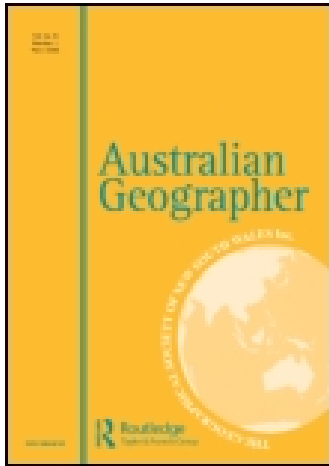


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Toward an Understanding and Definition of Wilderness Spirituality

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ABSTRACT *There is an increasing body of Western literature lamenting the loss of spiritual relationships and connection with the Earth, and numerous studies of wilderness spirituality. But what is wilderness spirituality? Do expert perceptions differ from public views of the meaning of the term? This paper explores these questions. Despite spirituality being an abstract topic, and spiritual values hard to define and measure, numerous authors have suggested definitions of nature-based and wilderness spirituality. A content analysis of a random sample of the general population in a preliminary study in Tasmania on wilderness spirituality meanings was compared to definitions supplied by experts on the topic. Strong commonalities between the two groups were the citation of words expressing connection and interrelationship, portrayals of transcending the self, and the quality of compassion. Weak commonalities were terms such as 'peace' and 'harmony', 'respect', 'joy', 'elation', 'happiness', 'sacredness' and 'reverence'. Disparate elements were found to be a sense of awe and wonder, religiosity, humbleness, and altered states of consciousness. The defining characteristics of wilderness spirituality were found to be a feeling of connection and interrelationship with other people and nature; a heightened sense of awareness and elevated consciousness beyond the everyday and corporeal world; and cognitive and affective dimensions of human understandings embracing peace, tranquillity, harmony, happiness, awe, wonder, and humility. A religious meaning and explanation may be present.*

KEY WORDS *Nature-based spirituality; spiritual landscapes; wilderness; wilderness spirituality; content analysis; Tasmania.*

As we human beings lost our spiritual connection with the Earth, as we lost the inner ground of our being, of our place in the world, we lost sight of the reciprocal interrelatedness of all life. We now walk the Earth with impoverished souls. (Maser 1990, p. 74)

Now we are no longer primitive; now the whole world seems not-holy. We have drained the light from the boughs in the sacred grove and snuffed it out in the high places and along the banks of the sacred streams. We as a people have moved from pantheism to pan-atheism. (Dillard 1982, p. 69)

Introduction

There is an increasing body of pervasive Western literature lamenting the loss of spiritual relationships and connection with the Earth in recent time (e.g. Berry 1990; Driver *et al.* 1996; Porteous 1996; Kaza & Kraft 2000; Lines 2001; Washington 2002; Kellert & Farnham 2002; Gottlieb 2004). Additionally, there are calls for a 'spiritual renewal' (Orr 2002, p. 1459), a 'spiritual renaissance' (Christie 2002, p. 1466), or the embracing of the 'spiritual imperative' (Kumar 2004, p. 1) in order to manifest true environmental sustainability. A spiritual awakening and the spiritual dimension of green politics have been recognised (see, for example, Spretnak 1986). There is also an emerging body of literature on spirituality as a theoretical framework within public land, national park and wilderness management processes (e.g. Magary 1996; Hamilton 2000; Maller *et al.* 2002; IUCN 2004; Perschel 2004).

There have also been numerous studies into wilderness spirituality in countries such as the USA (see, for example, Stringer & McAvoy 1992; Brayley & Fox 1998; Fredrickson & Anderson 1999; Heintzman & Mannell 1999; Trainor & Norgaard 1999; Heintzman 2002; Johnson 2002). In Australia, wilderness spirituality has been investigated by Fox (1997), with Lamb and Morris (1997) and Williams and Harvey (2001) addressing forest spirituality in their research.

But what is 'wilderness spirituality', and does expert opinion differ from public perceptions of the meaning of the term? With there being a paucity of Australian research to date, the time now appears to be ripe to investigate these questions. The approach taken here in answering these two questions is to draw together the diversity of thought on definitional and associated aspects of the abstract and complex concept of nature-based spirituality from the literature. A sub-set of nature-based spirituality—wilderness spirituality—is then examined. Finally, definitions of both nature-based and wilderness spirituality proposed by experts are compared to what the public said about wilderness spirituality in a preliminary study into wilderness spirituality in Tasmania. This latter comparison may not have been attempted before and thus fills a knowledge gap. It is hoped that this paper might be useful in increasing our understanding of nature-based and wilderness spirituality and inform blossoming research on the topic. The spiritual and cultural connections and associations that Indigenous and traditional peoples have with nature—in Australia, particularly with 'country'—is acknowledged with respect. However, the present paper limits itself to modern, Western concepts of spirituality.

The spiritual values of wilderness

Perschel (2004, p. 45) refers to the typology of wilderness values originally developed by Bergstrom *et al.* (2002, p. 12, 2006, p. 49) known as 'An Organizing Framework for Wilderness Values'. In the framework, 'Personal spiritual health and growth' is recognised as a 'Wilderness service'. More specifically, Johnson (2002, p. 29) recognises six spiritual benefits of wilderness as: 'the enduring'—coming face to face with ancient things and timeless cycles; 'the sublime'—the humbling of humankind by the awesomeness of the wilderness landscape; 'beauty'—a sensing of the aesthetic; 'competence'—experiencing physical trials and challenges; 'experience of peace'—opportunities for mental calm; and 'self-forgetting'—loss of identification with the ego. It is perhaps no wonder, therefore, that Timmerman

(2000, p. 362) says that wilderness serves as a 'vehicle for personal mystical experience'.

'Spirituality' and 'religion'

Before continuing further it is useful and even necessary to make the distinction between spirituality and religion. The lack of a clear understanding of the terms spirituality and religion can be problematic for natural area management agencies for example (Perschel 2004), as well as researchers. As Kumar (2004, p. 3) says: 'Sometimes the words spirituality and religion are confused, but spirituality and religion are not the same thing.' Elkins *et al.* (1988) agree, saying that in the past a spiritual person was thought of as being a religious person, but a change—possibly because of the perceived failure of traditional religions to cater for the spiritual needs of people—is now being recognised (see also Tacey 2000, pp. 52–5; p. 241). Titmuss (2000, p. 257) points to the Latin *spirare*, 'to breathe', as being the original meaning of 'spiritual'. The Greek words *pneuma*—in Greek philosophy, the vital spirit or the soul—and *pneumatikós* were used prior to their translation into the Latin words *spiritus* and *spiritualis*, respectively (Principe 1983). On the other hand, the word 'religion' is from the Latin *religio*, a binding together, which, according to Kumar (2004), means that people are bound by a certain belief system, as opposed to the 'freeing' agency associated with spirit, transcending beliefs.

Fox (1999, p. 461) maintains that spirituality 'is a fundamental aspect of human nature', and exists, at least potentially, in all people (Elkins *et al.* 1988). Further, Maslow (1970, p. 4) contends:

Spiritual values have naturalistic meaning . . . they are not the exclusive possession of organized churches . . . they do not need supernatural concepts to validate them . . . they are well within the jurisdiction of a suitably enlarged science and . . . therefore, they are the general responsibility of *all* mankind. (Emphasis in original)

Defining nature-based spirituality

Nature, place, and the evocation of spiritual experiences

People's relationship with a place is complex and multidimensional. A spiritual construct may be present such as in the 'Intangible relationships with environment' schema of Canadian geographer J. Douglas Porteous (1996) (see Figure 1), for example. The schema 'centres upon the notion of being-in-the world' (Porteous 1996, p. 8). Of the four relationships illustrated in the schema, Spirituality is the expression of reverence for the Earth as sacred space (Porteous 1993).

To gain spiritual meaning from nature, we need to understand what it is about a place that contributes to what Williams and Harvey (2001, p. 256) describe as a 'human–environment transaction'. In other words, what landscape elements can create deep emotional experiences? Or what, when present, represents the *genius loci*—the spirit of place? Plainly, further research is needed to answer these types of questions. However, certain features of natural landscapes do engender deep, affective and spiritual connotations. These features include mountains (Rössler 2003; Taylor & Geffen 2004); rocks, as in rock climbing (Coates 1996); forests (Seed 2000; Williams & Harvey 2001; Taylor & Geffen 2004); deserts (Taylor &



FIGURE 1. Intangible relationships with environment schema.
Source: Porteous (1996, p. 9).

Geffen 2004); limestone landscapes—caves and karst (Kiernan 1995, 2004); and water in all its guises—‘waterfalls, mist, crystalline pools, deep water, white water, whirlpools, still water, oceans’ (Magary 1996, p. 298). As Hay (2004, p. 1) remarks:

In terms of the bonds formed between people and affectionately regarded ‘scapes’ (which may be aquatic as well as terrestrial) I use ‘spiritual’ to connote a depth of sensitivity that precludes instrumental relations based upon function, and manifests as a profound empathetic attachment to place, one almost always characterised by a saturated vernacular knowledge of local or regional human and natural history.

The Transcendentalism philosophy developed by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) in the USA asserted the ascendancy of nature. With Gerard Manley Hopkins recognising the sacredness of nature through his notion of ‘inscapes’ (Timmerman 2000, p. 361), the natural world can exert a powerful pull upon us. Words such as ‘private’, ‘profoundly moving’, ‘intimate’, ‘deeply personal’, ‘awesome’, ‘inspiring’, ‘ineffable’, ‘sacred’, and ‘soulful’ have been used to describe this effect, otherwise known as ‘spiritual’ (Perschel 2004, p. 103). While spiritual experiences may occur in both natural and human-constructed settings, natural environments have customarily been places in which one gains spiritual insight (Fox 1999). Being alone in nature can contribute to a spiritual experience (Fox 1999; Idler *et al.* 2003; Heintzman 2003), although this is not a prerequisite (McDonald *et al.* 1989).

With natural settings ‘increasingly seen as therapeutic environments, places for cathartic experiences’ (Ewert *et al.* 2003, p. 141), national parks, as perhaps exemplars of nature, are becoming engaged beyond their traditional scientific or recreational milieu. For example, over 30 years ago Tasmanian national parks were recognised as being not only refuges for wildlife but also refuges for human life, essential in maintaining the ‘mental and spiritual balance of the people’ (Sharland

1972, p. 71). Davis (1980, p. 9) contends that one of the most important functions of national parks are as 'oases of spiritual and aesthetic refreshment' (see also Maller *et al.* 2002, pp. 43–4).

Difficulties in operationalising 'spirituality'

People's spiritual relationship with the natural world is an abstract topic, dealing with higher order emotions and thought; spiritual values themselves are 'ethereal and intangible and, therefore, hard to define and measure' (Driver *et al.* 1996, p. 5). Barnes (2003, p. 271) agrees, referring to spiritual values as 'fuzzy' values. Even if spiritual experiences are measurable, people may either not recognise them as such or find it difficult to verbalise such experiences (McDonald *et al.* 1989). Survey methodologies 'are not well-suited to delving into spiritual experiences' (Magary 1996, p. 292). However, despite these difficulties, the Spiritual Orientation Inventory, 'a measure of humanistic spirituality', has been proposed (see Elkins *et al.* 1988, p. 12).

The apparently simple task of defining something can be problematic. Thus Suzuki (1997, p. 201) proffers: 'Definition identifies, specifies and limits a thing, describes what it is and what it is not: it is a tool of our classifying brain'. And in any case, defining spirituality is not simple, because it is a complex, multidimensional construct (Elkins *et al.* 1988). A Buddhist writer adds that any spiritual definition does not necessarily reveal the true meaning of what 'spiritual' is (Maezumi 2002). According to McDonald *et al.* (1989, p. 206), it might be better to define spirituality broadly, and allow for individual interpretation; spiritual growth being primarily 'in the eye of the beholder'. Stringer and McAvoy (1992) and Heintzman (2003) support this notion of the self-definition of spirituality.

Progression toward a nature-based spiritual definition

Although Driver *et al.* (1996, p. 5) recognise the difficulties inherent in defining nature-based spiritual experiences to everyone's satisfaction, they say that such experiences include:

Introspection and reflection on deep personal values; the elements of human devotion, reverence, respect, wonder, awe, mystery or lack of total understanding; inspiration; interaction with and relationship to something other and greater than oneself; sense of humility; and sense of timelessness, integration, continuity, connectedness, and community.

Various authors have suggested definitions of nature-based spirituality. These are presented verbatim, to preserve their integrity, in Table 1. Apart from the word 'spiritual', another—'transcendent'—appears in the table. It is not uncommon to find the two terms used in association with one another in the literature. A possible nexus between the two is advanced by Fox (1999, p. 455), who says a 'spiritual experience is associated with moments of transcendence and spiritual enchantment' (see also Williams & Harvey 2001), although this may not apply to more grounded, nature-sourced notions of spirituality.

Hay (2004, p. 2) makes the distinction between two forms of spirituality—grounded and ethereal, and opines that the source of grounded spirituality is

TABLE 1. Examples of definitions of nature-based spirituality, and the associated term 'transcendence'

Definition	Source
[Spirituality is] An altered state of consciousness where an individual may experience a higher sense of self, inner feelings, inner knowledge, awareness and attainment to the world and one's place in it, knowledge of personal relations and the relationship with the environment, or a belief in a power greater than imaginable.	Fox (1999, p. 455)
The term 'spiritual' is loaded with portent. In most environmentalist discourse, as elsewhere, it connotes an other-worldliness; a dimension of being that is intangible, extra-rational, ineffable and usually defiant of scientific or 'common-sense' explanation.	Hay (2004, p. 1)
Spirituality is a deep feeling of compassion and unity and relatedness and connection with all of existence.	Kumar (2000, p. 46)
Descriptions of spiritual experiences usually include evidence of cognitive processes (active contemplation) and affective dimensions (feelings and emotions, such as peace, tranquillity, joy, love, hope, awe, reverence, and inspiration). They are frequently described as involving a transcendence of self and/or surroundings and are most often perceived as having some degree (usually high) of emotional intensity.	Stringer and McAvoy (1992, p. 14)
I define spirituality as the process of creating relationship with what we hold to be sacred. By 'sacred' I do not mean something set apart but something inclusive of and interactive with the everyday; something held dear; something to be respected, revered, treasured and protected. In this definition the sacred winds through the ordinary and the everyday as an animating vital lifeforce and spirit.	Shaw (2003, p. 2)
My own working definition of spirituality is that it is the focusing of human awareness on the subtle aspects of existence, a practice that reveals to us profound interconnectedness . . . an experiential, rather than an intellectual, awareness.	Spretnak (1986, pp. 41–2)
One definition of spiritual growth . . . may be the development of a mental or emotional awareness of fundamental or vital interrelationships, particularly between a universal force manifested in human and non-human life forms. This may occur suddenly (and be called a spiritual experience) or may develop over time (and be called spiritual growth).	McDonald <i>et al.</i> (1989, p. 194)
Spiritual growth is defined as delayed awareness arising from spiritual experience.	Fox (1999, p. 455)
[Transcendence is] A moment of extreme happiness; a feeling of lightness and freedom; a sense of harmony with the whole world; moments which are totally absorbing and which feel important.	Williams and Harvey (2001, p. 249)
Transcendental experience is achieved when one attains a level of felicity or exaltation such that one is 'taken out of oneself'. The self is left behind, or transcended, and a higher state of consciousness is achieved.	Porteous (1991, p. 100)

affective, from the emotions. The emotional aspect occurs regularly in the descriptions of spirituality in Table 1, as do feelings or sensations of interrelationship, or connectedness with nature, with life itself. This latter characteristic resonates with attachment to place alluded to previously (see Figure 1); moreover, in the recognition of Putney and Harmon (2003, p. 324) that such attachment is ‘such a strong motivating force in human society . . . [giving] homage to those special landscapes that seem to best express our fundamental connectedness to, and dependence on, the natural world’.

Wilderness spirituality

What is wilderness?

The spiritual values of wilderness, as a non-recreational use of wilderness, have been highlighted by Cordell *et al.* (1990) as one of the high-priority issues facing forest and resource planners in America. However, not only are there problems with an operational definition of spiritual values (White & Hendee 2000) but also for wilderness itself (McDonald *et al.* 1989). So what is wilderness?

The legal definition of wilderness in the USA is ‘where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain . . . an area of undeveloped . . . land retaining its primeval character and influence . . . [and] has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation’ (*Wilderness Act, 1964* (US Public Law 88-577)). Under the *Wilderness Act, 1987 (NSW)* areas of land identified as wilderness have ‘not been substantially modified by humans’ and provide ‘opportunities for solitude and appropriate self-reliant recreation’ (Section 6). It is interesting to note that the word ‘solitude’ and references to recreation free from constraint, *prima facie*, appear in both of these acts.

The commonly recognised qualities of wilderness are naturalness or primitiveness and remoteness (Kirkpatrick & Haney 1980; Parks and Wildlife Service 1999; Russell & Jambrecina 2002) and solitude (Russell & Jambrecina 2002). In a Tasmanian study, the primary defining characteristic of wilderness was found to be a natural, unspoiled area (Hocking 1995). However, Rose (1996, p. 18) maintains that definitions that claim ‘[wilderness] landscapes are “natural” miss the whole point of the nourishing Australian terrains. Here on this continent, there is no place where the feet of Aboriginal humanity have not preceded those of the settler.’

Thus wilderness¹ is a concept imbued with contested meanings, ‘a category at the extreme end of the protected area spectrum’ (Barnes 2003, p. 269). When it comes down to it, Hendee and Dawson (2002, p. 5) opine that wilderness is whatever people think it is, the ‘*terra incognita* of people’s minds’.

Wilderness antecedents

Nash (1982) notes that American writers Henry David Thoreau (1817–62), John Muir (1838–1914), and Aldo Leopold (1887–1948) have exemplified through their literature how wild nature can act to renew the spirit. Ewert *et al.* (2003, p. 142) go on to say that ‘These authors [Thoreau, Muir, and Leopold] have long held that being connected to natural areas restores a sense of relatedness to the spirit, to ourselves, and to each other.’ Thoreau, incidentally a student of Indian

religion (Timmerman 2000), and Muir recognised the untouched nature of wilderness, sensing wilderness as an example of divine presence (Berry 1990). More recently, acknowledgement of the spiritual quality of nature via photography may well have originated from the deeply evocative pictorial representations of wilderness by Ansel Adams (1902–84). In 1925 Adams wrote of the ‘spiritual potential’ (Stillman & Turnage 1992, p. 113) of wilderness national parks in America.

Landscape elements

The aesthetics, viewsapes, and landform diversity of wilderness areas provide visual delight and enchantment, promoting transcendent states (Fox 1999), contributing to a ‘sense of wonder, humility, and connectedness to nature’ (Fox 1999, p. 456). For McDonald *et al.* (1989, p. 204), wilderness landscape attributes contributing to a spiritual experience or opportunity include:

- Proximity to wildlife or opportunities to view and contemplate wildlife
- Auditory protection from man-made (e.g. mechanical) sounds
- Outstanding aesthetic opportunities
- Either open and expansive or closed-in and protected natural areas
- High places
- Water resources
- Environmental quality and integrity

The effect of the wilderness landscape, particularly via sensation, is possibly best summed up by Johnson (2002, p. 30):

We enter wilderness with all our senses and all our being: feeling the rain or breeze; smelling its pine and sage; hearing the water, the crack of lightning; seeing the world anew with each shift of light or perspective; not least, we know in our elemental core how our journey has entwined us—our comfort and our fate—with this landscape.

It is not to be forgotten that weather plays its part in wilderness landscapes. Changeable, often severe, conditions in wilderness areas, such as those that can occur very quickly in the Tasmanian south-west for example, can mediate in any spiritual relationship by being an ally or antagonist.

Self and wilderness spirituality

Linda Graber (1976) indicates in her first wilderness ethic corollary that wilderness has a hypnotic effect (metaphorically speaking), helping one achieve transcendence. It is possible that spiritual inspiration may be gained through becoming immersed in the wilderness setting (Fredrickson & Anderson 1999), or by the identification with ‘[wilderness] places and processes much grander and more enduring than our individual egos’ (Johnson 2002, p. 30). Immersion in the wilderness ‘resurrects our spiritual and corporeal connections with the rest of the biosphere’ opines Kirkpatrick (1998, p. 192). McDonald *et al.* (1989, p. 194) perceive the usefulness of describing the wilderness experience as ‘primarily a personal discovery, and second, a discovery of relationships’. The last word in this section is given to the

late Peter Dombrovskis (2003), renowned wilderness photographer and wilderness advocate:

When you go out there [Tasmanian wilderness] you don't get away from it all, you get back to it all. You come home to what's important. You come home to yourself.

Wilderness spirituality definitions

The 'spiritual experience process funnel' developed by Fox (1999, p. 459) as a theoretical framework suggests, among other things, that wilderness spiritual experience involves:

Intense emotions and feelings which contribute toward feelings of connectedness to nature, to spirits, to the inner self, to life perspectives, to one's sexuality, and toward a connection with other people.

Other definitions of spirituality relating specifically to wilderness include:

The capacity of a landscape to support or evoke the experience of, or orientation toward, an ultimate value larger than the self that enhances the meaning and purpose of one's life. (Kaye 2002, p. 7)

The sudden or gradual awareness of interrelationships among plants, animals, the landscape, and indeed all naturally-occurring things within a totally natural environment. (McDonald *et al.* 1989, p. 194)

Spiritual experience in wilderness is often described as a feeling of oneness with nature. (Glaspell & Puttkammer 2001, p. 12)

Wilderness spirituality in Tasmania

The 1.3 million hectare Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, known locally, and perhaps affectionately, as the 'WHA', represents approximately 20 per cent of the land area of Tasmania. The WHA contains a diverse mosaic of landscapes from mountainous, alpine environments, to wild ocean beaches, to calm, inland lakes. Visits from Australia and overseas are consistently about half a million annually. The Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service manages the area. A search of the WHA management plan revealed three occurrences of the use of the word 'spirit'—two in a descriptive sense (cultural perception or cultural landscape), and methylated spirits in the Fuel Stove section (Parks and Wildlife Service 1999). While spiritual *values* are not specifically mentioned in the plan, the caption to a photograph included in a major review of management effectiveness in the WHA may be indicative of change: 'For many visitors, wilderness areas offer a place for relaxation, reflection and spiritual renewal' (Parks and Wildlife Service 2004, p. 186).

Historic and traditional interactions with the wild country of Tasmania by piners, pastoralists, trappers, miners and loggers have created a strong attachment to the land, to place. The relationship and connection that these folk and their families have with place is the source of what Hay (2004, p. 9) describes as a 'potent wild country spirituality'.

TABLE 2. The meanings of the spiritual values of wilderness. Examples of responses from a random sample of the general population—preliminary study, Tasmania 2005

 Meanings of the spiritual value of wilderness

The spiritual value sought and found seems to give me a true measurement of myself, my place in society, in nature and the world. A sort of unifying occurs that gives me the realisation of my worth compared to everything. It's like a baptism, I feel awash to begin a newer life, become a better me ... it's an opportunity to regain ones [sic] soul, feelings, truth and respect of nature and its goodness, mystery, life. (Survey 2)

The sheer magnitude of our waterfalls, mountains and forests are an amazing experience giving a sense of something much bigger than any human race can or will achieve. (Survey 4)

Connectedness with something larger than I. (Survey 6)

Sense of calm—being away from everyday life makes me feel just a small part of such a big and beautiful world. Awe-inspiring landscapes and scenery. (Survey 8)

Peace, tranquillity and a sense of insignificance. (Survey 9)

It means a sense of peace with myself and with something greater than myself. A feeling of balance. (Survey 13)

Identifying with a natural environment, finding a sense of peace, feeling smaller than the environment you are in, and realising a great sense of respect for, and in, a natural force like the wilderness. (Survey 16)

As I observe and experience the beauty of the wilderness creation, I stand in awe and wonder of God who designed and created it. (Survey 19)

Inner calm and peace; connectedness to the world; a sense of proportion about the importance of mankind; a sense of the sacredness of pristine environments unpolluted by man; a sense of joy inspired by the beauty and magnificence of the natural world; a sense of the connectedness of all things on the planet; serenity. (Survey 32)

Often the quietness, the beauty, the experience of being in the wilderness allows an openness of my heart to God. (Survey 35)

A place of solitude and a gateway to an understanding of myself and the community. The wilderness is the older, wiser family member whose role it is to teach you, protect you, in a formidable way. (Survey 40)

The unspoiled beauty provides a spiritual awareness of creation and the Creator. (Survey 43)

To me, the wilderness is special; a place of peace. (Survey 55)

To be able to go into the Tasmanian wilderness and experience the isolation and beauty make you feel very small in the scheme of things. (Survey 60)

To feel part of a larger, living organism—to believe that every small part of that—myself included—is important and influential. To visit the wild is to feel 'reset'—experiencing a sense of calm. (Survey 62)

The feeling of awe at the beauty and scope of the natural creation complements my view of a personal God who has placed spiritual beings in a physical environment. (Survey 65)

The awesomeness and magnitude of nature. (Survey 67)

Spirituality in the understandings of wilderness users: some empirical data

The author conducted a preliminary study into wilderness spirituality in Tasmania in May 2005. In the study, a self-completed questionnaire survey was delivered by

TABLE 3. Spiritual values theme words derived from a content analysis of (i) respondent's descriptions of the spiritual values of wilderness—preliminary study, Tasmania 2005 ($n = 30$), and (ii) expert perceptions of nature-based and wilderness spirituality ($n = 14$)

Spiritually indicative words (sub-themes)	Respondents (frequency)	Experts (frequency)
Peace, tranquillity, serenity, harmony, relaxing, safe	12	3
Connection, interconnectedness, interrelationship, oneness, unifying	10	12
Awe, wonder	7	1
Beyond the self, transcendence, other worldliness, ultimate value, awareness of a higher force, valuing nature, truth	7	10
Specific religious (God, creation, baptism)	6	
Humbling, personal insignificance	5	
Respect	3	1
Joy, elation, happiness, lightness and freedom, love, hope, inspiration	3	7
Compassion	1	1
Sacredness, reverence	1	3
Altered state of consciousness, ineffable, heightened consciousness and awareness, extra-rational, intangible		7
Total	55	45

mail to a random sample of the general population. One of the questions enquired: *Some people find spiritual value in wilderness. This means different things to different people. If you find spiritual value in wilderness, what does it mean to you?* Example responses to this question are provided in Table 2.

Methods

Respondents' descriptions of the spiritual values of wilderness ($n = 30$, including the 17 examples from Table 2) were analysed for their content. The procedure generally followed that of Lamb and Morris (1997), and was additionally informed by the spiritual landscape elements identified by McDonald *et al.* (1989; above). Specifically, respondent's descriptions were examined and spiritually illustrative phrases extracted. Individual words within phrases were then matched with example words manifest in the Lamb and Morris (1997) study and the other literature (above). Concurrently, words were allocated into themes and sub-themes and frequencies calculated. As is common in classification schemes similar to that which is reported here, the themes are not necessarily mutually exclusive, there being some overlap between the themes. Table 3 shows the spiritual values theme. Other themes derived from the analysis are not reported here. In a similar

procedure, the perceptions of experts (Table 1 and wilderness spiritual definitions above; $n = 14$) were analysed for their content (see Table 3).

Discussion

The representative statements from survey respondents (Table 2) help to illustrate how the characteristics of wilderness spirituality are felt and experienced. These meanings are considered by the author to be particularly significant because they emanated from a random sample of the general population. The words used by both the survey respondents and experts to express the spiritual meaning of wilderness are similar (see Table 3), notwithstanding the fact that the sample sizes of the two groups are dissimilar; the public sample is about twice that of the expert sample.

The frequencies of three of the Table 3 sub-themes are comparable for the public and expert groups, indicative of a strong degree of commonality. Firstly, there is the citation of words expressing connection and interrelationship (a count of 10 for respondents and 12 for the experts, a total of 22 occurrences; Table 3). In the context of this paper, 'connection' may include both human and non-human life forms. Secondly, there are portrayals of being taken outside and beyond the self, of transcendence (a count of 7 for respondents and 10 for the experts, a total of 17 occurrences; Table 3), some individuals becoming aware of a higher force described as being either 'ultimate' or 'universal'. If the other terms opined by the expert group describing altered or heightened states of consciousness (seven occurrences; Table 3) are also taken into account, then nature/wilderness appears to be a potent force indeed. Finally, both groups recognised the quality of compassion (a count of 1 for both groups; Table 3).

There are also weaker degrees of commonality between the two groups. The words 'peace', 'harmony' and other like words are mentioned more often by respondents than by experts (12 times *vs* three times, respectively, a total of 15 occurrences; Table 3). Respondents used 'respect' three times and experts once (Table 3). Reference to 'joy', 'elation', 'happiness' and other like words is favoured more by experts than respondents (seven times *vs* three times, respectively; Table 3). Similarly, 'sacredness' and 'reverence' are used more often by experts than respondents (three times *vs* once, respectively; Table 3).

Turning to disparate elements between the two groups, respondents reported sensations of awe and wonder (seven times; Table 3) to only one mention of 'awe' by the expert group. While none of the expert group made reference to a personal God, survey respondents mentioned the word 'God' or other Judaeo-Christian terms a number of times in their meanings (six times; Tables 2 and 3). The expert group made no mention of feelings of humility or insignificance in their definitions. In contrast, survey respondents acknowledged these things (five times; Table 3). Additionally, altered states of consciousness were mentioned by the expert group (seven times; Table 3) but not by respondents. The four key disparities between the groups—awe, religiosity, humbleness, and altered states of consciousness—are interesting, and may be a reflection of the majority of the expert group being academics. Perhaps academics are more prone to 'intellectualise' their spiritual experiences or what they perceive as such? Increasing the sample size of the expert group in any further study of the nature reported here may prove otherwise.

Although this paper may be perceived to reinforce the concepts of spirituality and wilderness as indissoluble, people may visit wild places without necessarily having

any expectation of a spiritual experience. As Kaye (2002, p. 14) puts it: 'We need to keep in mind that spirituality is a significant, but not singular underpinning of the system of thought and belief embodied in the concept of wilderness.'

Conclusion

Nature in all its guises featured prominently in the definitions and meanings, thus reinforcing the sense of connection people have with each other and with the Earth. Perhaps this sense is innate within the various cohorts in Western society, possessed by traditional cultures as a matter of course, and manifesting when people are asked about it in surveys. Other opportunities are perhaps not available. Wilderness, symbolic and material, appears to facilitate the grasping of the ethereal, the intangible, the non-material. Clearly, though, the advent and popularity of wilderness experience programs since the 1990s, particularly in the USA, such as Vision Quest (see, for example, Riley 1996), and other organised groups, for example the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Sierra Club, National Audubon Society, and Outward Bound (Cordell *et al.* 1990), are fulfilling people's apparent need to connect or reconnect with the natural world. As Kaye (2002, p. 45) has observed:

An adaptive mechanism, the spiritual dimension of wilderness has evolved, is evolving, and will continue to evolve in response to changes in ourselves and our relationship to the natural world. The manifestation of spirituality in the wilderness concept both reflects the unmet needs of our urban, commodity-driven culture, and reveals some archetypal part of us that this culture has obscured.

An attempt to produce a definitive denotation of wilderness spirituality as a result of this paper seems somewhat idealistic and arrogant to me. I reiterate the view, above, of McDonald *et al.* (1989), Stringer and McAvoy (1992) and Heintzman (2003) who support the self-definition of spirituality. However, to keep faith with the title and intent of this paper, it is possible to derive *defining characteristics* of wilderness spirituality by drawing on the salient features of the public views and expert perceptions apparent in Table 3. They are:

A feeling of connection and interrelationship with other people and nature; a heightened sense of awareness and elevated consciousness beyond the everyday and corporeal world; cognitive and affective dimensions of human understandings embracing peace, tranquillity, harmony, happiness, awe, wonder, and humbleness; and the possible presence of religious meaning and explanation.

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NOTE

- [1] It is recognised that the concept of wilderness is problematic; that there is a substantial critique of this concept that challenges its contemporary legitimacy in ethnography,

culture and race. These contestations are beyond the scope of this paper, and 'wilderness' is deployed in the everyday sense in which Western society signifies certain valuings, meanings, and emotional responses to relatively natural terrestrial landscapes.

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