

## **An Hermeneutic Approach to Studying the Nature of Wilderness Experiences**

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The most prevalent approach to understanding recreation experiences in resource management has been a motivational research program that views satisfaction as an appropriate indicator of experience quality. This research explores a different approach to studying the quality of recreation experiences. Rather than viewing recreation experiences as a linear sequence of events beginning with expectations and ending with outcomes that are then cognitively compared to determine experience quality, this alternative approach views recreation as an emergent experience motivated by the not very well-defined goal of acquiring stories that ultimately enrich one's life. Further, it assumes that the nature of human experience is best characterized by situated freedom in which the environment sets boundaries that constrain the nature of the experience, but that within those boundaries recreationists are free to experience the world in unique and variable ways. Therefore this alternative approach seeks a more context specific description of the setting/experience relationship that is intended to complement more general management frameworks (e.g., the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum) developed in conjunction with the motivational research program.

**KEYWORDS:** *Emergent experience, experience quality, qualitative research, recreation motivation*

### **Introduction**

A persistent goal in natural resource-based leisure research has been to interpret and describe the relationship between wildland recreationists and

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the resources they use. One major focus of research addressing this goal has been to identify the relationship between setting characteristics (broadly defined to include physical, social, and managerial dimensions) and the nature of recreation experiences available in that setting. From a management standpoint, in recognition of the fact that wildland recreationists seek a diverse array of experiences, this research has been linked to the goal of ensuring diversity in recreation opportunities available on public lands. For example, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Planning System (Driver, Brown, Stankey, & Gregoire, 1987) is one effort to link research on the relationship between setting/experience characteristics with the managerial goal of ensuring diversity in opportunities.

ROS has been widely adopted by both the USDA Forest Service and the USDI Bureau of Land Management as a guide for classifying and managing recreation opportunities on their lands. However, those who developed ROS clearly emphasize that this framework "serves only as a macro guide . . . [and that] through site and project planning, additional diversity can be provided. . . . Because the ROS system can be oriented to regional planning of vastly different types of settings, any guidelines for its implementation will provide only general directions" (Driver et al., 1987, p. 206). In other words, even when the ROS planning framework is applied, additional site (context) specific research and planning is required to achieve a desirable level of diversity in opportunity.

The purpose of this paper is to present an approach for developing a more site specific understanding of the diversity and nature of experiences recreationists receive in a given area. The research described in this paper was conducted at the Juniper Prairie Wilderness on the Ocala National Forest in Florida at the request of the USDA Forest Service. In particular, the Forest Service was concerned with the question of whether or not visitors were receiving a wilderness experience at Juniper Prairie, primarily motivated by concerns about appropriate user numbers.

Wilderness is a state of mind influenced by personal and cultural values (Nash, 1982). Therefore, whether a particular experience constitutes a wilderness experience is a highly subjective judgment. For any given individual experience, there may be several opinions about the extent to which it represents a wilderness experience: the visitor may have one view, the researcher another, and the manager a third. In light of this perspective, the question of whether or not the experiences visitors find at Juniper Prairie constitute a wilderness experience is viewed as being a management decision rather than something that can be determined through empirical research. As a consequence, the research presented here adopted the more general goal of describing the nature of the experiences visitors find at Juniper Prairie in such a way that managers could begin to make a judgment about the extent to which these experiences represent wilderness experiences.

The research approach used in this study is grounded in the normative commitments of a hermeneutic paradigm (Patterson, 1993). A secondary

purpose of this paper is to present an exemplar (Mishler, 1990) of research conducted in accordance with the normative commitments of hermeneutics. The first section of the paper outlines the assumptions about the nature of recreation experiences which guided the selection of this paradigm as the basis for the research. The second section briefly outlines some of the basic tenets of hermeneutics. The final sections present the methodology, results, and discussion.

### Understanding the Nature of Experience

The most prevalent approach to understanding recreation in resource management has been a motivational research program that views recreation as an intrinsically rewarding experience rather than an activity (Driver & Tocher, 1970; Driver et al., 1987). However, rather than directly examining the nature of the experience, this approach defines recreational engagements in terms of "a package of specific psychological outcomes which are realized from a recreation engagement" (Manfredo, Driver, & Brown, 1983, p. 264). Thus, the motivational research program assesses expectations, goals, desired outcomes, motivations, and cognitive judgments about outcomes actually received (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Williams, 1989). As a result, its focus has been on satisfaction with the experience defined in terms of the degree to which desired and expected outcomes are realized (Brown, 1989; Williams, 1989) rather than on the actual nature of the experience. This focus, though useful, has limitations. First, for example, while the motivational approach may tell us that people visit parks to enjoy nature, this approach does not explore what it means to "enjoy nature" (i.e., the content of what is enjoyed, the process through which people attend to and perceive nature, or the emotional responses). Second, especially for first time users, expectations are often vague or nonexistent (Arnould & Price, 1993). Third, experiences often have an emergent quality. That is, experiences may differ from expectations and the most memorable or enjoyable aspect of the experience may, in fact, be the unexpected (Arnould & Price, 1993; Scherl, 1988; Rolston 1987). And finally, a person with inappropriate expectations may receive the type of experience that management hopes to provide but be very dissatisfied or unhappy with it.

As a result of the concerns listed above, this research project adopted an alternative approach. It focused on the meaning of the experience; that is, how the experience is constructed and remembered (in this case immediately after its conclusion). This approach reflects two major assumptions. The first assumption is that experience is best understood as a whole rather than as the sum of its parts. The second major assumption is that the specific nature of recreation experiences in natural environments is best characterized by the concept of situated freedom. Situated freedom is the idea that there is structure in the environment that sets boundaries on what can be perceived or experienced, but that within those boundaries recreationists are

free to experience the world in highly individual, unique, and variable ways. Under these conditions, the nature of experience is seen as emergent rather than predictable.

Under the two assumptions outlined above, the goal of research exploring the nature of experiences is to identify the boundaries of the environment and the types of experiences that visitors are obtaining within those boundaries. This can be done at various levels of abstraction (specificity). For example, at a very broad level one may determine that individuals visiting Juniper Prairie “experience challenge and excitement” or “enjoy nature”, both of which, on the surface, seem consistent with a wilderness experience. However, it is easy to imagine how both a visitor canoeing down Juniper Prairie and one taking a water chute log ride at Disney World find challenge and excitement; but the definition of what challenge and excitement mean and the manner in which these opportunities are related to the setting is likely to differ vastly for the two types of experiences. Similarly, one person can enjoy nature by watching panhandling bears along a road through a national park while another observes grizzlies as they congregate along rivers in remote areas of Alaska during a salmon run. While both individuals may report that “enjoying nature” was an important aspect of the experience, the actual nature, meaning, and consequences of the experience are more appropriately described in vastly different language. As a result, a more specific description of experiences is needed to provide a basis for managers to decide whether visitors are able to find a wilderness experience at Juniper Prairie.

Traditional survey techniques become problematic when the study requires more specificity than simply identifying that visitors “enjoyed nature.” In part this is because many traditional psychometric measurement techniques used to establish the reliability, validity, and statistical generalizability of responses are partly designed to eliminate specificity or uniqueness in items used to measure responses. Also, the concept of situated freedom is at odds with the use of a predetermined operational model to represent the nature of experience. Therefore, rather than starting with an operational model, the starting point for the analysis of experience in the research reported here was to obtain recreationists’ descriptions of their experience through open-ended interviews.

#### Normative Paradigm—Hermeneutics

Since Thomas Kuhn’s (1962) discussion of scientific revolutions, philosophers of science have defined the appropriate unit of analysis for exploring a research tradition as its macrostructure (Anderson, 1986). This macrostructure is composed of normative philosophical commitments that guide the practice of science (e.g., define what is knowable, prescribe how methodology is applied, establish criteria used in peer review processes, etc.). Different paradigms or approaches to science are characterized by differences in these philosophical commitments. Critical pluralism and other post-positivist perspectives in the philosophy of science emphasize the importance

of seeking a fit between a researcher's assumptions about the nature of the phenomenon being studied and the normative assumptions of the research paradigm one uses to explore the phenomenon (Anderson, 1986; Hunt, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1983). Additionally, to establish an adequate peer review process in the spirit of critical pluralism it is increasingly important for researchers to make their paradigmatic commitments explicit (Patterson & Williams, 1998).

Hermeneutics is a scientific paradigm with normative commitments consistent with the assumptions about the nature of recreation experiences described above and was the scientific paradigm that served as a normative guide for conducting this research. A detailed discussion of the normative commitments of hermeneutics is presented in Patterson (1993) but are briefly outlined below. Selection of hermeneutics as the normative paradigm underlying the research program described in this paper reflects the following philosophical commitments:

1. Attempts to understand the realm of meaning underlying human action are more like interpreting texts than like gaining knowledge of objects in nature (Polkinghorne, 1988; Olson, 1986);
2. Because human experience is mutually defined (co-constituted) by the transactional relationships among settings, individuals with unique identities, and situational influences, experience is more appropriately viewed as an emergent narrative rather than as predictable outcomes resulting from the causal interaction of antecedent elements;
3. Interview narratives provide one basis for "a direct interpretation of a complex unit of social interaction, in comparison to the standard [research] approach where such inferences are based on decontextualized bits and pieces" (Mishler, 1986b, p. 241).

### Study Area

Juniper Prairie is a 13,260 acre wilderness area in the Ocala National Forest in Florida. It offers a seven mile canoe trip down Juniper Run which starts at a concessionaire operated campground/picnic area and ends at a small landing just outside of the wilderness. The Run is a slow moving stream that originates from two springs, Juniper Springs and Fern Hammock Springs near the launch site. For the first several miles the stream channel is narrow, generally only slightly wider than 6 feet across as it winds its way through a thick and lush forest comprised of palms, cypress, and other southern hardwoods characteristic of a subtropical forest. Eventually it begins to widen and pass through prairie wetlands reminiscent of the Everglades before finally passing under Highway 19 at the edge of the wilderness. The landing site is on the far side of the bridge. The concessionaire rents canoes and provides a shuttle service that returns visitors to the launch point. Private boaters are also allowed to canoe the Run. A limited number of canoes are allowed to float the Run each day.

## Methodology

Within hermeneutics, methodological procedures are an emergent characteristic of the research, dependent on the questions being asked, the phenomenon being studied, and the understanding of the phenomenon which initially guides research. Hermeneutic research entails two components: data production and data analysis. In the present study, data were collected using open-ended interviews with respondents at the canoe landing at the end of Juniper Run. Interviews were necessarily short (10-20 minutes) because visitors were interviewed between the time they finished their trips and the arrival of a concessionaire's shuttle van which took them back to the launch point. Thirty group interviews were conducted, tape recorded, and transcribed verbatim. All but one of the 30 interviews were conducted by the same individual.

*Hermeneutic interviews.* Hermeneutics reflects a constructivist ontology in which knowledge of phenomena and reality is viewed as a textually produced construction of the interviewer and interviewee (Howard, 1991). From this perspective, the researcher must adopt the role of "self as instrument", participating in an emergent discourse. Although some discussions of survey methodology make a distinction between structured and unstructured interviews, Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (1991) point out that all interviews have a structure. Differences between interviews are really a question of how the structure is negotiated. With respect to interviews using open-ended questions, two extremes are evident. The first extreme is represented by interviews in which all respondents are asked a standard set of questions in the same order and responses are taken as given with no additional probing. The other extreme is to begin with a single pre-planned question with subsequent questions driven by spontaneous reactions to the interviewees' responses. Hermeneutic interviews seek a balance between these two extremes. The role of the interviewer is to lead respondents to certain themes and to clarify ambiguities in responses without directing them to express specific meanings (Kvale, 1983).

Initially, we approached this task by developing an interview guide composed of open-ended questions which were intended to lead respondents to discuss themes that were relevant to the research question without directing them to express specific meanings. However, during the course of the interviews, we began to realize the interview process was encouraging people to list the contents of their experiences (closer to measuring recall of how attention was focused) rather than to describe the nature and meaning of the experience. Analysis of the interviews as we were conducting them suggested that the most "successful" (informative, insightful) interviews were those in which the nature of the responses seemed closer to telling a story than to responding to interview questions. Additionally, observation of interactions among groups not interviewed supported this perception.

For example, consider the observations briefly summarizing the experience of the following two groups. The first was a family that arrived at the landing in two canoes (parents in one and children in a second). They

looked tired and unhappy and at first snapped at each other as they landed and disembarked from the canoe. They removed their gear and sat quietly saying very little, seemingly dejected, at first. However, after about 20 minutes they started discussing the experience with what appeared to be an increasing level of enthusiasm and animation. They talked about hearing "gators" calling to each other in the reeds. They discussed how one canoe lost track of the other, and how one group shouted to try and locate the missing canoe. They talked about having to decide whether to wait for the other canoe, whether they had taken the wrong turn, whether the other canoe would come that way at all, and whether they could find them or not. Meanwhile the other canoe had discovered the cabin near the boundary of the wilderness and had stopped to explore until they saw that it was not open to the public. The shuttle van arrived before they were finished discussing the experience.

In a second example, a husband met his wife at the landing. They had canoed the Run together a month before. This time he had done it with friends, and it had been an entirely different experience. The previous trip had been easy canoeing. This time the trip had been a real challenge, and that is what the story he told his wife focused on; how he had swamped and lost his glasses (later found) and about the times he had to get out of the canoe and lift it over obstacles to keep going. And even though this trip was not what he had expected, it seemed to make a good story, one he seemed to enjoy telling and appeared happy with. In recognizing this, subsequent interviews attempted to encourage people to tell the story of the experience rather than list the aspects of the experience.

*Hermeneutic analysis of interviews.* Hermeneutic analysis begins with in-depth exploration of individual interviews (idiographic level) to identify predominant themes through which narrative accounts of specific experiential situations can be meaningfully organized, interpreted, and presented. This involves: (1) establishing a point of view from which to begin analysis (the forestructure of understanding), (2) reading the entire narrative several times to gain an understanding of it in its entirety, (3) using this preliminary understanding as the basis for a deeper exploration of the "parts", and (4) modifying the understanding of the whole on the basis of the more detailed understanding of the parts. Subsequent to the idiographic analyses, a similar part-whole analysis is used to develop a nomothetic (across individuals) understanding of data. In a nomothetic analysis the goal is to identify themes that are relevant beyond the unique experience of one individual.

Tesch (1990) describes qualitative analysis as the process of developing an organizing system that can be used to help determine what individual statements reveal about the phenomenon being studied. The organizing system used in this study attempts to identify dominant themes which seem to characterize the nature of visitor experiences at Juniper Prairie and to present the different ways these themes were featured in visitor experiences.

*Sampling and generalizability of results.* The 30 interviews were conducted over a period of 8 days in July and August 1994 (13 interviews on weekends and 17 on weekdays). Although an attempt was made to spread out the

interviews and to select visitors with a wide range of characteristics, sampling was not random. As a consequence of the small sample size and the nonrandom sampling, the results presented here are not statistically generalizable. However, the concept of statistical generalizability is not entirely consistent with the assumptions about the nature of recreation experiences guiding this research approach. Statistical generalizability comes at a cost. As specificity (richness of detail, more concrete information, and less abstraction) increases, generalizability decreases. For example, at some level of detail everyone's experience is unique, while at the highest level of abstraction, statements that are true of everyone can be made (e.g., during the trip visitors experienced nature). Since the goal of this research was to describe how visitors experience Juniper Prairie, richness of detail was sought at the expense of statistical generalizability.

The concept of situated freedom is also relevant to the discussion of generalizability. Again, situated freedom is the idea that there is structure in the environment that sets boundaries on the nature of experience but that within those boundaries recreationists are free to experience the world in highly individual, unique, and unpredictable ways. Under this perspective, the experiences collected, analyzed, and presented here may be thought of as representative types (Bellah, Madison, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). The phrase "representative type" is used here to imply two concepts. First, it refers to the idea that the description of the experiences represent a detailed understanding of actual individuals rather than an aggregate characterization of some nonexistent average individual (Shafer, 1969). Second, it is used to emphasize the idea that the data "represent" a possible type of experience in relation to the context of the setting rather a statistically generalizable, law-like result. In other words, the results describe actual types of experiences that visitors are receiving at Juniper Prairie. However it is not appropriate to draw conclusions about the extent to which these types of experiences are distributed across the population of visitors to Juniper Prairie nor to assume that all possible types of experiences have been captured in the interviews.

*Evaluating hermeneutic research.* Use of interpretive paradigms such as hermeneutics has become increasingly prevalent in the recreation and leisure fields. However, these fields have yet to establish agreement concerning norms or criteria by which to evaluate the acceptability or legitimacy of interpretive research. Therefore, an hermeneutic perspective on these issues will be briefly reviewed. Hermeneutics represents an antifoundationalist epistemology that focuses more on evaluations of the research product itself rather than its adherence to antecedent methodological criteria. Three proposed instrumental criteria for evaluating hermeneutic research are persuasiveness, insightfulness, and practical utility (Patterson, 1993).

The concept of persuasiveness comes closest to traditional notions of validity and deals with the question of whether or not sufficient evidence is provided to persuade the reader that the interpretation is appropriate. Giorgi (1975, p. 96) defines persuasiveness as whether or not "a reader,



adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not he [or she] agrees with it." Mishler (1990) presents a similar argument, maintaining validation requires that the reader be able to make a reasonable judgment about the warrants for the researcher's interpretive claims. We have attempted to support the persuasiveness of our interpretations in two ways: (1) by documenting our interpretive themes with excerpts from interviews and (2) by defining appropriate boundaries within which results should be extrapolated (i.e., the concept of representative types in contrast to the concept of statistical generalizability).

The criterion of insightfulness has been defined as an "interpretation [that] allows the evaluator to see a set of qualitative data as a coherent pattern or gestalt" (Thompson, 1990, p. 28). Overall we conducted 30 interviews which, when transcribed, were typically 7-9 single spaced pages in length. If the analysis presented below transforms this data into a coherent pattern that leads readers to a deeper understanding of the nature of experiences visitors find at Juniper Prairie, then this research would successfully meet this criterion.

The final criterion is practical utility. This refers both to whether or not the research "uncovers an answer to the concern motivating the inquiry" (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 289) and the degree to which other researchers "rely on the concepts, methods, and inferences of a study, or tradition of inquiry, as the basis for [their] own theorizing and empirical research" (Mishler, 1990, p. 419). In the case of this specific research, if the study results are useful in helping managers to make judgements about the wilderness nature of experiences visitors receive and provides a useful perspective that helps shape future research on recreation experiences, it would satisfy this criterion.

## Results

At a nomothetic level, four coherent dimensions related to the question of whether or not visitors receive a wilderness experience at Juniper Prairie emerged. These dimensions (Challenge, Closeness to nature, Decisions not faced in everyday environments, and Stories of nature) are discussed below.

*Challenge.* The most prevalent experiential dimension in the interviews was the experience of challenge. This theme emerged in every interview, although the meaning of challenge and the role challenge played in defining the experience differed greatly across respondents. These different meanings of challenge were classified into fairly distinct categories (Table 1). The organization of Table 1 represents our interpretation of the strength or degree to which the dimension of challenge seemed to dominate the experience, with intensity or importance decreasing as one moves from left to right. At the extreme left, the theme of challenge seemed to define the meaning of the experience in the respondents' minds at the time of the interview. However, for the first group of respondents in this category (including members from three different groups), the challenge encountered led to unpleasant,

**TABLE 1**  
*Challenge as a Dimension of the Types of Experiences the Sample<sup>a</sup> of Visitors Interviewed at Juniper Prairie (July-August, 1994) received.*

Intensity (Category)	Challenge Defined Meaning of the Experience		Challenge Helped Make Experience a Good Story			Challenge was a Defining Characteristic of Experience		Role of Challenge Unclear	
	Specific Description (Group)	Absolute Negative	Sense of Accomplish- ment	Negative/ Positive	Tipping Over	Positive Skill	Positive Attachment	Ambivalence	Misc.
Interview Numbers <sup>b</sup>	72102 <sup>c</sup>	72103	72101	72303	80605	72201	72302 <sup>c</sup>	72203	80606
	72302 <sup>c</sup>	72202	72102 <sup>c</sup>	80702	80804	80601	72304 <sup>c</sup>	72301	80701
	80905	72304 <sup>c</sup>	72304 <sup>c</sup>	80703	80805			80602	80801
		80603	80604	81002	80902			80802	80903
							80803	81001	
							80901		
Percent of groups	10.0	13.3	13.3	13.3	13.3	6.7	6.7	20.0	16.7
Percent of respon- dents	8.8	11.8	11.8	11.8	11.8	5.9	5.9	17.6	14.7
	20.6		41.2			23.5		14.7	

<sup>a</sup>Due to the nonrandom sample and small sample size (30 groups), results should be thought of in terms of representative types rather than as statistically generalizable results (see text for explanation). <sup>b</sup>The third row presents interview identification numbers. Identification numbers are month/day/interview number on that day. <sup>c</sup>Most of the interviews were done with several members of the group participating. In some cases perceptions between group members differed significantly. When this occurred, both responses were included in the analysis. As a result, total number of responses presented in the table (34) is different from number of interviews (30).

dissatisfying experiences (Absolute negative group in Table 1). Consider the following excerpts:

F: When we were here 5 years ago, it was a lot easier than this time . . . the trees have almost totally blocked the flow there. . . . About killed my back. . . . It will be a cold day before I come back. We lost a pair of shoes and nearly got pushed in the muck over our heads. (female, interview 72302, #1<sup>1</sup>)

M: [Visibly unhappy] The first half of the river, . . . the branches and the trees, something has to be done about that. But the second part of it is fine, it's really, it's ok. It's just the overgrowth at the beginning. . . . I think it's

<sup>1</sup>The interview number represents month/day/interview number on that day, the number following the "#" is a sequential numbering of the excerpts used in the paper and is intended to facilitate references to the excerpts in subsequent sections of the paper.

pretty bad. . . . because there are a lot of trees that have fallen down that are like right on top of the . . . water . . . . I don't know what you could possibly do about that, probably would have to send somebody down there cutting all day, but it'd be worth it. (male, interview 80905, #2)

In the second group of respondents for whom challenge seemed to define the experience, the meaning was a more positive one (Sense of accomplishment group in Table 1). For these individuals, the challenge seemed to produce a sense of accomplishment, of overcoming or surviving a significant trial. The first two respondents in this category were quite similar in that they seemed to be actively debating in their minds whether the experience was, in fact, a positive one. For example, at the halfway point, one woman:

was hoping that there would be an option to get out and have someone pick you up there. . . . because you can start off thinking 7 miles is nothing, and then it seems very long. (female, interview 72103, #3)

However, when asked about the meaning of the experience, she responded:

Well personally today it's just that I survived it and managed to go. Because truly if there had been a half way point where I could have gotten out, then that's what I would have done. You know, just the idea of successfully completing it. (female, interview 72103, #4)

The second respondent in this category was quite similar. When asked if anything detracted from the experience the response was:

Just the difficulty of it. . . . It was pretty harrowing. We got stuck in one spot. I let them off [referring to his two children]. I was going to lift the boat over and I slipped because it was a fresh tree that was down. It was all kind of mossy and what not. And it took me about 45 minutes to get the boat right side up, the water out, and pulled up on the side and bring it around the tree. These guys were pretty scared, but I guess that was part of the experience. (male, interview 72202, #5).

However, when asked about whether anything stood out in his mind as adding to the experience, his immediate and sole response was "the challenge." Additionally, he seemed further along in trying to decide whether or not the experience was a positive one. He seemed to feel it made a good story even as it ended; he began enthusiastically describing his experience even before the interviewer approached him.

A third respondent in this category found a similar meaning in the experience. For example, much of the interview focused on the skill and challenge it had taken to canoe the run and when asked the meaning of the experience his response was:

Well, it was a challenge that I wanted to do on my own and accomplishing it means a lot. It's an achievement if you will. (male, interview 80603, #6)

However, unlike the previous two respondents, he did not seem to be mentally debating the appropriate evaluation of the experience or the positive contribution of challenge. In part this seemed to be because he had expected

a challenge whereas the two other respondents in the Sense of accomplishment group (one who been there before when experienced companions had done the paddling and one who had heard about it from a friend who "didn't give me any idea what it was all about") had not anticipated the degree of challenge.

These three respondents shared two other similarities beyond the interpretation of the meaning of the experience. First, they were all novice canoers (one had been down the Run before, but with others doing the paddling). Second, other dimensions of the experience were not a major aspect of the interviews, suggesting that coping with the challenge had dominated the focus of attention ("No I didn't see much anything else. Not that I expected to, you're spending most of your time watching the water . . . ." (male, interview 80603, #7)).

The final respondent in this grouping, though similar in some ways (a novice who found the experience a challenge), also differed slightly. First, she was a member of a large Sierra Club excursion in which the interview with the entire group focused a great deal on the aesthetic qualities of the place. Second, the meaning and challenge were linked to a deeper life experience. When asked the meaning of the experience, she responded:

It meant a lot to me because I was in a very bad car accident in 1992 and this was my thing. I had to do this and I'm delighted. (female, interview 72304, #8)

The second primary category concerning the role of challenge in the experience consisted of visitors for whom the challenge seemed to contribute to the construction of a good story (Table 1). The first grouping within this category (Negative/positive) was of individuals who initially suggested that the overhanging trees and submerged snags detracted from the experience, and usually suggested that something needed to be done about this. However their subsequent discussion indicated that this aspect of the Run in part made the experience what it was and provided a memorable story from the experience. The stories related by these respondents ranged from creative ducking, bending, and maneuvering of one's body within the canoe to actually tipping over as illustrated by the following two excerpts.

M: I just, I wondered. I've seen where they have cut some trees away and I just wonder if they couldn't get back out there. Some of them were really low. Almost impossible. G1: Almost like doing the limbo in a canoe. . . . But some of it was fun though. I mean I like, I'd leave some of it in. But some were really rough. G2: The ones that we went under, that last really, really low one. It had a branch hanging down like right in front of it and it was lower than the bridge. It was like, I don't know, wasn't that far off [hand gesture showing how far]. M: We all sat in the bottom of the canoe and got below the gunnels. I mean we were as low as we could get. G1: I mean we barely made it through. (male, two girls, interview 72101, #9)

I: . . . was there anything in particular that detracted from . . . your enjoyment of the trip. M: Other than dumping out of the canoe? F: [Laugh]. . . . No. M: No it was fine. F: Everything's wet. But it was good. . . . I: Anything in particular that added to the experience maybe? F: Falling in the water, yeah. That, that - M: That worked both ways. . . . F: And it was in a

good, nice sandy spot and we could both touch, so we got the boat back over. But, looking at the boat and seeing it full of water was like, wow, what do you do now? . . . F: When I went in that's what I thought [she would lose her glasses]. Though I held on to them. M: Found out your paddles float. F: They did? Yeah, they did [laugh]. I was too panicky—I'm in the water! (male, female, interviewer, interview 80604, #10)

The second grouping within the "good story" category (Tipping over) also emphasized capsizing and the challenge. In some cases these visitors capsized, while in other cases they described observing others tip over. In the latter case, the possibility of tipping over themselves was definitely on their mind. The primary difference from the previous group was that this group seemed to have already decided that the overhangs and potential for swamping were a positive aspect of the experience whereas the previous group seemed to still be debating the issue in their minds. For example, when discussing what made the experience and place distinctive, one respondent who had not capsized said:

I have been canoeing on the eastern shore of Maryland . . . I guess . . . the river is a lot wider there. It just takes a lot more skill [here], which we didn't have. . . it was just real challenging. A few times we said, I don't know if we're going to do it, but I don't think it was a negative . . . (male, interview 80702, #11)

While another who had capsized stated:

F: It looks natural, it doesn't look too made up for the public I don't think. Because they keep extra overhangs for, you know, the more natural kind of look. I: So you're happy with the overhangs? F: Yeah, I think so because otherwise it would be too boring. It would be like some sort of Disneyland ride that you can't hurt yourself in anyway whatsoever. No hazard zones. It makes it more fun and exciting if there is more blockage somehow. (female, interviewer, interview 80703, #1<sup>2</sup>)

The third grouping within the good story category was comprised of individuals for whom the challenge definitely led to a Positive story. While one of these respondents had tipped in, there was, in general, less emphasis on tipping in than in the previous grouping. The following excerpts are representative of these respondents' comments.

I: A lot of folks find this a little bit challenging to them—F: [Laugh] All the ones [overhangs] that you have to duck and stuff, there's a lot of ducking. M: For beginners, it's not good for beginners. F: There is a lot of ducking and stuff, but that makes it all the more fun I think . . . If it was straight through, it wouldn't be the same. (female, male, interviewer, interview 80605, #13).

M: Well it's totally different from Virginia because . . . in Virginia we had the more rapid moving water, you know, and fighting going down the rocks and going over little ledges and stuff like that where you don't have that in

<sup>2</sup>The tape ran out in the middle of the response, the portion after the brackets is a paraphrasing of the comments.

here. But here you're ducking trees and trying to make it around corners with tight turns. . . . I: How was the ducking under trees, was that a problem? Did that detract from the experience? M: Oh no. I don't even care about that, it's just fun. . . . Some of the places you go in are just pretty tight, you know, but who cares? You know, you didn't expect to be going down a main highway [laugh]. (male, interviewer, interview 80804, #14)

The final grouping within the good story category consisted of two interviews in which the respondents emphasized the opportunity Juniper Run provided for developing, using, and demonstrating their Skill as canoeists.

M1: . . . you have to learn how to read the current, like a downward V, and you have to learn the currents of the water. . . . I was anchor man on the bow. M2: That's why I liked it a little bit. I mean it is, some of the [snags] are all right, they're hard to get through. Just some of them are virtually impossible. We almost got tipped over and everything. (2 males, interview 72201, #15)

I: Is there anything about this particular river that you think makes it stand out, distinctive from the others? . . . F: It's more tight. M: What I like about it is it's more instinctive. . . . F: You've got to have more skill to maneuver it. M: Yes, it's definitely, you need some skill which makes it different from the other rivers. I mean above average skill to maneuver it properly. (female, male, interviewer, interview 80601, #16)

The primary difference between this group and the "sense of accomplishment" grouping in the primary category "Challenge defined the meaning of the experience" (Table 1) was that this group found the Run provided an opportunity to express an identity as experienced canoeists and to display skills. They never doubted their ability to successfully complete the trip, whereas the "Sense of accomplishment" group were novices and were, at times, uncertain of their ability to successfully complete the trip.

The third primary category with respect to the role of challenge in experiences at Juniper Run referred to interviews for which the theme was seen as a defining characteristic of the trip. There were two fairly distinct groupings within this category. The first included respondents with previous experience at the site who showed a strong attachment to place (Positive attachment group). The challenge of the Run contributed to that attachment.

M: Definitely as far as being able to canoe, this is about the best around. Because you can go to Alexander, you know, and that's basically a river. It's big and [wide] all the way down so if you want to get back into nature you're, here, in tight quarters. It's about the best place around. I: So what makes this different from a river you're saying is it's—M: Oh yeah, it's like a big creek. I mean if you want to canoe this is the best place to go. (male, interviewer, interview 72201, #17)

I: And why is it maybe your favorite over Alexander? F: Alexander is a wide stream of water, it's a wonderful spring and it's just a wide area. And lots of sunshine. I like the challenge, I like the crooked way . . . of these little meandering streams that we have coming out of Juniper. It's just my favorite.

Probably my favorite in all of Florida. (female, interviewer, interview 72304, #18)

For these two individuals, the specific conditions of the day (e.g., the first respondent's assessment that today's trip had posed a higher than normal challenge) were less significant because they seemed to think in terms of an enduring involvement with the place rather than in terms of a single outing or experience.

For the second grouping within this primary category (Ambivalence), the theme of challenge was raised as a definitive aspect of the experience, but respondents seemed somewhat ambivalent about its meaning to the experience.

. . . just moving around the logs and everything, that was all right. It got to be a pain every once in a while, but outside of that it was all right. (male, interview 72301, #19)

I: Are the trees making it more difficult to come down than it use to be?

M: It use to be more a relaxing ride [laugh]. You know, you've got to duck a lot. I: Has that taken away from the experience? M: No, no it's just got, you can't relax as much. You've got to keep your eyes forward. So it's just a different experience I would say. (male, interviewer, interview 80803, #20)

Thus, like other respondents, they recognized the challenge as a distinctive characteristic of this place, but generally it seemed as if they had not yet decided whether the challenge was a positive or negative aspect of the experience.

The final primary category in Table 1 contains a miscellaneous grouping of responses in which the theme of challenge was raised. However, for various reasons the role challenge played in defining the meaning of the experience was not clear. In two cases (80606, 80701) this seemed to be because the respondents appeared "suspicious of" or uncertain about the objective of the interview and therefore the interview was not able to get beyond the "public self" to deeper personal meanings of the experience. For example, the respondent in interview 80606 seemed suspicious, perhaps because he was an adult leader of a scout troop that had just arrived and were engaging in a playful brawl/mud fight in the water near the landing. As another example of situations in which interviews were placed in the miscellaneous category, in three interviews in this grouping (80801, 81001, 80903) the responses were somewhat contradictory. The Run was described as an easy one, but to varying degrees the challenge of it was also pointed out (it was not a big deal but they got caught in the brush and were sore after the work out; it was pretty "straight forward . . . [but] there were some places along the river where you weren't sure which way to go").

*Closeness to nature.* A second experiential dimension is suggested by one of the respondent's answers to a question asking him to describe the area to someone who had not visited before:

I don't know, I'd just say it's worth the money and effort to get through if you like the outdoors. If you don't like the outdoors, don't do it. (male, interview 80802, #21)

For many visitors, the experience provided an opportunity to get close to nature in a very literal sense. Table 2 presents the experiential themes relevant to this dimension. The first theme, closely related to (and not entirely distinct from) the dimension of challenge was closeness with nature afforded by the tight, winding stream strewn with blown down trees, snags, and overhangs. Over two-thirds of the respondents directly elaborated on this aspect of the experience:

. . . the first part of the trip there was an awful lot of overhangs. Which for the most part isn't bothersome, but all of the sudden we really . . . even if we had an option it was awful and we had these branches flying back at us. . . . In fact, a lot of people were yelling. I heard them in the background. They were just too low. If you weren't really careful you could have raked it right over your face. (male, interview 72102, #22)

M: Like I almost got rubbed off a couple of times. Look at my shoulders [showing brown streaks]. Owwww. I: Yeah, I've noticed that some people

**TABLE 2**  
*Closeness to Nature as a Dimension of the Types of Experiences the Sample of Visitors Interviewed at Juniper Prairie (July-August, 1994) received.*

Aspect of Nature	Overhangs	Alligators	Spiders	Bugs	Snakes
Interview number	72101	72102	72101	72201	80902
	72102	72303	72102	72301	
	72103	72304	72303	72303	
	72201	80601	80801	80902	
	72202	80602	80802		
	72301	80604	80902		
	72302	80702			
	72303	80801			
	72304	80802			
	80603	80804			
	80604	81001			
	80702				
	80801				
	80802				
	80803				
	80804				
	80901				
	80902				
	80905				
	81001				
81002					
Percent of groups	70.0	36.67	20.0	13.33	3.33



come down here pretty marked up. M: I'll tell you. (male, interviewer, interview 80901, #23)

Yeah, with kind of thick foliage. It's tight. You're really going through some tight spots. It makes you feel like you're right in wilderness. I mean you are pretty much. (female, interview 80902, #24)

The second most common aspect of this theme, expressed by more than one-third of the respondents interviewed (Table 2), related to the presence of alligators along the Run. In addition to a thrill, encountering "gators" under the close quarters of the Run gave rise to some feelings of discomfort and trepidation.

M: . . . a big gator. F: Oh yeah, the thing just sat there like he owned the world. It was beautiful, but dangerous. . . . I: So did ya'll stop and watch the gator. . . . F: Not the gator, maybe the deer, but the gator, we took off. (male, female, interviewer, interview 80602, #25)

M: It seems like the animals are closer to you. They're [the wildlife] not as scared as they are—we go to Shenandoah National Park and you rarely see anything because there are so many people in there all the time and the animals are real scared. At least the birds and the alligators, they never moved. So that made it a little bit different. F: They just look at you. I: Was that good or bad, the alligators not moving? M: Oh, I thought that was good. F: I didn't want them to move. I just wanted it to stay right where it was. (male, female, interviewer, interview 80802, #26)

M: I thought seeing the alligators was pretty neat. . . . Actually it swam right under our bow. I thought that was pretty neat. . . . he looked 4 or 5 feet. Man we saw one that looked bigger a couple of minutes after that, but yeah, he was right under it. F: About what, 8 feet from the boat? M: He acted a little belligerent. He didn't act afraid of us at all. He kind of came out to check it out. But the other one, that was neat, he went right under the boat. . . . I got to admit it did put . . . F: It made him nervous [pointing to child]. M: The one on the bank as we came by, you know, he came out towards us and stopped. F: He didn't respect us too much. . . . M: Oh yeah, he was real close. Yeah, the one he was, these two didn't even see it, I did, went right under the boat and popped up on the other side. And yeah, I mean I wasn't nervous about it, but yeah, it does catch your attention. Want to make sure you don't flip at that point. (male, female, interview 80801, #27)

In fact, given the "tightness" of the setting, even the thought of encountering alligators caused trepidation among some of the visitors.

M: We didn't see any gators. I: Was that a disappointment, were you sort of expecting—M: I thought we would see more wildlife. F: When I saw how close the banks were, I was just as glad. That was like face to face with a gator. I wasn't ready for that. (male, female, interviewer, interview 80604, #28)

I: Did you see any alligators? M: Not an alligator. . . . It's just as well, we spilled our canoe one time and if they knew [his sons] there was alligators in there, there's no telling what my two would have done. (male, interviewer, interview 81001, #29)

Another opportunity to experience close contact with nature discussed by several respondents who had been among the first down the Run in the morning was encounters with spiders and spider webs that appear across the Run after the last trip of the preceding day.

M: Giant spiders. I've never seen giant spiders like that. F: Oh yeah, the spiders. I: Were they a positive or negative? M: Well there was no problem because we could see the web coming and usually we got most of them away. Or they were going over us and everyone went 'Urrrrrh.' A few screams, but other than that it was a lot of fun. It was very entertaining in that regard. (male, female, interviewer, interview 72102, #30)

M: And when you're first you get all the spider webs knocked down from the trail too. F: [Laugh]. Yes. M: So we learned that one too. (male, female, interview 80902, #31)

Other types of bugs were also encountered in close quarters and considered part of a wilderness experience.

M2: All the bugs were exactly wilderness. M1: Yeah, you need to bring . . . . , I meant to bring some Skin So Soft. (2 males, interview 72201, #32)  
 . . . you have to go under limbs, where limbs are sticking out . . . you know, ants coming off limbs, and stuff like that, on you. (male, interview 72301, #33)

Thus, not only do visitors find a setting dominated by nature, many also found themselves in far more direct contact with nature than is typically found in opportunities provided by motorized nature trails or even many well-groomed hiking trails.

*Decisions not faced in everyday environments.* A third experiential dimension, already illustrated by the family whose canoes were separated during the trip, deals with decisions that are not faced in everyday environments. Although not as prevalent as the three previous experiential dimensions, this one was evident in some form in over 40% of the interviews (Table 3). The most common way this dimension was revealed in experiences was through the theme of wayfinding. Slightly more than 25% of the groups interviewed indicated that there were times when they were not certain what route to take. In one case this was a relatively minor issue, the best route to take through the obstacles. But in other cases, despite the presence of other users on the Run, some respondents briefly experienced the sensation of being lost, ultimately depending on their ability to read the current to find their way.

And now that I've thought about it there's a couple of places where I wasn't certain where the trail was and I was able to follow it because the current was pretty good. But there may be days that people might have some trouble finding their way. Again you balance that with the natural scenario . . . it was kind of a challenge trying to find it and I obviously found it eventually, but ... depending on the skill level of the people coming out, there could be some people get lost. (male, interview 80603, #34)

**TABLE 3**  
*Decisions not Faced in Everyday Environments as a Dimension of the Types  
of Experiences the Sample of Visitors Interviewed at Juniper Prairie  
(July-August, 1994) received.*

Nature of Decision	Way Finding	Markers	Facing the Unknown	Not Being Alone
Interview number	72102	72101	72203	72303
	72201	72202	72303	80606
	72202	80603	80702	
	72303	80905	80801	
	80603		80803	
	80604		80805	
	80801			
	80805			
Percent of groups	26.67	13.33	20.0	6.67

I: Could you hear other folks on the river? M: No, not after we let them all get away from us. F: It was like, are we going the right way? We're lost. [Both laugh] I: So you weren't certain a couple of times where the- F: No we were just- M: Well you can't be certain, but if you watch where the water flows. F: Yeah. M: The water is all going to flow to the right spot, so if you follow the current you're going to end up where you belong. (male, female, interviewer, interview 80604, #35)

I: Have you been down on a canoe trip before? G: Yes. We got lost. I: This time? G: No last time. (girl, interviewer, interview 72303, #36)

As the last excerpt in particular illustrates, for some individuals this was a memorable and lasting part of the story from the experience.

A closely related theme was the absence of markers. In these cases, visitors were not so much lost in space, but were losing instead their sense of time.

Maybe 1 or 2 markers, at least let you know where the half way mark is. I had no idea, we were going and going. But that was good, that was part of the experience. (male, interview 72202, #37)

M3: It needs more markers, how far down you are. M1: Yeah, because we don't like to bring watches, so maybe a time line. They tell us at the beginning maybe 4 hours . . . . an hour to go. (2 males, interview 80905, #38)

The second most prevalent theme was a somewhat diverse collection of responses in which visitors were faced with the unknown (Table 3). While the specific topics raised in the comments ranged from tannins that colored

the water (72203, 72303) to potential lightening (80801, 80803), they seemed to share in common a slight tone of apprehension or concern.

What I noticed this time, you can see the water's got that kind of rust color. And we noticed that almost right away. And that concerns me a little bit although I don't know what it is. Do you? (male, interview 72203, #39)

And for one individual these uncertainties of the trip led to one of the experience's broader meanings for him.

Well, I got a lot more canoeing experience. And I realize I need to be a lot more prepared than I usually am when I go canoeing. We don't canoe really enough to have prepared like we should have. We should have prepared for rain and we should have prepared, you know, to tip over. And we should have prepared more for that. But that's what I learned today. Because we need to be more prepared when we take on something like this. (male, interview 80805, #40)

The final theme within this dimension was related to the previous in that visitors were expressing some concern, in this case about being alone. The first was from a respondent who had never been to a natural area before who found the fact that there were other people on the Run "comforting in a way" (male, interview 72303). The second was an adult scout leader who seemed to want to avoid a solitude experience:

I: Were there times when you were out there by yourself or did you feel. . . . M: I was never in, I was not by myself. When I was by myself, I speeded up and I caught other canoers. . . (male, interviewer, interview 80606, #41)

*Stories of nature.* A fourth experiential dimension relevant to the question of whether or not visitors received a wilderness experience at Juniper Prairie deals with the opportunity the experience provides for visitors to focus on and enjoy nature. Although this dimension was prevalent throughout the interviews, compared to the other dimensions of the experience, it was more difficult to represent in an overall table for a variety of reasons. For example, this aspect of the experience was more variable than the challenge dimension with respect both to the variability in environmental conditions and the degree to which it was determined by the environment. For example, the contribution of the environment to determining the role and meaning of challenge to the experience—the overhanging limbs; snags; tight, winding course of the Run—was fairly constant for all canoeists, varying only to a small degree when visitors had a choice of different routes. In contrast, at least with respect to the wildlife component of this "Nature story" dimension, the contribution of the environment was more variable—for some visitors the alligators, otters, and owls were there to be seen, but for other visitors they were not.

With respect to the second issue, environmental determinism, the challenge of the Run was something of a "universal" theme. While there was individual variation in how intense the challenge was and the role it played in the experience, in a sense, the environment forced this dimension of the

experience on visitors whether they were receptive to it or not. In contrast, there was greater freedom to attend to or not attend to the natural features of the area. For example, one respondent for whom the natural beauty (and in fact the entire trip) seemed no big deal ("Everything seemed like, you know, it was a regular canoe trip, . . . nothing outstanding but a regular canoe trip" (male, interview 72301)) was primarily there to be with friends and family rather to enjoy the setting.

I: How did you decide on coming to Juniper Prairie? M: Um, some family members came in and that's what they were talking about doing. And everybody really got together last night and decided to come out here this morning. . . . I: And if you could sort of describe the meaning of this trip . . . M: Well, just coming down and being with the family you know, just being together really at some place.

As a consequence of the issues raised above, an organizing table for categorizing the type, nature, intensity, or distribution of nature stories within the sample of respondents was not developed. Instead, a few of the specific stories are presented as an illustration of the types of nature stories visitors told. The most common type of nature story told dealt with interactions with wildlife.

M1: And we saw different kinds of wildlife out there that we didn't expect to see from a 10 foot gator down to one about a foot long. And we saw different kinds of birds and we saw a deer and it was a good experience in that respect. I: Ok, . . . some folks are a little bit nervous about seeing the 10 foot gator. M1: Well it wasn't too bad as long as he was far away, but if we had been in one of the more enclosed areas and he'd have been too close to us, I'd have been a little shook. I: Whereabouts did you see him? M1: It was back there just when you come into the grassy area, right along at the beginning of that. And he was just laying there sunning himself. M2: And we didn't even make him blink. M1: Big ole thing. He didn't even move. . . . M2: But my most memorable thing was that deer . . . was not that afraid of us, and was right on the edge of the water and that was great. A snowy egret flew right over our head [gestured with hand over head and ducked]. You know it was wildlife for me. That was my biggest thing. I wanted to see life and we got to see big life. (2 males, interview, interview 80804, #42)

F1: Heidi and I have been here when the weather was like 28 degrees. F2: 28 degrees. F1: And the steam was rising off Juniper Run. F2: And it was fun. F1: And there were not many people on the river that day. And the birds [laugh]. F2: And the birds. Would you believe an Anhinga sitting there and boom, bombs away on me. And I say, 'Why you doing that?' And I talked to a curator at the museum. And he says they are very territorial, they don't want you here [laugh]. (2 females, interview 72304, #43)

Other nature stories revolved around other aesthetic aspects of the setting including details about the lighting and the vegetation.

I: If you were going to describe this place . . . how would you describe it . . . ? G1: An adventure. G2: With really long trails. And shady. With different scenes. Not all the same thing. And, oh, it was very pretty. Especially in the

morning. When we first started out it was gorgeous- G2: The sun is just coming up just a little and it's shining through all the trees. G1: And it makes things like rays in all the places. And the water changes different colors. M: It was really, the spectrums were really light. Lots of color, the mist on the water with the sunlight. It was really—that was earlier this morning. Right when we started. It was real impressive you know, just really neat. (2 girls, male, interviewer, interview 72101, #44)

I was saying to them, it reminded me of going down the African Queen somewhat. It was just lush. It's my vision of what the Everglades or something like that would look like in a tropical or semitropical, or temperate climate. And I have never really spent any time other than Disneyland that was anything even close to that. So I thought it was—in the beginning this was a fantastic lot of beauty. I mean the Spanish moss, the ferns, the banana plants, the things you don't see if you're from up north especially... and the wildflowers. (male, interview 72102, #45)

The excerpts presented above begin to suggest the intensity and memorability of the "Nature Story" dimension of the experience. As some of the excerpts above show, the stories told about the place were not limited to experiences of the present. Visitors with a history at the site remember the best nature stories from the past and apparently enjoy reliving and retelling them as part of the current experience. Also, exchanging stories with companions and with other groups at the landing often was a part of the final stage of the on-site experience. For example, the male from interview 80602 had already related some of his experiences to another group prior to my interviewing him. The couple from interview 80601 discussed their experience with another group after the interview while they were waiting for the van. The male from interview 80801 recounted at length and in similar detail his story of the encounter with the alligators (excerpt #27) to a pair of grandparents who had brought their grandson to the landing for a swim. For some then, the meaning of the experience seems to be the emergence of a story that can be relived and shared in the future. As one group responded when asked what the trip meant:

M: What would you say [to his son]? What did the trip mean to you? B: I don't know. I'll be able to remember it. I: Something you'll remember? B: Yeah. M: That's probably why Mary and I did it. G: We didn't remember it last time, but we remember it now. F: They were just 4 and 2. And I think part of my reason for choosing this rather than going some other place canoeing was that we did it before and really enjoyed it and I didn't want to take a chance about some other place that we didn't know. (male, boy, interviewer, female, girl, interview 80901, #46)

### Conclusions

All research is grounded in assumptions about the nature of the phenomenon being studied. One of the central assumptions guiding this research is the concept of situated freedom. Rather than representing a theoretical construct that is investigated empirically, situated freedom is a philosophical

assumption that serves as a guide for the design of the study and the interpretation of results. For example, the "situated" aspect of this concept not only refers to the idea that there is structure in the environment that sets boundaries on or constrains the nature of possible experiences, it also encourages greater focus on the specific setting regardless of whether the environment/experience relationships found within that setting generalize to settings beyond the one studied. As a consequence, this approach serves as an appropriate complement to more generalizable recreation planning frameworks such as ROS that, as noted previously, is intended by its originators to serve only as a macro guide. The "freedom" aspect of the concept recognizes that, within the boundaries set by the environment, recreationists are free to experience the world in highly individual, unique, and variable ways and calls for a research approach capable of capturing unexpected variations. Overall then, one main goal of the research was to describe the types of experience that visitors are obtaining within the boundaries of this specific setting as well as to provide insights into features of the environment that define the boundaries.

The challenge dimension provides a good illustration of the confluence of the two aspects of situated freedom. Despite Juniper Run's outward appearance as a calm and slow moving stream, visitors' descriptions of their experiences portrayed it as a challenging encounter; clearly the environment structured the nature of the experience which visitors received. The low overhanging branches, partially submerged snags, and tight winding turns were specific environmental features that made canoeing the Run a challenge. However, the nature and meaning of "challenge" and the role it played in the experience were quite variable. For some the experience of challenge was so intense that it appeared to be *the* defining characteristic of the experience, leaving little capacity to focus on other aspects of the experience. For some the experience of challenge, though less intense, helped to make the experience a good story, one they seemed to enjoy telling. For others, challenge was more simply *a* defining characteristic of the experience which served as a key aspect of an enduring relationship to the place for some visitors, but was viewed with ambivalence by others.

A second goal of the research was to describe the nature of the experiences in a way that would help managers make a judgment about the extent to which the experiences individuals received represent wilderness experiences. As noted earlier, a central assumption guiding this aspect of the research is the idea that wilderness is a state of mind which makes the question of whether an experience is a wilderness experience or not a subjective judgment for which there may be differences of opinion. As a consequence, data were collected in the form of open-ended, first-hand descriptions of the experience rather than through the use of some predetermined operational model reflecting the researchers' image of what constitutes a wilderness experience. However, even when the first-hand descriptions are summarized, the decision about whether the experience is a wilderness one or not remains a subjective determination. The following discussion is intended to briefly

illustrate how the data could serve as a basis for helping managers make this determination rather than to be a definitive conclusion about whether or not the Juniper Prairie visitors are getting a wilderness experience.

The Wilderness Act (Public Law 88-577) defines wilderness as a place that "has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation." The Eastern Wilderness Act (Public Law 93-622) further mandates that wilderness is to be managed in part to "promote and perpetuate . . . its specific values of solitude, physical and mental challenge, . . . inspiration, and primitive recreation. . . ." Thus specific descriptors of the wilderness experience that are legislatively mandated are primitive, unconfined, physical and mental challenge, inspiration, and solitude. None of these descriptors are given more specific definitions within these Acts. Most previous research has focused on solitude, its meaning, and factors that influence its attainment. The meaning of such terms as primitive, unconfined, or physical and mental challenge have largely gone unexplored. However, the data presented in this paper speak to these other aspects of the wilderness experience. Most notably the results provide evidence of physical and mental challenge as indicated in the discussion of the "Challenge" and "Decisions not faced in everyday environments" dimensions. Further the "Closeness to nature" dimension that describes an experience where "you have to go under limbs . . . [with] ants coming off on you" (excerpt #33), almost "get rubbed off" (excerpt #23) by "branches flying back . . . [which] if you weren't really careful you could have raked it right over your face" (excerpt #22), in a setting so closed-in that even the thought of encounters with alligators causes some trepidation (excerpts #25, #28, #29) speaks to the question of primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities. Inspiration is evident in the "Stories of nature" dimension and in the narratives of those who experienced the most significant challenge (excerpts #4, #5, #6). Thus we believe that the study approach generated data that provides managers an appropriate basis for helping make a judgment regarding whether or not visitors at Juniper Prairie are receiving a wilderness experience.

Although the primary emphasis of this hermeneutic research approach is on understanding the nature of experience in the specific context in which it occurred, the possibility for gaining more general insights into the nature of recreation phenomena exists. One more general insight apparent from this study deals with the issue of phases of a recreation experience. Recreation has been described as a multi-phase experience with five major stages: anticipation, travel to, on-site, return travel, and recollection (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966). Although investigating the phases of the experience was not a goal of this research, the results do suggest that an important shift in phases of the experience occurred at the landing.

During the course of interviews and observations of visitors at the landing it became apparent that many groups used the period of waiting for the arrival of the shuttle van as an opportunity to reflect on and define both the nature and the meaning of the experience. Consider for example, the observation of the family described in the methodology section who sat quietly,



seemingly tired and unhappy for about 20 minutes before beginning to discuss the experience with what ultimately became an increasing level of enthusiasm and enjoyment. In fact, many of those interviewed seemed quite eager to discuss the rather intense experience they had just received. Exchanging stories with companions and with other groups or individuals at the landing was not an uncommon occurrence, as noted earlier.

Further, this period of time seems important for sorting through the meaning of the experience. Consider the two respondents who seemed to be debating whether or not the challenge had made the experience a negative or a positive one (excerpts #3, #4, #5). To quote one respondent who had capsized (excerpt #10), "that worked both ways" and deeper reflection on the experience was necessary to sort through its meaning. Similarly, consider the group described in excerpt #9 who initially began by complaining about overhanging trees and snags in the water and suggested that they be cut away, but through this discussion came to realize that these very obstacles were what made the experience fun and a good story.

These observations suggest that, at least in the case of Juniper Prairie, the opportunity to reflect on, relive, define the meaning of the experience, and even share the experience at the landing was an important phase of the experience for many of the visitors, especially for those for whom the experience appeared most intense. It appears to be a distinct and important phase of the experience to which managers should give consideration. In fact, at Juniper Prairie this issue may warrant specific management attention. The landing is on the far side of a bridge that separates the wilderness from another part of the Forest. This area was also used extensively as a swimming hole by local residents. Especially on the weekends the site was often characterized by loud music, dogs running loose and occasionally fighting, air boats revving up their engines, drinking, shouting, volley ball games in the Run, and similar activities. In short, the landing, especially on the weekends, often was not at all conducive to quiet reflection. In fact, we believe that conditions at the landing have a far greater impact on the nature and quality of the experience than current use levels on the Run inside the wilderness and therefore deserves priority in management considerations.

A second insight into the more general nature of recreation phenomena offered by this particular study regards the conceptualization of time that underlies much recreation research. As noted in the literature review, the most prevalent approach to understanding recreation in resource management has been a motivational research program. This perspective conceptualizes time in relation to recreation phenomena as a linear sequence beginning with expectations and desired outcomes and culminating with cognitive judgments that compare actual outcomes with desired outcomes. The discrepancy between the two is thought to be the basis for satisfaction which is widely accepted as an appropriate surrogate for quality in recreation (Brown, 1989; Williams, 1989).

With respect to this particular study, this motivational model seems to provide an adequate account of the underlying psychological processes and

an appropriate basis for assessing the quality of the experience in a number of instances. Most notably, consider the response in excerpt #1 or the following response.

Let me just make a comment. I didn't sign up for the tickets, I didn't go up to the window, I didn't get any information. We're here because [my son-law] suggested it to us. I'm sitting here worried sick about . . . [tape ran out]<sup>2</sup> that older German couple. We were told nothing about what to expect. We were told to take this canoe trip. We had to duck and bend and squat. They need to give out more information about the river, about what to expect, about trees in the water, etc. (female, interview 72102, #47)

In both situations, expectations were inappropriate and one consequence was dissatisfaction with the experience.

However, for many other respondents, the motivational model may not be the most appropriate conceptualization for attempting to characterize or explain the quality of the experience. To begin with, unexpected yet clearly positive aspects of the trip, not surprisingly, enhanced the experience quality. However, in other cases unfulfilled expectations were actually satisfying. Recall for instance the following discussion:

M: We didn't see any gators. I: Was that a disappointment, were you . . . expecting—M: I thought we would see more wildlife. F: When I saw how close the banks were, I was just as glad. That was like face to face with a gator. I wasn't ready for that. (male, female, interviewer, interview 80604)

Similarly, unexpected and potentially negative outcomes were evaluated extremely positively by some respondents. Getting "bombed" by an anhinga (excerpt #43) was an unexpected event and might be interpreted by many as a negative. However, for this particular respondent at least, it ultimately became a highlight of the trip, one that led to further exploration of this type of behavior in aningas and became a story to be retold and relived when visiting the place again with others.

Additionally, the unexpected challenge was not always evaluated in a negative light. Consider for example the discussion between the husband and wife described in the methodology section. The husband's previous trip had been easy floating and the current trip unexpectedly difficult, full of obstacles and trials. Yet as noted previously he did not seem at all unhappy, it seemed to make a good story which he enjoyed sharing with his wife. Beyond this, while the unexpected may at times initially be perceived as a negative, subsequent reflection at the end of the experience may ultimately yield to a positive interpretation. This is illustrated by the experience of the following visitor. Repeatedly he referred to how unexpected the degree of challenge was.

A friend of mine had recommended it. . . she said it was a little tough, but she didn't give me any idea what it was all about. . . I didn't know what to expect. They should give you a little forewarning and asked have you ever canoed before because these guys [2 children aged 6-7 years] couldn't paddle. . . But it was a lot tougher than I expected, a lot tougher. (male, interview 72202, #48)

As noted in excerpt #5 this unexpected challenge had detracted from the experience. Yet when asked what added to the experience his sole and immediate response was the challenge. Having survived the unexpected ultimately led to the deeper meaning of the experience and yielded a story he was eager to tell immediately upon its completion. A similar situation was reflected in the response described in excerpt #4.

The examples described above illustrate an emergent nature of some recreational experiences which is not well captured in terms of a linear sequence that begins with motivations and expectations and culminates with cognitive evaluation comparing actual outcomes to anticipated outcomes. The motivational model has greatly increased our understanding of recreation experiences and continues to evolve in fruitful directions (e.g., recent attempts to distinguish between real-time and post-hoc satisfaction (Stewart & Hull, 1992)). However, it is important to note there are other ways of conceptualizing the nature of recreation experiences which may ultimately lead to new insights.

At the heart of the difference between the motivational model and the emergent experience model is a question of how people relate to their experiences. The different assumptions underlying these two models ultimately lead to different explanations of human behavior. For example, under the motivational model, situations where outcomes fail to meet expectations, yet visitors report being satisfied are problematic anomalies that must be dealt with by developing further psychological mechanisms, cognitive dissonance, denial mechanisms, product shift (Ditton, Graefe, & Fedler, 1981; Festinger, 1957; Schreyer, 1979), that explain the anomaly.

In contrast, as Arnould and Price (1993) note, the emergent experience model views "satisfaction as embodied in the success of the narrative, an interactive gestalt" (p. 25). Rather than seeking explanations for why recreationists are satisfied when expectations are not met, this situation is not viewed as problematic from this model and therefore research proceeds down other avenues. For example, one possible interpretation of the results from this study is the idea that what people are actually seeking from their recreation experiences are stories which ultimately enrich their lives. Good stories come from negative events which are overcome as well as from purely positive experiences, regardless of any underlying expectations. Ultimately, this perspective leads us to explore more broadly the question of how experiences are interpreted within the broader context of their lives (Arnould & Price, 1993). Further it encourages recreation researchers to delve into fields like narrative psychology (Howard, 1991; Mishler, 1986a) and literary folkloristics (Stahl, 1991) that explore the meaning, use, and nature of personal narratives in our lives.

In summary, the research described in this paper explored a different approach to studying the quality of recreation experiences. It differed from the prevailing motivational or post-hoc satisfaction approach in several ways. First, rather than viewing satisfaction as an appropriate surrogate indicating the quality of the experience, it sought to evaluate quality by analyzing actual

descriptions of the experience. This alternative approach provides insights into the actual nature of the experience visitors receive (i.e., rather than simply indicating visitors experienced challenge it described the meaning of challenge, the role it played in the experience, and the specific features of the setting that made the experience challenging). This approach allows managers to assess the quality of the experience in situations where visitors are dissatisfied (managers may decide that these visitors received the type of experience the area is intended to provide) and in situations where visitors in general express positive satisfaction (which is often the case). Second, rather than viewing recreation as a linear sequence motivated by specific expectations or goals that are compared to actual outcomes, the research sought to understand the recreation experience as an emergent phenomenon motivated by a not very well-defined, precise, or specified goal of acquiring stories that ultimately enrich their lives. This perspective seems consistent with the observations of visitors at Juniper. The implications of this alternative conceptualization of recreation for research and management need to be explored in greater depth in future research. Finally, this research indicated that, at least in the case of the intense experiences many visitors received at Juniper Prairie, there appears to be an important shift in the phases of the experience at its immediate conclusion. The opportunity to reflect on, sort through, analyze, and share intense experiences immediately after their conclusion may be an important phase with respect to the meaning of the experience and the benefits the recreationists receive. This phase needs to be explored in future research. Additionally, the role of management in facilitating this phase needs to be considered. In the case of Juniper Prairie at least, it appears that managers could create an environment more conducive to this phase of the experience by relocating the landing.

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