GENNY BLADES

2. WALKING THE GROUND

(Re)storying Footprints

> *The path which one follows is never straight because the walker is a sensual being who is in the world, not simply treading the surface.*
> (Lund, 2012, p. 233)

BEGINNING

> I take my first footsteps on the Lurujarri Heritage Trail in Broome on a warm, clear sunny day in July 2011. Walking with a large group of people from all around Australia and some from other countries, we make our way through back streets dusted in red sandy soil, passing signs on fences that declare 'no gas' and on the footpath 'gas free Kimberley'. Already, I sense something bigger than us.
>
> The Aboriginal custodian leading the walk calls us to gather on a sand dune, our first gathering place on this coastline. I listen with intent to a dreamtime story in and of this place. Ancient knowledge lingers in my mind and body as I walk bare foot along the vast expanse of beach at low tide. The sun is slowly setting and the colour of earth, sky and water change and mingle in the softening sun rays of reds and blues. My eyes gradually re-focus to the darkness and all I hear is the movement of water lapping on the shoreline. In the distance I see the faint glow of a fire which tells me I am getting closer to our first night's camp. (Blades, 2011, personal journal)

This is an excerpt of writing from a walk I did along an Aboriginal songline that is lead annually by the local Goolarabooloo[i] community. I would like to acknowledge the elders past and present, the custodians of this region, and pay respect to their on-going care of Country and living culture.

This walk will be shared at more length later in this Chapter, but to begin with, my impressions of my footsteps in rhythm with the tide, the time of day and the stories, evoked a sense of being welcomed to this place. I felt humbled and an immediate sense of respect emerged. It was a pace that allowed me time and space to attune to this place I was walking through. I have adopted the metaphor 'a dialogue of foot-to-ground' that was used by Mulligan (2003), to help bring forth my attention to the texture and movement of my footsteps. As an outdoor educator this metaphor has been a reference point for me to reflect upon and re-conceive my perspectives on walking and its broader contribution to the wellbeing of people and place.

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The footsteps I have taken have been in multiple places, evoking multiple meanings. These have included bushwalking in Australia, tramping in New Zealand, trekking in Nepal and pilgrimage in Tibet. Walking in beautiful places, busy places, disrupted places and spiritual places, all have evoked diverse experiences and responses. My intent has been to attune to the particularities of a place, where time, the rhythm of walking and the storied and peopled landscape coalesce to bring forth meaning. This also abides with attention to inner experiences, noticing the subjective emplacement of the walking body. John Muir's often quoted conundrum captures this:

> I only went out for a walk and finally decided to stay until sundown, for going out I discovered was actually going in. (Muir, cited in Wolfe, 1938, p. 427)

In exploring the physical nature surrounding him, he was, in effect, engaged in a meditative-like exploration of himself. This resonated with me as I began to appreciate and understand the value of this spectrum of awareness of outer to inner and its broader relevance in our modern lives and everyday lived experience.

This chapter explores walking as a lived experience which situates the exploration within the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology. This is not about examining how walking occurs in outdoor education, but rather, seeks to examine the nature of the experience of walking. Lived meanings emerge as we walk and the aim of this Chapter is to interpret these meanings in rich and deep ways that may, as Van Manen (1990, p. 9) suggests, offer us "the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with our world". To begin with, the experience of walking in outdoor education will be explored. Here, the nature of the experience is examined in relation to skills that are outwardly directed or, to consider this experientially, as acts of doing. The term 'performative conventions' (Edensor, 2000a) is used to reveal the nature of these acts of doing and then consider this experience as an encounter which I propose may exist along a continuum of performative to intimate.

The second part explores the significance of place in relation to walking encounters and locates this in Australia. The term 'peripatetic sense of place' (Adams, 2001) is used in order to highlight the significance of movement and the role of the body in relation to meaning making.[ii] Peripatetic derives from the Greek word *peri*, meaning around, and *patein*, meaning to walk (Adams, 2001, p. 187). By using the word peripatetic in front of sense of place, my intention is to implicate the walking experience within a place and examine the meanings that emerge from walking. In Australia, walking on Country is intimately connected to cultural traditions of Australian Aborigines that are strongly embedded in place. In this Chapter, an autoethnographic account of a walk I did along the Lurujarri Heritage Trail on the north-west Kimberley coast in Western Australia, forms a 'peripatetic sense of place' narrative that seeks to reveal walking as an encounter of dialogue of foot-to-ground.

Throughout this chapter, walking is acknowledged as a subjective embodied experience that, in the context of the contemporary environmental crisis, seeks to

counter a pervading sense of a separate self that is 'not implicated in the world' (Mathews, 1991, p. 13). This situates wellbeing in ways that goes beyond the popular social practices of walking, such as benefits for fitness. It is about considering wellness as a state of being that is rendered through the walking body.

WALKING ENCOUNTERS IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION

The growth of the western industrial society transformed the social and cultural significance of walking. Everyday walking experiences became compartmentalized and reduced to sets of activities that removed the subjective nature of phenomenon from the experience. For example, Mulligan (2003) claims that the activity of bushwalking has many layers in between the foot and ground that accentuate degrees of separation:

> Whenever we go, we recreate the frontier between the settled and the wild, and when we travel we are cocooned by our technologies. Even in our most dedicated efforts to 'get back to nature', we carry backpacks loaded with the 'necessities' for survival and we encase our feet in robust hiking boots…we need to keep in mind the degree of separation if we want to become more attentive and empathetic with the non-human world. (p. 284)

Walking is a common activity in outdoor education and in Australia, is referred to as bushwalking. Students often venture on foot as part of purposeful journeys outdoors carrying all the necessities to be in a place (usually semi- remote or remote) for a number of days. Whilst there are pragmatic reasons for the use of technologies such as safety, if these go unquestioned or unexamined in the context of an educational experience, then does this attention to the outer necessities distract from, or reduce, the possibility to engage fully in the subjective nature of the experience?

In outdoor education the walking experience has conventionally involved the learning of a particular set of skills such as navigation, and learning to walk in different terrain that usually requires attention to site-specific safety issues. The emphasis of walking using the guides of topographic maps and compasses has the walker constantly monitoring their direction, progress and location. Edensor (2000b, p. 97) suggests that "rather than an uninterrupted occasion for contemplation and sensual pleasure, such disciplines lead to continual physical self-control and spatial orientation". The perceived field then becomes a 'mapped space' defined by a prescribed route. This is an example of where the experience of walking can be reduced to particular sets of activities with the unintended consequence of not implicating ourselves in the world.

In Australia, during the early 20th Century, tracts of land in the east were set aside for conservation reasons and became National Parks. Bushwalkers were instrumental, in many cases, in the establishment of these areas (Harper, 2007). Outdoor education has adopted the bushwalking practices of that era where venturing on foot into wilderness areas became a primary motivation. Slattery (2009, p. 20) argues that in outdoor education this adoption has generally gone

unquestioned and includes assumptions such as 'entitlement to remote places is earned through mastery of skills' and that 'the pursuit of inaccessibility is a motivation, a lure, a challenge in its own right'. Furthermore, the choice to go to remote areas, with the absence of human impact, may be underpinned by an assumption that a heightened experience on personal and spiritual levels may occur (Slattery, 2009).

Choosing to venture into remote places does necessitate a degree of preparation around physical fitness and technology. Here, the nature and extent to which the walking experience is mediated comes under question. For the student, the question is, to what extent, and in what ways, do continuous encounters with technologies such as navigation aids, mediate their experience? This is not to say that experiences can become void of mediation but one can become aware of the nature of the mediation in order to be attentive and empathetic to the experience of walking in and through places. These examples of outwardly directed attention to skills illustrate performative conventions of practices that, if left unquestioned, may create busy acts of doing for students and subsequently reduce the possibility for the richness of their subjective experience to emerge.

In order to bring this awareness forth, expands the experience into something more whole and is why I choose to use the word encounter. In seeking to walk with awareness and reciprocity, enacted as a dialogue of foot-to-ground, encounter evokes interaction and considers the ways in which we observe and notice the world. Buber's dialogic philosophy has informed my research and he describes encounter with attention to the nature of the interaction:

> I would rather think of something unpretentious yet significant – of the glances which strangers exchange in a busy street as they pass one another with unchanging pace. Some of these glances, though not charged with destiny, nevertheless reveal to one another two dialogical natures.
>
> But I can really show what I have in mind only by events which open into a genuine change from communication to communion, that is, the embodiment of the word dialogue. (Buber, 1970, p. 21)

To reveal dialogue in this way, shifts one's attention to communion that invites a level of intimacy and mutual engagement. Buber is popularly known for his philosophy of dialogue expressed as the 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' principles that were first published in 1918. The relevance of this philosophy to outdoor education has been explored elsewhere (Blades & Bester, 2013; Blenkinsop, 2005, 2004). For the purposes of this Chapter, it is worth briefly noting that 'It' assumes an orderliness and predictability and the 'I-It' relationship "objectifies and alienates the world that Buber believed must be revered and related to" (Blenkinsop, 2005, p. 294). In other words, the inter-subjective nature of experience is the 'I-Thou', where the subjective 'I' encounters the subjective 'other'.

To consider encounters as inter-subjective, requires attention to the performance of outwardly directed skills to shift to inwardly directed attention to qualities such as awareness and presence. This embodies a sense of mutual engagement, and is what Buber (1970) referred to as 'intimate encounters', where moments of unity

claim our attention. For instance, have you ever experienced walking through a pine forest and having that uncanny experience of being scrutinised amidst the whispering rustle of pine needles? Abram (1997, p. 130) describes this as 'patient receptivity', whereby our senses can open up and attune to the place. As educators, bringing these qualities to our attention acknowledges the emergent and unpredictable nature of the walking experience, rather than the dominance and reliance upon ordered, reflexive positions. Edensor (2000b) argues that the latter has largely imposed 'normative, unreflective codes' upon walkers.

> Thus, walking can indeed be particularly suitable for stimulating reflexivity, yet the moment it becomes devised and practised as such, an awareness of practical conventions can obscure the chance occurrences and multiple sensations that stimulate a different sort of reflexivity, one which embraces the difference, the alterity of nature, the contingent, the heterogeneous, the decentred, the fleeting and the unrepresentable. (p. 102)

This requires a degree of trust from the educator in order to allow meanings to emerge in the multiplicity of situations and places we take students walking. This also requires a revision of traditional educational epistemologies and as Osberg, Biesta and Cilliers (2008, p. 213) suggest, alternative 'temporal' understandings of knowledge are called for. These authors explore how knowledge and reality are part of the "same emerging complex system which is never fully 'present' in any (discrete) moment in time". This, they claim, points to the importance of acknowledging the role of the 'unrepresentable' or 'incalculable'. In relation to the embodied experience of walking, diverse epistemologies of the sensual, the cognitive and movement exist in all their complexities.

It is these spaces in-between, the unknown places steeped in ancestral stories, the space in-between each footstep that the following section explores via an autoethnographic account of a walk I did along an Aboriginal songline. As Humberstone (2011, p. 495) suggests, "autoethnography can provide for unique insights into the embodied experiences of the life-worlds of 'being' in nature". In the narrative that follows, my intent is to represent in some way, my embodied experience of *being* walking, rather than an account of *doing* walking through this place.

PERIPATETIC SENSE OF PLACE: SONGLINES AND DREAMTIME STORIES ON THE LURUJARRI HERITAGE TRAIL

There is a tangible relationship between the walking body and the ground that brings us into immediate contact with our surroundings. Here, I am interested in the Australian context of place and the meaning of the ground beneath our feet that Aborigines refer to as Country. To situate this in post-colonial Australia, our (white Anglo Saxon) relationship to the ground is relevant to explore. The language used by Carter (1996) provides a textual resonance to colonization in the way he describes our relationship to the ground:

> we glide over it … to render what is rough (as) smooth, passive, passable; we linearize it, conceptualizing the ground … as an ideally flat space that can be traversed without hindrance … We walk on the ground as we drive on the road; that is, we move over and above the ground. (p.2)

This, he argues, denies us of our inhabitation of land. We need to focus instead on the ground at our feet, and "pay attention to its folds and inclines" (Carter, 1996, p. 2).

The Lurujarri Trail is a nine day cultural walking journey that is conducted by members of the Goolarabooloo community. I had the privilege to walk this Trail in July 2011. It is situated along the northwest Kimberley coast, in Western Australia and stretches about 130 kilometres from Minyirr (Broome) north to Minarriny (Coulomb Point). The Trail traces part of a song cycle of the Jabirr Jabirr, Jukun and Ngombal peoples. Songlines depict the life and journeys of ancestral beings or Dreamtime spirits and serve as an oral history map of Country. Short components relate to particular places and the entire sequence forms a map of the ancestor's journey (Sinatra & Murphy, 1999). The Lurujarri Trail was an enactment of a dialogue of foot-to-ground for me, beginning with exploring my sense of relationship with Country.

Walking on Country is a distinctive phrase in Australia and bears witness to the ancient wisdom of the indigenous culture and their deep relationship to this land. Chatwin (1987, p. 63) explains that all our words for Country are the same as the words for line and these lines exist as an interlocking network of 'ways through'. In relation to walking, this links with Ingold's (2013) notion of a network of lines, or lines of movement that manifest from inhabitation and threading their own paths. This relationship with the ground resonates as an intimate encounter and speaks of the Country as a living place as if one is speaking about a person or friend (Rose, 1996, p. 16). There is a dialogue embedded within this relationship and as Mulligan (2003, p. 276) explains, we are obliged to enter into this relationship with 'interactive responsibility'.

The following words are spoken from an Aboriginal law holder speaking about walking on Country of the Lurujarri Trail:

> We have to dig a bit deeper, but we settle on the surface. We don't go to what is in our bones, that feeling. In order to experience this, we have to walk the land. Then we wake up to feeling, what we call le-an here, and we become more alive, we start feeling, we become more sensitive. And that's the time you start to experience, when the land pulls you and takes over.
>
> We have to learn to see again, learn to walk, to feel all these things again. So if there's a process where we can be guided through to learn to get to the stage of making contact with the land again, we get some calling of responsibility our self. (Roe & Hoogland, 1999, p. 11)

To learn to 'see and feel again' invites us to consider how we might walk through places. Along this Trail there was an unfolding narrative of walking, of pausing and listening to Dreamtime stories that are deeply embedded in this place and

brought alive on this walk. Within this Country, the creator being is traditionally perceived as the Emu man 'Marella' whose journey as narrated in the song cycle, correlates site-wise with that of archaeologists' discoveries of three-toed prints that they speak of as dinosaur footprint. Aboriginal cosmology makes explicit the relationship between the spiritual and the practical where land is both a source of livelihood and a sentient landscape created by the Ancestral being (Wall, 2010).

As I walked, the interaction between the material and the imaginal emerged in unexpected ways. During the walk, we would sometimes meander and wander off the Trail, pause, sit for a while, and listen to a custodian share Dreamtime stories: stories about women's place and anthill dreaming, stories about snake dreaming and more. We were, to use Snyder's (1990, p. 145) metaphors, 'on the path' yet 'off the trail' where the 'path' is the material line followed and 'off the trail' refers to 'the relentless complexity of the world' that invites us to wander through, to learn and memorise slopes and gullies as if 'holding a map in the mind'. This metaphor enabled me to be open to the narrative of this land and for meaning to emerge. It became my inner map that was just not the features I could see. I was humbled by this sense that we are connected to a greater act of creation that goes beyond the geomorphic formation.

The Dreamtime stories represent a dynamic and on-going relationship with Country that supports the wellbeing of Country. Furthermore, the Dreaming is functional, meaningful and alive as poignantly described by Benterrak, Muecke and Roe (1996, p. 19):

> [The Dreaming] is not a set of beliefs which is being lost because it is no longer valid, it is rather a way of talking, of seeing, of knowing, and a set of practices, which is … as mysterious and beautiful as any poetry … it depends on people living in the country, travelling through it and naming it, constantly making new songs and stories.

As I walked in between these stories, my thoughts seemed free of evaluation. Was this my dreaming? A space entered into where imagination and stories meet? In this sense, the landscape is the text, not in the sense of a map representing the contours and the vegetation types, but as a map representing intimate knowledge (Arbon & Lowe, 2003). This meaning also had a profoundly human presence, one which was far removed from the colonial settler text of terra nullius (human absence). Therefore, the Trail is a lived space, where meaning emerges and where new songs and stories are made, that enables the exploration of old topics in new ways (Benterrak et al., 1996).

Another dimension of the encounter involved the invitation by the custodian to listen to and read the landscape. The stories told of the land evoked feelings of its aliveness and interconnectedness. For example, water held different meanings: running water was living water; ponds or lakes were holding or resting water. We observed an array of sharp stones and grinding stones on a midden site, evidence of people having lived there. This spanned a long section of sand dunes. I sat for a while at this place to bear witness to past time laid out before me. In the act of *being* walking, I began to notice that *listening* and *seeing* became the same thing.

For example, I heard the wind blow as well as seeing the unseen such as the wind-carved sand dunes. Therefore, the landscape and the elements of weather such as the wind were intertwined. When walking on my own, this became a walking meditation as I would observe my in-breath and out-breath, keeping it in time with the rhythm of my walking. Mindfulness is the process of being aware of the present moment and this enabled me to engage in 'patient reciprocity' in order to listen and to see. Ingold (2010, p. 122) describes a mindful body as a living, breathing body and the earth and sky are not external components but are 'rather regions of the body's very existence'.

We walked through clusters of saltwater paperbarks and freshwater paperbarks, observing and collecting some native berries along the way. All of these were a rich source of food and water. There was something about these stories that held me in those places. It was as if they were going through my body rather than my body walking through them. An analogy to this is when reading poetry, when words resonate to the core of your being and you feel your body connect to their trail. Here, my body was connecting to the Trail beneath my feet as well as the space around, enfolding the stories, the place and experience that brought forth a constant sense of connection. For instance, the temporal encounter of seeing ancient grinding stones and dinosaur footprints connected me to a continuum of the past, present and future.

The focus on footsteps calls into question footwear as a material layer and the nature of its mediation in the walking experience. Footwear has been considered as an invisible technology in the examination of the role of technology mediating the human relationship with nature, yet Michael (2000) suggests it can reveal the diverse and multifaceted relationship between humans and nature. The walkers on the Trail are supported with the transport of their camping gear to each campsite daily that enables them to just carry a light day pack. This provided supportive conditions to pay attention to the ground and the surrounds. Use of footwear for me was a personal negotiation of going barefoot, wearing rock booties (a light rubber sole) or light weight boots. This was dependent upon the physical conditions of the ground but also entwined in that was the opportunity to pay attention to the nature of contact with the ground. For example, it enabled me to feel the texture of the ground, its subtle inclines and declines, as well as changing my pace and rhythm of walking. Of course there were practical choices in this, as I was unaccustomed to walking barefoot and needed to protect my feet from the hot ground or from abrasion or rubbing from sand or coarse rocks! It would be simplistic to suggest that changing footwear enables the degrees of separation to be peeled away, but the process of making choices did open up my senses and awareness to the changing surfaces.

However, this responsiveness can reveal the contradictions and complexities of places. The nature of this relationship of foot-to-ground is not a negation of the ground (Carter, 1996). Instead, walking brings the stories of the ground to life in all their complexities. So rather than perceiving each footstep as distinct and purely functional, the footstep becomes a footprint to the next step – a past, a present and a future – unfolding meaning along the way, telling a narrative (Ingold & Vegunst,

2008). The material impressions of walking on the Trail were a mixture of meandering, wandering, pausing and walking with purpose, such as having to beat the incoming tide to navigate our way across watercourses! These were irregular and unpredictable, weaving on and off the beach, the sand dunes and inland through forests and wetlands. Figure 2.1 presents an imaginal perspective of footprints as texts, connecting them from past time to the present day. These images contrast the continuity of ancient time and the Dreamtime stories (Marella) entwined within them, with the present day human presence of walkers who, for a brief moment, pass through this place. In acknowledging the complexities embedded within a dialogue of foot-to-ground, acknowledges the heterogeneous nature of the human relationship to nature. The convergence of the material, the sensual, the cultural and the historical texts reveal the contested nature of places. The location of this Trail is idyllic in its natural sense. It is a place of significant biodiversity on a global scale. However, for many years, this Country was a contested site as corporate and government mining interests planned to develop of a major liquid natural gas port and processing facility in the middle of this song cycle at Walmadeny (James Price Point). This was recently overturned.[iii]

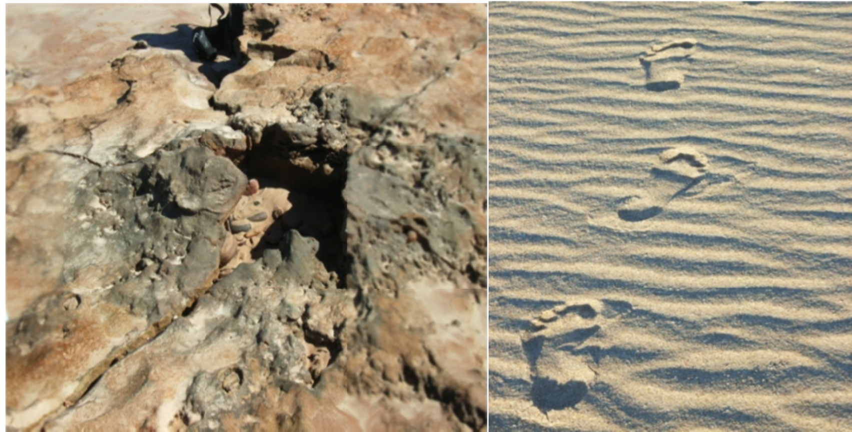

Figure 2.1. Marella's journey and the human journey. (Source: Author)

Finally, the spaces in-between, the familiar and unfamiliar, all intersect in these lines of movement. There was the daily routine of getting up, having breakfast, packing and loading the truck, then setting off on the Trail and arriving at camp in the afternoon which became very familiar. There was also the unfamiliar, particularly the Dreamtime stories. As I listened to the words I understood their literal meaning but there was a dimension of unknowing as I am not embedded culturally in these stories. However, I could bear witness to the pauses in the stories, the gap between each footstep taken, as if they held an unspoken story that emerged in those in-between spaces. These qualities resonate with the notion of 'spirit of place' that Rigby (2003, p. 114) considers can be a model of ecological

aesthetics. This is about what arises in the 'in-between of atmosphere' and involves 'the coupling of physical manifestation and sensuous perception'. This attributes to walking an agency that offers both sensory and perceptual awareness. As Roe and Hoogland (1996, p. 11) said, "we wake up to feeling, what we call le-an here, and we become more alive". Walking the Trail was an embodied walk through this place and as an outdoor educator, gave me cause to reflect upon my 'interactive responsibility' to places I walk through with students.

RESTING

> The path which one follows is never straight because the walker is a sensual being who is in the world, not simply treading the surface. (Lund, 2012, p. 233)

This quote evokes the attitude of the bodily experience, via the mobility and corporeality of walking, as a means of making meaning in the world. From a phenomenological perspective, Merleau-Ponty (1968) explains this by way of the ground, of all our thought, beneath our feet:

> … there remains the actual ground that we stand on, the earthly ground of rock and soil that we share with the other animals and plants. This dark source, that we can readily point even in the silence, will outlast all our purely human philosophies as it outlasts all the other artificial structures we erect upon it. We could do well, then, to keep our thoughts and our theories close to the non-arbitrary ground that already supports all our cogitations. The density beneath our feet is a depth we cannot fathom, and it spreads out on all sides into the horizon and beyond. Unlike all the human-made foundations we construct upon its surface, the silent and stony ground itself can never be grasped in a purely human act of comprehension. For it has, from the start, been constituted (or 'constructed') by many organic entities besides ourselves. (p. 155)

This attributes a quality of being deeply responsive, and for educators to trust in the emergence of what constitutes an interactive dialogue of foot-to-ground. As Osberg et al. (2008, p. 213) state, that with this understanding "knowledge reaches us not as something we receive but as a response, which brings forth new worlds".

It is an ecological responsiveness that seeks to bring forth walking encounters that attune our bodies, mind and place. Van Wensveen (2000, p. 32) describes attunement as a virtue which "cannot be taught or learned solely at the level of reflection" but rather, we "cultivate an attitude of attunement". This attitude, when considered as a virtue, brings forth the moral significance of cultivating this as our 'interactive responsibility' in walking through places. This invites us to slow down, to see and to feel, and in the words of Goolarabooloo custodians:

> We have to learn to see again, learn to walk, to feel all these things again. So if there's a process where we can be guided through to learn to get to the

> stage of making contact with the land again, we get some calling of responsibility our self. (Roe & Hoogland, 1999, p. 11)

The nature of the walking encounter can be opened up, and our senses become fully alive, as we bear witness to the ground beneath our feet and the emergence of meaning. This is not the surface layer, it is the enfoldment of layers of experience and meaning that are intricately entwined. It is not a sublime surface either, but rather, the surface reveals all its complexities and ambiguities that are unrepresentable and unpredictable. Therefore, if we pay attention to the qualities of being that stimulate a deeper reflexivity, we open up to the possibility of encounters with moments of unity between the known and the unknown.

NOTES

[i] Goolarabooloo means Keepers of Law and Culture for Jabirr Jabirr and Ngombal (Wall, 2010).

[ii] Wallace (1994, p. 18) states that peripatetic claims concerning the benefits of walking have changed through history and as the industrial revolution shifted travellers' attention to the process of travel, this altered the "socio-economic content of walking". Walking became desirable both in "practical and metaphorical ways": the re-creation of the self; reconnection with nature and with the divine; continuity of sense, mind and spirit and; community and connection with a communal past.

[iii] This issue was and is of major significance to this region and pressures to maintain its cultural and ecological integrity continue. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine the political relevance of the Lurujarri Trail. Refer to Wall (2010) for more background to the issue.

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Genny Blades
La Trobe University
Australia