Learning to Engage Place and Sustainability through Adventure Travel

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Setting and Participants

- Paddling the Big Sky canoe expedition in 2005 (see Figure 1).
  - 100 Days, May 9th to August 16th, from Hinton, AB to Kugluktuk, NU, Canada, 2,683 km.
  - An undergraduate outdoor program integrated into first 29 days.
  - Along the Athabasca, Slave, Yellowknife, Starvation, and Coppermine rivers.
  - Through the Boreal Plains, Taiga Shield, and Southern Arctic ecoczones.
  - Travelled across urban, rural, wild, and industrial landscapes, multiple communities.
  - 6 Participants, 20-35 years old, 3 male 3 female.
  - 4 experienced outdoor educators, strong in expeditionary canoeing.
  - 2 new to canoe tripping (each paddled half the route).
  - All had or were completing undergraduate or graduate degrees in leisure and phys ed.

Commonplace Journey Methodology

- Collaborative exploration through praxis.
- 10 commonplace cycles (see Figure 2) to facilitate exploration and learning along the way.
- Prompts to (a) explore topics, practices, & theoretical perspective, and (b) integrate multi-method data collection:
  - Participant observations and journals.
  - Semi-structured group discussions.

- Narrative Analysis
  - Comparison and contrast of participants’ practices, understandings of their socio-ecological surroundings, and the meanings they make of them through narratives (Palmer, 2005; Sparkes, 2002).

Theoretical/Ideological Principles

- Wildness
  - Travellers are visitors, not inhabitants, and should not alter landscapes. Leave No Trace, “take only pictures, leave only footprints”
  - Valuing nature untouched by humans. Escape urban life.
  - Wilderness travel as socially isolated, self-reliant.

- Sustainability
  - Landscapes are interconnected and shaped by flows.
  - Landscapes are inhabited, known, and shaped by people.
  - Landscapes are storied: they are replete with historic and contemporary issues, histories.

Structural Practices

- “Self-contained” provisioning and travel reliant on urban supply and economy.
- Avoiding human-altered landscapes. Locating trips to remain within borders of wilderness areas, avoid settlements.
- Restricting contact with friends and family “back home.” Insular focus within group, avoid establishing relations with other people, groups, communities other than for safety/emergency.

- Reindeer waters in the NWT.

Experiential Outcomes

- Little interaction with and knowledge of local economies and ecologies. Adventure travel of diminished value to local communities. Biophysical self and wellbeing of travellers abstracted from local landscape.
- Reinforce urban-nature dichotomy and ignores rural life. Few examples of how humans are living with the natural environment, how protected areas are continually managed and maintained, and impacted by factors that cross borders.
- Less engaged and aware of local socio-ecological knowledge and issues, land uses, impacts. Creates impression that landscapes of travel are disconnected from home.

- Participants stay at the fur trade fort at Fort Assiniboine, AB, a rural hamlet with a historic past and a gateway to the wilderness.

References