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**Minding the Meaning of Wilderness: Investigating the  
Tensions and Complexities Inherent in Wilderness Visitors'  
Experience Narratives**

By

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B.S. University of Wyoming 1991

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

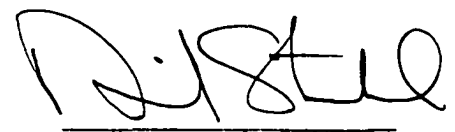
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## Minding the Meaning of Wilderness: Investigating the Tensions and Complexities Inherent in Wilderness Visitors' Experience Narratives

Chair: Norma P. Nickerson 

The meanings embodied in the 1964 Wilderness Act and reflected in the common practices of federal land management agencies have an important influence on wilderness use, yet they neither determine nor sufficiently describe the nature of visitor's experiences. The objectives of this study were to understand the meanings expressed by wilderness visitors, and further to investigate how visitors negotiate the range of culturally available meanings to reconstruct their experiences and evaluate wilderness management practices.

Data collection and analysis for this study was guided by the tenets of hermeneutic philosophy and informed by Giddens' Theory of Structuration and related concepts. Thirty-two open-ended, group and individual interviews were conducted with a total of 92 visitors at Gates of the Arctic National Park in Alaska. Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and rigorously analyzed using a multi-stage process of data organization and interpretation. Through this process, five dimensions of visitors' experiences were identified: A taste of the arctic, self-reliance, wildness, naturalness, and stewardship.

These dimensions reflect some of the major themes from the Wilderness Act and the Gates of the Arctic general management plan. However, within and across the dimensions, visitors expressed variable and sometimes contradictory meanings. They described wilderness as a place primarily absent of people, but also as a setting for defining themselves, interacting with others, and connecting with a common human ancestry. Likewise, some visitors described regulations as symbols of government intrusion or as constraints on their personal freedoms, but they also described them as means to enhance safety and preserve experience opportunities, and as symbols of good stewardship. These findings indicate that general or abstract meanings relative to people and regulations in wilderness do not necessarily reflect how visitors interpret encounters and management practices in the specific context of their lived experiences. In general, visitors do not appear to hold stable meanings for wilderness that uniformly influence their experiences or their interpretations of wilderness management regulations. The results of this study have important implications for wilderness management and also for future research efforts.



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## INTRODUCTION

This is a dissertation about wilderness. It is not intended as a critique of the popular images associated with wilderness, although it is informed by critical social theories and partially motivated by modern wilderness skepticism. Nor is it a celebration of those images, although I do not deny my personal fascination with stories of, and first-hand experience in, wild places. I am, after all, influenced by the very forces that are the topic of my investigation. Indeed, a central tenet of this dissertation is that what every person “knows” about wilderness, how they relate to it, and even how they experience it first-hand, is shaped—though not determined—by sociocultural forces. These forces are dynamic over time, so that the meanings popularly associated with wilderness now are radically different than they were 200 years ago. “Meaning” is a problematic term because it appears often in social science literature but is rarely defined (Williams and Carr 1993). It is used here and throughout this dissertation as a catch-all term to indicate images, feelings, beliefs, or values associated with an object, place, or class of places (such as wilderness).

Nash (1982), Cronon (1996), and others have documented the history of changes in the American orientation toward wilderness. From an initial strong antipathy toward areas of undeveloped nature, Americans have developed a passion for those same spaces. More than just a site for primitive recreation, wilderness is now valued as a symbol of restraint and humility (Kaye 2000) and as a reserve for maintaining biodiversity—crucial for the viability of all life on Earth. While restraint is a value that was commonly espoused by early wilderness philosophers, biodiversity is a relatively new value that

reflects advances in scientific understanding and the effects of additional decades of unchecked human population growth and industrial development. Significantly, biodiversity is a value that may be incompatible with recreation and restraint-oriented meanings of wilderness. Some prominent scholars (Callicott 1998) and wilderness advocates (Foreman 1998) have suggested that biodiversity should become the primary purpose of wilderness and the guiding value for use and stewardship of large natural landscapes. Callicott (1998) boldly calls for a “reformulation of the *raison d’être* of wilderness areas in the public domain” (p. 585). He contends that, “Preserving biodiversity is a more universal and higher-minded conservation aim than the provision of outdoor recreation and monumental scenery” (p. 591), and he acknowledges that biodiversity may be compatible with “selective logging” and “careful mineral extraction” (p. 592). Callicott’s suggestion that biodiversity is a more appropriate conservation aim has resonated with wilderness advocates, many of whom (like Foreman) have turned away from supporting some of the meanings that led to establishment of a national wilderness preservation system in the first place. If biodiversity supplants other values of wilderness, where then does that leave opportunities to enjoy transcendent recreational experiences or practice restraint?

The point here is not that one set of meanings is better than another, but that there are numerous, often countervailing meanings for wilderness, and those meanings undergo a constant evolution. In the relatively short history of wilderness advocacy in the United States, wilderness in various guises (e.g. “the frontier”) has been identified as the birthplace of human character and culture (Shepard 1996; Turner 1996), as a crucible for personal development, and as the source of America’s unique national character

(Roggenbuck 1990). The notion that wilderness is profoundly influential on people has been firmly established, so much so that the influence of people on the range of meanings for wilderness is sometimes overlooked. While it is commonly accepted that wilderness is a social construction—an idea anchored in history and developed through social interaction—it is more accurate to say that wilderness is socially *constructed*, implying that the process of creating and modifying wilderness meanings is on-going. Moreover, there is reason to believe that the evolution of wilderness meanings is accelerated and complicated by advances in travel and communication technologies and the elimination of trade-barriers, processes which increasingly pit alternative meanings against one another (Williams 2000). The increasingly complicated (and perhaps, contested) setting for shaping wilderness images means that people who visit wilderness today may arrive with a wide array of different perspectives. Those perspectives will influence how they interpret their experiences and how they perceive management practices, which have traditionally been aimed at maintaining opportunities for a narrow range of experiential dimensions.

Beginning with Emerson and Thoreau, the idea of wilderness in America has been closely tied to certain kinds of experience opportunities. In *Walden* (1854) Thoreau proclaimed the basic value of solitude, which he defined as being alone in nature, for achieving spiritual or transcendent states and experiencing the divine on Earth. John Muir is perhaps best known for his energetic, evangelical support of Thoreau's basic insight. He believed fervently in the power of first-hand experience in wilderness to transform people, as it did him. Muir had a famous taste for dramatic images of nature's power, and he was particularly influenced by his travels in Alaska, where views of



calving tidewater glaciers “filled his mind with a sense of nature’s endless beauty and power” (Muir 1915, p. 102). Of Alaska in general, Muir wrote, “To the lover of pure wildness, Alaska is one of the most wonderful countries in the world” (p. 13).

Following Muir, Robert Marshall was also a tremendous advocate of the experiential values of wilderness. He viewed wilderness experiences as a cure for many social ills, as an antidote to war, and as a basic human right (Glover 1986). Like Muir, Marshall was profoundly influenced by his personal experiences in Alaska. In two popular books (1930; 1933), he wrote of his travels there and he advocated making the whole of northern Alaska into a wilderness reserve.

The experiential values described by Marshall and others helped inspire the 1964 Wilderness Act (TWA), which called for the creation of a national system of protected, public wilderness lands. The Act famously defines wilderness as a place where “man is a visitor who does not remain”, and where “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation” exist. From these phrases, naturalness and solitude have been identified as the fundamental criteria which distinguish wilderness areas from other places, and freedom (unconfined recreation) has emerged as a guiding principle of wilderness experience stewardship (Hendee et al. 1990). In accordance with these items, the practice of wilderness stewardship has traditionally been regarded as a balancing act in which managers manipulate visitor use to limit impacts on naturalness and solitude with minimal imposition on visitor freedom. This “tradeoff” perspective implies that the ideal wilderness experience is wholly unregulated and that regulations and the desire for solitude uniformly influence most wilderness visitors. Despite eloquent pleas for an expanded perspective on visitor freedom and the effects of

management techniques (Cole 1993, 2001; Dustin and McAvoy 1984; McAvoy and Dustin 1983; McCool and Christensen 1996), visitor management approaches have tended to favor “indirect” methods such as education, over regulatory approaches which are regarded as being more obtrusive (Hendee et al. 1990).

Wilderness, as defined in TWA and administered by the four U.S. federal agencies charged with that purpose, has recently been the subject of much criticism. In particular, the recreation values espoused by Marshall and others have been criticized as shallow, misguided, outdated, and detrimental to human and human/nature relationships. As previously noted, Callicott (1998) argues that biodiversity constitutes a “higher-minded” conservation goal than preservation of outdoor recreation opportunities. White (1996) suggests that the preponderance of recreation meanings for wilderness reduces nature to being “an arena for human play and leisure” (p.173), and eliminates the opportunity for deeper relationships fostered by work. A related but more fundamental criticism is that the idea of wilderness as a place where humans are visitors who do not remain encourages a dualistic view of humans and nature that provides little hope for addressing environmental problems (Cronon 1996; Johns 1994).

While these criticisms may initially seem compelling, it is important to note that they are primarily directed at what Callicott and Nelson (1998) call the “received idea” of wilderness—the particular collection of meanings popularized by writers like Muir and Marshall, captured in the 1964 Wilderness Act, and perpetuated by the common practices of federal management agencies. It has been nearly 40 years since TWA was passed, and several additional decades since Marshall and Muir wrote about their travels in Alaska;

there is clear evidence that the pool of meanings associated with wilderness has expanded and evolved over that time.

Borrie and Roggenbuck (1996) contend that even the 1964 Act reflects necessary political compromises rather than the full compliment of meanings associated with wilderness at the time of its passage. They suggest that prominent wilderness advocates of the period described numerous meanings not directly reflected in The Act, including humility, timelessness, and care. They also note that the so-called Eastern Wilderness Act (PL 93-622), passed in 1975, explicitly allows for areas of previous human activity to be classified as wilderness, thus dealing a blow to the notion that wilderness encourages a strict human/nature dichotomy.

Following the so-called Eastern Wilderness Act, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) was passed in 1980. With passage of ANILCA, the late Robert Marshall's dream of a vast arctic wilderness preserve was realized. ANILCA more than doubled the number of acres protected as wilderness in the United States, and it represented a significant expansion of the values presented in the 1964 Wilderness Act. Whereas TWA defines wilderness as an area where man is a visitor who does not remain, ANILCA acknowledges the historical human occupation of wildlands in Alaska and it identifies subsistence hunting and fishing activities as a priority use of federal wilderness lands. ANILCA wilderness lands are regarded by some as exceptions to the ideals presented in previous wilderness legislation, but they may also be viewed as a recent legal evolution of the wilderness idea.

From a starting point of 9 million acres administered solely by the USDA Forest Service, the National Wilderness Preservation System is now composed of over 104

million acres administered by four different federal agencies (Landres and Meyer 2000). Across the United States, wilderness lands can be found in the high arctic, along the temperate coasts, in mountains and deserts, and in the dense forests of the southeast. Furthermore, there are wilderness lands located near urban areas, and others that are far removed from population centers. Roggenbuck (1990) notes that wilderness today “means much more than recreation in America’s cultural milieu” (p. 84). The public’s understanding of ecology and history, the global environmental situation, gender relations, and the racial and ethnic composition of American society have all changed significantly since establishment of the National Wilderness Preservation System (Watson and Landres 1999). It only makes sense that the host of meanings associated with wilderness places has changed as well.

### **Problem Statement**

Wilderness has been “alleged to be ethnocentric, androcentric, phallogentric, unscientific, unphilosophic, impolitic, outmoded, even genocidal” (Callicott and Nelson 1998, p.2). However, the “received idea” of wilderness which these criticisms are directed at has questionable validity. No doubt the descriptions within the 1964 Wilderness Act and some traditional wilderness stewardship approaches are problematic, yet the institutional treatment of wilderness does not likely represent the full range of meanings for wilderness held by the general public. Modern wilderness visitors may come seeking solitude and naturalness, but their understanding of these things will reflect unique, modern social situations. In addition, they may seek and find much more than opportunities to be alone or view undeveloped landscapes. Public wilderness stewards

are constrained by legal mandates, but within those constraints they can be responsive to multiple and evolving wilderness meanings. Moreover, they should not ignore their role in shaping those meanings (Fenton et al. 1998). This dissertation is founded on the theoretical perspective that people actively make meaning through transactions with the world, as opposed to discovering it in the objective properties of objects. However, those transactions are structured by imbalances in opportunity and ability—relations of power—that inevitably favor some meanings over others. Wilderness stewards, and wilderness researchers, have substantial power to influence wilderness meanings through their activities. Past investigations of wilderness visitor experiences have often focused on solitude or other pre-determined experience dimensions. Thus, current characterizations of the nature of wilderness meanings and visitor experiences may not accurately reflect modern orientations toward wilderness. While philosophers have argued the various meanings and implications of wilderness, there has been little empirical contribution to the debate. The basic purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the meanings expressed by wilderness visitors. Specific study questions include:

- (1) What are the primary dimensions of wilderness experiences as described by visitors themselves?
- (2) How do visitors negotiate the range of culturally available meanings to interpret and reconstruct their personal experiences?
- (3) How do visitors apply those meanings to interpret wilderness management practices?

## **Study Overview**

To address these questions, a visitor study was undertaken at Gates of the Arctic National Park (GAAR), a setting that is closely tied to both new (ANILCA) and classical (Robert Marshall) perspectives on wilderness. In chapter 2, past research is reviewed to situate this study within the fields of leisure, recreation, and wilderness studies. In chapter 3, a theoretical and conceptual framework based on the tenets of hermeneutic philosophy and Anthony Giddens' "Theory of Structuration" is described. This framework guided the investigative procedures employed in the study, which are described in chapter 4. The primary data collection method consisted of in-depth interviews conducted with wilderness visitors immediately following their trips. The data that were analyzed were in the form of verbatim interview texts, transcribed from tape-recordings. The study results are presented in two chapters. Chapter 5 describes five broad dimensions of visitor experiences and related thematic elements derived from visitors' reconstructions of their experiences. Chapter 6 provides an in-depth discussion of some of the tensions evident within those broad dimensions and specific themes. Chapter 7 summarizes the implications of this study for wilderness stewardship and future research efforts.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW — EXPERIENCE AND MEANING IN RECREATION RESEARCH**

The broad goal of this study is to investigate the meanings that wilderness visitors use to reconstruct their experiences. As such, experience, meaning, and wilderness are concepts of central importance. These three concepts have commonly been addressed in studies of outdoor recreation, although “recreation” may seem an unsatisfactory term for capturing the full significance of wilderness experiences. The purpose of this literature review is to explore the various ways that experience, meaning, and wilderness have been investigated by leisure/outdoor recreation scholars, and to provide some background for situating the research described in the following chapters within that general academic tradition. In the first section, I adopt a framework from Borrie and Birzell (2001) to describe four different approaches to investigating outdoor recreation experiences and review representative literature from each approach. Next, I provide an expanded review of past “meanings-based” investigations including work informed by critical social theories and contributions from consumer research. In the final section, I review the contemporary wilderness critique and implications for present and future research efforts.

### **Understanding Outdoor Recreation Experiences**

Borrie and Birzell (2001) suggest an organizing system that identifies four categories of recreation experience research: satisfaction approaches, benefits-based approaches, experience-based approaches, and meanings-based approaches. The categories are presented in rough chronological order of development.

According to these authors, satisfaction approaches originated to address the call for provision of quality recreation experiences. Measures of satisfaction were developed from expectancy-valence theory, which conceptualizes satisfaction as the difference between expected or desired, and actual outcomes. In wilderness settings managed to maintain “outstanding opportunities for solitude”, one might reasonably expect to encounter few other visitors. Therefore, there is an intuitive inverse relationship between numbers of visitors and level of satisfaction. However, research has generally failed to support that relationship. Further attempts to address the array of possible situational determinants of satisfaction have yielded more sophisticated measurement techniques, but the notion of satisfaction remains problematic. Borrie and Birzell suggest that satisfaction measures are best suited for investigating visitors’ perceptions of setting attributes, rather than the nature of their experiences. However, Williams (1989) suggests that the whole notion of satisfaction as a valid or meaningful construct is suspect. Among other criticisms, he notes that it is unclear whether the performance evaluations that underlie visitor satisfaction refer to the setting, the management agency, or the visitors themselves, who are largely responsible for “producing” their own experiences. “It becomes difficult to distinguish between the performance of the resource itself and the performance of the participant in creating a successful recreation experience” (p. 432). Williams further suggests that a focus on outcomes—satisfactions—may be inappropriate for understanding recreational engagements in which the focus should be on intrinsic enjoyment, “doing” rather than “fulfilling.” Williams’ comments foreshadow the later two approaches to measuring experience, which are discussed below.



Borrie and Birzell identify a second category of recreation experience research as “benefits-based approaches.” This category shares much in common with the first, and in combination the two categories capture a significant proportion of past work investigating outdoor recreation experiences. The benefits approach developed from Driver and Tocher’s (1970) conceptualization of recreation as a psychologically rewarding experience, rather than just an activity. Building on this early work, the purpose of benefits research came to be, “...understanding the relationship between the valued psychological outcomes of a recreation activity and the types of settings which facilitate those outcomes” (Manfredo et al. 1983, p. 264). The Recreation Experience Preference (REP) Scales (Driver et al. 1991, Manfredo et al. 1996) were developed and have been widely applied to measure desired psychological outcomes from recreation. The popular Recreation Opportunity Spectrum concept (Clark and Stankey 1979, Driver et al. 1987) was developed to provide diversity in settings that facilitate those outcomes.

The benefits approach views recreation participants as goal-oriented individuals who seek out settings that they expect to facilitate desired outcomes. As in satisfaction approaches, experiences are measured in terms of participant satisfaction, where satisfaction is understood in terms of expectations. Borrie and Birzell note that in this case, however, expectations refer to psychological benefits rather than setting attributes. Although the benefits-based approach has been useful for allocating recreation resources and understanding visitor motivations, it has limited utility for developing a deeper understanding of the nature of experiences or specific influences on those experiences. One reason is that, like the satisfaction approach, it measures experience in terms of outcomes, without addressing in detail the specific dimensions of the experience itself.

Furthermore, Borrie and Birzell point out that hypothesized relationships between setting attributes and experience preferences have not been shown to be as consistent or significant as predicted. They contend that, “measures of expected benefits... appear to be insufficient descriptors of the significance of the recreation experience” (p. 32).

Borrie and Birzell’s third category of measurement approaches—“experience-based approaches”—directly addresses the post-hoc limitations of the first two categories by focusing on experiences as they happen. The groundwork for this set of approaches was laid by Clawson and Knetsch (1966), who defined recreation as a multiphase experience consisting of five phases: anticipation, travel-to, on-site, travel-back, and recollection. Their theoretical model of experience went untested until Hammitt (1980) conducted a study of visitor moods during the five phases of a student field trip. Results from the study generally supported the multiphase model, although Hammitt acknowledged that the student field trip was “not a direct substitute for a recreational experience as defined by Clawson” (p. 114).

In the 1990s, researchers employing experience-based approaches have used a variety of innovative methodologies. Scherl (1990) asked participants on an Australian Outward Bound course to record their feelings in logbooks during a 9-day wilderness experience. Among other things, she found that participants’ focus of attention shifted between self, group, and environment in relation to activity and stage of the trip. Hull, Stewart, and Yi (1992) asked visitors to complete a questionnaire at each of twelve different stations arranged along the length of a two-kilometer hiking trail. They measured visitors’ moods, satisfactions, and evaluations of landscape beauty. The authors found that all three measured items fluctuated throughout the experience, leading

to their conclusion that experiences and their outcomes are dynamic rather than static in nature.

Several studies have used versions of the experience sampling method (ESM)—which involves having participants respond to a series of questions at randomly selected times when they are prompted during an activity—to investigate changes in focus of attention, mood, and other psychological states during recreation experiences. Lee, Datillo, and Howard (1994) used an adaptation of ESM techniques, called the self-initiated tape-recording method, to investigate various leisure experiences. Their study added support to the idea that leisure experiences are complex, with both multiple dimensions and multiple phases. Borrie and Roggenbuck (2001) used the ESM technique to examine four modes of environmental experience and six aspects of wilderness experience during recreational visits to Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. They found that the measured items varied between entry, immersion, and exit phases of visitors' experiences. Although their study hypotheses were generally supported, they found that visitors' wilderness experiences were less intense than those reported by well-known writers like John Muir and Robert Marshall. The authors suggest that one reason for the discrepancy may be that Muir and Marshall wrote about their trips long after they were completed, giving them time to construct the deeper meaning of their experiences. In their concluding remarks, Borrie and Roggenbuck note that, although their study approach yielded a wealth of information about the dynamic nature of visitors' on-site experiences:

...[W]e know little about how [visitors] were beginning to construct stories of their trip, how they were beginning and continuing to create meanings of their experience, and how they will embed their emergent stories in the context of their daily lives (p. 226).

Rather than identifying a flaw in their study, which was conducted with different purposes in mind, the authors' comments above suggest the need for a wholly different research approach to complement theirs, one focused on the meanings of experiences rather than their dynamics or multi-phase nature. Co-author Roggenbuck has expressed a similar sentiment in previous work. In a different study that also relied on the ESM technique to investigate outdoor recreation experiences, Roggenbuck and lead author McIntyre (1998) noted:

We believe it is not only the unfolding of the lived experience that is important in understanding how people experience natural settings. The written or spoken accounts of these adventures which people communicate to others or indeed tell to themselves are equally significant. Such personal accounts about nature experiences are reconstructions of the visit, viewed through the lenses of individual perceptions, past experiences, and the passage of time. The role of personal accounts is to provide perspective on those aspects of the nature experience that are remembered, elaborated on, and used to create meaning for the person (McIntyre and Roggenbuck, p. 402).

Experience-based approaches are significant because they add richness to descriptions of both visitors and settings. Focus on the experience itself and the added dimension of time highlights the transactional relationship between visitors and settings, in contrast to the stimulus-response relationship implied by the benefits-based approach. However, as the quotations above suggest, focus on the multiple phases or dimensions of on-site experiences may not capture their full significance for participants.

The fourth and final category of measurement approaches identified by Borrie and Birzell encompasses what they call "meanings-based" approaches. These approaches complement the others by attempting to understand experiences in the broad context of participants' lives. Like experience-based investigations, meanings-based studies have employed a variety of innovative methodologies. For instance, Arnould and Price (1993)

combined the use of questionnaires, focus group interviews, and participant observation to develop an understanding of commercial river trip experiences. The authors did not initially set out to conduct a study of meanings. Rather, they adapted their approach to reflect their emergent understanding of river floaters' experiences. They found that, like their study itself, participants' experiences were emergent; they were not shaped by well-defined expectations or motivations, but they reflected "an array of culturally informed narrative themes" (p. 42). In other words, they could not be appropriately characterized by satisfaction or benefits approaches. And, although the experiences were dynamic and multi-phase, their nature and significance was best understood by situating them in the context of participants' lives.

In a study informed by the work of Arnould and Price, Patterson et al. (1998) used a hermeneutic approach to investigate the nature of short wilderness experiences. They describe their hermeneutic approach in terms of two central assumptions: 1) recreation is an emergent experience motivated by the broad goal of "acquiring stories that ultimately enrich one's life"; and 2) recreation experiences are bounded by the environment but within those boundaries people are free to experience the world in variable ways (p. 423). Consistent with their guiding assumptions, Patterson et al. used texts created from participant interviews as their primary data source. Based on their findings, they suggested that some recreational experiences may be motivated by the desire for life-enriching stories. For instance, some events that were clearly unexpected or even unsatisfactory for participants at the time they occurred were ultimately described in a positive light because they made good stories. The authors also found support for the Clawson and Knetsch (1966) multi-phase model of recreation experience. In particular,

they found that the opportunity to quietly reflect on the trip they had just completed was an important phase of the experience for many participants. Through observation and semi-structured interviews, Patterson et al. were able to document the first stages of visitors constructing and embedding the stories of their trips in the larger context of their lives.

Jonas, Stewart, and Larkin (2000) relied on participant observation and extensive field notes to understand the nature of river floaters' experiences in the Grand Canyon. Like Arnould and Price (1993) and Patterson et al. (1998) they found that participants' experiences were emergent and highly variable within the bounds set by the river environment (limited campsites, hot weather, negotiating rapids). In addition, they found that floaters' personal recreation identities evolved and emerged over the course of the trip. An important setting feature that influenced the nature of emergent identities was the presence and behavior of other people. For many floaters, encounters with other people provided opportunities to define themselves positively as members of the river-running community, or in contrast to incompetent or inappropriate (motorized) users. In other words, encountering other people was sometimes a central and often a positive feature of participants' experiences. Linking back to satisfaction-based approaches and the focus on number of other people as an indicator of wilderness experience quality, this finding clearly has significant implications.

The meanings-based works discussed above have important implications for understanding outdoor recreation experiences. First, along with other research that might be broadly categorized as meanings-based, these works encourage an expanded conceptualization of experience. They treat experiences as windows into participants'

on-going constructions of the world and their places in it, rather than as discrete, on-site engagements. From this perspective, a recreation experience may be shaped more by the subjective meanings a participant brings to it, than by the objective qualities of the activities they engage in or the settings they encounter. Second, this work offers an alternative to the satisfaction and benefits-based approaches, which characterize recreationists as goal-directed individuals who evaluate their experiences in terms of well-defined expectations (Patterson 1993). Notions of less well-defined expectations related to “culturally informed narrative themes” and life-enriching stories draw attention to the social context that gives specific meaning to settings, activities, and the idea of a wilderness experience. And third, these authors’ work suggests the need for methodologies that are flexible and emergent to match the nature of recreation experiences. In the remainder of this chapter, a continuum for further organizing approaches to the study of experience is described, discussion of the meanings-based approach is expanded to include work informed by critical social theories, and the significance of the contemporary wilderness critique for future research efforts is briefly explored. In chapter 3, the theoretical and conceptual framework that guided this study is described, and additional literature relevant to that framework is reviewed.

### **Immediate felt experience↔abstract meaning continuum**

The expanded notion of recreation experience adopted in meanings-based work implies a sort of continuum ranging from immediate felt experience to general or abstract meanings that are largely removed from the specific events or dynamics of an actual experience. In very simple terms, the left-hand portion of the continuum represents

“what happened” and the right-hand represents what is made of what happened. It is important to note that this continuum suggests a clear distinction between experience and meaning where there is none. Any account or description of an experience amounts to a reconstruction, even when those accounts are close in time to the events described. The continuum is merely a tool for highlighting the various ways that experience has been conceptualized by recreation researchers. Beginning on the far left, experience might be described in terms of psychophysiological response to setting or activity stimuli. Ulrich, Dimberg, and Driver (1991) explain that, “Psychophysiological refers to research approaches that are concerned with the measurement of physiological responses as they relate to human emotions, cognition, stress, and behavior” (p. 73). These approaches have been used to measure recreational experiences by monitoring changes in heart-rate, blood pressure, stress hormones, and other physiological conditions in response to pre-defined leisure activities and collections of outdoor setting attributes. Experience is understood as a series of responses to objective environmental stimuli. And, because physiological changes are measured directly, the potential that participants or researchers will subjectively interpret experiences or ascribe symbolic meanings to them is greatly reduced.

Experience-based research approaches like ESM might be located near the middle of the continuum. Here mood, time, and other factors mediate the interaction between the participant and the setting. Experience is understood as a dynamic, multi-phase transaction rather than as a response to objective stimuli. Measurements are taken as close as possible in time to the environment-participant transaction; not to prevent participants from subjectively evaluating that transaction, but to reduce the likelihood that



memory decay, strategic answering, or other kinds of bias might affect them (Borrie et al. 1998).

Moving toward the far right on the continuum, experiences are understood primarily as written or spoken narratives. Here, there is little concern regarding the correspondence between the “reality” of an event and accounts of it. The question of “what really happened” is set aside in favor of understanding the stories that participants tell of their experiences, and how those stories are situated in the context of their lives. If recreation participants are thought to *respond* to settings on the left side of the continuum, and *transact* with them near the middle, then at the far right they *relate* to them. That is, they may hold meanings for places that are handed down or developed through social interactions, which structure their actual, first-hand encounters with those places. At the meanings end of the continuum, experiences are characterized as instantiations of these on-going relationships with places.

Although all of the approaches described in the preceding paragraphs purport to measure or understand experiences, they each conceive of experience in a significantly different manner. To the degree that a distinction between experience and meaning can be drawn, meanings-based approaches are directed at measuring or understanding meaning over experience, relationships with *places* over transactions with settings, or responses to setting attributes.

The concept of *place*, adopted from geography, has become an increasingly popular topic in the humanities and social sciences, and it has been widely and diversely employed in popular nature writing as well. According to the geographers, places are social constructs, created when people confer meaning on physical spaces. Tuan (1977)

suggests that place is created from undifferentiated space as people get to know it and endow it with meaning. Roberts (1996) defines place as, "A spatial part of the environment that one is related to through one's experiences, imagination, or feelings" (p. 61). Greider and Garkovich (1994) use the term landscape instead of place. They describe landscapes as, "symbolic environments created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature and the environment, of giving the environment definition and form from a particular angle of vision and through a special filter of values and beliefs" (p. 1).

The notion of place is not new in outdoor recreation research. In 1981, Schreyer and Roggenbuck published a study in which they attempted to differentiate among national park visitors based on the meanings they held for national park and wilderness places. They found that institutional meanings for national parks were too general to be useful for differentiating amongst visitors, and they noted that "personal experience, popular literature, and one's peers may all play a significant role" in forming images of park places (p. 43). In their concluding remarks the authors called for more site-specific investigations of place images to identify meanings that are relevant and salient to users. Also in 1981, Buchanan, Christensen, and Burdge published a study that related social groups to meanings for outdoor recreation places and activities. In their paper, Buchanan et al. describe several concepts which are fundamental to contemporary meanings and place-based research. They note that social groups, rather than objects in the environment, are the sources of place meanings and also the sources of meanings associated with recreational activities. Different groups may assign different, sometimes competing, meanings to the same space. Furthermore, "...social groups do differ in the manner by which they define the experiences provided by an activity" (p. 264).

Therefore, understanding recreational experiences and relationships to places may best be achieved by understanding the meanings held by different social groups.

The authors of the two 1981 studies cite Lee (1972) as an important influence. Over thirty years ago, Lee noted the lack of theoretical rigor in sociological studies of leisure, and outdoor recreation in particular. He suggested that recreation settings “may be best understood in terms of the meanings assigned to them by particular sociocultural groups” (p.68), and included a section in his paper titled “Experience and concepts of place” (p. 70). In the field of outdoor recreation research, Lee’s work was clearly ahead of its time. Beyond merely noting that social groups may define places differently, he also suggested that meanings must be “negotiated” and that meanings for remote recreation places may be defined by distant visitors who are more numerous than local rural residents. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of understanding how meanings may constrain recreational experiences and how the definition, allocation, and management of recreation places may favor the meanings of one group over another’s. Lee presents a series of questions for recreation researchers and managers, among them: “With whose expectations in mind are [outdoor recreation] areas reserved, designed, and managed?”; and, “Do the planners consider how differing visitor definitions of place will affect intragroup and intergroup relationships?” (p. 82). In his final comments, Lee suggests the need for a different orientation toward recreation research and management; an orientation that addresses social groups whose perspectives are typically underprivileged in the meaning-making process.

This study has demonstrated that areas reserved for outdoor recreation are not perceived as free spaces by all social groups. Such perceptions typify the views of those with higher mobility and income who take for granted the normative order they share. Policy makers usually identify with this group. It is therefore incumbent

upon them to suspend their personal and organizational perspectives so that they may objectively consider the needs of sociocultural groups whose schemes of order differ from their own (p. 83).

In the years following publication of Lee's paper, most researchers continued to treat recreation places as collections of interchangeable attributes, rather than one-of-a-kind sites for creating and negotiating meaning (Williams et al. 1992). However, Lee's work has lately been influential on what has become a significant body of place-oriented recreation research. For instance, in a series of empirical studies and conceptual papers, Williams and associates have explored place meanings in relation to public lands recreation and stewardship (Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, and Watson 1992; Williams and Carr 1993; Williams 1995; Williams 2000).

Williams et al. (1992) challenged the "multiattribute commodity view of outdoor recreation settings" (p. 29) with their study of place attachment among wilderness visitors. Through investigation of the place attachment construct, they found that people ascribe emotional and symbolic meanings to specific geographic places and also to general classes of places such as wilderness. They conclude that the place perspective is important because it reminds land managers that places are not mere collections of "raw materials to be inventoried and molded into a recreation opportunity" (p. 44). Williams and Carr (1993), citing Lee (1972), explain that their conceptual paper is "about meaning—how individuals and groups come to assign differing and often conflicting meanings to the same geographic locations, and how meanings serve individual and group needs" (p. 210). They suggest that resource management professionals "must learn to read the symbolic landscape" of place meanings in order to mitigate resource conflicts. Continuing to expand on the idea of conflicting place meanings, Williams (1995)

contends that, “Forces from the realm of meaning are arguably the dominant feature of modern natural resource conflict” (p. 6). He suggests mapping the spatial distribution of place meanings as a step toward addressing that conflict. Williams (2000) further expands his study of place meanings with a conceptual investigation of “the nature *and dynamics* of personal and social meanings of wilderness” (p. 77, emphasis added). He explores the ways that changes associated with globalization and modernization may influence meanings ascribed to wilderness. In this (2000) paper, the forces that structure the negotiation and adoption of meaning, rather than the meanings themselves, are the focus of attention.

A clear evolution is apparent in Williams' work. In the early 1990s he was primarily concerned with identifying the different meanings associated with places. In the mid-nineties he suggested that alternative meanings could be understood as sources of conflict. By the year 2000, he shifted his attention from understanding meanings as sources of conflict to understanding the dialectic between meanings and the forces that structure the creation and dissolution of those meanings. Appearing to refer to his earlier work, Williams (2000) writes, “Exercises in mapping meanings are, by definition, necessarily political acts in which meanings are being created and contested...” (p. 81). This shift from documenting meanings to understanding forces relevant to the creation of meanings represents an increasingly “critical” perspective; critical in this sense meaning a particular view of society and the role of research which guides investigations. Critical approaches are relatively well developed in general leisure research and the related field of consumer research, but they have been slow to trickle down to outdoor recreation and wilderness-related research.

## **Critical approaches in leisure research**

Definitions of “critical” are highly variable within the social sciences, and it is therefore difficult and of questionable utility to present a global definition here. Instead, the works of a few authors that may be identified with the critical tradition in leisure studies are reviewed below to illustrate the critical approach and contrast it with other meanings-based work.

J.L. Hemingway is one contemporary author who has been particularly vocal in calling for the expanded application of critical understanding and critical research methods in leisure studies (see Hemingway 1991, 1995, 1996, 1999; Hemingway and Parr 2000). Hemingway (1999) identifies three themes that define critical leisure research: historical specificity, difference, and emancipation. The theme of historical specificity draws attention to the context of leisure experiences and research activities. It is this context that situates or bounds the possibilities for making and negotiating meaning. This focus on context is similar to the hermeneutic idea of situated freedom that guided Patterson and others’ (1998) research on the nature of wilderness experiences, but the critical perspective differs in that it draws specific attention to artifacts of human action that function in specific situations as reified<sup>1</sup> or naturalized boundaries. For instance, socially constructed images of places or meanings associated with classes of places (such as national parks or wilderness) may be perceived by recreationists as objective qualities which constrain their experiences.

The theme of difference is closely related to historical specificity. It encourages researchers to turn from generalized categories like gender and wilderness and instead

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<sup>1</sup> To reify something is to regard a social construction as an objective thing.

focus on the variable experiences of real people and the different conditions of specific places (Hemingway 1999). The focus on difference is not a characteristic of all critically-oriented work, but instead represents one of many critical perspectives. This point is further explained in Chapter 3—*Theoretical and Conceptual Framework*.

The theme of emancipation has particular relevance for leisure research. Freedom is a fundamental characteristic of most definitions of leisure, and emancipation refers to the identification and elimination of restrictions on human freedom and developmental potential (Hemingway 1996). In particular, critical approaches are concerned with identifying and questioning meanings that have crystallized over time or have been otherwise removed from their contexts so that they appear natural or irreducible. Hemingway and Parr (2000) contend that, “Despite a historical association with freedom and assertions of its uniqueness, leisure is hardly empty of such...processes” (p. 154).

Although the conceptual framework for a critical approach to leisure research has been well-developed by Hemingway and others (see also Rojek 1989, 1995; Kelly 1993, 1999), critical work represents a relatively small fraction of leisure studies. The fact that Hemingway is still publishing papers whose primary purpose is to illustrate the need for a critical approach to leisure is indicative of the need for more work in this area. One significant existing body of critical work is associated with women’s leisure experiences. Publications by Karla Henderson and associates are illustrative of this line of inquiry.

Like Hemingway, much of Henderson’s work is primarily conceptual in nature. It focuses on how reified meanings of gender have constrained women’s access to leisure and influenced their leisure experiences, and how those meanings have been reflected in the evolution of leisure scholarship (see Henderson 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1994, 1996).

Henderson explicitly links her work to the general critical project of emancipation. She describes a multitude of ways that gender constructions constrain the free expression of women's leisure and she suggests that, "Research acknowledging the social construction of gender also has implications for leisure research on other disenfranchised groups who are 'different'" (1994, p. 119).

Henderson's 1996 paper "One size doesn't fit all" has especially significant implications for expanded application and further development of the critical perspective in leisure research. In that paper, she compares her 1990 analysis of gender issues in leisure scholarship with new insights achieved during the intervening six years. In 1990, Henderson proposed that research was beginning to converge on a single, coherent meaning of women's leisure, which reflected women's common life experiences. In the introduction to her 1996 paper, however, she notes, "The reality is that a single meaning has not manifested itself in the past six years...Rather, numerous meanings have arisen based on the life situations of women and the changing nature of the understanding of gender and leisure" (p. 140). While the category of "female" remains valid at a general level, being female does not predictably or uniformly influence women's leisure experiences.

Recognition of multiple, complex differences, as opposed to generalized categories of difference like male/female or privileged/underprivileged, represents an important conceptual advancement for critical leisure research. Although Hemingway identified historical specificity, *difference*, and emancipation as important elements of the critical approach, most critical leisure scholarship (as suggested by Henderson in the preceding quotation) has focused on the emancipation (constraints) theme, with little attention paid



to how sub-groups or individuals may uniquely interpret their experiences. While leisure researchers have tended to employ a one-dimensional critical approach, those in the parallel field of consumer research have applied a diverse array of critical perspectives to their work, resulting in a comparatively rich body of critical literature.

### **Critical contributions from consumer research**

It is not altogether clear why critical approaches have lately received more attention from consumer researchers. Some of the recent attention may be traced to a single paper (Murray and Ozanne 1991), which is discussed below. A more fundamental reason may be that the whole idea of consumer research—with associated notions of commodity fetishism and insidious advertising messages—encourages a more critical approach than the seemingly innocent topics of leisure or outdoor recreation. Certainly consumer researchers are at great risk of appearing to be sympathizers or co-conspirators with privileged or oppressive segments of society. However, consumer research and leisure research share much in common. Both fields have historically been concerned with customer or participant satisfaction, and they have progressed from the use of simplistic satisfaction measures to the use of complex transactional and relational frameworks. One line of consumer research is concerned with the meanings ascribed to market products and the construction of identities through consumption choices and behaviors (Mick and Buhl 1992); and an analogous line of leisure research is concerned with meanings and identities associated with places and recreation activities. In fact, meanings-based work in both fields has benefited from a substantial amount of cross-pollination (Patterson 1993; Williams et al. 1992). In the case of critical approaches, leisure research may

greatly benefit from the debate and developments which have occurred in consumer research.

In 1991, Murray and Ozanne published a paper titled “The Critical Imagination: Emancipatory Interests in Consumer Research” in which they proposed that investigations of consumer experiences and behaviors might be purposefully designed and implemented to reduce constraints on human potential. Adopting a critical perspective associated with the “Frankfurt School” of critical social theory, they outlined a philosophical basis for evaluating research and practice which is founded on social consensus, and they described an appropriate methodology for critical consumer inquiry. Their paper sparked a heated and productive debate regarding the application of critical theories in consumer research.

Larsen and Wright (1993) published the first critique of Murray and Ozanne’s paper. In it they argued that Murray and Ozanne’s critical perspective is fatally flawed. Among other theoretical inconsistencies which they identify in the paper, Larson and Wright note that the proposed critical perspective:

...[I]s at odds with the most powerful contemporary emancipatory force, the multicultural movement, which has sought to empower minorities and broaden participation in social and economic institutions by arguing that the perspectives of minorities are unique, that no universalizing consensus can capture those perspectives (p. 440).

This criticism reflects Henderson’s (1996) insight regarding the importance of differences among women and their leisure experiences, which she formerly regarded as relatively homogenous categories that reflected a unified perspective. As noted previously, emphasis on difference versus sameness (consensus) is one basis for distinguishing amongst critical perspectives.

Hetrick and Lozada (1994) also critiqued Murray and Ozanne's paper, but the point of their argument is that the proposed critical approach is not wholly consistent with the perspective described by the Frankfurt School theorists. Murray, Ozanne, and Shapiro (1994) responded to both critiques with a paper in which they celebrate the "revitalization of the critical imagination." Murray et al. explain that critique and vigorous debate were exactly what they were hoping for when they published their 1991 paper. They defend their characterization of Frankfurt School critical theory, but they also emphasize that there are a multitude of different, valid critical perspectives which share the common goal of identifying societal contradictions (often in the form of underlying meanings or reified constructions) and stimulating change. A review of the work of Thompson and associates (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994; Thompson and Hirschman 1995; Thompson and Haytko 1997) is useful for illustrating one of these alternative critical approaches and its application to consumer research.

Thompson et al. (1994) investigated the cultural viewpoints underlying product meanings expressed by consumers. Although their study was not explicitly critical, it was clearly informed by theories from the critical tradition and it provided a foundation for later, more explicitly critical work by Thompson. The authors describe the framework that guided their study in terms of hermeneutic philosophy, which states that, "...a person's understanding of his or her life experiences always reflects broader cultural viewpoints that are implicitly conveyed through language" (p. 432). Furthermore, those cultural viewpoints can be "modified and transformed but never escaped" (p. 454).

Thompson and Hirschman (1995) more fully addressed the critical implications of hermeneutic philosophy in their investigation of people's personal body images and

related consumption behaviors. They applied “poststructuralist perspectives” relative to self-concept and “ideological dimensions of consumption behavior” to interpret texts from interviews with a cross-section of consumers aged 6 to 54. They found that interview participants’ body images and consumption behaviors were “structured by long-standing cultural narratives” which “exerted an enduring influence on their everyday consumption activities” (p. 152).

Thompson and Haytko (1997) conducted a similar study in which they analyzed fashion discourses to identify underlying cultural meanings. Although their study was informed and implicitly motivated by the view that fashion is a force in indoctrinating people in the “ideology of consumption” which fosters “depthless, materialistic outlooks” (p. 17), the authors contend that their analysis shows that fashion does not function as a coherent, oppressive ideology at all. Thompson and Haytko suggest that consumers align themselves with some fashion meanings as a way to oppose other meanings. In doing so, they naturalize or reify certain meanings while “problematizing” others—that is, exposing them as historically situated social constructs. Thus, the effect of established cultural meanings on the experiences and identities of individuals is idiosyncratic rather than uniformly oppressive or enabling.

Thompson’s work is “critical” in the sense that it has as its primary goal the revealing of underlying meanings, with the implication that such revelations may lead to emancipatory change. However, Thompson is careful to specify that culturally imposed meanings may be negotiated but never escaped (Thompson et al. 1994). Furthermore, his work focuses on difference, with no expectation that tensions between meanings can be resolved, or that a basis for social consensus can be identified. In this way, it differs

significantly from the consensus-based approach proposed by Murray and Ozanne (1991).

There is a clear link between the conceptual evolution apparent in the previously described work of Williams and associates, and the evolution in Thompson's work described here. Each line of inquiry moved from a focus on identifying meanings to a focus on the processes of meaning negotiation and adoption. However, whereas Williams' (2000) work was strictly conceptual, Thompson and Haytko's (1997) work was based on an empirical investigation of consumer experience narratives. As such, it provides a useful model for incorporating Williams' critical insights into a real-world investigation of wilderness meanings.

### **The wilderness critique and implications for research**

Criticisms of wilderness are nothing new. The protracted debate preceding eventual passage of The 1964 Wilderness Act is part of modern wilderness lore; and wilderness is often criticized by those who oppose "locking-up" timber and mineral resources that might otherwise be developed for economic gain. What is new, however, is the growing chorus of criticism that can be heard from within the ranks of self-proclaimed wilderness advocates. Historian William Cronon and philosopher J. Baird Callicott are often associated with this new critique. While neither of them can really be credited with startling new insights, they are collectively responsible for organizing an array of established and emerging ideas into a coherent argument against what Callicott and Nelson (1998) have called "the received idea of wilderness."

The “received idea” is purported to be a collection of beliefs and images that have crystallized over time and are now popularly associated with places that have been identified or formally protected as wilderness. Among those beliefs is that wilderness is pristine space, untouched and historically uninhabited by humans. Noting historical evidence that reveals this notion to be false, Cronon (1996) then traces the historical development of the human-nature dichotomy in western society to its modern enshrinement as a fundamental tenet of the wilderness idea. He describes a variety of problems and injustices associated with this dichotomous view, among them the removal of indigenous peoples from history and, in some cases, from their physical homelands (see also Gomez-Pompa and Kaus 1992). According to Cronon, the human-nature dichotomy inherent in the wilderness idea is not the result of accidental historical oversight. Rather, the idea is founded on a Judeo-Christian religious tradition that views wild nature as “the unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization” (p. 80). Furthermore, Cronon contends that to subscribe to this view is to eliminate any hope for “discovering what an ethical, sustainable, honorable place in nature might actually look like” (p. 81). The thrust of Cronon’s argument, then, is that the popular idea of wilderness promotes and sustains an unhealthy relationship between people and the natural world.

Callicott and Nelson (1998) include Cronon’s 1996 essay in their edited anthology of wilderness criticism. The other papers in their anthology expand Cronon’s critique to address the negative consequences of wilderness for gender, ethnic, and political relationships as well. For instance, images of virile recreation and wilderness as an antidote to war favor masculine values, and notions of “virgin” land suggest outmoded gender stereotypes (Plumwood 1998). Callicott and Nelson are careful to emphasize that

they do not doubt the reality of the physical spaces called wilderness, or the benefits of protecting those places from industrial development; rather they find fault with the popular ideas associated with those places. They assert that those ideas reflect the perspective of a single social group—wealthy, white males—and ignore, or worse, actively suppress, the perspectives of all other groups.

Walker and Kiecolt (1995) provide general (if unintentional) support for this argument with their analysis of social class and wilderness use. Based on a review of secondary data, they conclude that members of the semiautonomous class—highly educated professional and craft employees—have been primarily responsible for the definition, allocation, and use of wilderness. Individuals who played a significant role in promoting contemporary images of wilderness such as John Muir, Robert Marshall, and Aldo Leopold were all members of this class. Furthermore, a survey of the contemporary wilderness context reveals that white males from the semiautonomous class continue to dominate wilderness research and management, and they constitute the bulk of wilderness visitors as well.

Fox (2000) contends that the basic elements of this wilderness critique have profound implications for future investigations of wilderness and wilderness experiences:

Understanding wilderness experience requires us to address, at a minimum: how the concept historically emerged and was passed down to current generations...how wilderness experience is circumscribed by wilderness history, literature, and concepts; how the concept privileges certain genders, socio-economic classes, races, cultural heritages, and experiential approaches; and how it conditions the future (p.51).

Recognizing the homogenous social history of the idea of wilderness calls into question many past approaches to understanding wilderness experiences. Fox notes that research

practices may define or structure experiences as well as reveal their nature. For instance, motivational (benefits-based) approaches like Driver's REP scales, based on hypothesized psychological benefits such as solitude, may function to "replicate patterns of white participation in wilderness areas, [by] glorifying the stories of male explorers...and images of self based on autonomy, solitude, and detachment" (p. 52). Likewise, experience-based approaches that rely on measurement items derived from popular wilderness literature (see Borrie and Roggenbuck 2001) may also unintentionally preference certain meanings of wilderness and experience. While the wilderness critique certainly does not invalidate these approaches, it challenges researchers to critically evaluate the influence of their activities and the assumptions inherent in their work.

Unlike many other participants in the wilderness critique, Fox contends that dominant meanings of wilderness are only problematic if they remain unexamined. She notes that popular images of wilderness have helped to foster profound relationships between at least one segment of society (white, North American males) and nature. However, she warns: "The wilderness grand narrative becomes an obstacle to moral and meaningful interaction if it presumes to replace individual and contextual reflection about the meaning of wilderness experiences" (p. 55). In other words, research that seeks or presumes a universal characterization of wilderness experience may have negative consequences for marginal groups or individuals.

Like Fox, Williams (2000) calls attention to the role of research in creating and contesting wilderness meanings. He also suggests that recreational use of wilderness has historically played a critical, positive role in producing and reproducing ideas about wilderness. "Without use and visitation, wilderness is reduced to an abstract unlive



experience or idea” (p. 77). This sentiment seems to echo that in the previous quotation by Fox, in that it implies the need for specific contextual inquiry rather than abstract theorizing.

The call for understanding wilderness meanings in relation to specific experiences or social groups seems to challenge the thesis forwarded by Callicott and Nelson (1998) which states that there is a coherent “received idea” of wilderness that is similarly interpreted across individuals and different social groups. Recall that Thompson and Haytko (1997) found that fashion meanings, also thought to represent a coherent ideology, were appropriated by individuals in various idiosyncratic ways. Much of the wilderness critique is aimed at meanings that are represented in the wilderness literary canon and in formal legislation, yet it is not clear that wilderness visitors interpret their experiences via that same (limited) constellation of meanings.

### **Summary**

This chapter has reviewed some of the ways that experience has been measured and conceptualized in outdoor recreation research. Within the meanings-based perspective, experiences are viewed as windows into participants’ on-going constructions of the world and their places in it. Spoken and written accounts of experiences reveal underlying cultural meanings that structure those experiences and are also influenced by them. In this way, a recreational visit to wilderness may be both “enabling and embedding” (Brandenburg and Carroll 1995). Enabling because it provides the opportunity to uniquely interpret and negotiate meanings, and embedding because it may also serve to reinforce existing cultural meanings. The critical perspective draws attention to

meanings that have been reinforced to the point that people perceive them as objective qualities of the world. These reified or “naturalized” meanings may function to uniformly constrain certain social groups, or their effects may be more idiosyncratic. Recent conceptual and empirical work in wilderness and consumer studies provides a foundation for further inquiry into the meaning-experience relationship.

The contemporary wilderness critique has exposed the culturally contingent nature and potentially oppressive effects of popular wilderness meanings. Critics have shown that the package of images and values that guide the definition, allocation, and use of wilderness in the United States primarily reflects the perspective of a single, homogenous social group. However, the literature reviewed here enjoins researchers not to view wilderness as a phenomenon that is perceived or experienced uniformly by all segments of society. Despite the history behind wilderness, modern citizens may relate to it in variable ways. However, this is merely speculation. If wilderness is to remain a viable concept in outdoor recreation research, the implications of the wilderness critique must be addressed. Therefore, there is a clear need to better understand the nature and dynamics of the meanings that recreationists use to interpret and construct their wilderness experiences.

### **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK— HERMENEUTICS, CRITICAL THEORY, AND “STRUCTURATION”**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the theoretical and conceptual framework that guided this study. The phrase theoretical *and* conceptual is meaningful. Theoretical refers to the underlying normative commitments that influenced the design and implementation of the study, and conceptual refers to the specific ideas and concepts that were used to interpret the data that were collected. The previously stated main objective of this dissertation—to investigate the meanings that wilderness visitors use to interpret and reconstruct their experiences—contains implicit assumptions that are worth noting here. The notion that visitors hold meanings which can be conveyed and intersubjectively understood by a researcher reflects a basic commitment to hermeneutic philosophy. The idea that visitors may “use” these meanings in a purposeful or self-reflexive manner to interpret their experiences reflects a perspective on the sociological structure/agency dialectic that is characteristic of theorist Anthony Giddens. And finally, the notion that wilderness meanings are a worthy topic of inquiry reflects concerns outlined in the contemporary wilderness critique, which are consistent with the general critical project of exposing naturalized meanings and understanding the influence of social structures.

In this chapter, I begin by presenting hermeneutics as the general model of human experience and understanding which forms the foundation for my study. Next, I review the origins of critical theory to reveal important differences within the general critical perspective. The work of Hemingway (e.g. 1996) and Murray and Ozanne (1991),

reviewed in the previous chapter, is explicitly linked to the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas, but his perspective is problematic for application to my study. Anthony Giddens presents an alternative critical perspective that is more appropriate. In particular, his “theory of structuration” offers a useful framework for understanding the relationship between wilderness visitors and the meanings that influence their experiences. In the final section of this chapter, Giddens’ theory of society and social action, and a related model of self-awareness—“critical self-reflectivity”—are offered as the basis for interpreting the data presented in subsequent chapters.

### **Hermeneutic Philosophy**

The term “hermeneutic” has been employed in a variety of ways by philosophers and social scientists. Thompson, Pollio, and Locander (1994) describe three distinct dimensions of the hermeneutic concept: 1) a model of the process by which understandings are formed, 2) a philosophical view of how to conduct research, and 3) a specific methodology for interpreting texts (p. 433). The second and third dimensions reflect the underlying normative commitments set out in the first, and all three dimensions can be thought of in terms of the central metaphor of the “hermeneutic circle” (Thompson et al. 1994). The hermeneutic circle refers to the iterative process of part to whole comparison and interpretation that is the foundation for human experience and understanding.

Within each of the three nested dimensions described above, there exist different versions of hermeneutics that may contain contradictory elements. This diversity is problematic for any summary explanation of hermeneutic tenets. Rather than review the

many versions of hermeneutic philosophy, I rely here on the previous work of Patterson (1993) and Arnold and Fischer (1994), who describe the tenets of hermeneutics as they relate to the study of leisure and consumer experiences, respectively.

According to Patterson, hermeneutics is primarily concerned with “systems of meaning” (p. 27). Reality is understood in terms of meaning, which is co-constituted through transactions between the intentional consciousness of the individual and the world. Elements of the material world may bound the nature of reality as experienced by an individual, but those elements can never be “known” in an absolute sense because all knowledge of them is always co-constituted; there is no distinction between subject and object because neither can ever be separated and reduced to an essence that can be known (Proctor 1998). In other words, reality—the only reality it is possible to know—is composed of meanings constructed through transactions with the world, but this does not preclude the existence of a physical universe that exists outside of individual experience or discourse about it.

The ontological assumption that actors subjectively co-constitute their realities has profound implications for scientific investigations. From this assumption, it necessarily follows that understanding is achieved through interpretation of meaning rather than discovery of objective information (“truth”). In fact, the notions of objectivity and universal truth are discarded in favor of contextually situated understanding. To be clear, this assumption makes hermeneutics an *interpretive* philosophy, in the same camp with perspectives such as existential phenomenology and ethnomethodology. Hermeneutic philosophy holds that meanings may be revealed through intersubjective understanding,

which is achieved through a “fusion of horizons” of the researcher and the subject (Patterson 1993).

Arnold and Fischer (1994) explain that a researcher’s “horizon” is formed by what he or she already understands about a phenomenon. In the context of consumer research, this understanding may reflect academic training in attitude theory and consumer behavior, as well as past research findings. Arnold and Fischer further explain that hermeneutics views the foreknowledge, “prejudice”, that a researcher brings to a project as a necessary part of any interpretation:

Prejudice is not necessarily unjustified or erroneous. In fact, prejudice is our window on the world, our basis for recognition and comparison. Without prejudice it would not be possible to make sense of the events and objects we observe or to find meaning in the words and actions of others (p. 59).

Prejudice in this sense is more than academic training, it is the basic knowledge that enables social action. As such, all human actors (not just researchers) carry their own prejudices (pre-determined meanings), which constitute their “horizons” and may uniquely influence the outcome of research efforts. Of course, some prejudices may indeed be erroneous, and distinguishing between legitimate (enabling) prejudice and “blind” prejudice represents a persistent challenge for hermeneutic researchers (Patterson and Williams 2002). In order to distinguish between the positive and negative connotations of “prejudice,” the enabling nature of prejudice is captured by the phrase “forestructure of understanding.”

An individual’s forestructure of understanding, then, consists of his or her collection of personal meanings. Any individual’s personal meanings always reflect their current situation and understanding of the world. “Personal meanings do not exist separately

from the intricate network of sociohistorical meanings that have been established by the various sources of cultural knowledge and socialization” (Thompson et al. 1994). In the “fusion of horizons”, different personal meanings are brought to bear on one another. The notion of a fusion of horizons implies that meaning is not “the private property of an individual”, nor is it solely accessible to the professionally trained researcher; instead it emerges or is produced through a fusion of the two entities (Patterson 1993, p.47).

To briefly summarize, meanings, which constitute an individual’s reality, are the partial products of that person’s life history and current situation. Any account of those meanings by a researcher represents a combination or “fusion” of the researcher’s meanings (understanding of the world) with those of the subject’s. This fusion is not viewed as problematic, rather it is fundamental to intersubjective understanding.

The notions of a forestructure of understanding and the fusion of horizons are integral to the concept of the hermeneutic circle. Any interpretation begins with the general knowledge that a given actor brings to a specific transaction. That general knowledge is then re-interpreted in light of the specific case, which leads to a re-formulated understanding of that specific case, which again influences the general knowledge. This iterative spiral is often illustrated by the example of reading a text; a single word or sentence becomes more meaningful in the context of a whole passage, and the refined understanding of that word or sentence then leads to a refined interpretation of the whole, and so on (Arnold and Fischer 1994).

It is easy to see how the metaphor of the hermeneutic circle might be extended from a philosophical model of human experience and understanding to describe a general approach to scientific inquiry and further to describe specific methodological procedures

for conducting research. As mentioned previously, the term “hermeneutic” is often used to indicate these later two dimensions. Indeed, research approaches with philosophical commitments that differ from hermeneutics often claim to use “hermeneutic procedures” [i.e. existential phenomenology (Arnold and Fischer 1994)].

These basic tenets of hermeneutic philosophy provide a foundation for understanding human experience, and the metaphor of the hermeneutic circle provides a useful procedural model for conducting research. For a study aimed primarily at documenting or cataloging meanings, these elements alone might represent a sufficient theoretical framework. However, they do not provide a sufficient framework for understanding the relationship between individuals and the sociohistoric context within which they construct their interpretations of the world. Hermeneutics emphasizes that all understanding is contextual, but how is that context structured? How do individuals negotiate amongst multiple or divergent meanings? Why do some meanings persist over time, and what are the effects of that persistence? These are questions more directly addressed by critical theory.

### **Origins of Critical Theory**

Like hermeneutics, the term “critical theory” has evolved to the point that it now has numerous different meanings. On the one hand, “critical” may simply mean the rigorous, questioning approach common to almost all academic endeavors. “Critical” may also suggest one of several more specific theoretical approaches that have developed since a group of German philosophers identified with the “Frankfurt School” began using the term “critical theory” in the late 1920s. For the purposes of this discussion, critical is



meant in the second more specific sense, as a particular theory of society and social action that both motivates and guides investigations of social phenomena.

Today, some scholars who identify their work as critical share very little in common with the original Frankfurt School theorists. Furthermore, a close investigation of those early critical theorists reveals significant differences between them; there is really no master thinker or single point of origin for the variety of critical perspectives that exist today (Kincheloe and McLaren 1998). The goal of this section is to contrast, in summary fashion, the contemporary critical theory of Jurgen Habermas with that of Anthony Giddens. Because Habermas is generally considered to represent the latest evolution of Frankfurt School theory, I will begin the discussion there.

The origins of Frankfurt School critical theory are often traced from Karl Marx. Marx was strongly influenced by another German philosopher, Georg Hegel. Hegel advanced the idea that reflective thought could lead to human emancipation. Emancipation in this sense means the achievement of a kind of self-understanding and social awareness that leads to an ideal relationship between individuals and society (Ashley and Orenstein 1998). Marx observed social conditions in industrial Europe in the mid 1880s and determined that the structure of the economic system was preventing opportunities for reflective thought and human emancipation. He subsequently developed a detailed theory of production as the primary activity of societies and a primary feature of human history, development, and social change (Rasmussen 1996). Marx characterized emancipation in terms of “class-consciousness”—a recognition of one’s true relationship to the means of production which would eventually help spark social revolution. Although Marx is credited (and blamed) for a vast array of influential

ideas, his production-oriented view of social relations—called “historical materialism”—was one of his most significant contributions. Marx also theorized that capitalism was merely a stage in human development and that it “bore the seeds of its own destruction” (Ashley and Orenstein 1998). In fact, he constructed a formula that one could use to calculate the “falling rate of profit” and predict the approximate time that it would take for a given capitalist economy to fall (Ashley and Orenstein 1998).

In “Philosophy and Critical Theory”, Rasmussen (1996) provides a description of Marx’s influence on the subsequent development of critical theory. The Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt (the “Frankfurt School”) was founded in 1922 for the express purpose of further investigating the problems identified by Marx. However, by the early 1930s it was apparent to leaders of the Frankfurt School that, given the political and social conditions of the time, Marx’s theories about the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism and class revolution were suspect. In the 1930s, the three individuals most often associated with Frankfurt School critical theory—Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse—fled Germany to the United States to escape WWII and initiated a split with Marx by turning their attentions to understanding the persistence and stability of capitalism, rather than its inevitable demise.

Morrow (1994) identifies three stages in the development of critical theory that correspond to the events described by Rasmussen (1996). The first stage corresponds with the early days of the Frankfurt School and the strong emphasis on Marxism. The second stage corresponds to Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse’s exile in the United States and their attempt to break from Marxist tradition. During this period, Horkheimer and Adorno developed an extreme pessimism about the possibility that rational thought

could lead to human emancipation. This pessimism stemmed from the idea that reason and rational thought mainly served dominant political and economic interests, rather than emancipatory interests. The theory that an increasingly rational society would ultimately have negative consequences for individuals is generally credited to yet another important nineteenth century German theorist, Max Weber (Ashley and Orenstein 1998). Thus, the development of critical theory through Morrow's first two stages may be viewed as a shift of emphasis from Hegel (reflective thought will lead to human emancipation) to Marx (class consciousness and the inherent flaws of capitalism will lead to social revolution), to Weber (rational society and instrumental reasoning will increasingly limit opportunities for individual emancipation). Morrow's third stage began in the 1960s with the rise of another German theorist, Jurgen Habermas, and it continues into the present. This stage is characterized by a diversity of critical perspectives from the "strong" critical theory of Habermas, to the "weak" theory of Anthony Giddens, to the post-structuralist/post-modernist perspectives of theorists like Michel Foucault and Jean-Francois Lyotard.

### **Habermas and Communicative Rationality**

Morrow (1994) identifies Habermas' theory as "strong" because it emphasizes ahistorical emancipatory goals and an evolutionary model of society. Habermas' critical theory can also be characterized by a renewed faith in rational thought, in contrast to the pessimism of Horkheimer and Adorno (Braaten 1991). Habermas specifically rejects the notion that all rationality is instrumental and therefore coercive or constraining. He suggests instead a "communicative rationality" motivated by the sincere desire for

consensus and mutual understanding among people (Braaten 1991). For Habermas, the idea of communicative rationality provides the basis for understanding and evaluating social action.

Habermas contends that communicatively rational action necessarily occurs in the process of constructing social reality. Warnke (1995) elaborates on this contention; he suggests that the idea of communicative rationality can only be denied if, "...we accept a naïve realism according to which there is no need to ground our beliefs about the world in consensus because the world is immediately and identically accessible to all without intersubjective checking or collaborative interpretation" (p. 125). Here, Warnke seems to be suggesting that communicative rationality is what motivates and structures the hermeneutic fusion of horizons.

Habermas proposes that communicative rationality is an opposing force to the instrumental rationalism described by Weber, and later by Horkheimer and Adorno (Rasmussen 1996). Instrumental rationality is a feature of what Habermas calls the system, the technical, control-oriented part of society geared toward production; and communicative rationality is a feature of the lifeworld, the everyday world away from work (Braaten 1991). When instrumental rationality impinges on communicative rationality, human potential is limited. According to Habermas, these forms of rationality are the primary forces in social relations and in the evolution of society as a whole (Braaten 1991).

A given situation might be understood and evaluated by comparing it with Habermas' idea of the "ideal speech situation" in which communicative rationality is allowed to freely operate (Dryzek 1995). Murray and Ozanne (1991), who suggest that a

critical approach to consumer research might be founded on Habermas' theory, describe the ideal speech situation as:

One in which all participants have an equal opportunity to engage in discourse unconstrained by authority, tradition, or dogma... This requirement ensures that no assertion will be exempt from critique, no single participant will gain privilege, and the participants will be truthful so that their inner natures will become transparent to others (p. 134).

Thus, the ideal speech situation is guided by communicative rationality and free from the distorting influence of instrumental rationality. It is important to note that ideal speech is intended to be a model for comparing social situations against, rather than an attainable ideal (Dryzek 1995).

As previously noted, Habermas' critical theory is the foundation of the critical perspective described by Hemingway in leisure studies, and Murray and Ozanne in consumer research. Hemingway (1996) links communicative rationality directly to the classical ideals of leisure. He suggests that research and leisure practices based on instrumental rationality limit the potential human benefits of leisure participation.

In classical conceptions, leisure's emancipatory potential lay in its discursive nature, which rested in turn on a communicative rationality... To the degree, then, that the communicative rationality underlying leisure is supplanted by a rationality giving rise to non-communicative social roles [here Hemingway is referring to commodification and commercialization], leisure's emancipatory potential is reduced (p. 30).

While Habermas' critical theory has clearly been influential, it has also been roundly criticized on both philosophical and practical grounds. In particular, scholars have pointed to the apparent inconsistency between the hermeneutic idea of contextual understanding, and the notion that communicative rationality universally applies to the human condition. Larsen and Wright (1993) question Habermas' critical theory in their

critique of Murray and Ozanne's (1991) proposal for a critical approach to consumer research. Larsen and Wright ask, "How can a theory which arises in history provide a basis for an ahistorical universal critique?" (p. 439). Murray and Ozanne acknowledge in their paper that, "All knowledge is socially constructed...[and] that researchers cannot produce neutral knowledge" (p. 138), yet they propose evaluating marketing approaches based on the notion of the ideal speech situation. Seizing on this contradiction, Larsen and Wright suggest that the concepts of historically situated knowledge and ahistorical communicative rationality are incommensurable and therefore constitute a fatal flaw in Habermas' theory.

Postmodern theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) also identifies problems with the concepts inherent in Habermas' work. Lyotard claims that he is suspicious of all universalizing claims, including specifically the ideals of rational communication and consensus as proposed by Habermas. Lyotard notes that consensus is only a state of communication, not its end. Furthermore, he contends that in light of the diversity of values and perspectives that are now known to exist in societies, "Consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value" (p. 66). In place of consensus Lyotard calls for what he calls "paralogy"—a kind of vigorous, open discussion that has the goal of sparking new ideas rather than achieving consensus.

In the specific context of wilderness, Fox (2000) and Williams (2000) have suggested that the diversity of meanings associated with places called wilderness should be recognized as an asset. The consensus view of wilderness—the "received idea"—has been critiqued as oppressive to many segments of society and detrimental to the human-nature relationship. Habermas might call for a re-worked consensus that incorporates

previously unheard voices and is arrived at through ideal speech, but it seems probable that no such consensus view would satisfy or represent all perspectives. As an alternative to the “strong” critical theory of Habermas, Anthony Giddens offers a perspective that is not based on communicative rationality or any expectation of lasting consensus. Giddens’ critical theory treats individuals as “knowledgeable agents” who are continuously engaged in constructing and reconstructing their realities, so that any understanding or consensus is only temporary, and the boundaries of social action are always subject to change.

### **Giddens and the Theory of Structuration**

Anthony Giddens is a contemporary British social theorist whose theories are often compared with those of Habermas (both by Giddens himself, and others; see Morrow 1994). His critical theory differs from Habermas’ in that it favors “a more flexible, discontinuous, and open-ended account of historical change” (Morrow 1994, p. 173). Giddens is also less overtly “critical” in that he is generally not as concerned with developing a normative basis (such as the ideal speech situation) for critiquing social interactions (Morrow 1994).

In his 1984 book *The Constitution of Society*, and numerous other works, Giddens presents his “theory of structuration”, which describes the relationship between individuals and society, and the nature of social change. Giddens uses “structuration” and the phrase “duality of structure” to describe his perspective on the classical sociological tension between individual agency and constraining social structure. With “structuration” Giddens turns these concepts on their heads. Essentially, he suggests that

agency and structure are different sides of the same coin. Structure is nothing more than the enduring effects of social practices (Giddens 1979). Because actions may have unintended consequences and structure persists over time, individuals may experience structure as a sort of objective reality. However, as the very building blocks of that structure, people always have the capability of changing it (Giddens 1984). Moreover, it is structure that makes human agency possible. “In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make their activities possible” (Giddens 1984, p.2). “Structure is not to be conceptualized as a barrier to action, but as essentially involved in its production” (Giddens 1979, p. 70). In other words, structure is not thought of only in terms of constraint; it is both enabling and constraining.

Giddens (1984) uses the metaphor of language to illustrate the constraining and enabling nature of social structure. In speaking a language, a person chooses what to say but is constrained by the rules of syntax and diction that are particular to that language. At the same time, those rules make intelligible speech possible. In speaking, a person reinforces language rules so that the structure of the language is nothing more than the enduring effect of having been spoken. Over time, that structure may change as a result of persistent individual agency (for instance, changing the meaning of a word by using it as slang). In a practical sense, structure consists of the “rules and resources drawn upon by actors in the production of interaction” (Giddens 1979, p. 71). In this case, those rules and resources refer to language, but language is only one example. Giddens also uses the language metaphor to clarify what he means by the “unintended consequences” of actions. He explains, “My speaking English correctly is intentional; the contribution I make to the reproduction of language is not” (p. 8). He further elaborates on the notion



of unintended consequences in the following quotation: “Human history is created by intentional activities but it is not an intended project” (p. 27). In other words, unintended consequences are not accidents, they are the inevitable, if unforeseen, products of intentional social action.

Giddens’ perspective on the nature of social structure has at least one significant implication relative to the general critical project of emancipation. Because agency and structure are inseparable, people can never be completely free from power relations and forms of domination. Like structure, power is both enabling and constraining. “Domination and power cannot be thought of only in terms of asymmetries of distribution but have to be recognized as inherent in social association...Power is not just the capacity to say no, nor can domination ever be transcended (Giddens 1984, p.31).

Giddens credits French theorist Michel Foucault with helping to develop the idea of power as a constitutive force in society. Foucault (1977) characterizes power as follows:

Power is not to be understood as one person or class’s domination over others. Power is never localized, never “in anybody’s hands,” never exchanged as a commodity. It is and is employed through net-like organization...People are subjects of power and simultaneously elements of its articulation (pp. 98-99).

The implication of Giddens’ view of power and structure is that no utopian future in which society has transcended all constraints on ideal speech and all people are fully emancipated is possible. However, Giddens does not claim that there is no hope for addressing oppressive social relations. Instead, he emphasizes that emancipation occurs through the actions of “knowledgeable social agents.”

According to Giddens, every member of society knows a great deal about how society is put together—they must, in order to get along. Individuals are not the ignorant

objects of social forces, they are themselves social forces and implements of change. Giddens (1984) cites a study of working-class schoolboys in Britain to illustrate the relationship between knowledgeable actors and social structures. The “lads,” as he calls them, were well-aware of the power distribution and many unwritten rules within their school. They used humor and subtle forms of resistance to create and maintain their tough, working-class kid identities and establish some autonomy within a system in which they had little power. On the one hand, their actions reinforced class divisions, but on the other hand they represented a creative and effective kind of resistance through appropriation and manipulation of the rules of the system (the elements of structure) (pp. 288-304). Giddens refers to the schoolboys’ actions as, “strategic conduct—modes in which actors draw upon structural properties in the constitution of social relations” (p. 287). He further states that the theory of structuration naturally points toward analysis of strategic conduct as one of the most important kinds of social inquiry.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984) conducted a study of French consumers in which he employed an approach similar to Giddens’ “analysis of strategic conduct.” His study focused on investigating the ways that people re-work and re-use cultural meanings in creative new ways. In particular, de Certeau describes how individuals make use of language and images that are “imposed” on them by media sources and cultural elites. The following quotation has particular relevance to the study of wilderness if one imagines that the language de Certeau refers to represents the “received idea” of wilderness.

The language produced by a certain social category has the power to extend its conquests into vast areas surrounding it, “deserts,” where nothing equally articulated seems to exist, but in doing so it is caught in the trap of its assimilation by a jungle of procedures rendered invisible to the conqueror by the very victories he seems to

have won...his privilege is likely to be only apparent if it merely serves as a framework for the stubborn, guileful, everyday practices that make use of it (p. 32).

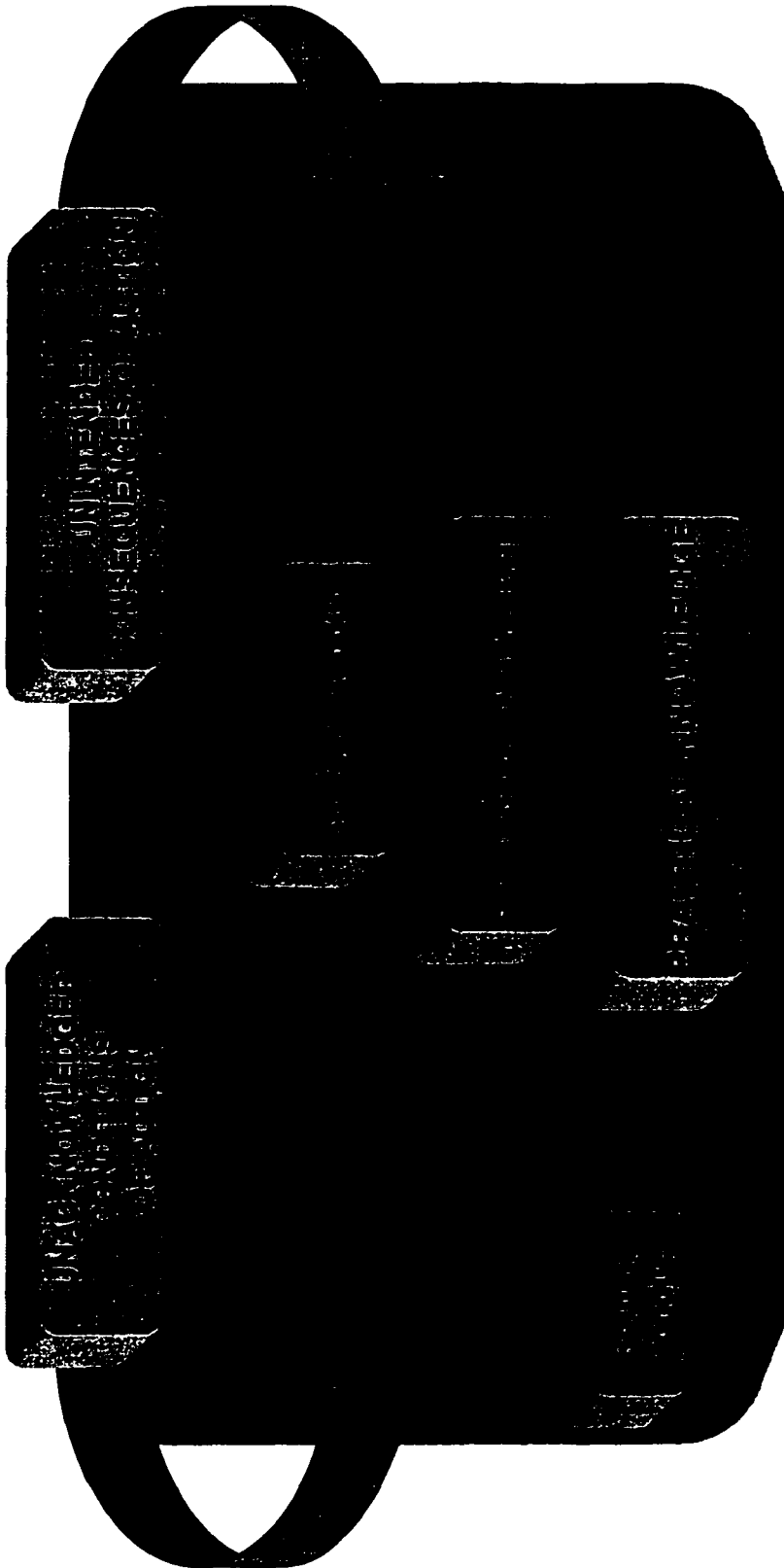
In simple language, de Certeau is saying that dominant or privileged meanings may become the raw material for new constructions that the original disseminators did not intend or imagine. This is “strategic conduct” precisely as described by Giddens.

At this point, it may seem that Giddens (or de Certeau) has overstated the capabilities of the individual. However, Giddens (1979) is careful to clarify that individual knowledge is bounded spatially and historically; people are not “cultural dupes” but neither are they omnipotent observers. A particularly important point made by Giddens is that not all “knowledge” is the kind that is immediately available to consciousness. “Knowledgeability does not mean that knowledge is available to the discursive awareness of the actor” (Giddens 1987, p. 62). Giddens distinguishes between “practical knowledge” and “discursive knowledge.” Discursive knowledge is what people “know they know” and can articulate. Practical knowledge refers to the kind of knowledge that is received through socialization and may be difficult or impossible to articulate. “Practical knowledge is primarily about the internalized rules and beliefs that guide social interactions without conscious attention to those rules and beliefs” (Kondrat 1999, p. 460). Giddens suggests that most action is routine and therefore guided by practical knowledge or a kind of “practical consciousness.” Routine actions and their enduring effects are manifested as “unacknowledged conditions of social action.” Practical consciousness and unacknowledged conditions form the domain from which discursive knowledge is drawn. When prompted (for instance, by a non-routine social interaction or an interviewer’s question) an individual may be able to reflexively evaluate

his or her action, thus drawing an element of practical knowledge into the smaller domain of discursive knowledge. As previously explained, intentional actions (informed by both practical and discursive knowledge) always have unintended consequences. Together, unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences form the boundaries of individual agency—they can be thought of as the constraining elements of social structure.

Giddens (1991) suggests that, as a consequence of the increasingly complex interactions of unintended consequences, modern social relations are characterized by contradiction, uncertainty, and ambiguity. In contrast to Habermas who suggests that interactions may be guided by a mutual desire for understanding and consensus (communicative rationality), Giddens contends that, “Social interaction is full of ambiguity and it is often unclear whether one’s actions are appropriate or if those actions produce optimal outcomes” (Kuentzel 2000, p.88, citing Giddens 1991).

In summary, then, the theory of structuration challenges the traditional agency/structure dichotomy by reconceptualizing structure as the enabling *and* constraining product of individual agency. Agency often takes the form of routine activity but may also occur as “strategic conduct”, which is the intentional, self-reflexive activity of knowledgeable social actors. Figure 1 shows the relationships between practical and discursive knowledge, routine and strategic conduct, and the enduring effects of social action.



**Figure 1. Basic elements of the Theory of Structuration. Adapted from Giddens (1984).**

## **A Model of the Knowledgeable Social Actor: Critical Self-Reflectivity**

Giddens' characterization of individuals as intentional actors with access to both practical and discursive kinds of knowledge naturally leads to questions about self-awareness. What kind of self-awareness is needed for an individual to engage in strategic conduct? Kondrat (1999) describes three ascending levels of self-awareness and a fourth—critical self-reflectivity—that is consistent with Giddens' theory of structuration. She identifies the first level as “simple conscious awareness.” At this level, awareness is defined in terms of perception—simply being conscious of one's surroundings and feelings toward those surroundings. Kondrat explains that simple awareness is “simple” because it is unselfconscious, in that attention is directed outward rather than inward toward the self. The second level of awareness is identified as “reflective self-awareness.” At this level, the “self” steps back to consider the experience it is having. Reflective self-awareness occurs when a person considers their feelings as a result of a given interaction or evaluates their own behaviors. The third level of awareness, “reflexive self-awareness”, is associated with the co-constituted notion of reality that is basic to hermeneutic philosophy. This third level presents a more complex characterization of awareness than that in the second level, but it does not “build” on that level. Indeed, it directly challenges the notion that a person can step-outside their self-awareness and objectively reflect back on it. That is, any judgment of the self is unavoidably self-referential; it necessarily occurs from the only viewpoint available, that of the self. As Kondrat notes, “...statements made on the basis of self-awareness are not simply descriptive statements about an objective self but expressions of that self” (p. 455). From this perspective, all knowledge of the world and the self is subjective; further, the only

*possible* kind of knowledge is subjective. Reflexive self-awareness forms the basis for the hermeneutic concepts of personal meaning and intersubjective (interpretive) understanding. Self-reflexivity is essentially the process of becoming aware of one's personal meanings and how they interact with others' meanings, a conscious recognition of the fusion of horizons.

Kondrat contends that each of the first three versions of self-awareness represents the psychological or social-psychological perspective, which is challenged by Giddens' theory that agents are not just co-produced through micro-level transactions, but are part of a larger network of social structures that exist prior to them. In her fourth level of self-awareness—critical self-reflectivity—Kondrat seeks to combine and reconcile elements from the other three levels and develop a concept of awareness that reflects the theory of structuration. She suggests that the concepts of practical and discursive knowledge are vital for developing a more sociological characterization of awareness. Discursive knowledge can be linked to the self-reflective version of awareness; it is what we know and can reflect on and articulate. Practical knowledge can be linked to the self-reflexive version of awareness; it is the “behind the scenes” knowledge that shapes an individual's perspective. Following Giddens' lead, Kondrat suggests that knowledgeable actors may reflect on their intentional actions and draw elements of their practical consciousness into the discursive domain.

Can actors come to identify some of the extended social and structural consequences of their [and others'] individually intended actions? Yes, according to Giddens. If encouraged to reflect on their own behavior and assumptions in light of the larger structural question, then individuals could conceivably arrive at [such] an awareness...(p. 460).

Thus, Kondrat's "critical self-reflectivity" can be seen as the bridge between reflective and reflexive definitions of awareness. Each individual is both product and producer of society. Through critical reflection a person may gain the knowledge needed to modify that society, but they can never escape it altogether. And, although any given individual's knowledge is partial and the effects of their actions are limited, every individual is a manifestation of his or her larger society and can be understood as a kind of window into the processes that constitute the structure of that society.

Kondrat lists several questions that an individual in the midst of critical self-reflection might pose, including the following:

-What do I believe about myself, my place in the world, and about the place of people like or different from me?

-To what extent do I accept (or accept uncritically) the values, beliefs, assumptions, and prescriptions I have received as a result of my socialization into particular communities? To what extent am I able or willing to raise questions about them?

-Are there inconsistencies or distortions between my received beliefs/assumptions and the concrete conditions of individual and group life? How do I account for these contradictions? (p. 464).

Posed in the context of a wilderness visit, these questions might become:

-What does my wilderness visit say about me and my place in the world? What do I think about other visitors and people who do not visit wilderness?

-To what extent do I uncritically accept the "received idea" of wilderness?

-Are there inconsistencies between my beliefs/assumptions about wilderness and the concrete conditions I have experienced on this visit? How do I account for those contradictions?

The concept of critical self-reflectivity is a useful elaboration on the theory of structuration. In particular, the idea of critical reflection is helpful for addressing Giddens' notion of strategic conduct. The working-class schoolboys and de Certeau's



(1984) French consumers each engaged in a kind of critical reflection which motivated and informed their strategic conducts. In combination, these ideas help to address the issues relative to general hermeneutic philosophy that were identified earlier in this chapter: How is the context for human experience and understanding structured? —By knowledgeable social agents and the enduring effects of their actions. How do individuals negotiate amongst multiple meanings? —Through critical reflection and strategic conduct. Why do some meanings persist over time? —Because of inevitable power imbalances, routinized actions, and unintended consequences of intentional actions. Certainly there are other compelling frameworks for interpreting human experience. However, in light of the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, Giddens' theories seem highly applicable to a study of the meanings associated with wilderness experiences.

### **Implications for the Investigation of Wilderness Experiences**

Hermeneutic philosophy holds that an individual's reality is composed of meanings which are co-constituted through transactions with others and the material world. Critical theory is founded on the idea that the relations that structure the creation and adoption of those meanings may be systematically influenced, so that some meanings endure over time, dominate others, and become oppressive. This is the central concern of the contemporary wilderness critique—that the dominant meanings and practices associated with wilderness are oppressive for certain segments of society, and more generally constraining relative to the relationship between humans and nature. Implicit in this critique is the notion that wilderness meanings are interpreted uniformly by different

people and experienced (in some cases at least) as external, constraining, or oppressive forces. However, some past studies (reviewed in the previous chapter) suggest that dominant meanings may be interpreted in a more contingent or idiosyncratic manner. Henderson (1996) suggests that women subjected to similar conditions at a general level may individually experience and interpret those conditions in variable ways. Thompson and Haytko (1997) similarly suggest that consumers, subject to the same dominating media images and cultural meanings of fashion, may uniquely appropriate combinations of those meanings to construct their personal identities. Giddens' Theory of Structuration and the concepts of strategic conduct and critical self-reflection offer a framework for understanding these findings. Within this framework, "...the individual is conceptualized not as the passive object of society's forces...but as intrinsically implicated in [making] society—acting, conforming, resisting, challenging, and modifying" (Kondrat 1999, p. 469). Through critical self-reflection, individuals may perceive contradictions or tensions within social structures, and through strategic conduct they may negotiate or manipulate those tensions to accommodate their needs. An investigation of wilderness informed by Giddens' theory would focus on how individuals reflect on and use meanings of wilderness to define themselves and negotiate tensions within social structures (and reproduce certain structures in the process). Along these lines, Williams (2000) has suggested that the study of recreational use of wilderness may be expanded to understand how recreation "functions to reproduce cultural concepts of nature and the wild" (p. 77).

An important implication of structuration theory is that every individual, as a knowledgeable social agent, is a kind of window into his or her society. While Giddens (1984) is clear that his theory does not point toward a single methodology (p. 327), the

normative commitments associated with hermeneutics and the general critical perspective, combined with the elements of structuration, do suggest certain investigative procedures. Thompson and Haytko (1997) describe an analytical perspective that is consistent with these commitments.

**This mode of analysis assumes that the particular (or microlevel) case represents an instantiation of macrolevel cultural processes and structures. Accordingly, the analysis of the particular case can provide insights into the operation of larger societal processes...In these terms, specific personal experiences, social practices, or cultural texts are interpreted as sites where cultural traditions of meaning and social value systems are enacted, negotiated, and transformed (p. 25).**

This approach has particular promise for application to my study. The hermeneutic perspective on constructed meaning serves as a basic foundation, and more specific concepts relative to individual agency and the constitution of society serve as the “interpretive logic” for understanding how the meanings expressed by individuals reflect social processes. In the next chapter, specific study methods consistent with this general approach are described in detail.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODS

### Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the wilderness setting that study participants visited, and the procedures used to contact those participants, interview them, and interpret their responses. The study population consisted of summer visitors to Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR), which is located in northern Alaska. The Gates of the Arctic Region has long been regarded as an exemplar of wilderness, and it served as the inspiration for Robert Marshall, Olaus and Margaret Murie, and others who strongly influenced the 1964 Wilderness Act. However, the region was not formally classified as wilderness until the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) was passed in 1980, and that Act recognizes some values that differ markedly from those traditionally associated with wilderness in other parts of the United States. Given its unique history, GAAR represents an excellent setting for investigating the array of meanings that modern visitors associate with wilderness. Summer visitors to GAAR were contacted in one of three Park-gateway communities immediately following their wilderness visits. Candidates for the study were intentionally selected to represent the range of different experience opportunities available within the Park. These visitors were asked to participate in in-depth, tape-recorded interviews that were guided but not determined by questions regarding the nature of their Park experiences, the nature of the GAAR setting, and their perceptions of existing and potential Park Service management practices. Each tape-recorded interview was transcribed and the resulting texts were

analyzed using a multi-stage, iterative procedure consistent with the theoretical and conceptual framework described in the previous chapter.

### **Study Location: Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve**

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR) represents the culmination of a long history of wilderness advocacy in Alaska. The region began to receive national attention when Robert Marshall identified two peaks on the southern flanks of the Brooks Range as the “gates to the arctic” in his 1933 book, *Arctic Village* (Glover 1986). Marshall was already a well-known wilderness advocate when he first visited northern Alaska, but his association with the region ultimately defined his legacy. Kauffmann (1992) writes, “Bob Marshall is to the Brooks Range what Henry David Thoreau is to the Maine woods and John Muir is to the Sierra Nevada” (p. 69). Marshall viewed the northern Alaskan setting as a national resource that could facilitate a unique kind of recreational experience. Foreshadowing the present-day emphasis on providing diversity in outdoor recreation, he suggested that the whole of northern Alaska be protected and maintained as a wilderness, “so that there [would] be a reasonable balance in the types of outdoor recreation obtainable on United States lands” (Marshall quoted in Catton 1997, p. 136). Marshall felt that genuine opportunities for self-reliance and adventure were lacking in the rest of the United States. He often lamented that he had been born too late to experience the thrill of discovery that explorers like Lewis and Clark must have felt (Glover 1986). In Alaska he saw the opportunity to establish a “permanent frontier” where he and others could explore and “discover” indefinitely (Kollin 2001).

Although Marshall's focus on exploration and discovery and his frequent references to wilderness as undeveloped and uninhabited country clearly influenced the dichotomy between people and wilderness that was eventually formalized in the Wilderness Act, historian Theodore Catton (1997) contends that Marshall was committed to protecting northern Alaska as an "inhabited wilderness." Marshall's book *Arctic Village* was primarily an ethnographic study of residents in the village of Wiseman, which is located just outside of what is now the eastern border of GAAR. According to Catton, Marshall's writing reveals a struggle to decide whether life in Wiseman offered a viable alternative to modern capitalist America (which was mired in the depths of the Depression at the time) or a temporary and artificial escape from it. Ultimately, Marshall decided that Wiseman "offered a preferred way of life, rather than a stage of economic development that Alaskans were trying to get beyond" (p. 140). Marshall did not suggest that the presence of resident peoples diminished the wilderness character of northern Alaska. In fact, according to Catton, he saw wilderness protection not only as a means of preserving recreation opportunities for visitors, but also as a means for preserving local residents' lifestyles.

Following Marshall's premature death in 1939, a series of high-profile individuals and publications continued to draw national attention to arctic Alaska. In her 1962 memoir *Two in the Far North*, Margaret Murie recounts her experiences as a young adult in Alaska. She and her husband Olaus Murie—who would later serve as president of the Wilderness Society—spent their honeymoon traveling 500 miles through the Brooks Range and they later made several other extended river and overland trips in the region. In the 1950s, the Muries campaigned tirelessly for wilderness protection in Alaska and

other locations. The couple was deeply involved in negotiations leading to the development and passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, and after Olaus's death in 1963, Margaret was invited by President Johnson to see The Act signed into law (Kollin 2001). The award-winning 1958 Disney movie *White Wilderness*, and Lois Crisler's (1958) book about filming the movie, titled *Arctic Wild*, also helped draw national attention to northern Alaska (Kauffmann 1992).

In the 1964 Wilderness Act, the social justice and lifestyle values expressed by Marshall are not reflected. Instead, the emphasis is on recreational values, and wilderness is defined as a place where man is a visitor who does not remain. However, the events leading to the establishment of GAAR, and modern National Park Service (NPS) planning documents, show that a much broader range of meanings continues to be associated with the idea of wilderness in Alaska. The first proposal for Gates of the Arctic National Park was put forth by the NPS in 1969, and by 1973 that proposal had evolved into a master plan for establishing both a "National Wilderness Park" and the "Nunamiut National Wildlands", to be co-managed by the NPS and resident Nunamiut Alaskan Natives (Catton 1997; Kauffmann 1992). According to Catton (1997), the 1973 NPS plan reflected Bob Marshall's belief that wilderness protection could preserve both recreational and lifestyle opportunities. The 1973 plan was eventually dismissed, but many of the central ideas from that plan are evident in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), which was passed in 1980. ANILCA established Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve as well as numerous other protected areas in Alaska. It more than doubled the acreage in the National Park and National Wilderness Preservation Systems, and it dramatically expanded the purposes of these public lands.

Perhaps most significantly, ANILCA identified subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering activities as priority uses of federal public lands (including wilderness) in Alaska. The spirit behind the ANILCA subsistence provision has been a hotly debated topic almost since its inception. Some people regard it as an unfortunate exception resulting from political compromise, while others view it as a purposeful expansion of the wilderness idea (Kollin 2001). Regardless, because the preponderance of designated wilderness in the United States was established by ANILCA, subsistence is now an allowable use on the majority (albeit a small majority) of the acreage within the National Wilderness Preservation System. Bob Marshall might be happy to know that the lifestyle values he advocated are now formally recognized on such a large scale.

ANILCA designated several vast wilderness reserves, but it identified GAAR as the foremost wilderness of them all. Furthermore, it clearly indicated that wilderness preservation and subsistence lifestyles are to be viewed as compatible purposes. Referring to the Park's unique history and founding legislation, the 1986 GAAR General Management Plan states: "Within the broad spectrum of resources and opportunities reserved in national parks, only Gates of the Arctic was established with such strong emphasis on wilderness purposes" (NPS 1986, p.3). Section 201(4)(a) of ANILCA directs the NPS to manage GAAR to: preserve the wild and undeveloped character of the area, provide wilderness recreational opportunities for visitors, protect habitat for healthy populations of fish and wildlife, and maintain opportunities for "rural residents engaged in a subsistence way of life to continue doing so" (NPS 2000). Clearing up any remaining ambiguity regarding the role of people in wilderness, the current Park strategic plan states:

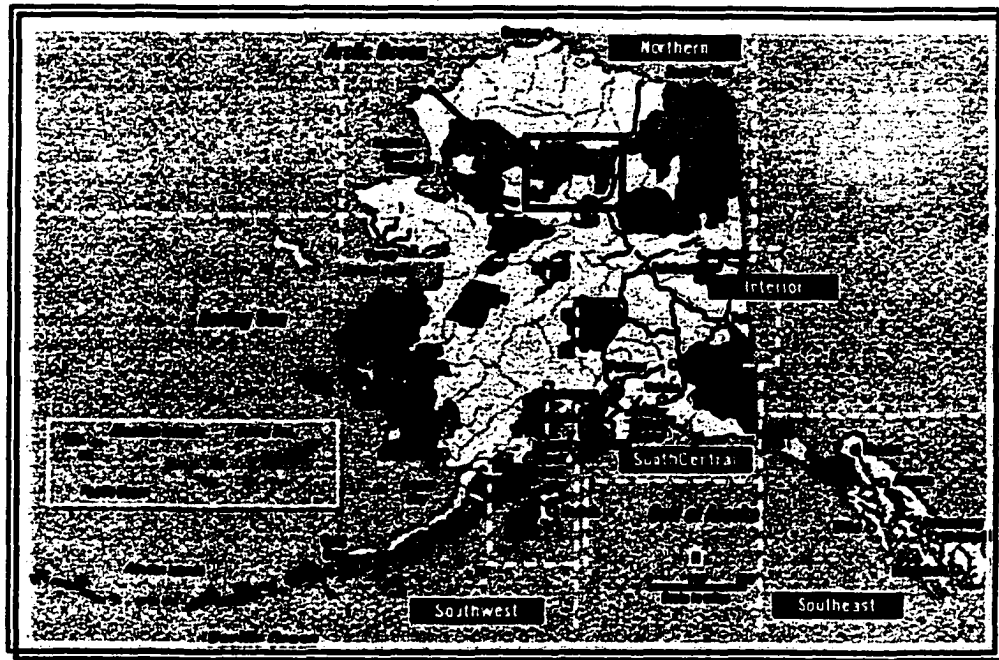


We protect and interpret historic and prehistoric sites and cultural landscapes that northern Alaska indigenous cultures, and those who more recently followed them, have used and occupied for centuries. We are also committed to protecting the continued opportunity for traditional subsistence activities in the park and preserve as the priority consumptive use, as well as non-subsistence hunting and trapping in the preserve. We recognize the subsistence harvest as a natural component of ecosystem processes (NPS 2000).

Consistent with the purposes given in ANILCA, GAAR is currently managed as a single vast wilderness area. The Park encompasses over 8 million acres of rugged mountains and arctic tundra. There are no roads leading into it, no maintained trails or campsites, and no permanent NPS facilities located within the Park boundaries. Beyond those boundaries to the east and to the west is a series of other protected areas. With GAAR in the middle, these areas form an almost contiguous collection of undeveloped lands, stretching from the Canadian border westward to the Arctic Ocean (Figure 2).

The village of Anaktuvuk Pass, formerly the proposed seat of the Nunamiut National Wildlands, is located on an island of private land in the north-central portion of GAAR. Residents of Anaktuvuk Pass and other villages bordering GAAR rely on caribou and other wildlife populations as a source of food and cultural identity. They may use motorized watercraft in the summer and snowmobiles in the winter to access GAAR for subsistence purposes. For visitors primary access is by air, and travel within the Park is by foot, raft, canoe, or kayak. The trans-Alaska pipeline and the dirt and gravel Dalton Highway border GAAR to the east. Visitors may conceivably drive 250 miles from Fairbanks (the nearest city) to where the Dalton Highway nears the Park boundary and access GAAR on foot, but it is believed that very few of them do so (Chakuchin 2001). Instead, the vast majority of visitors rely on regularly scheduled commercial flights to the community of Bettles, on the southern flank of GAAR, or to Anaktuvuk Pass. Once in

Bettles they typically charter a small airplane equipped with floats to access the Park backcountry. There are two primary air charter services that operate from Bettles. There are no air charter services based in Anaktuvuk Pass; visitors who fly into the village typically hike into GAAR on foot or float the John River, which traverses the Park from north to south and connects Anaktuvuk Pass with Bettles.



**Figure 2.** Location of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. The darker shaded areas depict other protected lands. Source: Alaska Public Lands Information Center Website: [www.nps.gov/aplic/land\\_map/index.html](http://www.nps.gov/aplic/land_map/index.html)

Most visitation at GAAR occurs during the four-month period from June through September, with July and August being the busiest months. Overall recreation use numbers are low. A recent attempt to compile existing information about use patterns at GAAR (Pendergrast 2001) shows that there are less than 2000 visitors per year, and visitation has been relatively flat since 1997. Predictions from the 1980s that recreation use would approach 10,000 visitors annually by the year 2000 (NPS 1986) were clearly

over-inflated. However, difficult access and lack of facilities at GAAR, traditionally thought to limit visitor use, may increasingly be viewed as attractions by the growing ecotourist population. Recent dramatic increases in statewide, nature-based tourism are expected to spill over into GAAR (NPS 2000). Pendergrast (2001) indicates that most GAAR visitors travel in small groups of three to five, but larger commercial groups of up to 10 are not uncommon. The average visit to GAAR lasts about 11 days, a number that reflects the committing nature of travel to and within the Park.

The first planners and managers at GAAR advocated a low-key, unobtrusive NPS presence that they perceived as consistent with the wilderness purposes of the Park (Brown 1988). That ethic is evident in the 1986 GAAR General Management Plan as well as current management practices. The Park administrative headquarters are located in Fairbanks, 200 air miles from the Park boundary. The NPS also maintains ranger stations in Bettles and Anaktuvuk Pass, and contributes to an interagency visitor center and administrative site at Coldfoot, on the Dalton Highway. Visitors who pass through one of these gateways may be asked to register, receive a backcountry orientation, and use bear-proof food containers (“bear-barrels”), which are loaned free of charge by the NPS. However, registration is voluntary, and it is entirely possible to make an extended visit to GAAR without interacting with NPS staff at all. Commercial guides and outfitters are required to obtain a permit to operate in GAAR, and requested to limit their travel-group sizes to 7 while hiking and 10 while floating. Visitors are encouraged to practice minimum-impact camping techniques, but there are no regulations regarding campfires, campsites, or length of stay.

There is a kind of dualistic symmetry in the establishment and modern administration of GAAR. Historically, the Park region has played an important role in the development of wilderness meanings. As a source of inspiration for some of the individuals who most strongly shaped the 1964 Wilderness Act, the Park may be associated with the meanings reflected in that legislation—the same meanings that have recently been the focus of much critical attention. However, GAAR was formally established in part to protect the very people and values that critics contend are overlooked or oppressed by popular wilderness images<sup>1</sup>. Modern visitors may be attracted to GAAR by images of pristine country, or they may be intrigued by the human history and contemporary uses of the area (or both). During their visits, they are likely to encounter things that both confirm and challenge the meanings they hold for wilderness. The complexity of the GAAR setting provides a rich opportunity to investigate the array of modern wilderness meanings.

### **Sampling**

The basic objective of this study was to elicit accounts of wilderness trips from visitors to GAAR in order to understand the nature of their experiences, and the meanings associated with wilderness and wilderness management practices. Accordingly, I employed a “meanings-based” approach guided by hermeneutic tenets and the theory of structuration. Within this framework, wilderness experiences are viewed as moments in visitors’ on-going constructions of the world and their place in it. Experiences are

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<sup>1</sup> As previously noted, some critics contend that the notion of wilderness as a place “where man is a visitor who does not remain” fosters an unfortunate human/nature dichotomy. However, one purpose of GAAR is to preserve subsistence hunting and fishing opportunities for local residents, both Natives and non-Natives, who live in and around the wilderness.

produced through transactions between visitors, their pre-conceived meanings, and the environments they encounter. Spoken or written accounts (reconstructions) of wilderness trips are viewed as sites where visitors negotiate the array of culturally available wilderness meanings to interpret and reconstruct their personal experiences.

Patterson and Williams (2002) list criteria for choosing an appropriate sampling principle in a study of this kind. The authors note that the general purpose of sampling is to represent the phenomenon of interest in some meaningful way. In the case of my study, the phenomenon of interest might be broadly identified as the array of meanings that wilderness visitors associate with wilderness and employ to interpret their experiences. Thompson and Haytko (1997) describe an investigative approach—the interpretive case method—in which accounts of individual experiences are understood as “instantiations of macrolevel cultural processes and structures” (p. 25). For my study, this means that individual reconstructions of wilderness experiences can provide insights regarding wilderness meanings and the larger social processes that structure them. In this sense, even a single case is representative, although it may not be generalizable. According to Patterson and Williams, there is a fundamental tension within the concept of representation: generalizability at a population scale always comes at the cost of depth of insight. In other words, a large, statistically generalizable sample may result in only a superficial understanding of complex phenomena. As noted in previous chapters, there are broad, persistent meanings of wilderness that seem to be widely shared. However, focusing on these generalized meanings may obscure important differences between individuals and their particular circumstances. One objective of my study was to investigate how individuals adapt generalized meanings to interpret their personal

experiences. Therefore, the guiding sampling principle was representation through depth of insight, rather than population generalizability.

Consistent with the goal of achieving depth of insight, the study sample consisted of a relatively small number of visitors who were purposively selected to represent the range of different experience opportunities available within GAAR. Three criteria were used to try and ensure diversity in the sample: activity type (hiking or floating), trip type (independent or guided), and region of the Park visited. In addition, sampling was spread over the bulk of the visitor season, from June through August 2001, in order to capture variation related to weather and season (in June, many lakes in GAAR were still frozen and by late August snow was again falling in some portions of the Park). The nature of visitors' experiences and wilderness meanings might differ according to any number of variables, including socio-demographic characteristics and past-use history, which are not easily discernable without an extended visitor contact. Activity, trip-type, visit location, and timing of visit were employed as selection criteria because they are easily discernable characteristics that likely capture other sources of diversity as well.

### **Contacting Visitors**

I contacted sample candidates immediately following their GAAR visits in each of the three gateway communities where the NPS maintains administrative facilities: Bettles, Anaktuvuk Pass, and Coldfoot. The purpose of sampling at all three sites was to ensure diversity by contacting visitors who accessed different regions of the Park. Most visitor traffic passes through Bettles, so I concentrated the majority of my sampling effort there—about six weeks in total. I spent approximately 10 days each in Anaktuvuk Pass

and Coldfoot. Contacting eligible sample candidates proved to be extremely challenging. The primary difficulty was identifying visitors who were returning from completed trips. All three gateway communities are sites where visitors both enter and exit GAAR. Therefore, a significant proportion of visitors at a given location on a given day were not eligible to be study participants. Presumably, a researcher stationed long enough at one gateway would see visitors both as they entered and exited the Park. However, some visitors did not exit through the same gateway that they entered. Furthermore, as a single researcher covering three access points, I sometimes moved to a new location and missed visitors as they returned through the place I had just left. Compounding these difficulties was the random and hectic schedule of airplane flights. Visitors who were returning from GAAR often paused only briefly in “town” before boarding another flight to return to Fairbanks. Regularly scheduled flights were often delayed because of weather, and chartered flights occurred at all hours of the night and day. North of the Arctic Circle, travelers are not constrained by normal daylight hours. On several occasions I contacted visitors and conducted interviews well after midnight. Successfully observing visitor traffic and contacting eligible study participants required that I be “on-call” almost around the clock, seven days a week, for the entire sample period. A final challenge relative to contacting visitors was the small overall visitor population. GAAR receives less than 2000 annual visitors, some of whom may not pass through the three primary gateway communities. Therefore, the total number of possible sample candidates was proportionately small as well. The final study sample size (32 groups representing 92 people) was ultimately determined by the limitations described above rather than a pre-determined numerical goal or principle.

Because I was a government employee while conducting this research, as well as a student at the University of Montana, I had the option of claiming either affiliation when contacting visitors. In Bettles, where I conducted 27 out of 32 total interviews, I generally approached visitors as they arrived at the airstrip and introduced myself as a student conducting dissertation research that would be made available to the NPS as input to planning and management decisions at GAAR. On a few occasions, an NPS staff member introduced me to visitors as “the researcher”, so that my affiliation was ambiguous. For a variety of reasons, it was obvious that some visitors perceived me as an NPS employee, even though I had introduced myself as a student. No visitors declined to participate in the study because they believed that I did or did not represent the NPS (or the University).

After introducing myself, I asked visitors if they were just beginning or just returning from a trip in GAAR. If they responded that they were just returning, I then asked appropriate questions to determine their primary activities (hiking or river floating), whether they were guided or independent, and the area of GAAR that they visited. Because I had access to visitor registration forms and cooperation from the local air charter services, I often knew these details ahead of time and could anticipate the arrival of visitors that I hoped to include in the study sample. Early in the sampling season, I sometimes chose to exclude otherwise eligible candidates from the study because they represented a combination of selection criteria that seemed likely to be over-represented (for instance, in June there were numerous small groups of hikers traveling independently in the Arrigetch Peaks region of GAAR). However, as the



season progressed and the difficulty of making contact with eligible study participants became apparent, I was more likely to solicit participation from all eligible visitors.

After determining visitors' eligibility for the study, I then asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview regarding their experience in GAAR. I explained that the interview format was open and flexible, so the exact length of the interview would be determined by them. I also explained that the interview would be tape-recorded and later transcribed, so that a complete and permanent record of it would be available for future analysis. At this point, a number of visitors indicated that they could not participate because of time constraints (a pending return flight to Fairbanks). No visitors declined to participate for other reasons, and no visitors indicated discomfort regarding the use of the tape-recorder. However, three different groups of visitors preferred to be interviewed while they unpacked and organized their equipment. In two cases this made tape-recording impossible, and in the third case it caused the tape to be corrupted. None of these visitors were included in the final study sample.

In Coldfoot, where most visitors arrive by car rather than airplane, I stationed myself at the interagency visitor center and used the same techniques employed in Bettles to solicit visitor participation in the study. Perhaps because the visitor center is staffed by Bureau of Land Management employees and not clearly affiliated with GAAR, the study participants that I contacted there did not perceive me as an NPS employee. Again, visitors' perceptions of my affiliation did not have any obvious influence on their willingness to participate in the study. Visitors passing through Coldfoot were generally not constrained by airplane flight schedules, and none of them declined to participate in the study. However, the overall volume of GAAR visitor traffic was much smaller than

in Bettles, so I was only able to conduct 4 interviews representing 13 total visitors. One group preferred to be interviewed in a noisy café near the visitor center, which made tape recording impossible, so they were not included in the final sample. I scheduled the time I spent in Coldfoot to coincide with known visitor traffic based on advance registration. Therefore, I only contacted visitors who chose to register and may have missed others who chose not to register or stop in at the visitor center.

There were very few eligible study participants in Anaktuvuk Pass. Most visitors who pass through that gateway begin but do not end their trips there. During my time in Anaktuvuk, I encountered only two eligible visitor groups. One group of 6 was included in the sample, and the other group (a couple from Switzerland) was not included because they did not speak English well enough to be interviewed.

### **Data Collection**

The primary data collection technique for this study consisted of interviews with small groups of visitors. In most cases, the interviews were conducted with travel groups. In some cases, the self-identified travel group was a sub-set of a larger group. For instance, a group of friends sometimes signed up for a guided commercial trip and found themselves members of a larger travel group. In these cases, it made sense to treat the friends as a group, but interviewing the larger party would have been awkward. Other times, members of the same travel group arrived and departed in separate airplanes, so that only a few of the members were able to be interviewed in the available time. Five interviews were conducted with single individuals. One of these individuals was a solo traveler and the other four were members of groups.

Interviews were intentionally open-ended and flexible, in order to provide participants the opportunity to determine for themselves the most important dimensions of their experiences. However, I did use an interview guide (Appendix A) that included a series of themes to be addressed and suggested lead-in questions to assure that the interviews produced relevant and comparable information (Patterson and Williams 2002). The interview guide was designed to elicit stories of visitors' trips, rather than answers to specific questions. It was adapted from a guide used in a past study of wilderness visitor experiences (Patterson et al. 1998), and expanded to include themes and issues with specific relevance to GAAR managers. The guide contained suggested lead-in questions organized under three thematic headings: The Trip, The Setting, and Existing and Potential Use Regulations. This organization was merely intended to facilitate the interview; it was not based on any expectation that the three themes would prove to be independent or exclusive of one another.

Each interview typically began with the question, "Can you please describe the trip you just completed?" From there, many participants carried the conversation, moving from topic to topic with little prompting from me. The dynamics of the group interviews often provided especially rich data as group members prompted each other to recall events or negotiated disagreements. I used the interview guide as a checklist to ensure that all relevant topics of interest had been covered, but I only rarely asked verbatim questions from it. The questions in the guide proved to be salient precisely because I generally did not have to ask them. I also took notes during each interview. The notes were intended to facilitate later transcription (for instance, by identifying which speaker

said what) or draw attention to a specific segment of the interview during later analysis; they never served as primary data themselves.

Sometimes interview participants asked me to clarify an NPS policy or offer a personal opinion. I always tried to defer the question by indicating that I did not represent the NPS or preferred to hear their opinions rather than offer mine. It was challenging to keep the interviews on-track and address participants' questions without unduly influencing their responses or appearing evasive or ignorant. As the season progressed, I became more adept at the interview process, so that some of the last interviews I conducted were the smoothest and most enjoyable of all. However, the overall nature of the interviews was primarily determined by the visitors themselves; there is no systematic difference in the "quality" or richness of the interviews relative to when they were conducted.

All of the interviews were very positive and friendly. Participants who seemed shy or initially reluctant to speak often opened up and told animated stories. Numerous participants indicated that they enjoyed recalling and sharing their experiences, or that they were pleased to contribute their time to a study that might somehow benefit GAAR, Alaska, or "the environment" in general.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Tape-recorded interviews were periodically packaged and mailed to a professional transcriptionist during the sampling season. By reviewing transcriptions of the first few interviews, I was able to make adjustments to my study procedures (altering the location of the microphone and tracking changes in speakers when interviewing groups larger than

3 people) before it was too late. After each interview was transcribed, I edited the transcription by simultaneously listening to the tape-recording and reading the text. The editing process was important for correcting small but significant transcription mistakes, and it also served as a preliminary, informal stage of analysis. While editing, I sometimes added punctuation or re-typed a word in all capital letters to better reflect the voice of the speaker. I also took notes regarding my first impressions of the significant themes or issues raised in the interview. These first impressions were subjective interpretations, consistent with the hermeneutic theoretical framework described in the previous chapter. This editing process sometimes took twice as long as the interview itself.

After editing, each interview text was converted to a rich text (.rtf) file and imported into a software program called QSR NVivo. The software assigns numbers to each line break in the text so that segments of the text can later be referenced according to their location within the whole narrative. It also allows an investigator to identify segments of text with codes that reflect his or her interpretation of their general themes or deeper meanings. The codes can then be grouped or arranged in various ways, and all text that has been assigned a particular code can be retrieved from a single narrative or a collection of multiple different narratives.

### Idiographic analysis

The first formal stage of data analysis was aimed at developing a thorough understanding of each individual interview. I say formal because by that point I had already established a familiarity with the data, including reading each interview text at

least once during the editing process. Therefore, even at the “first stage” of formal analysis, my interpretation and understanding of an individual interview was influenced by what I had already learned from the rest of the data. After a careful reading of the final edited text of an interview, I then began to identify predominant themes in the narrative and assign codes to segments of the text that reflected those themes. I used QSR NVivo to facilitate the coding process. At this stage, the themes and codes were “shallow” in nature. That is, they were not intended to reflect all the complexities inherent in the narrative. Instead, they served mainly as markers that provided a framework for subsequent deeper analysis. For instance, all references to bears, animal tracks, caribou bones, and birdsong within a given interview might be assigned the same general code, “wildlife.” A second re-reading of the interview text usually resulted in a more nuanced coding scheme. Text segments coded simply as wildlife were further coded to indicate whether they referred to live animal sightings, close-encounters, or evidence of animals. Often, text segments were assigned several different codes. For instance, a description of a bear encounter might be referenced with the code “animal sighting” and also with “risk.”

QSR NVivo is designed to support highly complex coding schemes that reflect users’ interpretations of the deeper meanings inherent in text documents and the interrelationships between those meanings. I chose to keep my on-screen coding relatively shallow and rely instead on a different approach previously employed by Patterson (1999) for the second stage of analysis. Using the codes I developed in the first stage, and the text-retrieval function in NVivo, I “reconstructed” each interview. Each reconstructed interview consists of coded segments of text that were reorganized under

thematic headings relevant to that interview. The process of reconstructing interviews represents a second, finer stage of analysis following on-screen, computer assisted coding. The thematic headings that form the frameworks for each reconstruction generally reflect the first-stage coding scheme, but they also show some additional interrelationships and complexities that reflect a developing understanding of the text. Within each reconstructed interview, individual text segments (“data excerpts”) are listed under appropriate thematic headings, identified by their location in the original text, and numbered sequentially for later referencing. When an excerpt contains several themes, it is presented under the most relevant heading and cross-referenced under the others.

Development of the reconstructed interviews was intended to serve two primary purposes. First, the process of arranging and cross-referencing text excerpts substantially increased my understanding of each interview narrative; it was in itself an important stage of analysis. Second, reconstructed interviews make narrative data more accessible to future readers and critical reviewers. Concisely presenting the data that justifies interpretations and conclusions is a significant challenge inherent in working with text data. The reconstructed interviews make it relatively easy to link interpretations to supporting data, and they represent a database that may be consulted in the future as new questions or insights emerge. In addition, reconstructed interviews are more accessible and easier to read than raw interview texts, so they may be more useful to the lay-public or, in the case of this study, NPS managers. For this study, reconstructing all 32 interviews resulted in a database of over 250 single-spaced pages of narrative excerpts. Those excerpts were formatted into a single document, bound and presented to the NPS

as one product of my study. Three examples of reconstructed interviews are provided in Appendix B.

The third stage of idiographic analysis consisted of developing narrative summaries of each interview. Developing the narrative summaries required further interpretation of the data and, similar to the reconstructed interviews, they were intended to provide an accessible overview of the major themes and important interrelationships within each interview. I linked statements in the narrative summaries to the specific text excerpts from the reconstructed interviews that provided the justification for those statements. The whole set of narrative summaries was also presented to the NPS as a product of this study. Three example summaries, derived from the reconstructed interviews in Appendix B, are provided in Appendix C.

Spiggle (1994) makes a distinction between data *analysis*, which involves manipulating data to divide and reorganize a complex whole into its constituent parts, and *interpretation*, which involves making sense of data through abstract conceptualizations. Although I use analysis to indicate both procedures, Spiggle's distinction is useful for summarizing the idiographic-level procedures that I used in this study. The first stage of coding involved dividing an interview into its constituent thematic parts—*analysis*, by Spiggle's definition. Coding was "shallow" and there was little interpretation involved. Reconstructing an interview was still primarily a process of manipulating data, but some abstract conceptualization was required to develop thematic headings and identify interrelationships. By the third stage—developing narrative summaries—more interpretation than analysis was involved. Rather than just manipulating segments of raw text, developing the summaries required that I represent the major themes of an



interview, and their relationships, in my own words. In short, moving from a raw interview, to a reconstruction, to a narrative summary required increasing levels of abstraction from the data—*interpretation*, by Spiggle’s definition. According to Spiggle, “interpretation occurs as a gestalt shift and represents a synthetic, holistic, and illuminating grasp of meaning...” (p. 500). In developing reconstructed interviews and narrative summaries, I attempted to make the procedures I employed for achieving interpretive insights as transparent as possible. However, interpretation is distinguished from the more mechanical procedures involved in simple analysis. Interpretive insights are creative, often serendipitous, and therefore cannot be prescribed by a fixed technique or series of steps (Spiggle 1994). The three-stage process I have described here implies a clean, linear kind of procedure. In reality, I often employed more of an iterative approach. Sometimes, insights achieved while developing a narrative summary caused me to go back and alter the organization of a reconstructed interview. Furthermore, insights from one interview sometimes led me to alter the summary of another. It is important to note that, although the reconstructed interviews and narrative summaries appear as finished products, they represent one moment in my developing interpretations of the interviews.

### Nomothetic analysis

After reconstructing and summarizing all of the interviews, I began the process of identifying themes that were relevant across more than one interview. The goal of the nomothetic analysis was to achieve a deeper level of understanding regarding sampled visitors’ experiences and wilderness meanings through the iterative, part-to-whole

process that is illustrated by the metaphor of the hermeneutic circle. At this point, I enlisted the help of two other scientists, not for establishing “inter-rater reliability” as advocated in other investigative approaches, but merely to help identify common themes that I may have overlooked precisely because of my proximity to the data. The collaborating scientists had access to all of the raw and reconstructed interviews, but they relied primarily on the narrative summaries to identify common themes. This represents a limitation in our approach because only the topics I included in the summaries were addressed. However, the purpose of the nomothetic analysis was to build on my idiographic understanding, not to start from scratch. Had I conducted the nomothetic analysis independently, I would have relied primarily on the summaries as well.

In cooperation with the other two scientists, I developed a “long-list” of more than 50 themes that “jumped-out” when reading through the interview summaries. We then worked to consolidate the list by combining themes that were redundant or very closely related. At the idiographic level, I coded and arranged themes in a series of different, complex hierarchies. However, this kind of hierarchical organization was not practical at the nomothetic level. For instance, remoteness was a prominent theme in many interviews. Some visitors described remoteness primarily as a setting quality, in which case it was grouped with other setting-quality themes. Other visitors described remoteness primarily as a feeling or state of mind, in which case it was grouped with other experiential themes. At the nomothetic level, we treated remoteness as a single broad theme that included both setting and experiential meanings.

After pairing down the long-list of nomothetic themes, we organized them into coherent groups identified as “dimensions.” The organization of the dimensions reflected

thematic relationships that were expressed by interview participants. However, some themes could clearly be included within more than one dimension. Therefore, the final organization is not solely data-based, but also reflects subjective choices made by the research team. We selected a heading for each dimension based on language used by interview participants. The headings were intended to capture the common underlying meaning of the themes within that dimension.

Two important issues emerged during the nomothetic analysis that caused me to re-evaluate my idiographic interpretations. First, in the process of identifying common themes, I found that less-common themes sometimes seemed more significant. For instance, many visitors indicated that they enjoyed the low-key, almost invisible presence of the NPS at GAAR. However, some visitors indicated that they would have liked to see a *greater* NPS presence. For them, lack of visible NPS activities and regulations was a sign of poor stewardship, especially inappropriate in a unique place like GAAR. The second emergent issue revolved around apparent contradictions within the meanings expressed by visitors. For instance, some visitors indicated that they strongly preferred not to see others during their wilderness visits, but they described the human encounters they had in GAAR as highlights of their trips. Contradictions such as these proved problematic during the nomothetic analysis: Is the common theme preference for solitude, or the positive nature of human encounters? Ultimately, I returned to the idiographic analysis and employed the concepts described in the previous chapter—critical self-reflection and strategic conduct—to understand the tensions within visitors' experience narratives. These concepts were the basis for the “logic of interpretation” that guided my interpretive insights. Specifically, the concepts provided a basis for viewing

apparently contradictory meanings as tensions that are negotiated by individuals in the process of interpreting their current situations. Within this logical framework, the goal of interpretation is to understand the interplay between those meanings, rather than searching for an underlying theme to reconcile competing meanings.

A reformulated idiographic understanding does not invalidate the nomothetic analysis—the broad themes and relationships still hold true. Moreover, the dimensional organization of themes developed at the nomothetic level provides a useful framework for interpreting and presenting idiographic complexities and tensions. For this reason, I present the results of this study in two chapters, and in reverse order of how interpretive analyses are typically presented. In Chapter 5, the nomothetic dimensions derived from visitors' experience narratives are presented and discussed. In chapter 6, I use these dimensions as a framework for presenting and discussing a series of tensions within the meanings visitors employed to interpret their experiences.

### **Evaluating the Research**

While there are well-developed and widely accepted standards for evaluating research based on quantitative data, standards for evaluating qualitative (text-based) research are comparatively less developed and less widely-accepted. A variety of authors have suggested various alternative methods for evaluating qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Patterson 1993; Spiggle 1994; Thompson 1990). Patterson (1993) suggests that three useful evaluative criteria are persuasiveness, insightfulness, and practical utility. Persuasiveness refers to a reader's ability to come to the same conclusion as the researcher. This does not mean that a reader must agree with the

researcher's interpretation, only that they can see how the interpretation was arrived at. Naturally, this requires that sufficient data are presented to justify an interpretation. Spiggle (1994) suggests a parallel criterion in "adequacy." In evaluating the adequacy of qualitative research, a reader asks, "Is there sufficient basis presented for assessing how grounded in the data the representation is?" (p. 503). I have attempted to address the persuasiveness/adequacy criterion by developing reconstructed interviews and narrative summaries that are linked to raw interview data, and also by providing data excerpts to support the interpretations presented in the next two chapters.

The excerpts that are presented in chapter 5 were selected based on two primary criteria. First, I tried to select excerpts that most clearly and concisely illustrated the themes presented. In some cases, just one or two excerpts were sufficient to illustrate a theme. However, when there were subtle differences in meaning within a theme, I selected one excerpt to illustrate each of the different shades of meaning. Collectively, these excerpts represent broader common themes that were expressed by multiple interview participants. The second criterion for selecting excerpts was representation from the full data set. Although some interviews were particularly rich sources of articulate excerpts, I attempted to draw excerpts from across the full set of interviews. In other words, I sometimes chose to present a slightly less-articulate or less concise passage in order to make it clear that the full set of interviews is represented. In chapter 6, where I sometimes used a more idiographic approach to illustrate tensions between meanings, the criteria for selecting excerpts varied. In each section of that chapter, I provide an explanation of how the selected excerpts represent the larger data set.

The criterion of insightfulness refers to the previously described distinction between analysis and interpretation. According to Patterson, insightfulness results from creative interpretation that results in a new, holistic understanding. It involves more than merely organizing data into constituent parts or common themes. Spiggle (1994) describes three related criteria that reflect different aspects of insightfulness: innovation, integration, and resonance. Innovation refers to newness: Does the interpretation provide a new way of looking at wilderness experience? Integration refers to the coherence of an interpretation. Resonance is closely related to innovation; it refers to the contribution of research: Does the interpretation enrich understanding of the phenomenon? In order for my study to be regarded as insightful, it must be more than a summary of themes, and it must also be more than an in-depth case study of a few wilderness visitors. It should demonstrate a creative new understanding of wilderness experiences and meanings, with applicability to the broader fields of wilderness and leisure studies.

The criterion of practical utility is somewhat self-explanatory: Does the research answer the questions that motivated it? Also, does the research address issues or problems that are of concern in the appropriate field of inquiry (Spiggle 1994)? A second dimension of practical utility is “trustworthiness.” According to Patterson and Williams (2002), trustworthiness refers to the degree to which the concepts and procedures employed in a study are used or have been used by other researchers. Thus, the results of this research might be partially evaluated based on the theoretical framework and procedures that guided the study.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESULTS—DIMENSIONS OF VISITORS' EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES**

### **Overview**

In this chapter I present results of the nomothetic (across interviews) analysis of visitors' experience narratives at Gates of the Arctic National Park. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how visitors described their experiences in terms of common themes and broad dimensions that emerged from analysis and interpretation of the interview data. These dimensions and themes set the stage and provide a framework for the in-depth analysis of countervailing meanings and tensions within visitors' narratives, which is presented in chapter 6.

Table 1 contains summary information relative to the interviews that produced the data for this analysis. The seven-character alphanumeric codes in the first column of Table 1 show the date (day/month), the location where the interview was conducted (BTT = Bettles, CFX = Coldfoot, AKP = Anaktuvuk Pass), and the interview number. A total of 92 visitors participated in 32 separate group and individual interviews. Thirty percent of the participants (28 visitors) were women. The interviews ranged from 25 to 70 minutes in length, with an average length of 46 minutes. Seventy-five percent of the participants were from outside of Alaska. Seventy-seven percent were visiting GAAR for the first time. Of 32 total interviews conducted, 12 were with hiking groups (31 participants), 15 were with river floaters (44 participants), and 5 were conducted with groups that participated in both activities (17 participants). Twenty-two percent of interview participants were members of guided groups.

ID	Length (min)	# of Participants	First Visit to GAAR?	Home State(s)	Hiking/Float	Guided?
622BTT01	50	2	Y,N	AK, CA	Float	N
626BTT02	40	1	Y	CA	Hike	N
626BTT03	33	1	N	CO	Hike	N
628BTT04	44	2	N,N	NM	Hike	N
628BTT05	42	2	Y,Y	MI	Hike	N
628BTT06	68	3	Y,N,N	AK, CA (2)	Both	Y
629BTT07	32	2	Y,Y	WI	Hike	N
629BTT08	38	3	Y,Y,N	PA, CA (2)	Both	Y
630BTT09	52	2	N,Y	CA, AK	Float	N
630BTT10	25	2	N,N	ME	Hike	N
630BTT11	25	3	Y,Y,Y	AZ	Hike	N
630BTT12	55	1	N	AK	Float	N
706BTT13	65	4	Y,Y,Y,Y	AK	Float	N
719BTT14	35	2	Y,Y	KT	Float	N
719BTT15	53	2	N,Y	AZ	Float	N
720BTT16	50	6	Y,Y,Y,Y,Y,N	AK	Float	N
721BTT17	40	2	N,Y	MN, CA	Float	N
722BTT18	44	4	Y,Y,Y,N	NY	Float	N
724CFX19	55	2	Y,Y	CT, NY	Hike	N
726CFX20	45	5	Y,Y,Y,Y,N	AK (4), New England	Float	N
728CFX21	55	5	Y,Y,Y,Y,Y	AK (2), New England (3)	Hike	N
730CFX22	70	1	Y	MI	Hike	N
809BTT23	30	4	N,Y,Y,Y	?	Hike	Y
810BTT24	30	2	Y,Y	AK	Float	N
811BTT26	55	2	Y,Y	ID	Float	N
812BTT27	45	1	Y	AK	Both	Y
815BTT28	25	2	Y,Y	AK	Float	Y
815BTT29	43	3	Y,Y,N	CA	Both	Y
815AKP30	70	6	N,Y,Y,Y,Y,Y	CA	Hike	N
817BTT31	48	4	Y,Y,Y,Y	CA	Float	N
817BTT32	60	7	N,Y,Y,Y,Y,Y,Y	IL	Both	N
818BTT33	35	4	Y,Y,Y,Y	MT,OH, MA	Float	Y
<b>Totals</b>	<b>46 min (Avg)</b>	<b>92 Participants</b>	<b>33% Repeat Visitors</b>	<b>25% From Alaska</b>	<b>37% H, 47% F 16% Both</b>	<b>22% Guided</b>

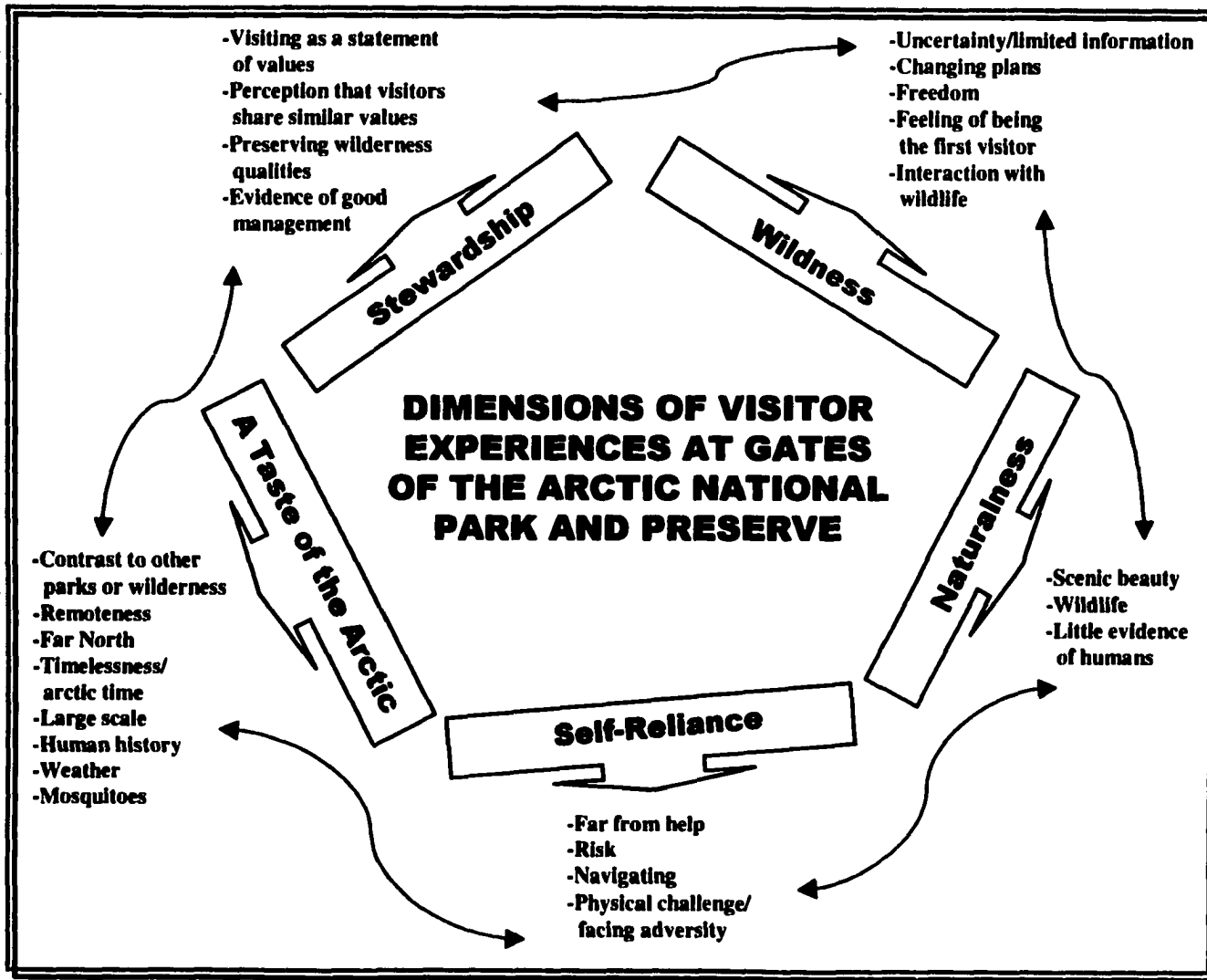
**Table 1. Summary Interview Data**



Figure 3 shows five dimensions of visitors' experience narratives at GAAR and their constituent thematic elements. These dimensions and themes are generally applicable across the sampled visitors, but not all interview responses are reflected in the five dimensions, and not all the related thematic elements were expressed in every interview. The presentation of discrete dimensions is somewhat artificial because, in some cases, a theme could be associated with more than one dimension. The arrows in the figure indicate the interconnected nature of the themes.

The five dimensions shown in figure 3 reflect some of the established meanings that have been traditionally associated with wilderness in Alaska and other places. For instance, naturalness and wildness are frequently regarded as defining qualities of wilderness and guiding values for wilderness stewardship (Cole 2000; Landres et al. 2000). Self-reliance is a value that was expressed by early wilderness advocates like Bob Marshall (1930, 1933), and it is explicitly recognized in both the founding legislation and the current general management plan at GAAR (NPS 2000). And stewardship is a term that is increasingly popular in the context of wilderness as an alternative to "management", which carries stronger connotations of control. However, a closer look at the thematic elements within these dimensions, as expressed by GAAR visitors, reveals variable meanings and important complexities.

In the remainder of this chapter, these thematic elements are discussed and illustrated with interview excerpts. The organization of the chapter is intended to facilitate the narrative flow of the discussion, not to imply hierarchical relationships between the major experiential dimensions that are identified. At the end of the chapter, I provide a summary to highlight the issues that will be addressed in chapter 6.



**Figure 3. Nomothetic Organizing System for Major Dimensions in Visitors' Experience Narratives**

## **A Taste of the Arctic**

Many interview participants came to Gates of the Arctic specifically seeking a sample, or a “taste”, of arctic conditions. They described being intrigued by both the tangible qualities (e.g. long-daylight hours) as well as less-tangible images (the arctic circle) associated with the north. Regardless of their reasons for visiting, participants often described their experiences and the settings they encountered as being characteristic of Alaska, the far north, or the arctic. Some visitors portrayed the arctic in general or Gates of the Arctic in particular as nearly synonymous with wilderness. They made explicit links between their ideals of wilderness, and characteristics of GAAR (lack of development, large scale, remoteness, etc.). These characteristics were presented as features that set GAAR apart from other park or wilderness places. In the paragraphs below, each thematic element related to “A Taste of the Arctic” is illustrated with representative interview excerpts.

### **Contrast to other parks or wilderness**

Many interview participants described GAAR or their experiences there in contrast to other places in the contiguous 48 states. Two primary distinguishing characteristics of GAAR were low visitor-density (most visitors enjoyed seeing no or very few other people during their trips), and the general lack of trails or other management infrastructure. A third distinguishing characteristic—remoteness—is presented as a separate theme in the next section.

R: It’s like nothing in the lower 48, that’s for sure (Randy, 7:376<sup>1</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> The information following each quotation refers to the speaker(s) (all pseudonyms), the interview number, and the paragraph numbers in the original interview that the selection was taken from.

H: [It was], different from a lot of parks that I've visited. It's no less beautiful or more beautiful in terms of the scenery, but there's that element of remoteness to it that you can't find in a wilderness area...with a trail map, trail markers, defined trails...(Harvey, 27:123-125).

J: But I've never been anywhere else I don't think where you'd have 6 days of not seeing other travelers. Even in the Boundary Waters (Joan, 13:692).

R: We have never been on a trip where people weren't asking us a baseball score or, you know, "Hey were you in Anchorage the other day?"...And the fact that we didn't see anyone for 7 days was what we really liked (Rick, 24:173-175).

G: You don't feel like you're in a park. M: No interpretive signs, and no trails (Gary and Mandy, 15:343-345).

E: But the difference out here from our other wilderness experiences is there isn't any evidence of...overuse or, you know, forced concentrations of impact to leave the rest of it, which you find in other wilderness areas... (Eric, 19:547).

Visitors not only commented on the lack of development within GAAR boundaries, they noted the lack of development outside the Park as well. The surrounding undeveloped land added to the wilderness character of GAAR, and for some visitors it made the Park boundaries irrelevant.

R:...I'm not sure just where the Park boundary ends, but I know it's down there part of the way. After that [it's] classified National Petroleum Reserve or whatever. Is it BLM land? I'm not sure what it is, but I guess my point is...down in the states you usually see four-wheeler tracks or something if you're outside the park...Here, it's open to them evidently, but they can't get at it because it's so remote...that was kind of neat (Randall, 26:183).

J: I had to ask Jerry where the Park boundary was as we were flying in... You couldn't look down and say, Yeah, okay, that's where the logging stops and this is where the park starts. You see, we grew up at Rainier together. You know where the park boundary is because you see logging right up to the boundary (John, 1:52).

M: Those particular borders around the Park don't bother me really. The land on both sides is the same to me (Mark, 3:187).

## Remoteness

A dominant theme in many interviews was remoteness. Within this theme, interview participants expressed a variety of slightly different meanings. Most of them described remoteness by referring to tangible distance from towns or developments such as roads, and the difficult access associated with that distance. As illustrated in the first excerpt below, some participants indicated that GAAR felt like more of a wilderness precisely because it was difficult to get to. As illustrated in the second excerpt, remoteness was often viewed as a distinguishing quality of GAAR and an attractive quality in and of itself. The *degree* of remoteness at GAAR was also described as a unique quality that is difficult or impossible to find in other regions of the United States. Finally, as illustrated by the fourth excerpt, a few visitors indicated that they had stricter standards relative to seeing other people or their impacts in GAAR because of the effort they themselves had put in to get there.

I: Okay. So, there are other places in Alaska, other places in the nation that we call wilderness. Is this wilderness different from that other wilderness? R: It's more difficult to get to. It takes a lot of effort to get to. And there's a lot of, well I'm from Utah and we have wilderness there but you can drive to the edge of it; pack in and pack out in a few days. So it's definitely more difficult to access...J: Well, it gives it even a more stronger sense of wilderness. I: The difficult access? J: Yeah (Reba and Jesse, 6:475-487).

T: Oh yeah, we came up here because it is the most remote, most natural, most wild place we could get to (Troy, 31:267)

J: And just kind of that initial feeling when the plane drops you off and just the fact that you're out there 100 or 125 miles from anything like a town is just unique, really hard to replicate anywhere else. M: Certainly not in the continental U.S...J: I think of this part of Alaska as just being, I mean in general, very remote (Jack and Mandy, 4:441-443).

S: But there's the weekend wilderness that you're willing to tolerate being on trails with more people. You didn't work as hard, but if you're going to do a two-week vacation and make all the plans and everything, it is nice to be able to get somewhere where you don't feel like you have to excuse yourself and bump into somebody else's camp site or hide a few trees away. That's something on weekends, yeah, I'll see another tent and just

tolerate it. That's the way it is. I'm still in the wilderness, but I know I'm not way out there. I'm not in the solitude part of it. So there's times when that is perfectly acceptable and that's good and there's times when you really do want to work a little harder and get a little farther. And going a little farther, the benefit is you don't have to be there with everybody else and their fluorescent yellow tents (Shannon, 9:528).

Whereas the preceding excerpts present remoteness as a tangible quality, there was also a less-tangible aspect of remoteness described by visitors that was not necessarily related to absolute distance from other people or developments. Some visitors described feeling isolated or profoundly separated from the "outside world." This aspect of remoteness was most affected by lack of communication, or the inability to communicate, with others and it was typically described in negative terms.

I: So did the air traffic along the North Fork affect the feeling of remoteness that you had? T: Uh, a little bit. Although when we were trying to signal them, it wasn't helping us...S: It felt real remote then. T: It felt more lonely than I guess not having any contact at all (Tom and Sven, 17:22).

I: So what do you mean by remoteness? C: Lack of communication with the outside world, exactly what it is...And that's one of the reasons why I came up here too. But it's a little different once you're here...I think about what I'd do differently. I definitely would get one of those satellite phones... I: So is that going to impact or reduce the remoteness? C: No. Yes,...it'll bring it a little closer. It'll bring [in] the outside world. I: It's a positive impact? C: For me, it is. Yes. Definitely (Carl, 2: 49-59).

### Far north

Interview participants frequently mentioned exotic images associated with the far north among their reasons for visiting GAAR. A significant proportion of them indicated that they were primarily interested in visiting the north, the arctic, or Alaska in general, rather than the Park itself. For them, the value of GAAR had more to do with its latitude than its status as a national park or a designated wilderness. Several participants indicated that they had never heard of Gates of the Arctic prior to visiting.

G: Plus also what adds to the whole lure is knowing where it is, knowing that a few hundred miles over the mountains to the north you've got the Arctic Ocean up there. (Grady, 33:271).

B: I had thought for quite awhile I'd wanted to come to Alaska and I'd also thought for quite awhile that it would be really cool sometime to be north of the Arctic Circle and see the midnight sun. Well, when we decided on the date that our trip was going to be [near the solstice], it fell right into this time. So, it made some sense to get north of the Arctic Circle somehow. And in looking for transportation to get into a Park or a Preserve, we considered trying to go and do ANWR or some of the others...there's a couple of other ones...I don't remember the smaller ones that are up north of the Arctic Circle. But we considered trying to do those and Gates of the Arctic was the only one that I was able to easily find air service into. And so it just made it easy and convenient just to pick Gates of the Arctic and come here and get in somewhere (Brad, 5:284).

M: We had talked about going to Alaska for probably 10 years and we didn't know how to see Alaska because it's so big. So.....we just kind of put off making any kind of decision as far as what we would do to see Alaska...Then when this came up, and we were kind of invited to go as part of a group, we said "Yeah! We want to do that." So, it's worked out great... I: So is it fair to say that you came to visit Alaska rather than Gates of the Arctic National Park? R: Yeah, I'd say yeah, that would be true, for us... R, Yeah, we found out about Gates of the Arctic once I looked on a map and said "Okay, we're going to do the John River, we're going to do this and that." I opened up a map and said, "Oh, we're going to be in the Gates of the Arctic Park." To be very honest, I'd never heard of Gates of the Arctic Park (Robert and Margaret 14:128-136).

### Timelessness/arctic time

The opportunity to enjoy activities that are unmeasured and uncontrolled by time has been regarded as an important quality of wilderness experiences (Borrie and Roggenbuck 2001). In wilderness settings, timelessness may be afforded by escape from normal daily routines. At GAAR, twenty-four hour sunlight facilitated the experience of timelessness for many visitors, some of whom described converting to "arctic time" during their trips. In addition to affording the experience of timelessness, 24-hour arctic light was also regarded as a novelty that some visitors initially found hard to imagine.

S: But [with] endless light, your schedule just isn't restricted by daylight, which is nice (Sue, 21:29).

P: Also, the factor of the midnight sun up here throws a whole spin on it, too. Everywhere else you know you plan your day you got ... you want to get back to camp before dark... The first full day I was out, I was quite pokey at getting up, and getting stuff together, and stuff. It was like 4:00 in the afternoon before I started to leave for the hike...But it was like, "so what if I get back at midnight?" I mean, you can still see (Peter, 22:121).

J: You know, your first day or two out in the woods on a trip like this, a lot of times all you want to do is just chill. Not go anywhere, not do anything...Kind of get into the rhythm of, you know, up at noon, lunch at 8, dinner at midnight. Kind of getting on the animal cycle...it didn't take us very long to make that shift to arctic time (Jeff, 12:19).

D: One of the funny things, you know, in the last e-mails we were honing down the gear list and I said, "Oh, and by the way, you really don't need a flashlight." S: So, what did the Californians do? We packed two head-lamps because she had to be wrong, there could not be 24 hours of light! (Dorothy and Shannon, 9:614-616).

### Large scale

The tremendous scale of GAAR and the features within it was a prominent theme in visitor's narratives. Frequently, interview participants referred to their abstract knowledge of the size of GAAR rather than their first-hand experience of it. This is a significant point because, as the quotations below illustrate, the image of GAAR as a vast wilderness strongly influenced visitors' experiences even though most of them were not able to directly observe the full extent of the Park. The idea that it is more than just "a little island of nature" contributed to visitors' perceptions that GAAR is a genuine wilderness.

J: So one of the things I really liked about this, just the magnitude, the scale of things is really different than what we normally see in our backpacking trips (Jack, 4:367).

K: I would say it's really awesomely big. It was really cool to go as far as we did, not see anybody, and to realize we only touched a small part of the Park...That's a happy thought (Kelly, 19:519).

R: I hope that we're able to keep the wilderness areas here in Alaska in the state that they're in...D: Yup, because it's an incredible experience...and you certainly don't get it in the lower 48 anywhere. S: No, and that's just it, the vastness of it...I mean the whole, the entirety of it is part of the "thing" you know, not just the mountains. It's how huge it is (Ray, Daniel, and Sue, 11:254-258).



G: It's no little island of nature surrounded by development. It's the real thing. R: Yeah.  
C: When I think of it sitting here, I think scale is essential to call something wilderness. It can't be wilderness if it's [only] 100 square miles (Grady, Rodney and Cole, 33:253-263).

### Human history

As discussed in previous chapters, the notion that wilderness places should be untouched by humans has been the subject of much philosophical criticism. Although wilderness has been legally defined as a place "where man is a visitor who does not remain", the past and present human occupation of GAAR did not seem to negatively impact visitors' perceptions of the wilderness character of the area. In fact, for some, the opportunity to experience the same emotions and challenges that historical people likely faced was a highly positive trip feature.

R: Another part of it for me, I really enjoyed standing in certain places and I could just feel exactly, or at least what I felt, how the first inhabitants would have felt coming up the Noatak...I could just feel some of the side canyons saying, "come on, come up here and take a look." And in my head I could just imagine 10,000 years ago standing there and saying, yeah, let's go take a look." And so there's kind of an atavistic connection to the first peoples up here, it's probably very similar to what they saw and experienced (Rodney, 33:239).

After facing the challenges of arctic travel, some interview participants expressed admiration for the toughness and ingenuity of historical inhabitants who faced the same challenges without any modern technological conveniences.

D: That's kind of neat to think about the history up there. How those people existed. My family mentioned the flies. How did those people deal with that? All the gear we had, what did they carry? The food we had, what did they eat?... It must have been just incredible. So, it's fun to be up there and think we're here in the year 2001, but somebody was here about 2000 years ago (Dan, 16:280).

E: It's wilderness but then again you know that for years and years there've been people who lived there and traveled through there...I: Does knowing that people lived there for an extended period of time make it any less of a wilderness? E: No. If you sit back and

think how... R: How did they do it? E: How did they do it and [inaudible] the knowledge. [It's] hard to travel and hard to make a living. R: Hard to walk over and navigate through. E: It makes me admire those people and wonder, or I'd like to know more about it (Ellen and Randall, 26: 283-289).

Visitors who encountered modern local residents living in or around GAAR (only a few did) generally expressed a similar kind of admiration regarding the residents' toughness and ingenuity. In one case, a visitor group described encountering two local residents as one of the highlights of their trip. For them, the encounter was evidence that GAAR is an authentic frontier where people maintain a link to rugged, solitary lifestyles of the past.

H: I mean to be the only two people, I think he said within 8 million acres. His closest neighbor was within 8 million acres. G: Sounds good to me. H: And they had this whole beautiful lake to themselves basically. The small, hand-built log cabin, which was just awesome, and the way they utilize the space...I thought it was simply amazing. Something I've always dreamt of doing... (Hank and Geoff, 32:205-209).

### Weather

Adverse, changeable weather was a significant influence on many participants' experiences. Those who encountered bad weather often described it as typical of, or appropriate in, the arctic. Some visitors who enjoyed good weather suggested that they were just lucky, and that good weather could lead to dangerous misconceptions about the nature of the place. For a number of visitors, bad weather provided the opportunity to face and overcome adversity, and as a result, it was interpreted in a positive light. Therefore, weather may also be considered as an important theme within the dimension "self-reliance."

R: ...But I think [what] struck me most about the weather was how it changed...I'd say almost within 12 hours there'd be something new coming, almost. I'd never seen weather like that that...I say well, a 40 mile trip here may be equal to a 100-mile trip down south (Randall, 26:13).

**F:** Part of the beauty of it was that the weather was, the first couple of days, much like you'd anticipate in the Lower 48 on the 4th of July, just really hot, it was almost [too hot]. Here we are north of the Arctic Circle. And [then] mother nature just gave us a little taste.....don't get too complacent, I can thump you in a minute! And we picked up some wind and some cold weather and it was great. Nice variation (Fred, 13:15).

**K:** Because the climate is what it is here, I mean, on my other trips, comparing it to this here, we were very fortunate in the weather. I mean you can have a terrible situation, the weather is very changeable here...So sometimes you have a good experience like this, you could be lulled into a false sense of security, and having been here before, I know that you need to be very careful when you're out there (Dick, 18:539-543).

**P:** ...but it's always satisfying being out there in bad weather and being able to be completely comfortable and feel safe and feel confident. So that was a neat thing that there was a couple of times, one night setting up the tent in the really strong wind with horizontal rain and stuff. I was sitting out and eating my dinner just smiling. You know sitting out in the rain going "Oh, this ain't too bad!" (Peter, 22:636).

### Mosquitoes

Even mosquitoes were an expected and significant (if not necessarily appreciated) element of many experiences. Visitors perceived them to be characteristic of the arctic, and although they were often surprised by the quantity of mosquitoes, they were equally surprised when they did not encounter any at all.

**B:** Other than that, yeah, I'd say the biggest thing I was unprepared for would be the bugs. I knew they were going to be here, but I had no idea on the quantity (Brad, 5:310).

**M:** And the bugs just added a new, you know, a different element to the whole [experience]. **R:** Yeah, the bugs...**M:** It was humorous in a lot of ways. More, I mean we just had to laugh sometimes at how bad they were instead of .....lose it. Sometimes we lost it. **R:** Yeah. I guess there were places where there were definitely times when they were worse than I expected. **M:** So, the bug aspect was different from other trips (Missy and Randy, 7:280-288).

**J:** The first part of the trip, we were greatly surprised that there were no mosquitoes. Absolutely none. Compared to the Kenai Peninsula and other places we've been in British Columbia. Even by California standards, there were no mosquitoes... We were carrying a mosquito net that we thought we were going to need (Joe, 30:37).

## **Self-Reliance**

Although self-reliance is not directly addressed in the Wilderness Act, it may be regarded as a dimension of “primitive and unconfined recreation.” At GAAR, self-reliance is explicitly recognized as an important value. The general management plan states: “Activities and methods of access that emphasize solitude, *self-reliance*, challenge, discovery, and minimum impact will be encouraged” (NPS 1986, emphasis added). Interview participants almost universally described the necessity or opportunity to practice self-reliance as an important dimension of their experiences. Some of them described “things that can eat you” (bears) as an important quality of wilderness, and risk as an essential element of a wilderness experience. Visitors enjoyed facing and overcoming the challenges associated with travel in rugged, trail-less terrain. Many of them described being extra careful during their trips because they were “on their own” in the case of an accident. Most interview participants held the idea of self-reliance in high regard. However, while some of them took purposeful action to force self-reliance (by not registering or not carrying a means of communication), others sought ways to mitigate the risks of wilderness travel. In a similar vein, some visitors intended their trips to be ascetic, physically demanding affairs, while others “planned for comfort.” More often than not, visitors sought to balance these extremes by weighing their ideals of self-reliance against their desires for comfort, convenience, and safety.

## **Far from help**

Most interview participants were acutely aware of their distance from help and the necessity of being responsible for their personal and group safety. Some of them intentionally planned their trips and their equipment to magnify their physical or

psychological distance from help, while others cited age or responsibility to friends and family as reasons for taking extra precautions that limited their self-reliance. Also, some visitors cited distance from help as an important quality of a wilderness experience.

T: ...If something had happened out there it would have been literally at least a week, and you would have had to hike yourself out. Like if somebody got seriously hurt, you would have walked yourself out or you'd have died, that's that (Tammy, 30:591).

H: ...Just knowing that you're out there a long ways from anything—a road or if you should get hurt or have some kind of illness or sickness...So, you know, I think that brings an extra caution to it that you have to be aware and be sensible in your choices and your route finding and not take risks (Harvey, 27:119-121).

R: So, in a way, it's kind of nice that you really are left to your own resources. And that you don't, I mean Park Service rescues are in the news all over the place, especially now with cell phones. So we really do have to come up here and know you are depending on your own resources and there are not readily available rescues here. I think that's really key to a true wilderness experience (Reba, 6:539).

J: And we inflict a little bit of that upon ourselves because we choose not to bring means of communication. Like for some people who come up here and they bring iridium phones or whatever...We don't bring a GPS. We don't bring an iridium phone or anything like that to make it more of a wilderness experience than it can otherwise be (Jenna, 23:561).

J: So that's when I started thinking about the radio thing. Um...which I'd never had before because that's .....that's a concession almost. Um... because part of being out in the wilderness is being self-reliant to the point if, like, something happens, you gotta deal with it. Um... and maybe that's the age thing beginning to creep in, where you realize that "Well, you know, something could happen and you know we're pretty self-reliant; however, if something really ugly happened, it sure would be nice to get on a radio and within like 24 hours get some help in." (Jeff, 12:97).

R: On the one hand, you like to be free. It's like [Ellen] says, we didn't really... I didn't really realize those satellite phones were down to this level now that a guy could pack one. I didn't know what the hell the deal was with them...Well, maybe [since] it's just the two of us, maybe we should have one. Oh hell, then you're checking your e-mail or something... you're checking your recorder, you know. E: But you wouldn't! R: Yeah. You know all of a sudden you got this thing that can just keep you in contact, you know with your message box, e-mail, or your message machine and stuff. So I think all that kind of takes away (Randall and Ellen, 26:293-297).

## Risk

The perception of risk was an important element of self-reliance. Aside from being far from help in case of an accident, several interview participants perceived a more immediate threat from wildlife. Some visitors suggested that the opportunity to experience risk has been limited by modern society and can now only be found in a few wilderness places like GAAR.

M: I think [the Park] deserves respect. It's really easy to get yourself in a bad situation up here (Mark, 3:99).

M: Um... yeah. We had camped in grizzly country before, but I think this was just different because we felt this was the most remote Park we've ever been in, so, for me, it was just always a little bit more in the back of my mind, that sort of fear of grizzlies (Missy, 7:296).

J: And to me that is one of the fundamental characteristics of a wilderness experience...to be worried about wildlife. I mean not worried in a negative way...cautious, aware of, you know, camping in bear country is not for everybody (Jeff, 12:93).

G: To me, it's like we gotten to be this culture of just safety obsession, where we take the zest of life out of things because we want to be guaranteed that it's not going to be too dangerous...God, don't let it happen in this park. Let people go out there and fry if they need to (Gary, 15:331).

## Navigating

The term navigating is used here to mean both the act of pinpointing one's location and of finding the way to a destination. For some visitors, being unsure of their location and traveling cross-country, without the benefit of trails or trail maps, was a positive experience that enhanced the feeling of self-reliance. As illustrated in the second excerpt below, other visitors expressed a desire to be able to pinpoint their location precisely. Whereas the use of communications technology was viewed negatively by many interview participants, this group of visitors viewed navigation aids like GPS units more favorably. For both types of visitors, navigation was an important experiential

dimension, but the first type enjoyed being uncertain while the second preferred more certainty. The fourth excerpt below shows the relationship between navigating and the previously described theme of timelessness. While Fred would have preferred not to use a map at all, the need to complete his trip on time and return to work led his group to use a map to carefully chart their progress. In this way, outside pressures constrained both the experience of timelessness, and the opportunity for a positive kind of uncertainty associated with navigating.

**K:** You're on your own for navigation, and that's nice... And the absence of any points of reference other than the relief that you could spot on your map is interesting. Like in most places we go there's at least a trail system or well-known routes. Up here, there are no well-known routes. Once you get up in those hills, you're just going.... that is, to me, almost a definitive part of the experience (Keith, 29:295).

**J:** I think if I were going to do that again, I would take the GPS. **L:** We've never used the GPS, but it certainly would be useful. **J:** You just can't see far enough and there's so many, and it's really is very difficult....**L:** I mean, you can probably rent them... But he kept saying "Oh, GPS would be so handy." **J:** ... I don't know how good they are, but the guide down there in Fairbanks said you can get them [accurate] within 20 feet of where you are. (Jonathan and Liz, 11:312-334).

**R:** We ran into a guy out there with a GPS and that's pretty neat. **T:** You can pinpoint where you're at. **R:** Right to where you're going! (Rick and Tim, 24:29-33).

**F:** We wanted to make maximum use out of our time. The map enabled us to do this, but I had mixed feelings about a map. I just as soon not have a map out there, but when you have contemporary pressures like....getting back [to work] Monday, it was helpful (Fred, 13:31-35).

### Physical challenge/facing adversity

Many respondents, especially those who participated in hiking trips, described their experiences as very physically demanding. The combined challenges of route-finding, rugged terrain, and changeable weather made for exhausting travel. However, facing and overcoming adversity often led to powerful feelings of accomplishment. Several visitors described these feelings as the best parts of their trips. In comparison, visitors who

participated in river floating sometimes seemed disappointed at the ease of their trips.

For these visitors, *lack of physical challenge or adversity* was a prominent theme.

R: This trip was...extreme. M: The most physically challenging, ever. R: I felt...that we probably both pushed pretty close to our ability levels in terms of endurance and in some places, skill (Randy and Missy, hikers, 7:268-278).

S: I thought the best thing about the trip was that we successfully accomplished something that pushed us all to our limits...And found our limits, I would say, and approached them and pushed ourselves a little beyond. And the deep personal satisfaction in doing that in the most remote, pristine wilderness out there, is something I don't anybody is going to forget any time soon (Steve, hiker, 30:583).

R: I think the best part for me was I think assuming you're going into a wilderness area and you're by yourself, although it was a large group of 7, that we had to kind of rely on ourselves and fix things. And we were out in the weather and we had backup stuff. We had an emergency phone. We had a satellite phone. And we had first aid equipment. It was well thought of as far as materials that we brought. But still, we had to kind of hang together and work out problems and yet we enjoyed the outdoors and, that, I think probably was the best part, all in all (Rob, hiker, 32:199).

R: We did it in 8 days, we figured we could do it 7, but 8 was just a comfortable paddle. V: We just floated we didn't paddle. R: We didn't work hard. E:...Fell asleep a few times. K: We had to tie ourselves in because you'd fall over if you weren't careful! (Ray, Dave, Edward, and Dick, floaters, 18:23-31).

E: We had fantastic weather. The weather was unbelievable. And everything went really, really well, except for the one deflation of the boat. Um....so, and in a way sometimes it feels like.....sometimes I almost felt like the good weather was both a blessing and a curse just because I find that usually on a trip when you encounter hard conditions, often it sort of brings out the best in people. And sometimes when people aren't challenged as much as they could be, they, you know, it kind of um.....I think there's less of a cohesion that happens in a group, you know (Eddy, floater, 8:220).

## **Wildness**

Whereas naturalness (illustrated in the next section) was most often described in terms of scenery and other tangible qualities, the elements of wildness were described by interview participants as intangible feelings or psychological states. According to GAAR visitors, an important element of wildness is uncertainty. Many visitors' experiences



were characterized by a high degree of uncertainty relative to weather, destinations, route-finding, and wildlife. Uncertainty forced some visitors to change plans at the last minute and it provided ample opportunities for “feeling like an explorer” as well. Visitors generally felt that they were free to pursue activities and change plans as they wished, and they often contrasted their unrestricted experiences in GAAR with experiences in places that have more visitor-use regulations. However, they also indicated a preference for some regulations to protect both visitors and natural resources. In addition, a significant proportion of visitors found that their freedom to make travel choices was heavily influenced by air-taxi operators and the necessity of arriving on-time at predetermined pick-up locations. A number of visitors equated wildness with “feeling like the first person” in an area, although they were careful to acknowledge that actually being the first person in an area was unlikely. Wildlife was also suggested as an indirect indicator of wildness; visitors interpreted some types of wildlife interactions as proof that few other people had gone before them.

#### Uncertainty/limited information

As illustrated in the first two excerpts below, the quality of wildness was frequently linked to uncertainty about how the events of a trip would unfold. Many visitors described the need to be flexible when planning their trips because of the unpredictable nature of the weather, or uncertainty regarding their destinations or travel routes. Some interview participants reported that they struggled to find information about GAAR in advance of their visits. The limited availability of information is partially the result of a purposeful Park policy to maintain opportunities for discovery, which is outlined in the general management plan (GMP).

It is recognized that information dispensed without special care could also interfere with visitors' opportunities for discovery...[therefore] a single, concise package of key information will be provided, but beyond that, visitors will be encouraged to rely on themselves..." (NPS 1986, p.v).

Although some visitors were frustrated by their struggles to gather Park information and resulting feelings of uncertainty, those same visitors often enjoyed feeling like "explorers" or "pioneers." In these cases, the GMP guidelines seemed to have the intended affect on visitor experiences. However, as illustrated in the fifth excerpt below, there was also a negative element of uncertainty regarding the NPS' motives for limiting information, prompting one visitor to call for a more forthright approach by managers.

I: So if you were going to describe this area to somebody who hadn't been here before, how would you describe it? M: ... I'd just explain it as what it is. It's actually wilderness. I: Why is it *actually* wilderness? M: I don't know. It's wild. You never know what's going to happen up here (Mark, 3: 109-115).

G: You know, it's like to me...that's the idea of wilderness. You go because you could be comfortable, you can not be comfortable, you can have a hair-raising experience, you can have a boring time. But it's not so controlled, like our daily lives in Prescott or Fairbanks or wherever. There's an unknown ....there's a creativity to it... (Gary, 15:179).

K: ...Gates of the Arctic was very hard to find information on, especially in New York, and we said, "Well, we'll just go to Fairbanks and we'll figure it out." So we got to Fairbanks and it was still kind of hard (Kelly, 19:489).

S: It was challenging trying to find route information...J: That added though, to the adventure of the trip...we all had a smug feeling like we were exploring... T: Yeah, it kind of goes both ways. Like on the one hand, you want to gather all the information you can...and know what you're dealing with, ...but that's also sort of the nature of the Park that you're playing explorer...D: Yeah, I definitely felt like a pioneer at some points (Steve, Joe, Tammy, and Dylan, 30:803-813).

W: In the spirit of keeping in Gates of the Arctic wilderness, it's really difficult to get good information about it. No one's going to say, "Oh, this is a good route." They're going to say I'm going here, what's it like? Then people associated with the Park will sort of grudgingly tell you. I: And how do you all feel about that? S: I would appreciate it if they just said right off the bat, "Look, this is what we're trying to do, so look at the map first then come back with questions." As opposed to sort of skirting around and saying "Well, yeah, you could go somewhere, sure, and here's some maps" (William and Sue, 21:449-453).

One consequence of the NPS limiting information is that visitors tend to concentrate in well-known areas of GAAR. One interview participant suggested that limiting information about alternative destinations amounts to a kind of de facto management.

R: ...the only thing that I think would have been maybe helpful would have been a way to get suggestions for other places to go because Arrigetch was the only place where we could get much information on. So then, maybe that had the opposite affect of what the Park Service wanted. Once our original plans of flying into some of the North Slope lakes kind of fell apart, we were scrambling for a route and this seemed the easiest one to get to. If there had been other descriptions out there, that might have helped (Randy, 7:510).

### Changing plans

This theme is closely linked to uncertainty. In several cases, visitors were forced to make last-minute changes to trips they had been planning for months because of weather conditions or the condition of a landing site. While some visitors were disappointed by the need to change plans, others regarded the spontaneity associated with those changes as a positive element of their experiences.

M: We were going to go to a lake called Cascade...but we got there and they were all frozen over, so the pilot took us down to Amiloyak Lake and landed there (Mandy, 4:17-23).

JO: We could not land on...JE: Hunt Fork Lake. We had too much wind from the north. JO: So we went up to Moss Lake...We couldn't land because of the ice still on the lake. It was frozen...So we decided we would just swing over and get on the North Fork. JE: Yes, we abandoned the John River. I: Were you disappointed? JE: No, we just wanted to be out. [Well], I think we were a little disappointed. JO: I was a little disappointed (John and Jerry, 1: 37-43).

B: On the Nigu float, we didn't even know our take out point until the pilot dropped us off and we just kind of said "Well, let's go here." D: Yeah, we just laid down on the gravel there... B: We didn't know until the very last second. I: And you feel that was a positive thing? D: Sure (Brad and Dan, 16:594-598).

## Freedom

Freedom was a common theme across visitors' experience narratives, with a range of different meanings relative to specific contexts. For instance, some visitors referred to "freedom from the clock." That particular meaning is addressed as "timelessness" within the "taste of the arctic" dimension. Here the idea of freedom refers specifically to opportunities to engage in activities and make choices outside of the regulatory confines that are typical of daily life and some kinds of recreational experiences. Interview participants often expressed distaste for regulations and they commented favorably on the lack of regulations at GAAR. Some of them chose to visit GAAR specifically because it lacks the kinds of restrictions that are common in other settings.

**M:** I didn't feel that I was limited at all. **J:** Yeah, I didn't feel at all constrained (Mandy and Jack, 4:501-503).

**S:** Having been in Yellowstone and Olympic National Park, Denali, and then going into a Forest Service area or BLM land you breathe this big sigh of relief and I think it is [because] you're not living inside of a set of rules. You haven't filled out day 1 I'm going here, day 2 I'm going to be camping here. We were able to change our plans [in GAAR]. We didn't have to have a permit hanging off the back of our pack saying we were a registered user of this area. [It felt like] you're in a wilderness versus a very highly regulated place (Sue, 21:811).

**I:** So is it primarily that hassle of getting a hold of a permit that is the drawback to having that kind of system? **D:** I think the drawback in my mind, I don't mind doing the permit and doing the work.....the drawback to us is that you're not perfectly free to do what you want. That's just something that maybe it has to do with being Alaskan or why people move to Alaska or why we're out here in the first place. We're just trying to get away from all that: Having to call up and ask permission. Have a list of rules to go by (Dan, 16:590-592).

Although visitors often expressed a preference for having few regulations, they also viewed regulations as legitimate means for preserving wilderness qualities in the face of population growth and other pressures. Visitors almost always evaluated freedoms in

terms of their costs, and most concluded that having some regulations was better than having none at all. In other words, they viewed regulations as preferable, not just acceptable. Furthermore, contrary to some published wilderness management principles (e.g. Hendee et al. 1990), some visitors suggested that regulations are not any less appropriate in wilderness than in other settings. In the fifth excerpt below, Harvey suggests that the cumulative effect of regulations in everyday life is what can make wilderness regulations objectionable (rather than ideals of freedom that apply specifically to wilderness or wilderness recreation).

**M:** I wouldn't be opposed to it [use of bear-barrels] becoming mandatory, I guess, because it's really for everyone's protection, not just the individuals, but for everyone else who is hiking in there, too. [If a] bear got to their food and they didn't have canisters, then we're all in trouble (Missy, 7:504).

**I:** So, just a moment ago, you suggested maybe having some kind of a regulatory requirement ...that people don't camp in the same place too many days...you wouldn't feel that that imposed on you or your freedom out there? **C:** I think, um, personally, I think it would in some aspect. You know, I hate regulations and rules and stuff....But if I took a moment to think as a rational person, I think I could see that as important...One of the gentleman I met when I used their satellite telephone, he was saying you know we're going to move camp. We've been here for 2 days and tramping down this area. We got 4 people. We're going to move to another spot. I really took that to heart and I thought it's a good idea (Carl, 2:164-172).

**I:** So how would it have influenced your experience if it was a requirement that you go through a back country orientation and fill out a registration form? **D:** I would've been kind of like, "this is kind of stupid."...but then I'd think about it and say, well everybody has to do that. And it's better that the guy that comes in here and thinks he's gonna hike 80 miles and doesn't know a thing about any of this, has at least seen it once before he goes and attempts it. Then it'd make it worth it to sit there through the little lecture or whatnot. **J:** Yeah, it would kind of suck. You'd be like ... I know what I'm doing, that's why I'm here, but if it helps the cause, what's 15 minutes to go through that thing? (Dylan and Joe, 30:797-801).

**S:** I'd much rather have that [a mandatory permit system] impinge on my personal freedom than arrive free to do whatever I want on July 4th and spend it with 400 other people launching at the same time (Shannon, 9:780).

H: It seems to me that there's only so much regulations a person can handle. Whether it be in their town, their community, their city, or a state park, public land...there's regulations everywhere...so when you go into a wilderness and you find yet more regulations that you find irrelevant, that can be frustrating...I: Are you suggesting that a park or wilderness should be more or less regulated than another environment? H: I don't think you can say that. It depends on the context of the park. If you're on the road system, like Denali, vs. this one, where you're not on the road system, and you're basically way more remote, I think your management plans and regulations have to reflect that to a degree (Harvey, 27:163-165).

Interview participants generally only commented on *regulatory* restrictions on their freedom to visit GAAR when and how they choose. However, some participants' comments suggest that private air-taxi services, which are the primary means of accessing GAAR, also play an important role in regulating visitor experiences. In one case, a visitor group chose to finish their trip at the Dalton Highway specifically to avoid having their itinerary dictated by a pre-arranged bush-plane pick-up.

P: And so the day was pretty uneventful. It would have been--it was actually perfect hiking weather. Ideal with the temperature and the overcast, and I was kind of disappointed I wasn't able to hike because I didn't know when exactly I'd be picked up (Peter, 22:63).

C: You're dropped off. You're out there until the plane comes. That could be, well we waited all day yesterday from noon on. He didn't land until about 5:30 or 6:00. We were waiting since noon. That's a long wait. We realized that when they say afternoon they mean AFTER noon. Not 12:30 (Carl, 2:151).

R: We had all these layover days planned but then up there at the top we decided we better just use those...I mean you're in big trouble if you miss your plane. They come and you have to pay them to come again...it's a severe penalty if you're not at your pickup (Randall, 26:67).

K: It's basically the reason ....Well, there were two reasons we came out to the highway. One is because of cost, that way we didn't have to pay for a pickup for the plane. And second, it was more reliable for us because we didn't know how fast we'd hike through the tundra. We heard all these horror stories about how horrible it was and how slow you're going to go...So, because we had so much time and we had variable conditions, we figured if we were heading to the road...[we could] kind of pick our own pace. We don't have to worry about being a certain place for the plane to pick us up. We don't have to worry about weather holding the plane up. And we don't have to pay for it.

### Feeling of being the first person

Many visitors enjoyed feeling like they were the first people in an area. In most cases they explained that they understood others had likely been there before. For them, it was more important to *feel* like the first than to actually be the first visitors to a place. Visitors also enjoyed feeling that they were the only people in a particular region, although they knew that this was an equally unlikely reality. Some participant's responses suggest that wilderness managers should aim to preserve "the illusion of wildness" by maintaining opportunities for visitors to feel like explorers.

R: The fact that we were up there essentially by ourselves made the trip. I think when we got to Crevice Creek and we saw a sign that said Crevice Creek, that was one of our first indications that there'd ever been anybody else up there (Robert 14: 164).

T: You know, it's really feeling like you're the only one there... You may be the first one that's been there; you might not have been, but it feels like it. You can't tell you're not. That's kind of what wild is (Troy, 31:329).

S: This is definitely the wildest trip, the wildest place I've been to since... whenever I went on a couple of rivers in eastern Canada that were sort of unknown rivers at that time back in 1965 or so. And ever since then, everywhere I've been there were signs that it was a trip that people did regularly, there were campsites, there were signs of usage... so this really had that [wild] flavor that you talk about (Scott, 20:426).

T: I just liked that we didn't have to worry about running into other people. When we did stay at that knoll, I would have been very disappointed if there was another group of people that were there or on the next knoll down. I liked feeling that we were all alone in the wild, dependent on ourselves. I liked that. I knew that it wasn't completely true, but it was a nice feeling (Tim, 5:234).

J: You had the illusion, which is the most wonderful thing. That feeling that you were the first person ever there... maybe nobody had climbed that mountain before, and maybe they have. Just the illusion that perhaps they hadn't ever been there was great (Jerry, 1:711-715).

### Interaction with wildlife

The presence of wildlife that was clearly not habituated to, nor managed by, humans was often described as an indicator of wildness by GAAR visitors. Interview participants

frequently contrasted the behavior of wildlife in GAAR with that of animals in other settings. The context for viewing and interacting with wildlife in GAAR further facilitated perceptions of wildness. Wildlife encounters in GAAR reminded some visitors that they were “part of the food chain”, whereas encounters in other settings were likened to viewing animals in the zoo.

R: All our bears seemed to act just like you’d want a bear to do...every one of them seemed to be good, wild bears (Randall, 26:345).

R: You know you can look at bears behind bars in a zoo or something like that, but to see one in the wild chewing on a moose, that’s terrific. That’s the real thing (Rick, 24:341).

I: What made it “wild?” R: Uh.... I think the food chain thing. Um... the fact that it’s largely ...not just largely... almost entirely unaffected by man. And it really is the critters’ Park. It’s not our Park. It’s the critters’ Park. To me, anyway (Rodney 33:69-71).

K: Denali is more of a big zoo, you know...I mean you’re bussed in there and you’re bussed out. It’s like going to the zoo. That’s no fun. So I’d rather see less animals but get a few sightings and then it begins to mean something. But if they’re all over the place, and you see them out of a window— R: It’s not the same—E: We can do that at home in the Sonic Park Zoo (Dick, Ray, and Edward, 18:407-415).

### **Naturalness**

Most interview participants described GAAR as a place where natural qualities dominate. They enjoyed viewing dramatic mountain scenery and wildlife as well. Those that did not see many live animals often described the abundance of tracks, bones, and other signs of animal presence. Visitors saw very little evidence of human influence on the Park environment. Significantly, a number of them explained that they would much rather encounter other people than campsite evidence, litter, or other impacts to naturalness. Interview participants often described naturalness as a sort of bedrock value that should guide visitor behaviors and management decisions. In this sense, naturalness is closely tied to the stewardship dimension.



### Scenic beauty

Not surprisingly, interview participants enjoyed being surrounded by beautiful scenery in GAAR. Traveling in a treeless landscape was a new experience for many of them. Rather than describing small details or intimate settings, they tended to focus on grand vistas, wide-open terrain, and spectacular mountains.

S: The peaks, you know, I haven't been that many places in the world, but of all the mountain places I've been, I've never seen anything as spectacular as that (Sue, 11:236).

R: And gorgeous views. The weather had cleared. You could see, it looked like all the way down to the Chukchi Sea. It was gorgeous. Big and windswept. (Rodney, 33:67).

K: It was also nice, too, because the tundra, there's no trees blocking your view, so all the time, you have this great impressive view of the mountains. We're used to hiking a little trail through the woods and you got to earn the view by getting to the top. That was fun to not have to do that and just to .... it was almost like you had to remind yourself, "Hey, wait a minute, look around me, this is great." It was nice (Kelly, 19:279).

T: But one of the things that's very important for most people to realize is it is the tundra, so it's very, very open... So I think of it, when I see a place like that, is something I need to point out to people. It's like you know if you're used to living in the trees and having...the rare vista. It's not like that. It's very open. You can see a long ways. There's a lot to see. But it's very easy for some people to pass over without actually seeing the details. And the beauty is in the details (Troy, 31:487).

### Wildlife

Wild animals—especially charismatic megafauna like bears, caribou, and moose—are arguably the most widely recognized images of Alaska and the arctic. Some GAAR visitors were amazed to encounter as much wildlife as they did, but a greater proportion of them was disappointed that they did not see more. However, most visitors encountered an abundance of tracks, bones, and scat, which they interpreted as proof that wild animals were all around. In fact, the absence of visible wildlife juxtaposed against clear signs that animals were present was often viewed as especially strong evidence of naturalness.

**P:** I mean, [on] all of my backpacks I've done in 3 years, I've never seen this much wildlife. I mean, big wildlife, you know. ... Grizzly bears were the first time. The wolverine was a first time. The caribou. So, yeah, the wildlife was amazing (Peter, 22:87).

**R:** I was disappointed. I thought we'd see moose, maybe even bear...every place we stopped had tracks, but we never saw the animals themselves (Robert, 14:50-58).

**T:** Found bones and plenty of signs. That was neat to find bones. **B:** There were definitely animals out there and a lot of it [sign] was fresh (Tim and Brad, 5:90).

**J:** You know it was just like so cool to see evidence of the wildlife out there... We didn't get to see them as much ..., it wasn't like Marty Stouffer's "Wild America" all around us, but it was cool to see the evidence that it is like that (Joe, 30:575).

**R:** I was critical at first about not seeing as much wildlife as I envisioned there would be, and then I'm saying to myself "this is why we call it wildlife" and they're probably here all the time but there so sensitive to seeing people...that they disappear into the brush (Ray, 18:405).

#### Little evidence of humans

Whereas the relative absence of other visitors strongly influenced the dimensions "a taste of the arctic" and "self-reliance", it was the absence of visible impacts from visitors that had a greater influence on the naturalness dimension. Many interview participants seemed to view naturalness as a fundamental quality of GAAR which should be protected and preserved at all cost. Some of them expressed support for limiting recreational use of GAAR now or in the future in order to preserve the natural qualities of the Park.

**R:** ...even though we would see occasional other parties out there, I never really saw evidence of other campsites. Never saw any remains of campsites. No fire rings. No nothing (Rodney, 33:77).

**M:** That's one of the things that drew us here was just the lack of any influence. It's just all natural and just the way it has always been, with a few humble signs of people we saw ahead of us. But just the natural aspect of the whole area (Matt, 29:293).

**C:** Seeing another party usually doesn't bother me in the least. Seeing ecological impact is like I don't want to come here anymore...If this is too heavily fished, trampled on, worked over, it's not really a wilderness anymore (Curt, 31:655-669).

**T: I think if use started to rise, I mean like I definitely felt like we were really super conscious about trying to leave no trace. No matter how hard you try, you're going to leave some little trace and this environment regenerates so, so, so slowly, that I think...I assume they kind of keep some track of numbers there, but if the usage rises above a certain point, I think you'd start to really see some permanent effects, negative effects, on the environment. And I think it's better to limit the number of people going into an area than let it get destroyed (Tammy, 30:829).**

**J: You have to start the permit process sooner than later. You really do. You have to take it drainage by drainage. You're talking to a guy that runs a ski area on Forest Service land. I'll tell you, I know about carrying capacity because I've seen how far you can push the needle... You've got to understand the carrying capacity of these watersheds. I have never seen a wolf in my life, but we saw wolf sign, wolf tracks, fairly fresh, and we saw a wolf! How many people can you send up this river drainage that we were in and still keep the wildlife reasonably comfortable with the human activity? (Joe, 1:721).**

Some interview participants suggested that not all impacts to naturalness should be viewed equally; those that occur as the result of well-intentioned human activities are less troublesome than those that occur as the result of purposeful human actions or negligence. This idea is briefly introduced here and more fully explored within the stewardship dimension.

**R: We found a few arrow points. D: Chips. R: Chips, yeah. D: That's litter. It's just very old litter... BR: I found a 30-caliber shell that had been out there a long time. You can tell man's touched it for many thousands of years... D: But you know when you pick up an old 30-cal shell on the Nigu and think, "Well, how did this get here?" there's a better story that goes with that than finding a pampers thrown up on the bank of the Gulkana... I: So it's almost like there's some kind of trash or litter that's ok and there's some kinds that aren't? L: Yeah, things that have a story like a shell or something like that, but RC cola cans and old tents and toilet paper left, those things are not ok... Things of human negligence, those things are not ok (Rick, Dan, Brad, and Linda, 16: 358-386).**

## **Stewardship**

This dimension reflects the deep significance that visiting GAAR held for interview participants. For many of them, a visit to the Park was much more than a temporary recreational engagement; rather, it was indicative of their long-standing commitment to

wild places. Many participants perceived themselves to be members of a small, like-minded community of wilderness advocates. Members of that community are distinguished from the larger domain of “wilderness wannabes” because they endured the time and expense required for a visit to GAAR. Visitors tended to be tolerant of encounters with others like themselves, even to the point of forgiving trash and noise (aircraft) impacts. Interview participants often implied that they and other visitors carry a significant portion of the burden for preserving the wilderness qualities of GAAR. Accordingly, they practiced minimum impact camping techniques and encouraged minimum impact education. They were also willing to forgo personal freedoms in order to protect and preserve the wilderness qualities of GAAR. In general, interview participants felt that NPS managers at GAAR shared similarly strong wilderness stewardship values.

#### Visiting as a statement of values

Due to the expense and hassle of accessing GAAR, many interview participants regarded visiting the Park as a significant statement of personal values. Although few of them expressed a strong commitment or attachment to GAAR in particular, a number of participants expressed strong feelings for classes of places like wild rivers, Alaska, or wilderness; and they felt that their visits to GAAR were indicative of those feelings. Some participants suggested that only a very small proportion of the general population shares their feelings, and that GAAR is therefore unlikely to ever receive heavy visitor pressure.

J: We're not rich and we're not young [but] we did it very nicely...would you rather have your cell phone and your Gucci shoes, or do you want to spend your money on something else? (Joan, 13:748-752).

**D: We don't own a second home and we don't have our own airplane. We don't have a motorboat; we don't have any of that. We do take our river trips (Dan, 16:674).**

**M: Yeah, so I sold my new Toyota truck and I drive a really old car now so that I would have the money to come to Alaska (Mandy, 15:433).**

**W: There's a lot of wannabes, I'm sure. But I think the people that actually do it [visit GAAR] are a slim minority (William, 13:281).**

**G: I don't think it's ever going to be a big issue, about numbers of people...I don't think they'll come in a lot greater numbers...I don't think you've got to worry about the private parties like us. You know, on our own initiative figure out the trip we want to do and call the right people and go there and do it (Gary, 15:145).**

### **Perception that visitors share similar values**

In addition to limiting the absolute number of visitors, difficult Park access may also limit the *kind* of people who visit. As illustrated by the two preceding interview excerpts, interview participants often felt that other GAAR visitors are a unique segment of the population. They suggested that people lacking appropriate wilderness ethics are unlikely to put up with the current system of difficult access at GAAR (therefore, current visitors are assumed to share similar values). Although some participants worried about charges that GAAR is managed for an elite (wealthy) few, they still tended to favor limiting access to like-minded visitors as the best means of preserving the Park's qualities. In one interview, the participants were so sure of other visitors' values that they interpreted litter as an accidental oversight by well-intentioned hikers.

**L: I think keeping things inaccessible [is the best way]. You talk about equality and only the rich people can afford it and that kind of thing, but I think [that] you don't have to have wheelchair accessibility to the top of Mt. McKinley or in Mt. Everest. I think inaccessibility is going to preserve that area. And people are still going to get to it. I mean all the people who are flying in the Lower 48 are choosing to spend their money going to Las Vegas or having three T.V.s in their home or whatever. They can get there if they want to get there. But to keep it like it should be, keep it inaccessible...Only the people who really want to go and usually are educated to that environment are going to go there...How many times has it been proven, make it accessible and then here comes the**

blight. Because when people grow lazy and can get there without much effort, they bring along with them the attitudes that don't preserve that area (16: 672-676).

C: It'd just be like if you could fly in there, like you could just fly in to Chimney Lake, party for a weekend, and get flown back out... And when you go on a trip like that you're a lot less concerned about your impact. You're just there for a short time... J: It's kind of like if you have to hike in there, if you have to work to get in there, then naturally the people that are lazy aren't going to pack their crap in for 14 days... the average person is not going to take that challenge. That's a good way to limit the impact we have on this place (Cal and Joe, 30:765-769).

S: Most folks aren't going up there just to leave their trash. You don't make all that effort to get up there to do that... so it's just something that was an oversight, fell out of a pocket, fell out of a bag, wind blowing hard and caught it... A: I have to think it was an accident. I just can't see going to the effort of getting there and still having a mind-set that you leave your trash (Sheila and Amy, 23:429-439).

In some cases, interview participants did not mind encountering other visitors specifically because they felt that they shared values or other similarities. Particularly in the case of airplane overflights, participants were likely to feel that planes full of "people like them" were less obtrusive than others. This finding may be especially important for NPS managers at GAAR who are concerned about the impacts of airplanes on visitors' experiences.

H: You might run into another backpacking party, but so what? They're doing the same thing you are... I mean we're sharing, basically. So I can't say that they're taking away from me (Harvey, 27:133).

I: How'd you feel about seeing those [airplanes]? R: They're a bummer. I: They're a bummer? R: Yeah. You know. H: But at the same time it was like, while I had not enjoyed seeing them, we had to use them ourselves, so it's kind of-- R: That's how people like ourselves access the area. H: Yeah... You can't really be too hard on the others because they're doing the same thing that you are (Reba and Harold, 6:325-337).

M: Well, it was kind of nice knowing that the few planes that did go over were more people such as ourselves. It wasn't just day tours, people paying to go fly in a plane and go look. It wasn't just sightseeing. It was people mainly doing the same thing we were doing. I: So, you would have felt differently about them if it had been flightseers? M: Yeah, that's annoying. K: Yeah. No question. M: It would have taken away from the whole experience (Matt and Keith, 29: 319-327).

J: But to me, a jet flying overhead...that's much more of a connection to the industrialized world than a bush plane. A guy flying a bush plane is flying people like me around. You know, they're either hunting or fishing or watching wildlife, just hanging out and grooving on the wilderness...And a jet is tied into the whole industrial megacommercial complex of the world (Jeff, 12:69).

### Preserving wilderness qualities

Concerns about impacts to the wilderness qualities of GAAR form the heart of the stewardship dimension. As illustrated above, some interview participants did suggest that the difficult access and absence of facilities at GAAR would be sufficient to limit visitor use indefinitely. However, most participants seemed to believe that increased use and other changes are inevitable, and that GAAR will therefore incur significant impacts in the absence of purposeful efforts to prevent them. Accordingly, many interview participants practiced and encouraged the practice of minimum impact camping techniques—even expressing concern about leaving footprints behind. Most participants were well-versed in minimum impact techniques, but some were unsure about the best practices for arctic settings. A number of participants suggested that visitor registration serves an important educational function in this regard, and that mandatory registration might therefore be warranted.

S: ...As word gets out about how gorgeous it is up here, I can see--I know it's more remote than the Grand Canyon and it [requires] a great deal of time and preparation and expense to come up here, but still I could see it getting kind of overrun. It's just too beautiful. (Sue, 11:278).

J: I mean Alaska has got more wilderness than the rest of America combined. Wilderness is a finite, scarce commodity that every year gets more and more attention from people who are looking for places to go. Econ 101: scarce resources, increased demand, you know, it's going to happen. More and more people are going to come to the same set number of acres that we've set aside for these kinds of things... And wilderness is a hot commodity. And [in] places like Gates of the Arctic people are going to, I mean, they're coming now. And they're going to continue to come (Jeff, 12:227).

**M:** Leave things the way you found them...I think that's very important...we packed out our trash, we used a stove, we never had a campfire. **R:** If a good rain comes along to cover our footprints, you won't know we've been there (Margaret and Robert, 14:249-251).

**G:** I even hate making footprints in mudbanks and stuff...Because I've had so many experiences here where you just get the sense nobody else has ever been here. Maybe I'm just a wilderness snob where I like that feeling and it's not really a possible thing in this world anymore. But I think you can be attentive to other people's experience. I think it's important for me to try to leave them what you'd want for yourself (Gary, 15:397).

**E:** This is such a different type of climate, and the sensitive tundra...we didn't know quite what to do with some of those [minimum impact] kinds of things (Ellen, 26:275).

**K:** Out here, I...was specifically looking for how to, what's the least impact camping we can do because I've never dealt with tundra and all I know about arctic alpine vegetation is that it's fragile. And it takes a long time to grow, so I wanted to know like what was the stuff you should stay away from. If we hadn't sought that out, we would have camped on little lichens for like 3 days and not know any better. Um... so that's why I think it's a good idea. And that's maybe if .....it's not maybe a big deal now because it's not very highly used, but if it ever becomes highly used, I think it's important. **I:** Important that there's a mandatory kind of registration? **K:** Yeah, I don't know, I really liked... The system they had at Glacier Bay I thought was so cool, just to like say "Okay, if you want to go there, you have to have a permit, you got to learn this, you have to at least be exposed to this information" (Kelly, 19:595-599).

In addition to seeking ways to mitigate visitor impacts, some interview participants advocated outright restrictions on the number of visitors allowed to access GAAR. As noted previously, participants frequently identified the unregulated nature of GAAR as a unique and attractive quality of the Park. However, they did not suggest that freedom from regulation is an essential element of wilderness or wilderness experiences. In fact, some visitors' implied that restrictions are warranted at GAAR precisely because it is a wilderness. No participants suggested that preservation of unrestricted access or unregulated experiences should take precedence over protection of the Park's other resources. In other words, interview participants universally valued preservation of



wilderness conditions such as remoteness and naturalness over the opportunity to freely access and enjoy those conditions.

R: This is the last place in the United States, if not, in close to the entire world, where there is true isolated wilderness. There are no roads in this park. There are no towns, with the exception of that one Eskimo village up in the northeast side, Anaktuvuk Pass, there are no established settlements. There is nothing but mountains, streams, hills and forests and tundra and wild animals. There has to be some bastion that is preserved like this. And if it means putting a limit on the number of people that come through here at any given time, I'm all for it (Rob, 32:673).

R: So I would say if the choice.....if I was the one voting and my choice was either just let how ever many people want to go in go in and do whatever they want and wherever they want or have some kind of permit system or something like that, I would pick the permit system (Ray, 11:268).

G: Okay, but here the thing that you're coming for is the wilderness. And wilderness, by definition, has to be wild. And so if it isn't wild, it isn't wilderness. I guess that's kind of why you can't just develop it or why you have to limit access. If you don't, then you destroy the thing that it's named for. It's main attraction. It's wild country. There's nothing there. There's no one there (Gwen, 20:424).

#### Evidence of good management

Most interview participants reported favorable impressions of managers and management activities at GAAR. They felt that managers were people with strong wilderness values, like themselves, and they generally expressed the belief that the NPS is a good steward of the Park.

J: If I never get out in it again in my life, I know it's being well cared for by smart people that have passions (Jill, 13:1046).

R: Most of the park rangers...they're environmentalists for the most part. We're environmentalists. We'd like to keep it wild and all that kind of stuff. I think they do too. So I think they're the good guys (Rick, 24:363).

S: They did the ranger talk, even though these guys are rangers they still did the talk, which to me had a lot of impact. I think it's pretty meaningful that they take their jobs that seriously...that leaves a pretty good impression that there's good management; that the Park Service is putting people out there that really care about the parks...(Shannon, 9:694).

Most visitors enjoyed the “low-key” management presence at GAAR. However, in a few cases, they indicated that they would like to see more evidence of active stewardship by the Park Service. Visitors in this category interpreted regulations as a positive sign of stewardship commitment, and the lack of regulations at GAAR as a potential indicator of insufficient stewardship.

C: I want to see what I’m protecting too. I give a lot of money to a lot of organizations that protect wilderness. I want to see where my money is going. I want to see where my tax dollars are going and I want to make sure that this is here...I want to make sure it’s here for future generations (Carl, 2:168).

P: I don’t think this was the first park that I went to that it [registering] wasn’t mandatory, but I kind of think it should be. So that...you can just keep track of the use and the areas that are being used and how it’s being used (Peter, 22:153).

T: ...Most places we’ve ended up going I’ve noticed the Park Service at least keeps track of how many people go in or out as a minimum...that was not apparent here...It was unclear to me whether it was well enough watched over (Troy, 31:551).

### **Summary and Implications for Further Analysis**

In this chapter, I have illustrated five dimensions—A Taste of the Arctic, Self-Reliance, Wildness, Naturalness, and Stewardship—that emerged from the nomothetic analysis of GAAR visitors’ experience narratives. These results address one objective of my study: to characterize the nature of wilderness experiences as described by visitors themselves. Alone, they may be useful to GAAR staff members who are charged with preserving experiential opportunities in the Park. For instance, managers may be surprised to find that solitude—a guiding value for traditional wilderness management—was not a major theme in visitors’ narratives. Seeing few other people was important, but mostly as an influence on other themes such as self-reliance. In fact, some visitors particularly enjoyed their encounters with other people in the Park. On the other hand,

they expressed a powerful distaste for campsite impacts and other indications of what they interpreted as human negligence. It may also be useful to know that visitors value GAAR as a unique component of the National Park and National Wilderness Preservation Systems. They suggested that GAAR is “more” of a wilderness than other places because of its remote location, large size, and lack of development. In addition, they described the combination of unique elements related to GAAR’s northern latitude as a significant value and an important attraction of the Park.

These findings can help provide direction and support for stewardship activities. GAAR managers may find comfort in the knowledge that visitors described their experiences in terms that reflect some of the central themes from the Wilderness Act and the current Park plan. However, they should also note the complexities that are evident within visitors’ descriptions. Indeed, the broader significance and value of these results may only be realized by further investigating the tensions within the common themes described by interview participants.

GAAR visitors’ experience narratives reflect a sophisticated and context-specific understanding of some of the broad cultural themes associated with wilderness. For instance, visitors described GAAR as a genuine wilderness in part because it is far removed from population centers and lacks evidence of human use, yet they recognized and appreciated the human history of the arctic (evident in the Taste of the Arctic dimension). They valued feeling like explorers, but they acknowledged that their perceptions of being the first visitors might be illusions (Wildness). They appreciated having personal freedom, but they also felt a strong responsibility to preserve natural conditions and experience opportunities for themselves and others (Stewardship). In

short, GAAR visitors did not present a simplistic, unified, or uncritical perspective on wilderness; instead, they described a range of different and sometimes countervailing wilderness meanings.

Combinations of countervailing meanings such as freedom/stewardship that are specific to GAAR visitors' experience narratives reflect the broader social dialogue surrounding wilderness management and the underlying tension between freedom and regulation. Likewise, meanings related to "being the first person", human history, and visitor use reflect the broader dialogue surrounding the presence of people in wilderness and the underlying tension between ideals of wilderness purity and the reality of wilderness use.

The tensions between these different meanings represent important sites for further understanding how visitors interpreted their experiences, and for understanding larger cultural traditions of meaning associated with wilderness. I use "site" here to indicate a kind of narrative arena where multiple meanings are revealed and negotiated. In chapter 3, I described a theoretical perspective (Giddens' Theory of Structuration) and related concepts (strategic conduct and critical self-reflection) that are useful for understanding how visitors draw on multiple meanings to negotiate tensions and construct their experiences. In the remainder of this chapter, I briefly review these items and their implications for further analysis of visitors' experience narratives.

According to Giddens' Theory of Structuration, society is the product of the fundamental tension between individual agency and social structure. This tension is irreducible and irresolvable because agency and structure are regarded as different sides of the same coin. That is, structures are nothing more than the enduring effects of

individual agency. Structures may limit or constrain agency, but at the same time they are the “scaffolding” that make agency possible. For my project, the “structures” of interest are the cultural meanings and associated management practices relevant to wilderness. According to Giddens, the Theory of Structuration draws attention to the ways that people negotiate social structures as one of the most important kinds of social inquiry. Giddens calls this process of negotiation, “strategic conduct.”

Strategic conduct refers to the ways that people appropriate, combine, or juxtapose meanings to situate themselves in social life and to address tensions or contradictions that they perceive in society. Strategic conduct is made possible by individuals’ sophisticated understandings of their social worlds. Giddens argues that all individuals are “knowledgeable agents” who must have a sophisticated understanding of society just to engage in social life. This understanding takes the form of practical (or tacit) knowledge, and discursive knowledge (which is “what people know and know they know”). Most social action is routine and guided by practical knowledge, but through “critical self-reflection” individuals are capable of reflecting on their practical knowledge and drawing elements of it into the discursive domain.

The Theory of Structuration and the concepts of strategic conduct and critical self-reflection offer a framework for understanding the relationship between individual wilderness visitors and the constellation of meanings relevant to wilderness. According to structuration theory, wilderness visitors are intrinsically implicated in constructing and re-constructing the meanings of wilderness. This is significant because it means that visitors are not mere receptacles for receiving established or dominant meanings of wilderness; rather they are active participants in enacting, affirming, resisting, and

transforming those meanings. Through critical self-reflection, individuals may perceive contradictions or tensions within meanings and management practices relevant to wilderness, and through strategic conduct they may negotiate or manipulate those tensions to accommodate their current situations.

The Theory of Structuration draws attention to tensions in social relations and social structures as an important area of inquiry, and the concept of strategic conduct provides a means for understanding how people negotiate those tensions. An investigation of wilderness experiences informed by these concepts would focus on how individuals reflect on and use meanings of wilderness to define themselves and negotiate tensions (and challenge or reinforce certain meanings in the process). The analysis I present in chapter 6 is both motivated and informed by these concepts.

## **CHAPTER 6: RESULTS—TENSIONS WITHIN VISITORS' EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES**

### **Overview**

In this chapter, I address study objectives 2 and 3: Understanding how wilderness visitors negotiate the range of culturally available meanings to reconstruct their personal experiences and interpret wilderness management practices. In chapter 5, I illustrated the meanings that emerged from the nomothetic analysis of visitors' experience narratives. The purpose of this chapter is to employ a more idiographic approach to illustrate how some interview participants combined and juxtaposed those meanings to describe wilderness and to situate themselves and their experiences in the broad context of social life. This idiographic approach necessitates the presentation of fewer cases in order to keep the chapter manageable. Therefore, only a subset of the interviews that were analyzed is discussed here.

The results of this analysis challenge the idea that there is a coherent and robust constellation of meanings that is uniformly influential on wilderness visitors [e.g. "the received idea of wilderness" (Callicott and Nelson 1998)]. Although GAAR visitors did express common themes that reflect some of the central ideas from the Wilderness Act and wilderness literature, they did not always express those themes in an un-critical fashion. That is, they sometimes recognized tensions or contradictions between established meanings of wilderness and the concrete conditions they encountered during their visits; and, to address these tensions, they drew on meanings of nature and society in ways that implicitly challenged some traditional perspectives on wilderness and wilderness management. As noted in the previous chapter, interview participants

described wilderness as a place absent of people, but they also recognized and appreciated the past and present human use and occupation of GAAR. In addition, they highly valued personal freedom and open access, but they simultaneously supported restrictions on those freedoms for a variety of purposes.

In this chapter, these broad tensions serve as a framework for illustrating a series of countervailing meanings and the variety of ways that visitors engaged in critical reflection and strategic conduct to negotiate among them. In the first section, I focus on the complexities and tensions inherent in the ways that interview participants interpreted the presence of people in the wilderness. The second section is organized similarly, but the focus is shifted to the ways that participants interpreted existing and potential wilderness management practices. In the third and final section, I summarize key findings to prepare the way for a discussion of the implications of this research in chapter seven.

### **People in the Wilderness**

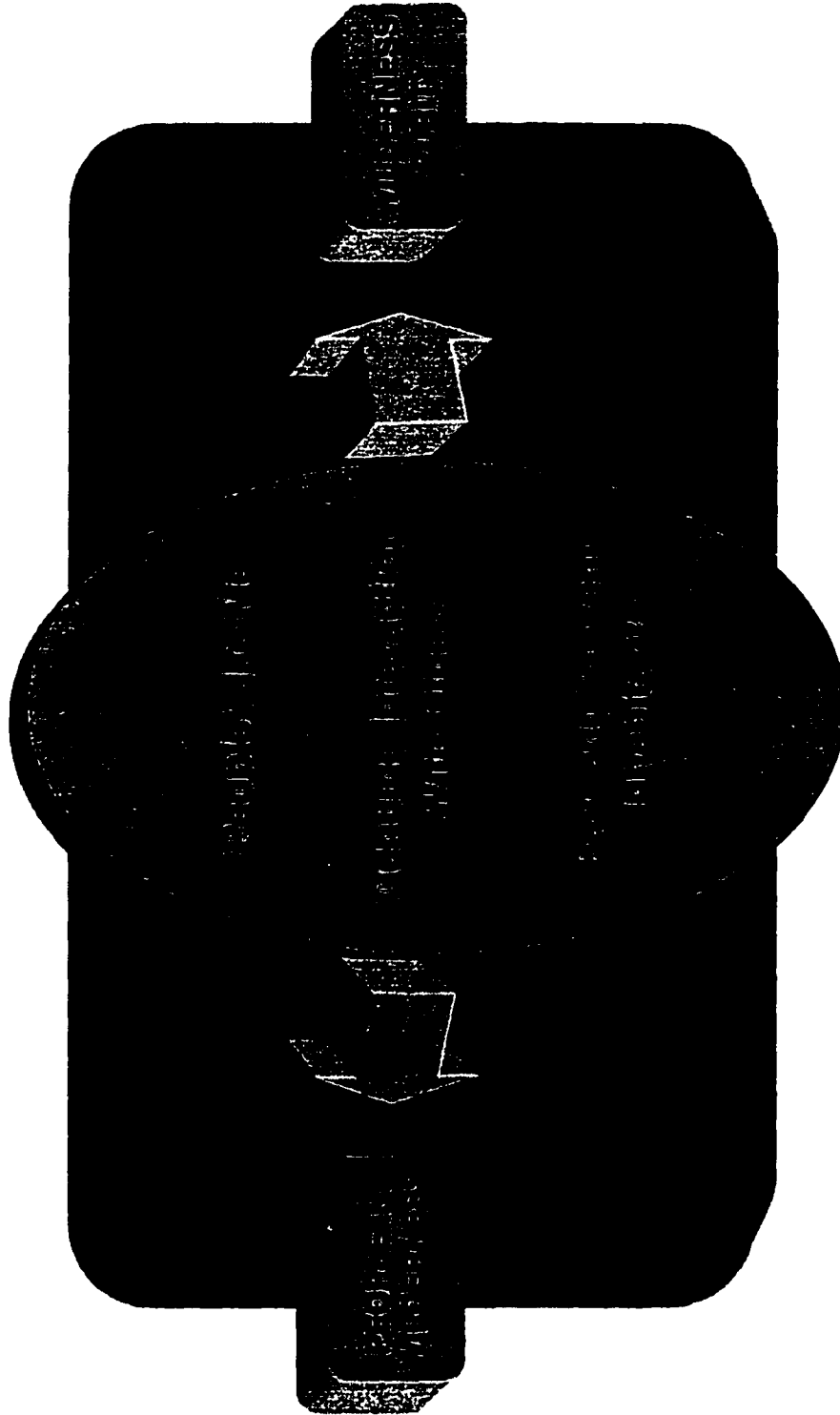
A fundamental tenet of the institutional (i.e. The Wilderness Act) view of wilderness is that it is a place largely absent of people or signs of people. Accordingly, wilderness is often managed to optimize opportunities for solitude and minimize the impacts of human use. It logically follows that the ideal wilderness experience involves seeing no other people, and the ideal wilderness receives no visitation at all. The basic assumption in this argument is that humans and their activities are fundamentally unnatural, so that human presence always reduces wilderness purity. Cronon (1996) identifies this as the central paradox of the wilderness idea: if humans are the antithesis of natural, and wilderness is



inevitably diminished by human presence, then the best approach to preservation is to eliminate people altogether. The notion that wilderness encourages this kind of hopeless human/nature dichotomy in the minds of the general public is a pillar of the modern wilderness critique.

In talking about their experiences, GAAR visitors frequently described wilderness as a place where people are not, and they expressed a preference for seeing few or no other people during their trips. However, they did not always regard other people as negative influences on their experiences or the purity of the wilderness. In fact, they sometimes described other people as integral components of wilderness or as positive elements of their visits.

In constructing the meaning of their experiences, GAAR visitors had to negotiate the tension between meanings of wilderness purity and evidence of past and present human use, as well as their own presence in the wilderness. Figure 4 shows the primary sites where this basic tension was addressed. Once again, I use the term “site” here to suggest a kind of narrative arena where tensions relevant to people in wilderness are revealed and negotiated. For example, some interview participants implicitly justified their own presence in wilderness based on their relationship to the environment and their past experience as wilderness visitors. These participants maintained the view that humans generally diminish wilderness, but they suggested that people like themselves were more acceptable than others who did not share similar skills and values. A secondary tension inherent in this “people like me” narrative is that, while these visitors preferred not to see others in the wilderness, their personal identities as the “right” kind of wilderness users were constructed in part through contrasts with other visitors whom they encountered.



**Figure 4.** Narrative sites where tensions relevant to the presence of people in wilderness are negotiated

Narratives of positive encounters with others constitute the second primary site where tensions relevant to people in the wilderness were negotiated. Rather than differentiating themselves from others, some visitors celebrated their similarities. They suggested that the un-peopled wilderness environment facilitates genuine interaction among strangers. In other words, they felt that wilderness should be free of people, but they also described it as a good setting for encountering others.

The third narrative site where tensions were negotiated involves interview participants' comments regarding past and present wilderness inhabitants (i.e. indigenous Alaska Natives). Some participants acknowledged that what they perceived as wilderness was "just home" to others. Participants also expressed a romantic view in which indigenous people were portrayed as essentially natural, in contrast to modern industrialized people who are not. This perspective allowed them to regard GAAR as a pristine wilderness while acknowledging historical human use. However, this romantic interpretation proved problematic for a few participants when they encountered evidence of modern indigenous residents that challenged their ideals.

It is important to note that negotiation of tensions does not imply resolution. According to Giddens, tensions, contradictions, and ambiguity are pervasive and inherent in society (1984, 1991; Kuentzel 2000). Often, the best that individuals can do is create a temporary space where they have a sense of comfort and coherency (Kuentzel 2000). This kind of ambiguity is disconcerting to me as a researcher, but it is evident in GAAR visitors' experience narratives. Frequently, visitors recognized and negotiated tensions, but did not come to any firm conclusions about how to resolve them.

## People like me

When describing their GAAR experiences, interview participants inevitably had to address the consequences of their own presence in the wilderness. This represents a pervasive tension inherent in the interviews conducted for this study. How do wilderness enthusiasts reconcile images of un-peopled wilderness with their own activities? One strategy was for them to suggest that they belonged in wilderness, particularly a place like GAAR, because they possessed relatively unique wilderness perspectives and underlying values. In the stewardship section of chapter 5, I used excerpts from several interviews to illustrate GAAR visitors' perceptions of themselves and others in terms of wilderness values. Here, I use excerpts from a single interview (Jeff) to provide a more detailed illustration of the process of constructing those perceptions. Interview participants frequently suggested that their encounters with others were mediated by perceptions of similarity or difference. Therefore, although Jeff is a single case, he may be considered representative of the process by which visitors determined mutual similarities and differences.

In the first excerpt below, Jeff suggests that he and his traveling companions interpret wilderness differently than most people.

Of course, I think my wilderness experience is probably different than a lot of people, particularly those who don't come from here. When they come up from the lower 48 and drive down Turnagain Arm out of Anchorage, it is a wilderness experience to many of them. So it's all relative... I mean this [the Noatak River] can provide an incredible wilderness experience beyond any of their wildest expectations. And then there are other people, like us. We never wanted to go to the Noatak because it was too damn crowded (12:125<sup>1</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> The information following each quotation refers to the interview number and the location of the excerpt in the original interview text.

Visitors like Jeff who distinguished themselves from other wilderness users often made references to their own extended use history in wilderness or specifically in the arctic. In his comments below, Jeff repeatedly makes implicit references to his past experience while addressing various different topics. The standing he has achieved through his long association with wilderness serves as the basis for his evaluation of encounters with other wilderness visitors. Those who appear to be like him (experienced arctic wilderness travelers) are generally accepted, while visitors who are different are the subject of disparaging remarks; and, by implication, they do not belong in a wilderness like GAAR.

I've spent most of my Brooks Range time in the Arctic Refuge because it's more remote. But given the political situation and all the hubbub over the opening of the Arctic Refuge as part of [president] Bush's so-called energy plan, I knew that interest in the Refuge was high...and this might be the summer to do the Noatak. Because the pressure is off...recognizing that there's probably a finite number of people who want this kind of really remote, camping in bear country, really removed from the safety line kind of outdoor adventure. (12:47).

I'm very much [into] the shift to Arctic time. Not in any rush, take my watch off...I harass people the first couple of days that don't take their watches off on my trips. After that I leave them alone, but at that point they realize I don't want to know what time it is...that's part of the wilderness experience, is breaking the connection to the clock (12:91).

...[W]hen you actually see another tent or see a body or a boat goes by...you know, you're looking at the color of their hair, what kind of clothes they're wearing, what kind of boat they're in. Are they buffoons? Are you going to joke about them later? God, did you see those guys wearing head-nets on the river? I mean why the hell you wearing a head-net on the river? The bugs aren't that bad, you know? (12:109).

We got in, a group came in last night, [then] we got another group that came in the morning. The morning group turned out to be Park Service guys... And of course, being Park Service, they made contact, "Hi guys! How's it going?" You know, which was, it was fine...And the weird thing was, being contacted by the Park Service folks wasn't as intrusive as the three guys that came in the night before...We talked about it a little bit as a group. We're kind of going, "Well, the Park Service,...they are doing their thing and they're informative and then they were gone..." (12:23).

It was interesting here because you got Beavers [bush planes] but there were no jets...And so in that regard, that was nice because when you're looking up and you're

seeing a jet, you're kind of going, "Boy, there's civilization up there." I mean that's like major league technology, you know, 35,000 feet leaving a vapor trail...I would say neither [kind of plane] is preferable, but having done bush travel in Alaska for 20 years [I know] the access is by Beavers or [Cessna] 185s. And they're kind of part of the fabric...I'd rather not have any at all, but that's not intrusive. But to me, a jet...that's much more of a connection to the industrialized world than a guy flying a bush plane. A guy flying a bush plane is flying people like me around (12:23).

In the first of the preceding passages, Jeff suggests that GAAR visitors are a relatively small and homogenous group. However, even within that select group, some kinds of people—those who do not know to put away their watches and be tolerant of mosquitoes—are distinguished from others. The implication is that some kinds of visitors are more intrusive and therefore less acceptable in wilderness. This implication is more apparent in the last two excerpts. While the encounter with rangers on patrol might be regarded negatively as an indication of surveillance (indeed, two other groups of interview participants described such feelings), Jeff claims that it was less intrusive than seeing another group of visitors. In the context of the whole interview, it is clear that Jeff perceives NPS rangers as competent people who are committed to protecting the wilderness, whereas the other visitors were perceived as inept.

The most striking example of Jeff's approach to interpreting the presence of people in the wilderness can be seen in his comments about airplanes. Even though jets fly at 35,000 feet and are barely visible aside from their vapor trails, Jeff views them as more intrusive because they represent people and technology associated with the industrialized world. In contrast, bush planes—which are noisier and more numerous—are less intrusive because he feels they are full of "guys like me." In other words, jets are wholly unacceptable in wilderness, but bush planes and the people in them are, as Jeff says, "part of the fabric."

As illustrated above, Jeff casts himself and the few others who are like him as an acceptable part of the Alaskan wilderness fabric. He constructs the personal identity that makes his presence in the wilderness acceptable in part through contrasts to others, such as the “buffoons” wearing head-nets on the river, or the injured party that is described in the passage below. This represents an important complexity in the way that Jeff interprets the presence of other people in the wilderness. He evaluates wilderness and his personal wilderness experiences in relation to the absence of other people: “The fewer people the better; I just as soon not see anybody, except the group that I have decided that I want to go out in the woods with” (12:89). Yet, it seems that encountering others is important for him to maintain his identity as a unique kind of wilderness user. The next passages illustrate how contrast to others helps Jeff maintain his self-perception even when it is threatened.

Now if I ever got into trouble, I started, actually this was the first trip I started carrying a little aviation radio. Because I figured after 20 years, my luck— I: Your number might be coming up? I don’t know, maybe it’s an age thing. You know, when you’re 25, you’re immortal. When you’re 45, you’re going, “God, if something [goes wrong], I’d sure like to at least have some kind of opportunity to talk to somebody and bring some help in (12:69-71).

And maybe that’s why I started carrying a radio with me. Because a couple of years ago my friend --- was on this trip, and my wife, and another couple. We were in the Arctic Refuge and we were backpacking... And he and I just walked up on a bear kill. Just stepped out of the willows and out onto a gravel bar and [she] was 50 yards away. And thank God she was asleep... so that’s when I started thinking about the radio thing, which I’d never had before because that’s, that’s a concession almost. Because part of being out in the wilderness is being self-reliant (12:95-97).

These guys came stumbling into our camp. It was some guy who had screwed up his knee. It was weird, the first thing he said was, “Got a satellite phone?” It was like, satellite phone? Why in the hell would you carry a satellite phone out here?...I have a little 5-watt aviation radio but I didn’t tell them that...they gave us a message, which we carried out today. And then they left and they came back an hour later [because] they’d given us the wrong date. They said, “Come pick us up August 1”...Of course, we knew

they meant July 1...And the guy wanted to chat. We didn't want to be rude, but we just kept doing our thing and he finally kind of faded away... (12:29-35).

Giddens (1984, 1991) suggests that the major challenge for individuals in modern society is to “maintain a coherent narrative”; that is, to make sense of themselves and the world in an increasingly complex setting of contested meanings. The notion of maintaining a narrative is useful for understanding the preceding excerpts. Jeff is disgusted by his encounter with the visitors in part because they thought he might have a satellite phone, but he admits to secretly carrying a radio himself. He regards carrying a radio (or presumably a satellite phone) as a threat to his ideal of self-reliance in the wilderness. Encountering the others might seem to threaten Jeff's narrative self-portrait because he is guilty of the very thing that he accuses the other visitors of. However, a closer reading reveals a consistent narrative theme. Jeff maintains a sharp contrast between himself and the others. He notes that the injured party “stumbled” into his camp, and they further displayed their ineptitude by giving the wrong date on their rescue note. Whereas the park rangers who initiated a conversation were “just doing their job”, the injury victim who “just wanted to chat” was regarded as a wilderness interloper who didn't understand the implicit rules for social interactions. Jeff regards carrying a radio as a concession to his age, but it is also symbolic of his extensive wilderness experience. His justification for the radio stems from a past bear encounter, but more significantly, it is also based on the general feeling that after 20 years of wilderness trips, his luck may be used up. In other words, carrying a radio is consistent with his self-perception as an experienced wilderness visitor, and the encounter with the injured party was helpful for maintaining that identity.



The passages I have presented from Jeff's interview are intended to illustrate "people like me", the first of three narrative sites where tensions relevant to the presence of people in the wilderness were revealed and negotiated. The point of this analysis is to recognize that Jeff's self-perception and the meaning of his wilderness experience was constructed in part through concerted efforts to distinguish himself, and others like him, from visitors whom he regarded as wilderness interlopers. As noted in the description of stewardship in chapter 5, a number of other interview participants also suggested that visitors like themselves were somehow acceptable in the GAAR wilderness, while others were not. In the process of juxtaposing themselves against these others, GAAR visitors constructed identities that justified their own presence in the Park.

In chapter 3, I proposed a list of questions that wilderness visitors engaged in critical self-reflection might pose. The first of those questions was: What does my wilderness visit say about me and my place in the world; and what do I think about other wilderness visitors? In the example above, Jeff appears to ask just such a question. By concluding that his current and past visits make himself and others like him acceptable wilderness users, he negotiates and (at least temporarily) resolves the tension between ideals of wilderness purity and the presence of people in the wilderness. An interesting complexity within Jeff's narrative of "people like me" is that his identity as an acceptable wilderness user is enhanced by the presence of other, less-acceptable visitors against whom he can contrast himself.

#### Genuine Interaction with Others

While most interview participants made it clear that they preferred not to encounter other people during their wilderness trips, they also tended to report favorably on the

actual encounters that they had in GAAR. About one third of interview participants did not encounter any other people at all. Those who did have encounters generally described them as pleasant but brief. However, some participants had lengthier encounters, and one group of seven had several extended encounters that they described as being among the highlights of their experiences. While these seven participants essentially represent a single case, they represent almost half of the visitors from my sample who had extended encounters with other people [only 6 groups (18 visitors) described having encounters that lasted a significant length of time].

The seven interview participants represented here are all friends from Chicago. They described their encounters as instances of genuine human interaction. Genuine in this case means unconstrained by petty concerns or protocols that influence interactions in other settings. The idea that wilderness facilitates a genuine kind of human behavior is well-represented in popular nature literature. For instance, Bob Marshall claimed that people living in arctic Alaska enjoyed positive and meaningful interactions because they were free of the competitive atmosphere of life in the crowded “outside world.”

Every individual living in the Koyukuk is important just because he is alive, and thus there is eliminated from his life all the nerve-racking striving which accompanies any effort to be distinguishable among the overwhelming numbers of the outside world (Marshall in *Arctic Village*; cited in Catton 1997, p.139)

In *Arctic Village*, Marshall’s book about life in the region that is now Gates of the Arctic National Park, he advances the thesis that people interacting in a wilderness setting—even for short periods such as a recreational visit—enjoy a more genuine, happy state of being than their counterparts in the cities. The same perspective is strikingly evident in the interview excerpts presented below.

During the interview, Rob—one of the group members—described Gates of the Arctic as, “The last place in the United States, if not close to the entire world, where there is true isolated wilderness” (32:673); and he later described the ideal wilderness experience as one in which “you see nobody else.” However, he and the other group members also described their encounters with other people as the best parts of their GAAR visit; in part because those encounters contrasted so dramatically with the kinds of interactions they had grown accustomed to in the city.

P: And the human encounters were actually in one sense very much more pleasant and personable and even intimate than you would have with a stranger in the city. In that since you are in the wilderness and you have people that you haven’t seen for a while, and you know they’re not going to see people for a while... you know that first couple that wandered into our camp, I mean, Steve brought down a bottle of cognac. They took a couple of pulls on it. And they were having trouble with their boat. Steve offered if they needed some help. They said no. There’s an exchange of caring to a total stranger (Paul, 32:619).

G: So there was an exchange, a human exchange, of strangers, conversations with strangers that, by far, is more intimate than what you can have like in a city because you’re so distrustful in the city. Out here, the few experiences we had with other people, there’s kind of like a caring aspect to it. Like, are you doing okay? Do you need anything clean or dry? (George, 32:623).

A: ...And in a sense it was like reciprocity. You know, we’ll give you some cheese and squash since they were willing to let us use their canoes... H: [I]t was nice instead of, you know, here’s 5 dollars give me my bag of chips and coca-cola. You know what I’m saying? It was like you give me something, I give you something. And it was a very good feeling on both sides. That’s just how I felt about it. I liked the whole idea (Abe and Hank, 32:631-635).

It is clear that these wilderness visitors did not just grudgingly accept the presence of other people; they actively enjoyed it. As they explain, strangers in the city are regarded with suspicion because they have unknown motives, but people in the wilderness are known to have the same basic needs (maintaining functional equipment, staying warm and dry, etc.). Thus, for these participants wilderness encounters were regarded as

“exchanges of caring” that were motivated by genuine concern for other people, even complete strangers. Moreover, as Hank notes, the standard anonymous method of exchange in the city—“here’s 5 dollars”—was forsaken in favor of more intimate means. Trades were made with personal goods and based on a feeling of reciprocity.

It is not hard to imagine why these visitors, conditioned to suspicion and anonymous exchanges in the city, would find the intimate nature of their encounters in GAAR particularly appealing. Their interpretations of these encounters reflect the same themes that are prominent in Marshall’s wilderness philosophy. An additional theme relevant to popular images of wilderness life is illustrated in the next passage.

H: The highlight for me was seeing Steve and Kay at Lake Takahula, just talking with them, seeing their cabin, how they lived, was just I thought was just amazing. I mean to be the only two people, I think he said within 8 million acres. His closest neighbor was within 8 million acres. There was no one there. G: Sounds good to me. H: And they had this whole beautiful lake to themselves, basically. The small hand-built log cabin, which was just awesome, and the way they utilize the space was just... just to talk to them and see how they actually lived out there was just a ... I thought it was simply amazing. Something that I would... I’ve always dreamt of doing. To live out there. But I don’t think I’m the person who could maintain it. Maybe a year, maybe two years, but I somehow would have to get back to civilization. They seemed to .... I asked them how did he adapt to it. And he said it grew on him. So, it got easier as it went on. It wasn’t like he wanted to get back to the city at all. He said after the first few months, he took it another month, and it just grew on him. He didn’t want to get back at all. He wasn’t anxious to get back at all (Hank and George, 32:201-209).

In this passage, Hank and George are referring to an encounter with two private citizens who live in the middle of the GAAR wilderness. For Hank, seeing the couple was the best part of the trip because they and their log cabin symbolized the kind of lifestyle he had “always dreamt of.” For most readers, the image of an idyllic frontier life in a lakefront cabin will be familiar. Steve and Kay represented tangible evidence that such a life is possible. Furthermore, Hank enjoyed a positive conversation with Steve who allayed some of his doubts about being able to stay away from the city by saying

that his lifestyle “grew on him.” The point here is that, for Hank at least, the encounter with Steve and Kay seemed to affirm the image of GAAR as “the last, true isolated wilderness”, rather than challenging it. Rob too agreed that, “Running into Steve and Kay can’t be described as anything but a more than pleasant experience” (32:147).

In addition to encountering other recreational visitors and the two Park residents, Rob and the rest of his party also met a group of subsistence hunters. Their account of that encounter foreshadows tensions that are discussed in detail in the “past and present inhabitants” section which follows this one.

I: Did you see any other people during your trip? ...T: Oh yeah, the Natives...they were out hunting...H: They were trying to do some subsistence hunting, they were looking for caribou, but it looks like they were a little bit ahead of the movement (Tracy and Hank, 32:109-121).

R: Now running into the Eskimo and his two sons, that was actually for me a nice experience. He was also actually with a Caucasian gentleman and it wasn’t clear to me the relationship, whether they were friends, hired, or whatever it was, but we had invited the Eskimo gentleman and his two sons to dinner. And they seemed very interested in that. Then I thought it would have been great to just have a little cultural exchange. But the white gentleman that was with them didn’t really seem interested. He wanted to get down the river, so .... that was a nice experience, running into the Eskimo and his two sons (Rob, 32:147).

Federal law allows for subsistence hunting by any rural resident in Alaska, Native or white, but Tracy, Hank, and Rob seem unsure of how to address the presence of the non-native hunter. Tracy doesn’t mention him at all, referring only to encountering “the Natives.” Rob at first only mentions “the Eskimo and his two sons”, then amends his account to include the white hunter. He describes inviting the Eskimo and his sons to dinner, but not the fourth member of their group, and ends his account by re-stating, “...that was a nice experience, running into the Eskimo and his two sons.” It seems a plausible interpretation of this passage that, like Steve and Kay, the Native hunters fit or

enhanced the group's wilderness images, while the white hunter did not fit so neatly. They addressed this ambiguity by essentially writing the white hunter out of their story. In the next chapter section, romantic images that interview participants associated with indigenous people are explored in more detail.

The group member's descriptions of their highly positive encounters are significant because of their stated preferences for seeing no other people. On the one hand, they clearly valued their interactions with others, but on the other hand, they feel that a wilderness experience should be free of other people. This tension is particularly evident in the next passage.

G: You know you come up this part of the world, you want the wilderness experience. The ideal situation here is that you are dropped off, you see nobody else, you see a ton of animals, and you get out safely. That's the ideal experience. So every time you see another human being who is not in your group, to some degree, that detracts a little bit from your experience. Generally, they are nice encounters... They're all nice people. That's not the point. But in the perfect world, you wouldn't see anybody else for the duration of your trip. You'd see wildlife around every corner and you'd just be surrounded by natural wonders. That's the perfect world. We were pretty close to that (George, 32:581).

George's comments are profound because they show that he clearly recognizes the conflict within the narrative produced by he and his friends. According to them, the ideal wilderness experience does not include seeing other people, yet they value wilderness in part as a setting for genuine lifestyles and human interactions. Essentially, they recognize two valid but contradictory meanings of wilderness: a place free of people, and a quality setting for encountering others. For this group, it is the very fact that wilderness is primarily free of people that makes it such a good setting for encountering others.

George and his friends negotiate the meaning of their wilderness encounters by contrasting them with city encounters and suggesting that wilderness facilitates a more

genuine kind of human interaction. However, this does not completely resolve the tension because they are left with two countervailing images of wilderness. In the end, when George says, “That’s not the point”, he basically lets the tension stand. He confirms that encountering others was a positive part of his wilderness experience, but he also chooses to maintain the image of an ideal wilderness experience as one without encounters.

### Past and Present Inhabitants

Wilderness in the United States is formally defined as “a place where man is a visitor who does not remain”, and it has often been imagined as a place free of any human history. However, research has shown that many places thought to be pristine have in fact been long inhabited by humans.

Scientific findings indicate that virtually every part of the globe, from the boreal forests to the humid tropics, has been inhabited, modified, or managed throughout our human past. Although they may appear untouched, many of the last refuges of wilderness our society wishes to protect are inhabited and have been for millennia (Gomez-Pompa and Kaus 1992).

At GAAR, wilderness visitors are constantly confronted with evidence of the human history of the area. Not only are there popular books and voluminous scientific studies documenting past uses, but visitors may encounter archaeological evidence first-hand, and they may also encounter the modern descendents of historical Native residents, who still practice a modified subsistence lifestyle. Further, they may encounter isolated modern homesteaders who reflect popular images of idyllic frontier life. Perhaps more than at any other wilderness in the United States, GAAR visitors have the opportunity to confront the tensions inherent in the idea of an *inhabited* wilderness (a term borrowed

from Catton 1997). Some of these issues were foreshadowed in the discussion of the dimension “a taste of the arctic” that was presented in chapter 5, and in the preceding “genuine interaction” section of this chapter.

As noted in chapter 5, some interview participants regarded human history as an intriguing feature of the GAAR setting, and they did not seem to consider knowledge or evidence of past and present inhabitation as a threat to GAAR’s wilderness status. For example, Rodney described GAAR as a “prime example” of wilderness in part because it showed “no signs of human habitation” (31:67); but he later described positive feelings of connection with the “first inhabitants” of the Park.

I really enjoyed standing in certain places and I could just feel exactly, or at least what I felt, how the first inhabitants would have felt coming up the Noatak...it’s probably very similar [now] to what they saw and experienced (31:239).

Like Rodney, other participants who referred to the human history of GAAR seemed to enjoy imagining the lives of past inhabitants and making comparisons to their own experiences. In addition, a few participants described seeing archaeological evidence of past inhabitants as an important or enjoyable part of their experiences. Like almost all the interview participants, these visitors tended to describe wilderness in contrast to places that are inhabited or altered by people, but in these cases they did not explicitly recognize or address any concerns relative to the tension between the human history of GAAR and its wilderness status.

That’s kind of neat to think about the history up there. How those people existed...We were talking the other day, [what] if you didn’t have bug dope? If you didn’t have a tent with a good screen? On the Noatak trip, one of the tent’s zippers broke--the kids’ tent. There was nothing to do. They duct-taped the door shut and it was still miserable and horrible...they were thinking about these Native women out there, or going out to go to the bathroom. How fast can you do it? We were just talking last night; can you imagine having a baby out there? How exposed and bug bitten you’d get. You and the baby. It must have been just incredible (Dan, 16:22).



S: We found an arc [archaeological] site. We knew it was there by prior information, but it was very obvious. We did not move anything, although we took photographs and wrote a few notes ... D: Yeah, so arc sites were kind of important because, you know, it was a feature to look for, but we also knew the rules and protocol--just to get the GPS coordinates and take some notes and leave everything (Shannon and Dorothy, 9:18-46).

Although the topic of human history in GAAR seemed unproblematic for the interview participants in the preceding passages, it served for the following two visitors as a site for highlighting the culturally contingent nature of their wilderness meanings.

I: Other than having few people and certain kinds of wildlife, what other things make it [GAAR] a wilderness? R: Lack of any permanent habitation that I could ever see...Just lack of any human evidence there...It's in pretty much the same state it's been in since...whenever. Unaltered (Randall, 26:217-219).

E: We always try to read books about where we're going [but] you know there's not a lot written about the Killik area...it just makes me curious. It's wilderness, but then again you know for years and years there've been people who lived and traveled through there—R: And it wasn't wilderness to them. E: I would say it's their home, so it's probably not wilderness to everybody, but certainly a wild place (Ellen and Randall, 26:221-225).

In the passages above, Randall first describes GAAR as a wilderness because it is “unaltered” and lacks “any human evidence”, but then he and Ellen reflect on the human history of the area. The couple is forced to acknowledge that what is wilderness to them was simply home to past residents. Although they implicitly recognize the socially constructed nature of their wilderness perspective, Randall and Ellen do not further discuss the issue. Ultimately, as in the previous passages by other interview participants, they regard the human history of GAAR as more of an intriguing curiosity than a threat to their wilderness images.

I: Does knowing that people lived there for an extended period of time make it any less of a wilderness? E: No, if you sit back and think how –R: How did they do it? E: How did they do it? [It's] hard to travel and hard to make a living. R: Hard to walk over and

navigate through. E: It makes me admire those people and wonder, or I'd like to know more about it (26: 283-289).

It is important to note here that the visitors represented in the preceding passages did not encounter any significant impacts caused by past or present people living in the GAAR area. It is plausible that they did not more fully consider the implications of the human history of the area because, for them, that history was more theoretical than actual. However, two groups of visitors who encountered what they considered to be unsightly evidence of modern GAAR residents found the issue of inhabitation to be more problematic.

D: ...I was disappointed by numerous large garbage pieces, a lot of litter scattered throughout the Park near Anaktuvuk Pass, which was a bummer. I: Why was it a bummer? D: ...I always thought that Natives had a deep respect for the environment and for wilderness and it was a shock for me to see differently; that some don't respect the land; that some are falling away from that culture. E: Yeah, I mean it's just a pristine wilderness and you keep running up on Pepsi cans and whatnot, you know, out there in the middle of the wilderness. It's kind of a drag (Dirk and Eddy, 8:28).

Dirk's comments reflect a common western cultural narrative in which all indigenous peoples historically lacked technology, lived close to the land, and shared a worldview that made them essentially "natural", in contrast to people from contemporary industrialized societies. Kollin (2001) suggests that this kind of generalized, romantic view of indigenous people is especially common in wilderness literature, including the Alaska-based works of Muir and Marshall. By maintaining romantic images of indigenous people, these authors were able to negotiate the conflict between their wilderness ideals and concrete evidence of inhabitation. Based on Dirk's comments, it appears that these romantic images are still employed by some people today to interpret the presence of indigenous people in wilderness.

Whereas Randall and Ellen suggested that past inhabitants probably regarded the GAAR landscape differently than modern visitors do, Dirk suggests that “Natives had a deep respect for the environment and for wilderness” that resembled his own perspective. In other words, he does *not* suggest that his values might be the result of his particular cultural background. Rather, he seems to feel that they reflect the only appropriate response to nature. Accordingly, when his romantic view of indigenous people is challenged by the litter he encounters in GAAR, he addresses the challenge by suggesting that some Natives have “fallen away” from their culture. In this statement, he seems to be implying that modern Natives have been corrupted, perhaps by access to technology or other outside influences. These same issues are evident in the following comments by Jesse, Harold, and Reba. During their visit to GAAR, these three interview participants encountered a trail that had been created by local Native residents using motorized all-terrain vehicles, primarily for hunting purposes. In discussing the trail, they acknowledged the culturally contingent nature of their wilderness perspective (like Randall and Ellen), and they also implied that modernity has corrupted the indigenous residents of GAAR.

I: You said the trash along the trail was pretty disappointing. What do you mean by disappointing? J: Well, you go out to an area like this and you expect it's not going to be trash[ed]. You know, it's a national park. I mean it's also, I understand it in a way. I don't necessarily approve of it, but I understand the local people use the trail, and they have a different concept of what to do with their garbage (Jesse, 6:182-184).

I: How did you feel about the fact that you were hiking on an ATV trail? H: Well, I appreciated the easy hiking...I understand that they view this area, to them it's their home, I'm assuming. And for us, it's more of a getaway. So they're going about their daily lives while we're taking a break from ours. So I understand, you know, they're doing what they're doing. But you know, with an area like that, I just don't understand the littering...It's one thing to litter in your city or a town, but in an area like that, it's so pure or whatever you call it, it's kind of disheartening (Harold, 6: 207-209).

I: So is the fact that the ATV trail is evidence of other people, is that what detracts from the wilderness aspect? R: Well, it does a little bit, but you also realize that it's evidence of an indigenous culture there, even though they may be modern. They're still an indigenous culture. They're somehow utilizing their native lands for whatever purposes they use them for now. So I mean I guess there's still that, being ok and appropriate for the area (Reba, 6:465-467).

In their struggle to reconcile their images of GAAR as a pristine wilderness with the impacts caused by GAAR-area residents, these participants acknowledge alternative wilderness perspectives and they also make implicit references to romantic images of indigenous people. However, they seem unable to come to a straightforward resolution like Dirk. Reba's comments in particular are illustrative. She feels that the ATV trail is somehow more acceptable because it was created by an indigenous culture, "even though they may be modern." Implicit in her statement is the idea that indigenous people are themselves acceptable in wilderness, that their perspective is valid because of their traditional relationship with the land, and that they have somehow been corrupted by modernity.

The complex nature of these visitors' comments makes it difficult to provide a simple summary of how they negotiated the tensions relevant to wilderness inhabitants. This in itself may be an important finding. Rather than presenting one common interpretation, interview participants responded to the human history of GAAR in myriad different ways. For most participants, this human history was unproblematic, primarily because it existed for them in a theoretical or hypothetical realm (that is, they did not encounter first hand evidence of inhabitation). Although there was an inherent tension between these participants' wilderness meanings and their knowledge of GAAR human

history, they did not address that tension directly (this in itself may be regarded as a kind of negotiation).

Two groups of participants, however, encountered more tangible evidence of inhabitation that more or less forced them to consider the implications relative to their wilderness meanings. When these participants found that their romantic images of indigenous people were challenged by the concrete conditions that they encountered in GAAR, they responded in different ways. Dirk negotiated this tension by suggesting that some inhabitants had fallen away from their culture, but Reba and her friends were less successful at coming to a resolution. Ultimately, Reba suggested that modern indigenous people are “ok and appropriate” in the wilderness because they represent a long tradition of ties to the land.

### Section Summary

In this section I have illustrated three sites, or “narrative arenas”, in which tensions relevant to the presence of people in the wilderness were negotiated. In the first site, “people like me”, Jeff suggested that people like himself constituted an acceptable presence in the wilderness. Further, the presence of people was shown to be important to him for constructing and maintaining his personal identity. In the second site, “genuine interactions”, visitors described two countervailing meanings: wilderness as an unpeopled place; and wilderness as a setting for meaningful human interactions. In the third site, “past and present inhabitants”, visitors confronted the notion that wilderness is a place where people are only visitors who do not remain, and some also confronted their romantic images of indigenous people. The important point here is that the meaning of

wilderness as a place free of people was not uniformly influential on visitors. As “knowledgeable agents”, visitors drew on multiple meanings to negotiate the basic tension relative to people in the wilderness. In this way, they implicitly challenged the simplistic notions that people are antithetical to wilderness and that encountering others always negatively influences wilderness visitors’ experiences.

### **Wilderness Management**

The idea of wilderness management is problematic for at least two reasons. First, wilderness is supposed to be “untrammeled” or unrestrained, and management implies purposeful manipulation and control. Second, wilderness is supposed to provide opportunities for “an unconfined type of recreation” and, once again, management implies just the opposite. The Wilderness Act language quoted here reflects the well-established cultural tradition that equates wilderness with freedom. According to this tradition, wilderness is a place where both natural processes and humans operate freely. As such, it is the last refuge of uncontrolled nature and, importantly, uncontrolled people<sup>2</sup>. Thoreau famously drew the connection between untrammeled nature and maintenance of freedom and democracy in the United States, and contemporary philosophers like (the late) Edward Abbey and Jack Turner have continued that tradition.

Allowing that wilderness management is something of a paradox, it is generally agreed that places that have been identified as wilderness require some degree of management to protect the very qualities that distinguish them as such. More often than

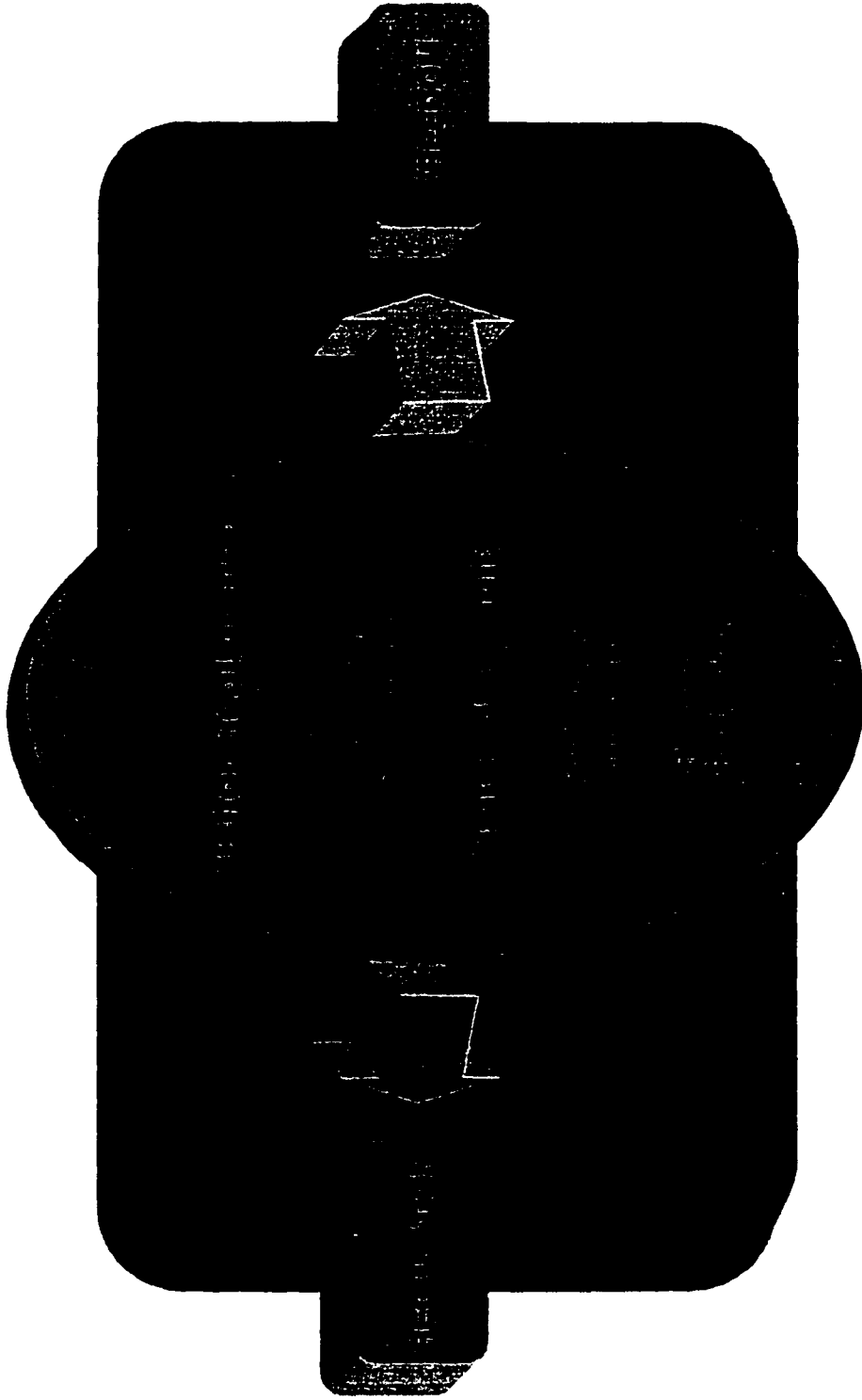
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<sup>2</sup> This is an admittedly abbreviated and oversimplified treatment of the subject of freedom in wilderness. Few topics have received more philosophical attention than the meaning of human freedom. My purpose here is not to engage in that debate but to introduce the idea that concerns about freedom underlie much of the dialogue regarding wilderness visitor management. Freedom in the specific context of visitors’ experiences is further addressed later in this chapter, and again in chapter 7.

not, the task of the wilderness manager is to manage people, who are increasingly regarded (in some quarters at least) as the primary threat to wilderness conditions. Due to the strong link between wilderness and freedom, codified in the Wilderness Act, managers have been encouraged by some to view formal regulations that direct visitor behaviors as tools of last resort. In fact, the authors of the textbook *Wilderness Management* suggest that using regulations only as a last resort is one of the fundamental principles of wilderness management (Hendee et al. 1990).

In contrast to this conventional wisdom, GAAR visitors expressed multiple different meanings relative to freedom and regulation in the context of wilderness. Most interview participants valued the freedom that wilderness can afford, and they enjoyed the lack of regulations at GAAR. However, they did not always view regulations negatively or equate them with restrictions on freedom. In fact, some visitors indicated a preference for more active management, including implementation of new visitor-use regulations, to enhance their personal experiences or preserve certain opportunities. These findings challenge the principle that regulations should only be implemented as a last resort, and also the simplistic notion of freedom that underlies that principle.

Figure 5 shows the two primary sites within visitors' experience narratives where tensions and complexities relevant to wilderness management were negotiated. Within the first site, "visitor registration", interview participants reflected on the current voluntary registration system at GAAR, and the implications of making that system mandatory (i.e. implementing a registration regulation). While a few visitors objected to the idea of registration altogether, most supported voluntary registration and some indicated that they would prefer for registration to be mandatory. Significantly,



**Figure 5.** Narrative sites where tensions relevant to regulations in wilderness are negotiated



participants frequently regarded registration as a way to enhance their experiences rather than as an imposition on their freedom.

Within the “use limits” site, interview participants considered various means by which managers might restrict visitor access to GAAR. Use limits are generally regarded as being among the least palatable of all wilderness visitor management practices, primarily because they constitute an overt restriction on visitors’ freedom to access their public lands. However, many participants supported limits as a means to expand or preserve freedoms, and some participants who objected to limits gave reasons that were unrelated to freedom of access.

### Visitor Registration

Currently at GAAR, visitors are not required to register before entering the wilderness. They are, however, encouraged to complete a voluntary registration form and receive a backcountry orientation if they visit any one of the Park administrative sites. Park officials are concerned that a significant proportion of visitors do not register, and as a result they have no accurate estimate of visitor use. They have considered implementing a registration regulation as a solution. For a few interview participants, like Mark below, the idea of such a regulation was troublesome.

I: So right now the Park encourages people to sign-in. M: Yes, encourages but not requires... As long as it's not required I don't get that government feeling about it. I can just walk out into the woods. As long as I can just walk out into the woods, it's no problem. I: So what if there was a mandatory sign-in, would that change your experience? M: Not my experience, but probably my feelings. I'm always kind of a little “grrrr” towards the government, so anything that I've got to do for them, you know it's just a perpetuation of the kind of thing that I think is really a step in the wrong direction. Government—you're taking all these little steps that are [in]significant along the way, but they're kind of snowballing into this larger thing (3: 169-179).

It should be noted that Mark did indeed complete the voluntary registration before his trip. For him, it is the *idea* of mandatory registration, not the act of registering itself, that is objectionable. Mandatory registration is regarded as an incremental step in the larger process of government expansion, which Mark thinks is “a step in the wrong direction.” Like Mark, Keith also registered voluntarily but objected to the idea of mandatory registration because it is symbolic of government intrusion.

I: When you registered, it was voluntary. What if it was mandatory? ... K: I don't agree with that, either. I don't like anything being mandatory. Goddamn government... The idea that the government requires me to do something before I can go into my public land just annoys me tremendously. Now, yeah, I know, you've got a fine line you've got to cut because you got a bunch of yahoos in there who don't know what they're doing. You've got a screening function and you've got an educational function, and you got a safety function. And I grant you all of that. But the nice thing about being up here is that this is such a low use area that anybody that's in there damn well better be knowing what they're doing or the gene pool gets cleaned out a little bit, and that's part of the experience too (29:567-587).

Both Mark and Keith refer to regulation and government primarily as abstractions removed from the immediate context of their lived experiences in GAAR. That is, they object to the general idea of regulation more than the specific practice of registration. This is an important point because other interview participants who considered registration and regulation in the specific context of their GAAR visits tended to interpret these issues more favorably. In the passage by Keith, he makes a reference to the inherent risks of a visit to GAAR and the potential safety, education, and screening functions served by registration. These issues are key to how many interview participants interpreted their registration experiences and the potential for a registration regulation.

As illustrated previously in chapter 5, visitors generally valued opportunities to practice self-reliance in GAAR. However, as illustrated below, they were also acutely aware of the risks associated with remote wilderness travel.

D: You got yourself out there, and you have to get yourself out of there. T: Yeah, no one's coming to get you. There's no help if you need it. You're just on your own. If you mess up, it's just all on you (Dylan and Tammy, 30:705-707).

S: You have to make the decisions here. There's not somebody you're going to sue because they didn't put up a guardrail on this cliff. J: Right. Yeah, you're freer, but you have responsibilities too (Sue and Jaime, 21:815-817).

T: Little things like crossing a creek that you don't think about normally... If something stupid happens you can't just quick hobble home and sit on the couch for two days... I thought about what I was doing a whole lot more. Like if I'm just out for a day-hike, I just hop, boom, boom, not really worry too much. If I wipe out, oh well, I might have to hobble back, but I'm not too worried about it. On this [trip] this far out, we really thought about it (Tim, 5:308-324).

Pervasive anxiety over the consequences of an accident is an underlying theme in each of the preceding passages. Many other interview participants also described feelings of being far from help or solely responsible for themselves; and, like Tim, they were extra careful even when engaged in mundane tasks. In this sense, the perception of risk was a burden that actually constrained some visitors' activities. Thus, it is not surprising that, unlike Keith whose perspective was presented on the previous page, other interview participants frequently interpreted registration in a positive light as a means to alleviate some of that burden.

I: How did you feel about filling out the voluntary registration? S: Oh, I'm all for that. T: Yup. S: Yup, absolutely recommend it. In fact, these other two guys...they hadn't done that. They said, "oh, I wish we had done that." I said, "Well, we'll tell them you're up here."... I guess it's like filing a flight plan. If you don't show up, somebody is going to be looking for you... I: So your feeling is that the registration serves a safety function? S: Oh, absolutely. Definitely. No doubt about it (Sven and Tom, 17:437-457).

I: How did you feel about completing that voluntary visitor registration form? Dk: No problem. Da: I feel good about it. They know where you are. They know when they

expect you out. It gives you some safety net. I think that's good. I: So that's your feeling, that it serves a safety function? Da: Oh, yeah, exactly (Dick and Dave, 18:755-765).

I: How did you feel about being asked to fill out that [registration] form? B: That was fine by me. I would rather, especially going into an area like this, I would rather be filling something like that out... That could be the difference between life and death... I: So is that your impression, that the primary function of registration is search and rescue? B: I took it they were probably gathering information on use, where people are, what parts get used the most. For the purposes of the Park, I imagine, that would be the primary function. From my standpoint, as I said, I'd rather they know where we're going... (Brad, 3:406-418).

In each of the preceding excerpts the speakers suggest that registration serves as a valuable kind of accident insurance. The last passage is particularly significant for two reasons. First, although it is not explicit in the given passage, Brad and his partner were not aware that registration was strictly voluntary. In fact, they mistakenly believed that both registration and the use of bear-proof food containers were required of all visitors. Therefore, when Brad says, "That was fine by me," he is responding to what he perceives as a regulation. The second reason that this passage is particularly significant is that Brad accepts the registration regulation because of the assumed personal safety benefit, even though he understands that safety is likely not the intended purpose of visitor registration. In other words, he recognizes that the (perceived) regulation is imposed by the Park Service to meet its needs, but he makes an active choice to interpret it in a way that does not create a feeling of being restricted (Thompson et al. 1994).

There is an inherent tension between visitors' interpretations of registration as a safety mechanism and their ideals of self-reliance. That is, the notion that registration might lead to rescue seems counter to the principle of being responsible for one's self. Despite this tension, most interview participants did not seem to feel that registering compromised their self-reliance. There were, however, a few exceptions. For example,

Gary chose not to register because, for him, registration is negatively associated with “the culture of safety obsession.” This passage by Gary is significant because, although he objects to registration, he interprets its purpose (safety) in the same manner as the other participants. In other words, he seems to be “the exception that proves the rule.”

I: Did you register at the Park Service building when you came in at the beginning of your trip? G: I forgot to [sarcastically]. I: Do you have any feelings one way or another about doing that? G: I’d like to continue forgetting to... [P]art of the experience to me is that you can go out there [and] you’re responsible for yourself... I’d hate to see the Park get into the rescue business... To me, it’s like we’ve gotten to be this culture of just safety obsession, where we take the zest of life out of things because we want to be guaranteed that it’s not going to be too dangerous or too much wilderness and all that. God, don’t let that happen to this Park (15:317-329).

Like Gary, the speakers in the next passage are also concerned about the implications of registration relative to self-reliance. They too feel that wilderness visitors should be responsible for themselves and should not expect to be rescued in case of trouble.

However, after some debate, one of the speakers concedes that she would probably like to be rescued herself.

I: How would you feel if checking in and filling out the registration form... was mandatory rather than voluntary? Jo: I could deal with that. Ji: That’s not a huge imposition. F: Yeah. Ji: I think there could be some wisdom in that. W: Yeah, at least they would know who is in the Park and they could say, “So and so has been in there too long, we better send a helicopter or whatever up the river.” Jo: I wouldn’t like that... I can see knowing you didn’t come out, but I wouldn’t want to – W: You wouldn’t want them to come and get you? Jo: I’d like it for me, but I wouldn’t... It’s the same thing I say about Denali. If you’re going to do it, you better be prepared for what’s going to happen, not assume that you have the right to be rescued... Now if it was me or you, I’d, you know, kind of like to get rescued (Joan, Jill, Fred, and William, 13:864-874)

In part because they recognized the tension between self-reliance and considering registration as a safety mechanism, these participants expanded their discussion to consider other functions of visitor registration. Ultimately, they concluded that

mandatory registration might benefit the greater GAAR visitor population, and even non-visiting wilderness advocates.

F: I think I'm with everybody else on that. I wouldn't mind registering. It's [not] an imposition. I don't think it really impacts the quality of the experience, and if in some way my registering helped the Park Service demonstrate the value by just being able to keep numbers as to how many people visited this place— Ji: Well, and the education piece is OK... I think we are very good stewards, I really do. But I know there are a lot of people that are not (13:914-920).

F: That's right. Well, and the other point is that I think without some documentation, like anything else in government, without the documentation to prove that this is an important resource for the citizens of this country -- Ji: Given the political climate -- F: --and the people of the world... And it is a very important resource. You've got to be able to document utilization (13:1008-1012).

F: The other advantage... to some sort of registration system is an opportunity for orientation and during that orientation a little proselytizing. But an opportunity for the Park Service too, to sensitize people to the issues that are constantly being applied to wilderness areas (Fred, 13:1016).

As these passages illustrate, Fred and the others feel that GAAR may be threatened both by current visitors who are poor stewards, and by a lack of political support. They see compulsory registration as a means to address these threats by providing an opportunity to educate visitors and also documenting use. Thus, registration is perceived to benefit all visitors by helping to preserve natural conditions in the Park, and it is also perceived to benefit the non-visiting public who might simply like to know that a place like GAAR remains protected.

The idea that mandatory registration might serve some larger stewardship purpose was also expressed by other interview participants. Like Fred in the preceding passages, Shannon suggests that mandatory registration is desirable because it can help address both internal and external threats to GAAR.

S: I think them knowing who and how many people are in the Park is not a bad thing. I understand that some Alaskans feel there must be an ulterior motive for that sort of thing.

I think that's not true. I think a mandatory permit [registration] system would not hurt anything and would probably help the Park Service manage impacts... And you know, I asked everybody how many people come into this park every year and nobody could answer that. I've been reading in the literature because of the politics of the oil drilling and stuff here. Everybody else has an opinion, but the Park Service doesn't know, and I think it would be a good idea... to know who's in there and how long they're in there and how much impact they're having... (Shannon, 9:724-740).

As the guest of a very experienced wilderness visitor group, Shannon was not particularly concerned about risk or safety during her visit to GAAR. Therefore, her support for mandatory registration is based primarily on the notion that such a regulation would facilitate stewardship of the Park. Near the end of this passage, Shannon seems to be suggesting that the Park Service has been negligent by not requiring visitors to register ("Everybody else has an opinion, but the Park Service doesn't know"). This idea, that lack of regulations might be interpreted as a sign of poor stewardship, is more explicitly illustrated in the passages below.

I: How would it influence your experience if there was a required registration? H: Well, I don't know that it would bother it at all. It's good to know that it's public lands managed with public funds (Harvey, 27:151-153).

C: I give a lot of money to a lot of organizations that protect wilderness. I want to see where my money is going. I want to see where my tax dollars are going, and I want to make sure this [GAAR] is here (2:168).

T: Most places we've ended up going I've noticed the Park Service at least keeps track of how many people go in or out as a minimum... that was not apparent here... It was unclear to me whether it was well-enough watched over (Troy, 31:551).

P: I don't think this was the first park that I went to that it [registering] wasn't mandatory, but I kind of think it should be. So that... you can keep track of the use and the areas that are being used and how it's being used... There should be a mandatory permit system so that you can start realizing ahead of time that there's potential problems instead of going, "oh shoot, we have problems now." It's a lot easier to do preventive maintenance than to try to do repair (Peter, 22:153-157).

In these passages, the speakers suggest that the Park Service has a responsibility to protect public lands. Harvey and Carl emphasize that park lands are supported by public

funds. Troy and Peter suggest that the Park Service has a specific responsibility to monitor visitor use that it is not currently fulfilling. They regard the current system of voluntary registration as insufficient and question whether GAAR is “well-enough watched over.” Troy and Peter are significant because they do not merely express acceptance or support for some abstract future registration regulation, instead they suggest that such a regulation should already be in place. One theme that emerges from these and the other preceding passages is that registration may be perceived not so much as constraint, but as a means to enhance visitor safety and wilderness preservation.

### Use Limits

It might be argued that mandatory registration is a relatively innocuous kind of regulation and that therefore it is not significant that interview participants tended not to object to it. However, it is important to note that participants who valued the potential stewardship function of registration frequently regarded it as the first step toward implementing visitor use limits. In other words, their support for registration included implicit support for more substantial kinds of restrictions. For example, Peter, who previously suggested that mandatory registration is needed at GAAR to “keep track of use”, clearly associated such visitor use information with implementation of visitor use limits.

P: [I don't think that this is the first park I went to that registration wasn't mandatory, but I kind of think it should be...] So that you have information and if you want to make management decisions, it's accessible. You start getting in where you're banning people and stuff, well then there's a good reason behind it. And I'm all for that (2:153).



Like Peter, Shannon too expressed support for registration as a means to track and ultimately limit visitor use. She feels that the constraint of a limited permit system is preferable to the crowding that would inevitably occur without such a system.

S: If it [a permit system to limit use] guaranteed me all the things we talked about, the intangibles of not wanting to see somebody else's tent... pick like the Middle Fork of the Salmon in Idaho, it allows one group to launch a day, so that assures you that you're not going to see other people, although there are constantly other people in that river corridor. Yeah, I abide by that because I know I took my lottery, I got my permit, and I'm guaranteed not to see other people. I'd much rather have that impinge on my personal freedom than arrive free to do whatever I want on July 4<sup>th</sup> and spend it with 400 other people launching at the same time. So yeah, and I'm one of those people who hasn't gotten my Grand Canyon permit even though I've been on the waiting list for 9 years. But I understand that when I get it, I'm going to have the experience that I want (9:780).

Shannon's use of the terms *assure* and *guarantee* highlights an important theme relative to her interpretation of use limits. For her, uncertainty regarding the threat of crowding is a very real kind of constraint. By ceding one kind of freedom (open access) she gains the psychological freedom of knowing that she will have the kind of experience that she wants. Although she does feel that use limits would "impinge on her freedom", she perceives a greater constraint in the form of other wilderness users. In the next passage, Shannon suggests that, in implementing use limits, the Park Service takes the blame for a constraint that is more appropriately attributed to people competing for the same recreational resources.

And I think everybody wants to blame it on the Park [Service]. It's very easy to say I should be able to climb Denali if I want to, or I should be able to float the Grand Canyon if I want. But you also have to be able to say, "Can I boat the Grand Canyon and not be on it with 7 commercial trips and sharing my beach with 4 other privates? And that is something I'm willing to tip the balance in favor of having the experience but limiting [use]. Maybe I can't do it every time I want or whenever I want, but when I want it, I'm going to get the experience... Yeah, I'm a very big advocate of controlling it so that you get the experience you're looking for... (9:784).

In the preceding passages, Shannon refers to her experiences with limit systems at other places in order to evaluate the potential for use limits at GAAR. As illustrated below, many other interview participants also reflected on positive experiences with limits in other park or wilderness settings in order to interpret the potential for limits at GAAR.

**R:** I mean I went to Denali where they have a permit system and there I suspect that is an important part in having it really feel like a wilderness. You get in there and there'd be zones where they only let a couple of people in to camp overnight. And I think, although we didn't get to go to the original zone we wanted because of the system, we got to go to other zones and they were completely spectacular... So I would say if I was the one voting and my choice was either just to let however many people want to go in [to GAAR] and do whatever they want whenever they want, or have some kind of permit system, I would pick the permit system (Ray, 11:268).

**D:** The backcountry of the Grand Canyon is permitted and it makes it much more of a wilderness experience than if it's open. The same thing when we went and climbed Mt. Whitney... And if it wasn't permitted, it would not be the same experience. So I would much rather see them do that and keep it that way even if I was unable to go (Daniel, 11:272).

**M:** I know when we've been to the Quetico, you have to apply for permits to go in. They limit the number of people in the area at any one time... But you do get the idea that it's more managed because you do have the permits and you do see the rangers... **I:** So when you say that it's more managed, is that a negative thing? **M:** No, no, not at all. I think it's real positive that an area that could be overrun with people is managed just to prevent the destruction of the area and the destruction of it being a wilderness because it's set up so that you limit the number of people in there (Margaret, 14: 194-202).

There are two important themes that emerge from these passages. First, despite the general principle that they be implemented only as a last resort, use limits have become a common feature of park and wilderness settings (at least the ones these participants choose to visit). Many visitors are accustomed to them, and for that reason limits may seem rather natural or inevitable. This notion is linked to the second emergent theme, which is that these participants feel that use limits are *essential* to preserve opportunities for the kind of experiences they desire. That is, they feel that opportunities to visit

uncrowded wilderness would not exist in some places without regulations that limit access. There is an inherent tension between freedom of access and freedom of opportunity; but for these visitors, denial of access is only a possibility, while loss of opportunity is guaranteed (in the absence of limits). This insight is helpful for understanding the following passages by Jerry.

Wild has a lot to do with freedom (1:597).

Wilderness doesn't mean rules. Wilderness means the country is so damn big that you can go out there and hack yourself a cabin out of the woods, and shoot yourself something to eat, and cover yourself in furs, and when it starts feeling crowded, you move again. There's nowhere else to go now... This is the last place (1: 585).

I grieved the day this became a park. It had to. It was part of what had to happen [but]... I loved it when this country had no name. You had to ask an Eskimo elder what the name of the place was. Maps were bad. You didn't even know where you were. I was lucky. I was fortunate to experience that... The fact is the earth is filling up (1:531-539).

I can't recapture what I felt when I was 20 years old in this country when there were no rules and no boundaries and no parks, no limits, no seasons, and no anything (1:691).

...I was blessed enough as a kid to experience that. Now it's got to be what we went through. It was great... It was an A+ wilderness experience. The country felt big. We didn't feel like it was full of people. It was still full of wildlife. It was still a wilderness experience (1:739).

You guys have to manage it. I would not have been irritated or bothered if we would have had to fill out a permit or pay a fee. I'm a believer in fees. I'm a believer in backcountry rules and regulations (1:641).

I'd rather [be forced to] wait two years to have this kind of experience than to see this get destroyed, personally (1:695).

A first glance, Jerry seems to contradict himself with simultaneous strong support for wilderness as a symbol of freedom and for "backcountry rules and regulations." However, a closer look reveals that, like the other participants, he feels that important qualities of wilderness will inevitably be lost without active management and regulation. Jerry feels a profound sense of nostalgia for the time when "the country had no rules",

but he also regards park designation and associated management as inevitable and necessary for preserving some semblance of the experience he enjoyed in his youth. He confirms that his GAAR visit was “an A+ wilderness experience” and feels that a two year wait (to receive a permit) would be preferable to losing the opportunity for such an experience altogether. It is significant that Jerry says, “I would not have been bothered to fill out a permit.” Like Peter in the preceding visitor registration section, he implies that limits or other regulations may be warranted right now, rather than at some point in the distant future (and this despite the fact that he had an A+ experience). The point here is not that Jerry is a fan of wilderness regulations; clearly he is not. Rather, he feels that inevitable social changes (e.g. population growth and information technology) will eliminate wilderness experience opportunities without such regulations in place.

One additional set of interview excerpts is useful for illustrating how some interview participants interpreted the meaning of use limits. Throughout their interview, Dan and Linda made it clear that they particularly dislike seeing trash, campsite impacts, or other signs of what they called “camper blight” during their wilderness trips. They indicated that use limits are an appropriate means of preventing “camper blight”, but unlike most other participants, Dan and Linda also indicated that they would be displaced from GAAR if limits were indeed implemented.

I: Would it be appropriate to limit the number of people who can access [GAAR]? D: I think it would if you were starting to get blight (16:566-568).

L: Well, people are going to push the issue and it's going to change, but we'll just keep searching for the most remote rivers to maintain our freedom as long as we can. I: So do you feel like if this became a permitted system you'd go somewhere else? L: Yeah. I: For that reason? D: Not because it was permitted. If it's permitted it means it is getting high impact or higher use. L: Higher use. More people. D: Therefore, we'll go somewhere else (Linda and Dan, 16:624-640).

In the second passage above, Dan and Linda suggest that freedom for them is associated with the absence of other visitors and their impacts, rather than the absence of regulations. From their perspective, camper blight necessitates use limits, and conversely, use limits are an indication that heavy visitor use has occurred. Thus, they indicate that they would be displaced if limits were implemented at GAAR; not because they object to being constrained by a regulation, but because they dislike encountering the kind of resource impacts that they associate with limits.

Like Gary in the preceding section on visitor registration, Dan and Linda serve here as an “exception that proves the rule.” Although they differ from the other participants in their response to use limits, they are alike in the sense that they feel the most significant threat to their freedom is pressure from a growing population of other visitors.

### Section Summary

In this section, I have investigated some of the ways that GAAR visitors’ interpreted two wilderness management tools: visitor registration and visitor use limits. The main theme that emerges from comments relative to registration is that visitors perceived it not so much as a restriction, but as a means to afford them greater safety and to improve stewardship of GAAR. Likewise, the main theme that emerges from comments relative to use limits is that visitors perceived them as a way to provide experience opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable. In this way, management practices that might be regarded as restrictive were instead interpreted by visitors as means to enhance their freedoms.

More so even than in the previous section on people in wilderness, the concept of strategic conduct is useful for understanding how visitors negotiated the tension between wilderness management regulations and the meaning of wilderness as a place where freedom reigns. By interpreting regulations as enabling rather than constraining, the visitors illustrated in this section were able to create a sense of well-being (safety) and freedom within a fairly restrictive system. Recall the example of the British schoolboys that I presented in chapter 3. The boys used the literal rules of their school environment to maintain their identities and establish some autonomy in a system in which they had little power. Their activities had the dual effect of giving them a sense of freedom and identity but also reinforcing the class divisions that limited their freedom to begin with. Likewise, GAAR visitors' interpretations of regulations facilitated a sense of freedom, but they may also have the dual effect of reinforcing or legitimating the use of restrictive regulations as wilderness management tools.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have illustrated how interview participants interpreted the presence of other people and the meanings of management practices (the current absence and potential presence of visitor regulations) in the context of their GAAR wilderness experiences. It is evident from this analysis of visitors' experience narratives that interview participants employed a variety of different meanings to interpret their experiences. Participants described wilderness as a place absent of people, but also as a setting for defining one's self, interacting with others, and connecting with a common human ancestry, and, in a few cases, as a homeland. Likewise, some participants

described regulations as symbols of government intrusion or as constraints on their personal freedoms, but they also described them as means to enhance safety and preserve opportunities, and as symbols of good stewardship. These multiple meanings are an indication that traditional perspectives on people and regulations are not uniformly influential on wilderness visitors.

The ways that GAAR visitors negotiated tensions relevant to people and regulations reflect a *context specific* understanding of wilderness. In philosophical debates about wilderness and wilderness management, people and regulations are frequently treated as abstractions removed from the context of everyday lived experiences<sup>3</sup>. Abstract scenarios provide a comfortably unambiguous setting in which it is often understood that the presence of other people always diminishes the quality of a wilderness experience, and regulations always reduce visitor freedoms. As revealed by GAAR visitors, however, the meanings of people and regulations in the context of actual wilderness experiences are rarely so clear. In fact, the direction of influence of people and regulations was sometimes reversed in visitors' narratives, so that they ultimately enhanced rather than diminished visitors' experiences.

With respect to the presence of other people in the wilderness, most interview participants expressed the traditional perspective that, "Every time you see another human being who is not in your group, that detracts a little bit from your experience" (George, 32:581). However, in the specific context of their GAAR experiences, they did not always evaluate other people in a negative way. For some participants, the disparity between the ideal of wilderness as a peopleless place and the reality of encountering

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<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1990) for this insight. In their paper on everyday shopping experiences they noted that philosophical debates regarding free choice similarly treat freedom as "an abstraction removed from the concerns of everyday life" (p.360).

others was mediated by the need to define themselves, by the contrast between wilderness and city encounters, or by romantic images associated with indigenous people. The point here is that, despite expressing a common abstract preference for seeing no other people in the wilderness, visitors interpreted the actual presence of others in myriad different ways.

With respect to wilderness management regulations, a similar theme is evident. While many interview participants shared Jerry's sentiment that, "Wilderness doesn't mean rules" (1:585), they also expressed general support for visitor registration and use limit regulations. In the abstract, regulations are often regarded as unpalatable because they represent restrictions that are counter to the idea of wilderness as untrammelled space where people are essentially free. However, in the context of their GAAR experiences, some participants regarded registration and use limits as means to *expand* their freedoms by enhancing safety and maintaining experience opportunities that would otherwise be lost.

In light of Giddens' theory of how social structures are produced and reproduced, these findings have important implications. In chapter 7, I discuss these implications, and also consider the implications of these research findings relative to the specific domains of wilderness research, and management practices.



## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

In the introduction to this dissertation, I listed three study objectives: 1) To understand the primary dimensions of wilderness experiences as described by visitors themselves; 2) to investigate how visitors negotiate the range of culturally available wilderness meanings to reconstruct their personal experiences; and, 3) to investigate how visitors employ those wilderness meanings to interpret wilderness management practices. These objectives were motivated by the desire to make an empirical contribution to the largely philosophical debate about the various meanings and related implications of wilderness and wilderness management in the United States. Specifically, I wished to document the meanings expressed by current wilderness visitors and understand how they relate to the “institutional” treatment of wilderness (i.e. the meanings embodied in the Wilderness Act and related management practices).

To accomplish these objectives I conducted interviews with visitors to Gates of the Arctic National Park and analyzed the texts produced from those interviews. Through an iterative, interpretive, analytical procedure, I identified five major dimensions within visitors’ experience narratives: A taste of the arctic, self-reliance, naturalness, wildness, and stewardship. These dimensions reflect many of the major themes from the Wilderness Act (TWA) and the GAAR general management plan. In this sense, it appears that the meanings embodied in TWA continue to be useful descriptors of, and significant influences on, wilderness visitors’ experiences. However, it is important to note that visitors did not present a simplistic, unified, or un-critical perspective on wilderness. That is, they sometimes recognized tensions or contradictions between

established meanings of wilderness and the concrete conditions they encountered during their visits; and, to address those tensions they drew on multiple other meanings of nature and society in ways that implicitly challenged some traditional perspectives on wilderness and wilderness management. Specifically, visitors described wilderness as a place absent of people, but also as a setting for defining themselves, interacting with others, and connecting with a common human ancestry. Likewise, they described wilderness as a place that is ideally free of regulatory restrictions, but they also expressed support for mandatory registration and visitor use limits. These countervailing meanings reflect underlying tensions between ideals of wilderness purity and the reality of wilderness use, and between freedom and regulation.

My analysis of the ways that visitors negotiated these tensions was informed by Giddens' Theory of Structuration and related concepts. Within this theoretical framework, wilderness visitors are viewed as "knowledgeable social agents" who are both influenced by, and influential on, wilderness meanings. That is, visitors have access to a variety of meanings that they may draw from in constructing their experiences. And, in the process of constructing their experiences, they enact and affirm certain meanings even as they resist or transform others. In light of this perspective, the results of my study have some significant implications both for wilderness managers and for future research efforts.

### **Management Implications**

The central premise of Giddens' Theory of Structuration is that agency and structure are different sides of the same coin. Structure is nothing more than the enduring effects

of individual agency, and at the same time it is structure that makes agency possible. In this way, structure is not thought of only in terms of constraint, it is both enabling and constraining. The enabling/constraining nature of structure is manifested in “strategic conduct”, which is the process of purposefully drawing on or utilizing structural elements to address tensions or contradictions in society and situate one’s self in social life. According to Giddens, strategic conduct often has the dual effect of challenging or transforming certain social structures even as it reproduces others.

Giddens offers structuration and strategic conduct as a model of how societies are made and changed. I suggest that these concepts are useful for the more focused task of understanding how wilderness meanings and management practices are made and changed as well. The ways that GAAR visitors negotiated the meanings of wilderness management regulations are an excellent case in point.

Although GAAR visitors frequently expressed a general distaste for regulations in wilderness, they also expressed support for mandatory registration and use limit regulations at GAAR and at other wilderness places they had previously visited. Many visitors regarded these regulations as means to enhance their safety, improve stewardship, and preserve experience opportunities. As previously noted in chapter 6, visitors’ interpretations of regulations facilitated their sense of freedom, but those interpretations may also have the dual effect of reinforcing or legitimating the use of regulations as management tools. Specifically, support for regulations may encourage their widespread use, and over time visitors may come to regard them as natural or inevitable elements of wilderness settings.

My findings relative to regulations are similar to those from past studies that have also found support for regulatory restrictions amongst wilderness visitors (Bultena et al. 1981; Fazio and Gilbert 1974; Shindler and Shelby 1993; Watson and Niccolucci 1995). Cole (2001a) notes that in these and other past studies visitors tended to favor the status quo. That is, they supported existing use limits but did not feel that current conditions warranted additional restrictions. For this reason, Cole suggests that visitors' support may be tied to existing management regimes rather than to use-limit regulations themselves. The results from my study, however, do not support this conclusion.

At GAAR, some visitors expressed support for mandatory registration and use limits even though those regulations were not currently in place. A few visitors even indicated that they viewed the current lack of regulations as a sign of poor stewardship by the Park managers. It is important to note that many visitors referred to their experiences with regulations in other park or wilderness settings when considering the potential for regulations at GAAR. It may be that after repeated exposure to regulations, visitors have internalized the rationale for their implementation. Dustin et al. (1995) use the 55-mile per hour speed limit as an example of this scenario. Americans eventually came to accept and support the limit—citing reasons such as safety and fuel economy—but only after having it imposed on them.

This process mirrors the model of society that Giddens proposes with his Theory of Structuration (see Figure 1, chapter 3). Routine conduct (regular exposure to regulations) leads to a practical or tacit knowledge relative to management practices. When confronted with tensions between their ideals of freedom in wilderness and the presence of regulations, visitors may reflect on their practical knowledge and engage in strategic

conduct to maintain a sense of freedom in a fairly restrictive setting. The unintended consequence of that conduct is that regulations increasingly appear to have the support of visitors and they become more widely and frequently used as management tools.

What all this means for managers is that they should be cautious when implementing regulations. On the one hand, the obvious utility of regulatory measures and general support by visitors presents a challenge to the frequently cited principle that regulations should be used only as a last resort in wilderness. On the other hand, it is clear that despite the last resort principle, regulations are currently widely used as management tools and visitors have begun to view them as natural or inevitable—or even as indicators of good stewardship.

Dustin and McAvoy (1984) argue for the relatively quick adoption of regulations in parks and wilderness as a means to preserve or enhance visitor freedoms. The results of my study indicate that many GAAR visitors view regulations in a similar manner. Dustin and McAvoy also suggest that managers need not worry about over-constraining visitors because they can rely on public input to check overzealous regulation. “Recreation resource managers do not operate in a political vacuum. Their actions are subject to public scrutiny. Should they establish regulations that are disruptive rather than regulative, they will surely hear about it, and be pressured to do something about it (p. 30-31). However, the Theory of Structuration and findings from this study suggest that managers may have a profound influence on the meanings of regulations. Merely by implementing regulations, they contribute to a process that leads visitors to increasingly view them as natural or inevitable. Therefore, managers should be more conservative

than Dustin and McAvoy propose because they might not be able to rely on the public to check their power.

In the specific context of GAAR, managers may want to be especially wary of the consequences of implementing mandatory visitor registration. The results from this study indicate that visitors regard registering as similar to filing a flight plan (i.e. the main purpose is to aid rescuers if visitors do not return as scheduled). If registration becomes mandatory, visitors may be more likely to assume that the Park Service is indeed “watching out for them,” and more likely to hold the NPS responsible for ensuring their safety.

An additional management implication derived from this study is related to the current debate about how best to care for the array of different places that constitute the National Wilderness Preservation System. Some argue that wilderness represents one extreme on the continuum of public lands, and that all wilderness areas should be managed similarly based on a strict non-degradation policy (Worf 2001). An alternative view is that wilderness should be managed differentially so that opportunities for both unrestricted access and experiencing high degrees of naturalness and solitude are available within the wilderness system. This latter view is represented in the new U.S. Forest Service Wilderness Recreation Strategy (Oye 2001). Within this strategy, diversity across the wilderness system is explicitly recognized, and management practices are tailored to meet demands for different kinds of experiences by preserving that diversity.

The Forest Service strategy is consistent with past and present calls for a more regional approach to managing recreational use of all public lands (McCool and Cole

2001; Wagar 1966; Warzecha et al. 2001). McCool and Cole (2001) argue that “area-by-area” management results in “suboptimization” and “homogenization.” They define suboptimization as failing to adequately serve the diversity of recreation tastes, and homogenization as a decrease in the diversity of opportunities. The authors list several kinds of information that are needed to facilitate regional management and counteract suboptimization and homogenization, including, “research at smaller scales...that can contribute to a richer vocabulary for describing recreation experiences than our current reliance on such vague terms as ‘wilderness experience’” (p.96).

The results of my study lend support to the argument for a differential approach to wilderness management and also provide the kind of needed information suggested by McCool and Cole. By focusing on a small population of wilderness visitors, I was able to capture rich descriptions of experiences that may help GAAR managers preserve the unique opportunities available in the Park. GAAR visitors frequently described the Park and their experiences there in contrast to other places. They suggested that GAAR differs from other places identified as wilderness because of its remote location, lack of management infrastructure, and low visitor-density. Additionally, they suggested that because of these qualities, GAAR provides a rare and valuable kind of experience opportunity.

At a general level, these results suggest that visitors recognize and value diversity within the wilderness system. At the specific level of GAAR, these results suggest that managers should carefully consider any changes to the current access and administrative infrastructures. While difficult access and lack of administrative infrastructure might be

regarded as liabilities within some professional circles, these qualities also represent unique attributes of GAAR that visitors clearly value.

### **Research Implications**

The results of this study indicate that established meanings of wilderness as a free and un-peopled place were not uniformly influential on visitors. As noted in the conclusion of chapter 6, although visitors indicated a general or abstract preference for not encountering others and having few regulations, in the lived context of their GAAR experiences they tended to interpret people and regulations in a fairly positive manner. This finding has important implications for how wilderness recreational experiences are conceptualized, and the direction of future research efforts.

The results of my study relative to encounters with other people are similar to those from numerous past studies that have failed to show a strong relationship between encounters and visitors' evaluations of experience quality (see Cole 2001a for a review of these studies). Researchers have considered various methodological and conceptual reasons for this weak relationship, including the idea that visitors engage in "coping behaviors" to mitigate the effects of undesirable elements of their experiences. Hammitt and Patterson (1991) explain that coping involves the use of strategies that help people function in the environment. "Coping behaviors are often exerted in an effort to make an environment more suitable for an individual or group; they allow for securing a desirable environment and keeping it desirable" (p. 226). Coping behaviors may include physical actions as well as psychological adjustments. One example of the later kind of coping is "product shift." Shelby et al. (1988) describe product shift as follows:



...[A] person hiking on a trail in a national park may expect a wilderness experience, a product with certain attributes including few encounters. If the visitor meets large numbers of other people, the possible reactions include leaving the situation (displacement), becoming dissatisfied, or re-evaluating the experience (product shift). In the latter case, the rational visitor might note the large number of other hikers, the wide and heavily trampled trail, and worn-out campsites, and conclude that, "maybe this isn't the place for a wilderness experience." If the new experience is defined as "hiking on a developed trail," different criteria may be used to evaluate the number of contacts (p. 276).

While there are obvious parallels between coping behaviors such as product shift and the concept of strategic conduct that informed my analysis of tensions in GAAR visitors' narratives, it is important to note that these concepts rest on fundamentally different theoretical foundations. The concept of product shift and other coping behaviors is underlain by a theoretical perspective in which people are viewed as rational, goal-directed individuals with well-developed and relatively stable expectations (Patterson 1993). Within this perspective, a wilderness visitor is viewed as an individual who knows what he or she wants and how to get it.

In contrast to the goal-directed perspective, the theoretical and conceptual framework that I introduced in chapter 3 paints a much different picture of the nature of human experience. Within this framework, individuals are regarded as "social agents" who operate in a world characterized by unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences. Social agents are continuously involved in constructing and reconstructing their realities, so that any understanding or consensus is only temporary, and the boundaries of social action are always subject to change. Whereas the goal-directed visitor knows what she wants and how to get it, social agents may be much less clear about their goals or how to achieve them.

Individuals frequently encounter situations where they do not know what to say and do next—where attitudes, values, or beliefs offer no clear guidelines for action. Social interaction is full of ambiguity and it is often unclear whether one's actions are appropriate or if those actions produce optimal outcomes (Kuentzel 2000, citing Giddens 1991).

The goal-directed visitor who employs product shift as a coping behavior is understood to hold clear definitions of both a wilderness experience and a developed trail experience, and also to hold different encounter expectations for each setting. In contrast, the social agent engaged in strategic conduct is understood to negotiate amongst an array of meanings associated with people and wilderness to define wilderness and evaluate encounters in a more contingent or emergent manner.

I believe this later perspective offers a more compelling framework than product shift for understanding how GAAR visitors addressed tensions relative to people (and also regulations) in wilderness. As illustrated in chapters 5 and 6, visitors did not appear to hold stable or precisely defined meanings of wilderness that predictably influenced their experiences. Take, for example, the group members from Chicago who described their encounters with others as instances of genuine human interaction. If asked in advance of their trip, it is likely that they would have indicated that any encounters would diminish the quality of their experiences. Yet, based on their descriptions, it appears that some encounters actually enhanced their experiences. In addition, they clearly did not resolve the tension between their ideal image of a wilderness experience and the reality of their encounters by changing their definition of the GAAR setting. Instead, they acknowledged an alternative legitimate meaning of wilderness (a good setting for interacting with others) and seemed to accept the resulting ambiguity and lack of resolution.

Within the goal-directed theoretical framework, the weak relationship between encounters with others in the wilderness and visitors' evaluations of experience quality is viewed as problematic, and coping behaviors are offered as one possible explanation for the discrepancy. In contrast, the "social agent framework" allows that, in the current social milieu, people have access to a number of meanings relative to wilderness that may diverge from traditional ideals concerning encounters with other people, and they may choose from those meanings to interpret their experiences. Rather than "coping" or rationalization, this behavior is understood as negotiation, and it is emergent and contingent instead of predictable. The goal-directed framework directs researchers toward identifying conditions that prompt responses such as coping behaviors. In contrast, the social agent framework directs research efforts toward documenting multiple meanings, understanding the processes by which people negotiate amongst them, and understanding the larger social processes by which those meanings are developed and transformed.

#### Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study are primarily related to the study site and the visitor sample. For a variety of reasons that were given previously in chapter 4, Gates of the Arctic National Park represents a relatively unique wilderness setting. Therefore, some of the specific meanings that visitors expressed relative to the presence of people and potential regulations may not be generalizable to other wilderness areas. For instance, visitors to wilderness areas outside of Alaska would be unlikely to encounter indigenous inhabitants and therefore unlikely to refer to connections with a common human ancestry

or romantic images of indigenous culture. Likewise, in a less remote and more heavily visited wilderness, visitors would be less likely to interpret registration as an important safety mechanism. It is important to note, however, that depth of insight, not generalizability to other areas, was the goal of this study. Furthermore, this limitation might also be regarded as a strength of the study. As mentioned previously, GAAR visitors described unique and valuable attributes of the Park that may help managers “think and act regionally” to preserve the benefits of a diverse wilderness system.

A second potential limitation is related to GAAR’s dual status as a national park and a designated wilderness. Although most visitors clearly distinguished between parks and wilderness in their narratives, there is the potential that some of them confounded meanings of the two classifications. This issue is most significant with respect to visitors’ evaluations of potential regulations. Because use limits and other regulations have traditionally been more prevalent in national parks than in other public land settings, visitors may have been more likely to perceive them as appropriate or inevitable at GAAR.

A third important limitation is related to the visitor sample. Travel to and within GAAR requires a relatively high degree of commitment and skill. Therefore, visitors there may be more likely to be highly experienced and knowledgeable about wilderness than visitors in more accessible places. Unfortunately, I did not systematically question interview participants about their general wilderness use history. (I did, however, ask about specific use history at GAAR, see Table 1). My feeling, based on first-hand interactions with the sampled visitors and lengthy immersion in the interview data, is that there is more diversity in experience use history and wilderness knowledge amongst

GAAR visitors than one might suppose. However, I cannot prove this conclusively. Numerous past studies have shown that experience use history has a significant influence on how visitors evaluate their experiences (e.g. Hammitt et al. 1989; Watson et al. 1991; Watson and Niccolucci 1992; Williams et al. 1990). If indeed GAAR visitors are a uniquely experienced and knowledgeable group, then the specific ways they negotiated amongst multiple meanings to construct their experiences may only be representative of other highly experienced wilderness visitors.

Perhaps more significant than the skill required for travel within GAAR is the sheer cost, in time and resources, required to get to the Park. Because GAAR is difficult and expensive to access, people with lower incomes or otherwise limited means are less likely to visit. Although I did not collect socio-demographic information from sampled visitors, it might reasonably be assumed that they were primarily representatives of the “semiautonomous class” of educated professionals and craft workers that has historically been most responsible for defining, allocating, and using wilderness in the United States (Walker and Kiecolt 1995). Therefore, it is important to note that this study does not represent the perspectives of other social groups who have historically been under-represented in (and perhaps constrained by) these activities. To be clear, my study only represents a limited group of current recreational visitors to Gates of the Arctic National Park. The perspectives of other stakeholder groups, including past visitors who may have been displaced, local residents including Alaska Natives, and members of the non-visiting public across the nation, are not represented. Future research, discussed in the next section, should include studies that focus on these and other groups who may have a stake in the future of Gates of the Arctic.

## Future Research

The results of this study suggest multiple avenues for future research. In the specific context of GAAR, there are several intriguing questions worthy of further investigation. For instance, as illustrated in chapter 5, the remoteness theme was described by visitors both as an observable quality and as a feeling of being cut-off or removed from the outside world. Remoteness is significant because it has been identified, in this study and numerous others, as an important quality of wilderness that may influence multiple dimensions of visitors' experiences (Shafer 1993). While the absolute distance between GAAR and major population centers may not be subject to change, advancements in communication and navigation technologies can reduce the psychological dimension of remoteness experienced by visitors. Future studies could further investigate the dimensions of remoteness, the relationship between those dimensions, and the impacts of improved technology and other changes on the perception and experience of remoteness.

Future research at GAAR might also be conducted on the various non-regulatory constraints on visitors' freedom. Freedom in the context of wilderness recreation is generally associated with lack of regulation and other obtrusive management techniques. However, while there are currently few visitor-use regulations in place at GAAR, visitors identified a number of other significant constraints on their experiences including safety concerns, expectations for minimum impact behaviors, and especially limitations associated with dependence on air taxis. Future research should explore the meanings of freedom held by visitors. In addition, focused studies of how air taxis and other non-regulatory factors influence visitors' experiences could help managers maintain or improve opportunities for visitors to feel free.

It would also be highly useful to investigate the distribution and saliency of the five primary experience dimensions identified in this study across the visitor population at GAAR. Research aimed at capturing a statistically representative sample of visitors could determine if the dimensions I have identified are meaningful across the broader visitor population and also measure and compare the achievement of certain dimensions amongst different segments of the population. (For example, do independent visitors experience a greater degree of self-reliance than guided visitors?)

As noted previously, it is important that future research addresses the perspectives of groups other than the current visitor population at GAAR. As stewards of federal public lands, managers at GAAR should consider the interests of all citizens. The meanings that recreational visitors ascribe to GAAR are likely to differ markedly from those ascribed to the Park by local residents, Alaska Native groups, and members of the non-visiting public, both within Alaska and beyond. The research methods that I employed in this study—loosely structured, in-depth interviews and interpretive analysis—have clear utility for developing an understanding of different stakeholder perspectives. In particular, loosely structured interviews are appropriate in cases where it is not clear what questions to ask (as in the case of groups that have not been previously represented), and in cases where extended face-to-face encounters are the preferred method of interaction (as with some Alaska Native peoples).

Moving beyond the specific context of GAAR, it would also be useful to replicate this study at other park and wilderness areas. The specific information about the nature of visitor experiences and the unique values of GAAR that was gathered in this study may help managers situate their activities in the context of the regional and national

wilderness systems. However, the full value of this information can only be realized if comparable studies are conducted in other locations.

On a more theoretical note, the Theory of Structuration which informed this study directs researchers to investigate the extended social consequences of individual actions and patterned social practices. Earlier in this chapter, I proposed that visitors' interpretations of wilderness regulations may contribute to the expansion of their use and a reformulated understanding of wilderness as a place where regulations are a natural part of the setting. Longitudinal studies of visitor experiences and management practices are needed to identify trends and better understand how wilderness recreation functions in the long-term creation and transformation of wilderness meanings (Williams 2000).

The idea of negotiated tensions that I explored in this study and the potential for longitudinal change or evolution of wilderness meanings highlights the fact that “wilderness” and “wilderness experience” are moving targets for social science researchers. The meanings associated with these items change constantly, so that no single characterization is wholly accurate or complete. Even for an individual, the elements that are considered essential to a wilderness experience may differ from one context to another. One final recommendation is for more research to understand the mechanisms that drive these moving targets—that is, research aimed at understanding the processes by which wilderness meanings are developed and transformed by social groups.



## **Concluding Remarks**

**This study has been an attempt to better understand wilderness meanings and the nature of visitor experiences. The relationship between established cultural meanings and visitors' experiences is complex, and designing and conducting research to further understand it is a daunting task. However, as a scientist and a wilderness visitor myself, I regard this complexity with delight and a bit of pride. Wilderness visitors are not mere receptacles for a received idea of wilderness, nor are they automatons predictably responding to environmental stimuli. Instead, through their behaviors, they are “minding the meaning of wilderness”—enacting and affirming, but also resisting and transforming, wilderness meanings and management practices.**

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## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE—GAAR wilderness visitor experiences**

### **Nature of visitor experiences**

- 1) Can you describe the trip you just completed?
- 2) Where did you go on your trip?
- 3) What did you see?
- 4) What was the best part of the trip?
- 5) What was the worst part?
- 6) What was this trip like compared to other (backpacking/floating/wilderness/backcountry) trips you have been on? Other GAAR trips?
- 7) Can you describe the influence of the people you traveled with on your experience?
- 8) Did you see or meet any other people?  
[probes]
  - a. Where were you when you encountered the other people?
  - b. What happened?
  - c. How did you feel about seeing/hearing/meeting them?
- 9) Did you see anyone hunting or fishing?  
[probe]
  - a. How did you feel about seeing them?
- 10) Did you see any wildlife?  
[probes]
  - a. What did you do when you saw (---)?
  - b. How did you feel about seeing (---)?

### **Meaning of the GAAR setting**

- 1) How did you find out about this place?
- 2) Is this your first visit? (if no, how long have you been visiting/how many times?)
- 3) Why did you decide to come here?

- 4) How would you describe this place to someone thinking about visiting?
- 5) Do you think of it as wilderness?
  - a. What does/does not make it a wilderness?
- 6) Is there anything about this place that makes it different to you?

**Meaning of existing and potential use regulations**

- 1) What did you notice about the NPS management of this place?
- 2) How would you describe the NPS management of this area?
- 3) How do you feel about carrying bear-proof food containers?
- 4) Did you complete the voluntary visitor registration?
  - a. How would it affect your experience if registration was mandatory?
- 5) Would it be appropriate to limit the number of visitors to this place?
  - a. How would it affect your experience if the number of visitors to this place was limited?

**\*\*\*Are there any other questions that I should be asking people?**

## **APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF RECONSTRUCTED INTERVIEWS**

## **THE TRIP**

### **Itinerary**

[1: 12] R: We started in Anaktuvuk and we hiked up the Koyukuk River up the Ernie Pass, and then down the north fork of the Koyukuk and then we had boats flown in and floated the river down to Bettles.

### **Gradual immersion**

[2: 211] J: And the trip to come here is very is very gradual. You have to take time to get to Fairbanks, which is already kind of the outback for some of us. And then you get to Anaktuvuk and then you get to hiking on this ATV trail, so it's, you know, and then once you get off the ATV trail, then you really feel like you're on.... I didn't realize how much the ATV trail had affected me until we left it. And once we left it, I really felt like "now I'm here." But it didn't really occur to me until after we got off it how much it was affecting how I was seeing things. But, again, it's a gradual process going into the Interior and it's a gradual process coming out. Um..... so you know, there's really only a couple of days when you're really feeling like, you know, it's a lot of work and a lot of planning to get to these couple of days when you can really feel like you're in the wilderness. And that's....that's okay, I think.

[see also excerpt 7]

### **Weather**

[3: 74] R: Yeah, the weather was beautiful. We kept calling it the arctic Riviera. We were there and it was sunny and warm.

[4: 347 to 349] H: I was also real happy with the weather. I was told we were extremely lucky in having the nice weather we had. R: Yeah, it was really amazing weather. It was hot and sunny almost the whole time. We got our token rain yesterday.

### **Hiking**

[5: 38] J: And we were hiking up along,.....the first couple of days.....we were hiking up an ATV trail. It was very easy hiking. But those that had been up here before were sloshing through the mushy tundra and the ATV trail made it pretty fast hiking. We were covering like 2 miles in a day. Or 8 miles in a day. But generally you are lucky to cover 3 to 5 in the Brooks Range.

[6: 221 to 225] R: I know it's not all easy on the ATV trail. There was a lot of marshy stuff on the ATV trail. H: That's true. R: It was easy in that you're not finding your own route, which was nice. What I didn't like about the ATV trail is that you almost still stuck to the trail. I mean, we're conditioned to follow a trail, so we followed the trail.

[7: 219] H: When I said that it was nice to have easy hiking, it kind of goes along with what she was saying earlier about it's all kind of a process of working up to it, is that I wouldn't have minded being thrown right away into a trailless area, but it just made



the....it made it a little bit easier to kind of work my way in and build up my strength for when there was no trail, I was a little bit more ready.

[8: 104] H: Either the 4th or 5th day, I'm not sure which, but the group that was ahead came up on a large field of tussocks, which was by far the hardest hiking. And me, being fairly new at the whole group backpacking bit, decided to try to get through it as fast as possible, and I made the mistake of getting far ahead of my group going through the tussocks, which had been, pretty much, never really did end. And that was probably the hardest hiking that we did. It was uh....go through tussocks 'til you get to a little creek when you go down through some brush and back up through the brush and be back in the tussocks. The speed of that was probably about 1/2 to 1/3 of what we were originally encountering.

### **Wildlife**

#### Evidence

[9: 138] H: Also, this is my first time up here and there were quite a few prints from caribou and bear and wolves in the first half. From what I understood from the other members, it was also the most that they had ever seen. Once we got closer to the river, the bear, wolf, and caribou prints still continued, but we also picked up more moose and lynx tracks.

[10: 164] J: Yeah, the tracking I mean there were tracks everywhere. At every sand bar we stopped there were wolf tracks. There were bear tracks. I have never seen so many tracks.

[11: 172 to 180] J: When we were following the ATV trail, we could see this one lone wolf, which was actually also on the ATV trail and then we came up on this part where you could tell that all of a sudden the tracks.....there were like a lot of wolf tracks and they were all in a big circle. You could tell this one lone wolf had come up on this big pack. Then we had....we camped like 100 yards down from that. R: You saw that on the ATV trail? J: Yeah. Yeah. It's really cool to see their behavior. I mean such a simple silly thing, but just to take their tracks and watch and follow them and see where they crossed the river and where they disappear into the woods. R: It was thrilling. J: So silly, but so thrilling.

[12: 377] H: This is kind of a strange highlight, but....a friend of mine's parents.... A friend of mine died a bit ago and his parents wanted me to bring a small amount of his ashes up here with me. And on one of our day hikes I was able to get away from the rest of the group and I climbed up near the top of some of these falls, and it was probably one of the most heavily-used areas, the most tracks I'd seen on the whole trip at that point. And I was able to spread his ashes over that area. I just felt so good to be able to bring him somewhere so beautiful. We'd always talked about going here together, but never had the chance to. So that was a really special time for me. So....yeah.

[see also excerpt 45]

### Sightings

[13: 38] J: Then our second day out, we were setting up our camp and we heard a bark. And then another bark. It sounded just like um..., you know, domestic dogs. And they were wolves. One of our members started to howl and they started to howl back. And they were way across the valley and way up this mountain. We walked across the valley and we sat out there for the longest time and we could hear them, but we couldn't see them. We had ten-power binoculars. Then finally we were just skimming across the rim and there was this big black wolf there. A little further on there was a gray wolf. It was sooooo exciting. To hear them. And then to see them. Then we sat there for the longest time and watched them.

[14: 361] J: And mine was seeing the wolves. Seeing the wolves was just a highlight, but seeing all the wildlife was amazing. Seeing all the creatures in their habitat. There's something really reassuring about that; that they're still out there.

[15: 58] J: Yeah. But that second night at our camp we had a grizzly. We were camped close to the river and then [inaudible] valley and the mountains. He was kind of at the base of the mountain. How far? Maybe three, four hundred yards away. He came through the willows and he was just grubbing around there. It looked like he looked at us a number of times. He should have been able to see us. We sat there for an hour or more looking at him grubbing around in the brush. And then he went away. He went back into the willows and there were some waterfalls up there and one of our members had gone up toward the waterfalls. He was hiking to the waterfalls and then the bear came back. He didn't see the bear. We saw the bear back at camp. I was watching the bear. The bear almost immediately you know, in wind... The bear picked up his scent immediately. Then it turned and bolted. It just ran right into the willows.

[16: 68] J: So, we knew that the bear was behaving appropriately. It was just kind of ironic to see him bolting away from one of us. He was really quite an amazing thing. See him catch the wind, and become alert, stand up and just take off. So that was that night.

[17: 355 to 359] R: I think the highlight was seeing that bear catch Dan's scent and take off. There was something really, I don't know, ironic about that. Ironic but really amazing. Not really scary. I was a little scared because, you know, I was watching him to see what the bear was going to do and see if we needed to warn Dan or anything like that and the bear very quickly responded properly. So I knew the bear was no threat. But just seeing him respond that way. I mean it's obviously a hunted area. The bear has a sense of humans. Maybe it was just seeing the sense that the bear had.

### Overflights

[18: 317 to 323] B: How about aircraft traffic? Did you see much of that? R: Yeah. H: Not really until towards the end, though, wouldn't you say? R: We'd see [inaudible]. We started seeing them when we were camping and patching the boat, which was like between Pyramid Creek and Kashwana Creek. I know there are two major landing strips in that area. We could hear.....we heard a plane come in to Kashwana probably three or four times that night. Maybe dropping off that other group off. So that was kind of the

first. And then the last week, at least the last three days, there were quite a few planes flying over. We saw at least one a day.

[19: 325 to 337] B: How'd you feel about seeing those? R: They're a bummer. B: They're a bummer? R: Yeah. You know. H: But at the same time it was like, while I had not enjoyed seeing them, we had to use them ourselves, so it's kind of a....R: That's how people like ourselves access the area. H: Yeah.. But at the same time, the reason you access these areas, is usually to try to, at least for me. [inaudible] just trying to get away from the rest. You can't really be too hard on the others because they're doing the same thing that you are.

### **Other People**

[20: 186 to 190] B: Did you see anybody else using the trail? J: Hm...mm.....H: Nope. Only once we got to the river did we see one group of tents, but no people. Other than that, it was only garbage we saw.

### **Prefer not to see others**

[21: 200 to 205] R: I think one of the things I really love about coming up here is the opportunity not to see other people. So, I mean I wasn't really disappointed to see them, but it definitely....it detracted from feeling like you're really out in the wilderness. But then, that's not seeing the people. J: Yeah. R: It's just the evidence. Seeing the people themselves would have been more of a detraction.

### **Evidence of others**

[22: 196 to 198] B: And how did you feel about seeing the group of tents? H: It didn't bother me at all. Up to that point, I kind of enjoyed not seeing anybody, which is part of the reason why I came up here. To kind of get a little escape, get away. But.. you know...as long as they were taking care of their area, I had no problem with them being there. Everyone has a right to be I guess.

[23: 453] R: And you don't get a feeling that it is well-traveled other than the ATVs. We did see....actually there was some...well coming from the confluence we kept coming on the same trail that someone else had taken. We saw the boot tracks. ....but you didn't get a feeling that it was as well-traveled as we had been lead to believe. So that was really nice. I don't know, maybe it is a well-traveled area. Maybe later in the season you get more of a feel for other people being around. I think we were one of the first groups to go through there this year.

[24: 136] J: Hiking along the ATV trails, there were places where there was a lot of garbage...which was kind of disappointing to see.

[see also excerpt 44]

### **Perceptions of local people**

[25: 182 to 184] B: To go back just a little bit to something you said earlier. You said the trash along the trail was pretty disappointing. What do you mean by disappointing? J:

Well, you go out to an area like this and you expect it's not going to be trash. You know, it's a national park. I mean it's also....I understand it in a way. I don't necessarily approve of it, but I understand the local people that use the trail a lot, and they have a different concept of what to do with their garbage.

[26: 207 to 209] B: How about the fact that you were, for awhile, hiking on an ATV trail? How did you feel about that? H: Well, I appreciated the easy hiking. I thought she said.....I understand that they view this area.....to them this is their home, I'm assuming. And for us, it's more of a getaway, so they're going about their daily lives while we're taking a break from ours, so I understand, you know, they're doing what they're doing, but, you know, with an area like that, I just don't understand the littering. It just does not make any sense to me, you know. It's one thing to litter in the city or in your town, but in an area like that, it's so pure or whatever you call it, it's kind of disheartening.

[27: 465 to 467] B: So is the fact that the ATV trail is evidence of other people, is that what detracts from the wilderness aspect? R: Well, it does a little bit, but you also realize that that is evidence of an indigenous culture there even though they may be modern. They're still an indigenous culture. They're somehow utilizing their native lands for whatever purposes they use them for now. So I mean that's I guess there's still that; being okay and appropriate for the area.

### **Group Dynamics**

[28: 405] H: Well, for me, this was my first time being in an organized group. It was always just me and a couple of friends throwing ourselves into an area, fairly unprepared, and kind of figuring it out as we'd go along. This time it was a larger group. Everyone was a complete stranger to me.

[29: 429 to 431] B: Can you describe how the other people on the trip influenced your experience? H: Well, like I said earlier, it was usually just me and a group of friends and we figured out as we went along. But this time I had people teaching me different things, which I did enjoy. They went about it pretty well. It wasn't so much them telling me as it was them showing me, which was good. So, me learning, that I liked a lot. Um...It was also kind of interesting because usually when you meet someone you get to know them..... like you meet them and you first figure out what they present themselves as and then the longer you get to know them, you kind of get to know what they are really like. But we didn't have time for that. We just had this one dinner where everyone met each other and then we were thrown together and you didn't really have time or there wasn't much point in hiding a whole lot. So it was fairly interesting just to see how everyone acted like that. It was kind of intense, too, because there were many different personalities, which in the long run worked pretty well together. But, intense would definitely describe a lot of the experiences, personal issues and such.

[30: 439] J: Um... I thought sometimes the other people on the trip enriched it and sometimes it distracted. What I was thinking about enriching, we took this day hike up a canyon and at the top of the canyon was a lake and there were seven of us... five of the.....I think they were all guys.....four guys and Terry....took off their clothes and went

into this lake. It was freezing cold, really cold. It was really beautiful. You know, it was half covered with ice. And it was just a blast watching these guys jump in the water and hoop and holler and jump out and.....I mean it totally enriched that whole experience. And then sometimes I would, you know..... it would just be really beautiful and there would be a lot of chattering going on. And I would find that kind of distracting. But it's like in any....it's like that in a couple, you know. I come with the group because I love being in a group. And so part of that is you get the good with the bad.

### **Accident**

[31: 229 to 237] B: So, tell me about the transition from the hiking part to moving onto the river? J: [She laughs loudly] R: [She laughs.] H: It was pretty exciting. J: It was pretty exciting. There's a story.

[32: 241] R: Well, the river was high and that first stretch of the river from.....we started below Ernie Creek, you're immediately maneuvering around or in between a lot of snags and strainers and the river was maybe like that for .8 miles..... or .5 miles, because, you know, we had .3 of the map... But as the crow flies. As the crow flies with the GPS. We hit a nice big snag and put a pretty good gash in the boat.

[33: 245 to 247] R: Yeah, in the raft; in the front half. I mean there just wasn't any time at all to get the raft.....the paddle raft through. Or even the canoe really....for them to even just get a feel for being on the river for you know commands for paddling. J: There wasn't any time..... you were immediately in the stuff. It was like giving somebody with a learner's permit, putting them on the Indie 500, and saying "okay get on out there!! Figure it out!"

[34: 259] J: We had a huge, huge L-shaped tear in it that, I know, everybody looked at that and said "Oh, man, how are we going to get to Bettles?" [She laughs.] And that was, you know, we'd been on the river for 20 minutes. So, we had to stay and make this incredibly meticulous patching job.

[35: 261 to 265] H: We got lucky that a couple of people in the group had been fairly experienced rafters and also they'd experienced patching rafts. It took them about 5 hours? J: Yeah, I think his real talent there was just he was a very meticulous man. He just had infinite patience for making this patch a work of art, which is kind of what it needed to be at that point. R: We weren't lucky. I mean, the trip was planned with repairs in mind and the knowledge to make the repairs. I mean, we didn't go out there unprepared.

[36: 277 to 279] B: So, what was the feeling after that? You had this accident, you patched the boat...J: Well, yeah. There were a lot of feelings in between there. I mean, you know, we got out of the boat, and they were five hours patching this boat. We were setting up camp and there were all of us, you know, we're setting up camp together. We were saying "What are we going to do? Is this going to work?" You know, you go back and you're looking at them operate on the boat and it does look like a very serious operation on an exotic animal and it's like the last one left in the world and if this one

dies, then that's it, they're all extinct. That's kind of the feeling that was there. Um...So, yeah, but then we were thinking is this patch going to hold? We knew right away we were going to have wait 8 hours, so we'd been on the river for 20 minutes. We were all so psyched to get on the river. We had to stop, camp, and not go until the next day. I think we were all...I don't know, I was really nervous about getting back into the raft. I had pretty good confidence that it was all going to work out okay, but just that initial getting in the raft and getting over that hump was definitely a little scary. But we were in the raft for like a minute, and it was all smooth and fine and we were in control. We just had really bad luck hitting that snag. I mean the river was still running fast. There were still a lot of snags. Um...But we just didn't have as bad of luck this time. Yeah, when I think....we retold that story.....I believe every night. We've made some allusion to that. It was kind of like we needed to debrief. Everybody telling their own part.

[37: 391] R: I don't even think the hole in the boat.... I mean that was a shocking moment and it was more disturbing for some people than for others. Some knew that that was part of the rafting experience, you patch it and you continue on. It's not like we were doomed and never going to get past.....the rest of the river was going to be just like that and we were never going to get through it. Um....but it's, you know, it was really interesting to see them talking about it later after we did get through it. And how it turned to humor and those types of adventures were part of the adventure-- central to the adventure-- it's what you make of it. [inaudible] different ways. For some it's more struggle making it a positive thing, but they were all pretty successful.

[38: 393] J: Yeah, I would definitely not call the hole in the boat a lowlight. I think it was a challenge, but then...you know, there.....there just wasn't a low point. You knew one way or another you were going to get back to Bettles. We all have to pay the mortgage next month. You weren't going to be stuck on that gravel bar for the rest of your life. I know.

### **Remoteness/Isolation**

[39: 427] J: Um... it was less remote. It was kind of....I thought it was ironic because it was less remote and I saw more wildlife on this trip than I saw in more remote areas. Um... so it was different....it was a really different experience. I couldn't clearly qualify one as better than the other. I really....when I was really remote, I really enjoyed that. And....valued that for what it was. But in the not-so-remote, it was still, I mean, such a spectacularly beautiful place. Seeing all the wildlife....

[40: 407] R: I didn't feel as remote as I have on other trips in other areas. Um....you know being on the ATV trail, just following a trail, a trail made by machines. It's not like we were....things were.....or help or anything was readily accessible, but it was more accessible than other places I have been. So you didn't feel quite as remote. But then in a way, I didn't really think about that. It was not a prominent thought during the trip. It felt like I was just in nature, in a beautiful area.

[41: 441 to 443] B: How would you describe this place to somebody who was thinking about visiting? H: I don't think it's that easy because I think a lot of people I describe it

to, they would be totally confused as to why I would pay a large sum of money to come somewhere so I could sleep on rocks and hike 8 miles a day with a 50-pound pack just to get to a spot on the river where I get to paddle all day just to be eaten by mosquitoes. So to a lot of people, that would not make any sense, but someone with a somewhat similar understanding, they would just be the.....I know both of them kind of said that they felt a little bit less remote than on other trips, but I still felt I was able to get away from a lot of my daily pressures and stuff. Just being in this beautiful wilderness with all these animals. People who felt a similar way, I would describe it as a good relaxed feeling, I guess.

[see also excerpts 48-50, 60]

### **Safety**

[42: 395 to 399] B: So, you didn't have that feeling at all that you were just lost out here...."nobody is going to come and get us." R: Well then, there's the bit...you know the first look at that hole there's a sense of that, a very brief sense of that, like "okay, now what?" But .....J: I've been in other situations out here where I have had that feeling, but we were too well supported and we were in too high of a travel area to really feel that. I've been in places on top of a glacier and the wind is blowing and you're five days hiked in and if anything happened at that point, all you had was a line-of-sight radio, then you definitely feel like it's on you right now. It's your trip. You know, you have to really pay attention to what you're doing. But in the situation we were in there, there was too much traffic overhead and too much intervention already in our hike, you know, we already had a plane come in. We just couldn't feel that remote enough to really feel like you're stuck out here. Not on this trip.

[43: 401] R: Then we had a sat phone. We had a satellite phone. We always had the phone number of coyote air. So, yeah.

[see also excerpt 40]

## **NATURE OF THE PLACE**

### **Wilderness**

[44: 461 to 463] B: All three of you have used the term "wilderness" once or twice in this conversation in reference to this place you've traveled through. What is it that makes it a "wilderness?" R: Well, the ATV trail makes it feel like less of a wilderness. Once you get past that, I think wilderness is a place that's really only accessible by foot, boat, or [inaudible]. It's a place that's untouched and doesn't have human trails....even though the animal trails are as distinct or more than human trails can be. That there is as little human impact as possible. When you feel like, when you have the sense of being the only ones or being one of the few in the area. But just little human impact.

[45: 469 to 471] B: How about comments from the other two of you, what makes it a "wilderness?" J: Um, you know, you can almost guess this from me, but it is a place where, you know, it's a big chunk of land where animals can still do their thing. They still have the mass migrations. They still have wolves. We have enough land that they can

do what they need to do. You need a lot of land for maintaining their packs. Um....a place where grizzlies are the first priority.

[46: 473] H: Part of it is the feeling of being able to get away because even though there's lots of different small parks and such in areas where I live, I don't ever feel like I've actually escaped out of anything. This is just kind of added to my definition, but I feel like when I'm truly in a wilderness area, I am away from the majority of human culture, I guess. And I put myself more at the mercy of nature than more of the...man-made rules.

[47: 479] J: And it's more, to me, it's just one of the last places left on earth where we still have this big hunk of land that doesn't have any infrastructure or it only has that one horrible haul road. Other than that, there's no infrastructure up here, it's so....piecemeal.

[see also excerpt 27]

### **Access**

[48: 475 to 477] B: Okay. So, there are other places in Alaska, other places in the nation that we call "wilderness." Is this "wilderness" different from that other "wilderness?" R: It's more difficult to get to. It takes a lot of effort to get to. And there's a lot of...well I'm from Utah and we have wilderness there but you can drive to the edge of it. ....pack in and pack out in a few days. So it's definitely more difficult to access

[49: 487] R: Yeah, it is positive thing. The more difficult it is to access the less it's gonna be used and abused. I mean there's land all over Utah that's far too accessible and it's absolutely abused, because they are right there.

[50: 483 to 487] J: Well, it gives it even a more stronger sense of wilderness. B: The difficult access. J: Yeah. That you're just a whole lot more remote. I mean on this trip, even though we felt a little less remote, you're still a whole lot more remote than other wilderness areas like in the Lower 48.

### **No rescue**

[51: 537 to 539] R: I was surprised that there were no permits. I mean for us there was, but you wouldn't need one if you were a private group. H: Why were you surprised? R: Because all the other parks have them. It seems like that's the way the Park Service keeps track of who's in there and knows when people who show up and don't show up. So, in a way, it's kind of nice that you really are left to your own resources. And that you don't, I mean Park Service rescues are in the news all over the place. Especially now with cell phones. So, we really do have to come up here and know that you are depending on your own resources and there are not readily available rescues here. I think that's really key to a true wilderness experience. And the Park Service really encouraged....they talked about that. They wanted to know that that was our expectation and I appreciated that.



## MANAGEMENT

### Little NPS Presence

[52: 491 to 493] B: What did you notice about the Park presence or Park management? R: I was the only one that had any contact with them. So there, I mean, there was no presence there. Even in Anaktuvuk. The group didn't..... I met the ranger in Anaktuvuk. So we...there was really no presence.

[53: 509 to 519] R: So I don't know, I think in an area like this, I think there was enough park presence. B: Did you have the sense that you were in a National Park? R: Not like you do down in the Lower 48, in a national parking lot. H: I didn't have a ranger checking up on me every night to make sure I paid or anything like that. I [inaudible]. R: But we new we were in a park, a national park. J: I think any sort of real physical presence that it was Park would have detracted from feeling like we were in a remote area or in a wilderness.

### Bear Barrels

[54: 503] J: We all had contact with them in terms of the beer barrels....the bear barrels. They were confusing to us because we didn't have enough to put all our food in, so every night we had this discussion, what are we protecting, are we protecting our food, so we'll have food for our trip? or are we protecting the bears so they don't get habituated to humans? I would say that through the bear barrels, the Park presence was kind of half....was disjointed....it didn't make sense to be strongly recommending it and really wanting us to have them.....there needs to be some sort of a way to put all of our food in them.

[55: 495 to 497] B: But you went ahead and opted for them even though they're optional. R: Yeah, although the first ranger I talked to, I think he was the head ranger... I talked to him on the phone. He didn't really make it sound optional. He didn't say we had to, but he encouraged them. Even though it's optional he really pushed for it.

### Group Size

[56: 16 to 22] H: We started out in Anaktuvuk that day. We flew up in two different groups. A fast group and a slow group, which did not work out as planned. Neither group was faster than the other. J: So, we kept kind of....we weren't allowed to be within sight of each other to dependent on each other so we kept having to allow....I was in the slow group.....having to allow the fast group to get ahead. H: There were nine of us? J: Yeah. That eventually sorted itself out later on in the trip. We stayed for a layover and then they managed to get [inaudible].

[57: 24 to 26] B: When you say you weren't allowed to be together....J: Well we....the group in the Park....for hiking you're allowed 7 in a group and 10 on the river. And so we made the trip with over 10 thinking we'd split up for the hiking part, and then we'd be together for the... We felt that 10 was better for the river trip.

[58: 409 to 411] B: How about being in the larger group. Did that impact the feeling of remoteness? R: I don't think so. If it had been any larger then maybe. I do think that you

know even in the back country portion of the trip where we did cross paths more than the rangers wanted us to. We really [inaudible] we did cross paths [inaudible]. And um.... because we knew each other and, in a sense, we really were together. It didn't really interfere with it. But I also wouldn't do it that way again. I would just keep it to seven on the river and for hiking. It just doesn't work well.

[59: 413 to 415] B: How do you feel about that policy? R: Well, it's kind of bizarre that it's 7 for hiking and 10 for the river. And maybe most people don't. And I can't even remember why I made the decision to go with 10. I can't remember why I thought having 10 was better for the river. It may have had something to do with pricing. Um...So, I think the policy... yeah, you definitely have to limit the size of the group. It should be a small size. If it were any smaller, it would basically be cost prohibitive for us to do it. It would be a more expensive trip and we wouldn't attract many people to it. And I think the impact...7 is basically a good size for low impact.

### **Limits on Use**

[60: 531] H: I think it is necessary to keep this land from getting overused. So, if that's what is necessary, even though I wouldn't enjoy it, that's what eventually will need to happen. Like we were saying, there are so many spots where we live where you can drive right up to it and you walk through it and you run into people constantly. There are many trampled trails. You lose that feeling of isolation and such, which is fairly important. At the same time, I don't want to be one of those people who is kept out of it because I don't have a permit. So, it kind of goes both ways.

### **Permits**

[see excerpt 51]

## **730CFX22 Peter (p), Interviewer (b)**

### **THE TRIP**

#### **Trip Planning**

[1: 137] p, Yeah, originally had planned on getting up here 2 years ago. And so the information that I had gotten from the Park I got 2 years ago. I wrote and just said "what information you got? I want to fly into the Park. Send me some stuff. Who have you got to contact to charter a plane?" Blah, blah, blah. Sent me a whole list of things. So I've been looking at that for 2 years. And I'd been traveling in other areas and I have to stop and work and make money to get up here. And then what I do is as I travel around the U.S., I have certain places I want to hit for sure. And the other ones, I just kind of go and you know I hear about a spot and I go to check it out as I go. Well, with coming up here, the plan was to get .... as I got closer to Fairbanks, I would start looking into chartering a plane. And I actually had the Milepost, you're probably familiar with the book, and in there it listed Coyote Air being out of Coldfoot. So then I started considering about, "well, shoot, if I drive 250 miles north of Fairbanks, it's got to be cheaper to fly out of Coldfoot than it would out of Fairbanks." So when I first got in to Alaska, crossed over from the Yukon, I called Coldfoot, or sorry, Coyote Air, and started inquiring about

prices and their availability to fly me out and so forth. And everything sounded right to me, so I made the decision to come up here. Then I just kind of “well, how’s it look for ..... I could be up here in a few days, how’s it look for the availability? You think you can get me in?” So I kind of made... I didn’t .... like most people are on a little bit more of a time constraint. They got two weeks off on vacation. They got to plan everything out ahead of time. With me, I’m on the road till my money runs out. I’ve been for 3-1/2 months now, traveling nonstop backpacking. I got another three months to go if I choose. So I kind of just get there and plan it out and make it happen when I get to a place. So that way, I’m not actually tied into schedules and stuff. So you know, kind of 2 years in the planning, but not really. Kind of made it up as I went, you know. So I originally contacted Coyote Air only probably about a week before I actually flew out.

[2: 109 to 111] b, Why did you choose to access the Park from Coldfoot as opposed to some of the other gateways? p, Um... cost. um... there was also a lure of driving the Dalton Highway. Um... Seeing the Alaskan pipeline. Not that I necessarily .... it’s weird. It’s like I didn’t really want to necessarily see ..... as far as the wilderness aspect, I didn’t want to see a pipeline running through the middle of the wilderness, but the Alaskan pipeline, looking at it from a ... I don’t know, you go see the gateway, you know St. Louis Arch, it’s, you know, something everyone knows about and you see and go up and see .... I drove up along the road along next to the pipeline. That aspect of it was kind of neat seeing the pipeline. Um..... but yeah the whole reason out of Coldfoot was cost, that Coyote Air was here, it cost me cheaper to fly from here than to fly out of Fairbanks and--like to Bettles--and then fly from Bettles to somewhere, so it .... Coldfoot allowed me to get into the Park other than by foot, get ..... it allowed me to get deeper into the Park with my .... with staying within \$800.

### **Reasons for visiting**

[3: 95] p, Um... the landscape, of course, was much different. I do a lot of mountain stuff everywhere. I try to do a lot of summits when I can. And but the fact that there was almost no trees except for just along the Tinayguk River made for definitely different scenery. I mean it was spectacular. And that was one of the things I was so looking forward to coming up here to the Gates of the Arctic was both the remoteness and the type of the scenery.... basically the treeless mountains and being in the tundra. And there was just a draw, too, to the fact that I was in the Arctic Circle, you know, because I had never been this far north before. The first time in Alaska and everyone thought I was crazy for doing it. But it really wasn’t that much different than any other hike as far as like difficulty. Actually, to tell you the truth, I’ve had a lot of hikes that were more physically challenging than this one.

[see also excerpt 23]

### **Wildlife**

[4: 23] p, Then on the way back to... it was getting a little bit dusk. I ran into four weasels that seemed to be quite curious also. I think they had a competition to see who could get the closest to me. It was pretty interesting.

[5: 31] p, Prior to doing the river crossing, when I was going through one of the quite dense brush areas where the brush was over my head, I was making a lot of noise going through just in case you know grizzly bears in that area, I didn't want to surprise anyone. And I flushed out a bull moose that was pretty close to me. Huge rack on him. And it was just awesome. He was trotting away from me just you could just hear the power just his mass trompling through the brush and across the ground. So that was the closest I've ever been to... I actually..... I don't think I ever saw a bull moose. I've seen cows in the wild, but , so that was neat. And then not too far away were two cows out there, too, with him. So I got some pictures of the cows. I couldn't get my camera out fast enough for the bull moose.

[6: 35] p, So I went up the right fork and then right near that fork, I saw a wolverine. The wolverine was kind of curious but at the same time wanting to get away from me. So he'd run a little bit, stop, look back and kind of stand up as high as he could on his front legs, take a look at me, run a little bit more, stop, and he did that about 3 or 4 times until he got up over the river bank and I couldn't see him any longer. So that was the first time I had ever seen a wolverine out on a trail. That was neat.

### **Bear encounters**

[7: 19] p, And um... starting off with that hike, I probably only got a half mile, three-quarters a mile up the river and I encountered a grizzly bear, which was actually my first grizzly I've seen in the wild. I've been pretty much, with only stopping to earn some more money, then backpacking quite extensively for the past three years pretty much nonstop. And I had yet to see a grizzly bear, so that was quite exciting for me.

[8: 19] p, He was about 70 feet away. Then,... so I was a little nervous during the time that he was coming over to me because I wasn't sure of his intentions. Um... but by this point, I realized he was just curious and he just wanted to check me out. So I stood there and watched him. Then he stood there and watched me. Then he sat down on his butt and started scratching himself. I knew he was, you know, there was no threat any longer. We sat there for about 15 minutes and watched each other. Then he crossed the stream over and picked up where he was grazing and started heading downstream and then I went upstream.

[9: 21] p, Then so I got about two more miles upstream, going up this tributary, and still thinking about the whole encounter, and watching my footings hiking up the rock with the elevation gain, and wasn't paying attention to my surroundings, which I should have been while I was hiking. I guess I was still kind of thinking about the whole past encounter. And all of sudden I hear this "phhhhh" kind of a sound similar to that and I look up and there's another grizzly. And so I was like "whoa!" He caught me off guard because I ... this one I hadn't seen ahead of time and he was about 65 feet away or so.

[10: 53] p, I didn't see any wildlife along that whole trip, but when I returned back to my camp, there was a grizzly bear taking a nap about 100 yards away from my tent. And when I came back, he awoke, he had heard me return. But then he went right back and started taking his nap again. But I was ready for dinner. I had had a full day of hiking in.

So I wanted him to leave because I wasn't going to start cooking with him being right there. So I'm banging rocks together and I'm yelling at him and stuff and trying to wake him up so he would take off and every once in a while he'd kind of look at me like "what do you want?" And go right back over and scratch himself and go right back to sleep. So I mean that went on for quite a while.

[11: 81 to 83] b, So it sounds like an amazing trip. What was the best part if you could single one out? p, Um....the grizzly encounters, for sure. Either the ... probably the 1st one. I don't know, the first one or the one by my tent. I would probably have to say the 1st one because after the 1st one, especially the 2nd one, because the 1st two grizzly encounters were the same day, I had that much more of a comfort level come over, being around them.

[12: 87] I was very, very satisfied with the amount of grizzly encounters I had, that they were all nonthreatening and that all the techniques that I chose to do and everything that I've been taught, worked. And it was awesome. It was incredible to be able to see them. I even wrote in one of my letters or actually two of my letters I wrote that I felt very fortunate to have been that close to this many majestic creatures and never be in a .... be in a non-threatening situation and be able to see them in the wild. Very few people get to. I mean people that I know. I mean like my family and stuff, they don't backpack or nothing. I mean they've never seen a grizzly bear out in the wild and never had one sleeping by their tent or whatever, you know. So that would have... I would have to definitely say the bears were the highlight. But I'd never seen a wolverine before. I 'd seen a couple of them you know stuffed. But I've never seen a wolverine, that was neat! Caribou, I don't... I think that was my first caribou I saw. Um... shoot, you know, this whole ... I mean, shit, none of my backpacks I've done in 3 years, I've never seen this much wildlife on. I mean, big wildlife, you know. Um... grizzly bears were the first time. The wolverine was a first time. I might have seen a porcupine or something when I was a kid, but the two porcupines I saw, I was like 5 feet from them. So that was neat. Never seen a porcupine that big. The caribou. So, yeah, the wildlife was amazing.

### **Weather**

[13: 33] p, Um.... and then I got up to an area that was probably 300-400 feet above the river level and found a nice flat grassy area and set up my tent while a storm was coming in. So that was quite strong winds setting it up and just barely beat the rain. And then I actually had eaten my dinner with like almost near-horizontal rain. It was rather interesting. It was quite a storm coming in. So that was fun. So from there, the rest of the trip it pretty much decided to rain.

[14: 39] p, And Wednesday, that'd be the 25th, I have in my notes that that night it rained all night long. But it seemed to then get into a pattern there for a few days where it would rain all night, have morning showers. During the day, it would be overcast with just maybe some small showers, and then be good and give me just enough time to get back to camp and then it would start raining again. So it was actually... I mean the weather, even though it rained a lot... I mean I got a lot of good hiking in where it wasn't too bad.

[15: 57] p, So Saturday the 28th came and it rained the entire day. It was just nasty. It rained and rained and rained. And I'm like "man" tearing down the tent while it was raining. And it means all my gear gets wet or gets somewhat wet. I was just like "I got just enough food, I can make it another day." So I just stayed in the tent, got out to cook my meals and to eat it in the rain and wrote some letters to some people and basically laid in the tent the day and that was it.

[16: 59] p, Then Sunday the 29th, I got up and it had stopped raining! My tent was dry! And I was happy! The sky was overcast. Wanting to rain any minute. But it held out long enough for me to pack my tent up dry and get everything in my backpack and my backpack cover on, and then it started raining. So it was perfect timing. Like I said, I mean, everything worked out well with the weather, even though I had not the most favorable. It, like everything would always give me just the exact amount of window I needed to do what I had to do and then when I was prepared for the rain, it would start just like "that." I mean it was like clockwork. It was scary. It was weird.

### **Overcoming adversity**

[17: 89] p, Then ... but I guess this part of it, I get out of other trips, too, but you know the weather kind of turned bad a few times. I never was ..... it was never real critical. It was never bad, but it's always satisfying being out there in bad weather and being able to be completely comfortable and feel safe and feel confident. So that was a neat thing that there was a couple of times ... one night setting up the tent in the really strong wind with horizontal rain and stuff was ... I was sitting out and eating my dinner just smiling. You know sitting out in the rain going "Oh, this ain't too bad!" It was like "I'm glad to be here."

### **Air Taxi**

[18: 63] p, And the plan was that Coyote Air was actually supposed to pick me up in the morning, but apparently...that didn't happen. It actually warmed up a little bit. I had a high of about 52 today while I was out there. But it was windy all day. Not too bad. And so the day was pretty uneventful. It would have been... it was actually perfect hiking weather. Ideal with the temperature in both overcast and I was kind of disappointed I wasn't able to hike because I didn't know when exactly I'd be picked up.

### **Hiking**

#### **Difficult terrain**

[19: 23 to 27] p, Then Monday the 23rd I moved my base camp 5 miles upstream, 5 miles up the Tinayguk River. Um... and that was quite a tough hike because it was all tundra and brush along that area. I'm sure you're familiar hiking across tundra with the ... I forget the name of the plant that keeps on growing and gets the big balls ....b, Tussocks. p, Yeah, tussocks... hiking across tons of tussocks and then through whatever there were... small, little tiny streams running across the land. There was thick brush and then I also had a ... I actually did a river crossing of the Tinayguk River.

[20: 57] p, So then Saturday the 28th I had planned on moving my base camp back to near the landing area. That gave me a two-day window to get five miles down stream, which is not very far, but once again this was pretty rough hiking. And I was running out of food. I had the rest of my food stashed at the cabin. I didn't take out as much with me as what I had wished because I didn't realize how bad .... I thought, well, if I need food I'll just run 5 miles back and get it and come back, it's no big deal, 5 miles is nothing one way. But going through all that, I was like I'm not hiking.... if I'm hiking back to the cabin, I'm hiking back and staying in that area.

### **Mosquitoes**

[21: 33] p, Um, going through that section, five miles across that tundra, the mosquitoes were just incredible. Um... fortunately, I ... there really wasn't any gear I wish I had had or there wasn't any gear that I didn't bring. I seemed to pack exactly right for this trip. One of them being a head net. So that was... I was very thankful for that because I literally had 100s on me at times... of mosquitoes.

### **Contrast to other trips**

[22: 91 to 93] b, So other than the length being a little longer and seeing a lot of wildlife, how did this trip differ from other ones that you've taken in the past? p, Well, one is this is the first time I've ever flown anywhere to get to a location. Everything else I do is I drive my car and then I hike. I usually do loops. And most of my hikes I usually pound down miles, where I'll go out and do, depending on the terrain, I'll do probably 6-12 miles a day and with this one here, I took you know 2 days off, not even hiking. And these were all just hiking up a tributary and coming back. So most of... well, a lot of my hikes I do are on trails, but I also try to combine a lot of ones that were a hike in a national park like partially on trail and maybe have a 5-mile off trail to another trail and then back on. This one was all off trail.

[see also excerpt 3]

### **Remoteness**

[23: 97 to 99] b, When you say that it was remote and that was part of the attraction, what makes it remote? p, Uh... one is the fact that it's in Alaska, which is just because I grew up in the Lower 48 states in Michigan, so Alaska is a long ways away. So everyone I know and my upbringing in the midwest, Alaska is the Last Frontier. So just the fact that it was in Alaska made it one thing. Then you got like everyone knows about Denali. Um... and Denali, I have... actually that's my next stop after re-supplying in Fairbanks. But Denali is another one of those parks that I kind of look at are the little tourists' national parks, like Yellowstone and Yosemite and stuff that I expect to see .... I've heard there's a big.....hotels and stuff near the entrance or I don't know, along the road, or what. I'm not sure, you know. And you know there's none of that here. This is ... you don't get your.... you don't get the family coming up here after getting off from Disney World and driving through the tour bus on the park and there's not even a road that runs into Gates of the Arctic National Park. And the fact that there is no road... it's difficult to get into the Park, um... you know, the fact that it's above the Arctic Circle, all contributes to the fact of remoteness. And it's not a Park you hear a lot about.

[24: 101] p, Um... and that was my main lure, or one of the main lures to coming up here is to get out and away from it. Because you know like I said, if you took away that cabin and took away the planes, it would have been the perfect remoteness that I had been looking for, for three years. Unfortunately, I didn't quite find it. I came close....but once I realized that town... that little village was up there, I was like "Shoot, I could do that in a day." It was actually from the landing strip at that point, it was 21 miles, I figured out today. But I could, you know, with this much daylight, I could put down 21 miles ... I mean that was .... wouldn't be too difficult. So that you know that kind of took away, too. It was like ... I mean it's good to have that option there, but I was like, you know, I wanted to be somewhere where there was like 300 miles to get to anything.

[25: 107] p, So you know but it was definitely a disappointment realizing that I wasn't as remote as what I had come up here for. Um... if I would've known that at the time, I might have picked a different spot in the Park because I think in other locations I could have got a little bit more remote. Being... like I said I kind of think I was just underneath a kind of a main flight pattern for supplies and people traveling to and from the village. Um.... and then my financial situation restricting me to how far away I could fly from Coldfoot.

[26: 111 to 115] p, So, I mean, it was \$810 with the radio rental. Today, I turned it on, this morning, just to make sure it worked, and somehow it had switched on while I was backpacking so the battery was dead. So.... I paid \$50 really for nothing. b, Peace of mind, maybe. p, Yeah. But you know, the thing was is I built everything up so much ahead of time because I was going to be in such a remote spot that I was sure that the smartest thing was to have the radio, which I'm sure it still was, but after day 1 out there, I didn't feel any different than any other hikes that I didn't feel the need to have that radio.

[27: 115] p, So it was like I took an extra precaution on this hike that I don't do in the same scenario with all my other ones. But it was just because I was going to such a remote spot that I had to have that one extra precaution. Like I said, it wasn't a bad thing. But that, you know, in a way almost took away from it, too, that I had that radio. It's kind of like part of that challenge of going out in such a remote spot by yourself and making it through on just your own ability.

### **Overflights**

[28: 71 to 75] p, So the whole time I was out, I never saw any people. But because of the location I was at, every day I saw several planes going to Anaktuvuk Pass. Then actually today, too, there was a helicopter that came in quite low down the river valley and upstream until I couldn't see him for a while. Then about 20 minutes later, he came back the other way. b, So how did you feel about seeing the planes and helicopter? p, Well, as a whole, like....I'm you know, I'm an avid backpacker, mountaineer. I've spent a lot of time the last 3 years going out. And I visited a lot of national parks. This has got to be at least my 50th national park and monument in the last 3 years. And in all my other locations, I really... I don't favor it. I don't like seeing the airplanes and seeing



everything. But I think I had a little bit more acceptability to it up here because of .... that's the main way to travel. Um.... I guess like what bothers me sometimes ... but I'm not necessarily dead set against it, but I don't really like it, is a lot of times just sightseeing flying out around different areas.

[29: 75 to 79] p, It cost me over just over 800 dollars to fly out round trip. And so it was a rather expensive trip for me, but it was worth it because of how remote I was going to get. Well, I realized once I was out there I wasn't quite as remote as I thought I was. In other words, I was ..... you're going to have to help me again with the name of the village....uh...b, Anaktuvuk Pass. p, Anaktuvuk Pass.. I didn't realize that I was going to be that close to it. And I didn't realize I was going to be over the main ... one of the main flight patterns for everyone flying in and to from there. I'm assuming that's where most of the planes were going. That's the direction a lot of them were heading. And then I'm pretty sure a couple of the planes that came through were just sightseeing planes also. So you know that was a little bit of a disappointment for me. Even the fact that that cabin was there was...nice as a safeguard and there was a food cache there and some supplies so that if I needed it, I'm sure I would have been very thankful, very, very thankful for the cabin being there and the supplies being there. But that also took away from the remoteness. You know part of the goal of this trip was, "okay, I'm going to spend this extra money to get out so remote that it's just going to be 100% me in the wilderness." And it almost was, but the cabin and the planes were the part that took it away from that. So that was a little bit of a letdown. But I got there by plane, too. So you know, what are you going to do? Some of those planes might have been other people flying into other areas of the park.

### **Wilderness**

[30: 127 to 129] b, So would you describe it as wilderness? p, Oh, yeah. I mean it was ... even though like I said, I've kind of hit quite a bit... a little bit on disappointed in not being as remote as I would have liked or would have thought I was coming into. This still ... I would say... I mean this was wilderness. I mean it was, you know, with the wildlife I saw and the..... so little signs of man, no trails made by man, other than the cabin,

### **Scenic Beauty**

[31: 117 to 119] b, So how would you describe the place to somebody thinking about visiting? p, Um..... well, I mean, you know I would definitely explain the landscape. Um... that's one of the draws here, is a lot of the other mountains you're in, you're hiking through trees and you know you get good spots throughout the hike where you get great views, you do a summit, you can see great views and stuff. It's like every foot of the way I could see just beautiful areas all around. And the mountains and rugged and so the treeless part of it was ... is a big part of explaining the terrain.

[see also excerpt 3]

### **24-Hour Light/Time**

[32: 121] p, Also, the factor of the midnight sun up here. Throws a whole spin on it, too. Everywhere else you know you plan your day you got ... you want to get back to camp

before dark. This is the first backpack I think I've ever not taken some sort of a flashlight with me, a headlamp or whatever. Um... and not being on such a time constraint as far as my daily activities. The first full day I was out, I was quite pokey at getting up, and getting stuff together, and stuff. It was like 4:00 in the afternoon before I started to leave for the hike. And most other situations to go the distance I went, it was only 10 miles, but it was some steep like 3300 foot gain, that I wouldn't probably try to go the entire distance and come back in one day, leaving at 4:00 pm, I would have definitely left earlier. But it was like "so what if I get back at midnight?" I mean, you can still see. So that... the whole sun thing was spectacular. Because I had, once again, never been in Alaska, never been this far north. That was... that's something I left out, too, that was a draw of coming to the Park, too, was the cycle of the sun. To experience that much daylight.

## **MANAGEMENT**

### **Bear Safety**

[33: 139 to 141] b, So what did you notice about the Park Service here and the management of the Park, perhaps, compared to some of the many other national parks that you've been to? p, Mmm.... you know one thing that I got that I thought was kind of odd, and I ..... it didn't seem like the people here at the visitor center were very persistent on people using bear canisters. They suggested them, but as I'm finding... especially in the last year or two, more and more of the national parks that have bears are like dead set on .... or either dead set as in it is mandatory or very strongly requiring bear canisters. Um... here, it was more kind of recommended, but no really pushed.

[34: 83] p, And you know in the Lower 48 states, you can't carry firearms in the national parks. But up in Alaska, some of the parks, they allow it only for bear protection. So being the fact that the park systems allow it, gave me a reason to believe that maybe there's a possibility there's a reason for me to carry them.

### **Visitor Use Regulations**

#### **Registration/permitting**

[35: 149] p, Um.. most of the national..... I do most of my backpacking in the national parks. Sometimes national forests or BLM land or whatever, but it's mainly the national parks that I hike in. And pretty much all the national parks require a permit, that is, it's not an option. Um... and I'm ... I try to be completely as 100% as I can .... leave no trace, minimum impact, and also I'm totally in favor of trying to manage the Park, you know, in both the Park's best interest and then also to meet the needs of people who come out, too, because...I mean you got to regulate it. You don't want to get you know too much use in a certain area. But at the same time, you don't want to completely say everything's off limits. Here's a national park, but no one can come visit it. If people can't get out and experience the wilderness and be a part of it then they're not going to make much effort to keep it there. So you got to let people kind of get in and use it a little bit, but you got to manage it. So for me it was a no-brainer, say "hey, you want some feedback on the Park that's going to help you manage it better? I'd be more than happy to be a part of that, to help give that information

[36: 151 to 153] b, So you said earlier that at other parks they usually require you to register. Did it change your experience any here, the fact that it was voluntary? p, Um..... you know I kind of, I don't know, it just ... I'm trying to think of how I felt about that at first. Um..... I don't know, you know I guess I'm used to that it's a mandatory thing that it's a little bit surprising. I don't know, I don't think this is the first park I went to that was ... it wasn't mandatory. But I kind of think it should be. So that, once again, you can just kind of keep track of the use and the areas that are being used and how it's being used. So that you have information that if you want to make management decisions for it, it's accessible. You start getting in where you're banning people and stuff, well then that's good if there's a good reason behind it. And I'm all for that. There's like a lot of the parks they limit how many people go into a certain zone a day, how many people are on a certain trail, how many permits they give out a day, and stuff. And I'm fine with that. Because that's a part of managing the park. That's keeping it without overuse in certain areas.

[37: 155 to 157] b, So your feeling is that the kind of limited access that you see in other parks might be appropriate here? p, Uh, yeah, I mean, it might come to that. In other words, I think the permits should be managed... there should be a mandatory permit system so that you can start realizing ahead of time that there's potential problems developing before..... instead of going, "Oh, shoot, we have problems now." Um... I think it's a lot easier to do preventive maintenance than try to do repair. So I think having a mandatory permit system just to get information on what people are doing I think is a good way to get that information.

#### **Focus on protecting natural qualities**

[38: 165] p, Where if you go to some of the other parks and you have designated sites where you plan out your entire route ahead of time, the exact trails you're going on, the exact spot you're camping every night, then you're held to an itinerary. Um..... and that kind of limits on how you enjoy your trip or what you do. You have to plan everything out before you even step foot in the park. I'm going to do exactly this many miles today and you just might not feel like hiking that far or you feel good and you want to put on another 10 miles that day. So you get into a park that doesn't have the restrictions, you're able to do what you want. The only thing is like I felt a little bit bad on my second base camp, I stayed a few more nights than what would have been most favorable. Because if you stay in one spot, especially if you have your tent in one spot, you start to impact the terrain right in that area and I can start see just some real mild signs of wear there.

[39: 159 to 161] b, You said earlier that limiting use, in other places anyway, is appropriate if there's overuse. What's overuse? p, Uh... you know, too many people in one area, what happens is people are out on an overnight backpacking, they have to put up their tents somewhere and some of the parks have restrictions as to how far off the trail and away from streams to set up. Other than that, you can choose wherever you want. Other ones have designated sites along the way that you have to register to camp in the certain area. You have to plan all that ahead of time. Um.. and that's all part of managing the use. If you get too many people in one spot, you know the landscape starts to suffer. The vegetation gets to be torn up.

[40: 163 to 165] b, If it came to that here in this Park, and there was limited access and perhaps designated camp sites and that kind of thing, how would that change your experience here? p, Well, see it's kind of a catch-22. In other words, I'm in favor of management of the Park to not ... for overuse in certain areas and stuff. But I have to honestly say I enjoy hiking and backpacking in the areas that are the least amount of restrictions. I like to be able to set up my camp where I want to within .... as long as I feel I'm doing it in a good way for the environment and the wildlife.

### **Support for NPS**

[41: 167 to 169] b, Okay, that's the end of my formal questions. Is there anything you'd like to add at the end? p, Um..... you know, yeah, I mean one thing is I'm glad that I've been able to come up and do this experience. This is definitely one of the, the highlights of this summer, being out on the Park. And it's one of those things where it's like you wish you could just say "No one else can go hike in the park." And that way it stays that much more remote, but... only but I can go. I can go out and do that stuff, so.. But that's what you're here for, to manage that, to figure out that plan of where we let people go and how many we let go and so... I mean I usually put a lot of faith in the park management in whatever park I'm at. I don't always .... I don't think you can always make a 100% of the time right decision all the time, but I think for most of the time, I see the parks do a good job of managing the property.

**815AKP30 Tammy (t), Lana (l), Cal (c), Steve (s), Dylan (d), Joe (j), Interviewer (b)**

### **THE TRIP**

#### **Reasons for Visiting**

[1: 633 to 635] b, So how did you find out about Gates of the Arctic and the route that you chose to do? s, This was all my... I was up here 8 years ago. In the village (Anaktuvuk Pass). And was up on the Dalton Highway at the same time and realized that you could do this trek basically you could go from the road to Anaktuvuk Pass and fly back, and do it cheaply. And the single biggest factor in planning this trip was the economics because the group couldn't afford to pay to charter a plane to drop us off deep enough and to do a trek like this. This was the only real option with the exception of doing a loop out and back to the highway, which would have kept us in the highway corridor, which I wanted to avoid.

#### **Route-finding/navigating**

[2: 23] s, Over Pasco Pass; Up Glacier River; Over Chimney Pass; Up Clear River for 2 miles; Over Holmes Pass; Down Pyramid Creek; Up the north fork of the Koyukuk; Up Ernie Creek; Over Ernie Pass; Down Greylime; Down the Anaktuvuk, to here.

[3: 167 to 171] s, Then going up Holmes Pass, from that camp at the confluence it was pretty straightforward to get up to the Pass. Like you could actually either continue up Holmes Creek itself. It looked like a pretty narrow canyon, but it turned out to be the easiest route. It was just a hike along the bottom of the canyon. Or half of us banked up

on the tundra. And then contoured around into the Pass. We had a.... l, It definitely would have been easier to .... .like I hiked up the creek most of the way and then it started ... the canyon walls started getting pretty steep, so I bailed out and walked above it, but definitely, like Eric walked along the river the whole time. That was definitely easiest. Like it ... coming up right after the pass, it was just a nice gradual gravel path leading right up to the top of the pass. That would definitely would have been easier than hiking along the .... the tundra was real steep on the banks above, so.....j, Yeah, definitely if the water level is low, go up the creek.

[4: 185 to 189] t, The first mile out from the Pass was pretty nice. Nice little creek you just following it along...s, It's like there's... yeah... it's like 3 miles from the Pass to the confluence of the two major forks of Pyramid Creek. Then the first 1-1/2 to 2 miles, it just gradually gets steeper, and the boulders get bigger, and the river is getting rougher. Then the mile above the confluence was either going through knee to thigh deep swift water in box canyons against the walls or trying to get around on incredibly steep tundra with drops, big holes, big soggy holes in the tundra. c, And lots of little feeder streams.

[5: 251 to 255] s, The confluence was just kind of deceptive because Shushuluk Creek comes in right there, as well. So looking from the river, it looks like a tributary coming in. It's not a major fork. It's just a smaller tributary coming out of the mountains. t, Yeah, Ernie Creek really comes in like a sharp right angle. s, Yeah, so it's an easy one to miss.

[6: 307] s, Yeah, so like after the rocks, the rocks petered out and then there was like 5 miles of real easy going along Ernie Creek, like great gravel bars, even though the river was high, it was no problem to travel on the river banks. Then you hit the triple confluence for Grizzly, Konunga, and Ernie where they all come together. And we had rain all day that day. Then going into Ernie Pass, either you go up, straight up the canyon, which was unknown in terms of how accessible it was to get in and out of, and there's lots of rain and lots of water, so we contoured up the west side of it to ... we had an altimeter, and we hiked up 800 feet to the height of the pass, ...contoured around in white-out conditions. And there's two major gullies that are only crossable at that elevation.

[7: 493] s, We had a GPS with us. We put each camp in and the total distance, route distance from camp to camp to camp to camp was 74, exactly. We were trying to figure in the average deviation from straight line progression. We figured about 20 to 25%. So we figured we did like 90 to 100 miles, all told. Triple digit .

[8: 565] d, One other thing that I think is extremely important that we did not do is everybody should have a map. We only had one, two maps. And one was like the small... or the large scale topo and one was the small scale topo. I would love to have a copy of the maps so that when I'm 100 yards ahead of somebody and it's raining and I don't want to stop and wait for them to catch up and start freezing because you know you're hiking with all your stuff on, you stop, you just immediately start freezing. I'd like to be able to look at the contours and say "okay, there's that peak, this is the direction I need to go." Rather than hiking half a mile past the confluence and having to go all the way back. Or

even if somebody just gets... you know, you're behind the group 20 yards and they go over a rise and you fall and hurt yourself. It's going to be a while before they come back and figure out where you are.

### **Daily Schedule**

[9: 225 to 231] d, We had a very late schedule. We'd get a late start, anywhere from noon to three. We started our hiking and then ... t, Go 'til like 10.d, Anywhere between 8 and .... j, Going into the Koyukuk was our longest night. I think I went bed at like 1:00.

### **Physical Challenges of Hiking and Camping**

#### **Too much weight**

[10: 31 to 35] c, 14 feet from where we started, I realized that I brought way too much stuff. That the tussocks were going to be some rough terrain to walk, and I was unsure that I was going to make our final destination. j, Backpacks were heavy with two weeks worth of food, were borderline...., I mean we were pushing it...we have physical ailments because our packs were so heavy. c, Lots of 'em.

[11: 533] d, The intensity and the terrain were just like nothing I've ever encountered before. I mean I was in Boy Scouts. I did 50 hikes at least. From day hikes to week-long backpacking trips, 50 miles or whatnot. But the amount of weight that first day, I just couldn't believe it. I couldn't tell myself that I was going to hike 80 miles with that much weight on my back and be all right. It didn't seem fathomable. It didn't seem possible.

#### **Tussocks**

[12: 45 to 49] t, The first day we counted a lot, a lot of tussocks right off, but we found this winter trail. It was actually on the map. We followed that for a good part of that day. j, Unfortunately, it didn't go over Pasco Pass. That's were we really like had our first, like real introduction to tussocks. You looked from a distance and it looks like you can just easily go right over that pass. And then when you get there, that last 200 yards takes 45 minutes. And you're just sweating and everything hurts and you just want to be there. d, Stumbling around, falling in between tussocks.

[13: 53 to 61] s, There's a good game trail going up Pasco Pass. The last 200 yards were really nasty tussocks. And going down was chill, but as soon as we got to the bottom, it was like the worse tussocks of the entire trip. t, Yeah. s, At first, was in the mile between the edge of that hill and where we found that winter trail again. People were falling over and unable to get themselves out and requiring assistance from other people just to get back up. t, I've fallen and I can't get up! s, And then people trying to help other people and falling over themselves. And so there's two people down. And screaming, waving their trekking poles in the air.

[14: 103 to 105] t, Glacier River we just kept crossing back.... we must have crossed it literally like over a hundred times, just back and forth, back and forth and to gravel bar to gravel bar. c, That was easier going than going through tussocks.

[15: 67] d, Yeah, the tussocks weren't nearly as bad close to the water they were in, like up on the hillside.

[16: 107] d, The tussocks actually got easier the further north we got, though. They got smaller and less depth in between each one. I found at first I was rolling my ankles a lot. You know you try to step on the top one and it just rolled down into the mud and stuff.

[17: 441] s, And then we hiked in here yesterday. The last, in general, I thought the going all along the north side was pretty good, like generally hard tundra. The tussocks that were there weren't nearly as bad as we'd experienced. There is a lot of good walking.

[18: 449 to 457] c, The ATV trails, part of them were...a lot more difficult to maneuver through than down on the tundra. j, Yeah. t, We really didn't hit any decent ATV trails 'til right..... leading into the village, here. Like you could see every now and then some tracks where an individual ATV had gone by, but it wasn't until we actually left the river, about you know 4 miles from here to turn inland that we actually hit a real trail. We saw one or two on the opposite side of the river, but very few trails. And the one that we followed in here, the last like 4 miles or so, it had been raining for days, so it was absolute mud. s, The bog slog. t, Yeah, it was definitely better than the tussocks leading in here, but you know you're up to your mid-shin in mud for most of it.

### **Wetness**

[19: 111], Yeah, pretty much from day 4 on, everybody just hiked in soaking-wet boots for the rest of the trip.

[20: 281 to 291] s, Then we went up and then from the confluence into the Valley of Precipices is like every possible kind of terrain, river gravel, we had some bad tussocks, we had some great game trails, we had to bash through some alders, we had .... and then it ended, there's a rise ... just about 2 miles of just these big piles of rocks. t, Really cool, like all moss and lichen covered. j, But incredibly slippery. Like the only full fall I took with the pack was on the rocks just because they were so slippery. And really dangerous. And it was all wet because of the rain. t, It was much better walking than the tussocks. d, We got real heavy rain. We got like a little shower. That was real tough that day because everyone was just so tired. And you end up "where should we camp now?" and it's slippery as hell everywhere. c, So we renamed it the Valley of Precipitation.

### **River hazards**

[21: 135] c, Steve had warned us, ...in the Bob Marshall books he talks about camping on sand bars and being like aware of water levels rising, that was like the first time we were like, okay, we're not going to camp on the sandbar right here because there's no where to go.

[22: 191 to 193] s, Yeah, lots of feeder streams. And really difficult access back down to the river. A bunch of us went up above and were able to drop back again in one of the only spots to do it, and that was mildly precarious getting down there. t, And I walked in the river and that was really sketchy, like in knee to thigh-deep water with like no gravel

bars, just like sheer wall, water, sheer wall. Sort of wondering if I probably shouldn't really be in here.

[23: 233 to 235] t, Yeah, we didn't even arrive until like almost midnight at the Koyukuk. s, Yeah. At night. And we crossed it immediately because the rain was coming up and we could cross it, and it was knee to thigh deep, not too bad. And then got across, set up camp, started to get some rain.

[24: 257 to 261] j, That's when we started to see the water level, like... Once we got across the Koyukuk, people started to be concerned about crossing rivers. Like before Glacier and Clear, everyone was going through these big drainages. But this is like when we started to stay on one side of the .... and we weren't crossing over much...it was getting kind of sketch to stay on one side. l, We also set up camp that night and then had to set it up again because the river was rising and, yeah, we could just watch the water rise. We had to move back up hill. s, We got our first really heavy rains that night. The next morning the river had gone cloudy. Had risen to the point where it couldn't be crossed. In the spots we saw.

[25: 419 to 427] s, Yeah, we camped on a sand bar that we estimated was about 3 feet above the height of the river. But it rained all night, really hard. l, The river rose like crazy overnight. j, [inaudible]we were below the confluence of that tributary..... so ...l, Yeah. s, So, 8 in the morning we had small rivulets coming in between our tents. And the river was still rising. It was still raining.

[26: 519 to 523] c, Yeah, even if we hadn't been to the Koyukuk in time before it started rising.... if it was not clear and we hadn't been able to see the bottom, I don't think I would have crossed it. At the end of that day. l, Yeah, at the end of that day, no way. t, Yeah, there were a lot of rivers we could have gotten stuck at for a while, yeah.

### **Exhaustion**

[27: 509] s, I thought Pyramid, Pyramid was by far the most challenging. Because of the terrain, because by the end of it, crossing the Koyukuk, we were all so physically exhausted, people were having difficulty thinking straight, dealing with stuff, and it was raining and it was cold.

### **Unexpected Elements**

#### **Mosquitoes**

[28: 37] j, Like we..., the first part of the trip, we were like greatly surprised that there were no mosquitoes. Absolutely none. Compared to where like the Kenai Peninsula and other places we've been in British Columbia. Even by California standards.... there were no mosquitoes. We didn't use bug dope for the first, like we used bug dope once on the actual trip. And it was sunny. We had sun. We hadn't seen the sun in the last three weeks down on the Kenai, but we ... we were in shorts with no mosquitoes. We were carrying a mosquito net that we thought we were going to need.



[29: 817 to 825] d, Do you know if mosquitoes are generally not that bad this time of the year? Or is this just a strange.....?b, Usually they're the least bad in August. That's why the most visitation occurs in the month of August. That and that the wildlife is up and moving around. j, I was amazed that we didn't have mosquitoes. I just heard horror stories about.....[inaudible group banter] s, It's tough. It definitely was tough having the screen house for no bugs, deciding to bring it, but then if the, yeah, had we been here in July, we would have been blessing every ounce of that house.

### **No down-time**

[30: 537] d, Yeah. And it seemed like "oh, we'll have plenty of time to get there." We'll even have a rest day or two. We can stretch it out here if we want to, to make up a little bit, be able to have a little more time to relax and whatnot, but we were pretty much hiking long... whenever we were hiking, it was long days. There was only one day that we only did a couple of miles. And one rest day. So, the amount of time that it took was more than I expected.

### **Equipment**

[31: 63] j, Trekking poles are a must. I was the only one who didn't have them. I ended up using our poles from our screen tent. We were like four-legged creatures humped over by the weight of our packs.

[32: 99] s, Three days going up Glacier River to Chimney Pass. We wished..... the equipment we didn't have was neoprene socks and some type of water shoe or something with more arch support. We hiked in sandals for 2 days with nearly full packs. It was really hard on our feet. Really hard.

[33: 515] c, Yeah. I'd say the hardest part for me anyway was carrying a bunch of wet cotton around. I had like 15 pounds of wet clothes at one point. After we had gotten rid of like half of our food. So it was pretty much like I was carrying the same weight that I started out with again. So, wet clothing I think was probably the worst.... it wouldn't dry.

[34: 525 to 529] j, Seriousness, the gravity of what we just did was like ... I look back on it now. If I was going to do it again, I'd want to know what every person is carrying. Because what the bottom line comes down to, I might have to carry that person or that person's gear. Everyone... everything... like I just didn't... I looked at it like we all just packed like we were going on another trip, but this wasn't .... if shit had gone down, we'd have really been put to the test. And I don't know how we got through with not ..... we had no issues. Our biggest issue was like "when should we start hiking?" We'd have long debates about if we should get up early and hike or if we should sleep in and fish before we hiked. It was ridiculous. b, You sounded right there like you were going to say that "we packed like this was just another trip, but it wasn't." j, Yeah, like I don't think it was. If something had gone wrong or we had an issue, like we would be really pressed. Like we have some.....some of the gear we brought was kind of like.....a mosquito net would have been nice if the mosquitoes were bad. But in all honesty that was weight we shouldn't have been carrying. I know I had stuff in my gear that I shouldn't have been

carrying. I brought a three-weight fly rod and an eight-weight fly rod and you don't need an eight-weight fly rod for a little 8-inch grayling. And that's probably like 4 pounds.

[35: 553 to 561] d, I just brought a lot of extraneous stuff that I didn't ever use. On top of the Walkman and all those tapes. I bought this little wooden wolf at the Ranger Station, not realizing that I was going on a 14-day hiking trip. I don't know what I was thinking. He became our little buddy. t, He was our mascot. d, When the going got tough, I'd have a little chat with him. l, Blame everything on Wolfie. Wolfie gnawing on our knees, Wolfie gnawing on our toes. On our backs. c, Everything that went wrong was Wolfie's fault.

### **Group Dynamics**

#### **Positive elements**

[36: 597 to 603] b, So it sounds like you all still like each other after this trip. Can you describe the influence that the other people in the group had on your individual experiences? c Well, that guy.....no. l, Well, notice there's only six of us. t, We ate the other one. [laughter]

[37: 605] c, It helped that we each had our different bad days and good days. And they weren't all on the same day. So if someone was having a good day and carried a little bit more weight, or do a little more of the work, um... if a person was feeling down or injured or just sick and tired of hiking, they could take a little break. And that was nice that our group worked like that.

[38: 713 to 715] l, No, I definitely feel like there was that ... I feel like we had a lot of just team mentality. Like I mean like what you said, [Joe], about people getting hurt and stuff. Because there were some minor injuries with knees and ankles and stuff. And people were willing to take more and that kind of stuff. If we .... if there were just two of us, it'd be way harder. But with 7, it's like "okay, this person's hurting today, lets do something about it." d, Or even if we had been a group of 7 that didn't know each other that well, had never really been together in a group before, because then you're kind of like well, I brought this stuff, I'm not going to pawn it off on someone else that I don't really know that well. I'm not really comfortable with asking them to carry my extra weight, since my ankle hurts today. It's more like everybody was like "oh, your ankle hurts? Give me some of your weight."

[39: 607] d, Definitely. I think we've also had, most of us have had a lot of experience together before, in hiking and camping and whatnot. Hanging out with each other, so there was a lot of good prep time for that for the most part. I think this is the true test of all of our previous experiences.

[see also excerpt 35]

#### **Difficulties associated with group size**

[40: 609 to 613] s, I was struck by the differences between hiking with a group of 7 and hiking with a group of 3 or 4 and the dynamics and decision-making and getting

everybody motivated and the speed at which the group can travel. There's definitely strong correlations between the size of the group and the speed at which all that can be done. t, Inverse. s, Inverse, yeah.

[41: 615 to 619] b, Are you saying that 7 was too many? t, 7 is just a lot slower than 3. s, Just a lot slower than I would hike individually or 3 people could hike together.

[42: 621] j, I was just thinking, it's only slower in the part setting up camp and getting stuff done. It's just because it's just like there's ... you don't need all 7 people to cook, so there's this whole kind of little like social loafing.

### **Weather**

[43: 205 to 215] l, It started raining. j, And it started to rain. d, It started raining. That was the first day we got real rain. t, Cold and wet...j, That was the first day we got real rain. d, We were feeling very broken at that point.

[44: 335 to 351] j, It was frigid. I've never been that cold. l, Yeah. We had to hike to be warm. t, People were wet and cold. s, Yeah, it was low to mid 40s with probably average 20 mile an hour winds and raining hard. j, Yeah, it rained. I was like pack up, get on and get out of here. Because you can't hang out here unless you're in your sleeping bag. If your environment was wet, like mine was, I had to be the motivator that morning...without popping in with one of you guys. Everyone was nice and warm. I was like "everyone get up, let's go!" s, That day we did more miles that day than any other day. It was amazing. l, Because we were so cold. s, Weather...c, The rain and the cool really got us going.

[45: 293 to 299] t, It pretty much rained from that point on throughout the trip, so that'll become a theme. s, Yeah, that was the start of the sort of incessant rain and regular rain. We had... but we had a great site, amazing views. Amazing place. t, Yeah, right by Black Face Mountain. d, Even though it was cloudy in there, like sometimes the ceiling would lift enough so that we could see the walls of the canyons in there. It was really cool. And then when we got up to the top of the valley, there, we hiked up along the side of Ernie Creek was in kind of a steep box canyon again, so we went up alongside of the hill. And looking back down the canyon after we had gotten up into the fog a little bit, was really cool, too, because every once in a while it would break up and you'd be able to see Black Face Mountain.

[46: 317] j, It was pretty exciting though. Making... going up the ridge line. It was pretty exciting because we were hiking up into the clouds. You couldn't see very well. You're very conscious of trying to keep the group together and make sure everyone was, you know, that we weren't going to lose someone in the fog. It was steep. We weren't that far from a pretty good drop-off to the right.

[47: 323] s, Yeah, we had a great view..... we were really blessed. The cloud lifted as the..... the mile and a half from the confluence of Ernie and the North Fork of the Koyukuk. It's some of the best views on the entire trip. You can see all the high peaks.

And we were fortunate that the cloud lifted enough to see virtually all of the summits. It was really special.

[48: 335] j, Sometimes you'd see the mountains on the sides of a pass and go "Whoa, look, there is a mountain over there!" It was just really neat kind of to have it always changing, but then it rained hard that night and the wind.

### **Escape**

[49: 571 to 573] b, What was the best part of the trip? d, Getting away from everything. And not hearing a single thing. Like this is the first trip that I've ever heard complete silence. Like not even birds chirping. Most camping trips in California, there's always a bird chirping some place. Or some kind of noise going on or a jet flying overhead. Or whatever. Complete silence. No wind in the trees. When we stayed at Smokey Lake there was no sound. It was completely quiet. It was so nice to just have some free time away from everything. No outside stimulants at all.

### **Challenge/Accomplishment**

[50: 583] s, I thought the best thing about the trip was that we successfully accomplished something that pushed us all to our limits. We all experienced something that we will remember for the rest of our lives. And found our limits, I would say, and approached them and pushed ourselves a little beyond it. And the deep personal satisfaction in doing that in the most remote, pristine wilderness out there, is something I don't anybody is going to forget any time soon.

### **Re-entry**

[51: 463 to 469] s, Then we arrived in the gravel quarry.  
t, Like "there's heavy construction going on!" c, We were all scared, like, we shouldn't go there, there's heavy machinery. Can we enter there. Are they going to be mad at us? We didn't know what to do. Just walk around in there and ...t, People! What's going on?

[52: 483 to 491] c, Yeah, we were super stoked with the washeria,... washeteria, whatever they call it. l, Sauna. s, Sauna. c, Sauna, showers. d, If I had only known that there was a sauna waiting for me here....all those rough times...

### **Luck**

[53: 517] j, Yeah, we were blessed, really, by the weather, that we could cross the rivers and we were also lucky that we didn't have any major injuries. Like everyone was able to carry a load. Everyone was able to make ground. We covered some distances, even though we started at 12 o'clock or 2 or 3 o'clock sometimes, we'd actually cover some serious ground in a day. Like looking back in retrospect, now, and wouldn't have taken much for us not to be here today or for the next week. You know that's what just blows my mind.

[54: 563] t, Yeah, I think we were very, very lucky, though, all in all.

## **PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLACE**

### **Scale**

[55: 647 to 649] c. Pristine and bigger than you could ever imagine. You're standing in an river valley, the river's right next to you so you have perspective on that, there's a giant wall over here and a giant wall over here and you really have no idea how tall the mountain is. You know, it could be a little hill in perspective to all the stuff around it. Or it could be 5,000 feet. It's really hard to gauge, I guess, distance. I was having a hard time for a while. t, On the clear days, you'd look at a mountain and would figure it out, looking at the maps and stuff, that it was like 40 miles away.

### **Demanding/Self-limiting**

[56: 641 to 645]b, This is always a fun question. How would you describe the area you visited to somebody thinking about visiting? d, It's so hard to put it into words. t, I'd tell my mom not to come. She could never hack it.

[57: 657 to 669] s, But...challenging, you have to know how to read a topographic map extremely well. I spent like ..... most challenging terrain you can imagine, every variety. And expect to be wet. t, Just hiking in wet boots,...but most people really probably shouldn't... the vast majority of people shouldn't probably ever attempt to come in. b, Because of the physical difficulty? t, Just because you need to be able to carry a really, really heavy pack and you need to know how to deal with emergency situations, you need to know a lot of survival skills, you need to just be able to you know prevent hypothermia, be able to dress properly, be able to dry yourself, be able to cook for .... like .....d, Be able to push yourself when you don't think you're capable of pushing yourself. t, Yeah, be able to like walk another 40 miles when you're injured. And I think it's probably beyond what most people are probably willing to do. l, Most people wouldn't consider it a vacation.

### **Wildlife**

#### **Sightings**

[58: 163 to 165] j, Didn't you have a wolf sighting on Glacier? c, Yeah, we were, I think, further north. I looked up. I was walking away from the group and, we were starting out, we'd just had a break, and I looked up at about a 15 foot bank, and I saw a little dog-like creature. I think it was a wolf, but I'm not sure. Right as I looked up it ran away.

[59: 159 to 161] s, Yeah, so our only bear sighting was going up towards Chimney Pass on the small creek. We saw a grizzly from like 75 yards on the embankment overlooking the river. We saw it. l, Well, we were on sort of in the middle of the river and it was on the bank up above, maybe 20 feet above us. Just sort of looking at us. Then I was like "Look at the bear!" My bear bell starting ringing and it was like "vwpppp!" Kind of stood up and it took off running away.

#### **Behavior**

[60: 685 to 689] b. So, you mentioned a couple of sort of attributes of a wilderness. You said "animals migrating," "no people." What other things made it a wilderness? s, No evidence of man. l, Alarming animals. Like we saw this lynx on the river. And I was just

like “oh, my....!” getting so excited. And the lynx like froze and then we saw it leap like 5 feet horizontal, just like back into the bushes. It was like that thing was so freaked out. But then it was kind of funny because we saw this porcupine. The porcupines are just waddling around like they don't know what's going on. They just have huge quills. So we chased it down so we could get a better look at it. It was really cool though because, it's a porcupine you know. So much stuff out there. Tons of rabbits. We saw so many legs of animals like the first day we saw this like lucky rabbit foot. Just like .... little did we know that we'd come across just tons of rabbit feet. They just get macked by everything it seems. They're little guys. Yeah, we just saw tons of caribou skulls and antlers and carcasses. Huge vertebrae. Just like went down with the river current. Stuff is picked clean. It's amazing. Like they don't leave anything around. California, they just have stuff you know the turkey vultures finish the carcasses off. Here, there's nothing like that. I was amazed.

### Evidence

[61: 697 to 701] j, There was scat everywhere. d, There you go, [Joe].j, Like that was something that, along with the footprints, there's scat everywhere. Sometimes you didn't even realize it, but you'd look over and there's a big ol' bear dropping right near you. Oh, are we cooking our food right next to that and no one realized it? It's like ... that kind of adds to the wildness because it's just this evidence everywhere. Even though we were scaring them off, there's just.... you know they're there. You know they're sitting there watching you go “what the hell are these?”

[62: 575 to 581] j, I liked when you're hiking along you'd see footprints and be like, “I should go that way”; then all of a sudden, you look and it's not a footprint it's a bear-print. And it's like, “Yeah, if a bear went this way it must be a good way to go”. It was so cool to just be standing around and to see like the wolf prints. They're just typical dog prints, but it's like four times the typical dog. And it's four times as deep as the typical dog. You know it was just like so cool to see evidence of the wildlife out there. Tough we didn't get to see them, as much as we ... it wasn't like Marty Stouffer's “Wild America” all around us, but... It was cool to see the evidence that it is like that. And that we're just too loud and whatever it was. A lot of time we had the wind at our back, so our smell was going out ahead of us, so ....d, Even without bear bells we were still noisy. l, It was great this great racket. t, Most of us had bear bells. I mean it was definitely good from a safety standpoint in that it gave the animals plenty of warning. Like bears weren't bothering us.

### Safety

[63: 73] l, Yeah. Saw tons of wolf and grizzly tracks. So that was exciting. Made us worry about our food.

[64: 627 to 629] d, One thing I was really surprised was that we never had any issues with animals getting into our food. I mean we did do a pretty good job of trying to toss it up in trees when we could. Even though most of the time it got to about just the reach of a grizzly bear's arms. He could've sliced it down with one blow, but at the end we had a pretty big sack of pretty smelly trash. We'd just throw it with the bear canisters and hope for the best. Nothing ever touched it. t, That's where being loud was good.

[see also excerpt 62]

### **WILDERNESS**

[65: 671 to 677] b, Would you describe the area you traveled through as a wilderness? s, Absolutely. j, Some of the most pristine...l, I'd say beyond, that's what was always so shocking to me, it's just so wild and to think of animals migrating and people being nowhere. It's so awesome.

### **Evidence of Other People**

[66: 365 to 381] j, I think we saw another person. We think we saw another tent. I'm pretty sure because that orange dot wasn't there...l, From the pass. t, Mike, the ranger, said there was somebody hiking up that way. Around that time, so probably was. j, That was the only person we saw. b, On the whole trip, that was the only person? c, Yeah. s, Mm..hm.. l, Well, we just saw a tent in the distance. s, That was like 3 or 5 miles away.

[67: 75 to 81] c, Yeah, and more on this trip than human footprints. That was pretty cool. j, There were no human footprints for the first like 3-4 days. s, Yeah, in Glacier River. j, There was no sign of ..... like I did see some trash along the winter trail, found a couple of pieces of garbage, but for the most part, there was no real sign that people had been there.

[68: 241 to 247] j, Then I found this nice fleece laying out in the wilderness [a fleece jacket that he is wearing]. And it was just muddy. It had moss growing on it. There were some roots going through it. I scrubbed it, cleaned it up, washed it, brand new. Got some history to it, like it looks like...d, Bullet hole....j, There's some patchwork and stuff. t, You can't even imagine what that thing looked like. It was like sort of trampled on by all these moose prints. He pulls up he was like "look what I found!" It was like completely covered with mud and moss and .... it looks really good now.

[see also excerpt 78]

### **Wildlife as Indicator of Wildness**

[see excerpts 60-61]

### **Overflights**

[69: 387 to 407] b. How about aircraft? Were there a lot of overflights? l, We saw the most....t, On the Koyukuk. l, Yeah, the most air traffic on the Koyukuk. d, That morning on the Koyukuk we saw three different planes. s, Within the space of like two hours. d, Yeah, l, And in stormy conditions. d, We saw planes when we were in Glacier. We saw like two or three planes in Glacier, as well. That was over a three-day period. s, Yeah, so we saw....t, Actually, maybe three days total out of 13 out there we saw planes. Otherwise, nothing.

### **Ethics**

[70: 679] c, It made me really conscious of .... we were kind of having a discussion at the beginning.... of super low impact camping, the best ways to deal with all the things you

have to do while you're camping. It just made me really conscious of all the serious impact that we do every time we go out. Even if we're not like leaving our trash all over the place and that kind of thing. It's just like if you leave an established campsite, it's not natural anymore. It's not the pristine wilderness anymore. And walking into places and never, you know, we'd see .... it was obvious where people had camped before because of a couple of rocks where they had staked out their tent or something like that. And it became really easy to pick out because for tons and tons of miles we saw no human impact at all. It just made me really conscious of, you know, how much impact our normal standards of camping really do to the environment. Of course in California, it recovers a lot quicker. It's a little bit warmer and stuff breaks down a little better. But ...

[71: 681 to 683] j, You actually see what your impact is, because this place is pristine, whereas when you're in California or any,...someone else has been there before you. We're not the first anywhere. I know we're not the first out here, but like going up to Glacier, it felt like we were the first maybe to see them because there were no footprints. There was nothing there in Glacier. It was so awesome. It was something to have that footprint next to the bear print. d, Yeah, we camped on the sand bar ... was that two nights ago? Anyway, we camped out on the sand bar when the river came up and we had to move in the morning. And within 20 minutes of getting there, I just noticed how much impact there was on the ground just by all the footprints around our tents. We hiked for 80 miles not seeing a single footprint or maybe one or two. And then to get into camp and there's like 50 right around your tent. It's such a different feeling you know. People have been here.

[see also excerpt 85]

### **No-Rescue**

[72: 585 to 591] j, Like you go backpacking in the Sierras and you get a serious injury and it's never more than 15 miles in most..... you can get lost, but in most places it's not that far between some sort of cabin and civilization or .... d, Highway...c, Or something, you know. But...t, Like if somebody had... if something had happened out there, it would have been literally at least a week. And you would have had to hike yourself out. Like if somebody got seriously hurt, you either would have walked yourself out or you'd have died. That's that.

[73: 703 to 707] c, I think the idea that you're so inaccessible and it's so hard to get in and so hard to get out is a wilderness to me. You're out there. d, You got yourself out there and you have to get yourself out of there. t, Yeah, no one's coming to get you. There's no help if you need it. You're just on your own. If you mess up, it's just all on you.

## **MANAGEMENT**

### **Prefer Minimal Presence**

[74: 759] l, The Park Service seems pretty intentionally hands off. In a place like this...this is the land, pretty much keep whatever, you know, hunting or development activities out of it. And you're sort of on your own, which is what we were looking for.



[75: 777 to 785] b, So you described the management as sort of hands off. Is that something the rest of you would agree with? d, Yeah, I didn't see any visible.... it didn't seem like there was anything that they had been doing obviously... Just let it go. Let it be. b, And how do you feel about that approach? d, I think that's the way it should be done. c, There's really nothing to do.

### **Misinformation**

[76: 743 to 757] b, What did you notice about the Park Service management in this place? t, I was amazed that [Steve] was telling us that the rangers were saying that people do the trip in 10 days? 8 days? s, 10 days. That was one of the ....t. Because there's no way .... we were pushing ourselves. We had basically one full day of rest. But if that river had been....d, You could do it if you had a food drop. t,... a little bit higher. If you had a food drop and the water was low, but I think....c, And we're all marathon runners. [laughter] t, Yeah, maybe on the moose highway.

[77: 761] s, Yeah, I thought the, in my experience talking with the Park, they're all very friendly and very willing to talk and... other than that piece of misinformation I would almost call it, about the 10 days, which was a big part in sort of my factoring into the length of time and planning because given that piece of information and given sort of what I worked out, I had seen that we'd have two to three rest days. And it didn't work out that way.

### **Limited Information/Opportunity for Discovery**

[78: 803 to 813] s, It was challenging trying to find route information. That was the one.... I guess that's just part of the nature of the Park, but I spent... I was unable to track down anybody who could describe the stretch from Chimney Pass to north fork of the Koyukuk going over Holmes Pass. Like that was completely unknown to this group because nobody had been there that I could find. But I guess that's just....j, That added, though, to the adventure of the trip. d, Yeah, definitely. j, I remember we all kind of talked about that, we all had a kind of little smug like we're kind of exploring. And then when we saw a footprint, it was like "oohhh we're not the first!" t, Yeah, it kind of goes both ways. Like on the one hand, you want to kind of gather all the information you can before you start and you know what you're dealing with and be able to kind of plan, but that's also sort of the nature of the park that you're sort of playing explorer. Yeah, I was bummed when I saw footprints, too. I was like "damn!" d, I definitely felt like a pioneer at some points. I mean I can see how the land hasn't changed very much. There's big Alaskan wilderness or whatever, that's in the 30s I guess and a lot of the same ... it doesn't sound like it's changed very much.

### **Registration/Orientation**

#### Education function

[79: 789] c, I think it was Lee, I think she was the lady ranger there at the other place, she wanted us to read the... because we had talked out there about our impact and like how to deal with things. Like how to deal with our feces. You know, like what to do with that. We still have different philosophies on how to deal with that. Maybe even more

education on that. That's like a good thing, that could be like a requirement as you enter the Park. You do want to keep it pristine. I thought that was good, but maybe you could even go further. I mean still we went through that little flip board thing and we still had a debate on that how we should deal with that issue.

[80: 791 to 795] d, But for the most part, I think our group had already discussed and talked about a lot of those things that they had on the board there. And I wouldn't expect a group planning a trip like this would not be educated about bears and how to deal with that, or what to do, pack it in and pack it out. And like I didn't know all those animal tracks, but that was good to know because...if there's something right in the area there and there's a carcass laying around, you don't want to camp right there. That's good information. c, I think the education about it is good. But, yeah, I would almost say if you're going to have a group going in, especially a large group going in, they should definitely all have gone through that. And maybe even sign something that says they went through it. l, Need to make sure they have a little education.

[81: 797 to 801] b, So how would it have influenced your experience if it was a requirement that you go through a back country orientation and fill out a registration form? d, I would've been kind of like "this is kind of stupid." Like I already know all this stuff, but then I'd think about it and say, well everybody has to do that. And it's better that the guy that comes in here and thinks he's gonna hike 80 miles and doesn't know a thing about any of this, has at least seen it once before he goes and attempts it. Then it'd make it worth it to sit there through the little lecture or whatnot. j, Yeah, it would kind of suck. You'd be like why did I .... I know what I'm doing, that's why I'm here, but .....if it helps the cause ...what's 15 minutes to go through that thing and initial a paper, sign a paper? Sign a log book. That you're going to do your best to limit your impact.

#### Safety function

[82: 843] j, Safety is the only other point I bring up. Like I mentioned, like there's a lot of people that might consider themselves experienced hikers or backpackers who would get destroyed trying to do hikes out there. It's sort of like the key thing, the safety factor. I don't know how the Park can make a difference, but it seems like there's a lot of margin for overconfidence and error by Lower 48 hikers.

[83: 839] t, And I think it's definitely a good idea to have everybody register, I mean especially if you're going to go out for 14 days like we did. Like you're kind of an idiot to not let somebody know you're going. Because if you don't come in, like, it's nice for somebody to know.

#### **Use Limits**

##### Support—ecological basis

[84: 827 to 829] b, Would it ever be appropriate for the Park Service to take a more hands on approach to managing this area? Like you suggested earlier, requiring people to register and go through an orientation or even, in some cases, limiting use in some portions of the Park? t, I think if use started to rise, I mean like I definitely felt like we were really super conscious about trying to leave no trace. No matter how hard you try,

you're going to leave some little trace and this environment regenerates so, so, so slowly, that I think... I assume they kind of keep some track of numbers there, but if the usage rises above a certain point, I think you'd start to really see some permanent effects, negative effects, on the environment. And I think it's better to limit the number of people going into an area than let it get destroyed.

**Focus on type of user**

[85: 761 to 769] s, But in general I found that it's pretty pristine. I wonder about the airplane access and if there's parts of the park that should be put off limit to the flight paths. If that is something the Park has ever considered. Like if there were certain areas that can only be accessed by foot. Like people can't just fly in, like how committed is the Park to maintaining as a complete and total wilderness in that way and not have people flying in. t, What part would you want to keep off limits? c, It'd just be like if you could fly in there, like you could just fly in to Chimney Lake, party for a weekend, and get flown back out. d, Yeah, we found whiskey bottles and garbage and stuff. c, And when you go on a trip like that you're a lot less concerned about your impact. You're just there for a short time. There's no [inaudible] that place.

[86: 773] j, It's kind of like if you have to hike in there, if you have to work to get in there, then naturally the people that are lazy aren't going to pack their crap in for 14 days...the average person is not going to take that challenge. That's a good way to limit the impact we have on this place. But, hey, I'd be down to fly back in there [inaudible]. It's kind of like, "As long as I can fly in there..."

## **APPENDIX C: EXAMPLES OF NARRATIVE INTERVIEW SUMMARIES**

## **628BTT06 Harold, Reba, Jesse**

These three respondents were members of a 9-person Sierra Club outing. They spent 7 days hiking from Anaktuvuk Pass to the North Fork of the Koyukuk River, then an additional 7 days floating to Bettles (excerpt 1). Reba and Jesse both served as group leaders, while Harold was a paying client. Both leaders had visited Alaska previously, but neither of them had been to Gates of the Arctic. This was Harold's first trip to Alaska.

The trip was characterized by gradual immersion into a remote wilderness setting, followed by a gradual return to town. As Jesse explains, the group met in Fairbanks, "which is already the outback for some of us", then progressed to Anaktuvuk Pass, then to a trail, and finally to hiking cross-country in a remote backcountry setting where "you can really feel like you're in the wilderness" (excerpt 2). Leaving from Anaktuvuk, the group was able to acclimate to the rigors of backcountry travel by following an established ATV trail for several days. Although the trail was wet and muddy, it offered easy hiking compared to what the group would later encounter, and it eliminated the need for continuous route-finding (excerpts 5-6, 8). Harold feels that the process of gradual immersion and acclimation afforded by the trail prepared him well for the difficult terrain that he eventually faced (excerpt 7). In addition to relatively easy hiking, the group also enjoyed sunny, warm weather and an absence of mosquitoes for most of their trip.

Wildlife played an important role in the experiences of these three group members. In addition to abundant animal tracks along the ATV trail and on nearly every sand bar they came across, the group heard and sighted several wolves, and watched a bear near their camp for more than an hour (excerpts 9-11, 13, 15). Jesse comments that the mere presence of "all the creatures in their habitat" is "really reassuring" (excerpt 14). Seeing animal behaviors first-hand was the highlight of the trip for both Reba and Jesse (excerpts 14, 17). Wildlife also featured in a very significant trip episode for Harold. He chose a site with "the most tracks [he had] seen on the whole trip..." to spread the ashes of a late friend (excerpt 12).

Despite their different roles (client and trip leader), Harold and Jesse describe similar feelings regarding the influence of the group on their individual experiences. This trip was Harold's first experience as a member of an organized group (excerpt 28). He enjoyed learning from the more experienced group members, but he also implies that personality differences within the group occasionally caused some tension: "Intense would definitely describe a lot of the experiences, personal issues and such" (excerpt 29). Similarly, Jesse describes the group's influence as both enriching and distracting. In reference to group travel she says, "...you get the good with the bad" (excerpt 30).

Like many other visitors, these respondents express mixed feelings about seeing airplanes during their trip. They saw "quite a few" planes while floating on the Koyukuk River (excerpt 18). Reba says the planes were "a bummer", but Harold notes that he too accessed the area by airplane (excerpt 19). He suggests, "You can't really be too hard on the others because they're doing the same thing you are."

Harold and the others saw a group of tents halfway through their hike, but they did not actually encounter any other people (excerpt 20). Reba and Jesse specifically mention that they value the opportunity not to see other people during their backcountry trips in Alaska, and they indicate that they were disappointed to see the tents (although

they note that seeing tents is still preferable to seeing actual people) (excerpt 21). Harold, however, was not particularly concerned with the tents. He says seeing them, “[D]id not bother me at all”; and, “Everyone has a right to be [out there], I guess” (excerpt 22).

In contrast to the tents, which were only briefly visible, the ATV trail was a constant reminder of the presence of other people. Comments about the trail itself, and trash along the trail, provide some insights into these respondent’s values and their images of the local Native people who use the trail. Jesse says that garbage along the trail was “disappointing”(excerpt 24), but then she explains: “I understand it in a way; I don’t necessarily approve of it, but I understand [that] the local people...use the trail a lot and they have a different concept of what to do with their garbage” (excerpt 25). Harold seems slightly less sympathetic regarding litter along the trail. While he acknowledges that locals have a different orientation toward the Park than he does, he still feels that there is a clear distinction between littering in a city and littering in what he calls a “pure” area (excerpt 26). Reba says that the trail made her feel “less remote”, although it appeared to be less traveled than she was expecting (excerpts 40, 23). While she clearly feels that the trail had a negative impact on the wilderness character of the area (excerpts 27, 40, 44), she also says that, “as evidence of an indigenous culture...even though they may be modern...the trail may be ok and appropriate for the area” (excerpt 27).

The ATV trail, air traffic, and size of the travel group seemingly all combined during this trip to limit the feelings of remoteness that Jesse and Reba had experienced on previous trips in Alaska. However, experiencing remoteness was not a significant focus of this trip for either of them. Comparing her recent trip to her previous, more remote experience(s), Jessie says, “I couldn’t clearly qualify one as better than the other” (excerpt 39). She further notes that being less remote did not impact the quantity of wildlife or the scenic beauty that she witnessed. Reba too, says that on this trip remoteness was not “a prominent thought”, and she still felt, “...like I was just in nature, in a beautiful area” (excerpt 40). In contrast to the trip leaders, Harold implies that he did feel quite remote. He suggests that most people would not want to suffer the hardships he endured in the backcountry, and that by doing so he was able to escape his daily pressures and enjoy a relaxed feeling in a beautiful environment (excerpt 41). For Harold, remoteness may have more to do with distance from his normal daily life than with absolute distance from people or services.

While wildlife and the ATV trail were major themes from the hiking portion of the trip, the floating segment was dominated by an accident that occurred during the group’s first moments on the river. High, fast moving water at the put-in gave them little time to practice maneuvering their boats (excerpts 32-33). After less than 30 minutes on the river, the group had torn a large hole in one of their rafts. The punctured tube deflated and dumped two members of the raft party into the river before the people at the back of the boat realized what was happening. After a struggle to get the raft to shore, the group was forced to make camp on the spot and spend hours making repairs (excerpt 34). Harold suggests that they were lucky to have some experienced rafters in the group who were able to repair the boat, but Reba quickly corrects him, saying, “We weren’t lucky; I mean, the trip was planned with repairs in mind and the knowledge to make repairs, we didn’t go out there unprepared” (excerpt 35). Although the accident stalled the momentum of the trip and caused some worry and uncertainty amongst the group members, it resulted in several positive outcomes (excerpts 36-38). Jesse and Reba

explain that their uncertainty was tempered by the knowledge that they were in a well-traveled area and were carrying a satellite phone (excerpts 42-43). Jesse says, “You new one way or another you were going to get back to Bettles” (excerpt 38). After the raft was repaired, retelling the story of the accident became a nightly event. Reba notes that the nightly stories eventually turned to humor, and she suggests that the accident was ultimately a central part of their adventure (excerpt 37).

Despite the limited remoteness and relative safety that she felt during the trip, Reba and the others repeatedly refer to the area they traveled through as wilderness. For Reba, a wilderness is “a place that’s untouched and doesn’t have human trails”, where there is “as little human impact as possible”, and you “have the sense of being the only ones or being one of the few in the area” (excerpt 44). Jesse describes wilderness as, “[A] big chunk of land where animals can still do their thing”, and where there is little human infrastructure (excerpts 45, 47). Harold describes wilderness in terms of his feelings rather than tangible qualities. He says wilderness is a place where he can feel like he has truly escaped “the majority of human culture”, and where he is at “the mercy of nature [rather than] man-made rules” (excerpt 46). For these respondents, a distinctive quality of the Gates of the Arctic wilderness is difficult access (excerpts 48-50). Reba suggests that difficult access limits “use and abuse” of the Park, and Jesse says that it enhances the feeling of wilderness. Reba also suggests that the experience of wilderness is enhanced by the Park Service’s emphasis on self-reliance. She says, “[W]e really do have to come up here and know that you are depending on your own resources and there are not readily available rescues here; I think that’s really key to a true wilderness experience” (excerpt 51).

Consistent with her feelings about the importance of self-reliance in wilderness, Reba—along with Jesse and Harold—were pleased not to encounter any NPS personnel in the backcountry (excerpts 52-53). Jesse says clearly that any sort of physical NPS presence in the Park would have reduced the wilderness feeling of the area (excerpt 53).

All of the group members met with a park ranger prior to heading into the backcountry in order to obtain bear barrels. Comments in excerpts 54 and 55 indicate that there is a fair amount of confusion and ambivalence regarding the use of the barrels. Reba says that the optional bear barrels did not sound optional at all when she first spoke to a ranger about them on the phone (excerpt 55). Furthermore, Jesse indicates that the group as a whole was not clear on the purpose of the barrels, and she suggests that the park message regarding their use was “disjointed” (excerpt 54).

Reba and Jesse initially planned to travel in two separate groups (in order to comply with the NPS recommendation that hiking groups be no larger than 7). However, during the first few days of the trip, they found it difficult to keep their groups apart (excerpts 58-59). Reba acknowledges that there are social and ecological impacts associated with larger groups, and she supports having a group-size limit—although she suggests that a limit of less than 7 would make the trip unfeasible as a commercial venture (excerpt 61). She says that she would plan for a smaller total group size in the future, because traveling in separate groups “just doesn’t work well” (excerpt 60).

One last issue relative to NPS management and presence at Gates of the Arctic has to do with the possibility of implementing a permit system. When asked if permits would ever be appropriate at Gates of the Arctic, Harold suggests that permits are inevitable and necessary, although he notes: “I don’t want to be one of those people who

is kept out because I don't have a permit" (excerpt 60). Without further prompting, he interpreted the question of permits to be one about limiting visitor use. In contrast, Reba responded by saying she was surprised that private visitors are not required to obtain a permit (excerpt 51). She suggests that most other parks use permits to track visitors for safety purposes. Reba's response suggests that mandatory permits would negatively impact her experience, but not due to any restrictions on her ability to access the park. Rather, from her perspective, permits would limit the opportunity to practice self-reliance in a no-rescue type setting.

### **730CFX22 Peter**

Peter spent 10 days on a solo hiking trip near the Tinayguk River in the eastern portion of Gates of the Arctic. He is a very experienced hiker who has been traveling and backpacking in various national parks almost continuously for 3 years, but this was his first trip in Alaska. Peter first became interested in visiting Gates of the Arctic two years ago, but he did not make any concrete plans for his trip until one week before it began. In contrast to other Park visitors who have to make trip arrangements well in advance, Peter's "non-stop backpacking" lifestyle allows him to make and change plans at the last minute (excerpt 1). He began his trip by driving the Dalton Highway from Fairbanks to Coldfoot, and then flying from there into the park. Cost was the primary factor in his decision to fly from Coldfoot. In addition, he was interested in seeing the Alaska Pipeline, which he regards as a landmark in the same class as the St. Louis Arch (excerpt 2).

Peter was attracted to Gates of the Arctic by the promise of unique scenery and terrain, long daylight hours north of the Arctic Circle, and remoteness (excerpt 3). He lists several qualities that made the Park seem particularly remote prior to his arrival. First of all, it is located in Alaska. To Peter and his family living in Michigan, Alaska was "the Last Frontier" (excerpt 23). In addition to being in Alaska, the Park is north of the Arctic Circle, and it is relatively unknown within Alaska, compared to other destinations like Denali (excerpt 23). During his trip Peter did manage to view the spectacular treeless terrain that he had imagined (excerpt 31). He also enjoyed the flexible schedule that long daylight hours allowed (excerpt 32). However, he was disappointed to find that the area he had selected to visit was not nearly as remote as he had hoped.

Peter hiked in an area with an old cabin and heavy airplane traffic. Although he knew about the cabin in advance, and he viewed it as a "nice safeguard", he feels that it detracted from the feeling of absolute remoteness he was seeking (excerpt 29). The airplane traffic, however, had a much more significant effect than the cabin. Although he did not encounter any other people, Peter saw several airplane flights everyday of his trip, and a helicopter on the final day. He feels that airplanes are more acceptable in Gates of the Arctic than in other parks because they are "the main way to travel" (excerpt 28). Therefore, the planes alone might not have had a significant impact on his feeling of remoteness. For Peter, the real issue was the realization that most of the air traffic was associated with the nearby village of Anaktuvuk Pass (excerpts 24, 29). Although he had initially justified the cost of his trip on the basis of "how remote he was going to get", the realization that he was only 20 miles from a village made him question his investment



(excerpt 29). In addition to the cabin, the air traffic, and the nearby village, Peter was carrying an aviation radio that also detracted from his feelings of remoteness and self-reliance (excerpt 27). In anticipation of being in an extremely remote place, he opted to bring a radio even though he normally would not consider carrying one (excerpt 26). As a final blow, after returning to Coldfoot he found that the radio batteries were dead; so the thing that had diminished his feeling of remoteness and self-reliance during the trip might not have been useable anyway (excerpt 26). Peter feels that not achieving the remoteness he sought was “a bit of a letdown.” In hindsight, he says that he should have picked a different location to visit within the Park, away from major air routes (excerpt 25).

Despite his comments about remoteness, Peter does feel that Gates of the Arctic is a wilderness--due in part to his many wildlife encounters (excerpt 30). On the first full-day of his trip, he enjoyed a lengthy interaction with a grizzly bear. After three years of non-stop backpacking, he had never seen a grizzly, so the encounter had special significance (excerpts 7-8). On the afternoon of the same day, he saw a second bear, and several days later he returned from a day-hike to find a third bear sleeping in his campsite (excerpts 9-10)! The grizzly bears were the unchallenged highlight of Peter’s trip (excerpt 11-12). For him, being close to so many “majestic creatures” was a meaningful experience, one that most people have never had (excerpt 12). In addition to the bears, Peter also encountered several playful weasels, a rare wolverine, and a bull-moose (excerpts 4-6).

Weather was an important factor throughout Peter’s experience. After two days of sun and warm temperatures, it was rainy, windy, and cold for the duration of his trip (excerpts 13-16). On one occasion, the weather confined him to his tent for a full day (excerpt 15). However, Peter notes that the rain always seemed to break at opportune moments: “It would always give me just the exact amount of window I needed to do what I had to do and then when I was prepared for the rain, it would start just like that” (excerpt 16). Rather than becoming demoralized by the rain, Peter gained a sense of satisfaction from staying safe and comfortable under adverse conditions (excerpt 17). On the final day of his trip, high winds delayed Peter’s air taxi. Because he was uncertain when the plane would arrive, he spent the day just waiting, and thus missed out on some “perfect hiking weather” (excerpt 18).

Peter found hiking off-trail in tussock terrain to be very difficult. He even changed his plans slightly after his first encounter with tussocks (excerpts 19-20). In addition to the difficult terrain, he encountered swarms of mosquitoes that “were just incredible” (excerpt 21). Despite these challenges, Peter says that his trip, “...wasn’t that much different than any other hike as far as difficulty.” In fact, he claims to have “had a lot of hikes that were more physically challenging than this one” (excerpt 3). Peter feels that the main difference between the hiking he experienced on this trip and his past experiences was the distance he covered and the lack of trails (excerpt 22).

Peter’s comments regarding management at Gates of the Arctic reflect his considerable experience in other national parks and his numerous bear encounters. Compared to other parks where bear barrels are mandatory or very strongly encouraged, he found it “odd” that they were just “kind of recommended” at Gates (excerpt 33). He also comments that the mere fact that firearms are allowed in the park made him think that perhaps he should carry one (excerpt 34).

Peter is in favor of making visitor registration a mandatory practice at Gates of the Arctic (excerpts 35-36). He was surprised that he was not required to register or get a permit because, "...pretty much all the national parks require a permit, that is, it's not an option" (excerpt 35). He sees two main purposes for mandatory permits. One is to provide information on visitor use for making management decisions, and the second is to direct or limit visitor use to prevent "overuse" (excerpts 35-37). Peter feels that a permit system should be implemented immediately, "...so that you can start realizing ahead of time that there's potential problems developing..." (excerpt 37).

The "problems" that Peter refers to are primarily ecological impacts associated with camping and hiking (excerpts 38-40). He is in favor of use limits to prevent ecological damage, although he admits that he enjoys backpacking in places that "have the least amount of restrictions (excerpt 40). He feels that the Park Service faces a difficult challenge in trying to balance the need for visitors to "experience wilderness and be a part of it", and the need to prevent overuse (excerpt 35). However, he is confident in the ability of park managers to meet this challenge: "I usually put a lot of faith in park management...I don't think you can always make a 100% right decision all of the time, but...most of the time, I see the parks do a good job of managing the property" (excerpt 41).

#### **815AKP30 Tammy, Lana, Cal, Steve, Dylan, Joe**

This group of six friends from California were members of a seven-person group that spent two weeks hiking from the community of Nolan, on the Dalton Highway, to Anaktuvk Pass. It is unclear why the seventh member of the group chose not to participate in the interview. Steve, the only group member with previous experience in Gates of the Arctic National Park, selected the basic travel route with low-cost as his principle concern (excerpt 1). By finishing in Anaktuvuk, the group was able to travel far from the highway corridor while only paying for a one-way, regularly scheduled (as opposed to chartered) flight from Anaktuvuk Pass back to Fairbanks.

This group's experience was strongly influenced by the daily challenge of finding a safe route through the Park's rugged terrain and successfully navigating toward their destination (excerpts 2-8). Meeting this challenge was clearly a major source of satisfaction for them. They describe numerous, complex episodes of route-selection (excerpts 2-6), and proudly report their final, "triple-digit" hiking mileage (excerpt 8). They were well-prepared to navigate, traveling with both a handheld GPS and an altimeter (excerpts 6-7), although they only brought two maps—which they suggest was a potentially costly planning oversight (excerpt 8).

The intellectual challenge of route-finding was greatly compounded by the physical challenge of hiking with heavy packs in difficult terrain. At the very beginning of the interview Cal says, "Fourteen feet from where we started I realized that I brought way too much stuff, that the tussocks were going to be some rough terrain to walk, and I was unsure that I was going to make our final destination" (excerpt 10). Dylan too, comments on his initial doubts about being able to carry his pack the full-distance of the trip (excerpt 11). As a result of experiencing the nearly-debilitating weight of their packs, the group members have new insights regarding appropriate equipment. They

recommend “trekking poles” to distribute weight and aid balance, quick-dry clothing to avoid accumulating water weight, and the elimination of absolutely all non-essential or duplicated items from amongst the group as a whole (excerpts 31-35). Tussocks—precarious lumps of accumulated tundra vegetation—caused numerous falls and moments of frustration (excerpts 12-13, 16). In some cases, the group members chose to repeatedly cross a river or hike in “mid-shin” mud in order to avoid them (excerpts 14, 18). River-crossings, rain, and general wet conditions kept the group’s feet wet for the duration of their trip (excerpt 19-20). Continuous rainfall also caused river levels to rise, making river crossings uncertain and forcing the group to carefully select campsites to avoid being flooded-out in the night (excerpts 21-26). Not surprisingly given the conditions, the group members found that they had very little time to relax and recuperate during their trip, and on at least one occasion they were exhausted to the point of “having difficulty thinking straight” (excerpts 29-30).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the extremely challenging nature of the weather and terrain, the group members describe their trip as a powerful and highly positive experience. Even the cold, cloudy, wet weather had several positive effects. For instance, cold sometimes motivated them to hike further than they otherwise would have (excerpt 44). One potentially dangerous occasion when clouds obscured the view of a nearby drop-off is described by Joe as “exciting” (excerpt 46). In addition, cloudy, windy weather provided constantly changing views as mountains were revealed and then hidden away (excerpts 45, 48). Recalling a moment when the clouds lifted to reveal a particularly striking view, Steve says, “...[W]e were really blessed...It was really special” (excerpt 47). Rather than bemoan the poor weather they experienced, Joe feels his group was lucky that even heavier rains did not make rivers un-crossable, and that no one suffered a serious injury (excerpt 53). Tammy seconds his opinion, saying, “Yeah, I think we were very, very, lucky...” (excerpt 54).

The group members are all close friends with past experience hiking and camping together (excerpt 39). Lana and Dylan note that their trip might have been much different (worse) with a group of 7 people that were not already good friends (excerpt 38). However, one consequence of traveling as a group of 7 was that decision-making had added complexity and daily chores took longer to complete (excerpts 40-42). Steve and Tammy suggest that there is an inverse relationship between the size of a group and the speed with which things get done (excerpt 40).

Despite the group member’s previous experiences together, this recent trip appears to have fostered a very close bond amongst them that is evident both in their joking, jovial manner (excerpts 35-36), and in the specific content of their responses. Cal describes the team-mentality that the group developed during their trip, and Dylan suggests that the trip was “the true test of all of [their] previous experiences [together]” (excerpt 39).

Steve confirms the “true-test” nature of the trip when describing his deep sense of accomplishment; he says, “I thought the best thing about the trip was that we successfully accomplished something that pushed us all to our limits, [w]e all experienced something we will remember for the rest of our lives” (excerpt 50). Closely related to this sense of accomplishment is the feeling among the group members that few people have the skills or proper attitude to handle the demanding nature of a trip in Gates of the Arctic. Tammy

sums up this feeling when she says, "...the vast majority of people shouldn't probably ever attempt to come in [to the Park]" (excerpt 57).

Rather than accomplishment, Dylan feels that the best part of the trip was escaping the sounds and other stimulants prevalent in other settings (excerpt 49). In fact, Dylan and the rest of the group became so accustomed to the quiet, un-peopled park setting that they were a bit shocked and confused when they finally arrived in busy Anaktuvuk Pass (excerpt 51). In addition to being quiet, the scale of the Park setting also had a significant influence on the group's experience. Cal explains that tremendous scale made it hard to judge the size of mountains or estimate distance to landmarks (excerpt 55).

Although they saw only one wolf and one bear, both at a distance, wildlife had a significant influence on the group member's experiences and on the meanings that they attribute to the park setting (excerpts 58-64). The group feels that noise from their bear-bells as well as the inevitable noise caused by 7 people hiking probably kept them from seeing many animals (excerpt 62). They cite the fact that they never had any problems with animals getting into their food or trash as proof that being noisy kept wildlife away (excerpt 64). However, abundant signs, including tracks, scat, and bones provided clear evidence that animals were all around (excerpts 60-62). Signs and behavior of wildlife are presented as indicators of the wildness of the area. Joe says that seeing bear scat "kind of adds to the wildness because it's just this evidence everywhere" (excerpt 61). And Lana interprets the skittish behavior of a lynx she saw as proof that local animals are not used to humans (excerpt 60). In fact, the overall absence of visible wildlife juxtaposed against clear evidence that animals were present is interpreted as proof that Gates of the Arctic is a genuine wilderness (excerpts 60-65).

In addition to wildlife, a second important quality of wilderness at Gates of the Arctic is little evidence of other people. The group did not actually encounter any other people on their trip, and they saw only one tent in the distance (although they debate whether it was actually a tent) and a limited amount of air traffic (excerpts 66-69). They enjoyed feeling like they were the first people in the area, and were disappointed to see evidence (footprints) that in fact someone had been there before (excerpt 78). Nevertheless, they do feel that Gates of the Arctic is largely pristine and has not changed much since the 1930s when Bob Marshall wrote about the area (excerpts 65, 78). One result of the pristine nature of the Park is that the slightest amount of human use creates a noticeable impact. In excerpts 70 and 71, Cal and Joe discuss becoming aware of how easily a pristine area becomes impacted, and their comments imply a sort of guilt associated with changing the wilderness character of an area as well as an ethic based on leaving minimal evidence of one's passing.

With respect to wilderness, one final quality of Gates of the Arctic discussed by the group is the feeling of being far from help or rescue (excerpts 72-73). Tammy feels that, "there's no help if you need it." A person traveling in the Park is wholly responsible for their own safety, to the point that, as Tammy further explains, "If somebody had got seriously hurt, you would either have walked yourself out, or you'd have died, that's that."

The group members feel that the Park Service pursues an intentionally hands-off management style, which they appreciate (excerpt 74). Cal, for one, feels that there is really not much management of the Park that needs to be done (excerpt 75). However,

they have slightly mixed feelings about the information that the Park staff provides to visitors. Steve feels that he was misinformed about the time it would take to complete the route he planned, and he was frustrated in his attempts to get any specific information about the nature of the terrain he planned to cross (excerpt 78). However, having little information “added to the adventure of the trip” (Joe) and allowed Dylan to feel “like a pioneer at some points” (excerpt 78). With the hindsight achievable after completing their trip, the group members seem to be in favor of maintaining opportunities for discovery.

The group did stop and register at the interagency visitor center in Coldfoot. They see at least two purposes for registration, one related to education and one related to safety. With respect to education, they feel that encouraging—even requiring—visitors to register and receive an orientation is a good idea because it may prevent ecological impacts in the Park (excerpts 80-81). Dylan and Joe explain that even though experienced backcountry travelers like themselves would be burdened by such a requirement, it would be worth it if it “helps the cause” (Joe, excerpt 81). With respect to safety, Joe expresses concern that, without a registration and orientation requirement, inexperienced and naïve visitors could get into serious trouble in the Park (excerpt 82). Tammy describes a different function of registration relative to safety. She views registration as an opportunity to file plans with someone, so that a search could be initiated if a party failed to come back from their trip (excerpt 83).

Throughout the interview, the group members make comments indicating their concern for ecological impacts. It is not surprising then that Tammy expresses clear support for limiting the number of visitors allowed into the Park if it is necessary to prevent ecological damage (excerpt 84). The other group members do not challenge her comments, but they seem to suggest that a focus on the type of users allowed in the Park, rather than the number of users, could achieve the same goal. They suggest that quick and easy access by airplane allows visitors who are less concerned about their impacts to visit the park (excerpt 85). In contrast, people who “pack their crap in for 14 days” are more likely to be careful and ethical campers (excerpt 86).