As Read (2000) writes: “It’s the connecting sensibility; and that’s what Aborigines are doing talking about the dreaming and the land. …Connect Connect Connect” (p. 200). The quest for connection as something more than a fleeting moment of recognition remains, but “how can you obtain this? How can you occupy a place and also have it occupy you? How can you find such a reciprocity?” (Lopez, 1996, p. 11). The Australian aboriginal leader, Patrick Dodson, believes that we must be guided through this process of learning our way back into the land:

Many Australians don’t know how to think themselves into the country, the land. They find it hard to think with the land. We Aboriginal people find it hard to think without the land. My grandfather taught me how to think about
relationships by showing me places. He showed me where the creeks and rivers swirl into the sea, the fresh water meets the salt, the different words of ocean and river are mixing together. (cited in Hawthorne, 2002, p. 366)

Dodson’s grandfather is a true pedagogue, a teacher and guide who uses both direct teaching and a “practical tutoring … [in] embodied intelligence” (Payne, 2000, p. 187). We can begin to distil a practical guidance for relating to place that is not only ‘out there’ or ‘in-here’ (Payne, 2000), but is located in relation between the two. Payne (1999) writes that “the term ecological represents…the duality but not sameness of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ natures as they are influenced differently by a range of historical, personal, social and environmental circumstances” (1999, p. 23). He calls us to reconcile inner and outer natures via inquiry into the body and embodiment, and therefore embodied relations with others. There are strong parallels here with Lopez’s description of external and internal landscapes. The external landscape, for Lopez, is the one we ‘see’, “not only the line and colour of the land and its shading at different times of the day, but also its plants and animals, its season, its weather, its geology, the record of its climate and evolution” (Lopez, 1988, p. 64). The interior landscape then, is “a kind of projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape…. the speculations, intuitions, and formal ideas we refer to as ‘mind’ are a set of relationships in the interior landscape with purpose and order; some of these are obvious, many are impenetrably subtle” (p. 65). What is required then is reconciliation between these reciprocal inner and outer worlds of experience.

**Reciprocity**

This reciprocity, the continuing moment of connection between perceiving subject and their place, is encapsulated in the description of existence, given to us by both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, as *being-in-the-world*. We do not need to prove the world as fact to experience it, and attempts by both the natural and social sciences to explain the world are always “merely second-order expressions of the *Lebenswelt*, the world of lived experience” (Grumet, 1997, p. 30). *Being-in-the-world* means that it is false to represent the world as “a pure object of knowledge from a point outside the world” (Matthews, 2002, p. 54). And, as Merleau-Ponty demonstrated, it is equally false to represent the body as an object apart from the world. Therefore we do not experience the world, by being in a relationship from *us* to *it*, nor even *for* it, rather our experience of ourselves and of the world can only be encountered from *within* the mutualism and
reciprocity of this relationship. This is what place is: the enfolding practice of a relationship that mutually and reciprocally ties the perceiving subject within an expressive place. It is for this reason, for both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, that “talk of ‘being-in-the-world’ is intended to emphasise an engagement rather than pure contemplation” (Matthews, 2002, p. 55).

What then, does the practice of this mutual engagement with place require of outdoor educators? It requires “becoming conversant with the Earth in a way that the delicate kinship and interrelationships of and with the Earth can be brought out. … a delicacy of discourse that has a kinship with the Earth” (Jardine, 1998, p. 28). This becomes the deep challenge for outdoor education:

We cannot talk about education without talking about a dialectic between person and world, a dialectic that holds all the mysteries and ironies of paradox. The apparent polarities of subjectivity and objectivity, immanence and transcendence, particularization and generalization, essence and existence dissolve into reciprocity, each constituting each other. (Grumet, 1992, p. 31)

In a place-responsive outdoor education we extend this challenge to consider how the inherent reciprocity of being-in-the-world requires us to delicately investigate how domestic and wild, inner and outer natures, and experience, interpretation and representation, constitute each other. These four existential structures of lived experience – space, time, body and relation – provide the primary ground upon which the professional orientation of the inquiry phase of this study was built. A secondary professional orientation is constructed through the work of previous researchers who have gathered empirical evidence concerning how people respond to outdoor places, particularly through outdoor education experiences. It is to this work, and its significance for this study, that I now turn.

Nascent research into place in outdoor education

In this section of the dissertation I discuss a number of recent research studies which consider the experience of place and outdoor education and have preceded, and thus informed, my study. There are many studies that have examined outdoor education participants’ experiences of ‘wilderness’ or ‘nature’ through the outdoor adventure journey (see for example, Allison, 1998; Andrews, 1999; Haluza-Delay, 2001; Haskell, 2000a, 2000b; Johnson, 2004; Martin, 2005), and its impact on participants,
including their development of environmental sensitivity. Despite interesting and challenging findings in several of these studies, including the potency of the ‘wilderness template’ (Haluza-Delay, 2001) and participants’ division of ‘city’ and ‘nature’ (Johnson, 2004), or how outdoor education participants either are alienated from nature, travel through nature, care for nature or become integrated with nature (Martin, 2005), it is difficult to discern much evidence that any or all of the four lifeworld existentials have been considered, incorporated methodologically or conceptually, into these studies.

As we have already seen, the characterisations of wilderness, nature and outdoor environment, have a powerful grip on the professional rhetoric of outdoor education, so it is of little surprise to see them continuing to be portrayed as objects of investigation. But there is little sense in these research studies that the particulars of the local places were considered in the representations of participants’ experiences. In most cases places are presented as neutral backdrops upon which human action occurred and subsequent adventure and/or environmental narratives were written. That this poses risks to local places has already been discussed at some length in this dissertation.

**The land as teacher**

There are however a small number of studies that have considered place, not as a mere setting or site for educational activity, but as a partner to participants’ learning experiences (Raffan, 1992; Henderson, 1995; Cuthbertson, 1999; Stewart, 2003a). These studies stand to offer important directions and insights for outdoor education practice and research. Collectively, they represent the first steps towards a deeper understanding of the role of place in outdoor education experience. I present Raffan’s work first and independently of the others, as his findings regarding the ‘land as teacher’ are incorporated directly into the inquiry matrix and the data gathering process in the inquiry phase of this study. I then critique Henderson, Cuthbertson and Stewart’s research collectively with the aim to garner specific insights relating to undergraduate university outdoor education programs and participants.

James Raffan’s doctoral thesis *Frontier, Homeland and Sacred Space: A Collaborative Investigation into Cross-cultural Perceptions of Place in the Thelon Game Sanctuary, Northwest Territories* (1992), explored how the land may act as teacher in shaping perceptions of place. Whilst his study did not directly involve the
collection or interpretation of data from an outdoor education program, the researcher made deliberate links to experiential outdoor pedagogy. Raffan’s goal was to better understand the range of human responses to a specific place, the Thelon Game Sanctuary, in Canada’s Northwest Territories, and how people learnt from the land. He collected data through an extensive range of interviews with indigenous and Euro-Canadians and also used his own poetic and artistic response to the land on a six-week long canoe journey to build insights into the person place connection. It is this ‘grounding’ of research activity within place, its local terrain and its people, that makes Raffan’s work so instructive. Whilst commenting upon the work of phenomenological investigations into people’s experience of place by scholars such as Tuan, Buttimer, Relph and Seamon, he observed:

There is, however, a problem with the bulk of sense of place research, namely that it is rarely based on primary field work. Tuan, for example, writes lyrically about sense of place, drawing from the mythology and traditions of a wide diversity of cultures, but in the end, one cannot ground his work in any one place. As such, the concepts are strong, but the work is almost too clean, not concerning itself with politics or the interactions within and between people. (Raffan, 1992, p. 23)

Raffan (1992, 1993) identified in the data four guiding concepts that constituted how the land acted as teacher for those that lived and travelled within it. He advocates them for consideration by educators, as a means of exploring connections to outdoor places. They are:

**Experiential:** Raffan describes the experiential component of sense of place as the personal link to the land itself through experience, although he notes that not “every experience leads to a deepening sense of place” (1992, p. 382). Raffan concluded that dependence upon the land for survival necessitated a much deeper attention to land, “an exponential jump in magnitude” (p. 384), and thus a deeper sense of place than resulted, for example, from self-contained canoe journey.

**Toponymic:** A toponymic sense of place refers to the origin and significance of place names and the process of naming places. Raffan noted that “it can easily be accepted that the [indigenous peoples] have a much more fully developed and finely tuned system for place naming … than most Euro-Canadians, but I think it is interesting that Euro-Canadians with a strong sense of place … also have their own naming systems that go well beyond the maps” (1992, p. 379).

**Narrative:** A narrative sense of place refers to stories of how the land came to be, tales of long ago, and tales of travelling the land: “What sets apart [indigenous] from most Euro-Canadian narrative is that native narrative is set into the land-knowledge triangle, and integrated into the mix of place names and personal
experience that has for many years been used by elders to teach young people about land and survival” (1992, pp. 381-382).19

**Numinous:** A numinous quality refers to a sense of divine presence in spiritual encounters with the land. “I give this component of sense of place”, writes Raffan, “the descriptor, numinous – meaning all that is awe-inspiring, all that transcends the rational” (1992, p. 386). Such a response by the author seems to result from the indigenous participants in the study who still retained mytho-poetic relations with their lands. A numinous response was far less evident amongst Euro-Canadian participants.

For Raffan, each of these concepts differentiated ways that people were potentially linked to, and learnt from, place within the holistic concept of ‘the land as teacher’. Even though much of Raffan’s study was based on an ethnographical inquiry into indigenous peoples, he found that these dimensions of the place experience held for some, but not all, Euro-Canadians. Raffan’s four dimensions of the ‘land as teacher’ offer considerable potential for the inquiry phase of this study to contribute a structure in gathering data and assisting with its interpretation. The influence of Raffan’s canoe journey and his poetic and artistic responses to the land and the participants in his study cannot be underestimated. Although they play a relatively minor role in the presentation of his dissertation, they offer the reader a way into the narratives, in a participatory sense, that is not possible in more formalised writing.

Yet Raffan’s work was not so much an examination of lived experience as it was an ethnography. With this important distinction in mind it must remain an overlay upon the existential structures of lived experience. Peoples’ experiences of places, their spiritual or mysterious encounters, the names and naming of outdoor places and the stories that people both tell and respond to, stand to offer important avenues for the inquiry phase of this study. For Raffan (1992), peoples’ bonds to land “constitutes an existential expression or definition of who you are and that the veracity of the force a person might exert to fight for a place is directly connected to the extent to which the person is attached to, or defined by, a particular piece of land” (p. 29). A potentially cautionary finding, for this inquiry into participants’ experiences of river-places, is provided in Raffan’s (1992) conclusion:

It is possible, or so it would seem from the Euro-Canadian accounts, for a person to visit the place with an outfitter on a guided trip, or even on their own trip with perspective narrowed to the river corridor exclusively and/or with sight shortened

---

19 Raffan (1992) refers to the land knowledge triangle as an embodiment of three ways of knowing: “place names, land related stories, and personal experience living, hunting and trapping on the land” (p. 370).
to map references only, and to return with no appreciable new insights or observation of what the land was like or what the land had to offer. (p. 382)

It is reasonable to assume that the experience of place through outdoor education is likely to be very different to that of the indigenous inhabitant. Yet despite Raffan’s suggestion that ‘the land as teacher’ would make a suitable model for experiential outdoor educators to follow, this has not been investigated or shown empirically. We can, however gain some important insights into the specific nature of the place experience through outdoor education from a small number of empirical studies.

**Place research in undergraduate university outdoor education**

The studies by Henderson (1995) into outdoor travel and guiding, Cuthbertson (1999) into expeditionary encounters with place, and Stewart (2003a) into environment specific learning, were all concerned with the experiences of undergraduate university students on extended outdoor field trips. There are several overlapping qualities of these three studies. Henderson and Cuthbertson both completed studies using an inductive, qualitative methodological approach, and both adopted a socially critical orientation. Cuthbertson and Stewart’s inquiries were both case studies of specific field programs, whereas Henderson’s was a retrospective account based on data collected from multiple programs. All utilised participant written accounts of experiences and the researcher’s (as leader/guide) observations, reflections and interpretations. Cuthbertson was the only researcher to also utilise interviews as a means of gathering data, whilst Henderson was the only researcher to conduct a ‘member check’ with participants of his research findings and interpretations. Collectively, their findings and interpretations begin to place some flesh on the skeletal framework provided by Raffan (1992, 1993).

“What does it mean to be ‘OF’ a place?” asks Henderson (1995, p. 33). In his study into the potential for outdoor travel to spark transformational action and an ecological/participatory consciousness, the researcher strives to keep this question in the forefront of his research:

> It is certainly a far cry from let’s ‘overcome’ this route, ‘challenge this whitewater,’ ‘beat this mountain,’ ‘study the particulars of this setting or phenomena.’ Perhaps it is a greater traveller’s challenge to be ‘still’ and come to see really where you are. (p. 33)
Henderson collected and interpreted student journal entries written over ten years, based on two long-standing field programs – an eight-day canoe tour and a five-day snow shoe trip. Both trips seemed to encourage heritage values of travel and exploration in the Canadian outdoors. Stewart’s study of Australian participants on a three-week long bushwalk was designed to gain insight into the experiences and learning gained from travelling through three different environments: “It is not an inquiry into ‘people’ alone, or of a certain environment, but rather of a particular people encountering particular landscapes” (Stewart, 2003a, p. 26). Stewart’s group traversed alpine and sub-alpine country, and then an area around the Snowy River, as they walked between food drops. The participants on this walk maintained a field journal to capture their own reflections but also to respond to a series of guiding questions (on leadership, community/social interactions and natural environment). The participants in Cuthbertson’s (1999) study faced the most arduous challenges in their outdoor expeditions; a month long back country skiing trip and, some months later, a six week sea kayaking journey. Cuthbertson’s research began with a simple and humble goal:

I wish merely to add to the concept of place so that those of us who live primarily in urbanized areas, but who still seek a profound relationship with nature may do so without feeling it to be somehow inferior. (Cuthbertson, 1999, p. 6)

For the purposes of comparison I have summarised the work of these three researchers in Table 2: A comparative analysis of outdoor education place research (pp. 121-122). The value of this research, in relation to the inquiry phase of this study, lies in the guidance it offers in orienting data collection and interpretation. Henderson, Cuthbertson and Stewart’s research forecasts some significant trends that relate specifically to the characteristics of self, community, outdoor nature and outdoor activity, with tertiary students experiencing outdoor places as a part of organised experiential programs.
Table 2: A comparative analysis of outdoor education place research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameters and orientation</th>
<th>Methodological approaches</th>
<th>Major theoretical sources</th>
<th>Significant findings</th>
<th>Contribution to O.Ed theorising of place.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Henderson, 1995</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral dissertation. (Canada)</td>
<td>Case study of participant experiences. Participants n = 10 Researcher as guide / observer with group. Data: written and oral. Thematic analysis. (emancipatory critical social science). A work in 4 phases: Interviews / preparation / expedition experience / post interviews.</td>
<td>Eclectic. Environmental philosophy (including deep ecology). Outdoor education. Place theory (largely phenomenological orientation). Wilderness literature. Critical theory.</td>
<td>Dominant theme: Place as a social phenomenon (social layering of the experience – self-reference to the group in place). Beneficial outcomes: Becoming cultural travellers – stories and encounters with historicized landscape. Concientized travel – becoming critically aware travellers (often as a result of discussing and working through some of the limiting factors listed below). Limiting factors: Intra-group tensions re travelling long distances, accomplishment of goals /gender differences / Style of travel (single file = social isolation and corridor travel / Physical and affective discomfort / Acknowledgment of temporary nature of experience / Meeting locals and being called ‘tourists’ / Idealisation of ‘nature’ at expense of the ‘city’.</td>
<td>Presentation of conceptual model. The model displays tensions between self / home as the core from which “any reflection on a compassionate sense of Place must begin” (p. 95) and levels of abstraction required to connect to a wider world beyond the everyday. The model represents the achievements and struggles of the expedition group to become critically aware travellers, and assists in ordering the narratives presented by the researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters dissertation. (Australia)</td>
<td>Case study of participant experiences.</td>
<td>Eclectic. Australian outdoor education theory. Aust. environmental education theory. North American phenomenological philosophy &amp; geographical inquiry into place. Aust. environmental history and cultural studies of land identity.</td>
<td>3 major themes with sub-themes: The environment providing a context for learning and experience: responses to place / observation and understating of the environment / stories told by the place / relationships with others / learning and insights. Factors that impacted on the experience of place: prior knowledge of a place / attitude toward the experience prior to departure / aspects of the place / structure of the experience / Issues relating to leadership / concepts of time. Critical reflection and thought as a consequence of experience: reflections on relationships with the natural world / developing relationships with place.</td>
<td>Pedagogical recommendations. ‘Experience’ is contingent upon place / Different conditions, limitations on travel, and learning resulted from the three environments / The mode of engagement, intentionality and structure of experience determine the experience of place / The influence of life experiences and cultural background of the individual / The leader as place role model / The specifics of local environmental issues / Participant competence needs to match technical demands of the trip / The journey-based model inappropriate to building place relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on two groups experiences of 3-week walk across three distinct regions. Major aims/questions: How did students respond to the overall experience, and were differences noticeable between the three different environments encountered? Pedagogic recommendations for outdoor education practice.</td>
<td>Participants n = 19 Researcher as leader / observer with group. Data: written. Thematic analysis using (grounded theory). Participant writings reviewed, coded and thematised after the completion of the experience.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With regard to self

‘Deep’ connections with community and ecology can lead to a transformation of self, the ability to ‘realise’ oneself and their connection to the world differently (Henderson, 1995), and/or a critical awareness of one’s outdoor journeys and their significance (Cuthbertson, 1999; Stewart, 2003a). This research suggests that such responses are possible as a result of relatively short, but intense, outdoor journeys (between five-days and four-weeks). But this seemed most compromised when personal comfort (physical and emotional) was challenged (Cuthbertson, 1999; Stewart, 2003a). All three researchers noted the significance of solo-time and the observation that participants responded to travelling through a ‘storied landscape’. Interestingly, Cuthbertson’s study, perhaps due to its duration and arduous nature, revealed how participants’ personal experiences were ‘fickle,’ in so far as participants encountered phases of the expedition experience when they definitely wanted to ‘go home,’ and other times when ‘there was no other place that they would rather be.’

With regard to community

All three researchers noted the importance of community relationships. Places encountered were often recalled in relation to social events that occurred there. Cuthbertson noted this social layering of the experience of place as the dominant theme of his findings. Interestingly, and perhaps as a result of the duration and arduous qualities of the expedition experience in his group, Cuthbertson was alone in commenting in any depth upon social influences that did not seem conducive to experiencing the place, such as gender based conflict and the formation of cliques within the larger group.

With regard to outdoor nature

There was little evidence that encounters with wildlife played a significant role in the participants’ experiences in these studies, and this is perhaps surprising. Instead, outdoor nature was largely referred to in more encompassing and possibly universal terms, such as mountain, forest or river. Cuthbertson noted that the romanticisation of outdoor nature at the expense of the city was a regular feature within his group, whilst Stewart concluded that expectation often resulted in a mismatch where the encounter with places
(for example, an ecologically damaged river), resulted in unexpected emotional responses such as sadness, disappointment and even a rejection of place.

**With regard to outdoor activity**

Henderson found that the simple means of outdoor travel and living, such as using fires and tarpaulins instead of stoves and tents, maintained an openness to nature rather than attempts to overcome it. Yet both Cuthbertson and Stewart found that the structures of the experience; for example, carrying heavy packs over demanding terrain and extended periods of single file travel, could impact negatively upon participants ability or desire to relate to where they were. Cuthbertson, in particular, devotes considerable textual space to discussing the influence of technology, and its cousin technique, and how they result from various social and cultural imperatives in relation to outdoor experiences.

**A gap in the research**

In addition to the guidance offered by the research outlined above, it is worth commenting further upon the gaps (or silences) in that research, to which this study can add. In so doing my study stands to contribute to this emerging body of empirical work that raises significant issues and possibilities for outdoor education pedagogy. A particular strength of the three research studies is that they were place based. Yet, apart from some introductory commentary about the locations of the programs, detailed descriptions of the places encountered by participants are not evident. This contrasts for example, with nature writers and some recent environmental historians (see for example, Park, 1995; Seddon, 1994; Sinclair, 2001) who dedicate passages of their text to providing careful descriptions of place locations, meetings with local people, and environmental contexts (such as landscape, light, temperature, time of day and so on). Such descriptions, if well crafted, can give the text a resonance that allows the reader a greater level of insight into the representations of participants’ experiences and the researcher’s own journey of discovery.

The challenges of representing the experiences of participants are dealt with quite differently by each of the researchers. Stewart (2003a) largely fails to consider the problematic nature of writing about human experiences, suggesting a belief that language is considered a relatively neutral, or transparent, conduit of human experience (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). In contrast, Cuthbertson (1999) comments upon agonising over the issue
of representation of the participants’ experiences, and finally opts for a fairly conservative, linear and prosaic presentation. In both of these dissertations the voice of the researcher in the ‘findings’ is somewhat less than I anticipated, given that they were guides with the participants in the field (although Cutherbertson reflects quite openly upon various issues and events as they occurred in the field, sourcing his leader’s/researcher’s journal to do so). Henderson’s (1995) representation of experience, both his as guide and the participants, is arguably the most radical departure from a conservative, linear and prosaic representation of experience. I noted that his side-by-side dialogue of participant quotations and guides interpretations demands something of the reader that the others did not. As I read between the texts of participants and guide, I felt compelled to insert myself into the dialogue. I could not help but ask myself if such a representation of experience might be extended even further, to incorporate the places of those experiences; the “return to the terrain” (Henderson, 1995, p. 231) that Henderson advocates, in order to capture even more of the lived quality of the experiences of outdoor places. Such considerations are the topic of discussion of the next chapter.

Summary

In the preceding two chapters we have seen how the theories and discourses of outdoor education, and their consequences in pedagogical practice, have served as a denial of the full possibilities of experiencing local places. In addition, the careful consideration of the existential ground (van Manen, 1997) of human experience and empirical research studies into place and outdoor education, has led towards the development of a conceptual matrix that offers unique opportunities for this inquiry into the lived experience of outdoor river places.

The contribution of the research discussed above into place and outdoor education has provided a crucial overlay that ultimately raises important questions regarding the pedagogical activity of outdoor education. Without this it would be difficult to make recommendations regarding plausible possibilities for a place-responsive outdoor education pedagogy. However, it can equally be argued that too much research in outdoor education has been conducted in this foreground and has, therefore, remain blinded to the existential qualities of experiences as they are ‘lived’. The development of the conceptual matrix for this inquiry was critical. It provides methodological guidance for both data collection and interpretation, constantly alerting me (as researcher) to how places are ‘lived’ by participants through the structures of space, time, body and relation.
Importantly, it also anticipates questions about how place experiences are socially and culturally constructed through pedagogical belief, values and practices. As such it became a guide not only to questioning but also to listening.

What it cannot consider, however, is how the findings of data collection and interpretation, using matrix as a guide, should be represented. Hermeneutic phenomenology offers considerable potential to address concerns relating to the textual representation of human lived experience, and this is the topic of the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE: “Words of the river, swarming here”

Awake after years; sudden exploding mangroves, alight as Mooney vanishes in mountain shade –

Late afternoon, confusion of words, language alive with a life of its own, lashing out and then licking its flesh wounds. Words of the river, swarming here, in branches of mangrove with prawn birds and fruit bats; and mullet, butting upstream, schooling leaping, and bull-nosed singing mullet songs -

(Extract and adaptation from No river, no death, 1997, Robert Adamson, in Adamson & Gemes, 1977)

A considerable amount of writing has already been devoted to developing the phenomenological orientation of this study. Having laid this groundwork, as often as possible through a poetic and symbolic approach to writing, it is possible now to focus more tightly on hermeneutic phenomenology and the possibilities and limitations that it brings to this study. In particular the challenge posed in the previous chapter, of representing human experience through textual means, is discussed in this chapter by exploring the following paradox. Language traps us in the world of texts, and severs ‘direct’, primordial or sensory experience from its linguistic and discursive representations. Paradoxically, it is a poetic use of language that has, possibly, the peculiar power to speak ‘earth’ (Bate, 2000), returning us to our earthen experience (Jardine, 1992).

I begin the chapter by looking at the origins and methods of hermeneutic phenomenology and why it is a good fit for this research. I then address the specific problems and limitations of attempting to represent the lived experience of participants through the medium of written language, and finally present an argument that it is
necessary for readers to adopt a participatory orientation and an empathetic reading as
listening, to representations of lived experience.

Outdoor education researchers/writers have, by and large, failed to debate the
significance of methodological choices about their research (Wattchow, 2004). None of the
meta-analyses or research surveys in adventure programming / outdoor education,
discussed in Chapter Three, included a critical analysis of research methodologies, their
ideological orientations, or trends and developments in the use of various research
methodologies. This stands in stark contrast to environmental education, an ‘allied’ field of
practice and inquiry, where two recent meta-analyses (Hart & Nolan, 1999; Rickinson,
2001) place considerable significance on research methodologies, are arguably more
thorough in their search methods, and reveal both a more liberal and inclusive view of
what constitutes research. In particular, Hart and Nolan (1999) note a “shift to interpretive,
critical and postmodern lines of inquiry” (p. 2) in environmental education:

> Reflexive discussions examining the politics of research and its representation in
environmental education, in particular the mismatch of the purposes, means and
outcomes and, therefore, the legitimisation of research endeavour have attracted
considerable attention and debate (Hart, 2005; McKenzie, 2005; Payne, 2005; Russell,
2005). Outdoor education, as a field of research inquiry, highlights experience as a
primary basis of its educational endeavours and therefore methodologies that have the
potential to investigate the lived experience of both educators and participants warrant
serious consideration. Developments in environmental education research discourse,
where investigations into the nature of lived experiences (see for example; Ballantyne &
Clacherty, 1990; Brody, 1997; Chawla, 1994; Payne, 1999; 2003) would appear to offer
considerable guidance for researchers in outdoor education.

Leopold (1987 edition) suggested some time ago that the most serious obstacle set
in the path of a community adoption of the land ethic “is the fact that our educational
and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness
of the land” (p. 223). I opened the first chapter of this dissertation with a quotation from
Leopold’s story titled *Song of the Gavilan* (which is contained within *A Sand County
Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*, 1987 edition). In this story Leopold traced the
demise of our ability to perceive the musical / ecological voice of the river. He sources
the blame for this failure to “the process of dismemberment … called research” (p. 153). Science, according to Leopold, doubts everything but facts, and facts are only rendered through specialisation. Thus “one by one the parts are … stricken from the song of songs” (p. 153). Yet Leopold did not dismiss scientific ways of knowing. Rather, he sought to balance the rational and atomistic view of the world with a poetic, participatory and caring relation to the world.

A different perspective on how Australian land is perceived and represented is provided by the anthropologist, Deborah Bird Rose (2004). Writing fifty years after Leopold she is well placed to consider the implications of the dominance of the positivistic method:

Many of our research techniques approach an inert world in order to dissect, rearrange, classify, typologise, and remake. This knowledge system is highly successful in producing technologies and economies that feed and fuel desire. We live today in a world that is in many ways delightful in its technological opportunities, and delightful for some in its economic rewards. But by the same process of fragmentation, modernity also produces pitiless and alienated selves – persons whose well-being is increasingly at risk, whose desires must be always unsatisfied, whose optimism requires a bruising indifference to others. We live in a world that is forever being dismantled, ostensibly in the service of our desires but more potently in the service of wealth, and this broken and fragmented world is increasingly unable to hold systems of life together. (Rose, 2004, pp. 180-181)

An even more sobering realisation for me as a researcher and a person of European ancestry, who has an interest in the experience of remote places, is that indigenous peoples such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), often have a very different view of ‘research’:

From the vantage point of the colonized … the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. (p. 1)

Rose (2004) believes that we must begin our work as researchers from the fundamental assertion that “the unit of survival is not the individual or the species, but the organism-and-its-environment in relationship” (p. 188). These relationships are recursive, “densely and mutually entangled through time” (Rose, 2004, p. 188). Such a stance, like Leopold’s, serves to undermine Western assumptions about the universality and rationality of knowledge and practice and, subsequently, how it may be researched. Instead, it returns us to an examination of the inter-subjectivity (Mereau-Ponty, 2002 edition) of relationships that are experienced locally.
How then might we begin to bring lifeworld and text together (Hart, 2005; Payne, 2005)? Taking a lead from environmental education researchers (such as Hart, Payne, and Russell) and ecologists and anthropologists (such as Leopold and Rose), might suggest that what is required is more modesty regarding any claims (or assumptions) for authority of the researcher (and his/her methods). Adopting a modest view of one’s own position as researcher in relation to the researched highlights the need for a discussion of the limits and challenges of representing others (people and places).

Hart (2005) writes that “all we are doing, as reflexive researchers is to write in ways that reveal the limits of knowledge, our political orientation and other dimensions of self, in ways that reveal the discourses that shape our work and open possibilities for thinking about our work as we get on with it” (p. 399). Whilst emphasising the role of bodily experience, even as the basis of metaphorical language, Payne (2005) seems to suggest that more is needed than simply being a reflexive researcher:

The researcher and researched should, where possible, have a ‘common interest’ and shared experiential backgrounds in the topic/problem of inquiry so that there is an embodied/intercorporeal ‘empathetic rapport’ that assist the intersubjective co-production of socio-environmental meanings in the name of re-search. (2005, p. 429)

But what if some of the research participants, the more-than-human others constantly referred to by Abram (1996a), cannot share or declare their ‘common interest’. If we are to begin the work of eroding the apparent nature/culture division of the West, how does nature, or better, how does place become a co-author or co-producer in our texts (Russell, 2005)? To answer these questions, and explain these considerations, requires a discussion of hermeneutic phenomenology, and how its current limits might be extended to accommodate the needs, voices and silences not only of human lived experiences but also of the more-than-human inhabitants and character of places.

Hermeneutic phenomenology

What then is hermeneutic phenomenology, and how does it counter the inevitable fragmentation, marginalisation and objectification of rational positivism that has been briefly challenged in the preceding paragraphs? Hermeneutics originated in the study of sacred texts, such as the Bible. The term ‘hermeneutic’ coming from the Greek verb hermeneuin, meaning ‘to interpret’ (Moran, 2000). In Greek mythology Hermes was the
wing-footed messenger whose task it was to relay messages from the gods to people on
earth. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) is credited with extending the “application of
hermeneutics from the interpretation of texts to the whole field of human studies”
(Odman & Kerdeman, 1999, p. 188). The hermeneutic tradition is broad and it begins as
“a humble gesture, acknowledging that life proceeds and surrounds interpretation”
(Pinar & Reynolds, 1992, p. 241). As humans are considered to live in a socialised
context, and insofar as meaning making is continually a communal activity,
“hermeneutics challenged the assertion that an interpretation can ever be absolutely
correct or true. It must remain only and always an interpretation” (Patton, 2002, p. 114).
Within hermeneutics, all understanding is considered as interpretation where meaning
occurs in a certain temporal and cultural context, which is known as “the ‘horizon’ of
understanding because it is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen
form a particular vantage point” (Mugerauer, 1995, p. xxvii). It is amongst a community
of interpreters, in a particular context (place), that consensus for the meaning of a text
that is representative of human experience, may be achieved.

One of the most significant structures of this consensus is the hermeneutic circle,
which is an acknowledgement of how human interpretation works as an interdependent
cycling between wholes and parts. Mugerauer (1995) reminds us that “understanding
any part of our world depends on a prior connection of the whole, and any
understanding of the whole can proceed only from an understanding of, or projection
from, the parts” (p. xxviii). The two cannot be separated. Thus familiarity becomes
essential to interpretation: “Insofar as familiarity obtains, a person to some extent
already has understood that which he or she is trying interpret. This preliminary
understanding is known in the hermeneutic tradition as ‘preunderstanding’” (Odman &
Kerdeman, 1999, p. 186). Without preunderstanding, reflective understanding would not
be possible. Preunderstanding “functions as a structure, a whole within the limits of
which reflective understanding evolves” (Odman & Kerdeman, 1999, p. 187).

The hermeneutic circle provides the means by which texts may be interpreted. At
the same time it “captures how ordinary people experience and make sense of life”
(Odman & Kerdeman, 1999, p. 187). Thus empathy with participants and familiarity
with the contexts of their experiences becomes a vital component of hermeneutic
phenomenology. As such, my various experiences as teacher, guide and many hundreds
of days on the rivers being considered, becomes necessary to the trustworthiness of the
findings of the inquiry with its emphasis on embodiment and place.
It is at this point that I can begin to refine how hermeneutic phenomenology is used in the inquiry phase of this study. I have already introduced the idea that phenomenology relies upon a temporary suspension of our preconceptions and theories, and that its primary interest is in the human experience of the everyday lifeworld – the world of lived experience. Hermeneutic phenomenology then provides a methodical approach (van Manen, 1997) to investigating this interpretive world as it is shared by a human community in a particular time and place. This can apply to any situation, but would seem to be a particularly good fit to understand the experiences of participants in the isolation of the outdoor journey. Hermeneutic phenomenology can justifiably respond to the human experience of place, but can it respond to the more-than-human-world (Abram, 1996a; Russell, 2005)? When van Manen (1997), paraphrasing Dilthey, states: “We explain nature, but humans we must understand” (p. 4), we see that hermeneutic phenomenology continues to objectify the more-than-human-world, rather than acknowledge our intersubjective, reciprocal reliance upon it, as Merleau-Ponty would have us do. I shall return to this challenge shortly.

Van Manen suggests that hermeneutic phenomenology offers no procedural system (1997). Rather, the researcher must enter a community striving for meaningful insights into the essential nature of human experiences. Exemplary hermeneutic texts may serve as role models. Yet each new text must find a way into and through the labyrinth of many meanings that spring from each experience. The method requires an “ability to be reflective, insightful, sensitive to language, and constantly open to experience” (van Manen, 1997, p. xi).

Hermeneutic phenomenology involves both the careful interpretation of existing texts and the writing of passages of descriptive text that allow the researcher/writer and the reader to interact with the essence of the phenomenon being studied. For van Manen (1997) the researcher aims to “transform experience into a textual expression of its essence, in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience” (p. 36). This can only occur after an intense quest for understanding of the experience prior to its description. This is a crucial point. The researcher must come to live, first and foremost, within the research question, prior to the attempt to transform it into description. For van Manen (1997),

this gives phenomenological human science its fundamental fascination. To do hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to
remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. (p. 18)

Despite the acceptance amongst hermeneutic inquirers that there can be no set, linear procedural system, it is possible to suggest principles and pitfalls that might assist the researcher/writer. Kneller (1984) provides four useful principles worthy of consideration (cited in Patton, 2002, pp. 114-115):

- Understanding a human act or product, and hence all learning, is like interpreting a text.
- All interpretation occurs within traditions.
- Interpretation involves opening oneself to a text (or its analogue) and questioning it.
- The inquirer must interpret a text in light of his or her situation.

Whilst van Manen (1997, pp. 30-31) suggests that hermeneutic phenomenological research is a ‘dynamic interplay’ that involves six research activities:

- Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.
- Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it.
- Reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon.
- Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
- Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.
- Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

Van Manen (1997) goes on to provide the following useful guidance to the researcher/writer who strives to produce descriptions of lived experience:

- You need to describe the experience as you live(d) through it. Avoid as much as possible causal explanations, generalisations, or abstract interpretations.
- Describe the experience from the inside, as it were; almost like a state of mind: the feelings, the moods, the emotion, etc.
- Focus on a particular example of incidents of the object of experience; describe specific events, an adventure, a happening, and a particular experience.
- Try to focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time.
- Attend to how the body feels, how things smell(ed), how they sound(ed), etc.
- Avoid trying to beautify your account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology. (Adapted from van Manen, 1997, pp. 64-65)

This is useful guidance for the researcher. To understand what is asked of the researcher who would interpret the world like a text, “the hermeneutic phenomenologist needs to
put herself or himself in the place of the author of the text in order to comprehend the situation and the person more fully” (Ehrich, 2003, p. 51). Yet ‘text’ remains a dangerous metaphor because we are enculturated into demanding literal meaning from texts. Texts may represent experience and the world, but cannot literally be them. Payne (2003) notes that “interpretive approaches to enquiry like phenomenology can also slide into a form of reductionism” where description of phenomena “does not fully capture the experience as it was lived and is embodied, perhaps pre-consciously, pre-reflexively and pre-discursively” (p. 188). In other words, our attempts to capture the essence of the experience in textual form will always be limited as language itself is limited. An awareness of how this occurs sounds a note of caution for this study, which relies upon textual description for both data gathering and interpretation, and later in the representation of the lived experiences of the participants.

**Language severs**

Written language severs us from the flesh of our experience which, as Merleau-Ponty demonstrated, is interconnected with the flesh of the world. To be more precise, writing poses specific problems when it comes to the representation of the human experiences of outdoor places. First, as we have already seen in the work of Raffan (1992, 1993), Henderson (1995), Cuthbertson (1999) and Stewart (2003a), story plays a significant role in experience of places by participants on outdoor journeys. Yet written language makes ideas and stories transportable through time and from one place to another. It disembodies and decontextualises the story from the story-teller, the story listeners and their collective place. Second, our experience of language in postmodern times, especially after the ‘linguistic turn’ of the 1970s, has moved researchers and theorists towards an understanding and acceptance of culture and experience defined as a system of symbols. “Meaning is discursive”, write Pinar and Reynolds (1992); “it can represent only approximations of original experience. Language occupies the space between experience and the word” (Pinar & Reynolds, 1992, p. 5). The experience of language in both of these ways risks severing us from our experiences and our places. Lopez (1986) and Abram (1996a) believe that stories can hold the accumulated knowledge of people and place and that the act of telling a story, when one had earned the right to do so, was “to actively preserve the coherence of one’s culture” (Abram, 1996a, p. 181). However:
Writing down oral stories renders them separable, for the first time, from the actual places where the events in those stories occurred … the places themselves are no longer necessary to the remembrance of the stories, and often come to seem wholly incidental to the tales, the arbitrary backdrops for human events that might just as easily have happened elsewhere. (Abram, 1996a, p. 183)

In such a scenario the place, the more-than-human setting in which the story is created, is in danger of becoming no more than a backdrop. Eventually it becomes unnecessary altogether and the place origins of the story are forgotten. Csordas (1999) believes that textuality has become “a hungry metaphor, swallowing all of culture to the point where it became possible and even convincing to hear the deconstructionist motto that there is nothing outside the text” (146). For the deconstructionist, text is no longer metaphor but a reality, and it has “gobbled up the body itself” (Csordas, 1999, p. 146):

The radical epistemological move was that representation does not denote experience, but constitutes it. This move closes the gap between language and experience, and thereby eliminates a dualism, but does so not by transcending the dualism but by reducing experience to language, or discourse, or representation. (Csordas, 1999, p. 146)

Textuality has come to dominate the centrality of some discourses, “where the constitutive powers of language is emphasised and ‘natural’ objects are viewed as discursively produced” (Alvesson, 2002, p. 47). The text then, for postmodernists, is not a means of expressing subjectivity, but constitutes it, and it is at this point that an anthropocentric postmodernism reaches its apogee – its most distant point from the earth. For those seeking a path that may connect them back to place, or the earth, the postmodern ‘turn’ towards the subjectivity about one’s experience as only text is misleading. The “panoply of possible experiences and imaginings projected through the infinite potential of writing” (Bate, 2000, p. 251) turns out to be a cage that ‘screens’ (Patton, 2002) us from physical reality. Caged in such a world we cling to the illusion that we can make, or re-make meaning and indeed experience, by re-naming the outdoor education activity of kayaking for example, as Thomas and Thomas (2000) attempted to do for their white water paddling students (Payne, 2002). Hite (2000), it appears, seems unaware of the potential for deception, when his outdoor education group begin ‘rampantly’ naming the ‘pristine, and natural setting’ they are travelling through:

It also shows that we are aware of our power in the word-world – a landscape which we can increase and enrich at our whim. A group in the wilderness which is fluently
and unconsciously naming things has made the final step into living in poetic dreamtime. (Hite, 2000, pp. 10-11)

If only it were that easy. Neither Thomas and Thomas nor Hite’s naming and re-naming of the world is likely to connect participants to place because the word-world created is a linguistically mediated imposition by leaders/authors who may be, in effect, dispossessing the participants’ of their experiences in the outdoors (Brown, 2002; 2004). Instead, we are likely to find that the earth has been silenced (Russell, 2005) and that “we are the only resonance, the only and singular voice” (Jardine, 1998, p. 96). Abram (1996a) traces this silencing of the earth to the development of the alphabet and subsequently to phonetic reading, which requires us to “disengage the synaesthetic participation between the senses and the encompassing earth” (p. 187). Humans had established a new reflexivity between themselves and their own sign-world. As a result we have become cut off from the organic earth that sustains us. Judith Wright (1971) poetically captures this view:

The cold spring falls from the stone.
I passed and heard
The mountain, palm and fern
Spoken in one strange word.
The gum-tree stands by the spring.
I peeled its splitting bark
And found the written track
Of a life I could not read. 20

What does an acknowledgment of the limitations of language, especially in the written text, require of us if we are to proceed with a hermeneutic project that attempts descriptions of lived experience, and in particular, the quest for some intelligible notion of our embodied relations with place? I have already stated that we must humbly admit that textual description of embodied experience can never fully recapture or represent that experience. Furthermore, Seddon (1972) concluded that “our language is poor in words of place” (p. 260). But language is never dead, indeed it has the potential to pulse with life, and language can be deeply implicated with place (Bonyhardy & Griffiths, 2002). Our task

---

20 In the poem Scribbly-Gum (1971) Wright realises the impossibility of ever capturing nature completely in the world of words; the mountain with its stream and stone and forest speaks in a strange language and she cannot read the scribbly inscriptions left by the insect on the surface of the gum-tree. Abram (1996a) notes how the profound shift of engagement of humans to written language has estranged us from the earth: “The participatory proclivity of the senses was simply transferred from the depths of the surrounding lifeworld to the visible letters of the alphabet. Only by concentrating the synaesthetic magic of the senses upon the written letters could these letters begin to come alive and to speak…. For our senses are now coupled, synaesthetically, to these printed shapes as profoundly as they were once wedded to cedar trees, ravens, and the moon. As the hills and the bending grasses once spoke to our tribal ancestors, so these written letters and words now speak to us” (Abram, 1996a, p. 138).
is not to abandon language and literacy, but becomes one of taking up the “written word, with all of its potency, and patiently, carefully, writing language back into the land” (Abram, 1996a, p. 273).

**Poetic language speaks ‘earth’**

How then, might we take up language and being to write it patiently and carefully back into the land? *Being-in-the-world*, for Heidegger, is a world that is already an interpreted world at that temporal moment (Webster, 2003). For Heidegger, authentic dwelling, that which allows places to reveal their essential character, is articulated in language, which is the “house of being” (Heidegger, cited in Zimmerman, 1996, p. 66). It is a historico-linguistic world that requires constant telling and re-telling, interpretation and re-interpretation. But if writing severs us from our immediate situation, asks Bate (2000), “then how can it speak to the condition of ecological belonging?” (p. 251):

Heidegger replies with the other half of the paradox: there is a special kind of writing, called poetry, which has the peculiar power to speak ‘earth’. Poetry is the song of the earth. (Bate, 2000, p. 251)

Bate (2000) argues that poetry allows us to step outside the technological frame to awaken “the momentary wonder of unconcealment” (p. 258). “For Heidegger”, Bate continues, “poetry can, quite literally, save the earth” (P. 258). As Heidegger writes, in his famous essay *Poetically Man Dwells* (2000):

Poetry builds up the very nature of dwelling. Poetry and dwelling not only do not exclude each other; on the contrary, poetry and dwelling belong together, each calling for the other. (p. 93)

If we are to attempt a hermeneutic description of the lived experience of outdoor places we might, therefore, approach the writing task with a poetic sensibility. Such an approach has already been demonstrated by many ‘place’ writers (see, for example, Dillard, 1975; Hay, 2003; Leopold, 1987 edition; Lopez, 1979, 1986, 1988, Pinn, 2003, Read, 2000, 2003; Rose, 2002). It is not so much a dismissal of other attempts to represent human experience as it is an acknowledgment of what is required for *this* description of lived experience. “Whereas science departs from the ‘given’”, comments Norberg-Schulz (1980), “poetry brings us back to the concrete things, uncovering the
meaning inherent in the lifeworld” (p. 10). Thus Geoff Park’s decision, in *Nga Uruora (The Groves of Life): Ecology and History in a New Zealand landscape* (1995) to use only native (Maori) words for indigenous forms of life (trees, birds, Maori practices and so on), is a poetic one. As is Park’s use of juxtaposition in setting his own embodied journeys in the New Zealand’s remnant coastal forests alongside scholarly historical narrative. The result is a “polyphonic account”, writes Seddon (1996, p. 397). The reader’s frame of reference, to comprehend the Park’s text, must strive to return to an understanding of the place itself. The result is a writing that is “for New Zealanders about becoming New Zealanders” (Seddon, 1996, p. 405). Similarly we see how poetry and dwelling, quite literally, are intertwined in the work and life of people such as Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Les Murray. The poet/farmer becomes apprenticed to his or her place. In *Evening Alone at Bunyah* (2002), a poem Murray writes about intergenerational connections with their poor farm home in northern New South Wales, he offers the line: “This country is my mind”. In so doing, he explains for us Heidegger’s belief that poetry and dwelling are inseparable, where words become enfolded into place, and place becomes a source of words. The insights of Abram and Leopold, and the poetic examples already introduced in this dissertation, provide an important correction to van Manen’s anthropocentrism. The poetic writer gives up the illusion of certainty in language. Instead, she or he is prepared to have the unruly and unpredictable voices of others invade the text. How does this happen? Ironically, van Manen himself provides the crucial clue.

**Phenomenological hermeneutic description is a poetising project** (van Manen, 1997). This poetising does not refer to a particular type of poetry, such as verse making, but rather an activity where language reverberates (Bachelard, 1969), “a language that sings the world” (van Manen, 1997, p. 13). What is required, according to van Manen, is a ‘depthful writing’, a crafted description that results from multiple ‘workings’, “reminiscent of the artistic activity of creating an art object that has to be approached again and again, now here then there, going back and forth between the parts and the whole in order to arrive at a finely crafted piece” (1997, pp. 131-132). In the words of Hay (2003): “the place essay, then, is an essentially creative mind/place dialogue that is closer to literature – even poetry – than it is to the learned paper” (p. 272). If a hermeneutic description of the lived experience of outdoor places is to be attempted, it must somehow include, interpret and represent this mind/place dialogue that is mediated by the body. Within the description there must be a place for the body and a place for place:
hermeneutic phenomenology employs modes of discourse that try to merge
cognitive and non-cognitive, Gnostic and pathic was of knowing. By these terms
we mean that not only do we understand things intellectually or conceptually, as
we experience things in corporeal, relational, enactive, and situational modalities’

The style of hermeneutic description as a poetising project I developed then for “Moving
on an effortless journey,” had its genesis in many sources, experiences and places. Some
of these can be readily traced. When reflecting upon his writing of an environmental
history of the Snowy River, Seddon (1997) wrote that “part of my problem in writing
environmental history stems from the linearity of language, where I wanted a polyphonic
account” (1997, p. 58). Carter (1987) experienced a similar dilemma in writing his spatial
history of the exploration and settlement of Australia in The Road to Botany Bay:

We clarify our ideas by setting them out. By covering the previously clear page, we
give our unruly thoughts an order and perspicacity all their own. The linearity of
writing (in contrast with the multi-dimensionality of experience) and the linearity of
the logic it expresses reflects neither the nature of experience nor, for that matter, of
history, but rather the limitations of the medium. (p. 157)

“Moving on an effortless journey” is then, in part, a response to Seddon’s latent question:
Is a polyphonic, or many voiced, approach possible, whilst also resisting the pull of the
blank page to fill it with lines of linear prose. At a telling point in Spell of the Sensuous,
Abram (1996a, p. 223) breaks stride from the linearity of prose to leave several lines of
blank space on the page. The reader draws breath …

… and realises that sometimes silence is our most articulate response.

For Pinn (2003) poetry offers an intensity of language, which is non-dualistic, vulnerable
and brings us close to a sense of embodied experience. It can “provide an enfolding of self
with place, of the outer with the inner” (p. 45). The potential of poetry and poetics has
begun to attract attention in discussions of qualitative research methodologies (Brady,
2005; Stewart, K., 2005). It offers a way of pursuing knowing and knowledge that has been
“ignored and formally discounted” (Brady, 2005, p. 981), suppressed and relegated to the margins (Pinn, 2003, pp. 45-46). A poetic response and representation of experiencing can “exceed and complement more conventional strategies” (Brady, 2005, p. 982). It is “tied to the context of the immediate and the immanent, to the processes of ‘being there’ and sensual saturation” (Brady, 2005, p. 991).

“Moving on an effortless journey” is poetic in several ways. The selection of participant quotations/voices, their careful positioning on the page in relation to my interpretations as researcher, my own poetic responses to the places, events and participants may all be considered part of the larger poetising project. Collectively they call for a particular type of reading of the lived experience of participants and particular places, which I shall elaborate shortly.

As already mentioned, and of considerable relevance to this study of participants’ river experiences, inspiration also came from Bob Henderson’s doctoral dissertation Outdoor travel: Explorations for change (1995) with its side-by-side dialogue of the voices of students and guide. Recently, in Australia, a number of collaborations between non-indigenous and indigenous authors/speakers (Benterrak, Muecke, and Roe, 1984; Niedjie and Taylor, 1989; Rose, 2002), and between poets and artists (Adamson and Gemes, 1997; Piggot and Brennan, 2000), have produced multi-vocal descriptions and text-image representations of experience and place. Laurie Duggan’s (1987) epic poem The ash range combined multiple voices, styles and fragments of historical texts in an evocative elegy to Gippsland, the land of his forbears. Whilst it is true that these represent a different genre to the hermeneutic writer who attempts to author a description on behalf of others, they do point towards a willingness to break free from some of the assumptions and conventions of textual representation through linear texts and the literal use of language.

In the early years of my doctoral candidature I experimented with a particular style of representing the lived experiences of participants in outdoor places for a conference paper21 and a book chapter,22 and these were important methodological and representational steps in crafting a style for “Moving on an effortless journey”. Although “Moving on an effortless journey” differs in structure and style again, as it

---


needed to be responsive to the unique people and places of this inquiry, these earlier attempts provided important opportunities to develop an innovative style, and gain critical feedback through the peer review and editorial processes. My intention in these publications, and in this dissertation draws inspiration from the diverse sources described above and retains a conviction to leave space for the reader to engage and work with the descriptive representations of lived experience.

(Re)placing the empathetic reader as listener

Bachelard’s classic work, *The Poetics of Space* (1969) can be read as an ontology of the poetic (Bate, 2000) where the author calls for a mode of reading that is a listening rather than an interrogation. Bachelard’s phenomenology was concerned with “the moment of the onset of the poetic image in an individual consciousness” (Bate, 2000, p. 154). “To speak well is part of living well”, writes Bachelard, “the poetic image is an emergence from language” (1969, p. xxvi). Thus to tell a story, is to rely upon the “listener’s trust” (Lopez, 1988, p. 64), and to write a poetic description is to rely upon the reader’s engagement with the words lifting from the page as they reanimate her or him in their own experience. It is the hermeneutic writer’s challenge to draw the reader into participation and to have them empathise with the experiences of those who are represented in the text.

Meaning is not fixed. Even as we rely upon our memory to recall and re-tell experiences from the past, an activity central to this inquiry, meaning is always temporal, situational and reliant upon other people, other beings, and place itself. This is Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty’s ‘world’, Abram’s ‘earth’, Leopold’s ‘land’ and Rose’s ‘country’.

“Meaning … is not stable; it shimmers”, writes Sammel (2003, p. 158). For Bachelard, it is “a shimmering consciousness” (1969, p. xxvii). A poetic sensibility to interpretation and description relies both upon the intentions of the author and is “equally dependent on the historical situation of the reader/listener” (Sammel, 2003, pp. 158-159). It calls upon “subtle undertones of language, to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak” (van Manen, 1997, p. 111).

In both *Many Voices Speak the Country* (2003) and *Many Voices Speak the River* (2004), I went to some lengths to invite the empathetic, listening reader to engage with the textual description:

There is no ‘right’ way to read the text. It deliberately attempts to escape the usual linearity of narrative and readers may venture from left to right, from top to bottom,
in cluster, or back and forth, and so on. I hope you will find it interesting enough to
experience more than one reading. The text attempts to bring into being a polyphonic
(many sounded / many voiced) account of the experience of the adventure-river-
landscape. …remember that your voice, the reader’s voice, is as mutually engaged in
the seeking of essential meaning as any of the voices on paper in the text.
(Watcchow, 2004, p. 7)

Kathleen Stewart (2005) makes a similar request of the reader when she promotes a
“cultural poesis”, where her writing “tries to mimic felt impacts and half-known effects
as if the writing were itself a form of life” (p. 1028). She asks the reader “to read
actively, to follow along, read into, imagine, digress, establish independent trajectories
and connections, disagree” (p. 1027).

Van Manen (1997) suggests that we should not expect the phenomenologist to
provide a conclusion or a summary of their study as, like the poet, to provide a summary
of meaning and direct our interpretation of the poem “in order to present the result
would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result” (p. 13). Yet, it does seem
reasonable to offer ‘plausible insights’ (van Manen, 1997), the end point of which, is
“knowing how to act tactfully in pedagogic situations on the basis of a carefully edified
thoughtfulness” (p. 8). In the inquiry, I have utilised the term ‘plausible insights’ to refer
to the interpretation of the significance of what has been revealed in the representative
texts of participants’ lived experiences, in terms of the possibilities of a place-responsive
outdoor education. The complete presentation then, of “…Moving on an effortless
journey”, is roughly analogous to the ‘findings’ and ‘discussion’ phases of a more
conventional thesis or research report.

Hence “…Moving on an effortless journey”, particularly through the gathering
momentum of the interpretative descriptions and plausible insights, sought to reveal the
lived qualities of participants’ experiences of river places, just as they were, in all of
their complexity, ambiguity and contradictory nature. Only then, was it able to serve the
professional outdoor education community of researchers and practitioners by reflecting
upon the possibilities of a place-responsive pedagogy. In order to understand how it
does this it is necessary to be aware of the conduct of the research process in the inquiry,
and this is described in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX: Methodology for the inquiry

In the previous chapters, the development of the conceptual frame for the inquiry was accompanied by the discussion of some important methodological considerations, particularly issues relating to the representation of participants’ lived experience of river places in textual description. In this chapter I detail the formal procedures of the inquiry phase of this study in order that the reader may have a good understanding of the participants and the methodological approaches that defined the limits of data collection, interpretation and representation. For the purposes of clarity I utilise the following subheadings: (1) The research sequence; (2) Participants and recruitment; (3) Data, sampling and more data; (4) Drafting of single case interpretations; and (5) Thematic development of “Moving on an effortless journey”.

The research sequence

Alvesson (2002) has been critical of simplistic versions of the research process that fail to account for the range of influences that shape the research process. Too often the qualitative approach sees the task of the researcher to be one of reducing a large and amorphous collection of data into an ordered, logical and manageable product – the research text. Alvesson believes that blindly “following methodological guidelines is totally insufficient for good research, and at least some of the complexities and uncertainties involved must be taken seriously and addressed” (2002, p. 9). Instead, he proffers a ‘complex’ version of the research process that attempts to convey influential factors such as pre-structured understanding brought to the research by the researcher, expectations and assumptions of the researcher, and social dynamics between the researcher and the participants. The following descriptions expand upon the presentation of the research sequence, which appears in Table 3: Towards a place-responsive data gathering and interpretation sequence, (pp 143-144). This table shows that there were nine distinct phases in the research sequence of this inquiry. Phases A and B refer to the pre-structured understandings that I, as researcher, brought to the inquiry, and have been disclosed and developed in dissertation thus far. The remaining phases of the inquiry are outlined and discussed below.
Table 3: Towards a place-responsive data gathering and interpretation sequence.

**The researchers expectations / assumptions / private theories:**
Twenty years of working in outdoor education resulting in concerns based upon observation and anecdotal evidence relating to rhetorical claims that outdoor education can teach relations to natural places.

A pragmatic environmental ethic.
Preferences for literary and artistic ways of reflecting upon and representing experiences of outdoor places.

**Researcher – informant dynamics:**
All informants were prior students of the researcher. This could possibly have resulted in loyalties between the researcher and participants that introduced bias into the data and its interpretation. Conversely, it provided the researcher with the potential for a detailed understanding of the events and empathy with both the participants experiences and the places where those experiences were located.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-structured understanding</strong></td>
<td><strong>Methodology Review:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Recruitment and data gathering</strong></td>
<td><strong>Initial data interpretation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Data gathering</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) Critical review of research and professional literature of outdoor education claims about individual, social and nature relations.</td>
<td>Snowballing recruitment produces access to 64 experiential text documents written by participants close to the time of the experience.</td>
<td>Long table thematic interpretation of the experiential texts produces:</td>
<td>Twenty-one personal, interviews (with participants) conducted and audio taped for later transcription.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Critical review of place literature and research into lived experience of place in outdoor education.</td>
<td>Participants in the study:</td>
<td>(a) A ‘reconnaissance’ analysis for each of the three subgroups.</td>
<td>Researcher’s observation notes of interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30 = Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education, La Trobe University) 16 = Graduate Diploma of Outdoor Education, La Trobe) 18 = Bachelor of Sport and Outdoor Recreation (Monash University).</td>
<td>(b) Targeted recruitment (intensity sampling) of seven from each subgroup for the Interview Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Detailed preparation for interviews from long table interpretation, interviewee’s experiential text, guided by the inquiry matrix.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Inquiry Matrix:** The inquiry matrix is developed to guide the interview process and to assist with interpretation of data.

**Circles within cycles:** The hermeneutic circle relies upon the researcher/writer constantly moving between wholes and parts to achieve a fuller understanding of the phenomena being studied. This process is represented in stages D through H.
Table 3 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>J</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data organisation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Further data interpretation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Data representation and discussion of ‘plausible insights’</strong></td>
<td>Concluding discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Detailed transcription of interviews: | Twenty-one single case interpretations: This phase produces a detailed statement for each individual case which provides: | “Moving on an effortless journey”: | The concluding discussion completes the research process for this project by summarising the findings of “Moving on an effortless journey”.

- Transcription completed 50% by researcher: 50% by professional transcriber).
- All transcripts proofed in detail by researcher.
- Copies returned to interviewees for checking / alterations.
- Original experiential texts paired with interview transcripts for the 21 interviewees.

| Returning to the rivers: The major rivers in the inquiry (the Murray, Snowy, Mithcell and Mitta Mitta were each visited again in the final two years of the study. In particular, a major solo expedition was undertaking on the Murray river and many of the single case studies (stage G) were drafted on this journey. Thus the rivers bring their own presence to the research and the texts produced. In this way this investigation strived to make space for and respond to topos (Pivnick, 2003) through writing-in-place and maintaining place-in-writing. Drafted texts themselves may then embody the outdoor journey and the river place as they are ‘roughly hewn’ interpretations, splattered with droplets of water from the river, and bleached and weathered by the sun and wind. |

| | | | |
Recruitment of participants and access to ‘experiential texts’

In Phase C of the research sequence, participants in the inquiry were drawn from three groups:

Subgroup 1: Graduates from the La Trobe University Graduate Diploma of Outdoor Education degree, (between 1995-1998).

Subgroup 2: Graduates from La Trobe University ‘Bachelor of Arts: Outdoor Education’, (between 1995-1998).

Subgroup 3: Graduates and final year undergraduates from Monash University Bachelor of Sport and Outdoor Recreation degree programs, (between 2001-2003).

An advertisement was placed in an outdoor education association journal in October 2003. It outlined the study and provided the researcher’s contact details to potential participants. In addition an address list of contacts was collected from the ‘network’ of graduates of these degree programs through ‘snowballing’ (Patton, 2002). Potential participants were then contacted via telephone, email or surface mail. Snowballing and making contact with potential participants took place between December, 2003 and July, 2004. In all, out of a possible 120 students who took part in the original river programs approximately 90 sets of contact details were gathered for people now distributed throughout Victoria, interstate in Australia and, in several cases, overseas. Potential participants were asked to indicate their willingness to participate on two levels:

1. Willing to allow the researcher to quote material from their writings about these experiences as an undergraduate student.
2. Willing to be considered for selection of a sample group for a personal interview with the researcher as outlined in the Research Explanatory Statement and Letter of Informed Consent.

It was clearly stated in a Research Explanatory Statement (Appendix A) that interviews would be face-to-face with the researcher, would only be conducted in the state of Victoria, and within a specified time frame. Due to travel and cost reasons potential participants who were interstate, overseas or would not be visiting Victoria within the time frame that the interviews were conducted within were excluded from the interview phase of the inquiry.

Ninety Research Explanatory Statements and Informed Consent Forms (Appendix B) were mailed out and 64 participants responded favourably. All of the participants were adults between the ages of 20 to 45, 17 of which were female and 47 male. Informed
consent gave immediate access to 64 documents, or experiential texts, written by the participants close to the time of their river experience, and every one of these was incorporated in the study.

All bar a small number of participants had graduated from their university degree programs and were not in any sort of relationship with the researcher that might be considered inappropriate for the conduct of the inquiry. However, two of the participants were current undergraduates of the Monash University Bachelor of Sport and Outdoor Recreation degree program at the time of data collection. I considered these two participants to have been in an unequal power relationship as I was both researcher in this study and the course coordinator of that degree at the time, and potentially may have been teaching these participants during the data collection phase of the inquiry. I therefore made arrangements to minimise exposure to this risk for these participants by arranging alternative assessors for their work for the duration of their final year at university. The letter of informed consent clearly stated that participation was on a voluntary basis, and at a level that was acceptable to the individual. It was a condition of informed consent that participants could withdraw at any time without penalty.

I initially tracked data by using participant names and initials. However, I decided to represent individuals in the inquiry by way of coded identification. This minimised the risk of identification of any individual in the text or subsequent publications of the research. Permission for the conduct of the inquiry in the way that it has been described above was sought, and granted, by Monash University’s Standing Committee On Ethics In Research Involving Humans (reference number 2003/664).

Data, sampling and more data

Patton (2002) suggests that there are three kinds of qualitative data; interviews, documents and observations. In this study the emphasis was on the first two of these, although observation, particularly during the interviews, did play a lesser role. These observations were recorded in note form shortly after each interview. In addition, my observations of river places through note taking in the field, has been drawn upon in the resulting poetic descriptions of experience. For van Manen (1997) the notion of ‘data’ is misleading. Rather, the phenomenologist should speak of ‘gathering’ or ‘collecting’ “lived experience material of different forms” (p. 53). I shall continue using the word ‘data’ under the caveat
that I am sensitive to this phenomenological interpretation. It is with this in mind that the participants ‘river writings’ served as ‘experiential texts’ in this inquiry.

**Participants river writings as experiential texts**

This data provided broad background material to the inquiry, and was also used for a ‘purposeful intensity sampling’ (Patton, 2002) of participants for the personal interviews. These river writings included letters, reflective field trip writings and expedition reports completed by the participants when they were university students.

I had the original copies of each of the reflective letters from the La Trobe University students for all but a small number of the students. Two students contacted me for whom I did not have letters, and who wanted to participate in the study, and one forwarded to me a copy of a field trip journal, the other a field trip log from that time. For the Monash University graduates, all who completed the river expeditions had submitted a report of the expedition, which was an assessment requirement. Ultimately 30 letters from the La Trobe University Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education); 14 letters plus one trip journal and one trip log from the La Trobe University Graduate Diploma (Outdoor Education), and; 18 expedition reports from the Monash University Bachelor of Sport and Outdoor Recreation students made up the 64 experiential texts, totalling several hundred pages of documentation.

Having gained permission from participants to use these documents made it possible to complete a long table thematic analysis (Phase D) for each of the subgroups. These are included as Appendix C. This preliminary analysis was used in three ways:

1. As a ‘reconnaissance’ interpretation for each of the three subgroups, to gain an initial insight into broad themes for both individuals and the subgroup.
2. To assist in a targeted recruitment (intensity sampling) of seven from each subgroup for the Interview Group.
3. As preparation for interviews by providing both a collective perspective of all of the material and, particularly, a detailed individual reading of the interviewee’s experiential text.

The reconnaissance of these experiential texts was a very valuable phase of the research process. It enabled me, as researcher, to reacquaint myself with the reflections and opinions of the students via writings that they had completed close to the time of the experience. In particular, several themes emerged for each of the subgroups, some common and some different. A long table analysis codes each of the statements made in the data by topic, for each participant. Collectively this coding culminates in a broad, but
indicative, overview of emerging trends and themes. It was a highly instructive form of preparation for the interview phase of the inquiry as I became alert to question participants in the interviews about subtle differences within these emerging broader themes.

I limited the interview group to a total of 21 participants (seven from each sub-group), in the anticipation that interviews would take between 60 and 90 minutes in duration. Seven interviews in each sub-group was considered manageable in terms of the volume of recorded data that would be produced, whilst providing enough diversity of perspectives and responses as to be indicative of the larger group.

Purposeful intensity sampling (Patton, 1990) targets “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)” (Patton, 1990, p. 171). Intensity sampling was possible in this study via the access to student undergraduate writings and aimed to collect data for the interview phase that was most likely to yield significant insights into the phenomena being studied, in this case participant’s experiences of river places. I was mindful of generating an interview group that represented a diversity of responses and attempted to select participants who had worked as outdoor educators since graduation (this information became available in the snowballing phase). The interview served largely as a conversational and reflective exploration based on the inquiry matrix, and an expansion of responses initially written about by the participants in their experiential texts.

The interviews

My aim as interviewer was to elicit stories about the participants’ memories of their encounters with river. The inquiry matrix and the participants’ experiential texts were the only guides used in the interviews. They were placed on the table, seat or the ground nearby for my benefit to initiate conversation, provide a coherent approach across interviews, whilst also allowing a degree of flexibility. Least of all did I want the interviews to be a kind of ‘talking questionnaire’ with a battery of listed questions to follow. Like Sammel (2003), I was not expecting to discover the participants “fixed and total understating” (p. 163) through an endless list of questions. Rather I wanted the preparation for the interview (via the participant’s written text, my unfolding understanding of the phenomena as a result of the long table analysis of the three subgroup’s writings, and the guiding inquiry matrix), to compel me to be actively engaged and responsive to the descriptions of experiences by the participants, aware that “interviewers are not simple conduits for answers but are deeply implicated in the
production of answers” (Alvesson, 2002, p. 115). Similarly, the participants’ writings were vital in allowing me to adapt the interview to each individual participant (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

I opened each interview by asking what the interviewee had been doing, particularly in terms of outdoor education work and their encounters with rivers since they had completed their studies. In the case of the Monash students who were still undergraduates at the time of the interview, I asked only about any river experiences that they might have had since their expedition experience. Responses to these questions made it possible to construct a table of demographic details in terms of current location of employment, outdoor education work since graduation, current employment, ongoing river experience, teaching/guiding experience on rivers since graduation and specifically what data had been collected for that participant. Table 4: Participants’ codes and demographic details (pp. 151-152) shows this detail and provides important information that may assist the reader in placing the data gathered from each participant in context. Each participant was given a code to ensure that their data could be reliably identified and tracked throughout the inquiry. The main body of the interview then started with a question formulated from the top left corner of the inquiry matrix, which asked interviewee’s to recall their strongest memories (positive or negative) of personal experiences from the river programs.

The interviews then unfolded around each participant’s narrative re-telling of those memories. When one line of inquiry seemed to be exhausted I moved vertically down the grid of ‘prompts’ from the matrix. Many of the follow up questions focused on the memories of subjective responses to their experiences (for example; ‘What did that feel like? Can you recall how it felt at the time, to experience that? Can you tell me a story about when and where you felt like that?). There was often a need to accept silence as the interviewee stared off into the distance (and past), before gathering themselves to speak. I noted similarities and differences between the participants re-telling of stories and events that they had written about in their experiential texts some years earlier. In the case of the La Trobe students many had not had access to their reflective letters, as they were submitted and not returned (and many were hand written). I could dismiss only one account of ‘false memory’ (when a participant told of seeing a water dragon, a reptile, on the Murray River trip – when the species distribution is limited to East Gippsland). Overwhelmingly, spoken stories in the interviews were a close match to their written precursors.
### Table 4: Participants’ codes and demographic details.

| Participant’s Code | Gender | Degree | Year of graduation | Current location of employment | Outdoor teacher/guide positions since graduation | Nature of current outdoor employment | Ongoing river experience | Outdoor teacher/guide on rivers since graduation | Data Collected |
|-------------------|--------|--------|--------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Par#1.BA(O.Ed).95.F | F/M    | BA-OEd, La Trobe | 1995 | Camp | Several (Int) | Outd teacher | Regular | Multiple | Letter / Int |
| Par#2.BA(O.Ed).96.F | F/M    | BA-OEd, La Trobe | 1996 | Camp | Several (Int) | Outd teacher | Regular | Multiple | Letter / Int |
| Par#3.BA(O.Ed).96.M | M      | BA-OEd, La Trobe | 1996 | Camp | Several (Int) | Outd teacher | Regular | Multiple | Letter / Int |
| Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M | M      | BA-OEd, La Trobe | 1996 | Regional City | Two (Aust) | Outd teacher | Regular | Multiple | Letter / Int |
| Par#5.BA(O.Ed).97.M | M      | BA-OEd, La Trobe | 1997 | Regional City | Two (Aust) | Study | Some | Multiple | Letter / Int |
| Par#6.BA(O.Ed).97.F | F      | BA-OEd, La Trobe | 1997 | Camp | Two (Vic) | Outd teacher | Regular | Multiple | Letter / Int |
| Par#7.BA(O.Ed).98.F | F      | BA-OEd, La Trobe | 1998 | Regional City | Two (Aust) | Outd teacher | Some | Multiple | Letter / Int |
| Par#9.GD(OEd).95.F | F      | GD-OEd, La Trobe | 1995 | Regional City | Several (Aust) | Some outd teacher | Regular | Multiple | Letter / Int |
| Par#11.GD(OEd).96.F | F      | GD-OEd, La Trobe | 1996 | Regional City | Several (Int) | Non-outdoor | Very Little | Some | Letter / Int |
| Par#13.GD(OEd).98.M | M      | GD-OEd, La Trobe | 1998 | Regional City | Two (Vic) | Non-outdoor | Regular | Some | Jnl / Int |

Data Collected: - Letter (Let) - Interview (Int) - Journal (Jnl) - Trip Log (Log) - Report (Rpt)
| Par#15.BSOR.01.M | M | BSOR, Monash | 2001 | Regional Town | One (Vic) | Some outd teacher | Some | Some | Rpt / Int |
| Par#16.BSOR.01.M | M | BSOR, Monash | 2001 | Camp | Two (Vic) | Outdoor teach / guide | Regular | Multiple | Rpt / Int |
| Par#17.BSOR.01.M | M | BSOR, Monash | 2001 | Regional Town | One (Vic) | Some outd teaching | Very Little | Some | Rpt / Int |
| Par#18.BSOR.03.M | M | BSOR, Monash | 2003 | Overseas | One (Int) | Outdoor guiding | Regular | Unknown | Rpt / Int |
| Par#19.BSOR.03.F | F | BSOR, Monash | 2003 | Camp | Two (Vic/Int) | Outdoor teach / guide | Regular | Some | Rpt / Int |
| Par#20.BSOR.04.F | F | BSOR, Monash | 2004 | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown | Rpt / Int |
| Par#21.BSOR.04.M | M | BSOR, Monash | 2004 | Regional Town | One (Vic) | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown | Rpt / Int |
I carefully noted how participants were responding to my questions, particularly as they were guided by the inquiry matrix. In general, much of the time in interviews involved participants telling stories generated by questions arising from the ‘experiential’ column on the matrix. I quickly found I did not need to ask specific questions relating to toponomic aspects of the participants’ stories – the matrix keeping me alert to how fluently the participant recalled or used names of places or, alternatively, how they would struggle to recall anything other than one or two major features (like the name of a large rapid). Similarly, the presence of the four existential ‘ground’ layer of the matrix (space, time, body and relation) kept me actively listening to moments when the participant recalled an event or response to an event, which offered the potential to further explore these crucial elements of lived experience. I concluded the interview by asking about any ‘numinous’ encounters from their experiences the participant recalled, if it had not already been discussed, and finally, I asked them about any particular stories from their experiences that they had told frequently over the years (that had not been raised through the interview). The interview was then closed by offering the participant the opportunity to revisit anything that they had said, or by asking me questions about the interview or the study.

The interviews were conducted at a time and place of convenience to the participant, taking me on a number of ‘road trips’ ranging across Victoria, attempting to cluster interviews in regions wherever possible. Each interview was later transcribed verbatim by myself or a professional transcriber (50% each), and I ‘proofed’ each transcript by listening to the interview again (Phase F). Interviews ranged between 50 and 90 minutes in duration with an average of 75 minutes. Individual transcripts were then sent to each of the interviewees with a request that they check the transcript for accuracy. One participant requested a section be discarded as, in retrospect, he could not be sure that it accurately represented his recollections. Collectively, the experiential texts and the interview transcriptions totalled about 500,000 words of data.

The data in this study, written and oral, made possible the interpretations of lived experience of the participants on those river programs. The crucial difference for phenomenology, according to van Manen (1997) is that the gathering and analysis of data are “not really separable and they should be seen as part of the same process” (van Manen, 1997, p. 63). “Data analysis begins while the interviewing is still under way”, suggest Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 226), and in this study this was informed from the outset by the participants’ experiential texts.
Drafting of single case interpretations

At the completion of the interview phase the 21 interview transcripts were matched with each interviewees’ experiential texts. In this eighth phase (Phase G) of the inquiry the 21 single case interpretations were completed. This process took six weeks, with approximately two days spent on each case. Each case required 3000 to 5000 words of text, and it was at this stage that the distinctive structure of representing place, and participants’ and researcher’s interpretations began to emerge. I have already outlined some of the further sources of inspiration for this style of representation. A sample of one of the single case interpretations is included as Appendix D. It was possible to be very accurate, in terms of matching the settings of participants’ narratives (for example, a particular rapid paddled or campsite used on a particular day of a particular program), by reconstructing program details from my own work and field journals. An overview of the paddling programs is provided in Appendix E, so as to provide further contextual detail for the reader. These single cases interpretations represented participants’ lived experiences through three integrating columns.

- **Place poetry/notes**: Descriptions of topography and time, location and light, place names and poetic responses, historical events and features of the field program, served to both set the scene and respond to the place that was the setting of the participants’ narrative descriptions.

- **Participant narratives**: These narratives were developed through quotations sorted and selected through repeated readings of each participant’s experiential text and interview transcript with themes and idiomatic phrases indicated. I arranged the quotations around the major narrative themes that emerged for each participant (typically three to six themes). In many cases this involved bringing fragments of the experiential text and interview together. In addition, interview conversations would often ‘double back’ to explore significant memories further, or the interviewee would make a statement later in the interview that enriched a previous account. The sources and timing of each quotation were carefully indicated in the document.

- **Interpretations of lived experience**: This section presented my re-interpretation of the participant’s lived experience. It is presented as a hermeneutic description. It outlined the main structures and essence of the experience. Considerable time was devoted to drafting and redrafting these texts. This was done without reference to theory or any other sources. As many of the participant’s had had similar experiences, or even shared experiences on the same field program, I became aware of common themes and patterns emerging during the six week period over which the 21 cases were drafted. Even so, each participant was considered a unique case, and independent descriptions were written for what could have been considered
very similar experiences. This was vital as it developed the complexity and subtlety of similarities and differences between participants.

In a smaller research project, particularly one with a narrative inquiry focus, it may have been enough to present a selection of these cases as the ‘results’, and discuss the implications of these experiential/place biographies for outdoor education. However, in a more ambitious inquiry such as this, where the intent is to search for patterns of responses for a number of participants to a range of river places, it was necessary to develop a final stage of interpretation and representation (Phase H: “Moving on an effortless journey”).

The 21 single cases were constructed in landscape page format. I wrestled for some time with the decision to revert to a vertical page format for the presentation of “Moving on an effortless journey”. Each type of format is a restriction, a limitation that the writer must work within. Ultimately I favoured the vertical page as it was in keeping with an important aim of the inquiry, which was to encourage a participatory reading of the text.

**Thematic development of “Moving on an effortless journey”**

The preparation of “Moving on an effortless journey” involved two steps. Firstly, the participants’ narrative extracts from the 21 cases were coded and themes developed (see Table 5: Frequency of coded responses for subgroups, p. 155). I sorted the extracts by the participants’ university courses, which allowed matching with the program details. In addition, it had already became clear, through the interviews and the writing of the 21 single cases, that participants spoke about three types of river programs quite differently: (1) moving water training (MWT) which included some overnight trips; (2) flat water journeys (FWJ); and (3) expedition travel (Exp.). These three categories were used to assist sorting of the coded data extracts. In total, 501 extracts were coded.

What is important to recognise here is that hermeneutic descriptions are not necessarily based upon the frequency of participants’ responses, although van Manen (1997) does advocate the thematic analysis of lived experience descriptions. The single utterance of one participant on one topic might provide a key insight to the interpretive process. However, the trend of responses and themes served to indicate those narratives that I needed to be particularly attentive to as I crafted the representations of participants’ lived experiences. Some of the minor themes indicated in the frequency table above were combined to produce more nuanced larger themes (‘Reflecting on life’, ‘Reflecting on pedagogy’ and ‘Story’ were combined into ‘Reflecting on life and river
pedagogy’; ‘Play and ritual’ and ‘The journey’ were combined within ‘River-life’). The final six themes that emerged were as follows:

"Moving on an effortless journey" – (part one): Two major themes:

**Rivercraft:** Relating to the development of technical knowledge, language and performance that participants’ felt they needed to feel safe and comfortable on the river

**Romancing the river:** Relating to a desire felt by participants to experience the river as ‘wild’ nature; as immense, powerful and enduring, and; as a refuge from modern civilisation.

"Moving on an effortless journey" – (part two): Four minor themes:

**River-life:** Relating to the participants experience of the river as an environmental resource.

**The social river:** Relating to the socialisation of the group in varying river localities.

---

Table 5: Frequency of coded responses for subgroups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>La Trobe. B.Arts (OEd)</th>
<th>La Trobe (Grad. Dip)</th>
<th>Monash BSOR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MWT</td>
<td>FWJ</td>
<td>Sub Total</td>
<td>FWJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic river:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Dangerous path</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(40)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Immense / powerful</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Therapeutic refuge.</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(74)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivercraft.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River life.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensing the river.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with the river.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on life.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy and the river.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play and ritual.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The journey.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>161</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>210</strong></td>
<td><strong>131</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sensing a connection with river places: Relating to participants’ sensory encounters with slow flowing sections of rivers

Reflecting on life and river pedagogy: Relating to participant reflections upon the pedagogic and life consequences of their river experiences.

Each of these themes is outlined in the introductions to “Moving on an effortless journey” (part one and part two), and elaborated further again at the beginning of the presentation of each theme.

The second stage involved the actual writing of representations of participants’ experiences, a process that required many drafts to complete. I was especially careful to maintain the integrity of matching descriptions of places and events, poetic depictions of experiences, participant narratives and my interpretations, as they had arisen in the single cases. As the draft of each theme neared conclusion I began drafting the ‘plausible insight’ response, which considered the significance of what had been revealed in terms of the possibilities for a place-responsive outdoor education.

It was from these sources, and with these guides, that I crafted “Moving on an effortless journey”. The final text arranged themes and insights into a meta-narrative sequence that invites the reader to participate in a journey through the river experiences with the participants. It works through the themes that dominated participants’ responses, to those that were narrated less often but are, nonetheless, no less significant, and culminates with a consideration of place, pedagogy and outdoor education.
CHAPTER SEVEN: “Moving on an effortless journey” (Part One).

So I lay my paddle quietly across the gunwales
And sit motionless, moving as the river.
And as I sit, quite and still
My thoughts are taken by the current of the river
Flowing unseen, deep below
Moving on an effortless journey
And in this way I learn to be the river
And the water, red gums and blue skies are part of who I am


The fundamental aim of phenomenological research, as already mentioned, is to ask: “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). In Chapter Five of the dissertation I explained how this task must be undertaken with great sensitivity to language, context and setting, and how writing as a poetising project (van Manen, 1977) brings us as close as is textually possible to representing peoples’ lived experiences of outdoor places.

“Moving on an effortless journey” thus breaks from the customary linear presentation of prose and the conventional desire the researcher/writer feels to fill each page with words and description. Instead, it seeks to re-animate the reader in the experiences of the participants, and in their own experiences of outdoor places as participant and educator. The writing that follows in this chapter and the next relies upon pause, silence and echo as much as it does upon poem, quotation and prose, and it asks the reader to approach the task of reading as an empathetic listener to what is revealed in terms of the lived experience of river places. Lived experiences are often complex, contradictory and ambiguous, and only by revealing the qualities and structures of those experiences that are so close to us that we often fail to ‘see’ them, or even ‘think’ them, can we hope to

23 The title for this chapter, “Moving on an effortless journey” is a lyric in a song sung to me by Greg Waddell, one of the participants in the inquiry. We shared our memories of paddling programs and rivers over home made cake and several cups of tea, and towards the end of the conversation Greg mentioned that he had written a song based on a return solo canoe journey he had made to the Barmah Forest section of the Murray River, and sung it for me with his guitar. The song, River Journey, is from Greg’s self produced CD Eclectic Journey (2004).
reach a position where we can offer a worthwhile consideration of the significance and potential of a place-responsive pedagogy for outdoor education.

The review and combination of the 21 individual cases indicated two major and four minor themes. In order to clearly demarcate major from minor themes “Moving on an effortless journey” is presented in two parts. Part one, the two major themes are presented in this chapter and part two, the four minor themes, in the following chapter. This task of arranging and (re)representing the lived experiences of participants was, at all times, guided by the data and the participants’ narratives themselves.

The ‘plausible insights’ discussion that follows the presentation of each theme and do the grounded, theoretical work of considering and the possibilities of what has been revealed for a place-responsive outdoor education pedagogy. In addition, this discussion considers the cumulative influence of the various themes and narratives as they unfold. The themes work interactively; sometimes converging, diverging, contradicting previous sections of the text, or even ambivalent to them.

The two major themes are presented in this chapter, and dominated participants’ responses in the data. They are as follows:

**Rivercraft**: The term ‘rivercraft’ is used here in the same way that others use terms such as ‘bushcraft’ or ‘mountaincraft’. It represents the learning that is required for participants to feel competent, comfortable and safe on the river whilst paddling in rafts, canoes or kayaks. It includes knowledge of technology and technical skill development, an ability to ‘read the river’ for clues and signs to choose a ‘line’ of safe passage, and the development of an activity specific vocabulary. I use the term here only in relation to the activity of paddling, and not in relation to camping on the river’s banks.

**Romancing the river**: Participants’ responses echoed the beliefs of the Romantic movement who desired and valued an encounter with ‘wild’ nature. Three elements of romancing the river were evident in participants’ responses: (1) The river adventure experience as an encounter with ‘pleasurable fear’; (2) witnessing the river as immense, powerful and enduring; and, (3) the river as a therapeutic refuge (or escape) from modern life.
Rivercraft

The term ‘rivercraft’ suggests a technologically mediated and instrumental orientation to the river. It represents the embodied learning and expressed understanding that is required for an individual to feel competent, comfortable and safe on the physical space of the river whilst paddling in a raft, canoe or kayak. It includes, but is not limited to: the physical management and use of paddling technologies and technical skill development (hence a technics of river/paddling experience); an ability to ‘read the river’ for clues and signs in order to choose a ‘line’ of safe passage down the river; and the linguistic development of an activity specific vocabulary. Interestingly, although rivercraft is a major theme in terms of the totality of responses from participants, it was largely limited to responses relating to technical training and expedition paddling experiences that involved rough, fast moving water. This suggests that these encounters not only dominated many participants’ particular memories of their river experiences, but the dominance of this mode of experience across the entire sample.

To understand the influential character of this theme in this inquiry we must re-enter the participants’ lifeworld as a student paddler learning their rivercraft. Interpretation of the data suggested three developmental stages: (1) the novice paddler; (2) the coping paddler; and (3) the performing paddler. Transition between these stages was not neat, nor did all participants ‘progress’ through these stages. In some cases participant’s oscillated and even regressed between stages. The three different stages are characterised in the following three narratives:

First narrative: ‘I was a rank novice’. In this narrative we experience again the uncertainty and discomfort of the unfamiliar river environment as it is ‘lived’ by the participant with a novice level of rivercraft. All of the participants in the inquiry who had experienced programs on rough, fast moving water were able to recall experiences that revealed the lifeworld focus of the novice.

Second narrative: ‘First of all I look at the dangers’. Here we find the participants begin to develop strategies to cope with the moving water setting through their abilities to name moving water features, to ‘see’ a line of safe passage, and to begin to embody a specialised response to the river. Again, responses from all of the participants in the inquiry who attended these programs, indicated vary degrees of comfort and familiarity with the lifeworld of the coping paddler.

Third narrative: ‘Playing with an unstoppable force’. Finally, we gain an insight into performing paddler via a very small number of participants who developed a high level of rivercraft expertise.
Each of these narratives has implications for the participants’ ability to respond to the river as ‘place’, and the empathetic, listening reader should keep this in mind as we re-enter the representations of the lifeworld of the participants. We begin by setting the scene through a poem, which sets the novice paddler adrift on the river, being swept inevitably downstream to a point where the river falls away out of sight into the chaos of a tumultuous rapid; a meeting with the river that the novice cannot avoid …

HORIZON LINE

Converging landscape,  
    wet bank boulders, wedge of sky,  
    deeply in the hills.  
The riverskin stretches, and  
    pulls her on, onto  
    a silver horizon

    beyond there, a vanishing world

conceals itself in shadow,  
    a lurking river,  
    suspends the day.

Space raises the sound of water,  
    falling steeply on itself,  
    a deep and hollow tone  
    beyond the silver line,  
    where droplets swirl, on  
    hidden vaporous breath.

Now the river darkens.  
Now the tone deepens.

Like the hunted to their future,  
    the river rushes her forwards.
First narrative: ‘I was a rank novice’

The characterization of the ‘rank novice’ was largely aligned with participants’ experiential responses to two rivers; the Big for La Trobe students and the Mitchell for Monash students. The Big River was the first naturally flowing river that La Trobe students encountered in their elective paddling program. It flows, roughly northwards, beneath The Coldweather Range, through a steep sided valley in the Big River State Park. It receives little sunlight in winter when these paddling programs were run. The surrounding ranges rise to nearly 900 metres and were covered with a dusting of snow on more than one paddling trip. The river is ‘tight’ for a group of novice kayakers, with smallish eddies, and is lined with tea-tree along the sections we paddled between Enoch’s Point and the Eildon-Jamieson Road bridge.

“this was doing something that I had done very little of and I was a rank novice and that was unsettling” (Participant#4.M, int. lines 63-65). “when I get into my kayak, I have to actually physically wrap my body into that shape and that’s quite awkward” (Participant#4.M, int. lines 182-185).

“anxiety on that trip was huge – I’d never done the river, only just been in the boat…. there was lots of people in our group, specifically females, that couldn’t roll at all and were … even over the edge for them …. Cause the water was so cold … it can be unfriendly” (Participant#2.F, int. lines 195-205).

“I feel it fairly physically … in my guts and with sort of eeaarr … tightening, tightening … I just feel a tensing up … get a bit more rigid” (Participant#17.M, int. lines 72-76).

“it wasn’t my instinct to look at something and say: ‘Oh there’s a stopper and a hole or there’s the tongue that’s the line to follow.’ It’s just looking at it and being: ‘Oh, that’s just big, white mess’” (Participant#20.F, int. lines, 122-134).

“it’s a big blur … the adrenalin’s pumping so high you try to remember what happened and all you can remember is there’s white water everywhere … that’s all I can remember” (Participant#21.F, interview lines 254-264).

For the novice paddler the craft, the activity, the river environment, even the social group, combines to become a puzzling, overwhelming mystery.

The participant must contort their body to meet the needs of the kayak, which feels tight and awkward. This tightness is carried onto the river and manifests itself in a stiffness of movements that are ill matched to the flowing water. Parts of the river are navigable to the novice paddler, similar to the flatwater environments on which s/he has already developed some basic techniques. But there are ‘spots’ on the river which are unrecognisable to the novice and well beyond his/her ability to cope. This tightness and awkwardness leaves him/her feeling mismatched to what the kayak and the water just ahead seem to demand.

The novice simply wants to survive the encounter with the water and stay upright and dry. Whole sections of the water ahead seem hazardous and stand between the paddler and the haven of the large eddy downstream, where the more competent members of the group have already begun to congregate. This leaves the novice alone with their fears and insecurities, trapped in a tightening world, limited by his/her lack of skill and ability to interpret the river. Time races and space blurs between short periods of pursuing security, which is often found clinging to an overhanging branch or the bank, as the relentless water tugs at the kayak, pulling it back into the downstream flow.

Back on the water, every stroke borders on disaster as trees, rocks, waves and even the other paddlers pass by in a blur, all potential hazards leading to a capsize …
“when I’m capsized and I don’t mean to be ... I’ve got tipped in ... it’s really horrible and ... I want to get my head straight out ... I don’t have any sense of actually being able to control what I wish – what I’m going to do next ... I’ve got to pull the deck – I want to get out ... that’s how it feels ... that’s how I see it ... the voice in me just - no” (Participant#6.F, interview lines 101-113).

“I didn’t really read the river, I didn’t know how to read the river and just went straight into a hole... went bang and flipped over ... went for a swim, um, yeah wasn’t quite sure what I was doing. Looking around, everyone’s yelling out at me, but the river’s really loud and you can’t hear what they were saying.” (Participant#21.F, interview lines 99-109).

For many of the participants the thing they feared most about kayaking and the river was the unexpected capsize in fast flowing water. When retelling these stories their bodies would often tense up as they relayed the sense of confusion and panic they felt in those situations. Moving water paddling involves environmental risks that are often unavoidable. Cold water, invisible obstacles beneath the water surface, trees and branches along its banks, all have to be negotiated by the novice. But the greatest memory of fear for these participants was the panic induced by immersion and a sense of entrapment in the kayak.

“the voice in me just - no” (Participant#6.F, interview line 113).

We now need to set the scene for the next narrative, which follows these participants as they develop their rivercraft, becoming increasingly familiar with the boats they are paddling, and the demands of the moving water environment. Physically, this required them to move onto the rivers of Gippsland, in the south-eastern corner of mainland Australia.
The rivers of Gippsland offer longer sections and more demanding water for paddlers than the rivers of the north-east, such as the Big. Both the La Trobe Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education) and the Monash Bachelor of Sport and Outdoor Recreation students encountered these rivers on their programs. The Monash students did all of their paddling here. The La Trobe students moved on to these rivers in their third year of elective paddling. These rivers flow in an ancient, complex, eroded terrain. The rounded hills and deep valleys owe their topography to time and the action of water against stone. The Thomson drains the snowy tops of the Baw Baw plateau and flows southwards where it is dammed to supply water to the distant suburbs of Melbourne. Beneath the dam wall it turns east where it has cut a deep sided and moist valley, which is home to messmate, stringy bark, tree fern, bellbird and platypus, before it flows into the Latrobe River. Together they spill into the Gippsland Lakes. Further east the Macalister is made when the Barkly and the Wellington join in the rain shadow country near the town of Licola. It meanders slowly southwards until it is dammed at Glenmaggie for local irrigators. The remnant flows join the Thomson upstream of its junction with the Latrobe.

Then the Wonnangatta and the Dargo flow southwards from the Howitt and the Dargo high plains, which provide snowmelt flows to the rivers. These rivers join to make the Mitchell, which flows south-east to enter Lake King in the Gippsland Lakes. To the north the Mitta Mitta flows southwards out of the Bogong High Plains before hooking north to be dammed at the township of Dartmouth, and north again until its junction with the Murray River. The junction of these two rivers is drowned beneath the waters collected by the Hume Weir.

That leaves only the Snowy, which flows from the summits of Australia’s highest mountain ranges. It flows east then south then west and then south again before it finally meets Bass Strait at Marlo. The Snowy is dammed near its headwaters at Guthega and at Jindabyne, where more than 90 percent of its waters are piped either into the Murrumbidgee or the Swampy Plains rivers, both then flowing into the Murray. There are many smaller and shorter rivers and streams throughout Gippsland, but these are the major rivers and those journeyed upon by paddlers.

The formation of a rapid requires two things – a river that has a falling gradient and an obstruction to that fall. The obstruction may be a ‘ledge’ of more resistant rock that has taken longer to erode than the surrounding rock and earth. Typically this will form a waterfall. Or it may be a series of boulders that have fallen into the river from the surrounding valley sides. As the river undercut corners landslides containing rocks, trees and earth will fall into the river. The action of the water will remove the soil quickly, the trees before too long, and the rocks eventually. This type of rapid represents a rock garden. Notable rapids are named, graded and carefully described in guidebooks. They might be ‘big’ or ‘technical’ or ‘big and technical’. Paddlers seek out those short sections of rivers that contain these rapids. There are many sections of fast or slow flowing water and minor ‘un-named’ rapids between the major rapids. A grading system of rapids, that attempts to objectify risk and difficulty, allows the paddler to anticipate the severity of white water they might encounter: Grade 1 (Easy), 2 (Medium), 3 (Difficult), 4 (Very difficult), 5 (Exceedingly difficult), 6 (The absolute limit of difficulty). Grades for particular rapids may vary significantly as the river height rises and falls as a result of rain, snowmelt, or dry weather.

**Names and Grades of Rapids in South-East Victoria***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Thomson</th>
<th>The Mitchell</th>
<th>The Mitta Mitta</th>
<th>The Snowy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Gorge (2-3)</td>
<td>Slalom (3-4)</td>
<td>Pinball (2+)</td>
<td>Compressor(2-3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple Stager (2-3)</td>
<td>Amphitheatre (3-4)</td>
<td>Graveyard (3+)</td>
<td>A-Frame (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boulder Rapid (3)</td>
<td>Den of Nargun (3)</td>
<td>Dislocation (3+)</td>
<td>George’s Mistake (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chute (2)</td>
<td>The Old Weir (3)</td>
<td>Waterfall (3)</td>
<td>Gentle Annie (3-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final Fling (3-4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second narrative: ‘First of all I look at dangers’

“finding the path that’s going to mean that I’m not ending up upside down in the water ... The path that will allow me to pull out halfway if I decide that I want to plan, I want to look further down the rapid if I can’t see the whole lot ... first of all I look at dangers and then I look at the path” (Participant#1F, int. lines 292-301).

The paddlers’ developing rivercraft is both embodied and linguistically constructed. They learn to see and name dangers and project an image of a ‘safe’ path (called a ‘line’) from the top to the bottom of the rapid. This is called ‘reading the river’. They develop a ‘survival’ technique that will keep them upright and on the ‘line’.

“[spot on technique] helps, but it’s not the most important part about paddling that’s for sure ... reading the river and confidence are more important ... You can break in on a brace type thing and do it just as well and safely and have fun just as if you do a bow draw, whatever and look flash. You can still do the same trip as somebody without being fully technically correct although it’s something to aspire to” (Participant#2.F, int. lines 239-246).

“[a good line is] one that has a line basically... where you can get through to the bottom of the rapid. So you’re not going to get stuck – it’s not a dead end. Something that I’m capable of. So, picking a line you know not picking one that’s got a stopper that some people might want to play in, that might not be my line” (Participant#2.F, int. lines 149-152).

Reading the river from the bank means making sense out of the confusing chaos of white water in the rapid. The viewer learns to decipher the clues displayed on the water’s surface, and gives each a name. This is a collaborative group activity. Point and name: ‘See that there, look at the shape of that wave, we call that a …’ The participant is inducted into a specialised vocabulary for the river (see below). Through this the participant plots a path down the rapid, hoping to avoid the dangers. The plan counters the assault upon the senses of the rapid - its speed, noise, foam, mist, and cold breezy winds. All this builds the tension (a mix of anxiety and anticipation) within the paddler – which shifts her/him to the edge of her/his perceived limits. The whole perspective of the rapid then changes from the bank to on the water, and the paddler struggles to remember the signs seen from the bank. S/he keeps to narrow line of safe passage through the rolling white wash ahead ... attention fixed on the narrow path to the safety of the still water in the bottom pool.

(IN CONTROL) READING THE RAPID (OUT OF CONTROL)

Third narrative: ‘Playing with an unstoppable force’

All participants in these paddling/river programs ‘progressed’ from novice to being able to cope (most of the time) with the environmental demands of the moving water rivers they were paddling. Very few ‘advanced’ further to the point where we might employ the well used paddling cliché – ‘at one with the water’. This dramatic increase in rivercraft for a few students resulted from them doing a great deal of additional river paddling in their own time. Even though only a small number of participants in the inquiry reached this level it is important to represent their experiences in detail, so as to gauge their responses to the river as place.

“when I’m sitting in a kayak I, I forget that I’ve got legs ... you’re still using the muscles in your legs to do things for sure, because you’re using them for every paddle stroke and for your bracing and so on, but you tend to imagine the boat as a part of yourself” (Participant#3.M, int. lines 229-235).

“reading white water. That’s one of the things that I do lots of in my head as I paddle the river ... I look at the surface and ... imagine what’s happening to create that ... thing on the surface, so ... what can I see, what can I not see underneath the water ... what sort of hydrology is taking place there to create that on the surface” (Participant#3.M, int. lines 148-155).

“The rapid unfolds for the ‘advanced’ paddler in a recognisable and predictable sequence of events. What had been a blur for the novice and simple line to the bottom for the coping paddler, is like a field of performance for the proficient/advanced paddler. Now the paddler takes note of passing that triangular rock with the dry top on the right as a signal to start sweeping hard to the left. Then the huge stopper on the right, snarling as s/he passes is acknowledged, but only in his/her periphery, as s/he is already positioning him/herself for the perfect entry into the chute between the two sharp submerged rocks, the one on the left with the rooster tail of water. S/he leans onto the pressure wave, already spotting the small eddy ahead. The vision of performance seen from the edge of the bank has become a series of placements in the rapid – a sequence of point like moments of fleeting recognition. Within the rapid s/he is constantly moving between placements, both going with and overpowering the flow of the river. Always s/he is looking just ahead and modifying the view. Subtle shifts in position in the rapid require abandoning past plans and performance becomes, at times, a spontaneous response to the water. The body is pushed slightly further over by a wave, but the paddle was already there, in just the right position mid-stroke at the crest of the wave to roll into a low brace and apply a little more force to regain balance. The body is executing its skills as the mind is always just ahead down river, or across that wave, seeing where s/he needs to be. In the next moment, the body puts it there.
“Because it is just a magic feeling if you are in control of the river, whatever water height the difficulty is, and being the master of it. It gives you sort of peace of mind and freedom to take the river to your advantage, rather than the river takes you over. And it took ... a couple of years to get to that level ... you have to be far more connected to the whole notion of flow of the water ... how the waters working” (Participant#15.M. int. lines 567-577).

“[in the rapid] the noise disappears. I think I stop listening. ... my concentration is no longer on the sound. The sound is ... a before thing when you come up to the rapid. But once you’re in the rapid the sound is no longer a big part of it” (Participant#3.M, int. lines 218-221).

“at that level ... it’s not about knowing the river, it’s about knowing where to place myself” (Participant#3.M, int. lines 174-175).

For only the proficient and advanced paddler …

“Paddling is often referred to as ‘playing on the river’ but I would prefer to call it ‘playing with the river’. Paddling is all about working with the water: feeling what the water wants you to do and responding to it. It is futile to attempt to work against the river as you are playing with an almost unstoppable force” (Participant#3.M, letter lines 82-87).
Plausible insights: Rivercraft and the experience of place in outdoor education

These textualised reconstructions of participants’ experiences of rivercraft have implications and consequences for the possibility of a place-responsive outdoor education. Overwhelmingly, participant responses were centred upon a need to feel competent, comfortable and safe doing the activity (kayaking, canoeing or rafting) on the white-water rapid. For many, the rest of the river and surrounding environments seemed to have vanished as their attention was drawn again and again to the regular encounters with the river’s rapids; its obstacles, dangers and risks. As one participant put it: “I guess [that’s] what you think white water rafting is – rapid after rapid after rapid” (Participant#20.F, interview lines, 222-223).

The majority of participants wrote and spoke about these experiences in much the same way regardless of whether they were paddling a kayak, a canoe or a raft. There was one important exception which is crucial to highlight. The kayak posed a specific challenge to several participants because of the perceived threat of being trapped underwater in a capsized boat. Yet none expressed this as a fear of drowning. Despite becoming quite competent paddlers, and continuing to paddle since university, this response to capsizing and immersion persists for them and significantly influences their current river experiences. For a number of the participants it is a deep and lasting fear that has two qualities; a sense of entrapment in the kayak, and a loss of feeling of being in control of their predicament and the risks they are taking. The same participants mentioned that they were quite comfortable to capsize a raft or canoe, or to swim in a rapid. This suggests that the technical ‘framing’ of the body by the kayak, with its tight fitting enclosures, is markedly different to that of the open canoe and raft.

Whilst it is tempting to think that this phenomenon and other responses within the theme of rivercraft are purely matters of skill development, the hermeneutic texts reveal that the participants were often ‘captured’ within a larger experiential struggle of learning to become a paddler. They were temporally ‘over-saturated’ with the environmental and technical demands of becoming competent and comfortable amidst the embodied and enframed challenge that paddling the white water rapid presented. This involved a more complex response of becoming an articulate reader of the rapid, which developed in partnership with the techniques, skills and abilities that particular paddling technologies demanded.
Rivercraft thus represents a “specific cultural skill” (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1999, p. 104); a way-of-being that is acquired, and has its fullest expression, within a sub-culture in outdoor education that has constructed itself around a specific river feature – the rapid. This, then, is the significance of the participants’ development of rivercraft capabilities (embodied and linguistic) and requires further elaboration in the next few pages, for the novice, the coping paddler, and the performing paddler. Each involves quite specific implications for making meaning out of the possibilities of river pedagogy and place.

**The novice**

For the novice there is little memory of the detail of the view of, and ‘ride’ through rapid, after rapid, after rapid. Memory of the experience is polarised around the confusing view of the rapid from the banks, with its attendant embodied responses of tension, nausea, shaking, hot flushes, and so on - “like a balloon is being blown up inside me that makes me incapable of breathing” (Participant#1.F, lines 215-216) - and the adrenaline fuelled ‘rush’ experienced within the rapid. The anxious or fearful participant rarely escaped from the perceived ‘grip’ of the ‘rapid’, and it infiltrated all of their experiences: “I couldn’t sleep ’cause I was so scared about what was going to happen the next day” (Participant#15.M, interview line 50). Although it seems extreme, we may draw a useful analogy with the rapid as a place of conflict, like a battleground: “it sort of seemed really like an operation” (Participant#20.F, interview line 58). The participant feels little choice in how they will engage the adversary: “Oh God, I don’t want to go down, but I’m going to do it” (Participant#6.F, interview line 387).

Some participants coped with this sense of risk and danger by taking a laconic or fatalistic “bit of a cross the fingers feeling” (Participant#2.F, interview line 168):

> It was fun for all of us, exciting and scary at the same time … I can’t remember terribly much if we were in control but we just went with the water and where it took you and we popped out the other end. (Participant#20.F, interview lines, 154-157).

For both the fearful and the ‘gung-ho’ novice paddler, the metaphorical quality of the experience of the rapid remains as a *blur*. Both time and space are *blurred* in the convergence of rapids, risks and fears. The experience of the rapid as a *blur* applies equally, if not more-so, to the river as a whole, where the calmer sections of water between rapids ‘vanish’ from memory. To draw again upon the military metaphor,
where the rapid is engaged with as in a ‘battle’, the whole river is met with the glazed
over, culture-shocked stare of the soldier on foreign ground, where street signs are
unintelligible and the local language seems like a rushing and meaningless babble.

For the novice, whose encounter with the river is a *blur*, the experience is that of
the misplaced outsider who is barred from understanding or experiencing anything much
of the wholeness that the place offers. And it would seem that the greater the technical
demands of the activity, as it is exemplified in the individual pursuit of the kayak
paddler, the more persistent is this phenomenon of misplacement. The river as place has
become subjugated to the technical activity of paddling, which has intentionally sought
out those fragments of the river that most accentuate, and thus exacerbate, the fearful
response.

**Coping**

How does the novice paddler begin to become competent and comfortable in a place that
felt so confusing and threatening? Some participants provide important insights. The
‘tightness’ that made participants hesitate and respond too slowly (both in mind and
body) is steadily replaced by more fluid and powerful movement patterns that anticipate
the moving water and its relations to the river ‘obstacles’. How does this happen and
what does it mean in terms of the experience of the river as a place? The answer to this
question is found in understanding that the participant comes to balance on a fine line
between an increasingly specialised, technical performance and the ability to name and
interpret those parts of the river relevant to that performance. This naming of parts of the
river is a rational and social act called ‘reading the river’ and it orientates the body
towards a specific encounter with the river – *picking and paddling a line*. Picking and
paddling the line becomes the crucial experiential structure that enables the coping
paddler to begin to become comfortable with the river. Yet, we might already anticipate
that such a specialised activity, constrained as it is to such a linear structure, is likely to
prove problematic for the possibilities of knowing the river more fully as a place.

A paddler’s ability to ‘read the river’ is, however, quite different to say that of an
experienced person fishing for trout in those waters. People fishing these same waters
also speak of ‘reading the water’. It is useful to analogy to explore. The trout fisher
starts with the water and looks ‘out’ to connect an ecological web of understanding that
includes which plants are flowering, what insects are hatching, the water quality and
temperature, the flow of the river, and its features for housing trout. Fishing thus
becomes an ecological and personal lesson where one must observe and participate with a particular stretch of river intensely, often for many years, (Leopold, 1987; Maclean, 1993; Stewart, 2001; Weigall, 2002). For the trout fisher, ‘reading the river’ means a search for ecological patterns of weather, insect life, light, temperature, water quality and river features, and complimenting these with stories of fishing the river in years past. For the paddler, improving their rivercraft equates to a looking ‘onto’ the rapid to identify dangers and then a ‘line’ of safe passage: “first of all I look at dangers and then I look at the path that I should take” (Participant#1.F, interview line 301). A ‘line’ is charted in the mind’s eye upon the surface of the rapid to safely navigate between the dangers that have been recognised and named – stopper, haystack, strainer, big hole, and so on. The blur has become a line, a narrow and specialised path that minimises exposure to the named hazards. The view of the river is entirely restricted and constricted. To get off line - “we got a bit off centre, right at the top and so we went … into a stopper that we … knew we shouldn’t (Participant#6.F, lines 195-196) – is to enter a world of chaos. Thus the paddler’s body and mind is instrumentally subordinated to ‘the line’, that reasoned path of safe passage from the top to the bottom of the rapid.

There are several important relations that the coping paddler experiences with the rapid as they move between, and past, secure and threatening spaces. Large eddies in the rapid provide resting points amidst the action, and the bottom of the rapid provides temporary security: “that release of tension bodily and psychologically. Just want to put the paddle down and lie down and aaaahhh (exhaling loudly)” (Participant#17.M, interview lines 150-152). Then the mind begins to range ahead to the next anticipated rapid downstream: “You have to always think further down what will happen” (Participant#15.M, interview line 218). A vernacular language develops for the chaos that the rapid represents beyond the line, and is based on the metaphor of being consumed by the river. Participants paddled down the ‘tongue’ of the rapid, and were then ‘sucked down’, ‘engulfed’, ‘swallowed’, and ‘eaten’. When things went wrong it resulted in ‘carnage’. If they made it to the bottom of the rapid they were ‘spat out’ or ‘popped out’. This language highlights the adversarial quality of confrontation with the rapid, particularly the continuing fear of losing control to the river, which is perceived as an animate being. The rapid becomes the mouth of a monster capable of ‘ingesting’ the unwary or unskilled.

On the water the mind stretches forward along the line. Where the novices were trapped within the swirling immediacy of their bodies, boats and the water, and thus in the compressed and intensified sense of time they were always reacting a little too late,
the coping paddler now can look down the line, interpreting on the run, as the body begins to deal more skilfully with its situation. We can draw a useful analogy with walking along a bush track (trail). Rarely do we fix our gaze upon the ground of each footfall – if we did we could not walk with any fluency at all. Instead we look ahead and select a path, whilst our body is already coping with the path selected some moments before, and in most terrains this occurs completely beneath the level of rational analysis. We can easily be absorbed in conversation with a partner whilst walking along even a moderately rough track, yet we can’t look away from the track for any length of time. The body here functions as Merleau-Ponty’s body-subject that comes to know how to be in its world by way of routine performance, and is indicative of an embodied knowing how to be in its place. Yet for the coping paddler that place is literally and physically narrowed and restricted to the line. The rest of the rapid is chaos. The river remains necessarily a linear world of tunnelled vision and experience; no longer a blur, but not yet the ecological, pattern-seeking relation to the river of the fly fisher.

An important part of the quality of the experience for participants at this stage was that they narrated their experiences from the perspective of novelty even though they were no longer novices. The ever rising experience curve of river challenges faced by the participant meant that she or he was on an endless encounter of ‘firsts’ – first time on this river, first time in water of this volume, first time on water of this speed and power, first time on such technical water, and so on. Again, as with the novice for whom the blur of the rapid extended to include the whole river, so the line for the coping paddler who constantly faces up to new challenges extends forwards to encompass the length of the journey; “You’re on this river … it’s like looking down a tube” (Participant#19.F, p. 221).

Given that this is the way of becoming and being on the river that most participants attained on these programs, at least in terms of rivercraft, we must ask: How did they respond to the river as place? Although no longer misplaced on the river as utter outsider, they are in ‘place’ only by way of a slender thread – the line. This is a line that is objectified and instrumentalised, and one that critics of adventure activity could easily argue is displacing through its reductionism. Participants’ competence and comfort is limited to the line they had learnt to see and name and to which their performing body grew accustomed. We conclude, therefore, that they remain largely an ‘outsider’ to what the river offers ecologically and historically as ‘place’.
Performing

In the most ‘advanced’ level of rivercraft indicated in this inquiry participants view of the rapid no longer required a rational dismantling into a recognisable line of passage between hazards that have been named. Instead, the performing paddler projected an image of themselves upon the water where the river became like a field of performance: “I’m looking at the motion of the boat coming down and … where you need to be and what type of strokes you’ll be doing” (Participant#18.M, interview lines 102-103). The paddler felt unified with their boat and extended through the possibilities that this technics of paddling afforded, and escaped the confines of the line. For the skilful paddler, being in a rapid matched to his/her capabilities was a technologically embodied performance where the paddler existed with “the boat as a part of yourself” (Participant#3.M, interview line 244).

The body knew how to react, perform and position itself (as it was extended through the paddling technologies) at specific points on the surface of the rapid that provided either the opportunity for safe passage, or for expressive play. The separations between mind, body, boat and water, that were the hallmark of the novice, and had just began to merge for the coping paddler, converge completely into one smoothed-out body/boat/moving water performance. The paddler’s rivercraft had become the ability to apply techniques and hydrological knowledge simultaneously and in a way that responded perfectly to what was demanded technically and environmentally. This performance is analogous to the craftsperson that goes beyond mere production of a crafted object to an artistic expression in the process of production (Dormer, 1997). The craftsperson as artistic performer risks destruction of the object they are making if they work at the limits of their abilities. The wood turner risks a fracture in the fine wall of the bowl that has emerged from the block of spinning wood. The potter risks the collapse of the fine neck of the vase and the uncertain outcome of the glaze as it is fired in the kiln (Lopez, 1998). Thus to call the rapid a playing field is only partly accurate as the paddler crafted an ephemeral performance on a field that wavers between threat and play. What does this mean as a response to the river as place?

It seems reasonable to say that there is potential for a response to place in the experience of paddling a river as an act of expressive performance. It is a performance on a field that is full of nuance, joy and passion: “Paddling is all about working with the water: feeling what the water wants you to do and responding to it. It is futile to attempt to work against the river as you are playing with an almost unstoppable force” (Participant#3.M, letter lines 82-87).
But it remains a highly specialised, technologically embodied performance with significant ecological and place consequences (Payne, 2003). In much the same way that the craftsperson knows the tools and materials they work with great subtlety and perceptual acuity, so the paddler knows the medium of moving water and the tools of paddling. But there can be no guarantee that they know the river beyond the rapid. Like the craftsperson who imports their tools and materials, rather than making and sourcing them locally, the paddler may perform within the artificiality of the workshop or studio. Many craftspeople, however, do develop an ecologically based knowledge that connects them to their local places through their work (Dormer, 1997; Fox, 2002), and it is reasonable to assume that highly skilful river paddlers might do the same. But there was little evidence of this in this inquiry. We are given a salient reminder by one of the participants in this inquiry that performance at this level is probably unattainable in most outdoor education experiences: “it took … a couple of years to get to that level” (Participant#15.M, interview line 570). Surely it would take even greater commitment, and perhaps it is ultimately impossible, to achieve a sense of place for the river, solely as a result of technical performance.

In this theme on the participants’ development of their rivercraft we have seen that paddlers responded to the challenging demands of the river and the technology of the boat (kayak, canoe, raft, paddles, spray decks) in particular ways, and that this had consequences for how they responded to the river as a place. For the novice paddler, the river was a confusing, threatening and disorienting place, a blur. As participants developed competence, and become articulate in naming and, consequently, socially constructing sections of the rivers they paddled. They did so by limiting the river linguistically and metaphorically to a line that marked safe passage through a dangerous and chaotic place. Finally, for a few, the river became a field of performance, a setting for a dance ‘with’, or rather to, an unstoppable force. What is indicated in these interpretations of technical performance is the structure of how the river is colonised through the activity basis of river travel, its demands on paddlers use of technologies, and both the embodied and linguistic relations with the rivers ‘places’.

This representation of ‘rivercraft’ responded to participants’ narratives of developing competence and confidence upon moving water where the program emphasis was largely
on technical skill and leadership development. Technical paddling activities and moving water river places are deeply implicated in the pedagogy I have reflectively examined. It is reasonable to conclude that the extreme demands of the technical activity of white water paddling, and the particular sections of rivers specifically chosen as places to test, extend and perform that activity, run counter to the possibilities of fuller experiences that such river places potentially and pedagogically offer. Participants were so constrained by the demands of the activity, both in terms of how it made them relate specifically to moving water challenges and the length of time it took to develop a degree of skilful performance, and thus become comfortable, that the cultural and natural richness of the river places went largely unnoticed. The adventure education paradigm and ‘traditional’ values of adventure activities demand an ever-escalating search for novel terrains and experiences. Such novelty comes at a cost.

Within this phenomenon, in the place of richness, diversity and detail, the participants non-paddling activity related narration of the river came through all embracing clichés such as ‘immense’ and ‘overpowering’ and ‘Mother nature’. But these clichés are not themselves without a significant cultural heritage that also shapes the participants’ lived experience of river places. Collectively, these responses can be characterised as Romantic in-so-far as they echoed sentiments for outdoor places that were popularised in Europe in the 18th and 19th century. These Romantic underpinnings are examined in the following theme; *Romancing the river*. 
Romancing the river

When reviewing the written and interview data in this inquiry the second major theme to emerge, alongside and closely linked to the first theme of rivercraft, were responses to experiences that echoed the sentiments and of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century Romantics. Although not particularly surprising, as Romanticism is largely responsible for contemporary Western culture’s vocabulary for the ‘wild’ nature encounter, what is interesting is the dominance and range of responses within this theme. Romanticism is closely linked with the modern popularity of ‘wilderness’ (Hay, 2002) and with the rise of outdoor leisure pastimes (Macfarlane, 2003). As a European phenomenon, Romantic sensibilities and values for the outdoors is part of the cultural heritage that settler Australians bring to outdoor places in this country. The responses of participants in this inquiry indicated three distinct characteristics of ‘romancing’ river places. Each is are represented in the following narratives and will be examined in greater detail:

First narrative: ‘A sense of fear and respect’. At first this narrative seems to overlap with the descriptions of rivercraft. But rather than concerns of technique, skill and comfort it points towards a desire for the fearful encounter with the more demanding sections of moving water rivers.

Second narrative: ‘Part of the river, like a leaf’. In the second narrative we find that participants responded to the rivers as immense, powerful and enduring entities and, in turn, experienced themselves as small and seemingly insignificant by way of comparison.

Third narrative: ‘Disconnected from society, relaxed and fluid’. In this final narrative the river is experienced as a therapeutic sanctuary, a refuge from the perceived complexities and stresses of modern society.

The first narrative is set around the site of a particular rapid on the Mitchell River, a place recalled in great detail by many of the participants in this inquiry. Therefore, we commence with a detailed description of this place …
THE AMPHITHEATRE RAPID

Many responses by participants relating to the experience of technically demanding white water centred upon their encounters with one rapid, ‘The Amphitheatre’. It is a long rapid on the Mitchell River with three distinct drops. Regardless of whether the participant was a student in the La Trobe paddling elective or a Monash student, the basic structure of the program was very similar, as it is defined largely by the river. After a long drive up into the mountains on the road towards the township of Dargo in eastern Victoria, a dirt side road begins its long, winding descent into the Mitchell River valley.

After about twenty minutes the road comes to a sharp turn that overlooks the surrounding country. The steep sided mountains are clad with green eucalypts, and ridgeline after ridgeline fold into each other it seems, away to the distant horizon. Far below, an expansive grassed clearing, part of a cattle lease, can be seen. The clearing is known as Angusvale, and it marks the beginning of the participants’ river journeys, which was almost always completed as an overnight trip.

The Mitchell River is the last major river in South East Australia that has not been dammed. The section between Angusvale and the Glenaladale Bridge, the pull out point, consists of long flat stretches of water interspersed with rapids rated between grade two and four standard. The location of the rapids can usually be anticipated by the presence of rocky bluffs either side of the river. About mid afternoon on the first day the valley sides steepen even more dramatically and there is a long southerly reach of river where the flow has been naturally held back by rock fall. The river swings in a long curve to the left beneath sheer silt stone cliffs that rise 150 metres out of the river on the right bank. This is the Amphitheatre Rapid. There is an almost overwhelming sense of ‘looming compression’ approaching the top of the rapid, as the held back waters funnel into the first fall. The noise of the water crashing onto stone is amplified and echoed back to the paddler by the natural amphitheatre of the cliffs.

Paddlers generally pull into a vegetated island of rocks immediately to the left of the main channel to inspect the first and second drops and to set up safety. Individuals are set in safety positions with throw ropes and paddlers in kayaks may be positioned below the first drop, but there is very little time to affect a rescue before a swimmer would be swept into the second fall. A portage can take place over the rocks on the edge of the rapid – but there is no easy line to paddle as the main flow takes all craft into the centre of the drop and pushes them towards a large hole on river right.

There are a series of small eddies on river left below the first drop. The second drop disappears around a corner to the left. Again the main current tends to push paddlers across to river right into a series of large boulders. Once past the boulders there are some larger eddies on river left, but the main current continues to sweep quickly downstream. The final drop consists of water cascading across a ledge or jagged rocks to the right, and then swings sharply left. Again, there is a large boulder on the right hand side that the current piles up against before flowing out into a large pool below.

The rapid is well known by reputation, and legendary stories of encounters with ‘The Amphitheatre’ have generally been passed down from one generation of students to another, and this combines with the students’ research about river heights and grades for the rapids. Collectively, the participants had already begun to generate ideas and expectations about the rapid, and the river, even before they laid eyes on it …
First narrative: ‘A sense of fear and respect’

“it’s just Amphitheatre that plays with my mind” (Participant#1F, interview line 369).

“the river itself had been hyped up so, the rapids, everyone was saying; ‘oh, they’re really hard.’ Amphitheatre, Amphitheatre was like a big word you know in my head – capital letters - AMPHITHEATRE it was getting a bit scary” (Participant#20.F, interview lines, 47-51).

Let’s take a spatial and temporal run through the rapid with the participants; at the top, during the descent, and at the bottom …

**AT THE TOP**

“at the top you’re looking down and you can feel your heart beating through your chest ... you’re looking down and it’s like: ‘Oh, shit!’ ... It’s good, it’s good and bad all in the one. It’s just like, you’ve got butterflies in your tummy and your heart beating through your chest. It’s like: ‘Oh, this is it.’ … ‘going for it’” (Participant#21.M, interview lines 240-249).

“We had several scouting boats with us that would have been the lecturers ... they scouted the river to make sure it was safe for all the boats. When we saw that happen ... it was probably one of the most dangerous sections of the river - obviously if they were setting up that much safety. So, my heart started to pound and you go through the thoughts of what if, what if I don’t make it out the bottom” (Participant#21.M, interview lines 211-219).

“Oh, anxiety. Definitely anxiety comes with that ... right on the edge ... I could come to harm here. I really can’t guarantee that I’m going to be safe and I ... probably took that risk” (Participant#2.F, interview lines 117-129).

At the Amphitheatre fear is courted for its own sake. This is not an encounter borne out of necessity, for participants could take the option of portaging the rapid across the island. But fear, for many, has become desirable. Despite precautions being taken by staff, which themselves serve to signal danger to the participants, the rapid contains genuine dangers, and therefore, real risks. The group spends a considerable amount of time standing on the slippery, rounded boulders beside the rapid. Some are being coached to pick a line through the rocks and white-water. Tension and ambition form an uneasy alliance in such a place. Peer pressure and staff modelling play their part. Few choose to portage.

The participant takes a calculated gamble, staking their well-being against the prize of a successful outcome. To paddle into the top of a rapid is to enter into a risk-taking wager – experience against the river.

“the Mitchell River when it was in flood ... was particularly vivid just because the size and volume of the water at the time and it was the biggest thing I’d ever seen” (Participant#3.M, interview lines 35-37).
‘I was pretty focused on the chute or the fall. To the extent of I didn’t really notice much of what was going on elsewhere’ (Participant#17, interview lines 127-128). ‘I don’t know that there was anything I was looking for - was just, more mesmerized, transfixed on what was coming up’ (Participant#17, interview lines 133-134). ‘the river seemed to narrow … still reasonably broad, but the river was sort of focused on this one climatic point of the river. And as you sort of got drawn into the water as it was being funnelled through this area … that inevitability of going over it became greater because there was no backing off, or getting out.’ (Participant#17.M, interview lines 119-125).

‘we were at the top and we, we got a bit off centre … so we went into a stopper that we … knew we shouldn’t. We knew we were in trouble right there, we went into it sideways and went over. My memory of it ... I just remember swimming and knowing, I guess knowing what the next bit of the river, knowing that there’s the rock there and ah, seeing [another student] and knowing that he was coming, and getting on the deck and getting to the side into the eddy and going: ‘Oh, thank God you know I didn’t go down that’’’ (Participant#6.F, interview lines 221-227).

“When it’s really flowing I know that you just can’t control it, you can’t … there’s nothing you can do, Mother nature is in control. So there was … this knowing that there was this huge thing that was just so powerful…. White water. The force of water ... on a rock. It just blew me away” (Participant#7.F, interview lines 364-373).

“it’s the noise ... it catches me ... It’s an exciting feeling but it’s a scared feeling but it’s sort of a feeling I want – I enjoy and that – and afterwards I really enjoy it – it’s like that’s why I do this. Yeah, but it’s always the roar that gets you” (Participant#19, interview lines 146-155). “it is the roar, the sound of the white water that sometimes really gets me.... Oh, like a monster” (Participant#19.F, interview lines 181-184).
Of course not all paddlers capsize and swim. Some make it through upright and unscathed. Even those that do capsize are rescued, and their equipment recovered, and reunited at the bottom of the rapid, where the whole group collects before continuing on downstream.

“Just the general excitement that you’ve made it … you’re still – a little bit shaky from excitement” (Participant#21.M, interview lines 254-264).

“I remember feeling like ooohhhhhhh (exhaling loudly) a little bit. Just ah, trying to find the right word. Just – momentarily ... fatigued. Just like floppy ... I guess that release of tension bodily and psychologically. Just want to put the paddle down and lie down and aaaaahhh (exhaling loudly)” (Participant#17.M, interview lines 148-152).

“there’s this feeling of being so intensely small compared to say the river. The river’s such a powerful thing” (Participant#3.M, interview lines 639-650).

“I often refer that feeling as a sense of fear and respect ... not the sense of fear as in ‘oh my goodness I’m going to die’, but the fear that ... people relate to fearing God or fearing ... something to the point of respect. ... rivers don’t make me nervous as such, but ... there is definitely a sense of fearing the river or sense of respect of the river before, during and off the river” (Participant#3.M, interview lines 129-134).

“If I wasn’t getting nervous before rapids, then ... I wouldn’t have respect for the place I suppose. And ... I don’t know how to describe this ... I suppose I respect it and I know that there’s danger, I’m aware that there’s danger and that if I didn’t have that feeling it would be a bit too comfortable and something could easily happen I suppose. ... It was, just afterwards it was incredible” (Participant#19.F, interview lines 132-139).

On the river the water is forever falling and turning away out of sight. Visually, it is constantly appearing as s/he moves closer toward each corner, around which the river seems to always be disappearing. The rush of the rapid passes, and the paddler recovers from their heightened state of fear and action. The large eddy at the bottom of the rapid signals safety and security, and immediately downstream the river is calm. But there in the distance, it turns away to the left, and the sound of water on stone can be heard again, being channelled up the valley on the breeze …

It is the repetition of this experience that gives the river journey its emotional quality. The emotional journey rides a wave between anxiety and security. Anxiety increases as the corner is approached. It recedes if no dangers are revealed. Or it remains heightened if dangers are spotted or heard ahead. The paddler constantly rides this wave between tension and relaxation, risk and reward.

Surviving the rapid is the descent of a dangerous path, even for the team that capsized. For most there is a happy sense of release. For others there are lasting impressions of the speed, volume and force of the water. There seems to be a dynamism inspired in the river, a miracle of something that is ever changing, yet ever recreating itself – each ripple, each reach of river, each rapid.

“you’ve always got in the back of your mind if you’re paddling a big long flat section on the river that there’s another white bit coming up and ... you can’t just, you ... gotta keep that in mind, in the back of your mind” (Participant#5.M, interview lines 326-329).

Always, the river ahead is deep in its valley, and vanishing from sight, calling the paddler on …
RIVER BEND

Shoudering the river,
the mountain dons
a cap of eucalyptus green,
pierced everywhere by a morning sun.

The river’s depth of flood reveals
carved face of bone, and
quartzite flesh,
a wrinkled lichen skin that peels
above the river’s violence.

From the belly of the range,
a place where time suspends
verdant, fecund and moist with life,
the river folds upon itself, a bend.

Rock shelving into wave,
like a shipwreck beached, and
laying on her side,
her old life glistens, with
silent history,
but no-one stays to listen.

Distance folds the mountain stream
both friend and fiend, where
final spur will shunt unseen,
the river vanishing,
into the next bend.

The participants’ physical encounter with the Amphitheatre is complete. Their desires for, and fears of, the ‘wild’ river have taken them to the threshold of their experience. Now a new knowledge of the river is held within their bodies and stories begin to ferment in their minds. The campsite is ahead, and we wonder how their experience of the river will change as they shift from the feelings of danger and exertion to the stability and security of the river’s banks?
Second narrative (part one): ‘Part of the river, like a leaf’

Two parts are needed in telling the second narrative of *Romancing the river*. In this first part, we join the group of white water paddlers in camp on the river’s banks. In the second part, we move for the first time onto the calm, inland waters of the Murray. Despite the dramatic differences in the two locations, there are similarities (albeit with subtle differences) that need to be acknowledged in the participants’ responses to the different rivers.

But first, it is here on the banks of rivers such as the Mitchell and the Snowy, away from the action of white-water for a while, that participants witness the immense, powerful, and enduring river.

“we had a thunderstorm come towards us, pretty much separating around us and joined back up and not a drop of rain on us. And I just remember sitting by that river and just being amazed by what was going on around, thinking that ... our end was to come. Like it was going to trash us pretty much, but just the most spectacular experience that you’ve ever witnessed ... that is still a very vivid memory for me. ... I’d never experienced anything like it, like a – just almost seemed supernatural” (Participant#1.F, interview lines 38-59).

“just take time out to go and sit on a rock and, observe whatever we wanted to. Maybe not even observing, just sort of letting things happen around us, and just staring into the water and watching the froth do its thing in eddies and, and its just times like that where I’ve sort of been filled with a wonderment ... we’ve sort of got our own cares and concerns and the way we pursue them, but when [it’s] all said and done, these things will keep going despite what’s going on to us” (Participant#17.M, interview lines 323-331).

The storm in the confines of the river valley is a symbol of the unpredictability and inexplicability of nature. It is encounter with an all-powerful natural force. But unlike the river, where the force of nature is experienced as threatening and unavoidable, on land the power of nature is something to be appreciated. Nature ‘spares’ the participant and the group as it rages past them. No-one speaks. The silence experienced is a human silence, as though their voices have been stolen away by the immensity of nature. A similar response is evident in the moment of ‘silence’ when a participant wanders to the edge of camp to find a quiet place alone to observe the river.

The river campsite is both a calm haven, a release from the anxiety of travelling on the river, and a place to ‘witness’ nature, in a way that is not possible whilst on the water. The experience of a stress free calmness in camp is directly linked to the heightened stresses of negotiating the river and its rapids during the day. The two extremes of the river experience are tightly linked, each intensifying the other in the totality of the encounter.

“sometimes its not the awesome things ... that I’m struck by ... the magnificent things. Sometimes it’s just the ... simple things..., the way water maybe over a period of time has marked a course through a rock. ‘How long did it take to do that?’ ... just thinking ... ‘water did that’ ... makes you contemplate time in a different perspective. ... It makes ... me feel quite like a small player really.... I don’t have much bearing on much of anything given that I’ll only be here for 70 years at the most” (Participant#17.M, interview lines 344-359).
On river’s banks the participant can take ‘time out’ from the stresses of the river, and even the social group, to rest and reflect. The river waters are mesmeric and the sensation of time slows and becomes palpable. The participant is open to an experience of the immediate. S/he is struck by the paradox of the river and its’ valley appearing to exist in a time so vast that it seems stable and enduring, yet clearly the river is ever changing its environment. The river seems to be saying: ‘I will still be here long after you are gone, doing my work of wearing away mountains, carving away rocks and carrying them down to the sea’ …

TULLOCH ARD GORGE

Deep in the range, threads a singing path, where every bend reveals a world of sheer too steep for life to cling. Beneath a plunge from cloud to liquid depth, where it repeats and arcs away, beneath a world of drift, a song a chime against the stone, a whispered word, too soft for you and I to hear. But all the time it steals away the mountain chain, grain by grain, ‘till none remain, but the mute white beach.
Second narrative (part two): ‘Part of the river, like a leaf’

The flat water canoe journeys on the Murray River, where participants felt no danger or threat from the river, reveals further aspects of the experience of the river as immense, powerful and enduring. The passage of time, as it is ‘lived’, by the participants is influential in their response to the river.

“The slow pace with which we were allowed to drift down gave me a feeling for the strength and longevity of the river” (Participant#14.M, student log, lines 28-29).

THE LESSON OF DRIFT

On the Barmah Forest canoe trips we would drive to the launching point at Morgan’s Mill on the Murray River, an old timber mill site. Arriving in the dark was a deliberate choice so that students would see the river slowly materialise in the dawn light the following morning. Then we would launch and drift downstream into the upper reaches of the Barmah Forest.

On the first morning of the trip I encouraged groups to drift as much as possible. This was intended to slow the students’ pace to match that of the river, to adapt to river-time, and to provide a contrast to the pace of life immediately before the trip began (with its demands of university commitments, social life, and preparing for the trip itself). Some students revelled in this, and others found it frustrating. It would often take us several hours to drift from Morgan’s Mill to The Steps, just a few kilometres downstream, where we would boil the billy over an extended lunch and often bake the bread that would be needed in camp that evening.

“The times when I’m sitting and just moving with the river not trying to go upstream or across the river or faster than the river. Just moving with the river ... I felt that we hadn’t journeyed on the river as, as with it ... just move with the river, the pace of the river, and go where the river takes you ... it’s just [an] amazing sense of vastness and knowing ... here I am on this river which is quite wide and then there’s this forest enveloping me but then ... if you were up in sky looking at it, if you were out in space ... you’d just see this tiny little part of the river like a leaf”. (Participant#9.F, interview lines 183-195).

“Its not a time to analyse sort of thing in a way, like the river for me the rivers a very still thing and so that peace and that quiet and the drift are the sort of crucial sort of elements, and to do any analysis being there is almost an insult” (Participant#13.M, interview lines 63-66).

Stripping participants from many of their normal expectations for the outdoor education river journey (destination, navigation, activity and technique, carefully prepared food and shelter) was intended to shift their perception of reliance from themselves towards the river and its surrounds. The slow but steady flow of the river was the initial lesson. The key components of drifting at the river’s pace often resulted in participants becomes immersed temporally into a sensuous awareness the rivers steady, enduring flow. The ‘drifter’ began to blend in, and this marked the first stage, perhaps, of become just another part of the place, like a leaf floating downstream on the surface of the river.
Third narrative: ‘Disconnected from society, relaxed and fluid’

As the flat-water canoe journey unfolds on the Murray River, with its mixture of drifting, gentle paddling and living on the river’s banks, the river forms as a refuge (or escape) for the participants from modern society.

“The pace of the trip down the calm Murray River was just what I needed to counteract all the hustle and bustle that was still in my mind due to the previous weeks rushing around meeting deadlines” (Participant#11.F, letter lines 7-12).

“I discovered, to immerse relief, that I have the capacity to be stress free – that I didn’t need to worry about others not pulling their weight ... I became more acquainted with, was able to explore, and became (perhaps) in some ways better able to express, my feelings for the natural environment” (Participant#9.F, letter lines 6-10)


“I was completely relaxed ... I’d got rid of a lot of, any hassles that had I suppose. I didn’t have to think about any of what my family were doing or what, you know, I needed to be doing anywhere else, or what the time was, or what we gonna eat, or anything. It was just completely relaxed and just taking in nature.... It wasn’t the enjoyment of what’s going to happen ... it was just the enjoyment of the moment, and the moment lasted for a long time” (Participant#8.M, interview lines, 114-121).

“there was serenity that I don’t find in other bush activity. You know walkings close, but walking still requires movement and, and sort of motoring – whereas in the river you can journey and not move, and therefore it’s quite amazing in the stillness you can have but still be moving” (Participant#13.M, interview lines 76-79).

“The experience of travelling downstream at the pace of the river gives the participants a sense of distance from life outside the trip. An envelope surrounds and sustains the experience of the river as a refuge. The river-place becomes the antithesis of modern society, which is seen as rational, noisy, crowded, overloaded, where there is no time to drift. The transition from society to the river involves first a conscious letting go, a stilling of the desire to think, speak or write, that is followed by a release of tensions. The participant has to become still and quiet, both intellectually and physically, before the river will pick her/him up as part of its load and carry her/him away to a place that seems peaceful, nurturing and natural. This provides the central paradox to being accepted by the river. The participant must still her/himself to the point that s/he will be moved by the river.

In drifting the participants feel themselves become just another small part of a holistic nature – ‘the rawness of the world’.
Plausible insights: Romancing the river and the experience of place in outdoor education

The broad range of responses gathered together in this major theme that represents how participants have romanticised the river places they experienced, indicates the complexity and even contradictory character of this influential cultural construction. The first narrative of the risk taker on the white water rapid, where the river cuts its way through the mountains, seems opposed to the third narrative of the refuge-seeking, or escapist drifter who sheds their ‘civilised’ stresses on the river slowly meandering across its floodplain. Yet these narratives are bridged by the second narrative. It contains the deeper essence of the Romantic sensibility for a ‘wild’ river, where the outdoors appears to the attentive traveller as a place that is immense, powerful and enduring. For many of the participants in this inquiry the river seemed a place that held a strong allure, calling them to return to a ‘wild’ nature. The river place had become a landscape of desire (Cronon, 1996; Heller, 1999; Soper, 1995). ‘Desire’ for the citizens of liberal capitalist societies, argues Heller (1999), is an “amalgam of individualistic, competitive, and acquisitive yearnings” (1999, p. 5):

When such approaches to nature and desire meet, they give rise to an unfortunate approach to ecology. Combining an individualised and capitalistic notion of desire with an abstract and romanticised understanding of nature, we engender a movement of people who long to return to a more pristine quality of life by consuming artefacts and experiences that they deem ‘natural’. (Heller, 1999, p. 5)

Romantic literature abounds with traveller’s narratives in outdoor places where nature was deliberately sought out for its health, educational and spiritual benefits (Macfarlane, 2003). It was the search for the sublime experience, a return to nature to rediscover meaning and lifestyle denied by modernity, that launched the ascendancy of outdoor places as desirable destinations. The ‘sublime’ denotes a heady mix of ideas that embraced temporary solitude from society, a search for self-knowledge and personal improvement, and the wilderness experience as a spiritual quest of personal discovery. The view of the crashing rapid, and the exhilaration of the storm sweeping down the valley, provided the celebration of nature necessary for the student participant, as Romantic traveller, to reconsider their relations with the world. These views of the outdoors have been promulgated in Australian writing and art since European colonisation and have profoundly influenced our attitudes, visions, and physical explorations ever since (Horne, 2005). It is remarkable that outdoor education
theorists have paid such scant attention to the influence of Romanticism on outdoor experiences.

Equally, it is dangerous to dismiss a contemporary desire for the wilderness experience in outdoor education as only a form of neo-colonialism (Brookes, 2002; Stewart, 2003c). This inquiry has revealed it to be both persistent and pervasive in its influence over participants’ experiences of the river and the same may be true for other outdoor places and how they are used pedagogically. Our contemporary attitudes to nature, the pursuits we choose to take us there, and even our experiential pedagogies remain, in significant part at least, our inheritance from the Romantic movement. Romantically inspired resistance to unbridled industrial expansion and the despoliation of nature provided the impetuous for being in the outdoors in the first place. Yet, if we believe Beck (1995), in an age of ecological risk, the same desires that led us to turn back toward nature now sow the seeds of its destruction. In wanting to re-posses nature we are in the process, he argues, of destroying the very idea of nature. So, we must ask, what is the significance of this contemporary romancing of the river for the potential for a place-responsive outdoor education? Does the experience of a Romantic river wholly deny the river as a place? These important questions can be considered by assessing the three narratives developed in this theme, as each reveals a distinctive component of the desire for the river experience.

**The desire for fear and respect for nature**

Certain landscapes became desired as places where participants can be exposed to nature’s elemental forces, and experience fear. Much outdoor education theory and practice has been based upon this Romantic assumption. It is, for example, inherent in the adventure education paradigm and in narratives of risk-taking (Zink, 2003) and character building (Brookes, 2003). However, the characteristics of what is meant by ‘fear’ require qualification. Although the experience may feel like a battle, where the river is an adversary that is “quite, quite menacing” (Participant#21.M, interview lines 207-208) or “like a monster” (Participant#19.F, interview line 184), it is not a fear that is imposed on an unwitting participant. It is a fear that is deliberately sought out, in this case by taking an elective program and by deciding not to portage certain risky rapids. In what is perhaps the first rigorous cultural history of an outdoor recreational pursuit (mountain climbing), Macfarlane (2003) traces the rise of outdoor risk taking as a relatively late development within the Romantic response to nature. According to Macfarlane, it became popular for
people to actively seek exposure to a “pleasurable fear” (p. 73); to re-experience the intensity of life that had become dulled in modern society. Macfarlane argues that the pursuit of *pleasurable fear* required the wild landscape to be culturally constructed as a *testing ground.* For the first time the sublime vision for nature as intensely beautiful became extended to embrace the voluntary experience of danger. Now, not only could the Romantic traveller marvel at the wild scene before them, they had the cultural licence to step into it and experience its’ power:

> When approaching the Compressor my body was overwhelmed by anxiety, it was the first of a series of larger rapids that we could be confronted by during our journey on the Snowy River ...we all got out of our boats to scout the best path to run through the raging water. At this point in time I was struck by pure fear ... So I gathered my emotions and paddled the rapid. Once successfully getting down the rapids elation filled my body. (Participant#19.F, report lines 49-56)

The stories that participants told in this inquiry reveal several significant qualities about embracing *pleasurable fear* and its consequences for river places. When retelling these stories in interviews many of the participants drew upon expressive gestures to either emphasise what they were saying (fists clenched, hands and arms making waves or carving down the meanders of the river in its valley, the hands clutching throats and stomachs) or to convey feelings that it seemed they could not verbalise. In addition, several participants retold stories that they had written in their letters or reports, sometimes several years earlier, with remarkable accuracy. The anecdote would unfold with the same sequence of events and the same key phrases.

Collectively these responses indicate the intensity of the memory of these experiences, where certain experiences become *amplified* over time. “Time doesn’t stop or slow down when you are in danger,” writes Macfarlane (2003, p. 67), but “we subject these periods of time to such intense retrospective scrutiny that we come to know them more fully, more exactly”. This revelation provides an important undercurrent to the participant experiences of developing and narrating their rivercraft. What appeared on the surface as an activity with educational goals of technical skill and leadership development remains a specific cultural expression of encountering wild places. Whether it be *line* or *field* on the river rapid, the participants charted meaning upon dangerous waters that had already been culturally defined as a *testing ground,* and where cultural approval had been granted for the voluntary acceptance of physical danger. It is this cultural licence, previously unexamined by outdoor educators, that underwrites the risk-taking paradigm of adventure activity and travel.
Where risk-taking continues to be endorsed on outdoor education programs we can anticipate that participants will keep bringing home their survival stories and wear them as a badge of honour: “when people say to me what, what height was it I go, ‘well there was no island at Amphitheatre. Right!’” (Participant#2.F, interview lines 107-108). These stories become “thrillingly amplified” (Macfarlane, 2003, p. 90), are intensely embodied, and dominate memories of the encounter with the river. To recall these memories is to relive them; the hands tighten around an imaginary paddle shaft and the butterflies begin to uncurl their wings again in the stomach of the storyteller.

Of course not all risk-taking narratives have a happy ending, and some ‘endings’ appear to have re-inscribed the beginnings of a new story for engaging with the river. Despite there being no major incidents or injuries on any of the paddling programs, several participants indicated that they continue to wrestle with their fears of the white water experience (as indeed I had with my own memories of the Franklin River). In particular, two participants whose responses in interviews indicated very high levels of fear and apprehension had developed strategies for continuing to paddle in the places that were the source of those fears. In each case they appeared to have negotiated with the river, and even specific rapids, a path that kept them well within their ‘comfort zones’. For example, one participant described choosing a line on a rapid that avoids more challenging water, and paddling down a river with a pre-plan of portaging certain sections even though others in the group would paddle them. This would seem to reflect both a maturity that speaks to a lack of concern for what others may think of their paddling performance, and a knowledge of the place in advance. These two participants, who articulated an ongoing passion for river places, had escaped from the alluring grip that the rapid and perhaps their peers and culture held over them in their days as an undergraduate. Both provide important clues for structuring paddling experiences for participants on moving water.

The desire for witnessing immense nature

The second narrative in this theme revealed another aspect of the Romantic experience of the river. Here we began to see, for the first time, a transition away from narratives of moving water towards narratives of calm, or flat-water experiences. More explicitly, we note a shift away from experiences that respond to technical training on what one participant called ‘technical rivers’ (such as on the Big, Thomson, Mitchell and Mitta Mitta). As already discussed, responses to these experiences dominated participants’ accounts of developing their rivercraft, and the Romantic desire to encounter the river as a
setting where ‘pleasurable fear’ could be experienced. Broadly speaking, revealing more
subtle aspects of participants’ responses to river experiences in this inquiry was a result of
incorporating the flat-water journeys on the Murray River and the extended expeditions
down the Snowy River as a part of a more expansive inquiry.

For example, in the middle section of the Snowy River expedition participants would
take two days to navigate the isolated and steep sided gorge country, which includes four
large rapids. Typically, participants spoke about this part of the journey in much the same
way as they, or others, had referred to the passage down a rapid, which might only take
minutes to descend. Like the approach to a rapid, they felt funnelled into an unavoidable
encounter:

I just remember these long, flat sections of water before Tulloch Gorge and then …
then they just narrow into these cliffs that get narrower and narrower … you can’t
see that far ahead. You can just see the next cliff wall and then it tucks around …
you don’t know what’s around that next point. Yeah, I distinctly remember paddling
with [paddling partner] at that time and us just going; ‘Oh, what are we getting
ourselves into here’ (Participant#18.M, interview lines 205-212).

The experience became defined by anticipation and anxiety about the challenge ahead:

the unknown … I think that builds this anticipation inside (Participant#18.M,
interview lines 215-216).

And, as with the rapid, there was release when the crux of the challenge on the river was
passed:

and then, before you know it, you’re out the other side. ‘We’re through, we’ve done
the Tulloch Ard!’ (Participant#18.M, interview lines 230-231).

The narrative of desire to witness a ‘wild’ river serves as kind of crossing over point,
where our attention starts to shift from the technical demands and challenges of the river
and the desire to experience a ‘pleasurable fear’, to other responses and concerns arising in
the participants’ narratives. The two major themes of Rivercraft and Romancing the river
converge, and then begin to diverge. The interesting point here is the desire to witness the
river as immense, powerful and enduring was evident regardless of the river setting,
whether it be raging rapid in the mountains or a calm meander on the floodplain. This
suggests that it is one of the deepest and most pervasive of the assumptions brought by
participants to all river places in this inquiry. It reflects, perhaps, deep-seated cultural
beliefs that outdoor education pedagogy has not yet found a way to acknowledge, yet alone challenge.

Our Western heritage of cultural ideas and myths about rivers (Schama, 1995) and river water (Strang, 2004) have been traced back many millennia. However, these historical accounts have mainly concerned human settlement on rivers and the cultural uses of water (as resource, as site of myth, as political tool, and as site of conflict over proprietary rights). What is of particular interest in this narrative of the river as immense, powerful and enduring is how the river place is encountered and experienced by the outdoor education participant as a visitor.

Some participants struggled to find words, or were even hesitant to express their feelings for this aspect of the river experience: “I don’t know what these feelings symbolise or mean. In many ways I am afraid I might destroy them by analysing them and reducing them to words” (Participant#9.F, letter lines 78-80). Whether it was the feeling of the sheer size and vastness of the river landscape, the power of the storm, or the feeling of the river working in deep time, the reaction was one of wonder (Horne, 2005). For another participant, ‘wild’ nature, as exemplified by the river, seemed miraculous and an example of perfect balance in the universe:

I’m continually blown away by the power of this little earth that has … so many perfectly balanced things happening on it. This tiny little planet that’s just exactly the right distance from the sun and turns at exactly the right speed … and all the trees grow at exactly the right height … and then there’s this feeling of being so intensely small compared to say the river. The river’s such a powerful thing” (Participant#3.M, interview lines 639-650).

Feelings of insignificance and smallness is typical of the Romantic response to the grandeur of outdoor nature, and predates the desire to be physically tested there (Macfarlane, 2003). The essential character of participant narrative accounts of the ‘wild’ river was the urge to connect to the magnitude of a larger universe, of which the river is encountered as a living example. It was a desire to encounter the world as a potent mystery that has not, and possibly cannot, be solved. Participants wanted to be like a leaf or twig, just another part of the river’s load being swept away downstream, by forces considerably more enduring than their own or even those of humanity. For some participants this search for connection was represented by little more than a passing comment or anecdote about the river’s apparent power or longevity, but for others attempts to understand and articulate it became a crucial component of
connecting to the river as place. The responses of this latter group are the basis for the theme developed later in Sensing a connection to river-places.

The desire for an enveloping nature as refuge

The final expression of a Romantic desire for the river expressed by participants in this inquiry was that the river served as a therapeutic sanctuary from the perceived stresses of modern society. This desire for the river as a place of refuge was revealed quite specifically by one subgroup of participants; those who completed the La Trobe University Graduate Diploma in Outdoor Education. This degree was completed in one year, students were generally older than other undergraduates (having already completed an initial university degree to qualify for entry into the Graduate Diploma), and their only paddling experience during the degree was mostly limited to some initial canoe lessons and the flat water Murray River canoe journey. The narrative of the river as refuge was virtually nonexistent for La trobe University Bachelor of Arts elective paddlers (despite them having done a similar flat water canoe journey in the core component of their degree) or for the Monash University Snowy River expedition participants (despite a lengthy section of their journey being on relatively calm water). There are several factors that may explain why one subgroup in the inquiry had such a distinctive response.

First, the characteristics of the Graduate Diploma group may have resulted in this particular desire for a calmer and less stressful encounter with the river. Many of them may have already made a choice about changing direction in life and returned to study to bring that to realisation, and this may have included a desire to escape from and/or simplify some aspects of their personal or professional life. Second, the intensive nature of their studies may have meant they felt more pressured than the other participants who were completing three and four year degrees, and the river trip provided a release from that pressure. The greater the pressure, the greater the search for its antithesis (Beck, 1995). Third, despite the content of the Graduate Diploma having strong similarities with the La Trobe Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education) degree, the intensity and timing of theoretical and practical experiences was a unique. Their responses surely echo to us some aspects of their learning experiences within the degree. However, these comments are speculative. What is not speculation is the dominance of the river as refuge response for this group and its near total absence from the other two subgroups, despite them having had experiences that gave them the opportunity to express similar responses. It seems more reasonable to attribute the response of the Graduate Diploma graduates to a combination of the qualities
of the particular program on the Murray River and the character of the Barmah Forrest, with the absence of the *intense amplification* of memories associated with the white water encounter. From the outset of the canoe journey on the Murray River, there was a perception amongst this subgroup of a lack of danger and hardship (real and/or imagined), that they had grown accustomed to associating with other programs. As one participant commented:

> It wasn’t a threatening environment to me … the adrenaline levels weren’t huge … it was achievable … stress wasn’t there and the risk was low. … Quite enjoyable and not out of your comfort zone. Comfortable trip. (Participant#11.F, interview lines 57-65)

Another participant wrote in his reflective letter at the time that the program gave him cause to reflect on the flat-water canoe journey as a contrast with earlier outdoor experiences in the year:

> it became increasingly frustrating, when bushwalks were planned and carried out as though they were a march, and climbing trips were just that, climbing trips. It would probably seem strange that this canoe tour is so far, one of only two (perhaps three) trips I have participated on that fits the framework I had earlier envisaged. (Participant#10.M, letter lines 8-11)

Every Graduate Diploma participant in the interview group commented upon the nature of drifting at the river’s pace and the resulting feelings of release from stresses and concerns that had been left behind. It was drifting, the sensation of travelling at the river’s pace, and on river-time, that acted as a demarcation between this experience and other outdoor experiences and their experiences back in society. The desire to experience the river as immense and powerful is consistent for moving and flat water, but the *drift* seems the antithesis of danger: “for me the rivers a very still thing and so that peace and that quiet and the drift are the sort of crucial sort of elements” (Participant#13, interview lines 63-66).

Clearly, the phenomenon of drifting upon the *river as refuge* answered to a perceived need in the participants for a release from stresses of their everyday lives. To consider the implications of this for a place-responsive outdoor education we must first understand the structure of this phenomenon. For these participants this encounter of with the river emerged as they became *enveloped* physically and imaginatively within the experience. Despite the Barmah Forest section of the Murray River being an ecologically damaged place where even its annual flow regime has been reversed to serve irrigators and
downstream water consumers, the veneer of an intact nature was enough to experience the river as pristine, peaceful and unpeopled. For nature to be a refuge, it would seem, that it must be seen and experienced as unadulterated by humans: “nature appears as a passageway to ‘consecrated’ self-evident truths; as an endangered store of unbreakable rules to be discovered, guarded and cultivated” (Beck, 1995, p. 53).

This finding is quite remarkable given that the journey was through the type of landscape that the poet Les Murray (1990b) has called a ‘working forest’, with a constant but subtle background of vehicle and chainsaw noise, cattle grazing nearby, flow regulation gates and weirs across anabranches. That participants on these journeys could remain largely unaware, or could forget the presence of these ‘unnatural’ phenomena, speaks to the ability of the envelope that forms around the encounter to act as a filter. Those phenomena that contribute to the river as refuge pass through the osmotic skin of the envelope, those that do not are repelled: “for me, when I’m on the river, it’s me and nature” (Participant#13.M, interview line 122). Why is this filtering envelope such a crucial structure in the ability to experience the river as refuge? Without it, the experience collapses, and the river would become just another damaged place, like the city. The ongoing romanticisation of nature continues in spite of ecological collapse through a persistent projection of the pristine. It is precisely this illusion that so much of the outdoor travel industry, and perhaps outdoor education, is built upon. It is as if a clock has been stopped at “an arbitrary point in a fictional past” (Seddon, 1997, p. 187), keeping the river pristine in the minds of the participants. It is, argues Seddon (1997), a “nostalgic invention” (p. 187).

Initially, this insight into the structures through which the river becomes romanticised, would seem to offer little in the way of a response to the river as place. Yet many of the participants on these river programs, more so than for any of the moving water experiences, returned to Murray River again and again, both for personal recreation and as teachers and guides with their own groups after their graduation. The ability to experience the river as aesthetically beautiful and therapeutically calming, despite lacking a detailed knowledge of its cultural history or imperilled ecology, may be an important first step towards an attachment to place. Perhaps, as Leopold (1987 edition) suggests, aesthetics and love for place may need to precede the science of rational appraisal. However, it is apparent that some participants may have slid so far into the introspective and Romantic quality of the experience that they were in danger of staying forever enveloped in the imaginary world of the pristine river; never to face the question of whether they could equally
love a badly damaged river. Participants responses to these issues are further developed later in the theme Reflecting on life and river pedagogy.

The interpretive representations and the discussions of the narratives presented in “Moving on an effortless journey”, both parts one and two, are intended to work cumulatively towards a more complex and nuanced understanding of participants’ lived experiences. Whilst the two major themes, Rivercraft and Romancing the river, dominated participants’ written and oral responses, they did not represent all of the responses made by participants in the inquiry. Four additional minor themes emerged which require consideration if we are to understand the phenomena of experiencing these rivers more fully. In particular, we must cumulatively consider the interactions, convergences, divergences and contradictions within these themes. Even so, as we proceed with the interpretation of these minor themes we do so in the knowledge that they are less representative of the whole group of participants.

Participants’ responses to the technical demands of moving water and their romanticisation of the ‘wild’ river will remain the most significant findings of this inquiry. As such we might proceed with a degree of pessimism about the prospects of a place-responsive river pedagogy. However, the aim of this inquiry was to not only ‘report’ on these dominant trends, but also to reveal the possibilities within the less obvious, ambiguous and even contradictory meanings, structures and essences of peoples lived experiences of river places. For it may be within the mundane and the ordinary aspects of experience that we find a way forward. This is precisely the potential that the methodology adopted here offers. So, we turn our attention to the minor themes interpreted from the data.
CHAPTER EIGHT: “Moving on an effortless journey” (Part Two)

In Part One of “Moving on an effortless journey”, I presented and discussed the two major, and dominant, themes of Rivercraft and Romancing the river. The descriptions and portrayals of the participants’ lived experiences revealed the extent to which their encounters with the river had been framed by the paddling technologies they were using, and also to the persistence of the values and ideals of an Old World Romanticism. By and large, these aspects of the participants’ lived experiences were considered to be problematic for the possibilities of a place-responsive outdoor education pedagogy.

In this second part of “Moving on an effortless journey” I represent and discuss the four minor themes were interpreted from the data. They are as follows:

River-life: This theme refers to participants’ responses to two aspects of their river experiences and its implications for place: (1) Taking notice of life around them (birds, plants, animals, insects) and reflecting upon its significance; and (2) being aware of relying upon the local environment for resources (firewood, water, shelter).

The social river: Whilst the participants in this inquiry did not suggest that social experiences amongst the whole group connected them to river places, their stories and responses did indicated that their experience of subgroups was influential in their opportunities to respond to place.

Sensing a connection with river places: This theme represents the more subtle sensory encounters that participants had with slow flowing rivers, and how they felt themselves first opening to, and then filling with, a sense of connection to those river places.

Reflecting on life and river pedagogy: This final theme responds to a small but significant number of participant reflections that directly addressed the pedagogic consequences of those formative river experiences.

Each of these minor themes is now represented separately. The plausible insights discussions that follow each theme continue the collective work of considering the greater complexity of participants’ lived experiences as they unfold through the meta-narrative.
River-life

Initially it was tempting to logically conceptualise the theme of *Rivercraft* as incorporating all aspects of learning to live comfortably whilst journeying along the river; reading its waters, navigating its flows and camping on, and exploring its banks and surrounds. However, as this inquiry has already revealed, these aspects of the experience were, by and large, either not reflected upon at the time or have faded from participants’ memories, for the white-water programs. Therefore, the theme of *River-life* draws almost exclusively upon participants’ responses to the Snowy and Murray river journeys, which were typically ten and five days in duration, and where a focus on developing technical paddling competence was only a relatively minor component (on the Snowy) or non-existent (on the Murray).

What is meant then by the term *River-life*? In general terms it refers to a cluster of responses and stories in the data that relayed what was significant to participants as they learnt to live within the river environment. Three narratives emerged:

**First narrative:** ‘Looking beyond river, beyond the activity.’ In this narrative we encounter the awareness of participants shifting away from the activity of paddling down the corridor of the river. It is a crucial first step that pre-empts the following two narratives.

**Second narrative:** ‘The ebb and flow of what was occurring.’ Here we see the participants developing particular rituals and routines as they become accustomed to life on the river and its banks as the journey unfolds.

**Third narrative:** ‘I’ve got to stop and watch and learn.’ Finally, we see how other life in, on and around the river begins to reveal itself to some of the participants on their river journeys.

Collectively these narratives offer some startling insights into the participants’ responses to the river places they experienced via the paddling programs. As we will see, some of these experiences can be interpreted as offering participants the opportunity to begin to become emplaced within the river and its surrounding life, while others continue to limit their ability to dwell in the river as place.
First narrative: ‘Looking beyond the river, beyond the activity’

“the nature of the moving water river ... becomes a strong focal point, and it’s taken me a long time to get to the point where I can drift down the river and not really care which way my boat is pointing and be looking up at the trees and take notice of the birds and what’s actually happening in the river underneath me…. I think for me, at any rate, it took a long time to move from that point of being very focused on the river and what I was doing to having the space, the mental space, to be able to look beyond the river, beyond the activity.” (Participant#4.M, interview lines 552-559)

“you are more immersed in the whole environment rather than in the river and the water and what’s ahead of you. So you look around at the beaches, you look around on the hillsides, and you look around at the vegetation. So you take a lot of other things in – the smells, the noises. So I think you are far more open than just the technical side of it, to somehow stay upright and master the next piece of river” (Participant#15.M, interview lines 131-137).

“the Snowy ... I guess after about day four ... all the anticipation of getting on the river’s been negotiated, you’re actually out there now and you’re getting used to your lunches on the rocks ... maybe having a brev at lunch and getting down to ... having dinner. And ... a couple set up the tarp, someone does the emptying of the barrels to get out tonight’s dinner and the few other people are dragging boats up. And just the almost, not the chores of life, but the regularity of life that you need to do” (Participant#18.M, interview lines 147-157).

“cause we’re going down the Snowy River we’re exploring and to go without a stove makes ... you don’t know the outcomes. Don’t know exactly what’s gonna happen. Not only don’t you not know what’s gonna happen on the water, but at then end of the day you’ve got to make sure you’ve got wood to cook your dinner, and I suppose that’s a bit more like the explorers of the past ... If we had had a stove, I think it would have lost that bit of a touch ... collecting wood and making sure the fire’s right. It was a great skill to learn” (Participant#16.M, interview lines 261-270).

The participants’ awareness of a wider life (theirs and other beings living near and on the river) begins through a loosening of the grip of the technical activity of paddling down the corridor of the river. The potential for this widening of awareness seemed available from the outset on the Murray, and in the calmer sections of the Snowy both above and below the gorge. In both cases the meaning of the design of the boat seems to disappear, and it becomes just a floating vehicle. Participant responses from kayaking experiences are notable for their absence here.

Two types of experiences of river-life begin to emerge. The first is a landscape gaze – a spectator’s view of surroundings as concern comes away from the demands of the river and the activity to take in certain aspects of the surrounding environment (such as topography, vegetation cover and more obvious wildlife). The second is participatory, and involves the river travellers having to develop and refine practical actions that sustain their lives on the river’s banks (such as lighting a fire, unpacking, cooking a meal, building a shelter). Collectively these actions are dependent upon the environment and establish a dwelling on the river’s edge.

Awareness shifts from the activity of paddling the river to activities whose meaning easily slides beneath conscious analysis. These activities, like boiling a billy of water, reek with the smell of the ‘everyday’, and are rich in potential meaning …
THE LESSON OF THE TWIG FIRE

From beneath a fold of bark
and the hollow in a tree,
beneath a fallen log, that lies
in a sleeper cutter’s dream,
I curled a fist of grass,
brittle twigs and leaves.

There, on a bullocky’s fire scar,
beneath the dripping trees
we kindled the small flame to life
from a candle stub, and
smelt the river’s history
in that first faint hint
of curling smoke.

You cleared the nearby ground
of fallen branches, each
no thicker than your thumb.
In summer one might leap to life,
uncurl into a snake,
but there they built the fire
‘til it part the smoke,
with its own heat.

On that winter morning
with the billy from the river,
you warmed your hands,
stared into the flames, and
a curl of steam rose
from your jacket cuff.

Then the billy hissed and spat
‘Watch this – the timing matters.’
Left hand lift the billy clear, as right
cast leaves across the surface
of a rolling boil.
‘Just right.’
The leaves uncurl, and
stain the water the
colour of a mountain stream.

Pouring the steaming brew in
chipped china mugs, their
broken handles lost upriver,
I remember. I remember
cold lips shocked by
heat and bitterness, and

a final curl of smoke,
the twig fire now
a tiny mound of white ash.
Second narrative: ‘The ebb and flow of what was occurring’

As the experience deepens participants become aware that they new knowledge and practices are needed if they are to live well on the river and its banks. They must adapt to the specific demands of this place.

“having a lunch break coming down the Snowy – we’d pick a beach where it was a still section of the river bank and pull in and, just out of sort of force of habit became, we put … something in at the waterline. We’d become accustomed to needing to know, or desiring to know, what the river was doing. Just so we could make, you know, better choices and know what was happening. Because prior to us leaving on the Snowy there’d been quite a lot of water fall up in the headwaters area, and we just were sort of wanting to monitor what was happening where, where we were paddling. … So things can happen subtly – there’s subtle changes going on around us and, and … I found myself thinking, ‘unless you take specific notice of what’s going on it can slip by you pretty quickly and um, you might miss something that you might regret having missed’… the ebb and the flow of what was occurring” (Participant#17.M, interview lines 172-192).

“it’s amazing how nature works … there’s so much in nature that I need, I should, I’m still to learn and but how much nature is teaching me by being in the environment” (Participant#19.F, interview lines 519-530).

There is a high degree of satisfaction felt in learning to live life on the river and its banks. Routines and rituals emphasise reliance upon the river; a billy of water boiled on a driftwood fire, a large river stone an anchor point for the tarpaulin shelter, a small stand of regeneration wattles on the white sand beach provide shelter. A small stick planted on the edge of the river at the waterline will indicate whether the river is rising, falling or steady, and at what rate.

Knowledge obtained from this simple stick-gauge expands the world beyond the immediate section of river in view. On a river the participant can always look ‘back’ upstream where s/he has come from, and downstream where s/he will be going, but the view is limited by the river’s turns. The work of the stick is to tell what is happening to the river outside the world of immediate vision. The water level on the stick gauge rises two centimetres over lunch. It’s been raining somewhere upstream. Water has gathered and made its way into the river to flow down to this point. Downstream – after lunch – tomorrow – the river is rising. Rapids, campsites, portages, the rate of travel, are changing due to the message given by the little stick. This simple technology expands the ‘here’ and ‘now’ to the ‘there’ and ‘then’ …

RISING WATER ON THE SNOWY

Open country. Huge sky.
Downstream fair-weather cumulous.
Upstream slate-grey stratus.
“look mate, rainin’ somewhere”
Granite boulder. Bleached white.
Smoothed in the river’s deep time, on valley flanks the cypress pine, are ordered in their ranks.
Far away. Mountain fold.
Turns in its shadow, as a wall of wattle drifts away, and the river’s surface of silver swirl.

Arrive at camp,
read clouds and bending tree,
ask the waters coming down,
poke a stick into the sand,
“right on the edge, mate, right on the edge” where the river pulses its simple geometry.
Shoreline. Very Edge.
Black flecks of bark, white reed, drift in waters dark
cling to toes, and then are free drifting downstream, away on the rising river.
It has the pleasure of the shanty, and
the falling down shack,
it is flotsam, edge and haste.
Cool breezes wait
no invitation
to fill its rooms,
and the musty smell of rain, and
stone and leaf,
curls beneath its canopy.

Pitched cross wombat paths, and
goanna sign,
it listens, to
wind and rain and even small ‘roos,
who snuffle past its luffing roof.
Artful dodgers avoid low spots,
where rain puddles pool, and
in the night,
beneath a darkened moon,
eight bodies curl in their cocoons,
breathing quietly, under
the tarpaulin democracy.

"simple things like when these
thunderstorms came with the lightening, and
it was ... the activity that took place to try to
rescue our tarpaulins that were blown all
over the place and try to find sheltered area
further up ... just doing those things
together where there was a hint of adversity
and, and, and coming through it unscathed
... Cause there was some trepidation about
it I guess.... Given that we didn’t have tents
and it was all pretty much jury-rigged sort of
stuff that we had. But just the enjoyment of
the immediacy of the threat subsiding and
putting it all together in the gusting wind,
and as primitive as it was, just being able to
create this little shelter, and doing it together
and talking about it and enjoying the fact
that we’d done it together. And the next
morning the joking and the banter about how
we went about it and; ‘Oh, [you] you looked
like this’. You know ... just the shemozzle
that it must have looked like if you were
looking down from on top. But just the ...
different things that it brought out in people
and the ... different personalities, the
different strengths, the different combination
of all these things and, the learning about
people ... it was like an altered sort of social
sort of microcosm there” (Participant#17.M,
interview lines 447-476).

"it does give the people or participants more experience because if you sleep under a tarp, which
is open you know, you smell the cold, you feel the breeze on your face – and a lot of people don’t
do that anymore. They are not having these sort of senses anymore. ... You want to have that
breeze in your face, you want to smell things, you want to get the notion of cold, warm ... and you
only get it under a tarp” (Participant#15.M. interview lines 738-745).

River life poses a string of challenges that provide an enjoyable ground for experimentation and
shared experiences that become the basis of stories told later on. The threat of the storm calls for
immediate action and the application of skills and knowledge. Like a jury-rigged sail on a sailboat,
which is made out of damaged equipment, the joy of the construction of the shelter is in its
improvisation. It is also the spirit of working together as a team to solve the problems that the
storm brings to their lodging on the river’s edge. Building the tarpaulin shelter extends the small
group into a community in a way that was not possible on the water in the individualised
performances of kayak, the pairs of canoeists or the subgroups of rafters. Sharing the simple, open
sided shelter of the tarpaulin creates an intimacy amongst group members and also with the
environmental surrounds, and is an experience that is simultaneously social and ecological. The
successful tarpaulin shelter is both an egalitarian and ecological act of applied knowledge.
Third narrative: ‘I’ve got to stop and watch and learn’

The paddling group’s life on the river is surrounded by the life of the river. There are fleeting encounters where wildlife is glimpsed as it flees from the boisterous group.

“Hearing birds, in particular the bell birds, witnessing the emus drinking from the river, the dragon lizards, goannas, snakes, ants and swans was amazing. The abundance of wildlife present within the Snowy River environment was remarkable, and certainly deepened the friendship between the environment and I” (Participant#19.F, report lines 69-73).

“While paddling down the Snowy River we came across adult swans mothering their chicks. As we got closer to the family of swans the little chicks would panic and frantically swim in any direction to escape our presence. The parent swans would then make a barking call to the signets (sic) and attempt to round them up in effort to rescue them from our presence, which they sensed as dangerous …. I found the experience moving. I sympathised with the adult swans need together and calm the signets (sic)” (Participant#19.F, report lines 73-78).

“I recall seeing a platypus for the first time ... we paddled to the left of a small island in the middle, and it was a little bit of a backwater ... I was the front boat, paddling solo I believe, and I saw a platypus right in front of me, bob up and down a couple of times, and then disappear ... that’s the first time I’ve seen a platypus in the wild, and I was thrilled about it. I’m sure I would have written it in my log. I could look back on my log and I could find that platypus there” (Participant#12.M, report lines 140-148).

So, quite often there, you cross paths with those animals or plants and that’s the point - to take notice. But you have to say well, I’m not actually in a hurry to get from A to B. I’ve got time to stop and to watch and to learn. And then it’s a layering thing, it’s not one chunk of knowledge that you suddenly acquire. I think it’s learning over time” (Participant#4.M, int. lines 530-539).

Encounters with wildlife are fleeting and more often than not the participant seems to surprise wild life that is then simultaneously revealing itself for view as it retreats from the presence of the paddling group. There is the sensation that it is the participants who is invading the home of these wild animals, reminding the participants that it is the animals, not the participants, who belong to the river. The participant may be reminded that they are the visitor and intruder, and that things will return to normal for the animals once the group has passed by and disappeared around the next bend. The occasional, more prolonged and significant encounter with wild life occurs when the imposition of time and the group can be temporarily suspended, most often when the participant is alone, and when encountering wild life becomes the reason for being there, not an incidental accessory of the experience …
AZURE BLUE KINGFISHER BY A RAPID IN WINTER

On a white morning,

you hide in an overhanging branch, that
trails a ripple line in the water.
I drift into your awareness,
spinning upstream in the eddy.

The backwash draws me to you,
to your azure blue cap,
to your tawny breast,
and your dagger beak,

‘til I am floating in your black-eyed gaze.

Each of us settles,
stilled across a space of knowing …
yet it is the same river’s edge,
that draws us here,
onto the standing wave, of
each other’s surveillance.

Then a shock of red, a
rush of loud voices
twist down the eddyline.
The rafters gasp at cold water splash, and
laugh at the game of it all.

My gaze falters,
the twig now empty –
shivers.
Plausible insights: River-life and the experience of place in outdoor education

On the longer river journeys along the Murray and Snowy rivers, particularly where there was an absence of perceived threat, most participants were able to escape from the technical and corridor perspectives of river travel, and began to recognise the significance of experiences not directly associated with the activity of paddling. Some of these experiences; such as boiling a billy of water on a small fire, pitching a tarpaulin for shelter, or seeing a waterbird take off from the river downstream, seem so ordinary, fleeting and even mundane that their significance has often escaped the consideration of outdoor educators. Experiences such as these contribute to the ‘everyday’ background of lived experience on the river journey as they replace the regular routines of life back in society. As one participant put it, being on the river was,

definitely a way of life. Whether or not you want to do it forever … I don’t think. But you soon forget about what’s going on back home and … all the … things that you might consider essential back home. The internet, e-mail, other people’s thoughts … No, it’s enjoyable” (Participant#18.M, interview lines 163-167).

It has to be remembered that in this inquiry virtually all of the participants were already adept at living in the outdoors and had established skills and routines utilising outdoor products that made it possible for them to live comfortably in the outdoor environment. They could already pitch their nylon dome tent, and cook their pre-packaged meal on a lightweight liquid fuel stove, and they had already learned to share tasks with one or two others. But both the Snowy River expeditions and the Murray River journeys through the Barmah Forest deliberately undermined these ways of being in the outdoors. Tarpaulins were taken instead of tents, unprocessed group food replaced pre-packaged food, and stoves were regularly left behind. Aldo Leopold had already elaborated a simple philosophy of this approach well when he wrote in 1949, that,

outdoor recreations are essentially primitive, atavistic; their value is a contrast-value; that excessive mechanization destroys contrasts by moving the factory to the woods or to the marsh. (1987 edition, p. 181)

For one participant on the Murray River trip; “it was a simplification of being in the bush” (Participant#4, interview line 205). Many commented upon pitching the tarpaulin, and taking joy in the act of improvising shelter, and then sharing that communal space. Not
only did the tarpaulin shelters become the space for storytelling, they sometimes became
the subject as well. The intention on my part in structuring the programs in this way was
twofold. First, I wanted participants to have to learn how to live on and by the river
without the usual commodified trappings of the outdoor industry (as far as possible), and I
wanted them to come to rely upon the places they were travelling through for water, heat
and shelter. In doing so I hoped that by ‘changing the basics’ there would be room for
spontaneity and creativity on the part of the students as they learned to live well with the
river. As another participant mentioned in relation to the Murray River journey:

you do get into a routine and you do get into a rhythm, and … your body does sort of
become accustomed to the day. Not as in time, not as in mechanized time, but as in
you know, morning, mid-morning, afternoon, late at night. Time as you would
normally live it … became inconsequential. … you’d wake up with the light and …
the bird calls, and you’d be up, get ready, get packed, eat on the river.
(Participant#10.M, interview lines 158-170).

But what was the significance of this for participants in experiencing the river as place?
Again, a phenomenological orientation to such a question requires us to go beyond the
more obvious instrumental values for our actions, so that we can begin to understand how
those actions structured the lived experiences of participants. It would be worthwhile
examining many aspects of living by and with the river from this perspective, such as
personal hygiene or the consumption of water and food, and the role they play in the
outdoor education experience. Yet there would seem to be an almost total absence of
interest in such fundamental human experiences in outdoor places by researchers and
theorists.

In the theme of River-life it was possible to see how participants familiarised
themselves relatively quickly to daily tasks, and the obvious enjoyment that most took in
doing them. Some of these tasks, as they would in participants’ homes, quickly became
routine and even ritualised, making it even more likely that we may miss their significance
in shaping the experience. For example, boiling a billy of river water on a twig fire and
planting a small stick on the river’s waterline to serve as a river height gauge, are two
examples of river-life routines whose meaning goes far beyond obtaining a hot drink or
providing a river height report. Both actions are potentially brimming full of natural, social
and cultural significance and consequences and are worthy of our attention as outdoor
educators.

The basic, and instrumental, function of the gauge-stick is to connect the participant
to the river in a way that is not immediately possible in an embodied sense. The constant
changes in river flows could easily elude the participant because they are not sudden or spectacular. Pulling into camp one of the first actions performed is to plant a small stick in the sand on the waterline so that in a few hours time the participant can check to see if the river is rising, falling or is maintaining a steady level of flow. Sadly, this has become largely irrelevant on the Murray, which is now carefully regulated, but remains important on the Snowy as, despite it also being dammed in its headwaters, its flows can still fluctuate significantly. This has real consequences for the group, especially as they approach the isolation of the gorge country. “Things happen subtly – there’s subtle changes going on around us,” commented one of the Snowy River participants (Participant#17.M, p. 186-187), recalling checking the gauge-stick and noting a rise in river level. To note those changes is to stretch the imagination well beyond horizon upstream to where rain might be falling, and simultaneously days downstream where it is possible to imagine rapids intensifying and even becoming impassable in flood.

To be on such a river, walled in by its steep sided gorges is to feel deep ‘in’ the earth and physically isolated and remote from the world ‘outside’. Backtracking upriver is impossible, and climbing out of the gorge would be extremely difficult. That the journey is possible at all becomes largely dependant upon the flow of the river itself, and the participant who was aware of this became attuned to the ecological dynamism of the place through the improvised technology of the stick.

In such a scenario, with the river rising and the group camping in the depths of the gorge, some participants became aware that their destiny had become physically linked to the ebb and flow of the river’s waters. This is an experiential lesson in dependence upon place that may start with a subtle observation and then expands appreciation outwards to potentially include the entire river’s watershed:

It always, just amazes me just how a river … rose a metre overnight … I know there’s the catchment and that – but just seeing it, just seeing and you’re continually just sitting there at lunchtime and you have a stick in and within an hour how much it had risen … it’s amazing how nature works … it makes you really think about the processes involved, and all this rain and all this water, where it’s going. (Participant#19.F, interview lines 519-524)

The ecological lesson epitomised by the gauge-stick seemed to be one that was recognisable to many participants: “I try to see the whole landscape … I haven’t always done that … it’s not just water running down a conduit … there’s lots of interactions and relationships” (Participant#17.M, interview lines 301-304).
But few participants commented upon the significance of such seemingly mundane experiences as drinking a cup of tea made from river water and the inherent lesson of our physical dependence upon the river. One participant wrote that, “our choice and philosophy to keep to basics such as cooking on an open fire and using minimal shelter such as tarpaulins added an element of reliance on the land and the river” (Participant#16.M, report lines 12-13). But in the later interview expressed this reliance in fairly instrumental terms: “If we had had a stove, I think it would have lost that bit of a touch … collecting wood and making sure the fire’s right. It was a great skill to learn” (Participant#16.M, interview lines 261-270). Another participant came close to representing an appreciation of this fundamental level of connectedness to the river by adapting a popular saying: “there’s that funny saying about the history of the world [being] in a cup of coffee and in a sense there’s a history of the river is in a billy of water of the river” (Participant#4.M, interview lines 640-642).

We gain some clarity on how and why such ‘everyday’ phenomena slip beneath our conscious attention by recalling Gibson’s (1986) theory of affordances – an ecological approach to visual perception. The affordances of an environment are “what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (p. 127). Humans have been particularly successful as a species, Gibson argues, at making available those affordances that benefit them and making less pressing those that harm them.

For a terrestrial animal such has the human, the riverbank is immediately recognisable for what it affords; a flat rock to use as a bench, a level place to lie down, easy access to water, or a tree to which a tarpaulin line might be tied: “The basic affordances of the environment are perceivable and are usually perceivable directly, without an excessive amount of learning” (Gibson, 1986, p. 143). Unlike the rapid which had to be actively colonised through technology, technique and language, the river bank is immediately perceived as a possible campsite. It is already familiar. This reciprocity of perceiver and environment (Gibson, 1986) requires a special effort to re-examine the mundane; to question the meaningfulness of the everyday.

The examples of building the tarpaulin shelter and encountering wildlife also provided an interesting contrast which illustrates how the experience of river-life had potential to both connect and distance participants from the river as place. The joy of improvising the tarpaulin shelter was commented upon by many participants, but narratives of encounters with wildlife were far less evident. Within the data there were some extraordinary stories of wildlife encounters, such as birds landing on canoes, or waking up next to grazing kangaroos, yet such encounters almost always occurred when
participants were alone and on personal trips undertaken after their university paddling programs. Responses to seeing wildlife on the paddling programs almost always referred to wildlife as it was disappearing from view (the duck lifting from the river’s surface and flying away, or the platypus glimpsed diving in the river).

The two experiences contrast as one is participatory and the other spectacle. Dwelling on the river’s edge, as epitomised in the construction of the tarpaulin shelter, involved an immediacy in response to local terrain, which Edward Casey (1993) has called a dwelling-as-wandering. On the other hand, glimpsing wildlife that was already retreating, whilst gratifying, did not seem to offer a level of engagement that resulted in the kind of detailed narratives typified by nature writers such as Aldo Leopold, Annie Dillard and Barry Lopez. It was not the wildlife experience that was fleeting (or perhaps fleeing) in these brief encounters so much as it was the participants who quickly drifted on, or turned away to another task that seemed more pressing. The kind of lengthy and solitary devotion necessary just to ‘see’ wildlife, as exemplified in Dillard’s (1975) story of spending a year learning to stalk muskrats, Lopez’s (1978, 1986) many years in the field attempting to understand how the lives of arctic animals and peoples are indebted to each other, or Leopold’s year-long reflection upon the wild birds and animals that shared his run down farm, does not appear to have been encompassed within the experiential domain of the outdoor programs in this inquiry. Perhaps there was a brief introduction to a reluctant wildlife, but familiarity will take much greater commitment and time.

The idea that participants sustained themselves as they consumed part of the environment to make heat and in ingesting water from the river would seem to be a classic example of routine and habit sliding beneath awareness. The lesson of the immediacy of dependence upon the world, where it has not been abstracted through gas lines, electric cables or plumbing pipes, remained either unnoticed or too subtle for articulation by the participants in this inquiry or, I was unable to access these memories as interviewer. I suspect that the absence of these responses indicates a further dimension of these types of experiences that is, as yet, unrealised, and requires further study. As such we might think of these narratives of river-life as the first steps into a dwelling-as-wandering, an art of living in outdoor places that requires considerable commitment, time and experience. Perhaps the level of pedagogic commitment that goes into the development of technical paddling competence; the detailed knowledge of sequencing and progression of skills and desirable locations, requires re-direction to wider parameters of the river experience.

The three narratives within the minor theme of river-life represent a shift in focus away from the immediate corridor of river travel and the technological framing of the
participant through paddling activities, to experiences of the river as an environmental resource. The aesthetic pleasure of the wildlife spectacle, and the utilisation of nature to meet the group’s basic needs have widened the scope of the river as place. But it is doubtful that it is yet a firm enough foundation on which to build a place-response pedagogy.
The social river

The three previous themes have shown that we cast many layers of meaning upon the surface of the river’s waters, including aspects of our personal histories, technical ambitions, cultural legacies and desires, and our environmental imperatives. These layers influence and direct the interpretations of our experiences. The data suggested that socialisation within the paddling group was another layer, albeit of lesser influence, through which the river experience was ‘lived’.

Socialisation, with its notions of group dynamics, bonding and team building, is claimed as one of the important and beneficial outcomes of outdoor education, and therefore requires consideration. What is of interest in this inquiry are the ways that socialisation, within the whole group or within subgroups either limited or afforded a response to the river as place. Two narratives within the theme emerged that provide potential for insights:

**First narrative:** ‘The river sort of bares people.’ In this narrative we see how social phenomena such as gender, competition and work were felt to impact upon and limit some participants’ experiences on the river journeys.

**Second narrative:** ‘I think that’s about being comfortable with the person.’ Largely in response to experiences that are reflected in the first narrative, some participants developed social arrangements within the larger group that enhanced their experience of the river and the river journey.

The theme of River-life has already shown us that the encounters with wildlife are often fleeting and solitary, possibly compromised by the presence of the larger group. Yet equally there were times when the group appeared to work well together to negotiate rapids, pitch tarpaulins and cook meals. However, the phenomenological orientation of this inquiry requires us to dig a little deeper into meaning and structure of these social experiences and participants’ memories of their influence. We begin with a poem which recreates an image of the shared experience beside river …
THE SMELL OF PARTICULAR WOODSMOKE

On the edge,
   between river and forest,
   we circle.

Ringed by loud words,
   tucker box, billy,
   camp oven ‘n old welder’s glove,
   a shovel of red coals,
   the smell of baking bread, and
   the bitterness of tea.

Meaty things sizzle
   on an old iron plate
   swinging from its post, while
   beyond the firelight circle
   the river whispers.

Yarns are spun, and
   stories ‘n even
   fireside philosophy,
   ‘til we run dry of talk
   ‘til the coals glow
   ebbs with the dark tide.

Vaulting over decades
   the smell of particular wood smoke
   will reach down and
   pluck me from the years.

Where I find myself
   staring into middle distance,
   seeing myself sitting
   inside that ring of friends,
   the whisper of the river, there
   beneath the everyday.
First narrative: ‘The river sort of bares people’

Group sizes on the paddling programs varied from as few as six on the Snowy River expeditions to 15 on some of the Murray River trips. On the La Trobe paddling elective programs there were typically about ten participants. The responses in this first narrative have been drawn participants experiences with the larger groups.

ON THE MURRAY

“any sort of negative thoughts that would come to mind if I thought about that trip would be to do with the social interaction within the group” (Participant#9, interview lines 47-49) “Outspoken males. … and I didn’t have a lot of respect for them ... a couple of them had made comments like ... ‘what do we have to do this environmental crap for? I just want to learn how to canoe. What do I have to do this shit for?’ ... jeez, it’s all coming back to me now. They didn’t care beyond what they could get out of it” (Participant#9.F, interview lines 334-345).

“the pace of the river I think sort of bares people ... a bit raw, a bit more rawer to who they really are.” (Participant#13.M, interview lines 420-450).

AROUND RAPIDS

“just the blokey excitement of this and I just don’t get it .... Just that blokey, getting pumped and excited about it ... the sort of tackle the next challenge, pumped up stuff ... I remember that being interesting ... because blokes in our year were just fantastic blokes, but it was like somehow the river just turned them into these ... macho, we’re gonna get out there and conquer it kind of thing ... Like their skills were built because they’d put themselves on the line and just get into it ... so their skills and development were just amazing” (Participant#6.F, interview lines 361-375).

WORKING IN CAMP

“there were the few in the group who were sort of quite happy to let other people do a bit for them and as time wore on that got a bit more noted I guess and a few people got a bit shitty, with each other” (Participant#8, interview, lines 362-364). “there was a split in the group right the way through until then – from the workers and the non-workers” ( Participant#8.M, interview, lines 388-390).

“I was initially surprised when the discussion followed the course that it did. ... The accessibility of a particular task was perceived by one group (which I had deemed to be lacking in initiative & motivation) to be related to issues of competitiveness and gender. I did not realise that what I perceived as an unselfish act – doing my share promptly and enthusiastically ... actually had the effect of reducing the accessibility of the group tasks to other members of the group. This was somewhat of a revelation to me, and one which I didn’t immediately grasp while we were having our discussion ” (Participant#12.M, letter lines 25-34).

River travel and river-life involve dramatic changes in social organization. On the water the participants can spend long periods alone in their craft, or in partnership in a canoe, or in a small group on a raft. However, getting out onto the banks to inspect a rapid or establish camp represents a sudden shift in proximity and relations with the group. At the rapid it became clear to one female participant that male students were particularly extroverted and excited about tackling the challenges the river posed. Interestingly, this seemed to leave the female participant trapped within a dilemma, rejecting their bravado but respecting the technical skill development they were able to achieve as a result of their aggressive approach. On the flat-water journeys living on the banks, although seen as a time to experiment and improvise (as seen in the theme River-life), could also be a time of friction within the group. The ‘work’ tasks associated with preparing food, shelter and the campfire seemed to some to be unevenly distributed amongst group members. The temporary river community experienced a wide range of social responses: from cohesion to intolerance, acceptance to rejection.
Second narrative: ‘I think that’s about being comfortable with the person’

BUILDING THE CANOE-RAFT AND THE SUBGROUP EXPERIENCE

“We made a raft and [three other students] and I (the sort of ‘older’ members of the group) ended up on it. What a fantastic experience to lay around mostly drifting, discussing the nature of the Murray – its colour, space, sound, silence, sky, flat, rough, flow. We read to each other, played guitar and generally lay about quietly. Even on a 4 person raft I felt HEAPS of space – Even more so than on a double! We stopped at a billabong and I was hesitant at first (some crappy little fear) we covered ourselves totally naked in mud and baked dry in the sun. It was incredibly bonding and earth connecting experience” (Participant#13.M, journal lines 208-228).

“We just lashed them together so we could have something big and stable … that’d be the place where people could go to play their chess or play the guitar … and we found some more bits of timber and decided we were going to put a fire in between. So we found some more timber, got some mud, put some mud on top of the timber, sheet of iron on top of that, and had the fire on there. That was great, that was one of the best experiences at uni for sure … You know … make a cake … rather than taking your dried stuff or pre-made meals … I remember one morning there was four of us in the thing and getting up and making carrot cake in the middle of the canoe as we were cruising down the river … people were sort of rotating through paddling this big catamaran … you know, find someone to have a game of chess with … and someone else would take a boat away…. Oh, it was great, it was really amazing to have an experience that you’d have in your kitchen or in your lounge room, just kicking back – hanging back – hanging out” (Participant#5.M, interview lines 461-483).

A supportive subgroup, whose members share similar expectations of the experience, such as respecting silence and knowing when it is appropriate to have fun, enriches the experience for participants. Making the ‘canoe-raft’ by lashing a couple of boats together subverts the technology of the canoe and contains the same joy of improvisation that building a tarpaulin shelter has on land. It changes the rules and expectations of the experience. It feels more stable and spacious – and more socially accommodating. There is a social licence to allow reflection and discussion to drift through a number of topics, and it allows for spontaneous activity to arise. What starts as a mud fight ends up as a ritualised experience bonding peers together and the beginning, perhaps, of a collective consciousness of a response to place. Alternatively, what starts as a problem solving activity, attempting to bake a cake whilst continuing to travel downstream, becomes an extended period of adult-play and socialisation.

The experience of the river and/or the group is sustained with the ‘right’ small group of students who share a similar aspiration for, and response to, the experience. They seem to know when silence is the best response and when it is appropriate to play. They seem aware of the delicacy of the experience and do their part to sustain it. The raft of canoes and supportive friends serves as a counter balance to the unavoidable social tensions encountered when the whole group must function on the banks, in and around camp.

“there were a few times when I paddled with people that I was very comfortable with and we didn’t talk … if I were to paddle with [another student] or [another student] we would just paddle and we might talk but, we might also go for an hour or so without talking … unnecessary talking … and that’s about being comfortable with the person and that - the analogy for me is being comfortable in the place too and not feeling like I’ve got to fill the silence” (Participant#9.F, interview lines 118-124).
Plausible insights: The social river and the experience of place in outdoor education

The structure of paddling programs necessarily involved participants experiencing quite dramatic changes in the group’s social organization, particularly between being on and off the river. On the Murray River canoe journeys I cultivated this through making suggestions about paddling solo, in pairs and experimenting with making rafts of boats. These varying experiences of the social group, including on the moving water rivers, had a double aspect for participants. They served as both a point of possible connection and a point of disconnection from experiencing the river as place. Within the larger social group, attention was drawn to the social context of the temporary community of river travellers. There was feeling that the character of each participant could be ‘uncovered’, or bared, in terms of what each contributed to the community. Some participants found the large group detracted from their experience: “I have a sense that there were times when the groups were a little bit large to feel that sense of real cohesiveness, or true cohesiveness.” (Participant#3.M, interview lines 357-365). Several participants made comments that indicated how it was possible for them to assess their level of skill, and to measure their position within the large group:

I wasn’t one of the stronger paddlers until third year. In second year I don’t feel like I was because I was starting from complete scratch and so I felt I was one of the weaker paddlers – when I was upside down all the time. But on those third year trips I felt like I could help other people out, or whether it was just going down first … or second or third, or whatever it was to … scout the rapid or whether it was … to pick lines. (Participant#5.M, interview lines 276-292)

But mostly group sizes of 10 to 15 brought problems associated with differences attributed to gender in terms of how participants approached paddling rapids, varying attitudes to community living, and particularly to the environmental philosophy or ways of knowing the river discussions on the Murray River journeys. Whilst these comments came from a minority of participants they do alert us to the possibility of an underlying phenomenon that may have been influential in the overall inquiry that is significant to the experience of the river as place. Responses based on gender did not emerge as a consistent theme, yet of the 64 participants in the inquiry only 17 were female and 47 were male (a ratio of one to three). There had already been a noticeable difference in gender-based participation in the La Trobe Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education) paddling elective groups and the Monash Snowy River expedition groups, with a ratio of approximately two males to every female.
Not only may there have been a hidden discriminatory screening of participants into these programs at the time, it is also possible that the snowballing of contacts used in recruitment for the inquiry reflects a further ‘disappearance’ of females from outdoor education and river ‘teaching’ since their graduation. This observation relies upon the reasonable assumption that, for this inquiry, snowballing was more likely to yield contacts still active in outdoor education and who had maintained an active interest in paddling activities and river travel. The interview group in this inquiry consisted of eight females and 13 males, which restored a roughly similar ratio to that of participation levels in the original paddling programs.

There has been some interesting research conducted into gender differences in outdoor education undergraduates in recent years (see for example, Green, 1994; Lugg, 2003; Spencer, 2003) that indicates the persistence of gender-based discrimination in the masculinized profession of outdoor education. Liz Newbery, a female canoe guide working on a university program that appeared to valorise the strength and athleticism of male staff and students, noted the dominance of “masculinist discourse of wilderness travel” (2003, p. 208) and posed the question: “What sort of bodies and identities are being produced in this pedagogical space?” (2003, p. 205). Doreen Massey (1994), whilst denying that there can be any “authenticity of place” (p. 121), suggests that places result from multiple social relations, and thus are “riven with internal tensions and conflicts” (p. 137). We should remain guarded about arguments of place-authenticity and whether a sociological perspective on place-identity alone can be sufficient. Beck (1995) argues, for example, that sociologists suffer a ‘congenital blindness’ to the ecological dimensions of issues they study, particularly those that implicate ‘nature’. Even so, Massey’s and Newbery’s insights are important when we turn our attention to the participants social relations and their influence as a component – a layer - of lived experience that responds to, or limits, the possibility of experiencing the river as place. We must consider the social river, when experienced with the large group, may indeed have been ‘lived’ by participants as a masculinized river.

Most notable here were responses and narratives that depicted the river, whether it be rapid or campsite, as a place of work where there was a propensity for male students to maximize learning by seizing upon opportunities for practical action (such as paddling a rapid, pitching a tarpaulin, baking bread, or kindling a fire). The tensions this created were interesting. As one participant noted: “there was a split in the group right the way through until then – from the workers and the non-workers” (Participant#8.M, interview, lines 388-390). The alternative perspective was that the ‘workers’ were denying the learning of the
‘others’ as they enthusiastically embraced these opportunities. In both the narratives of the ‘blokey excitement’ around tackling the rapids, and in the competition to complete the practical tasks of establishing camp, it can be argued that in establishing the river as a place-of-work, masculine patterns of work routines came to dominate the experience. The historian Richard White (1996) sums this up well, although he too perhaps makes the subconscious error of failing to state that ‘we’ might better be stated as ‘we males’:

Our play in nature is often itself a masked form of bodily labor … The most intense moments of our play in nature come when it seems to matter as much as work: when the handhold in the rock matters; when we are four days form the trailhead and short on food; when whitewater could wreck a craft. It is no wonder that the risks we take in nature become extreme. We try to make play matter as if it were work, as if our lives depended on it. We try to know through play what workers in the woods, fields, and waters know through work. (p. 174)

The notion that the river became masculinized as a place of work is reinforced by the narrative of one of the female La Trobe elective paddling students. In order to succeed she found she had to reject her female peers - “there was lots of people in our group, specifically females, that couldn’t roll at all and were really, sort of right over the edge for them” (Participant#2.F, interview lines 202-204) – and developed her technical paddling through extending her training with a group of male students:

I was still a bit worried about that sort of thing, that I might not be a hundred percent with my rolls…. just sort of being there with mates who I’d been paddling with and putting their time in, those specific guys I’d been paddling with…. just working together and everyone supporting each other and it was ex (sic), just a real buzz. And, and finishing a section [of the Mitchell River] without even going over was pretty rewarding for me. I felt like I’d been on the ball. (Participant#2.F, interview lines 63-68).

I hesitate to make too many emphatic conclusions based upon gender differences for these river programs as The social river represents only a minor theme in this inquiry, and participants’ responses were largely directed towards other topics. Yet two things are clear. First, the river as a masculinized place-of-work applied specifically to two sites, the rapid and the campsite. This provides an important qualification to our understanding of the technical river and to the experience of river-life that required practical and improvisational action. Second, it was clear that the social politics of the large group were, for many, overwhelming and possibly detrimental to their experience. Interestingly, given time and freedom to experience the river in a social arrangement of their choice, particularly on the Murray River journeys, almost all participants recalled organising
themselves into supportive subgroups. Narratives of the ‘canoe-raft’ experience frequented participants’ written and oral accounts to such an extent that it is a phenomenon that requires explicit analysis.

**The significance of the canoe-raft experience**

The significance of the canoe-raft experience would seem to rely upon how it contrasted the experience of the whole group on the bank and in camp, and the importance of having time with members of a self-selected subgroup based on friendship who shared similar values for the experience. The canoe-raft offered participants important opportunities for acceptance through shared play and reverie, not available in other aspects of the program:

We were mucking around and people saw us standing up at the end of the boat [canoe-raft], juggling, and were being silly and having fun. But we also … were talking about some of the readings that we were doing, and mulling over ideas and stuff. I suppose I was with a group of people that I wasn’t threatened by and whose opinions I valued. (Participant#9.F, interview lines 215-220)

The world of work, rules and program expectations had been temporarily suspended, and the technology of the canoe subverted in a way that fundamentally changed the experience. The canoe-raft became a floating house with a kitchen and a lounge! The apparent ‘lack of rules’ and ‘program’ for a time, resulted in the participants creatively expressing their preferences for the experience. In the same way that the experience of the river as a place-of-work refined our understanding of how certain situations on the river were experienced as a masculine setting for ‘technical’ and ‘practical’ action, the narratives of the canoe-raft provide an important qualification of the experience of the river as refuge. Memorable experiences arose for participants out of the spontaneity afforded by the canoe-raft; such as bonding with peers and place through caking themselves with river mud, or carrying a fire from one camp to another and boiling the billy whilst travelling downstream. These experiences seemed to break from participants’ preconceived expectations for being in the outdoors:

What a fantastic experience to lay around mostly drifting, discussing the nature of the Murray – its colour, space, sound, silence, sky, flat, rough, flow. We read to each other, played guitar and generally lay about quietly. (Participant#13.M, journal lines 211-217)
Importantly, these narratives reveal a part of the river experience that did not seem to be mediated by technique, attitudes to work, gender or competitiveness, and therefore opened another window of opportunity to share an experience of the river with each other, and possibly with the river as place. As Veronica Strang (2004) found in her study of the cultural meanings of the Stour River in England:

The whole point about ‘re-creation’, after all, is that it is about play, a release from adult responsibilities, a childlike journey of rebirth and discovery. As such, it enables an intensive focus upon sensory interaction with water, whether this takes the form of dignified aesthetic appreciation, or the intense engagement of swimming, canoeing, fishing or walking alongside the river. All of these enable the collection of close-grained knowledge and identification with place that permits people to feel that they are part of the orderly system that they observe. (Strang, 2004, p. 111)

How the participants’ social experiences of the river are counter balanced between the river as a place-of-work and a place-of-play and reverie, are potentially significant for outdoor educators. In some quarters the recreational values of outdoor education have been rejected in favour of a socially critical agenda (Martin, 1999). Although this discussion responds to a minor theme within this inquiry, it seems fair to suggest that recreational experiences remain an important component of the lived experience of outdoor places. Whilst perhaps not providing the principal reason for being there on an educational program, educators should remember and plan to accommodate the needs of participants for friendship groups and shared experiences of play and reverie. These experiences, far from detracting from the potential to encounter outdoor places, may well offer opportunities to experience place socially and thus more holistically, in ways that would not otherwise be possible.
Sensing a connection with river-places

Another minor theme to be discussed explores how participants came to sense a connection with the rivers, primarily the Murray and Snowy, through their paddling journeys. Again, it was the experience of slow flowing rivers and the absence of technically demanding and threatening rapids (below the gorge section in the case of the Snowy) that provided the possibility for participants to openly consider sensory experiences within the river place. This is not to say that participants did not write or tell of significance of sensory experiences on the moving water training programs, far from it. There were many stories of hearing rapids up ahead, and the heightened emotional and physical responses felt by participants, predominantly sensing the threat downstream. But these narratives, and their implications for place have already largely been told in the preceding accounts of Rivercraft and Romancing the river.

What is important in this theme about sensing a connection to river places, is the focus on a more sensory embodied relations with the slow flowing rivers. As David Abram reminds us (1996a): “Direct sensuous reality, in all its more-than-human mystery, remains the sole solid touchstone for an experiential world … only in regular contact with the tangible ground and sky can we learn how to orient and to navigate in the multiple dimensions that now claim us” (p. x). The following two narratives, distilled from the data, represent a progression in the ways that participants wrote and spoke of these sensory encounters:

First narrative: ‘The sounds, the colours, the smells, all flooded my senses.’ In this narrative we read how participants sensory awareness of the river place resulted from both the development of their own bodily rhythm within the paddling activity, and an emerging awareness of the rhythms of the river and its surrounds. Ultimately, we see how the river was experienced as ‘speaking’ to those participants who were able to open their senses to becoming emplaced with the river.

Second narrative: ‘A welcoming place.’ In the second narrative I use the interpretive structure of three connection stories to convey different ways that participants felt they connected to the river and its surrounds as a result of their sensory encounters. In the first story we listen to an individual La Trobe Graduate Diploma participant on the final morning of the Murray River journey, as he re-tells us of a life-changing encounter with the river. In the second story three La Trobe participants tell us how they have returned to the river, again and again, to deepen a connection first encountered on their university trip. Finally, two Monash
participants describe their river journeys in terms of first and opening, then a filling with meaningful experiences of the river-place.

The first narrative, and the first two connection stories of the second narrative return us again to the Barmah Forest section of the Murray River. Its local topography and history have formed a distinctively local place long before it was encountered by the La Trobe participants in their canoes. Yet the choice to canoe profoundly shaped the participants’ sensory experiences. So I juxtapose two opening texts as a prelude to the narratives to remind us that body, canoe and river-place were, at all times, deeply implicated in the participants’ experiences …
I lay my paddle across the gunwales. Hands balance my body weight as I step aboard and settle into a paddling position; buttocks on seat, my toes, tops of feet and shins rest on a mat on the hull, lower legs folded beneath the seat, both knees to one side angling my body towards the water. Fingers curl around the paddle grip and shaft; the last joint of the thumb overlaps the last joint of the index finger. Reaching the paddle forward I stroke, and stroke again to build up some speed. Reach-coil-unwind-stroke. As the blade clears the water both wrists rotate towards the front of the boat to bring the paddle shaft horizontal. As the body coils the paddle forward the blade feathers horizontally through the air. The wrists rotate beneath the shaft to bring it vertical, the bottom arm extends fully as the torso tensions. Then the top hand drives the blade into the water and pushes – forward, across, down. The bottom hand pulls and parallels the gunwale. The body unwinds – releasing its stored power, independent of the mind. With the blade past the hips the top wrist rotates down – thumbing the water, the bottom wrist rolls the paddle shaft against the gunwale – the paddle now a lever. The blade flickers vertical, the front hand pulls slightly towards the centre of the canoe as the blade clears the water – drawing the bow back on line. I feel the river quiver through the paddle, I feel the water sliding past beneath my shins, feet and toes; the canoe is now my skin. River-skin. Skin against skin.

But it is a deception to describe paddling as a single stroke. Paddling overlaps stroke upon stroke to make a whole rhythm, until all that remains is a wake of bubbles and a string of whirlpool eddies, marking the placements of the paddle. They make the softest noise sucking at the edge of consciousness. Paddling is rhythm - a meeting place of body-canoe-river.

The Barmah Forest is 28,900 ha in size, of which 24,686 ha is ‘productive redgum forest’ and 4,500 ha is swamps and lagoons. The river in the Barmah owes much of its current character to two colossal damming events – one deep in geologic time, the other in recent settler history. The Cadell Tilt block was formed by a geologic uplift along a fault line around 25,000 years ago, which crosses the river near the site of the Barmah township. This dammed the river, splitting it into two streams (the Murray flowing south and the Edwards anabranch flowing west). As a result the uplift the river regularly flooded an immense area, creating the distinctive forest and wetlands. The second damming occurred when the river’s waters were impounded behind the Hume Weir, completed in 1936 (262 kilometres upstream from Barmah). This human regulation of the river made it possible to control winter and spring floods, and thus allowed extensive European settlement along the Murray Valley. It also made it possible to reverse the flood regime of the river, storing water in winter and releasing it for summer irrigation. The river’s water thus became an economic commodity that could be traded, between governments and water users. As a result the forest no longer experienced regular flooding and its ecology must now be ‘managed’ by ‘controlled’ floods.

The Barmah region was originally populated by the Bangerang Tribe, which was decimated by two smallpox epidemics in 1788/89 and 1830. The current indigenous peoples of the region call themselves Yorta-Yorta. Dispossession followed by pastoralists in the 1940s when Edward Curr established the Currs’ Lower Moira run to graze sheep, cattle and horses in the forest in the driest months of the year, after the spring and winter floodwaters receded. Firestick farming by the Bangerang and Yorta Yorta had created the open forest pastures so attractive to those who would displace them. Cattle adjustment, timber harvesting, bee keeping, tourism and now outdoor education is practiced in the Barmah. Earth oven mounds, canoe trees, and occasional place names (War Creek and War Plain) reminds us of the past and continuing presence of the Yorta Yorta, and their continuing struggles to reclaim their land.

* (source: Fahey, 1988, Barmah Forest: A History)
First narrative: ‘The sounds, the colours, the smells, all flooded my senses’

As we have already seen in earlier themes and narratives, the dominant demands of moving water technique focused participants’ attention and body in relation to the river in such a way that broader experiences were limited. Yet when the demands of technique were relatively modest, students quickly established a paddling rhythm. Unlike the performing white water kayaker, their focus was not fixed on specific ‘paddling’ features in the river. Instead, they became open to more subtle aspects of the encounter. We recall ‘the lesson of drift’ in an earlier narrative and how participants responded by experiencing a sense of the river’s enduring flow. We also recall in the narrative how participants tended to encountered the river as a refuge. We must keep these earlier narratives in mind as we follow participants’ experiences here, gaining a deeper and subtle understanding of the sensory presence of the river.

‘once you are feeling comfortable … with yourself, the boat and the environment it, it does just start to become a natural process. I mean, fatigue becomes a bit of a problem initially, but you do work your way through that … and you do find that paddling becomes second nature, and so the concentration comes off paddling and you start looking at the things around you.”

(Participant#10.M, interview lines 226-233)

“My attention to nature’s detail also increased with each stroke of the paddle; the sounds, the colours, the smells, all flooded my senses. This made me slow down my thinking and my movements to suit the environment that surrounded me and I was alerted to the importance of the forest to so many people”

(Participant#14.M, student log, lines 38-43).

“There was this tiny sound of the boat moving through the water. Because the boats are so beautiful to paddle … they just had this sense of cutting, and then there was the tiny movements of the paddle, the noise of the paddle”

(Participant#12.M, interview lines 96-100).

A shift is made as a level of comfort is achieved, first with self (an inner nature), then the boat (technologically mediated nature), and finally to the surrounding environment (an outer nature). Active concentration slides away from technique. Participants reflect later that a shift in attention occurred as a result of paddling becoming a rhythm. Whole body continuous motion overlaps the fine detail (the position of a finger on the paddle shaft for example) until the paddler experiences rhythmical motion – the body and canoe merge. They become a second nature for the body. An inner nature turning to an outer nature. A reconciliation of ‘natures’. The mind is released to wander and wonder; viewing the landscape, reflecting upon life, and the paddler only realises in retrospect that they have stopped having to think about each overwhelming detail of technique. But in the times of quiet, solitary paddling this experience was re-told by many participants – a regular response to ‘The River’ in the Barmah. This transition takes place beneath the level of consciousness.

When the stroke disappears into the rhythm of travel, then the mind is quiet and being turns outwards towards becoming. It opens to place, as will be seen in the following account of the dawn paddle on ‘The River’, through the Barmah Forest ...

---

221
Later in the Barmah trip, usually during the evening of day three or four, I would introduce the idea of a pre-dawn start. Flexibility in timing was required as there needed to be an easy launching site from camp, a section of river where the current was slow, and hopefully light winds. Students prepared the night before by organising equipment, arranging who would be paddling together and who would paddle solo. In the morning there would be no (or minimal) speaking, and I would acknowledge each boat as it got on the water. The predawn silence of the forest and the camp would be carried onto the water. A common section of the river experienced here was between Bull Paddock, where a long meander almost completely folds back on itself, and Punt Paddock Lagoon, a place of prolific bird life.

“I suppose for the first ... hour or so it was just pitch black. It was just a matter of keeping the boat in the middle of the river. Making sure that you’re not running into the trees and just paddling. Just sort of keeping the river going. But as dawn began – dawn and the light sort of just start to, a gradual thing, take shape around you. ... images that sort of appear out of the darkness. So you just see trees come to life you know, you start to hear birds – the dawn chorus. I suppose just colours – grey turn into colour as the sun comes up. ... it was just so unique and something that I’d never even think of doing that ... it’s just stuck with me”
(Participant#10.M, interview lines 103-116).

“I can just remember you know putting the paddle in the water and it sort of feeling really oily ... that morning when it’s just so still, it’s just cruising through - through, you know this big sort of, um stand of trees on either side of you. And the sun just peeking over the horizon and, it’s just an experience that – a feeling I suppose of, just inner peace, like – it’s pretty hard to put into words”
(Participant#14.M, interview lines 97-102).

The sounds, the feeling of travelling, or knowing you were travelling but you couldn’t really feel it, and then sometimes you might feel a bit of breeze on your face which gave you the sense that you were moving, um, um, spiritual in the sense that you felt some sort of connection to a larger ... environment”
(Participant#12.M, interview lines 523-535).

Silence, aloneness and the mode of travel create a particular sensory of response. Noticing that the canoe leaves no trail, that the sign of his passage leaves no mark or sign to follow, accentuates the sense of aloneness and reflective space.

The forest is imagined as having its own life parallel to that of the participant. Each is waking up to the day. The trees stand in their apparent permanence beside the river, catching the morning sun, a few birds are beginning to stir and call. There is a sense of ‘timelessness’ about the experience. The embodied sense of river-time experienced on the drift, opens to include the diurnal cycle of the forest. Trees and birds come to life. Forest-time is sensed as a larger, enfolding experience.

Even the material quality of the water seems to change. In response to the stillness and silence it feels ‘oily’, denser than usual. The denial of the dominant sense of sight has accentuated both auditory and tactile senses. But the embodiment of the dawn encounter with the river is more than this. It expands the sense of rhythms outwards from the individual participant, until they feel absorbed into the rhythms of the river and its forest.

There is a density to the experience that manifests as an inner peace – a felt response that is difficult to articulate ... then the river speaks ...
“Being able to see how indigenous people would have lived there struck a real chord with me ... 
when I felt a strong affinity with those people, and I suppose that comes out of being on the river in 
a similar style – not the same craft – but in a similar style and being able to camp in the forest and 
engage with ... living in that environment in that way.... I could live here and I could see how they 
would live here and why it was significant to them. And there was aspects of that I suppose, where 
you try ... to understand with the emotive aspect of that and how the river for me has a voice.... I 
don’t know how else to describe it, but it, it speaks to me in its ‘own way” (Participant#4.M, 
interview lines 317-326).

The river speaks subtly. For the participant above there is minimal disruption to the experience of 
being comfortable in a place that reciprocates his feelings. A feeling of ‘at homeness’ arises. The 
participant’s horizon expands out beyond the immediacy of himself to consider the life of the place 
and its inhabitants more broadly. An appreciation of time also expands to include the past. But a 
feeling of being welcomed by the place precedes the rational analysis of the encounter. The river-
place is always speaking to us, but it requires a special effort on our parts to listen.

**FLOODPLAIN ACOUSTICS**

Here on its floodplain,  
the river slows, quietens, and  
folds upon itself.

A pulse of distant snow and rain,  
silenced for years behind a  
concrete wall, returns its voice.

The waters climb the banks, and  
curl into the grasses,  
launching dried insect cases, it  
seeps into forest,  
turning country into river,  
river into country.

Spirally spilling itself, it speaks,  
The first note washing through  
the leaves and branches, the  
breath of distant pressures  
equalising.  
The second note a screech and  
clatter of beak and wing and  
claw,  
a raucous resident’s territorial  
claim.  
The third the insect hum of Earth,  
always there, but rarely heard.

Still the river flows,  
abandoning its notes to  
sun-baked clays, it leaves to sing  
its’ song downstream.

A thumbnail slice of clay  
*plop!* into a quiet eddy,  
a leaf spirals down, *smack!*  
upon a mirror pooling, a  
grain of sand falls from the load,  
*crack!* upon a beach,  
then quiet.

The whispering banks,  
are speaking, to those  
who silenced themselves  
upon the cusp the deaf,  
and that is where we find them  
listening.
Second narrative: ‘A welcoming place’

CONNECTION STORY #1

On several of the Barmah trips on the ‘The River’ we were fortunate enough to be joined by a member of the Yorta Yorta community. On the final night of the trip we were camped at the junction of the main channel and Cutting Creek, a small anabranch that flows into the head of Barmah Lake. Cutting Creek is much narrower and flows faster than the main channel and is completely overhung by young redgums. Students would start the final day by paddling down the anabranch in soft predawn light. Quite suddenly the trees disappear and the canoeists find themselves within a narrow corridor of tall cobungi reeds before emerging onto the wide expanses of the lake. After five days on the main channel, it was a sudden spatial ‘shock’ to make the transition to the expanse of the lake and the dawn sky. For one participant this encounter proved to be of lasting significance.

“The presence of [the Yorta Yorta man]...it was the first time I’ve had an opportunity to talk to an aboriginal about their spirituality and affect of white history ... I found the ‘walkabout’ and the ‘mat’ concept very enlightening. I found some parallels with how I relate to the bush” (Participant#8.M, letter, lines 18-25).

“on the last day when I left early to watch the bush come alive as the sun rose on Barmah Lake. [the Yorta Yorta man] told us the night before how this was a special place, the centre of his ‘mat’. It has now become a special place for me. As the sun slowly rose above the trees and I felt it’s warmth, the birds began flying about. This was the only sound, even though there were a few of us there on our own. I can’t remember feeling more relaxed and closer to nature” (Participant#8.M, letter, lines 44-52).

“everyone was absolutely dead silent ... just taking this, almost spiritual moment I think it was – and it was really powerful – yeah. I think it was a combination of listening to [the Yorta Yorta man], the end of the trip, and the perfect conditions that we struck it on. Just the time of the day. And then ... half an hour after sunrise the birds started arcing up a fair bit and a little breeze sprang up and the magic was gone” (Participant#8.M, interview, lines 207-218).

“It was some sort of journey that I’d been through to get to that moment” (Participant#8.M, interview, lines 229-231). “probably one of the most inspirational, deeply impacting experiences I’ve ever had” (Participant#8.M, letter, lines 194-196).
Several of the participants had returned many times to the ‘The River’ (specifically to the Barmah), guiding trips and finding their own way to live, for a time, with the river.

“part of it is that it was a welcoming place … I felt at home and quite comfortable there”
(Participant#4.M, interview lines 329-332).

“I’ll gradually evolve into getting into river pace, and then once I’m there I could be there for two days, ten days, twenty days, 6-months, 3-years I reckon … once you are in that sort of zone you’re just existing. So, it’s really a feeling of peace and connection. Like I’m part of the river – I feel like I’m the river – I’m on it, I’m part of it. I’m not trying to do anything to be against what the river is … more fully experience how it is, not how I am to it, or how I affect it, but to just sort of secretly almost hiding on the water there – like ‘I’m not here, I’m not here – just do what you do and I’ll just follow along’”
(Participant#13.M, interview lines 313-324).

“But I never felt that connectedness [before] … it didn’t sort of feel as though that entered me at that [other] environment. Whereas I did feel [it] that morning” (Participant#14, interview lines 127-129). “an accumulation … even if I’d never been back, I’d always have said; ‘Oh, Barmah’ and associated that … connectedness with that region - for the rest of my life. But having gone back, that feeling’s got stronger … I’ve had so many experiences in that region, so much of my life’s been spent there” (Participant#14.M, interview lines 649-657).

THE BARMAH NAME MEANDER

Morgan’s Mill
(where old sleeper cutters dream)
The Steps
Black Engine Lagoon
Mud Bank Landing (3 star campsite)
Log Landing, and the Bunyip Hole.
Then Tongalong Creek
Sandspit Creek, to The Gulf
(just past old Yilema Station).
On to Pinchut Bend
Mill Log Landing
Fish Basket
Red Tank ‘n’
Punt Paddock
(sacred ibis roost here).
Then its on to Nine Panel
Bend, (where you look across a neck of land, an hour downstream),
Pelican Point.
Cambells
Little Budgee, and the Edwards River anabranch
(sheering off right).
Picnic Point
(a caravan invasion – “crackacan” and “didyabringyabeeralong”)
Tarragon Lodge
[a shock of right angles]
Poverty Point
Snake Bite Camp
(who died here?)
Double Hole, then compressed into
The Narrows, there’s the 258 mile tree
(an old blaze for steamer captains)
War Creek, now down Cutting Creek, an arch of young redgums, cobungi reeds and, finally, out, out, onto Barmah Lake.
All vast sky, mirror clouds and the distant sound of ducks paddling their feet across the water, trying to lift off.
Two participants from the Monash river journeys in Gippsland also found ways to connect to the river-places. These four quotations are offered here to leave an echo of their thoughts, before we move on to the ‘plausible insights’.

“you are more immersed in the whole environment rather than in the river and the water and what’s ahead of you. So you look around at the beaches, you look around on the hillsides, and you look around at the vegetation … you are far more open than just the technical side of it, to somehow stay upright and master the next piece of river. So I think in that respect you are immersed in the whole landscape rather the river”
(Participant#15.M, interview lines 131-137).

“It has become a place of connection and security” (Participant#15, report lines 268-271). “I had given myself up to a landscape and a country I have finally begun to understand” (Participant#15, report lines 317-318). “I allowed myself the opportunity to open up and to fill the empty spaces within me with stories and new memories”
(Participant#15.M, report lines 335-340).

“Without having to occupy your mind with tasks or things that needed to be done for the maintenance of your group, or for procuring wood or resources to cook or eat with. Just having that time to wonder I guess, and be filled with …what’s about you”
(Participant#17.M, interview lines 339-342).

“I try to see the whole landscape, but I probably haven’t seen, I haven’t done that always. It’s more … the more ... I’ve ... studied and learned and seen that it’s not just water running down a conduit. But there’s lots of interactions and relationships” (Participant#17.M, interview lines 301-304).

IRONICAL CONNECTIONS

The experiences of the participants on the Murray and Snowy River programs, despite their differing geographical and university locations, were more intertwined than is obvious at first glance. The waters that they paddled on, and the places that they have become temporarily connected to, are part of a complex ecological and cultural history that now connects the destinies of the Murray and Snowy rivers. The Snowy River begins its 500km journey to Bass Strait, high on the south-eastern slopes of Australia’s highest peak, Mt Kosciusko, at about 1700 metres above sea level. Within its first 50 km it is dammed twice, at Guthega and Jindabyne, where water is redirected into the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Scheme. Ultimately this water flows into the Murray. At the flick of a switch at the Guthega Power Station, the river downstream runs dry. Until recently, 99% of the original Snowy River flows did not make it past the Jindabyne dam wall. Beneath the dam wall, the river is a dry course for nearly half of its journey to the sea. For years lobbyists argued for ecological flows to be returned to the river. But it took a change of state government and an independent candidate winning the electoral seat of East Gippsland, who then held the balance of power between the major parties, to initiate an agreement to return some water to the Snowy. At the moment about 6% of original flows have been reintroduced to the river, with a target of about 25% over the next decade. Construction on the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Scheme began in 1951. It was Australia’s largest post World War II nation building project, and continues to be celebrated as one of the countries greatest engineering achievements. It aimed to simultaneously water the dry inland agricultural districts to the east of the Great Divide, to initiate population and industrial expansion, to provide hydro-electric power, and to promote large scale immigration from Europe to Australia in the post war years. Much of Australia’s current multi-cultural diversity owes its origins to the Hydro scheme. Yet there was no consideration given to the ecological consequences of taking water from one river and giving it to another. Nor to the fact that every aspect of the human lived experience of these river-places would be changed forever by the tangle of subterranean tunnels and tubes, and those monolithic concrete walls.
Plausible insights: Connecting with river places in outdoor education

David Abram (1996a), paraphrasing Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), the modern founder of phenomenology, suggests that “underneath the layer of the diverse cultural lifeworld there reposes a deeper, more unitary lifeworld, always there beneath all our cultural acquisitions, a vast overlooked dimension of experience that supports and sustains all our diverse and discontinuous worldviews” (pp. 41-42). If we accept this proposition then, residing beneath our technical, cultural, environmental and social interpretations of our experiences of river-places is the possibility of the experience of a direct and sensuous reality. It is this overlooked dimension of experience that has so fascinated the phenomenologically inspired inquiry into the human experience of place in the twentieth century by scholars such as Heidegger, Tuan and Relph, and Merleau-Ponty, Casey and Abram. Perhaps it takes that peculiar economy of words that some Australians possess to summarise this belief:

No matter how we attempt to package or construct it, the land will always break out of whatever fancy dress we foist upon it. (Tacey, 1995, p. 7)

Yet Raffan’s (1992, 1993) research into the ‘land as teacher’ would suggest that participants who connected with a particular place would engage with its toponymic features and also demonstrate a numinous response to place. We have already seen in the theme Romancing the river that a numinous response on the part of outdoor education participants in this inquiry was largely limited to a quasi-spiritual feeling for the ‘wild’ river, an echo that repeats but distorts the Romantic quest for the sublime encounter. When questioned specifically about river experiences for which they could find no rational explanation, two participants spoke of their Christian beliefs and of the need to act as stewards who care for and maintain nature. Several others rejected the possibility, voicing a secular scepticism that David Tacey (2000) argues predominates in contemporary Australian society.

And what of acknowledging the toponymic character of the river places encountered? Aside from the development of a vocabulary for the features of the rapid, described in the theme Rivercraft as an act of colonisation, there is little evidence that participants in this inquiry could recall the names of much more than a few dominant features (names of major rapids or obstacles like Tulloch Ard Gorge). The exceptions where the few participants who had forged a stronger connection to specific sections of
rivers through repeated visits, either for work or their own recreation. Does this theme of Connecting to river places, then, make us more or less hopeful for the possibilities of a place-responsive river pedagogy?

Earlier themes and narratives in the inquiry have revealed the extent to which the technical, cultural, environmental and social lifeworlds of the participants had, by and large, ‘captured’ their experiences within seemingly impervious layers above the more fundamental layer of human experience to be found in relation with ‘the land’. Prior to Sensing a connection to river places, it had been the narratives within River-life that have come the closest to revealing an encounter with a ‘unitary lifeworld’ in the mundane and improvisational tasks of living by, on and with the river, and in the brief encounters with wild creatures. The two major themes of Rivercraft and Romancing the river, and the other minor theme of The social river provided important disclosures which serve to attune us to the essence, meaning and significance of the layers of lifeworlds that dominated, and possibly served to displace the participants.

Yet the written and oral data from participants in this inquiry suggested that some participants were aware that there were subtle aspects of their experiences with river places that seemed ‘just’ beyond articulation, and may even be endangered by words: “I am afraid I might destroy them by analysing them and reducing them to words” (Participant#9.F, letter lines 73-81). These type of experiences belonged to ways that participants responded to their situation at a sensory level and then to feelings of connection to the river-place. It may be for some individuals that by “examining the contours of this world not as an immaterial mind but as a sentient body, I come to recognize my thorough inclusion within this world in a far more profound manner than our current language usually allows” (Abram, 1996b, p. 85).

Recognition of these sensory experiences and embodied relations with a place, and our attempts to carefully articulate them, will be crucial for a place-responsive outdoor education. They can so easily be missed precisely because they are difficult to express. They are there in the seemingly simple utterances of the participant who says of the experience of his predawn paddle, that he was “simply keeping the river going” (Participant#10.M, interview line 105), or the participant to whom the “river speaks in its own way” (Participant#4.M, interview line 356), or for the participant that feels she might “explode with the enormity of my feelings” (Participant #9.F, letter lines 76-77). They are there also for the participant that felt the river place “enter me”(Participant#14.M, interview line 128) as he paddled slowly downstream while the sun rose beyond the Barmah Forest redgums.
Why are such expressions so crucial for the possibility of a place-responsive outdoor education? Without this clear acknowledgment of the deep significance of our sentient engagement with the world, our rational constructions of ‘place’ would become nothing more than another addition to the already diverse and contradictory cultural lifeworlds that govern so much of our interpretive experiences. Place would fall under the same illusion that we can name it and thus grasp it, and therefore master it. Although it must escape complete representation in language it is possible to disclose the experiential structures that made such meaningful articulations of experience possible for the participants in this inquiry.

A sensory reciprocity with river-place

In Chapter Four I provided a critique of van Manen’s (1997) four lifeworld existentials of human experience (spatiality, temporality, corporeality and relationality), and their worthiness for guiding data collection and interpretation in this inquiry. In addition, I provided a ‘correction’ to van Manen’s anthropocentric methodology through the place and ecological orientations of Relph, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Abram and further localised it via a consideration of Australian scholarship and poetic writing about culture, identity and land. In particular, elements of the critique highlighted the role and significance of the lived-body in our lived-relations to others and the world.

Such an orientation to the inquiry provided the foundation for a revelation of participants’ sensory reciprocity with these river-places. Merleau-Ponty’s (2002 edition) conclusion that we are not finished at the skin – the flesh – that we exist only in a network of relations with the world, and that those relations are only possible because they are embodied in us, is supported in this inquiry. The narratives distilled from the data suggest that many participants felt their bodies and the river-place became osmotic; that they transgressed each other. The moment that we accept this being-in-the-world, we equally accept that a return to direct sensory experience is possible, and can provide a basis for an experiential pedagogy.

Based on an interpretation of narratives in this theme there were three ‘transgressing’ phenomena that help us understand both how and why participants were able to feel, and hint at, an expression of a sensory connection with river-places. Again, it is worth re-stating that the data and narratives I am drawing upon here were almost exclusively derived from experiences of calm sections of rivers where the participants did not feel any threat from the environment, either immediately or projected downstream, and where the
activity had very modest technical demands. These phases are evident in the apparent simplicity of the following participant quotations. In the first quotation we note a ‘releasing and opening’ of both the participant’s mind and body to the experience:

you do find that paddling becomes second nature, and so the concentration comes off paddling and you start looking at the things around you. (Participant#10.M, interview lines 227-234)

In the next quotation a participant conveys a ‘sensing and filling’, the rhythm of the paddle recedes until it is no more evident than the pulse beneath the skin, and is replaced with a responsiveness to his surrounds:

My attention to nature’s detail also increased with each stroke of the paddle; the sounds, the colours, the smells, all flooded my senses. This made me slow down my thinking and my movements to suit the environment that surrounded me. (Participant#14.M, student log, lines 38-43)

And finally another participant describes the sensations she felt in connecting with a place in the world:

It can be like being with somebody you love – overwhelming, intense and moving. The sun and wind on my skin, my senses alive and alert, enervated and aware, when my mind is at peace or racing, my breath catching in my throat with fear or exultation, or flowing easily, when my heart beats steadily or pounds furiously, when my chest tightens with emotion I cannot express and I feel I might explode with the enormity of my feelings, when I am brought to tears by the ecstasy and beauty of a place, of just being there, of experiencing it, of sharing it or keeping to myself. I don’t know what these feelings symbolise or mean. In many ways I am afraid I might destroy them by analysing them and reducing them to words. (Participant#9.F, letter lines 73-81)

If place experiences can be approached more sensitively through an embodied and sensory encounter, it becomes the structure of this encounter, how an experience of connection is lived, that provides a key to this inquiry into place and outdoor pedagogy: releasing and opening, sensing and filling, and finally, connecting. It is clear that it is not a fully indigenous experiencing or knowing of place, but it may be the crucial first step.
The nature writer Barry Lopez spent many years traversing the arctic with indigenous peoples. His summary of the experience of hunting provides some important clues:

It is more than listening for animals or watching for hoofprints or a shift in the weather. It is more than an analysis of what one *senses*. To hunt means to have the land around you like clothing. To engage in a wordless dialogue with it, one so absorbing that you cease to talk with your human companions. It means to release yourself from rational images of what something “means” and to be concerned only that it “is”. And then to recognize that things exist only insofar as they can be related to other things. These relationships – fresh drops of moisture on top of rocks at a river crossing and a raven’s distant voice – become patterns. The patterns are always in motion. Suddenly the pattern – which includes physical hunger, a memory of your family, and memories of the valley you are walking through, these particular plants and smells – takes in the caribou. There is a caribou standing in front of you. The release of the arrow or bullet is like a word spoken out loud. It occurs at the periphery of your concentration. (Lopez, 1986, pp. 199-200)

We might conclude from participants’ narratives in this inquiry that the first step towards connecting to river places involves just such an experience of ‘releasing’ from rational images as is required by the native hunter, or the fly fisher perhaps in his or her search for patterns. It is a release from analysis and language. This is not an abandonment of these human qualities, but it does re-position them as secondary to the more unified lifeworld we experience at every moment, whether we think it or not, through what Merleau-Ponty has called the body-subject; that vast and untapped resource of human experiences required for us to live within the everyday. It is the experience that the Western mind has attempted to silence from the inter-corporeality of our existence with places. As Raffan (1992) found in his study of ‘the land as teacher’, the greater our dependence upon place the greater our propensity to connect with place.

To release ourselves, if only momentarily, from the confusing and ambiguous technical, cultural, environmental and social layers of our lifeworld, is to embrace Merleau-Ponty’s challenge to the traditional view of Western rationalism: “The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it” (cited in Matthews, 2002, p. 61). As one participant said:

Pushing off in a canoe is … a release, and it’s … like a plunge, like a drift in loveliness, drift into peacefulness … it’s a bit of a journey to get there … so I’ll do a lot of sighing initially and just releasing crap that I’ve got in me, and then … I’ll gradually evolve into getting into river pace, and then once I’m there I could be there
for two days, ten days, twenty days, 6-months, 3-years I reckon. Once you are in that sort of zone you’re just existing. So, it’s really a feeling of peace and connection. Like I’m part of the river. I feel like I’m the river” (Participant#13.M, interview lines 313-324).

**Filling with river-place**

In this inquiry it was clear that participants experienced the river, as we would imagine, mainly from within the technical, cultural, environmental and social lifeworlds, for it was the construction of experience through these ‘layers’ that dominated their interpretations. As already noted, activities like white water kayaking would appear to severely limit the possibility of experiencing the river more openly and more sensuously for all but a few who invest the time and energy required to become comfortable on the river in this highly individualised pursuit. Yet there were experiences for participants in this inquiry that did seem to offer the opportunity for a type of direct, sensuous encounter with the river, and that they occurred regularly enough to sense a pattern. For one participant, the quiet escape from the duties of camp, late in the journey down the Snowy River, begins with a sense of reverie, but then becomes something more:

> Without having to occupy your mind with tasks or things that needed to be done for the maintenance of your group, or for procuring wood or resources to cook or eat with. Just having that time to wonder I guess, and be filled with …what’s about you. (Participant#17.M, interview lines 339-342)

Almost every participant who experienced the predawn paddle on the Murray River trips commented upon the sense of heightened perceptual acuity to their surrounds. At its deepest level this was manifest as an experience of the limits of the body becoming porous, and a feeling that the place entered the participant:

> But I never felt that connectedness [before] … it didn’t sort of feel as though that entered me at that [other] environment. Whereas I did feel [it enter me] that morning. (Participant#14.M, interview lines 127-129)

These accounts must be read in the context of the program experiences detailed in earlier themes and narratives. It was the experiences that subverted the modern, commodified outdoor experience that provided these opportunities most often. The program provided an accumulation of experiences that seemed to demand an open and attentive responsiveness to place; the drift, the fetching of water from the river, the moments of silent and solitary reflection by the river, pitching a tarp, cooking on a fire and gauging the flow of the river.
Then, late in the program, there were experiences that appear to arise, almost spontaneously for the participant, although often they were the result of careful timing and eliciting certain actions through suggestion/hinting by the teacher/guide, a responsiveness to river-place. As Abram (1996a) astutely concluded:

A genuinely ecological approach does not work to attain a mentally envisioned future, but strives to enter, ever more deeply, into the sensorial present. It strives to become ever more awake to the other lives, the other forms of sentience and sensibility that surround us in the open field of the present moment. (Abram, 1996a, p. 272)

Connecting with river-place

And so we see that a personal connection to certain river-places, as a result of quite particular experiences, is possible. It is not equivalent to the holistic and seamless lifeworld of place that belongs to the indigene; Relph’s (1976) existential insider. Nor can these experiences of connection be explained by Relph’s empathetic insider who strives to comprehend the indigenous qualities of place. These experiences occur at that moment when participants’ experiences are located in a temporary suspension of being through the secondary lifeworlds of technique, culture, environment and society. It occurs beneath language and is pre-discursive. This is Bachelard’s (1969) “shimmering consciousness (p. xxvii) – the mind and body merged with place. It is perhaps the first step, for those of us steeped in an outsider’s heritage, towards an indigenous experience of place.

This is not to advocate “reducing knowledge to sensation” (Merleau-Ponty, cited in Moran, 2000, p. 418). Rather experiences such as those represented in this minor theme of Connecting to river places serve to bring sensation and reflection into correct relation with each other. In the wake of such experiences it becomes possible to critique the lifeworld layers of technique, culture, environment and society and how they are influential in both displacing and emplacing us. But we are wrong to think that we can master our experiences through rational critique alone.

In the first connection story of the second narrative in this theme we encountered one participant who had reached an epiphanal moment on the last morning of the Murray River trip. His letter and interview revealed how much reflection upon life, work, history and nature he had undergone during the journey. Yet this reflection was only brought into perspective – into correct relation – in the quiet, still, sensory experience of the drift on the mirror surface of Barmah Lake:
[It was] one of the most inspirational, deeply impacting experiences I’ve ever had. (Participant#8.M, letter, lines 194-196). It was some sort of journey that I’d been through to get to that moment. (Participant#8.M, interview, lines 229-231).

Such an experience of place, though fleeting, ripples through a lifetime. For in our memories it dawns as a realisation that “intelligence is no longer ours alone but is a property of the earth; we are in it, of it, immersed in its depths. There can be no separation of “the cultural environment from the natural environment” or of “a world of mental products distinct from the world of material products” (Gibson, 1986, p. 130). And indeed each terrain, each ecology, seems to have its own particular intelligence, its unique vernacular of soil and leaf and sky” (Abram, 1996a, p. 262). Such a realisation shakes our foundations, as no amount of effort on our part can make or re-make place. Nor can we imagine or re-imagine place. For neither ourselves nor place exists as an object either ‘out there’ in nature, or even ‘in here’ in our body. Both place and ‘the placed’ exist only in “complex relations of mutual dependence” (Priest, 1998, p. 73) that are always transgressing each other, tying us together with invisible threads. Only a pedagogy that is a responsive to this reciprocal and mutual interdependence, can become an authentic educative experience within place.

Such a pedagogy is not without risks. For some years John Cameron at the University of Western Sydney as been conducting a ‘sense of place’ curriculum that has required students to engage in place-based projects. He cautions:

I have observed a tendency amongst some students to take refuge in their chosen places, to derive personal comfort and significance from these visits, to revel in their newfound place attachment, and not to relate to the larger questions of sustainability, or cultural change, or control of economic power. It is a risk for educators that experiential learning can lead students so deeply into their internal experience that they are reluctant to emerge from it. (Cameron, 2003a, p. 188)

Were most participants’ experiences, that have been interpreted and represented in this inquiry, so immersed in their riverine refuges, that they failed to resurface back into the troublesome lifeworlds of technique, culture, environment and society? Or were they able to build a bridge back from the sensorial-moment into the everyday experience of home and their own pedagogy as outdoor educators in the years to follow? These questions are addressed in the final theme Reflecting on life and river pedagogy.
Reflecting on life and river pedagogy

Experiential outdoor programs that claim a responsiveness to nature (Allison, 1998; Martin, 2005; Martin and Thomas, 2000; Thomas and Thomas, 2000) or outdoor places (Cutherbertson, 1999; Henderson, 1995; Stewart, 2003a, 2004b; Wattchow, 2001a, 2003) might only be justified on three interrelated grounds. First, in these programs participants may experience an embodied reciprocity with the world. Casting aside the cliché’d misappropriation of the phrase for a moment, this is what it means to have a sense-of-place. We cannot predict or chart the outcomes of these encounters. Like any creative work that shifts our perception of phenomena: “the practical consequences of that work – social, environmental, and political in the broadest sense – cannot be controlled or predicted. They will be surprising, haphazard, indirect, long-term” (Bate, 2000, p. 23). However, we cannot avoid the question of whether participants were able to translate something of this experience to their everyday home and into their future work as outdoor education guides and teachers.

This question brings us to the second justification of a place sensitive pedagogy. Such experiences of connection should evoke reflections upon how we are placed in the world and how we are called into further learning and action to care for places. Places become, as Heidegger calls them, our “fields of care” where we take responsibility for their maintenance (see Hay, 2002, p. 161). This practice should be active and must work towards conserving, rather than preserving places (such as in attempts to manage wilderness-like places where evidence of human occupancy has been erased and time has been frozen). This practice will be a combination of routine actions and those that are the product of careful reflection.

The final justification is an extension of the second. A place-responsive pedagogy should be inspirational and, to a degree, adaptable to other places. “Mobility is in my bones”, writes Pinn (2003, p. 41), and we are, more than ever before, a mobile population. We are increasingly itinerant and our encounter with particular places may be hours, days or years. But very few remain who lives their life in a singular Heideggerian ‘field’. Like Lucy Lippard (1997) it is unlikely that there can be one centre of meaning for us. We are destined to experience multiple places – multiple centres of significance and experience. The outdoor places that we visit and teach in may become
such places. Hence, the places we care for may be places where we live most of our life (work places and home places), but equally may be recreational and pedagogical places.

Therefore, it is appropriate that this final minor theme interprets and represents participants’ narratives of reflecting upon the pedagogic meaning and significance of the river experiences they had as university students. This has been, of course, the overriding theme of the whole inquiry and the stated intention of the plausible insight interpretations of each of the preceding themes. Within the written and oral data there were a significant number of participant reflections that directly addressed the pedagogic consequences of those formative river experiences. In a sense, the participants here are providing their own plausible insights into the potential of a place sensitive and responsive pedagogy. Two narratives emerged:

First narrative: ‘Without realising it I had become a storyteller’. Here we listen to participants reflecting upon making the transition from being a participant to being a teacher/guide, and the ways that they were able to consider and construct their own pedagogies as they returned to the river-places or ventured to other river-places with their students.

Second narrative: ‘I found there’s lots of dilemmas.’ Their river experiences also caused participants to reflect, often with sadness, about the ecological plight of the river-place they had experienced, and to consider how their future is implicated with the future of the river.

As we move to these narratives it is all too easy to revert to reading as interrogation, critiquing these participants’ lives, rather than reading as empathetic listening. I use a poem here, at the outset, to remind us as readers, that we continue to actively engage with the texts. Reflection, both ours and the representations of the participants in the inquiry, itself occurs in place. It, too, is an act that results from the ongoing and reciprocal transgression of world, word and body …
THE LIGHT OF THE RIVER

For the first time in days the breeze is with us, funnelled by an overhanging arch of gums. The wrinkled lines that skin the river are vanishing beneath a rash of ripples before the nor-easter. There’s a slate sky over The Divide.

‘Rain from the east, three days at least,’ or so the local says.

But an afternoon sun still shines up the westward reach. The mirrored trees and banks are gone in a play of light and dark, and flashing silver filaments of sky. The mirror of myself, is gone, the words, the world dissolving, eddying away, in the current of The River.

Beneath the gums a shimmering light, wave upon wave reflecting, where

I am no longer solid, I hold no reflection of myself, I shimmer in the light of The River.
First narrative: ‘Without realising it I had become a storyteller’

These narratives of returning to the river as teachers/guides centre once again upon the Murray and Snowy rivers. As ‘pedagogic returns to place’ they reflect how participants have been able to adapt their own approaches to teaching and guiding on these rivers, each providing an example of being responsive to the river-place.

Two experiences – one year apart.

(Her initial journey on the Murray River trip)

“That was something I learnt about the Murray …. You’d see people fishing in their tinnies … lots of snags and lots of evidence that there’d been big groups or big base camps, campers or caravans or four wheel drives. I didn’t mind that. It felt … like: ‘Hey, I can do this, this is really ordinary. Anyone can do this.’ … it doesn’t feel so elite and exclusive … It was nice and ordinary for a change. Oh, just sometimes the [other university] trips that we did were so specialized. You had to have everything and you were so remote and you had to be so highly skilled to be able to get to those areas. Whereas you just go to the Murray and you’ve got your boat, got your dog, got your cup of tea, paddle down, maybe fish. I just found that really humble”

(Participant#7.F, interview lines 99-115).

(On her first trip as a guide one year later, as a third-year student taking first-years)

“From there on we only paddled between the hours of 4am and 9am. The mornings were magic and my plan was to make sure everybody experienced them. The group responded fabulously to travelling at dawn only. We saw much wildlife, wrapped ourselves up in rugs, and were bewildered by the silence and amazing colourings of the sunrise. By 9am our paddling was done and we retreated to late breakfasts and being creative during the day. We all made crochet hooks, and I taught the participants how to make beanies [woollen hats]. Another participant taught us how to make clapping sticks [an aboriginal musical instrument]. This trip turned out to be the most memorable of the course for me. It was one of my first attempts to combine outdoor education with artistic creative ability”


The initial slow journey down a section of the Murray River seemed spacious and open to possibility. The participant was subsequently able to design and run a trip that took elements of the original but was also flexible and responded to her own values for guiding people on the river. The removal of the specialisations of moving water paddling, and the ordinariness of the flat water canoe journey, created the space and licence for experimentation and responsiveness. She felt that she was able to overcome the gap between some of the things that she felt outdoor education to be (physical, technical, detailed, specialised, elite) and some of her ideals for what it should be (to develop different ways of seeing and being in nature).

Another participant returned to the river some years later and adapted his own pedagogy for the river from his experience as an undergraduate.

“I started doing trips similar to that Barmah one and worked out that I didn’t have the same capacity to pick up and run that trip in the same way … I needed to work out ways that I could take people to the river, that sat comfortable with me. So I went through a process there for a while, trying to work out what aspects of the river could I talk about and what stories there that are of interest to me”

(Participant#4.M, int. lines 418-423).

A pedagogy for the river is a negotiation between teacher, learner and place. This sounds both rational and common sense. But if all three of these entities are in a dynamic state of change the pedagogic task can only be understood as an ongoing and never ending negotiation. It becomes a
“Why do you want to talk about stories that are pretty depressing and hard to come to terms with [like salinity]? But I found some ways to do that. Get off – walk away from the river – talk about the river but actually go to a different part of it where there isn’t the river itself, go and talk to local people – farmers, indigenous people about their lives close to the river or on the river and involving students in that process. So that there’s different ways to see the river and what’s happening with it. How people use it and how people understand it” (Participant#4.M, interview lines 437-445).

Returning to the same river-place again and again erodes the novelty value of the encounter for participants, as they become story-tellers for the river.

“I took a group down rafting recently and I surprised myself with the stories that I was telling them. Just, sort of my feelings, that was the first time on really large rapids and how I felt on my trip and my experiences and try and put myself in their - sharing that with them ... We talked about the water and I was referring back to my trip when I travelled on the Snowy ... I was saying how I saw lots of emus at the time of the year when I travelled in September ... ‘watch out there’ll be dragon lizards ... and the students are like; ‘Oh, you knew.’” (Participant#19.F, interview lines 63-66).

The first journey as an undergraduate serves as an experiential reference point. The memory of particular aspects of the first trip allows her to both predict encounters (with the water dragons), and to note differences (with the water quality). The ability to call upon the previous experience in the form of meaningful stories seems to come naturally. They are intact and vivid in her memory. Each story contains a lesson for being on the river with the students she now guides (be alert, be attentive, be respectful).

“I love taking people down there and having a bit of a chat. Telling them about the little bit I know and a couple of stories. As your experience progresses or as you’re in the area you can always just point to a hill and say something funny that happened.... And you’re always learning a bit about the history the more I’m there and you’re able to put things together and you’re going down and you come past Campbell’s Knob and ... it’s good being able to tell people about it ... it’s not just the site of a river ... there used to be heaps of people living down here, a community, a mine and all that sort of thing” (Participant#16.M, interview lines 460-470).

Repeated journeys, and particularly conversations with locals, reveals a deep vein of human experience with the river landscape far beyond the initial exploration. But rather than negate the value of his first river journey they add layers of meaning to it. Gradually, places can be revisited and become scenes for other human’s encounters with the river. The river becomes a much more storied place and one with a great deal more personal, experiential and storied depth. There is now the feeling that the river is limitless in its ability to hold experiences and stories. Rather than a place that can be experienced and learnt in one journey, it is a place that is experienced in ever deepening layers of stories and subtleties.

“Without realising it I became a storyteller” (Participant#15.M, report lines 249-267).
Second narrative: ‘I found there’s lot’s of dilemmas’

This final narrative concerns how participants have been influenced by their experiences to consider the ecological plight of the river, and how it continues to be changed. Some participants became aware that the rivers they have experienced are wounded places.

“I think I’ve got a lot more appreciation for water, just water conservation. I used to sit there at home and you’d have a twenty minute shower and you wouldn’t think anything about it and ... then you go to the Snowy and that and you realize we are the driest continent on earth and that, and in twenty years time these rivers might not be running, so you just have a bit more appreciation just for water. It’s the most basic thing that we need, but everyone takes it for granted. You don’t realize how important it” (Participant#21.M, interview lines 780-787).

“I’d heard about ... the Snowy River Hydroelectric Scheme and seen some old footage and stuff ... But when I was actually there and I saw it in real time and real perspective I thought; ‘Boy, this must have been an amazingly large river, and the loss of volume and, and incredible life within itself.’ So I was quite taken aback by the change that has occurred over the last fifty years” (Participant#17.M, interview lines 260-266).

“I find that there’s lots of dilemmas ... I am struck be the way we can manipulate ... that large a volume of water. Just move it from one place to another, and the effects that it seems to have on the natural environment in terms of lower section of the Snowy where it seems like the ecology’s changed and is changing and also the effects on townships and people’s livelihoods around the place” (Participant#17.M, interview lines 273-278).

“even though its less than it was, I can still engage with it ... in a meaningful and uplifting way at a personal level” (Participant#17.M, interview lines 412-414).

The participant recognises the social and personal dilemmas in the state and fate of the river. The future of the river seems balanced on the brink between peoples need to use it as a resource and the need to care for it as a steward. The lesson of an imperilled river seems transferable to wider life, but it has provided few practical solutions to the dilemma. The realization that humans are capable of making such massive changes to the river and its flows seems incomprehensible, and he struggles to reconcile this with the personal scale of experience with the river. There is evidence all around of the river’s deep past, in its deeply eroded river valley and its smooth, water-worn rocks. Yet the scale of change in water flows seems so vast that a restoration to past levels seems impossible, especially as human lives are so dependant upon the water which has been redirected to flow down the Murray. Despite all this, there is a note of optimism. It is, after all, possible to embrace the experience of a wounded river.

The tension remains between the river we imagine – what we think it was, is, and might become – and the return to live on its banks, drift on its waters, and listen to the voices that keep whispering beneath all of our human desires.

“What role does it play in my life? I suppose in the last couple of years it’s formed ... a very central thread of how I’ve come to understand experiences I generate for others, but also at a personal level how in some ways it’s a barometer for ... how society, our culture, our community’s doing and how it relates to places. So, yeah I struggle with that contrast between feeling really sad about it, pretty disappointed about what’s happening with, going back to the river and being excited ... about being on its’ banks encountering it again” (Participant#4.M, interview lines 659-665).
Plausible insights: Reflecting on life and a pedagogy with river places in outdoor education

These final two narratives above bring closure to the meta-narrative work of interpreting and re-representing the experiences of participants in this inquiry. The majority of participants told stories of how the experiences of the Murray and Snowy river journeys had provided ongoing meaning in their lives. The encounters with these river places have served as experiential touchstones over time: “When someone says Murray River to me, that’s the bit I think of [the Barmah]” (Participant#8.M, interview, lines 600-602).

The pedagogic outcomes of these experiences are manifold. They may be found in a future parent reminding a child that the water from the bathroom tap they leave running is connected to the life of a river somewhere, or the member of a community making decisions and taking action about their local water catchment. It may also be found in participants opening themselves to experience the miracle of the earth as it expresses itself to us again and again, in whatever place we locate ourselves. But the central concern of this study has been to consider the possibility of a place-responsive pedagogy.

Of the 21 participants in the interview group, 14 had either returned to the specific sections of the rivers they had previously encountered or had adapted the pedagogy of the programs to suit other river-places in Victoria. For five of the participants, returning to the rivers as outdoor education teachers had become a central part of their life experience. Several of the participants had continued to paddle kayaks in demanding white water for personal recreation, but none had used kayaking in an educational context. Those who had gone on to teach and guide on white-water sections of rivers had done so exclusively in rafts. Flat-water programs developed by the participants had used both canoes and constructed rafts (out of barrels and timber). The two narratives in this theme have explored the pedagogic consequences of the Murray and Snowy river journeys. I do not mean to suggest that it is not possible to construct experiential and meaningful educational programs on the shorter, more technical sections of rivers (such as the Big, Mitchell and Mitta Mitta), but certainly this inquiry has revealed that this largely did not happen for these participants. So, what can we take from these final two narratives in terms of direction for a place-responsive river pedagogy?

The first narrative is inspirational. It shows participants adapting a pedagogy for themselves, the learners in their care, and the river-places they went on to teach within. That this was possible to do from the canoe and raft journeys on the slower flowing rivers suggests that these experiences were more open to adaptation and negotiation between the
teachers/guides, learners and river-places. In almost every case it was not the activity of canoeing or rafting that was central to their stories of teaching on these rivers but aspects of river-life (such as camping, cooking, seeing wildlife) and designing experiences (such as drifting on rafts, integrating art, craft and paddling, dawn paddles) that offered possibilities for responding to place. In addition, participants spoke of themselves as storytellers and have begun the important task of re-narrating the river-place. This final aspect is, perhaps, the most promising of all. Several participants had gone on to become teachers/guides who got to know aspects of a river’s geological, biological and cultural story, and were becoming aware of not only the importance of these stories, but of how, when and where they should be told to learners in their care.

The second narrative serves as a sober reminder. The rivers we have experienced, and return to, are damaged and disrupted places. European colonisation has irrevocably changed them both ecologically and culturally. Only a few of the participants had accepted and embraced these rivers as wounded places. Their stories and work resists the ongoing loss of places. As Rose (2004) writes:

Denarrativisation is a negative legacy for us on two counts. The first is social: as settler-descended peoples we inhabit country for which other people already have stories. This is not empty of unstoried land. The second is ecological. … the belief that the world is expressively inert does not destroy the world’s expressivity. Modernity may damage our ability to hear, even as our violence damages the world’s ability to communicate, and we become caught up in an amplifying process of reduction: the refusal to hear stifles or destroys living things, thereby reducing the multivocal expressivity of the world. Nevertheless, it is essential that we not mistake an inability to hear for an absence of communication, and not mistake loss for total death. (p. 183).

Yet within the laments for what the river has become there is cause for optimism. These participants are prepared to embrace the river for what it is, not what it once was or might one-day be. Perhaps they have recognised, like the New Zealand ecological historian Geoff Park that “any stretch of country, no matter how pervasive agriculture’s marks [and other place-diminishing manifestations of European colonisation – my addition], has an indwelling life force, waning or waxing, which distinguishes it from any other” (1995, p. 331). With this in mind, I conclude this interpretation of participants’ experiences and memories of river-places with an expression of a place-responsive pedagogy that has been revealed from within the collective themes, narratives and their textual representation in this inquiry. I stress that it is not intended as a transferable model of pedagogical practice. Rather it represents a pedagogic sequence that was most successful in realising a practice for outdoor places for the participants in this inquiry, at a particular time, and in those
particular river-places. Consideration of its adaptability and transferability to other places and with other teachers and learners must be left to the reader, and ultimately must be negotiated within the experience of each different place and its peopled. The sequence provides a pedagogic pathway between the embodied, sensory encounter of river, the ‘sensorial present’, and the interpretive lifeworlds of technique, culture, environment and society.

**We are present**

Hay (2003), paraphrasing Bachelard, states that the ‘real’ can only be approached “via a sub-linguistic process of uncritical, childlike wonder” (p. 273). To encounter the world with this sense of wonder, as if for the first time, is a mighty pedagogic challenge. For those of us steeped in the Western heritage of enlightened rationalism it is ever tempting to fall “back into the confines of his intellect’ (Lopez, 1986, p. 250). Lopez’s demanding questions to himself as a writer – “How can you occupy a place and also have it occupy you? How can you find such a reciprocity?” (Lopez, 1996, p. 11) – attune us precisely to this pedagogic challenge. How does the outdoor educator lead participants to a sense of childlike wonder with the world? Simply by crafting an encounter with the world that has scope for a ‘childlike’ vulnerability:

> The key, I think is to become vulnerable to a place. If you open yourself you can build intimacy. Out of such intimacy will come a sense of belonging, a sense of not being isolated in the universe. (Lopez, 1996, p. 11)

Repeatedly, in this inquiry, we have seen that when participants felt threatened by the river (and the activity they were doing there) they retreated from the expressivity of the outdoor place into the secondary lifeworlds of technique, culture and social group. Equally, we have seen that there were aspects of programs that opened the participants to the ‘sensorial present’ (in the drift, the dawn paddle, solitary moments of escape from the social group, in routines around camp, and even perhaps in the fleeting encounter with a wild animal). Such encounters often begin with an intentional act on the part of the outdoor educator, to give him or herself, and the participants in their care, up to the possibilities of the place they are within. This is nothing less than the phenomenological suspension of belief, a ridding oneself of the assumptions that come from the secondary lifeworlds, that govern our interpretations and representations of our experiences.
Therefore the work of the outdoor educator, in this first phase of crafting an experiencing with place, is to find ways to resist the eclipse of the unitary lifeworld of embodied experiencing by the secondary lifeworlds of interpretation. Such an experiencing of place is likely to be temporary, momentary, even fleeting. But participants will feel themselves become porous – osmotic with place. Their body will be flooded with their surrounds and they will no longer be finished at the skin. There have been many clues within “Moving on an effortless journey” that offer these possibilities. In particular, critiquing, rejecting, and ‘shedding’ the normal outdoor education orientation to the river with its emphasis on safety, skill, technique and adventure, is likely to remedy much of the silencing of river places. The structure of such encounters has already been detailed in the plausible insights interpretation of Sensing a connection with river places (releasing and opening, sensing and filling, connecting). This authentic response within place, is precisely this reciprocity, the ongoing interchange between by body and the entities that surround it. It is a sort of silent conversation that I carry on with things, a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below my verbal awareness. (Abram, 1996a, p. 52).

The world ceases to be an object, and the participant has come to stand alongside all other beings, as an integrated co-member within the land community (Leopold, 1987 edition). We are released to return to the terrain itself (Henderson, 1995). This is the quintessential possibility of a truly experiential outdoor education. Is it possible to further refine this pedagogy response within place?

**We listen: Apprenticing ourselves to outdoor places**

We recall, according to Abram, Lopez and Raffan, that native hunters must apprentice themselves to the animals that they would kill (Abram, 1996a, p. 140). We might go even further and suggest that the indigenous or local person apprentices themself to place, where the ‘land is teacher’ (Raffan, 1992). In such an apprenticeship people draw into balance the tension always existing between the pre-discursive ‘sensorial present’ and the interpretive word-world of refection. As Cameron concludes: “a felt response to place without ecological understanding is as one-sided as scientific or historical knowledge of a place without any emotional attachment to it” (2003a, p. 194).

Several of the participants in this inquiry had established long term relationships with the outdoor places studied here, returning again and again either for their own recreation or as teachers and guides. Their emotional bonds of attachment to these river places had
grown strong and, in some cases, it was clear that they were developing a considerable ecological and cultural knowledge of place. For these participants the initial contact with these river places found them to be ‘welcoming places’, where they felt secure and where they experienced the type of encounter just outlined. This inquiry did not consider directly why they felt moved to return to those places, to migrate back to the river again and again, and such a research project would make a valuable further addition to our understanding of how place experiences and knowledge accumulates in an individual over repeated visits.

What is clear, however, is that the participants’ experienced this accumulation as a layering of experience and knowledge: “it’s a layering thing, it’s not one chunk of knowledge that you suddenly acquire. I think it’s learning over time” (Participant#4.M, interview lines 538-539). Another participant on a return to the Murray River in the Barmah Forest, this time as an outdoor education teacher, suddenly realised and embodied an awareness of the significance of the Cadell Uplift and its profound influence upon place and experience:

Why does the river suddenly turn south there? Why is there an anabranch there that disappears off there for hundreds of kilometres and comes back? … Why is there a huge a wetland there? Why is there such a massive redgum forest/wetland there? So it all fitted together. It was like the penny dropped. Oh, that all makes sense. And then for me I was able to pass it on really simply to students. (Participant#12.M, interview lines 636-642)

As the participant circles between the unitary and secondary lifeworld layers of interpretation, again and again, their embodied and emotional bond with place deepens in concert with their intellectual understanding. Embodied experience and rational interpretation become reconciled into a correct relation with each other. It is as if they are living the legacy of Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (1987 edition), which models for us, again and again, the elegant human tension between poetic response and rational description. The experience of place is neither one nor the other, but both. As such they become educators and guides who are willing to assist in the birth-place of new experiences and situated knowledge with learners. They practice:

[an] open attentiveness, the willingness to suspend judgment and ‘listen’ to a place, the capacity to reflect on both affective and intellectual responses. These are abilities which are best communicated by the presence and attitudes of the educators themselves – by how they are rather than what they say when they are outdoors with the students. It sets the outdoor educators on just as much a journey as the students; always broadening and deepening their relationships with places. (Cameron, 2001, p. 32)
They have heard the wounded river whispering beneath the cacophony or noise we cart to and impose upon the river, in the forms of our equipment and desires for what we imagine the river should be for us, and they respond …

We speak

Geoff Park (1995) opens Nga Uruora: The Groves of Life, with a quotation from Frank Gohlke: “At its best, telling the landscape’s story can still feel like a sacred task” (p. 11). Yet “every storyteller falls short of a perfect limning of the landscape – perceptions and language both fail” (Lopez, 1988, p. 69). The river flows to us through a land so deep in time and vast in complexity that we are ever destined to fail in our attempts to arrest it in our imaginations and words:

when we cease to demand the truth and realize that the best we can have of those substantial truths that guide our lives is metaphorical – a story … that the interior landscape is a metaphorical representation of the exterior landscape, that the truth reveals itself most fully not in dogma but in paradox, irony, and contradictions that distinguish compelling narratives. (Lopez, 1988, p. 71)

“Without realising it I had become a storyteller,” said one of the participants in this inquiry. In doing so he found himself “embedded and immersed in the landscape … on both physical and spiritual levels. It has become a place of connection and security” (Participant#15.M, report lines 268-271). Having allowed himself the “the opportunity to open up [he] began to fill the empty spaces within with stories and new memories” (Participant#15.M, report lines 335-340). This participant, and the others who expressed similar sentiments, have begun the onerous task of learning our way towards a “place-responsive society” (Cameron, 2003a, p. 193).

When we tell these stories we complete a hermeneutic circle of telling and sharing the meaning we take from our experiences of outdoor places, whilst remaining every aware of ‘the sensorial present’ – the unpredictable, unmanageable, ultimately unspeakable ‘sensorial present’ – that is there beneath the everyday, a whisper reminding us to listen before we ever speak a word.

The outdoor educators duty and privilege then, is to witness to the whisperings of a wounded world, and to carefully and respectfully negotiate a pedagogic response. In the words of Aldo Leopold:
one of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds ... An ecologist must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise. (cited in Orr, 1992, p. 54)

In the final conclusion chapter to follow I summarise “Moving on an effortless journey” specifically from the perspective of a place-responsive pedagogy. Heidegger was right to return us to the interpretive quality of being-in-the-world. Merleau-Ponty was right to return us to the fundamental importance of the body in experience. Leopold was right to return us to a consideration of ‘the land’ and community. The Australian scholars of place were right to return us to a consideration of what will be required of those of us with a settler heritage to belong here – to become Australian. And, Abram, and the poets quoted throughout this dissertation, were right to return us to a careful consideration of the ‘earthiness’ of language. Based on the interpretations of river experiences as they have been ‘lived’ and represented here, I consider what might be necessary for the outdoor education profession to return to a pedagogy of place.
CHAPTER NINE: “O shining and winding water, winding in me”

Bound to that place by what mysterious love!

O shining and winding water, winding in me

And moving towards a song, as in the tree
to bud and leaf the sap’s cool currents move,
Never have I lost, no never at any time
However ice-bound, never in any place
However distant, one eddy’s splash or chime,
One ripple’s flash, one still pool’s darker grace.

(Extract from The River, 1992, Douglas Stewart)

Lived experience of outdoor places and reflection upon place experiences are deeply interwoven. This relationship and its pedagogical potential has often been poorly understood in outdoor education, particularly the impacts and implications of educational choices made about designing and employing outdoor activities. This dissertation has explored participants’ experiences of river places, through their written and spoken reflections, and has revealed important aspects of the lived meanings, essences and structures of those experiences. It achieved this by being attentive to the tension between experiencing and reflection. This tension has remained a constant throughout the poetic representation of “Moving on an effortless journey”. It was present between participants’
voices and researcher’s interpretation, between theme and poem, between textual fragment and its echo. It was there also in the space between thematic texts and reflective plausible insights: a continuing hermeneutic circling between parts and whole, that gathered momentum as the meta-narrative unfolded. And, most importantly, it was present I hope in the reader’s own ‘lived’ interpretations and how they were moved to consider their own appropriate pedagogic response to experience and place.

By patiently, carefully writing words back into place and back into experience as it is lived, I have relied upon a human poesis; the ability to form a creative image out of experience that re-animates us in the lived quality of life. The image forms, as it does for the Inuit hunter, “at the periphery of your concentration” (Lopez, 1986, p. 200). Then, in the words of the poets that I have used to initiate and guide each chapter in this dissertation, we may hear the river speak in the silence through our lived encounters, we may be mindful of the many fictions we impose on and translate from the river, we may witness the words of the river swarming before us, and we may live to translate those words, for ourselves, our students and our communities. As Martin Mulligan (2003) suggests, this is important work, but it remains some way from a satisfactory conclusion:

we need to look beyond the rational to decolonise our mindsets, and such a decolonising movement might be led by people with expertise in non-rational understandings of lived experience. In Australia, for example, landscape painters, poets, novelists, creators of children’s literature, photographers and film-makers have all engaged in an exploration of the dialogical interaction between people and the land that might enable settler society to finally ground itself in Australian environments. This has been a very difficult project and is far from reaching any kind of satisfactory resolution. (Mulligan, 2003, p. 280)

“Our uniqueness might lie right here,” writes Australian novelist David Malouf (1998), “in the tension between environment and culture rather that in what we can salvage by insisting either on the one or the other” (p. 33). This, George Seddon writes, is “the inescapable tension in being and becoming Australian [my emphasis]” (1997, p. xiv). Hence, there are many openings for an outdoor education pedagogy that is committed to being and becoming responsive to Australian places, but the conclusion of a study such as this one requires a degree of caution.

It is customary in the conclusion of a study to reiterate the main findings to offer a ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’ posed at the outset. In the case of this study we now recognise the ‘problem’ for outdoor education is that it practices a pedagogy that, in significant measure, denies the particulars of local places. However, proposing a categorical solution to this ‘problem’ would be illusory, and indeed antithetical to both a phenomenological
interest in *being* and *becoming* and to the needs of the lived experience of place. The temptation to ‘solve the problem’ should be resisted. It is, however, possible and appropriate to offer some summary comments on the study as a whole and guidance for the consideration of outdoor education teachers and researchers about how they might begin to think and act as a response to their own situation.

In this concluding chapter I do this in two ways. First, I direct the reader to *Table 6: Summary interpretation of “Moving on an effortless journey”* (pp. 251-252). This summary provides a distillation of the structures, meanings and essences of the lived experiences of participants in the inquiry. It outlines the pedagogic consequences for outdoor places. The usefulness of this summary will be defined by the reader’s ability to reflect upon their own pedagogic emplacement with learners in their care, and to trigger a greater responsiveness to experiencing the particulars of outdoor places. Second, I offer a speculative conclusion that looks forward to the possibilities of a place-responsive pedagogy.

**The healing middle ground: Summarising “Moving on an effortless journey”**

I stated in the introductory chapter of this dissertation that the ultimate purpose of such research is for outdoor education teachers and, invariably other researchers, to know “how to act tactfully in pedagogic situations on the basis of a carefully edified thoughtfulness” (van Manen, 1997, p. 8).

You might recall the lines I wrote in the poem *Floodplain Acoustics* - “turning country into river / river into country” (p. 209) - and the way that the human participants in the poem had silenced themselves to listen to the manifold voices that surrounded them and ultimately enfolded them into river-country. In the moment when the river breaks out from its humanly regulated control and reclaims its indigenous heritage, it becomes ‘country’ once again. For a wounded river, what is required is a shift in identification away from the human ego and its desire for control, towards river-country; the river as place:

we can urge each other to ‘care more’ about the environment, but until we have revised our sense of identity to include the natural world our best intentions may be in vain. The cure for our ecologically disastrous abuse of the earth and for our culturally debilitating racism is the spiritual renewal of consciousness ... The discovery and development of a new imaginal vision will create the healing middle ground between western rationality and aboriginal animism, between the ego-centred awareness and the living ecological earth. (Tacey, 1995, p. 175-176)
Table 6: Summary interpretation of “Moving on an effortless journey”.

**MAJOR THEMES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INQUIRY THEMES</th>
<th>STRUCTURE OF LIVED EXPERIENCES</th>
<th>MEANING – ESSENCE OF LIVED EXPERIENCES</th>
<th>CONSEQUENCES FOR A RESPONSIVENESS TO ‘PLACE’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Rivercraft</strong>&lt;br&gt;Participant responses primarily based upon moving water programs where the major aims were technical skill, leadership development and expedition travel.</td>
<td>Participants’ experiences were structured exclusively around ‘the rapid’, with three levels of competence. Each reveals how the ‘space’ of the rapid is apprehended and colonised by the paddler: 1(i). Novice paddler (where the rapid, and the river, was viewed and encountered as a <em>blur</em>). 1(ii). Coping paddler (where the rapid ‘read’ and named as it was rationally dismantled into hazards and a <em>line</em> of safe passage. 1(iii). Performing paddler (where the participant projected an image of themselves upon the rapid; the rapid became a <em>field of performance</em> - a smooth and ‘playful’ dance between danger and the opportunity for expression.</td>
<td>A TECHNICAL LIFEWORLD. The ‘rapid’ became a site of technologically mediated embodied performance. Particular paddling technologies (kayak, canoe, raft, paddle, PFD) ‘framed’ almost all aspects of the encounter, including its linguistic naming into hazards, <em>line</em> or ‘field of performance*. These technologies themselves are designed specifically around the opportunities / threat of ‘the rapid’.</td>
<td>The participants’ lived experiences of the river became ‘captured’ by the specificity of the paddling technologies, the continual emphasis on training and technique, and the demands of ‘the rapid’. The river, through the intensified encounter with the rapid, is lived as a challenging arena of performance. It is, at various times, constructed as a monster, an adversary, and an opportunity. The river is colonised by the paddlers as a narrow corridor that provides for adventurous outdoor activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Romancing the river.</strong>&lt;br&gt;Participant responses in this theme were evident for both white water and calm sections of rivers: 2(i) Applied only to white water rivers. 2(ii) Applied to both white water and calm rivers. 2(iii) Applied only to calm rivers.</td>
<td>The river encountered as a desire for ‘wild’ nature; structured in three types of responses: 2(i). A threatening ‘wild’ river. An intense <em>testing ground</em> where <em>pleasurable fear</em> was encountered and respect held for the ‘wild’ river. 2(ii). River as immense, powerful and enduring. The river as a living example of a universal and timeless ‘wild’ nature. Participants witness the wild river with a sense of <em>wonder</em>. 2(iii). A non-threatening river. The calm river (on its floodplain) was experienced as a primordial <em>refuge/escape</em> from modern, industrial society, and sustained by participants developing an experiential <em>envelope</em> that <em>filtered</em> the experience.</td>
<td>A CULTURAL LIFEWORLD. The tradition of Romanticism provided the template for a cultural interpretation of the river as a lived example of ’wild’ nature. This layer of cultural meaning existed for all river places in the inquiry and initiated particular relations with the rivers (as testing ground; as immense, powerful and enduring; as refuge), which were dependant upon the presence or absence of a perceived threat from the river.</td>
<td>2(i) and 2(ii) were evident for participants on programs where rapids were encountered. The romanticised relations of physical risk/adventure activity and the setting of the rapid underwrote the pursuit of rivercraft. Specific memories became ‘thrillingly amplified’ over time through intense reflection. Participants felt insignificant against the magnitude and mystery of the ‘wild’ river. 2(ii) and 2(iii) is a variation where the non-threatening river is perceived as immense and enduring whilst being a pristine refuge. It is the antithesis of the despoliation of nature by modern civilisation. Collectively, the ‘wild’ river is experienced as a place of beauty and wonder, but other constructions of the river (geological, historical, ecological, spiritual) are, by-and-large, erased.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3. River-Life

This theme responded to participant accounts of learning to live on the river’s banks during canoe, kayak and raft journeys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>INQUIRY THEMES</strong></th>
<th><strong>STRUCTURE OF LIVED EXPERIENCES</strong></th>
<th><strong>MEANING – ESSENCE OF LIVED EXPERIENCES</strong></th>
<th><strong>CONSEQUENCES FOR A RESPONSIVENESS TO ‘PLACE’</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3(i) Developed through an improvisational response to environmental conditions. Some aspects of river-life quickly become routine and slide beneath conscious attention.</td>
<td>AN ENVIRONMENTAL LIFEWORLD 3(i) and 3(ii) are contrasted experientially as participation and spectacle. Participation is more meaningful to participants and dominates responses. The river is constructed as an environmental resource for what it can supply in terms of materials and entertainment.</td>
<td>Participants’ were aware of relying upon the river-place’s ‘resources’ for flow, fuel and shelter. Water from the river, as a daily resource, was taken for granted. Other beings, for whom the place was ‘home’, were encountered briefly, but not meaningfully. Environmental relations hold considerable potential for developing place responsiveness, but would require greater time and emphasis to develop than was evident in these programs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3(ii) Encounters with ‘wildlife’ were fleeting. Much of the wildlife that is aesthetically appreciated as spectacle is fleeing the presence of the group.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AN ENVIRONMENTAL LIFEWORLD</strong> 3(i) and 3(ii) are contrasted experientially as participation and spectacle. Participation is more meaningful to participants and dominates responses. The river is constructed as an environmental resource for what it can supply in terms of materials and entertainment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A SOCIAL LIFEWORLD</strong> Places were experienced socially and tensions and conflicts were inevitable. Tensions and social differences were most evident when the river was lived as a work-place. Yet these differences could be ameliorated relatively easily on the river through self-selection into subgroups.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. The social river

Socialisation within the group(s) and its influence on experience the river as place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>EXPERIENCES</strong></th>
<th><strong>A SOCIAL LIFEWORLD</strong></th>
<th><strong>EXPERIENCES</strong></th>
<th><strong>A UNITARY LIFEWORLD OF EXPERIENCING</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences were contrasted between large and subgroups: 4(i) Within the large group the river became masculinized as a place of ‘work’ (around rapids and in camp duties). Social politics of the large group were often considered detrimental to the experience of being on the river. 4(ii) Self-selected subgroups of supportive friends often subverted the ‘rules’ of ‘work’ and constraints of technology, to initiate experiences of shared reverie and play.</td>
<td>Places were experienced socially and tensions and conflicts were inevitable. Tensions and social differences were most evident when the river was lived as a work-place. Yet these differences could be ameliorated relatively easily on the river through self-selection into subgroups.</td>
<td>Experience of the ‘sensorial present’ beneath the secondary lifeworld layers of technique, culture, environment and society. These experiences were often brief, even momentary, but of lasting significance.</td>
<td>The river-place is experienced as welcoming. It is a place of deep felt emotional attachment. The river-place is reflected upon as meaningful, but the experience is difficult to articulate. There are some concerns that participants may not be able to re-surface into the more ambiguous lifeworlds of technique, culture, environment and society.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5. Sensing a connection to river places.

Where some participants experience a sense-of-place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>EXPERIENCES</strong></th>
<th><strong>A UNITARY LIFEWORLD OF EXPERIENCING</strong></th>
<th><strong>EXPERIENCES</strong></th>
<th><strong>A UNITARY LIFEWORLD OF EXPERIENCING</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A sensory reciprocity with river-place developed in three phases: 5(i) Releasing and opening: Release of rational expectations/interpretations and opening of the senses. 5(ii) Filling: A sensation of being entered by place, the body becoming osmotic with the river. 5(iii) Connecting: The river place experienced as ‘speaking’, connected by invisible threads of relations with place.</td>
<td>Experience of the ‘sensorial present’ beneath the secondary lifeworld layers of technique, culture, environment and society. These experiences were often brief, even momentary, but of lasting significance.</td>
<td>The river-place is experienced as welcoming. It is a place of deep felt emotional attachment. The river-place is reflected upon as meaningful, but the experience is difficult to articulate. There are some concerns that participants may not be able to re-surface into the more ambiguous lifeworlds of technique, culture, environment and society.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6. Reflecting on life/river pedagogy

The significance to life and work as teachers/guides

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>EXPERIENCES</strong></th>
<th><strong>A SPECULATIVE PEDAGOGY OF RIVER-PLACES</strong></th>
<th><strong>EXPERIENCES</strong></th>
<th><strong>A SPECULATIVE PEDAGOGY OF RIVER-PLACES</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The experience of the river programs resulted in reflections upon life and outdoor pedagogy: 6(i) The river-place was a source of dilemmas about environmental resources and abuses. 6(ii) A river pedagogy was discerned as ‘being present’, ‘apprenticing oneself to place’, and ‘speaking for place’.</td>
<td>The river is experienced as a wounded place, but remains meaningful, and one that requires careful reflection about its use and translation.</td>
<td>Some participants were able to acknowledge the wounded river, and express care and concern for its plight. In addition, some participants had begun to see themselves as storytellers, who had the potential to translate the river-place for the learners they were now teaching/guiding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This move towards a healing middle ground might also be understood as the need to reconcile the extreme differences between rational and subjective ways of interpreting meaning from our experiences. This has emerged as a prevailing argument throughout this study. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) propose an experientialist remedy to the opposed myths of objectivism and subjectivism. Soper (1995) asks both ecological realists and sceptical postmodern deconstructionists to temper their positions in a more practical and responsible politics for nature. Read (2003) discovers a continuum of experience between the scientifically provable and the haunting presence of a spirit-of-place - not an irreconcilable duality. And writers such as Lopez, Leopold and Park model textual styles that blend ecological science and historical ‘truths’ on the one hand with an embodied poetics on the other. If such requests and demonstrations are representative of a genuine shift in belief and practice that holds greater possibilities for a societal and pedagogic place-responsiveness, what then does this study tell us about the role that outdoor education may play in this journey?

“Moving on an effortless journey” serves as a guide towards this healing middle ground for outdoor educators in several important ways. First, in a renewed commitment to experiencing outdoor education pedagogy can bring participants closer to an awareness of experience as it is lived. The undercurrent of the everyday is brought to the surface and reveals our indebtedness to place. The siren song of the secondary lifeworlds of technique, culture, environment and society is temporarily suspended. It was clear that this involved a short-term suspension of educational goals, objectives and the technical aspirations of adventure activities as we typically think of them as outdoor educators. Equally, participants needed to feel comfortable in what they were doing, physically, socially, emotionally, and in their setting. The moments when this lesson was most accessible to participants were almost always quiet, were relaxed and even meditative in character, and involved the onset of an awareness of the rhythms of nature (diurnal/nocturnal changes, the rivers flows and dynamism, the erosive work of the river in deep time). It is a paradoxical moment of realisation, when the river is experienced as its own entity, independent of human desires for what it might be, or whatever naming (Thomas and Thomas, 2000) or names we might give to a river (Stewart, 2004b) and our activities there. In so doing the river ‘comes to life’ for us.

Part of the work of the outdoor educator then is to craft, through program design, a responsive negotiation between participants and place. Central to this task is the search for pedagogic opportunities or ‘moments’ that peel back the many masks we make for the earth’s places. We might then encounter pedagogy as a “certain encounter of togetherness
between … teacher and pupil” (van Manen, 1991, p. 30) and place. This entails sensitivity to the ‘tone’ and ‘atmosphere’ of the pedagogic situation (van Manen, 1986) and particularly to place, where the educator is always ‘tactful’ (van Manen, 1991) - watching and listening as experience unfolds. More explicitly, by considering and adapting van Manen’s (1991) principles of pedagogic tact, we gain valuable insight into what it might be like to work as an outdoor educator who sees their task as encouraging learners to weave the invisible threads that bond people to places:

Pedagogic tact shows itself as holding back (in listening before speaking).
Pedagogic tact shows itself as openness to the learner’s experience(ing).
Pedagogic tact shows itself as attuned to (inter)subjectivity (and inter-corporeality).
Pedagogic tact shows itself as subtle (and local) influence.
Pedagogic tact shows itself as situational (and local) confidence.
Pedagogic tact shows itself as improvisational gift (especially through the gift of story).

And, we might add,
(Pedagogic tact shows itself as always responding to the particulars of local places).
(adapted, with additions and alterations in brackets, from van Manen, 1991, pp, 149-159)

The second way that “Moving on an effortless journey” is instructive for a healing, place-responsive outdoor education pedagogy, is its demonstration that a pedagogic watchfulness and listening on the part of the educator invariably requires a deepening knowledge of both participants and place, and their needs. The kind of pre-packaged outdoor education experiences that have become popular in many Australian schools, where much of the program is ‘outsourced’ to ‘external providers’, should be anathema to a place-responsive outdoor education, unless special provision can be made for the teachers/guides to know both participants and place deeply. Similarly, a school based outdoor education teacher who is inattentive to the wider lives of participants and places, who slavishly follows the attempts at objectifying and universalising learning that has become prevalent in contemporary curriculum documentation, is also unlikely to be in a position to listen to the ‘tone’ of the pedagogic situation and to respond to the particulars of a local place. Both these examples risk delivering participants to a theatrically commodified experience where place is relegated to the role of arena and where the participants perform well-rehearsed lines. Alternatively, the educator whose aim is to guide participants towards responsiveness to place is engaged in what Michael Thomashow (1995) calls ‘ecological identity work’. Thomashow offers a perspective that requires a response:
Ecological identity work requires the ability to overcome both internal and external distractions, achieving a state of mind, a way of being, an approach to life experience, and a philosophy of learning. The challenge is to experience ecological identity everywhere, not just in specific places – contained regions such as nature centers or parks – but in the various domains of everyday life. (1995, p. 179).

Thomashow is right to highlight the distinctiveness of learning required to experience an ‘ecological identity’ and to call us back to the needs of everyday life, but wrong, I feel, to think that a universal ecological identity is possible. Rather, what is needed is an acceptance of how particular places call us to learn and how this learning may be interconnected from one place to another, for example, from the outdoor journey to our everyday home. This study reveals the extent to which this division remains problematic for outdoor education. Learning, and life itself sometimes, seems to remain out there in the outdoors, not back here in the confusion of the everyday. It is worth reminding ourselves of this dilemma as forcefully as possible by reading the following student poem titled I want to go back, written at shortly after the Murray River – Barmah trip in 1995:

I sit here in the lounge chair listening to the silence being broken by the sound of cars and ambulance sirens.
There is no flowing river to hear, no croaking frogs.
There is only silence.
I can not hear the birds singing or the murmur of people collected around the camp fire.
There is only silence.
The florescent lights hurt my eyes.
There is no gentle glow of campfires, no flickering candlelight or kero lanterns.
The doorways are square, the cupboards are perfectly angular and sharp.
They hurt my eyes.
There is no randomly shaped trees filled with life and history, nor imperfect seating arrangements, only smooth walls that have no texture, no life. There are no leaves to turn golden in the setting sun, nor rippling river to reflect those glowing rays. All I see is a city landscape with automated lights.
The things that I can not see hurt my eyes.
The house is warm and stuffy. I can not feel the cool night breeze or the flowing river beneath my hands.
I feel numb.
I cannot feel the warmth of the fire upon my face as cold air is at my back.
I feel nothing.
The carpet beneath my feet is sterile. I can not feel the dirt, the softness of leaves and grass or the crunching of bark as a I walk.
I feel numb.
The tap water stinks of chlorine. The air is absent of the smoky smell of a campfire.
The air is stuffy not fresh. There is no smell of Eucalyptus.
I can not smell.
The kitchen is empty, there is no smell of tea cooking at the campfire.
I can not smell.
My bed is already made. I do not have to try to construct a place to sleep.
I do not have to think.
Everything I need can be turned on, water at the tap, light at a switch, heating at a
dial.
I do not have to think.
The sink and the toilet conveniently dispose of sewage and unwanted water.
I do not have to think.
The bin fills with rubbish, someone else will take it away.
I do not have to think.

As I sit in the house that shuts out the world,
I do not hear,
My eyes hurt, I do not see,
I feel numb, I can not smell,
I do not think,
    So as I sit here, I wonder if I am alive.
(Participant#47.F, letter)

The poem poignantly counter balances river-place with home, and embodied knowing with rational thinking. The student-poet concluded: “the trip took place on the river but for many I think the trip also took place within themselves. They looked not only at the surrounding land, but also the landscape of their minds and souls” (Participant#47, letter lines 22-25). That such deep insights can be fostered by an outdoor education experience with the river is encouraging. But they are balanced by the substantial sadness of the poem, particularly the image of the post-trip, lonely and disconnected student, trapped inside the ‘house that shuts out the world’. It is a strange world indeed where a sense of domestic security is now ‘out-there’ on the river. The place of escape (Beck, 1995) has become a haven from a placeless society. Now it is home, the house, the city that has taken on the metaphor of a wilderness of lonely isolation. The student-poet cries out for assistance in travelling across the gulf between home and the journey. Such disconnections have become a part of the modern experience of life and must be anticipated by educators who themselves may be struggling for their own attachment to place.

Until outdoor education can foster a philosophy of learning, whose outcome is that learners reflexively seek to experience and know each place they find themselves in, it will not contribute to bridging the old dualities of civilisation and nature, the wild and the domestic, the journey and home. It will continue to risk abandoning participants on which ever side of the divide they feel a sense of attachment. Such an outdoor education is unlikely to have much to contribute to a broader communal journey towards a place-responsive society.

The third way that “Moving on an effortless journey” can serve as a pedagogic guide is found in exposing the mismatch between a sense-of-place and a rational knowledge-of-
place in current outdoor education practice. We have already seen that a sense of
connection and attachment to outdoor places is possible. Yet we are reminded once again
by Cameron (2003a) that, “a felt response to place without ecological understanding is as
one-sided as scientific or historical knowledge of a place without any emotional
attachment to it” (p. 194). What can be gleaned from the study with regard to knowing-
place scientifically and historically?

The experiences of slow moving rivers and living artfully on the rivers banks,
particularly as shown in this study through the Murray River-Barmah trips and the lower
reaches of the Snowy River, seemed to offer many opportunities for the development of
a sense-of-place. The themes of River-life and Sensing a connection to river places
revealed how this might be possible, but equally showed how little many of the
participants had learned of the river’s histories or ecology. This represents an intuitive
overcorrection perhaps to the disembodied approach to learning found in more
conventional approaches to schooling, outdoor education, and even to the intellectual
study of place, but may have been equally unbalanced.

There are two points worth summarising here. First, outdoor educators are
potentially well placed to present a truly integrated curriculum for learners; one where
outdoor education teachers and guides know how to thoughtfully and tactfully combine
experiencing particular places with the study of those places. Such a curriculum and
pedagogy, one that is committed to the mutual ties between experiencing and reflection,
and people and place, has the potential to position outdoor education pedagogy as an
exemplar for other teaching areas to follow. Second, such a place-responsive pedagogy
would require us to become more reliant upon local places and peoples, to study a
place’s histories and ecologies, and constantly couple this with experiencing places, as
Leopold (1987 edition) and Park (1995) have demonstrated so eloquently. It is likely
that such a program would require more time for historical and ecological study and
creative writing/artistic responses to place, meeting and working with locals who inhabit
the region, greater reliance upon the local community for resources and knowledge, and
consideration of the interconnection between the outdoor place encountered and the
participants’ home places of residence. We can then extend the questions inspired by
Wendell Berry into a cycle that compels us to respond to places wherever it is that we
teach:

**What is here in this place?** What can we seek to learn here through our sense-of-
place and our knowledge-of-place? Who (human and non-human) lives here? Who
relied upon this place? What was its past, how has it changed and what is it becoming? What futures might this place have?

What will this place permit us to do? What wounds does this place carry? Who cares for this place? How can we insure that our experiences do not wound this place further? How can our actions help to heal this place?

What will this place help us to do? How does this place sustain us whilst we are here? How do we design an experience that is attuned with this place; that works with it rather than against it? How do we remain watchful, attentive and listening to this place whilst we are here?

How is this place interconnected with my home place? How is this place influenced by my home place? How is my home influenced by this place? Can we reveal and experience these threads of this connection? Are there ways of experiencing and knowing this place that return us to the first question when we return to home: What is here in this place …

These are, of course, all rational questions that would seem to seek a rational response. But we have seen repeatedly in this study that this will not be enough. We must remain ever cautious about our propensity to colonise places with our own intentions, desires and rationalisations. We must remain alert to the non-rational and the sensual moment when something of place may be revealed that we cannot reduce to words. Then, perhaps, that which has been strange to us will be less so, and we will see that places which seemed fragmented and isolated are part of a richer mosaic. Such insights are only possible as a result of a pedagogy that is prepared to suspend, at least temporarily, the assumptions loaded upon it through its heritage. It is a pedagogy that might position itself in the very heart of the tension between being and becoming.

Questions of pedagogy and methodology have been woven together throughout this study. “Research is a caring act,” writes van Manen (1997, p. 5). He means, that it is a caring act between participants, researcher and the resulting descriptive text of lived experience - between people and words. In this study that caring act has been extended from person and word, to include the places implicated in this research. Indeed, none of these three can be separated as they are enfolded into each other. It is worth commenting briefly upon several methodological aspects of the research conducted in this study.

**Reflections on method and methodology**

Bringing a phenomenological orientation to the interpretation and representation of lived experience of river places through outdoor education tested my confidence and
conviction as a researcher/writer on many occasions. In this type of study each new phase, from the initial guiding question, through the critiques of broad and eclectic literatures, the initial interpretation of data, and to the representation of participants’ lived experiences, was filled with uncertainty and posed unique challenges. It truly is a research methodology that had to be lived through. I cannot imagine that the study could have been completed without taking leave for a full year from work for the writing up of the dissertation, and this has implications for the size and scope of future research studies where a researcher would become similarly immersed in topic and method. Yet such an approach does yield insights for pedagogic practice that it is not possible to gain through any other method.

The development of the inquiry matrix proved to be a very useful methodological guide. As a guide to conversational interviewing, particularly where consistency across a number of participants is required, yet where each conversation needed to take its own particular twists and turns, it seemed vastly superior to a list of questions and prompts. The experiential texts written by the participants when they were undergraduate students were crucial in allowing preparation for the interviews and for exploring specific memories of experiences. The reflective letters written by the La Trobe University students were more useful here than the expedition reports written by the Monash University undergraduates. Such personal, and often poetically written reflections, were wonderful sources of data for myself as researcher. The expedition reports were more constrained, and often less useful as ‘entry points’ into the participants’ experiences. The predominance of participant quotations in “Moving on an effortless journey” were drawn from the interviews and, again, it is impossible to imagine the research here as being satisfactory without this component of data gathering.

The writing of the 21 individual case studies provided another key to this study. This was a very time consuming phase of the inquiry, but it forced me as researcher to understand each participant’s experiences in great detail. Each one served as a kind of life-story (van Manen, 1997), thus revealing the nuances, complexities, ambiguities and contradictions that constitute a person’s lived experiences, how they live on in memory, and the impact that those experiences continue to have.

The range of river places and university programs and the different times experienced by participants in this study were also beneficial. In retrospect, this breadth posed considerable challenges in searching out the convergences, divergences, ambiguities and contradictions that people bring to places through outdoor education. Yet it was precisely these contrasts; between river rapid and slow meander, between the
‘high-tech’ kayak and the ‘low-tech’ tarpaulin, between the deep isolation of the Snowy River gorge country and the peopled Murray River on its floodplain, that made many of the distinctive themes of the inquiry recognisable. It is hoped that this diversity is sufficient to resonate with the reader and that it is enough re-animate consideration of their own pedagogic and research imperatives and circumstances.

This study has been designed around written and spoken interpretations of lived experiences and their textualised representations. Perhaps it is time that outdoor education researchers broadened their conceptualisation of what constitutes data and its interpretation and representation. Images (video, photographs, sketches, paintings), crafted objects and the recording of the voices and sounds of people and places might also be incorporated in future studies. Also, and even more tellingly, we might rely more and more on the empathetic rapport (Payne, 2005) between researchers, research participants and researched places. The researcher who would strive to methodologically respond to each unique and local situation also requires the same abilities that are required to negotiate a pedagogy that is responsive to place.

Only then will we be able to justifiably say that we are co-producing the meaning of the embodied and reflective experiences between people and the places they experience.

The final words in this dissertation belong to the rivers. Ultimately, it was these river-places that were the sources for all of the utterances, stories and images that sustained this research. And so, I turn to an epilogue to this story …
EPILOGUE: “The voice of running waters”

In addition to the primary tasks of examining the assumptions that underpin the pedagogical practice of outdoor education and the lived experiences of participants in river-places, there has been an element of my personal journey as teacher, river traveller and researcher throughout this dissertation. As a researcher my efforts have been sustained not only by the desire to better understand participants’ experiences of outdoor education and river-places, but also through my personal journey to become more responsive to the places where I live and work. As such, I feel a few closing remarks are necessary.

Let me begin by retracing my path back up river to the place of beginnings. I opened the presentation of this dissertation with three written extracts: part of a poem, a section of prose, and an excerpt from my river journal. Let me return first to the poem.

In the opening two stanzas of Judith Wright’s poem *Northern River* (1971), we began a journey with the river in its mountain fastness where, in its purity, it spoke in the silence to those who would listen. Then, on the river’s floodplain, a place accessible to man and his so-called civilising influences, the river is spoiled. There is a third and final stanza to the poem that I present now:

But where, grown old and weary,  
stagnant among the mangroves,  
you hope no longer – there on a sudden  
with a shock like joy, beats up  
the cold clean pulse of the tide,  
the touch of the sea in greeting;  
the sea that encompasses  
all sorrow and all delight  
and holds the memories  
of every stream and river.

(Extract from *Northern River*, 1971, Judith Wright)

What is the poet trying to tell us? Perhaps she wants each of us to follow the path of a river, both literally and metaphorically, from headwaters to mouth. Then we might experience change from the youthful, clear mountain stream to the ageing wounded river, and finally to its death in the eternity of the ocean. The river’s death in the sea is meant to be a re-birth. But I’m not so sure. On one of the Monash University Snowy River
expeditions we had found our way to the mouth of the river at Marlo, 500 kilometres downstream from its birth amongst the gullies and glacial tarns of the Main Range. The once mighty river was no more than a trickle of water flowing out to meet the sea only as a result of the ebbing tide in its estuary. The river mouth was choked with sand – a mute, white beach. We waded the 20 or so metres to the other side. It was no more than knee deep. Like the mouth of Wright’s Northern River it was a strange place where river and ocean waters mix – where joy and sadness blend. But, in thinking back now, and in writing about the experience, I am reminded of the Australian place-writer Pete Hay who wrote: “the prevailing mood in my essay – in all my essays - is a melancholic acceptance that the integrity of my place is unlikely to endure. … For me, place writing is a way to embrace and work through grief” (Hay, 2003, p. 278).

Aldo Leopold’s essay *Song of the Gavilan*, drawn from *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (1987 edition), provided the second extract. In it we hear the same melancholic tone that governs Pete Hay’s writing and Judith Wright’s poem. As Leopold sits on the banks of the river he can hear the song that so many refuse to listen to, or will destroy in their haste to decode and master. He attributes much of the despoliation of nature to our uncritical acceptance of the controlling and atomising intent of science. It is, Leopold believes, a science of specialists that has lost the ability to balance, or temper, its beliefs and facts with aesthetic or poetic sensibilities: “That the good life on any river may likewise depend on the perception of its music, and the preservation of some music to perceive, is a form of doubt not yet entertained by science” (1987 edition, p. 154):

I do not know if the Gavilan still sings an unadulterated song. If it were a river in south-eastern Australia, it almost certainly would have been significantly changed and degraded in the 50 years since Leopold penned these words. Now, finally, to my river journal entry.

The journal entry was based upon field notes written at the end of the first day of a 1400 kilometre solo journey down the Murray River, a section of which has been vital to this study. More so than the Snowy, or any of the rivers represented in this study, the Murray is ‘my’ river. Part of me is claimed by ‘The River’. Three generations of my ancestors have lived on its banks in South Australia. They pioneered a farm out of the mallee scrub, cut wood for the steamers that plied their trade on the river, and daily drew sustenance from its waters. But my father had left the river as a boy on an educational scholarship to the city. All of his children would go to university and scatter where their professions took them. Now none of us live on the banks of ‘The River’. 
But I have found myself pulled back to its waters. For 15 years I’ve been going back; teaching, watching, waiting, and listening. In the last two years of this study I returned to all of the rivers mentioned by participants in the inquiry, and re-paddled those sections that have been the source of their reflections and stories. But these places are not in my bones, my flesh, in the same way as ‘The River’.

Early in the final year of writing up this study I journeyed the ‘top’ section of the river for a month. I walked across its highest elevations, where runoff first pools into a stream. Then I canoed its course out of the mountains and across its floodplain, eventually finishing just downstream of The Barmah Forest. Late in the year I joined the river again, paddling from that point deep into the irrigation heartland of the Murray-Darling Basin. The river on its floodplain is in no hurry. You can paddle its meanders all day long for a handful of kilometres as the pelican flies. All the way down the river I kept jotting notes into my journal. Penning lines of poetry. Trying to catch those consonants and vowels circling in the eddies, seeking out the words for the waters and the surrounding country, and stringing them into sentences that spoke of the river as a place of personal meaning and experience.

At times the journey was difficult and at times it was a joy. At times the wounds we have inflicted upon ‘The River’ were all too evident in the ceaseless beat of water pumps, the sting of petrol fumes on the tongue, or a slick upon the river’s skin. Even though I am here, now, in my study writing these last few words, part of me remains out there, high up in ‘The River’s’ mountain headwaters, sitting quietly on the bank; watching, waiting, listening …

UPRIVER SONG

Falling water chuckles ‘cross a bar
of orange, pink and brown stones.
Their edges wave beneath the stream,
dissolve - reform, where
silver sheen of river skin
holds apart the words:
Water and Air.

Then the water falls,
rises to a crest and then a wave.
In perfect stillness it repeats,
over and again,
where it leads the ledge of stones
from shore,
into a deep green pool.

263
The wave curls upon itself a hollow, and light rotates within, streaming orange, pink, and brown, silver and green.

Out of the mouth of the curling wave the river sings a perfect chord, forever unwavering, across the surface of the pool.

I do not know if the river can be healed, whether we can return its unwavering song, and teach more people the value of learning to listen for it. In all honesty, I hold the gravest of fears for ‘The River’. For another part of me is out there on the ‘middle river’, where the river is well into its journey across its ancient floodplain of sand and clay. Out there, as with Wright’s Northern River, I encountered a reckless human force in denial of ‘The River’

SKIN

The long weekend petrol-adrenaline booze filled roar fills the quiet space of the river.

All day long men buzz the reach, hollowing the riverbank in the echo of their wake.

Some are peeled to the waist sunburn. Their European skin grows old, not native, under a melanoma sun.

Others wear their skin black rubber war striped in a neon cart wheeling across the water’s sheen.

And there, from the city, a quiet child stands on a lapping shore; a t-shirt and socks of white skin watching.

One day he’ll write a poem to the river he listens for when the bonfire subsides, when the dark tide returns the voice of running waters.
I cannot decipher the full meaning of these words, even though I am their author. The observation of the scene, the action, I can locate in time and place. But the onset of the image that comes from the part of me that I have given up to ‘The River’ is, and will remain, a mystery. That mystery is embodied in the small boy who stands on the shore and waits for the noise and reckless consumption of the river to subside. The twin of despair is hope. Perhaps, in my quieter moments, when I feel myself returned to the ‘The River’ and its mysterious ways, I will catch myself listening for the voice of running waters. Then there will be hope that the river will survive the rapacious fire of our modernity, and when we have consumed all that we desire, there on the other side, the spirit of the river will be waiting.
REFERENCES


proceedings, April 14-16, Adelaide, South Australia (pp. 205-227). Underdale, SA: Outdoor Educator’s Association of South Australia.


Appendix A

Research Explanatory Statement

The socio-ecological experience of river places in outdoor education: A phenomenological study.

My name is Brian ‘Ponch’ Wattchow and I am conducting research under the supervision of Associate Professor Tony Taylor (Faculty of Education, Monash University, Gippsland) and Dr Phillip Payne (School of Arts and Education, La Trobe University, Bendigo) towards a doctoral degree. My research examines how participants socially construct meanings attached to outdoor ‘places’. As you may well be aware there is a considerable body of research concerning the effectiveness of outdoor education experiences with regard to the development of intra and inter personal relationships, yet there is a dearth of empirical research concerning the ways that human-environment and socio-ecological relations are formed, their characters, and how they may be sustained and transformed through educative experiences in outdoor places. In essence, my research asks:

How do the lived experiences of outdoor places through outdoor education contribute to an education in personal, cultural and ecological relations?

This research is place based and aims to use narrative constructions of participants and the outdoor places they experience. These narratives are to be constructed around the experiences of specific place locations – selected rivers within south-eastern Australia (specifically the Murray, the Snowy and to a lesser extent, the Macalister, Thomson and Mitchell rivers). In this study I aim to collect data that provides insight into participant’s experiences of these outdoor places through outdoor education whilst they were completing university degree programs that train outdoor education teachers/leaders/guides.

In order to research this issue I am looking for potential participants from the following groups.

Graduates from the La Trobe University Graduate Diploma of Outdoor Education degree, (between 1995-1998).
Graduates from La Trobe University ‘Bachelor of Arts: Outdoor Education’, (between 1995-1998) who completed the Year 3 Paddling Elective.
Graduates and undergraduates from Monash University Bachelor of Sport and Outdoor Recreation degree programs, (between 2001-2004) who completed their ‘wilderness expedition’ on the Snowy River or Murray River.

Graduates from the La trobe University degree programs may recall submitting a reflective letter (the ‘Dear Ponch’ letter) at the conclusion of their paddling experiences, and Monash University graduates and undergraduates may recall submitting a major assignment based on their river expedition. I still have copies of all of these written submissions. For the purposes of this study I am seeking your permission to use these writings as research data.

In addition, I am seeking a sample of volunteers for interviews that will last between one and two hours to provide a rich source of data based on your memories of these experiences. These interviews will be face-to-face, one to one, and will be conducted in Victoria at a time and location of your convenience between the following dates - 31/10/03 and 24/12/04.

If you participate in the study you will be required to complete an Informed Consent form and indicate your name (so that I can locate your written submission of your river experiences) and your contact details (should you be willing to participate in the interview phase of the research). Past student writings will not be used in the study unless informed consent is completed. You will not be contacted in relation to an interview unless you provide accurate contact details.

Research findings will be written up in a doctoral thesis, and may also be presented at conferences and published in academic journals / books. If you participate in the interview phase of the study you will be given the opportunity to indicate whether you would like to be contacted and notified in relation to any publication of results and findings from the study. Because of the potential sensitivity of the findings

281
participant’s will be given the opportunity to have their privacy and identity protected by having the information fully de-identified, or through the use of a pseudonym. Alternatively, participants may elect to be completely identifiable via the use of their real name in the study.

All information collected will be stored for at least five years as prescribed by the university regulations. Neither your personal information (name and contact details) nor any of the research data (writings and/or audio-taped interviews) will be disclosed to any other individuals or institutions without your permission. You may request access to your personal information, your writings or your audio-taped interviews at any time during the five year storage period. At the end of the storage period the information will be destroyed. You would be able to withdraw from the study at any time simply by informing me, or one of my supervisors.

By participating in the research you will contribute to a better understanding of how human-environment relations are formed with specific outdoor places, and therefore how the curriculum and pedagogy of outdoor education (particularly in Australia) may be more responsive to the positive relations of individuals to specific outdoor places.

If you have any queries or would like to be further informed of the background of this research project you can contact me on the telephone (03) 5122 6366, or 0429 421084 or email Brian.Wattchow@education.monash.edu.au or by writing to me c/o Faculty of Education, Monash University, Gippsland, CHURCHILL, 3842.

---

You can complain about the study if you don’t like something about it. To complain about the study, you need to phone (03) 9905 2052. You can then ask to speak to the secretary of the Human Ethics Committee and tell him or her that the number of the project is 2003/664. You could also write to the secretary. That person’s address is:

The Secretary,
The Standing Committee of Ethics in Research Involving Humans
PO Box 3A
Monash University
Victoria, 3800
Telephone (03) 9905 2052  Fax (03) 9905 1420
Email: SCERH@adm.monash.edu.au

Thankyou,

Brian Wattchow
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

*The socio-ecological experience of river places in outdoor education: A phenomenological study.*

I agree to take part in the above Monash University research project. I have read the explanatory statement, which I will keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to allow the researcher to use undergraduate writings I completed at university relating to my river experiences as data for this study.

I am (please circle one of the following) prepared / not prepared to be considered for selection as part of the interview phase of data collection for the study. I understand that the interview will cover a range of topics relating to the focus of the study as outlined in the explanatory statement, that it will involve me describing my memories of those experiences and that there is a possibility that this may involve some unpleasant memories, and that it will take place at a time and location of my convenience.

I understand that I provide consent for the use of this information (either interview transcripts and/or my writings) in one of the following ways (please tick).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My information will be fully de-identified therefore no potentially identifying information would be included in the analysis.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A pseudonym will used instead of my real name.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will be completely identifiable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I understand that the data may be considered for further research projects by the researcher, provided that these projects have ethics approval and that any details that may identify me have been deleted.

I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

Name .......................................................... (if your name has changed, please indicate your name at the time of your university studies)

Signature .................................................. Date .................................

If you have indicated that you are prepared to be considered for the interview phase of the study, please provide contact details below.

Contact address

.......................................................... ..........................................................

Phone .............................. Mobile phone ..............................

Email ..........................................................
Reconnaissance of experiential text data using long table analysis for each of the three subgroups in the inquiry is presented in the following pages.
Long Table Analysis of La Trobe University Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education) Elective paddlers letters (1995-1998).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES / VENUE</th>
<th>Participant sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOVEMENT / BODY</td>
<td>Technical – Par#44; skill levels vary in group making teaching difficult – Par#37; partner skill match – Par#37; Adaptation between craft – Par#36; skills and confidence &quot;improved out of sight&quot;* – Par#36; strength v technique flow – Par#34; falling out / breakthrough – Par#5;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As skill:</td>
<td>rolling as acceptance of skill level by others – Par#28; fear / competence / roll link – Par#6; finally developed a live roll / one of the best trips at university – Par#29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As performance:</td>
<td>Par#32; “pressure to perform” – Par#32;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body:</td>
<td>Par#22, Par#34, Par#25, Par#1, Par#42, Par#4, Par#29, Par#5, Par#3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“intuitive paddling” – Par#22; “Paddling is a mind game” – Par#28; Like a fish* - Par#34; “thoughts can be elsewhere as the rhythmic motion of paddling (canoe) becomes a blue in the conscious” – Par#25; ability / disability – Par#1; absorbing / affinity – Par#42; paddle as extension of arm – Par#4; C1 “every aspect of it feels good” – Par#29; canoe whispering banks breathing* – Par#5; feel of the boat / the water / tacit / extension of the body - Par#3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEADERSHIP / TEACHING</td>
<td>teaching as skill – Par#44; anxious at first / flexible – Par#35; flexible – Par#37; anxious “first 10 minutes … nightmare … flexible” Par#36; novice difficult conditions / class – Par#39; “spinning raft” – Par#39; share experiences – Par#3;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEAR / THRILL</td>
<td>Gender discussions anxiety of next rapid, swimming, male conversations different – Par#32; “Paddling is a mind game” – Par#28; “watching from the sidelines” 1:1 nurturing / rolling / leader insight into fear – Par#27; “the fear of being swept downstream”* - Par#34; stories of grade 5 rapids – Par#38; fear / capsize / breakthrough – Par#1; fear from Franklin experience / grade 5 / 1:1 – Par#42; 1:1 failure / success /failure / nightmare / back to scratch / “quiet state of nervousness”– Par#6;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excitement / Adrenaline:</td>
<td>Par#22, Par#25, Par#24, Par#30, Par#43, Par#5, “I immediately dedicated myself to the most exciting” – Par#22; “paddling a grade 5 … but it is an unsustainable way of life” – Par#22; “The Gippsland Rivers trip was a fantastic trip providing everyone with some adrenaline rushes – Par#2; danger-fun – Par#30; “the thrills of being hammered upside down in a wave and then return to an upright position top surf it out was intense”– Par#25;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect:</td>
<td>Par#28, Par#3; respect/rolling/swimming – Par#28; playing with the river – unstoppable force – Par#3;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VENUE / LOCATION</td>
<td>Par#35, Par#42, Par#6, Par#29, Par#3, Conditions conductive – sheltered, sunny, no visible distractions – Par#35; river levels too high too low – Par#37; intimidating for beginners – Par#37; low levels or flood – Par#24; pristine / degraded / revistit – river as place* - Par#42; Mitchell River home / Final Fling pool – every rock – Par#6; low water levels – Par#29; Mitchell river description* - Par#5; “learning … river systems” / return river moods – Par#3;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WATER</td>
<td>Par#22, Par#34, Par#30, Par#6, Par#4, Par#5, Par#3 “Travelling by water” – Par#22; “getting to know the river and its flow” – Par#34; “swimming … mass of life”* - Par#34; a unique wilderness – Par#30; being under the water – Par#6; “water on blade” – Par#4; elements “I want to work with water and rock” – Par#5, hydrology, love of water – Par#3;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGNS</td>
<td>Par#36, Par#6, Par#5, Description of reading the river signs* - Par#36; every rock “in that small setting, for a short period of time I felt at home in a boat” – Par#6;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>Par#32, Par#27, Par#30, Par#41, Par#38, Par#4, Par#29, Par#5, Par#3, “Perhaps kayaking allows one to become intimate with the river in a different way than canoeing does, but I find that I don’t have much of a chance to take in my surroundings like I do when I’m in a canoe” – PAR#32; equipment canoe moving “paddle an extension of my body” – PAR#27; boat design histories / wood / seal – Par#30; Maas in a raft – totally different – Par#38; style of craft / home and hand made paddle – Par#4; Canoe-kayak contrasting experiences* - Par#5; technology v-e – Par#3; Raft access – Par#29;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES</td>
<td>Par#33, Par#34, Par#30, Par#5, Par#3 Murray river dawn paddle, intrinsic feeling, doubt upon reflection – Par#33; “swimming the river acknowledged it for me”* - Par#34; “When I am paddling white water my focus narrows to concentrate on staying upright, having fun and looking after the others in my group, the environment has much to say but I am not listening” – Par#30; philosophy trip story – Par#5; solo – Par#3;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE / NAMING</td>
<td>Par#22, Par#28, Par#40, Par#25, Par#38, Par#6, Par#29, Par#43, “I just had good supports or bailed” – Par#22; “crusing / getting threshed” – Par#22; “Amphitheatre” – Par#22; “bomber roll” – Par#28; “a complete bumbly” / creekers / – Par#40; “getting hammered in a wave” – Par#25; “punters” – Par#38; bailing / hanging around / big line up – Par#6; Amphitheatre / Den of Nargun / gumbies – Par#29; place/action names * / Amphitheatre / “we were at the top of the Amphitheatre” story* - Par#43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>Par#4 Sanskrit poem - Par#4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILOSOPHY</td>
<td>Par#27, Par#24, philosophy of paddling can’t be spoken – not wanting to name it – Par#27, kayak = excitement / canoe = philosophy – Par#24;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>Par#32, “male role models unapproachable” “female differences” – Par#32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELAX / FUN / FREEDOM</td>
<td>Par#22, Par#35, Par#40, Par#25, “Boysish grin” – Par#22; “discovered a very real sense of freedom” – Par#35; childlike look in their eyes – Par#40;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICS</td>
<td>Par#28, Par#40, Par#27, Par#39, Par#29, Par#5, Par#3 accreditation / liability – Par#28, accreditation – organizations / competition – Par#40; group camping in wrong place reported to Koori friend – Par#29; liability-sadness – Par#5; quals – Par#3;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEMES</td>
<td>Participant sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing / Language</td>
<td>Par#13, Par#45, Par#9;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different to society</td>
<td>Par#13, Par#9, Par#10, Par#10, Par#47, Par#48.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Par#13, Par#14, Par#9, Par#52, Par#47, Par#47,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Par#13, Par#45, Par#52,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Par#13, Par#14,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group +ve</td>
<td>Par#13, Par#14, Par#10, Par#49, Par#53,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group -ve</td>
<td>Par#14, Par#45, Par#9, Par#51, Par#52, Par#47, Par#50, Par#53, Par#47, Par#48,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection story</td>
<td>Par#13, Par#52, Par#51, Par#46, Par#50, Par#48, Par#46, Par#49,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping</td>
<td>Par#13, Par#14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pairs experience / Friendships</td>
<td>Par#13, Par#9,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace / Time / Rhythm</td>
<td>Par#14, Par#52, Par#10, Par#49, Par#53,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence / Sounds</td>
<td>Par#14, Par#8, Par#45, Par#49,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>Par#8, Par#46, Par#10,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>Par#8, Par#46, Par#47,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo</td>
<td>Par#8, Par#46, Par#45, Par#47, Par#47, Par#50, Par#53, Par#13, Par#8, Par#51, Par#52,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Par#46, Par#13, Par#10, Par#49,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife</td>
<td>Par#45, Par#51,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing-letting go</td>
<td>Par#45,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>Par#45,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood memories</td>
<td>Par#49, Par#47,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>Par#10, Par#47,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signs of destruction / European invasion</td>
<td>Par#50,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEMES</td>
<td>Participant sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANDSCAPE</td>
<td>Par#16, Par#18, Par#21,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AESTHETIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIMPLICITY / TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>Par#16, Par#54, Par#59, Par#21,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYTHOLOGY</td>
<td>Par#16,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEELINGS - EMOTIONS</td>
<td>Par#16, Par#59, Par#19, Par#55,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPERIENCING WILDERNESS</td>
<td>Par#54, Par#61, Par#60,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BODY - PADDLING</td>
<td>Par#54, Par#59, Par#57,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEACE AND CALM</td>
<td>Par#54, Par#55, Par#21,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROUP Group +ve</td>
<td>Par#54, Par#59, Par#60, Par#55, Par#63, Par#54,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group -ve</td>
<td>Par#55, Par#57, Par#21,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIVER’S DEGRADATION</td>
<td>Par#54, Par#17, Par#61, Par#59, Par#56, Par#57, Par#64,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RITUAL</td>
<td>Par#17,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER HUMANS</td>
<td>Par#61, Par#55,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SURVIVAL / UNKNOWN</td>
<td>Par#54, Par#59, Par#18, Par#60, Par#55, Par#58,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISOLATION - REFLECTION</td>
<td>Par#18, Par#60, Par#56, Par#54, Par#17, Par#57,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILDLIFE</td>
<td>Par#19, Par#55, Par#63; Par#59,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HYDRO SCHEME</td>
<td>Par#16, Par#18, Par#59, Par#61, Par#60, Par#57,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABORIGINAL</td>
<td>Par#57,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTION STORIES</td>
<td>Par#64, Par#61, Par#19,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE RIVER SPEAKS</td>
<td>Par#63, Par#60,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

287
Appendix D

Single case interpretation for Participant# 4 is presented in the following pages.
Participant#4: Single case interpretation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place / poetry notes.</th>
<th>Narrative theme (in bold)</th>
<th>Reinterpretations of lived experience.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description of place, time and location of events.</td>
<td>Extracts, phrases from the informant’s written text are in non-italics, those from the interview are in italics.</td>
<td>Structures of the lived experience (bold). Researcher’s interpretative descriptions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Narrative theme (in bold)**

- **Idiomatic phrases (underlined)**

**Description of place, time and location of events.**

The Big River is part of the upper Goulburn River system. Several rivers (Jamieson, Goulburn, Delatite and Big) provide the inflows to Victoria’s largest fresh water catchment in Lake Eildon. The Big River trip followed several months after the Bluegums trip for second year elective paddling students at La trobe. The best flows in these rivers were in winter and spring – and this trip always ran early in semester two. The Big flows through a steep sided valley in the Big River State Park. It predominantly flows northwards, thus getting little sunlight in winter. The surrounding ranges rise to nearly 900 metres and had a dusting of snow on more than one paddling trip.

The river is ‘tight’, with smallish eddies, and is lined with tea-tree along the sections paddled; from Enochs Point to Chaffe Creek and Chaffe Creek to Eildon Jamieson road bridge. The kayak paddle is comprised of a shaft and a blade at each end (most often offset at 90 degrees). The blades are usually curved.

**Learning to survive:**

“I’ve got some quite vivid memories of ... going to the Big. ... It was freezing cold, my skill level was pretty low and I just remember at times actually being quite uncomfortable ... spent a lot of time ill at ease on that trip ... just trying to cope with the cold, cope with the activity” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 50-54).

“this was doing something that I had done very little of and I was a rank novice and that was unsettling as well” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 63-65).

“I love kayaking – and I spend a lot of time getting better at that over the years, but sometimes when I get into my kayak, I have to actually physically wrap my body into that shape and that’s quite awkward” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 182-185).

“we pulled into an eddy that was actually in amongst the bushes and sitting there as a group ... I actually got knocked or tent the wrong way and ended up out of the eddy in the current and came out of my boat. Drifted down the river, got banged by a rock on my knee; ... then just trying to cope with the cold. I didn’t have a lot of good gear ... to keep me warm and dry” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 67-73).

“I can remember a couple of spots on the river in particular where every time I go back there I can remember that how I felt at that point on that trip – was coming around the corner and you can see down this chute under the ...overhanging trees .... feeling quite anxious, seeing some people playing on a wave: ‘sh*t how am I going to get down there and get through them – are they going to get out of the road?’ Are they going to give me some space to get through?’ ... feeling a bit annoyed at some of the more competent paddlers that could move around and weren’t always, from my perspective, respectful of the novice paddlers trying to get through rapids and get down the river without coming out” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 107-116). “trying to get the eddy behind where they were playing perhaps, just to have a bit of a break” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 100-103).

**The closed world of the novice:**

For the novice paddler the craft, the activity, the environment, even the social group, combines to the point where it seems overwhelming. This results in a feeling of discomfort. This discomfort can be further qualified as having internal and external characteristics. Discomfort is experienced first and foremost as an internal sensation of anxiety – even trepidation. The kayak has to be climbed into and the participant must bend themselves to the needs of the kayak. For the novice the craft feels tight and awkward.

This tightness is carried onto the water. It manifests itself in a stiffness of movements that are ill matched to the flowing smoothness of the river. Parts of the river are navigable to the novice paddler. These are the parts of the river that are most like the flat water environments on which the participant has already developed a working technique. But there are ‘spots’ on the river which are experienced as well beyond his ability to cope. There is a sense here that the novice simply wants to survive the encounter with that ‘spot’ and get to the end of it upright, intact and dry. But there are many hazards that stand between him and the haven of the large eddy downstream where the group of more competent paddlers have already begun to congregate. There is a sensation of aloneness here for the novice paddler – he feels trapped in a closed world limited by his lack of skill and ability to interpret and respond to the river. Every stroke borders on disaster. To the hesitant and stiff paddler small waves are translated into larger imbalances. Waves, rocks, overhanging trees, even other members of the group are all potential hazards that may cause a capsize. His whole world comes down to the immediacy of making it to the haven of that eddy downstream where he can get a break from the overwhelming confusion of the river.
The canoe paddle has a shaft a single blade and a ‘T’ shaped grip at one end. The blade is usually flat. However, these are gross simplicities and there is an infinity of subtlety in the design of this implement. The shaft may be springy or stiff; round or ovalled at the point where the hand grips the shaft. The blade may be straight sided, flared or tapered. It may be constructed out of timber, aluminium, plastic or carbon fibre. All of these elements affect the feel of the paddle and influence the resulting performance. Rembrandt would not try to paint a masterpiece with a broken stick!

“I think you said early on … that the canoe, you can feel the canoe or the kayak as an extension of your body and it took me a long time to get my head around that” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 273-275).

“Paddling with a home and hand made paddle has changed my feel and understanding of water on blade and how to manoeuvre the boat as an extension of the self” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, letter lines 24-26).

“If I take a manufactured paddle with an aluminium shaft and a plastic blade… it’s an ill fit. It just feels uncomfortable. It’s light, sure, but it just feels uncomfortable. Whereas I pick up the wooden paddle that I made, that fits my hand that’s the right length for me. That’s like an extension of my arm in some ways” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 210-214).

“But eventually I got that, and … I think one of the big things there was the timber paddle and that the capacity with its’ flat surfaces, no ridges, to actually feather it and move it through the water…. and I started playing around … particularly paddling solo in a canoe, being able to move the craft around in all different ways without actually taking the paddle out of the water…. That just seems quite natural to be able to turn the paddle on its side and feather it back through the water very effortlessly, and then propel the boat forward again so, I have taken that feeling – it came in a canoe - but I have taken that feeling particularly into my river kayak …. I got very comfortable in that craft and was able to move the boat around the river without actually forcing it, and where I reached a skill level and understanding of the boat, the craft, the paddle, and the river that allowed me to move around in that environment quite comfortably” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 279-292).

“It’s interesting, I’ve thought about it quite a bit … I’ve made a conscious choice not to teach white water paddling. I do a lot of it myself privately but I made a conscious choice not to teach it” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 94-96).

Play and touch bridges the mind body divide:
When does the participant begin to feel capable and comfortable in the boat. For this participant it seems to begin through the production of a paddle that is far more sensitive to the feel of changes in water pressure on the blade. He changes craft and goes back to flat water. No longer does the technology feel uncomfortable and ill fitting. He starts just playing around. The whole notion of play is one of comfort, freedom and exploration. The movements seem smooth, effortless and natural. The paddle becomes an extension of himself a sensitive receptor reaching out to feel beneath the surface of the water. This feeling is then transferable back to the kayak and the moving water environment. This is a step in the development of skilful paddling – but things are still compartmentalised – the mind, the body, the boat, the paddle, the river. It is still a step away from a smooth and holistic response to the moving water environment.
RAPID ACOUSTICS
The Cold Weather Range folds down, To where the tea-tree lean downstream on the last flood. The long reach of silver vanishes, into a shadow turn, and from that dark recess there is a river cursing. Soon a snarl echoes the body’s dark hollow. From the lip a fall, all things descending, where the river’s violence smashes itself amongst the stones. In twist and scream it heaps upon itself one giant convulsion. From this mouth a roar repeats, over and again.

But in its sucking rant, in its own vaporous despair, it inhales the poison that gives life. The monster’s skin is rent, as it becomes a gallery of bubbles, a limitless constellation of atmospheres softening the blow, each one surfacing with a hiss. In the snarl’s wake, there is only final exhalation aaaaaaahhh It is the rapid Speaking the end of itself.

Negotiating safe passage through a dangerous place:
“at that time reading the river meant seeing a way down the river that would be a route in which I was less likely to fall out…. So trying to avoid rocks, trying to avoid the big waves, and I wasn’t very good at it to start with. I could see where the v’s were and then where the white water was, but other than that it took me a long time to work out well, what’s actually making that part of the river, what’s happening underneath, what’s the hydraulics and I spent a lot of time just sitting on the banks subsequently trying to work out what it’s doing and trying to understand” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 132-139). “initially quite fearful of trying to read a path that was the safest path for me. And that not always being obvious” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 147-148).

“just the noise. You come round a corner and you can hear the river....” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 96-99).

On the Thomson. “I hadn’t paddled with a fully laden boat before…. I found that pretty nerve racking. The boat responded quite differently, quite heavy, limiting in terms too of what you can take. I actually liked that section of the trip…. Something about that river felt different too, it felt quite welcoming – quite, it was a fun trip for me that section” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 155-160).

The Mitchell in flood. “yeah pretty apprehensive there. Noise, I remember noise being a big issue there and in the end um, we did a short section down the first rapid, I can’t remember its name. Pulled out and had a look. Some people paddled, I didn’t paddle. I was pretty uncomfortable, I couldn’t see what we were going to paddle on ‘cause we couldn’t get out to it. Um, I remember the noise in particular there as well, and then I didn’t, I didn’t paddle after that” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 161-166).

“The journey between threat and play is not a simple progression. It involves many advances and retreats. As one reads the rapid they are also reading themselves, and on any given day on any given rapid they either will or will not be able to seem themselves moving across its surfaces.

Projecting safe passage onto the water:
It takes a long time to learn to ‘read’ the river and to be able to ‘see’ a safe route down the rapid. Reading the river from the bank means being able to make meaning out of the confusing jumble of white water. At first it presents itself as a rational exercise – the mind must decipher the clues displayed by the river. However, as experience develops the participant is able to ‘put’ his kayak into that water in his mind’s eye and senses how he and the kayak will be moved by the water when it is paddled. This ability – to place himself in the rapid prior to placing himself in the rapid – relies upon the relationship between perception and the embodied store of kayak experience on all rapids paddled up to this one. Becoming literate in reading the river is as much about feeling as it is about seeing.
FLOODPLAIN ACOUSTICS

Here on its floodplain, the river slows, quiets, and folds upon itself. A pulse of distant snow and rain, silenced for years behind concrete walls, will return its voice.

The waters climb the banks, and curl into the grasses, launching dried insect cases, it seeps into forest, turning country into river, river into country. Spirally spilling itself, it speaks, The first note washing through the leaves and branches, the breath of distant pressures equalising.

The second note a screech and clatter of beak and wing and claw, raucous resident’s territorial claim.

The third the insect hum of earth, always there, but rarely heard.

The river as a welcoming place:

“Canoeing has become for me a water based means of exploring the bush, bushwalking on water if you like. Canoeing is different though, for the craft and the style are critical ingredients to the experience” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, letter lines 11-15).

“exposure to the style of craft, camping and equipment … has changed significantly the way I approach and carry out my trips in the bush (be it in a boat or on foot)” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, letter lines 18-21).

“sitting in a canoe, picking up a paddle very early on just felt very comfortable and very natural almost. It’s just like, this fits well with me” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 180-182).

“The Barmah trip, partly about the style of the way the trip was framed and the style of living - simplify it. Yes, you could take what would fit in your canoe but at the same time it was a simplification of being in the bush in some ways” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 203-205).

“Being able to see how indigenous people would have lived there struck a real chord with me … when I felt a strong affinity with those people, and I suppose that comes out of being on the river in a similar style – not the same craft – but in a similar style and being able to camp in the forest and engage with … living in that environment in that way … I could live here and I could see how they would live here and why it was significant to them. And there was aspects of that I suppose where you try … to understand with the emotive aspect of that and how the river for me has a voice…. I don’t know how else to describe it, but it, it speaks to me in its own way” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 317-326).

“We were there camping as a group – cooking as a group and the style of the cooking and living meant that we had to do some things as a group and get along with each other …. and that worked o.k., but it also created some tension at times when some people weren’t helping others I suppose, and um, sharing the load” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 379-384).

“At homeness’ is feeling comfortable and welcomed:

The contrast between the threatening and welcoming river is pronounced.

Unlike kayaking, where the participant feels little prior experience to draw upon, canoeing on a flat inland waterway seems to have many parallels with bushwalking in which the participant is already highly skilled. It seems to offer the same style of simple living. Other than the canoe, paddle and buoyancy vest there is no other specialist equipment – indeed much of the same clothing and equipment used in bushwalking is used in bushwalking is used on the canoe journey. Rather than bursts of frenetic activity followed by short periods of rest – the canoe tour requires a steady level of effort and attention. The participant feels almost instantly welcomed into the place and the activity. There is no sensation of tightness or threat. By contrast the canoe and the landscape seem open with possibility.

Rather than the confusing, confronting and overwhelming roar of the rapid, the river seems to speak more subtly and directly to him. There is minimal disruption to the experience of being comfortable in a place that reciprocates his feelings. There are times when the social group, as a large entity, does not appear to share these feelings, but the group can easily be escaped by walking into the forest or paddling away to a quieter place on the river. A feeling of ‘at homeness’ arises instead of feelings of apprehension and fear. His horizon expands out beyond the immediacy of himself to consider the life of the place and its inhabitants more broadly. An appreciation of time also expands to include the past. But a feeling of being welcomed by the place precedes the rational analysis of the encounter. First and foremost he feels welcome and comfortable.

The river speaks:

The ‘drift’ serves as a release from the participant’s assumptions and expectations for the river and the activity. Initially this involves re-placing assumptions about the apparent directionality of the canoe and the river. The river always seems to be flowing away to some point out of sight. The design of the canoe seems to embody this with the gunwales drawing together into a
Still the river flows, abandoning its songs to sun-baked clays, it leaves to sing downstream.

A thumbnail slice of clay plop! into a quiet eddy, a leaf spirals down and smack! upon a mirror pooling, a grain of sand falls from the load, crunch! upon the beach, and then quiet. The whispering banks, are speaking, to those who silenced themselves upon the cusp of deafness, and that is where we find them listening.

ways and, particularly to go back to sections that I know or know quite well. It’s like … going back home – going to see a friend. Going to see a dog you happen to know or “something – an animal that you know. It’s just, it’s a welcoming place” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 493-497).

“the nature of the moving water river is, for me at any rate the river, in a moving water setting … becomes a strong focal point, and it’s taken me a long time to get to the point where I can drift down the river and not really care which way my boat is pointing and be looking at the trees and taking notice of the birds and what’s actually happening in the river underneath me … I think for me, at any rate, it took a long time to move from that point of being very focused on the river and what I was doing to having the space, the mental space, to be able to look beyond the river, beyond the activity.” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 552-559).

“that’s the tricky thing I suppose is learning to read the landscape to see those things …. It’s about, for me it’s actually about slowing down and not necessarily having an agenda, but saying well, it’s not just the bush or just the river, there’s lots of components to that and we need to think about how we can be open to experiencing them, the place in a different way and seeing those aspects. So, quite often there, you cross paths with those animals or plants and that’s the point - to take notice. But you have to say well, I’m not actually in a hurry to get from A to B. I’ve got time to stop and to watch and to learn. And then it’s a layering thing, it’s not one chunk of knowledge that you suddenly acquire. I think it’s learning over time.” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 530-539).

“What role does it play in my life? I suppose in the last couple of years it’s formed … a very central thread of how I’ve come to understand experiences I generate for others, but also at a personal level how in some ways it’s a barometer for … how society, our culture, our community’s doing and how it relates to places. So, yeah I struggle with that contrast between feeling really sad about it, pretty disappointed about what’s happening with, going back to the river and being excited … about being on its’ banks encountering it again” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 659-665).

“I’m quite conscious of that, um, Barmah but also the moving water experiences impacted on me in ways that I could never have foreshadowed” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 697-699).
The outdoor classroom:
The lesson that takes place in the outdoors is wholly unfamiliar with the lesson that takes place in the built classroom. The classroom is constructed out of a belief in stasis and order. The rows of seats, the whiteboard, the data projector, the carpet to mute scraping feet, the controlled temperature, the riveted closed windows, the single point of access – it is both theatre and prison. The lesson relies upon the twin illusions of predictability and certainty.

To teach well in an outdoor place, such as a bend in the river, relies instead upon embracing an encounter with the fickle. It is unbounded, uncertain, uncontrollable. In the midst of a talk about European impacts on the river, an old fisherman tracks around the bend in his well worn punt. The wrinkles in his face mirror the ripples on the surface of the river. The lesson – is the fisherman.

Negotiating a pedagogy for the river:
“it’s funny with students I quite often say, well ok we camped at one of those good spots last night. Let’s pick a spot that’s not so easy to get out and see how they’re different and what can the forest tell us about that spot that the other spot couldn’t; I’m so try and make those choices conscious to them” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 243-248).

“I started doing trips similar to that Barmah one and worked out that I didn’t have the same capacity to pick up and run that trip in the same way. I thought that trip worked well for that group of people in that time, but for me it wasn’t my trip I suppose and I needed to work out ways that I could take people to the river, that sat comfortable with me, so I went through a process there for a while trying to work out what aspects of the river could I talk about and what stories there that are of interest to me” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 418-423).

“Why do you want to talk about stories that are pretty depressing and hard to come to terms with [like salinity]? But I found some ways to do that. Get off – walk away from the river – talk about the river but actually go to a different part of it where there isn’t the river itself, go and talk to local people – farmers, indigenous people about their lives close to the river or on the river and involving students in that process. So that there’s different ways to see the river and what’s happening with it. How people use it and how people understand it” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 437-445).

“So trying to make some connections between what we’re doing and experiencing with some of the history – whether it be cultural, natural of that place. So, not trying to make everything that we do transferable to somewhere else, but trying to put an experience of a place into a broader context...... Being on the river’s a beautiful thing but I’d like to go back to it in twenty years time or think that [my child] might go back to it in a hundred years time, fifty years time and encounter something similar, certainly ... no less degraded. So having some sense that it’s not just about me or the group that I’m with now experience - that needs to be connected with the future and the past. So my experience on any given day needs to be relative” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 609-618).

“there’s that funny saying about the history of the world in a cup of coffee and in a sense there’s a history of the river is in a, in a billy of water of the river” (Par#4.BA(O.Ed).96.M, interview lines 640-642).

Pedagogy as negotiation with place:
A pedagogy for the river is a negotiation between teacher, learner and place. This sounds both rational and common sense. But if all three of these entities are dynamic – in a state of flux and change, and if some of that change is unpredictable then the pedagogic task can only be understood as an ongoing and never ending negotiation. It becomes a pedagogy of connection.
Connecting the river and its broader landscape, the river with its peoples, the river with its pasts and possible futures, the different visions held for the river. Yet all of these rely upon an acceptance that this place – this place is the lesson. Within the web of connections the whole lesson can be encountered and experienced from each and every starting point of experience: this stretch of river, this stand of redgum, this flock of ibis, this farm with its water pumps sucking at the river, this leaf floating in the eddy, this cup of river water. But the lesson requires more listening than it does interrogation.
## Appendix E

### Overview of participants’ river programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>(a) Flat water skill training (conducted in February / March).</td>
<td>Spring Gully Dam:</td>
<td>Four two hour sessions of skill development, learning to paddle canoes solo, effect deep water rescues, self rescue etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Flat water canoe Tour (March / April)</td>
<td>Glenelg or Goulbourn rivers</td>
<td>A three day introduction to canoe touring and camping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>(a) Flat water canoe tour (May / June)</td>
<td>Barmah Forest trip.</td>
<td>Four to 5-day canoe tour along the Murray River between Morgan’s Beech and Echuca. Linked to a unit on environmental philosophy (multiple perspectives of land, environmental perception etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Kayak training (February / March)</td>
<td>Spring gully dam</td>
<td>Several sessions of skill development, learning to paddle kayaks, effect deep water rescues, self rescue etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Moving water kayak training (February / March)</td>
<td>‘Bluegums’ on the Goulbourn River</td>
<td>Three day introduction to moving water paddling: technical skill development, self and assisted rescues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Moving water kayak training (July / August)</td>
<td>Big River</td>
<td>Three days continuation of paddling development with day touring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>(a) Surf kayaking trip (February)</td>
<td>Barwon Heads</td>
<td>A 3-day surf kayaking trip aimed at improving moving water skills, self rescues, group management and rescue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Gippsland Rivers trip (September / October)</td>
<td>Macalister, Thomson, Mitchell rivers</td>
<td>An 8-day tour paddling multiple rivers with skills consolidation, overnight camping, leadership and group management themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Teaching trip (October)</td>
<td>Lake Eildon</td>
<td>Conducting an aquatics based camp for a Melbourne school (canoeing, raft building, initiative and environmental activities etc.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### La Trobe. Graduate Diploma of Outdoor Education. 1995 - 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Flat water skill training (conducted in February / March).</td>
<td>Spring Gully Dam:</td>
<td>Four two hour sessions of skill development, learning to paddle canoes solo, effect deep water rescues, self rescue etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Flat water canoe tour (usually May / June)</td>
<td>Barmah Forest trip.</td>
<td>As for the Barmah Forest trip outlined above.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Monash University, Bachelor of Sport and Outdoor Recreation / Bachelor of Education. 1999-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>(a) Rafting introduction day</td>
<td>Thomson River (at Cooper’s Creek)</td>
<td>A 1-day introduction to moving water rafting: equipment management, paddling skills, rescue skills, safe swimming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Raft tour</td>
<td>Mitchell River</td>
<td>A 3-day adventure travel tour: skill development, river reading, team work, group management, cooking and camping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>(a) Kayaking skills</td>
<td>Hazelwood Pondage</td>
<td>Two half day introductions to kayaking and sea kayaking skills and self rescues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Coastal paddling trip</td>
<td>Waratah Bay</td>
<td>Coastal exploration via surf and sea kayaking, group activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>(a) Mini expedition</td>
<td>Mitchell or Mitta Mitta rivers</td>
<td>A training trip for the Snowy expedition: skills, rescues, river reading and navigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Snowy River Expedition</td>
<td>Snowy River</td>
<td>A 10-day river journey: all aspects of expedition travel plus students must complete a cultural / natural history study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>