

Outdoor adventure in promoting relationships with nature

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Abstract

Critical outdoor education seeks to promote improved human to nature relationships. As academics and teachers strive to develop theory and practice appropriate for such outcomes, the traditional role of adventure activities is being scrutinized. This paper draws on a two year qualitative study which traced changes in human/nature relationships reported by a group of university students as a consequence of involvement in an outdoor education programme. From the many outcomes of the study, the following discussion extracts and concentrates on the role outdoor adventure activities can play in shaping connectedness to nature within outdoor education. Results suggest that adventure can be a very powerful tool for green outdoor education and that deskilling activities as a means of enhancing environmental outcomes may be counterproductive for some students.

Introduction

At the last national outdoor education conference, one of the interactive workshops posed the question, "has traditional outdoor education reached its use by date?" (Lugg and Gaechter, 2003, p. 312). The question was rhetorical, and the workshop directed towards a critique of adventure from feminist and environmental perspectives. It questioned the suitability of adventure-based learning for environmental outcomes.

An unease with adventure activities in outdoor education, unthinkable a decade ago, has grown as a consequence of improved environmental awareness in a mutable curriculum. In recent years, outdoor education's contribution to curriculum has shifted from personal and group development towards seeking to understand humans and their relationship with the non-human natural world. Evidence of this reorientation can be found in formal curriculum documents within Australia, most notably from Victoria, and in changing foci of conference and journal papers, many exhibiting a stronger environmental presence, although, again, the shift in material from southern mainland states is most noticeable (Martin, 2003). In Victoria, the greening of outdoor education has resulted in two distinct subjects available to students. Senior secondary students now choose between the year 11 and 12 Outdoor and Environmental studies course, or opt to complete Vocational Education and Training outdoor recreation modules. Simplistically, the former explores the importance of natural environments to humanity, the latter, outdoor pursuits and an introduction to outdoor leadership.

I have been an advocate for a greener critical outdoor education, arguing back in 1993 that taking groups into wild places can only be justified in pursuit of more environmentally

sympathetic understanding (Martin, 1993a). However, what may be lacking in the greening of outdoor education are programmes which enhance environmental connectedness, yet retain the potency of adventure-based learning which has for so long endeared students and teachers to outdoor education as a viable alternative pedagogy. The risk is that as the modified outdoor activity, content and context of green outdoor education slides in, adventure, fun and a love of the bush with body and soul are squeezed out. Perhaps today's green outdoor educators are actually rediscovering field-based geography? More importantly, outdoor education as reinvented geography may actually be less effective in developing a more environmentally sympathetic citizenry when compared to outdoor education's adventure-based possibilities.

For many years, adventure-based learning was the foundation for outdoor education. However, the inadvertent disempowerment of adventure brought on by critical outdoor education risks discarding the logic and pedagogy which has underpinned outdoor education's curriculum potency. While it is right that such foundations be questioned (Nicol, 2002; Lugg, 2004, this issue), any alternatives require just as careful scrutiny and evaluation. It is possible that in an attempt to green outdoor education's content and context, largely informed by feminist and socially critical literature, well-meaning academics and practitioners are potentially leaving out the very essence of what makes outdoor education so effective as a way of building profound relationships between people and nature.

To find out how outdoor education influences human to nature relationships I tracked, via journal and in-depth interviews, the changes university students experienced while undertaking a three year degree programme in outdoor education. While there are many

outcomes from the study, in this article I have chosen to extract and concentrate on the role outdoor adventure activities play in shaping human relationships or connectedness to nature within outdoor education. In so doing, it becomes clear that adventure can be a very powerful tool for green outdoor education and that its more sedate alternatives are not without pitfalls.

The research context and methods

The subjects who participated in the study to its conclusion were 14 students (8 men, 6 women) and four staff (3 men, 1 woman) involved in the outdoor education degree at Bendigo, Victoria. Data were collected over a two-year period via repeated interviews and journals. The outdoor education degree programme at La Trobe University, Bendigo emphasises human/nature relationship topics, making it an information rich context to explore pedagogical alternatives.

Outdoor education [at Bendigo] is the study of the relationships humans have with nature through outdoor experiences. The discipline examines the influence of education and culture on human-nature relationships, with particular attention to implications for human and environmental futures (La Trobe University, 2001, p. 394).

Within the outdoor education programme at Bendigo, students complete a range of both practical and theoretical outdoor education experiences. Practical work is typified by journeys of four days' duration involving either bushwalking, paddling, cross-country skiing or rockclimbing "as a way of getting to know the environment and people" (Department of Outdoor Education and Nature Tourism, 1998, p. 1). Shorter skill development or environmental science field trips also occur as part of the programme, as do some more extended field trips, one of 18 to 21 days. While the basis of the programme is traditional adventure activities, alternative less adventurous ways of being in the outdoors are well supported and explored. As a minimum, students in this study completed 52 days each academic year in practical fieldwork; they complete far more in their own time. The theoretical aspects of the programme include environmental science/studies and differing concepts related to outdoor education theory and practice drawn from education, eco-psychology, environmental ethics and eco-philosophy.

In-depth interviews took place prior to the commencement of the programme, at the end of year 1 and at the end of year 2. Students also maintained a research journal for the two years of the study. The qualitative data were coded

and analysed with the use of the NVivo qualitative data analysis programme. Although a member of the outdoor education department, I was not directly involved in teaching any of the research participants during the data collection period. All names used in this article are pseudonyms. Selected extended quotations are used in reporting data as a means of thick description, to permit the reader her/his own analysis and to add authenticity to the data reporting.

Outdoor education promoting skills for relationships with nature

I care about nature heaps more than when I started the course. Even small things like recycling and stuff. Just from starting the course I watch how long I'm in the shower and all that sort of stuff. Yeah, just like having less time in the shower, riding my bike instead of driving. (Kate, interview 3)

Behaviour in the bush has changed slightly, I'm a little more caring, but behaviour at home has changed a lot more, behaviour 'round town. Like I try to drive as little as possible now, I try to recycle as much as I can. I think that is while – before the course or even half way through last year, I realized I needed to conserve and be sensitive to nature while I was out there [in the bush], but while I was at home I didn't really think about it, I didn't really have to. Whereas doing the course you sort of have to every day. Just sort of thinking about it makes you do those things I think. (Peter, interview 3)

The most fundamental finding from this research was that the process of outdoor education, as experienced by these participants, helped to shape their relationships with nature towards an increased sense of connectedness to, and caring for, nature. Each of the 14 student participants changed in a similar way, universally adopting more environmentally sympathetic behaviours and orientation, although not all to the same extent. In terms of meeting the kinds of environmental behaviour changes sought via a green critical outdoor education, this programme founded on adventure-based activity seemed successful.

Of primary importance for this discussion was the way in which outdoor education helped the students in this study develop the knowledge and skills to shape a relationship with nature. Although research participants identified a range of factors which helped positively shape their relationships with the natural world, two

significant categories of knowledge and skills were apparent from the responses. These included knowledge and skills of language to enable formulating and discussing a relationship with nature, and knowledge and skills for comfort and competence in the settings favoured by the outdoor education programme.

A language of relatedness

According to respondents, one of the most immediate aspects initiated by the outdoor education course was the creation of a culture, language and conceptual framework to enable them to think about and discuss their relationship with non-human nature.

The lectures have given me a way of explaining what I thought. Without the lectures I think I couldn't have explained what we've talked about. (Rick, interview 2)

. . . well I had never really heard of the term, 'relationships with nature' and I was just totally stumped by the question. Now, I think, ah, . . . I have heard all of the jargon, I have heard all of how it's supposed to be and what's supposed to be good and what sounds good and everything – so I reckon I've been influenced by all that. I think it's a good influence Because I have really had to look at how I do really relate to nature. I don't think I had ever sat down and thought about nature, it was just always there. (Silvia, interview 3)

The four staff members interviewed also raised the importance of theory in enabling students to reflect and discuss course material. Although each participant in this research made mention of some theoretical aspects within the course that helped him or her understand and develop their relationship with nature, there seemed no general consistency about what was the *most* influential theory in this regard. All staff and some students variously mentioned the importance of course material which raised alternative worldviews, such as literature on deep ecology, eco-feminism, and spirituality in nature. Staff and student participants generally thought theory to be important as a way to encourage critical examination of taken-for-granted assumptions about humans and nature, particularly in understanding nature relationships as "subject-to-subject" relationships (Gary, staff interview). The most significant aspect to emerge from the discussion of theory within the course was that the outdoor education programme provided students with a language and conceptual framework to discuss their relationship with nature, and a reason to do so.

A classical debate among developmental psychologists concerns the relationship between cognition and language (Goodluck, 1991). For example, is it possible to understand a concept well if someone lacks the language to describe and explore the idea? In her analysis of research, Goodluck (1991) concludes that cognitive development and linguistic development are parallel phenomena. Language, often through metaphor, provides for what Bowers and Flinders (1991) describe as "a schema or cognitive map for thinking" (p. 10). Certainly there are no shortages of cross-cultural examples where concepts well understood in some cultures give rise to improved language options, such as the multiple Inuit expressions for 'snow' and the Arabic for 'camel'. To use an outdoor example: in cross-country ski touring, the advent of non-wax ski bases has meant that the need to understand subtlety of snow type and the ability to describe that in terms of the wax required for touring has all but disappeared. The contemporary ski tourer no longer requires a conceptual understanding of the diversity of the Australian snow pack, and the language to do so has also disappeared from common use. The language and insight derived from adventure pursuits can shape and enable understanding of natural environments in ways which both enhance and diminish environmental well being.

For the students in this research, being introduced to concepts of human relationships with nature, and being able to talk about, describe and reflect on those relationships, greatly helped their conceptual understanding of their own relatedness to nature. It is interesting to note that the importance of language development has not often been acknowledged as important in outdoor education, although metaphorical imagery (Gough, 1990; Martin, 1993b, 1999) and differing values of nature (Kellert 1993, 1996) can be easily applied. This study has highlighted the value of a language of relatedness with nature as an important primary component to any critical outdoor education programme seeking to develop student relationships with the natural world. It is also worth noting that environmental science or scientific ecological knowledge, although included in students' course of study and mentioned as variously useful in getting to know more about a place, did not provide any language for describing how students felt about nature.

Comfort and competence in nature

Language enables consideration and understanding of human relationships with nature, but it does not dictate any particular direction for the ways in which relationships can develop, nor does language in itself give students something meaningful to talk about. As was expected, direct personal experience

with nature was a key component of developing a relationship with nature and remains a cornerstone of outdoor education. In this research group, staff and students alike were unanimous and adamant that positive relationships with nature do not develop without ongoing, direct personal contact with nature. Feeling comfortable, enjoying the nature experience, and feeling competent to be safe and secure with nature were important to forming a positive relationship. Conversely, positive relationships with nature do not develop from experiences where people are scared, uncomfortable or intimidated in nature. It is here that the adventure-based activity evident in the course gave the students a vehicle for being with nature, the motivation for continued involvement, and something to talk about.

I really enjoy going to Arapiles, I think it's because I have been there several times now and every time is like a revisit. I sort of think that to get to know a place well you have to go there several times and I've done that. . . . Feeling comfortable in a place is a good sign that you are on your way to really knowing that place. . . . Because I feel so comfortable now in the bush it's like being at home almost. (Ed, interview 2)

It was probably after the Grampians 6 day hike I started to appreciate nature more. After those 6 days I felt a hell of a lot more comfortable going out into the bush. Before that I'd just felt insecure and not at home. And then after those 6 days, that made me appreciate nature a lot more. And then on the 21 day hike a lot more again, just from spending so long out there. (Kate, interview 3)

Yeah, I'm completely at home in the bush whereas before I felt like I was just visiting. Now it's my other home, it's a natural thing. I can pack a pack in about half an hour, I know what I need to be completely self-sufficient out there and I can use what's around. (Karen, interview 2)

However, a simple dilemma existed. Staff and students identified that more intense skill-focused activity, essential to develop living and travelling skills for comfort in the outdoors, did not in itself develop a more caring nature relationship, and may sometimes work against such relationship development.

I feel confident with say bushwalking, so I get more with nature. But say on paddling I'm starting to get more confident, but I still feel like say nature's over there

and I'm over here. Like I'm fighting against it when I'm paddling. Similar to climbing too. I'm just terrified of the rock and I feel like it's fighting against me! (Kate, interview 2)

With paddling and climbing I'm sort of concentrating on what I'm doing, on the skill. (Peter, interview 2)

This presents perhaps the most significant educational dilemma for constructing teaching experiences in the out-of-doors with adventure-based activity which aims for an increased relatedness with nature. Skills are required for comfort, but skill learning detracts from environmental awareness. It is this dilemma that has given rise to the conclusion that if adventure was removed, then students would be free to more easily develop their relationship with nature via more passive means. I believe such logic to be flawed.

The paradox of skill learning and environmental appreciation

The research participants were generally aware of the tensions between developing relationships with nature and the need to learn technical skills – skills which at times can represent nature as a metaphorical playground. One staff member interviewed, Julie, described how on bushwalks or canoe trips, a focus on getting to the campsite could 'overrun' the process of exploring nature en route. She described how she dealt with that:

I have a string of strategies to deal with, to fight, that destination preoccupation – being more vague about what we are going to do at the start, so there is not a particular expectation . . . and then having to fight it if you want to have flexibility from it. Making a point of finding places for the main stops. We used to try getting them to find, getting students to find places, but it often wouldn't happen. Like, "go around this corner and look for a lunch spot", but they'd be just on the side of the track anyway.

[What are you looking for in those stopping places?]

Just, a, a *place*, not a stopping spot? Some care to think about where we might want to have a meal, as opposed to how far do we have to get before this allows us to stop. Maybe just get to the creek and walk down it a while, – or let's go and have a look beyond this log, or let's go and look for a view. It doesn't have to be any particular feature, it doesn't have to be a view or a waterfall but it has to

be something that takes away that "we're getting from here to here and we are stopping here because it's three quarters of the way there." It's only a tiny shift. (Julie, staff interview)

Staff members who were interviewed described how they were open with students about the tension between skills and experience with nature, communicating as clearly as they could how basic skills are a requirement to be safe and comfortable in the outdoors and an essential precursor to developing a deeper relationship with nature. Graham (staff interview) also mentioned the need to de-emphasise the activity and suggested two strategies for doing so: naming field trips around the location rather than the skill (for example, the "Murray river exploration" rather than a "canoe trip"), and moving straight into using the outdoor skill in a travelling, journeying sense, rather than having preparatory skill development days.

The description provided thus far indicates how a skill development focus moderates, or slows, developing a positive relationship with nature and how staff members had developed ways of addressing this. That skill learning through adventure impinges on environmental outcomes is in agreement with much recent writing which questions the use of traditional adventure activities in outdoor education (see, e.g., Payne 2002; Lugg, 2004, this issue). It provides the academic rationale for the *deskilling* of outdoor experiences and the subsequent reduction in the level of adventure appropriate for students who are technically less competent. However, it is an argument dominated by academic rhetoric and is conspicuously short of empirical evidence. Some students in this research brought attention to the cost of such deskilling.

For some students, an emphasis upon relationships with nature and a consequent de-emphasis of skill acquisition actually worked *against* developing a positive relationship with nature; opposite to the outcome theorized. George, who had the deepest personal relationship with nature of any research participant (as evidenced by other indices used in the study), commented how skill development was sometimes given too little space.

I remember being quite critical in my journal of the first Stirling ski trip and the climbing trip we went on – like they [staff] were saying "now you have got to develop a relationship with this place, a relationship with nature while you are on this trip". It's like "I haven't got time! I'm learning these skills", it's the wrong end of the continuum at the moment. "Let me get the skills developed then

I can move forward and start to work on the relationship with the place."

It's [the course] definitely promoting a deep connection with nature. But not everybody is ready for that deep connection. (George, interview 3)

George's comments highlight the need for well-sequenced skill development matched with an appropriate level of environmental challenge. George was not ready for a deeper relationship with the snow and cliff environments he was introduced to. The extracts from Simon and Rick below also contain interesting comments on teaching for human/nature relatedness. From Simon:

Like, yeah, you're out in the environment, you're here, but you're mainly here to become real close [to nature], which is good, but just suddenly – it's hard to explain, just the way that they [staff] go about it. I think would put people off a little bit.

[What puts you off, can you think of examples?]

Umm, it's hard because I like the bush heaps, and the course, but the way they go about it... Like I'll see some who are walking along and then sit and talk for like 2 hours about something then. I don't mean to be destination-orientated but sometimes you just have to be. It's just weird how some people say as soon as we get out there "we are not here for the destination, not here to get somewhere, we're just here to have a look around." And sometimes you think yeah that's good, but wouldn't that be good sometimes to just do a hard day's walk?

They don't piss me off, but sometimes they do get me annoyed, just the little niggling. (Simon, interview 2)

From Rick:

As far as the trips go, the activities are a non-event in my mind. . . . Sometimes on the [course] trips I feel like they're just chucking us in the trip and they want nature to become part of us without letting us take it as a gym first and then build on it, you know. And the best relationships with a female, a male-female relationship – well they're friends first and then it becomes deeper and then they become part of each other, well – it's the same thing as nature, you've got to see it as a gym . . . and then as a friend and then part of,

deeper. There's nothing wrong with [the] focus on the trip the fact that this is a climbing trip. Let's just go and climb our guts out and enjoy the climbing and the nature thing will just come you know – of course it helps if there is someone there and says oh this is, ah, such and such a type of rock and how it's used and how to use this feature to your advantage and that sort of thing.

[Where do you position your experiences this year with respect to that summary?]

I feel that they just hate this – we're not allowed to see nature as a gym – we haven't been there and experienced nature as a gym yet, this is someone who might not know nature. They want us to be at one with nature, nature to be a part of us and I think in a way it's kind of a sleazy thing you know, you go to a nightclub, you pick up and you might ... and to make yourself part of that woman or whatever, you know, but you haven't gone through those steps in between. That relationship then is worth nothing. A one-night stand is not worth very much. (Rick, interview 2)

Rick's analogy used here is ironic. Rick has taken on the 'nature as a friend' metaphor, to which students were introduced in class, and then re-applied this to his own experiences with the course. He has used this newfound language to more clearly explain his perspective. Paradoxically, Rick came into the course as a highly competent rock climber and it is clear he didn't enjoy some of the time in the outdoors promoted by the course. His comments are a direct critique of contemporary green outdoor education practice.

Umm. On the climbing trip at the start of the year we were presented with a bunch of skills and we were also presented with umm the idea that we can't view a climb for its grade. We had to learn a lot of skills but we didn't get to experience a lot of climbing. On the hiking trips I've done they haven't taken us anywhere very spectacular, it's just been doing laps around the forest. Perhaps it helps in navigation stuff but even then it tried to incorporate the navigation with other stuff. It hasn't just been hard and fast navigation for a couple of days – like on the peer walk we had to get to know the area as well, you know.

On the ski trip of four days we were presented with a number of skiing skills to learn. Umm but we were told this trip is not about skiing – even though there were a number of us that had never skied before, or even skied at all, or seen snow. And we were . . . guided around parts of the mountain to get to know part of the mountain more than to get to know our own skiing skills – in a way it can make you hate nature I guess – you know you don't have the skills to make you feel comfortable in that area, then you're not going to enjoy it in a big way.

I've always thought that I enjoy nature and value it – since I've been doing some trips I find I'm doing it just to tick the days off, I don't want to be there. And – in terms of that, I might as well be in jail I don't want to be out there, it's like torture. (Rick, interview 2)

The comments above were from only a few students in the study, all male, but that they arose at all is significant and the observations important within the context of qualitative research. In the programme under study, staff student ratios in the field rarely exceed 1:10, staff are very knowledgeable and highly skilled outdoor educators, the students themselves are all over 18 years and well motivated, having chosen a career in the outdoors. That some students expressed concern over practical involvement needs to be understood in that context. I wonder how less motivated year 9 students ambivalent about the environment would respond in such circumstances?

The principal conclusion from this data is that an over-emphasis on getting to know nature which de-emphasises skills to the extent that comfort or security may be compromised, or enjoyment and the existing relationship with nature diminished, could lead to students hating their experience with nature. This message was most prominent in Rick's comments, but underpinned contributions from George and Simon also.

In summary, skill acquisition was important to gain basic outdoor competence to enable a relationship with nature to be developed. For any extended overnight experience with nature, students require a level of outdoor living and travel skills. The outdoor activities were enjoyed by most students and were an important part of being with nature; they enabled students to explore a diversity of natural environments, often distant from conventional urban living spaces. However, a focus on skills tended to provide tacit support

for ways of interacting with nature which promoted a sense of nature as a place for recreation and human amusement, a focus determined by teaching staff to be inappropriate. To offset this, staff members had developed specific strategies to counter the tendency, and to highlight nature as more than just a playground. But ironically, in some instances, even for an ideal group of learners such as those in this study, the de-emphasis on skill learning was cause for frustration and resentment. In such cases students felt unable to enjoy the outdoors as a place to play, they felt forced to comply with particular ways of being in nature that were neither comfortable nor enjoyable for them. As a consequence, their relationship with nature suffered.

Outdoor education which seeks to promote a positive relationship with nature needs to carefully monitor student learning and ensure that students are coping with the demands imposed by the activity and/or environment. Enjoying a relationship, or having fun, remains as important a part of a human/nature relationship as it is in a human to human relationship.

Technology and experiences in nature

Part of what creates the paradox between the need for skill acquisition for comfort in the outdoors and the desire to de-skill an outdoor experience to focus upon nature is the extent to which particular activities are seen as essential to the process of outdoor education. While the course at Bendigo emphasised developing human/nature relationships, this was not the only goal of the programme. Staff members understood and commented on the need for students to gain skills to safely lead and teach others in the outdoors. This goal of developing a base for future leadership roles demanded students spend considerable time and energy in developing their own technical skills, independent of any need to develop a closer relationship with natural environments. But does outdoor education need to have any skills more technical than overnight walking in the bush? Are activities which are more technically demanding, such as rock climbing and white water canoeing, essential to a programme which seeks relationships with nature? Considerable evidence exists in the data from this study to suggest that students did develop their relationships with nature precisely because of these sorts of more adventurous activities. High adventure outdoor activities may well be one of the most effective educational tools available for developing positive relationships between humans and nature, particularly when blended with opportunities for reflection. However, a clearer answer to this question will only come from research which deliberately compares samples and outcomes from parallel

programmes founded on both adventurous and non-adventurous activity.

In this research, rock-climbing was commonly cited by research participants as the activity which most encouraged them to return to the same location; thus enabling an accrual of experiences and a connection to place over time. Both climbing and white-water canoeing were mentioned as activities which forced students to understand how nature worked. For example, students needed to understand river flows in order to safely paddle a canoe on moving water, or to look at rock structure in great detail to climb and place protection. In earlier research, Raffan (1993) had concluded that human dependency on nature was the single most powerful determinant in helping learn a sense of place in nature. Dependence upon nature is highest in the more adventurous activities such as paddling on moving water, or rock climbing. High adventure therefore provides both medium and rationale for understanding nature.

Although dependence on nature can be moderated by the use of increasingly technical outdoor equipment, such equipment and higher skill levels were acknowledged by students as useful in helping them develop relationships with places otherwise inaccessible to them. Although this can be viewed as retrospective justification for more technical outdoor pursuits, there is little doubt from the data that the majority of students in this study enjoyed the more adventurous activities. They liked the time in the bush because the activities they did there were challenging and fun; although, as noted earlier, the imposition of constraining educational agendas and inappropriate sequencing can undermine even the most keen.

Whilst student participants in the research freely acknowledged how technically adventurous activities could take time away from being with nature, there is a strong sense that without the challenge and fun which accompanied those activities, the desire for being in nature would diminish. In the outdoor education programme studied, adventurous activities enabled students to enjoy and be motivated to spend time in nature, but there was a growing sense that the balance between adventure and environmental appreciation is a fine one and for some students it had already been compromised to the detriment of their relationship with the outdoors.

The importance of emotional connections

I believe there is a key element which supports continued use of adventure activities as the basis for outdoor education pedagogy and which underscores outdoor education for more environmental relatedness. One of the pivotal findings of this research is that students develop relationships with nature which are increasingly

based on *emotional* resonances. "Love" in particular was used by a number of participants as the word they thought best described their relationship with nature. Other words used to describe participants' relationships with nature included emotions such as fear, happiness, relaxation, respect, and contentment.

I think I've felt umm, when I have touched something I've felt connected to it, or felt different outside myself because I've been there. I've felt more inner feelings like peace and joy and happiness, stuff like that. (Silvia, interview 3)

I think it comes back to a feeling inside – it's tacit, it can't be explained. It's a feeling in your heart when you are there. Some places I find really inspiring while in others, although they might be visually inspiring, the energy there might not be so as inspiring or accommodating – I don't know. (Aaron, interview 3)

Because you can't separate. You can't say the Box Ironbark [forest] is separate from the mountains, is separate to the Grampians, is separate to Tasmania – it's all part of the same planet. So if you can feel the connection with part of the planet you can feel it anywhere – wherever you can put your feet. (George, interview 3)

[The] only words I could think of were inside – I can't really show you but you get a warm squidgy feeling going right the way through you – that's the only words I could think of. Contentment probably describes it. (Karen, interview 1)

The outdoor activities provided the initial excuse, then the continued motivation to develop extensive and ongoing *personal* relationships with nature. Students in this study were passionate about the outdoors and their involvement with it.

Such relationships with nature lead to changed actions with respect to nature for all participants in this study – they were *felt* relationships and influenced behaviours directly. As a consequence, emotional ways of knowing and responding to nature need to be encouraged throughout any activity or programme. The students in this research who reported the greatest changes in everyday environmentally-related behaviour were also those who stated most interest and identification with more spiritual connections to the natural world. The importance of emotional responses in developing relationships with nature is

supported by previous research (Bragg 1995; Kellert 1996; Haskell 2000) and is philosophically consistent with an eco-feminist ethic of care. In this respect, the current study agrees with Bragg (1995) in concluding that emotional connections to nature are most consistently related to environmentally responsible action (p. 383). It also agrees with Kellert's (1996) research which described reactions to nature as founded upon emotional responses (p. 165). It is my argument that adventure activities are a powerful medium to elicit emotional connections to the natural world. Adventure induces an emotional response, but also draws people to wild places that play their own role in eliciting emotional reactions from participants.

It would be inappropriate to conclude without acknowledging that adventure activities can promote the worst of human exploitation of nature, where the desire for a new 'buzz' can override any environmental consideration. Adventure activities experienced by the students in this research were always conducted mindful of a strong environmental ethos. Quieter, more contemplative reflective time was a common element in the journeys students described; often it was this combination and contrast to the adventure activity that enabled the relationship with a place to strengthen.

There was a few times on the long walk where we had solo time. Just time to sit and reflect and absorb. It's pretty powerful. (Ed, interview 3)

I find bushwalking, and climbing as well, I don't think of the nature side of things when I am actually doing the activity especially with climbing, although I like sitting at the top of the cliff writing in my journal, but I'm not into it while I'm climbing. Bushwalking I guess I can reflect a lot better when I'm sitting down at the end of a day's walking. (Barbara, interview 3)

Conclusion

A greening of outdoor education and a growing emphasis upon teaching for improved human/nature relationships is a worthy cause. Changes to outdoor education practice to enhance such outcomes need to be well founded in research as well as theory. Deskilling outdoor education has been promoted as one possibility. In this article I have shown that this carries an inherent risk of de-stabilizing the longstanding attractiveness of outdoor education processes for some students, and may even work against improved relationships with the natural world. A passion for spending time with nature, easily promoted through adventure activities, blended

with reflective moments may well be the greatest gift we can give our students to take with them into the future of the world.

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About the Author

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