

Is This a One-night Stand or the Start of Something Meaningful? Developing Relationships to Place in National Park Backcountry

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Abstract—This paper presents empirical evidence that helps to understand how some visitors develop relationships with Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. The paper describes relationship to place as the active construction and accumulation of meaning, which involves both physical and social interactions over time. The discussion is organized around three themes evident in the data and the literature that describe, in part, how relationships to place develop: (a) time and past experience allow place meanings to accumulate, (b) social interactions with companions, and (c) physical interactions with the setting both contribute to how visitors create and assign place meanings. Implications are discussed from the perspective that a segment of visitors are engaged in long-term place relationships rather than seeking to meet short-term needs and expectations.

Introduction

When visiting wildlands, some people do more than encounter, record, process, and store information from the physical environment in their brains about the quality of their experiences. Researchers and managers inevitably miss the full array of meanings that visitors associate with particular places and their experiences when they try to download visitors' mental comparisons of what happened to what was expected during a given visit using satisfaction surveys alone. Understanding and assessing the personal and social meanings that visitors assign to wildlands and evaluating the quality of the experiences that visitors have there remain difficult tasks for researchers and managers despite decades of research.

Challenges arise when visitors describe their experiences in ways that offer little concrete information to managers

for improving the quality of a particular setting or experience. For example, visitors with a history of returning to a backcountry area (long-time visitors) may express a love-of-place and important social relations that have developed with time:

I love Rocky Mountain National Park. It was a special place that my family would always visit every year from the time I was six months old. Every year I continue to visit as much as possible. Anything that can be done to preserve this area would just be great, so that I can bring my children to visit. I hope to carry on my family tradition in this way and have my children love and respect the Park as much as my parents have taught me to do so (Additional comment written by a survey respondent; Wallace and others 2004: 165).

This visitor describes a valid way of relating to a wildland place and expresses something other than fulfilled expectations for a given visit. Similar place relationships probably exist for other long-time visitors at Rocky Mountain National Park (the Park). This paper examines how place meanings accumulate and how lasting bonds with the Park develop. We propose that long-term committed relationships with the Park are meaningful for visitors' lives and contribute to quality experiences and well-being in ways that are not completely understood (Fournier 1998). The objective is to move understanding of relationship to place and the quality of the experience forward by providing empirical evidence that describes how some visitors develop place relationships as they interact with settings, their companions, and themselves over time. Next, we briefly review the research literature that guided this study.

Past Experience and Place Bonding

Having a place relationship presumes that a person has spent some amount of time at the place. Accumulated recreation experiences such as a person's or a family's history of visiting the Park or the frequency of trips in a one-year period can be useful indicators of place bonding (Hammit and others 2004). Previous studies demonstrate positive statistical relationships between measures of place attachment *and* familiarity and number of prior visits during a one year period (Williams and Vaske 2003), frequency of trail visitation (Moore and Graefe 1994; Moore and Scott 2003), total visits, and years since first visit (Williams and others 1992). Past experience at a place and longer history

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of contact with a place tend to be positively associated with emotional place attachments. Correlation, however, does not imply that place bonding is caused by past experiences, but time spent at a place is necessary to allow for the accumulation of place meanings through interactions with the setting and one's companions.

Related Research on Place

Relationship to place and place meanings are not novel research topics. In a thorough review and synthesis of the scholarly literature on place concepts, Manzo (2003: 53) concluded:

Relationships to places can be a means through which we consciously express our worldview and explore our evolving identity ... people actively engage with places and the creation of meaning, and in doing so, can consciously foster relationships to places.

Manzo implies at least two conceptual areas that are important for understanding the process whereby people develop place relationships: the active creation of place meanings and evolving place identities.

Place Meanings

Scholars have discussed how a variety of people actively assign personal, spiritual, and socio-cultural meanings to a variety of places through experience (Brandenburg and Carroll 1995; Fredrickson and Anderson 1999; Greider and Garkovich 1994; Gustafson 2001; Williams and Stewart 1998). Places are created by continuous reciprocal interactions between people and the environments in which they live and visit. People participate with places and places participate with people. In addition to socially constructed place meanings, places have important physical characteristics or environmental features with which visitors participate and interact (Eisenhauer and others 2000; Lane 2001; Stedman 2003). Research also supports that place meanings and relationships develop incrementally over time in a process characterized by continuity, change, past memories, and future potentials (Gustafson 2001; Manzo 2005; Milligan 1998). In Gustafson's (2001) three-pole "self-others-environment" model of interrelated place meanings, individual desires, group aspirations, intentions, and activities, at times in the history of a place, allow people to reassign past meanings, reproduce existing meanings, and create and assign new place meanings. Researchers have generally depicted people-place relations as multi-dimensional, interactive, and dynamic.

Place Identity

People are affected when they create and assign place meanings. The development of emotional bonds with places can influence well-being by allowing individuals to actively adjust their views of self-in-place through introspection and personal growth, which can shape aspects of their lives relative to the places in which they live (Hay 1998; Korpela 1989; Manzo 2005; Sarbin 1983; Stokols and Shumaker 1981). An underlying theme in this literature portrays the concept of place identity as evolving alongside place relationships.

Proshansky and others (1983) argue that places can play important roles in the psychological development of the self where place identity develops as a sub-part of self-identity. Place identity has been defined as a set of interrelated clusters of broadly conceived thoughts and emotions about a physical environment. Place identity consists of:

... memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings and conceptions of behavior and experience which relate to the variety and complexity of physical settings that define the day-to-day existence of every human being (Proshansky and others 1983: 59).

The set of cognitions that comprises a person's place identity does not come pre-fashioned; rather, these evolve through experience. The idea that people create place meanings implies that actual behaviors are directed toward knowing the self in relation to place in order to construct a place identity (Sarbin 1983). Place meanings accumulate and environmental skills may develop as a person consciously and unconsciously interacts with a place.

Finally, other people play a substantial role in shaping one's place identity and relationship (Eisenhauer and others 2000; Gustafson 2001; Kyle and Chick 2004). For example, simply visiting a place or participating in an annual recreation trip is but one part of a person's socialization and evolving identity with the place or the trip. Seeing what his or her parents, siblings, or friends do there, hearing how they discuss the place or the event together, interacting with others through stories or recreation, and learning how others react to their experiences may each contribute to how a person assigns meaning to the place and the experience.

Methodology and Analysis

Research shows that the concept of relationship to place consists of the self, the physical setting, other people, the interactions between these, and the place meanings that accumulate at various stages in the process. Figure 1 is presented to organize these dimensions and interactions for

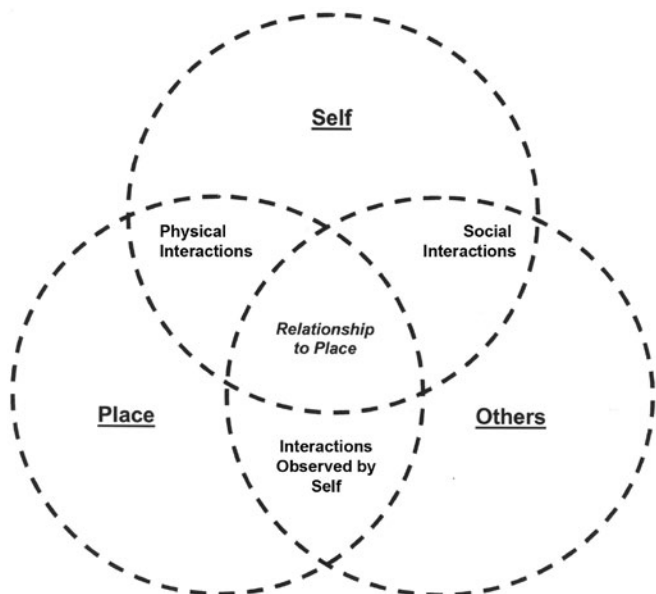


Figure 1—Self-place-others model of relationship to place.

this analysis. We adopt an appropriate definition of wildland recreation that views the visitor experience as emergent and “motivated by the not very well-defined goal of acquiring stories that ultimately enrich one’s life” (Patterson and others 1998: 423). In doing so, we hope to address the complex and dynamic nature of place relationships (Christensen, this proceedings).

To investigate how a person’s relationship to a place is defined by accumulated meanings and to add flesh to the skeletal structure in figure 1, we chose a triangulation design of three methods each with different samples: survey items, observations of behaviors, and qualitative interviews. We attempt a synthesis of results from the three studies to provide a basic description of relationship to place. Observations of visitor behaviors (Brooks and Titre 2003) and qualitative interviews (Brooks 2003) were conducted in 2001. These were followed, in 2002, by a comprehensive survey of visitors’ perceptions, attitudes, and experiences (Wallace and others 2004). Table 1 provides a summary of the methods

used in each study. For more detail, the reader is directed to the project reports and references cited in table 1.

The objective of combining methods and samples is to present complementary data that, when integrated, describe in part, how long-term place relationships may develop. Our analysis and conclusions are not intended to represent all park visitors’ relationships to place or individual differences in degree of place attachment in the population. In the spirit of exploration, we attempt to illustrate a story using empirical observations to better understand the dynamic nature of relationship to place and its emerging dimensions, each requiring additional research.

Results and Discussion

The Visitor Survey

The accumulation of experience at a place has been shown to be positively correlated with place bonding and attachment

Table 1—Summary of the three visitor studies used in the triangulation analysis.

Detail	Behavioral observations (Brooks and Titre 2003)	Qualitative interviews (Brooks 2003)	Visitor survey (Wallace and others 2004)
Method	Structured field observations of visitor behavior (n = 378) ^a	Semi-structured in-depth interviews with park visitors (n = 12)	Structured self-administered questionnaire (n = 682)
Sampling	Random selection of locations by time block with purposive selection of subjects to maximize variation in sex, age, and group size	Random selection of locations by time block with purposive selection of subjects to maximize variation in sex, age, and type of visitor (i.e., day and overnight)	Random selection of trail head by time block with census of visitors (cluster sample); 67 percent response rate
Sample characteristics	139 families, 70 non-family groups, 111 couples, and 58 individuals	Ages 23 to 60; 7 male, 5 female Caucasians; 7 day, 5 overnight visitors; 0 to 10 years post-secondary education; various religions/occupations; 8 Colorado, 4 out-of-state residents	91 percent college or post-graduate education; 67 percent ≥\$50,000 household income; 60 percent Colorado residents; 28 percent ≥11 previous visits
Data management	Recorded on ethogram ^b forms in the field; database created in Excel	Tape recorded and transcribed	Mailed back or dropped off at the Park; database created in SPSS
Analysis	Frequencies of occurrence and rates of occurrence for behavioral events	Two-stage hermeneutical interpretation (I) within transcript and (II) across transcripts in Atlas.ti version 4.1 for Windows	Statistical analyses of scale items and continuous variables; Content and categorical analyses of open-ended items
Supporting citations	Altman 1974; Burch 1974; Suen and Ary 1989	Brooks and others 2004; Kvale 1983; Mishler 1986; Patterson and Williams 2002; Patterson and other 1998	Fowler 2002; Scheaffer and others 1996

^a Sample sessions of observations averaged 10 minutes in duration and are the unit of analysis.

^b An ethogram is “a thorough description of behaviors exhibited by individuals in specific situations” (Pellegrini 1996: p. 80).

variables (Hammitt and others 2004; Williams and Vaske 2003). Wallace and others (2004) included a measure of past experience in their survey that asked visitors how many total previous visits they had made to the Park's backcountry. They found that past experience was statistically associated with the place attachment and familiarity variables included on the survey and with an item that asked visitors if they associated friends with the Park (table 2). Similar to previous studies, survey participants who had visited the Park more times over the years tended to report higher levels of attachment, familiarity, and tended to agree that they associate other people with the Park. It seems intuitive that past experience and longer history of contact with the Park would play some important role for developing emotional and social place bonding.

Interested in the experience of off-trail exploration, Wallace and others (2004) asked visitors if they had hiked cross-country through places without trails. Survey participants often left the popular trails and attraction sites—20 percent of the sample reported that they had hiked cross-country in places with no trails during their visit. Fifty-four percent of those participants reported that they had ventured from designated trails two or more times. To further examine the interactive nature of hiking off-trail, Wallace and others (2004) asked the 128 participants who reported hiking off-trail to write in more detail about their best discoveries and experiences while exploring. The sub-sample of visitors listed 155 best discoveries or experiences that were grouped into six categories. One category, with 96 responses, was “observing or discovering some kind of attribute or phenomenon” perceived to be special or unique. For example, one respondent said that she went looking for the remains of an old cabin but without success. Another visitor went off-trail to summit a backcountry peak and wrote about finding, for the first time, antler velvet and eating ripe, wild raspberries. Another saw

two white tail ptarmigans in autumn plumage while on a cross-country fishing excursion. Two friends reported that they took “the road less traveled” to smoke, during which, one of the two “got hot and decided to go skinny-dipping in a mountain lake.” They continued with an amusing story of how the skinny-dipper was surprised when spotted by other visitors passing nearby. This relatively small sample seemed to enjoy exploring away from the designated trails perhaps as a way to interact with the setting and their companions in more meaningful and personalized ways.

Observation of Visitor Behavior

Brooks and Titre (2003) observed individuals and groups physically exploring, getting into, and touching (table 3) the “particularities of place” (Lane 2001: 60). Visitors shooed, fed, intently watched, videoed, photographed, touched, and even tried to capture birds, ground squirrels, and spawning trout at some of the observation sites. We observed visitors (often adolescents) digging in the soil, throwing stones, snow, and sticks, climbing in trees and over rocks, and touching, tasting, and entering the water of lakes and streams. Physically interactive behaviors with the setting may play a part in shaping visitors' knowledge and memories of places (Gustafson 2001), particularly for children and adolescents. How these interactions and experiences allow visitors to create and assign place meanings requires further investigation.

In-Depth Visitor Interviews

The data summarized thus far, when integrated with findings from previous research, provide some basic empirical evidence suggesting that place relationships involve return

Table 2—Mean differences indicating positive association between dimensions of place relationship and number of total previous visits (analysis of variance).

Indicator of place relationship ^a	Experience ^b	n	Mean	Standard deviation	F	P
How attached are you to RMNP?	High	289	7.9 ^c	1.2	76.7	<.001
	Low	188	6.8 ^d	1.7		
	None	133	5.9 ^e	2.1		
How familiar are you with RMNP?	High	289	6.9 ^c	1.5	181.2	<.001
	Low	187	5.3 ^d	1.7		
	None	134	3.8 ^e	1.6		
Being in RMNP brings back memories of time spent here with friends.	High	288	3.9 ^c	1.1	46.6	<.001
	Low	186	3.5 ^d	1.2		
	None	129	2.7 ^e	1.1		

^a The attachment and familiarity items each used a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all attached/familiar) to 9 (extremely attached/familiar). “Being in RMNP brings back memories of time spent with friends” used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

^b Visitors who reported making 0 total previous visits to RMNP were classified as having no past experience, visitors who had made 1–4 total visits to RMNP were classified as low experience, and those reporting 5 or greater total previous visits were classified as high experience.

^{c, d, e} Statistically significant difference among experience groups using Scheffe's multiple comparisons test at P = 0.05.

Table 3—Observations of visitors interacting with the setting.

Physical interaction ^a	Frequency of occurrence ^b
Exploring off designated trails within sight of observer	341
Feeding, disturbing, and/or watching wildlife	202
Throwing snow, stones, sticks, and other debris	181
Touching or entering water in lakes and streams	57
Miscellaneous	<10

^aActual behavioral events that were recorded in the field during 58 hours total observation time.

^bWe recorded behaviors for 139 family groups, 70 non-family groups, 111 couples, and 58 individuals.

visits—spending time at a place to consciously or unconsciously gain experience and familiarity. Second, time spent at the park, for some, appears to be purposely interactive and exploratory relative to both one's companions and the physical setting. Although interesting and insightful, these data alone provide an incomplete understanding of how relationships with the Park develop. To flesh out a more complete story of visitors' relationships with the Park, Brooks (2003) conducted qualitative in-depth interviews.

Time and Experience in Place. One broad theme that emerged from the literature and our empirical observations, is the importance of time, past experience, and extent of contact within place. We illustrate how the interviews provide deeper insight into the importance of returning to the Park and what specific experiences there mean to some visitors. Julie (pseudonym), a day visitor at a popular waterfall, describes how return trips involve a certain ritual that allows for the accumulation of place memories and meanings for her family.

They say that smell is the sense that brings you back to a certain spot, in your mind ... just walking in here, smelling the pine ... you just immediately think of the maybe five or six times you've been there before. *What kind of feeling does that evoke for you?* Good memories, a sense of stress-free, going back to ... usually good memories—you know, our kids are up the hill a little farther and the last time we were here they were—maybe 10 years ago, and you take pictures in the same spot and then you've got these little steps that they grew up in ... and then you go home and put it together and create stories ...

Extended overnight stays in a wildland may contribute in important ways to one's relationship to that place and perhaps one's concept of humanity's position in the environment. Jon, an overnight backpacker camping with family, describes how the experience emerges for him when immersed in the setting for extended periods.

Would you consider people separate from wilderness, in the sense that they don't normally live in the wilderness? Well, I would like to think not. I think that the urbanized world that most of us live in—there are some important contrasts there that allow us to appreciate both of those things ... I know one of the states of mind that I like to get into when I'm in the wilderness and takes 2 or 3 days to do that ... is to remember that you are not just kind of out camping that you're living outdoors. And it's kind of immersing yourself in [the] fact that you're living outdoors ... you deal with whatever comes whether its great weather or bad weather or physical issues that you may be dealing with, things like that, that's part of the challenge ... once you immerse yourself in it, you realize

that you become less and less separate from it. You adapt and adjust to whatever the physical conditions are of the place. I like to think that people come out of the wilderness understanding that as a species we're totally inseparable of course from the physical environment. I'm not sure from my experience that many people grasp that.

While past experience at a place may contribute to an accumulation of meanings for some visitors, an understanding of the processes involved when place relationships develop requires closer examination of the social interactions and physical contacts described by visitors.

Social Interactions in Place. Sam, a day hiker who visits the Park regularly, talks about his experiences there with family and friends. In one conversation, Sam describes how he socially identifies with the Park by associating the experience with memories of "special times" with his father.

... some special times that I've had with my Father—just he and I on top of a mountain having a conversation ... not a lot of people get to do that with their parents. People can have kind of strained relationships, and boy I'll tell you when you're walking up a 14,000 foot mountain, the world's problems seem pretty small, and you can sort of drop the walls and let the bullshit go and just have a talk, and that's something that I've experienced.

Sam indicates that the experience of hiking a mountain together has fostered an openness between him and his father that may not have developed outside of the backcountry setting. Sam continues by elaborating on his family's history and relationship with the outdoors and the nature of his social interactions with companions.

Do you think that it is important that this stuff be around for future generations? I would like to bring my children up here. Earlier today I was hiking with my family and some friends of our family, and the last time my friends were out here, they've got some children, and the last time they were out here their daughter was nine months old and now she is seven, and we are hiking the same trails and she is seeing this stuff again ... it is neat to see that ... I would love to bring my kids up here. My Dad moved out here in '70 from Jersey, and he and my mom, they were both campers out there, avid campers up and down in the Appalachians and did a lot of outside type of stuff, and then they moved out here, one for the job, and two because of this, and so as I've grown older, I've seen it change and get developed and I've seen a lot of growth here ... I just hope to be able to bring my kids up here someday and show them what I saw ... there is something special about a Dad passing that on to his son or daughter, and even like on the trail we were teaching [the girls] to use their *wilderness voice*, and be quiet and listen, 'What is

that sound? You know what that sound is, it's water falling down, we are getting closer because it is getting louder,' so that develops the kid's logical skills and reasoning skills ... maybe the selfish hope is to develop their outdoor wilderness skills, camping skills, and that kind of stuff.

Socialization of children at the Park emerges as a type of social interaction that may be an important dimension of relationship to place. Sam and his companions purposively teach the children in the group how to behave in the backcountry. Sam explains how people can develop a "wilderness sense" over time through repeat visits and active informal training. The parents and friends of visitors with little past experience at the Park may try to pass on elements of their place relationships by fostering "wilderness skills" and appreciation for features of the backcountry experience that they think are important such as quiet and natural sounds.

Returning to wildlands for leisure and recreation with familiar people makes the place part of a person's broader life and the quality of the experience is associated with the visitor's family and friends (Gustafson 2001; Kyle and Chick 2004). Family history in a place provides the time and social interactions necessary for place relationships to develop and for interpersonal relations to strengthen.

Being in the Park with other people can evoke other interactions such as philosophical discussions about humans and wilderness. Jon describes such conversations:

And there always tends to be—I guess you can call it an activity. I mean it seems like every time whether I'm by myself or whether I'm with a group we get into discussions about value of wilderness and the spin offs that have to do with the larger human civilization and the directions that we are going. And these kinds of places often become philosophical—these places become kind of catalysts for those philosophical discussions.

It appears that an accumulation of social interactions over the years at a place contributes to the formation of a visitor's place relationship, but additional research is required to fully understand the role and importance of such discussions and other socially derived place meanings.

Physical Interactions in Place. Some experiences at the Park may not be expected or positive at the time. Kim, an overnight visitor, shared a personal story from a previous visit in which she recounts about being unprepared and falling down a mountainside.

. . . of the places that you've talked about . . . are there any particular places that have a special importance to you based on your beliefs, family, experiences, friends or memories? Oh my gosh, there's so many. Pretty much—I could pick a place in this park, and I could think of an experience that's been good, or scary . . . Would you mind briefly describing one for me? Oh sure, good, bad, a hike with friends? I guess probably one of the most vivid memories, and ones that still stick with me sometimes, are those—the ones that are—that were really frightening, I guess. The ones that really make you realize how small you are compared to the Earth. Like one day I went and hiked up Flat Top [a nearby peak] just a little more up above here. I wasn't equipped well enough, and I ended up coming down, falling in a waterfall, losing my jacket, my car keys, and all my food, and my lighter, and it was getting dark, and I had to cross the river, scurry across a log, and I was shaking so bad. Finally got down, made it down before total dark. Many people driving down the road . . . hitched a ride down. Finally made it back into town, all bloody and

scraped up, going 'Oh my gosh! I am so small.' You know and I was getting kind of cocky about being hot stuff, like 'I can do it' . . . you felt like you were brought down a couple notches? Oh yeah, like a hundred.

For Kim, the most memorable experiences at the Park are those in which she feels humbled by the forces of nature. Kim's relationship with the Park seems to include knowing her place in the backcountry. She respects it because of its power, physical challenges, and vastness. In this story, Kim provides a vivid description of what this particular humbling (and physical) experience was like when she failed to properly respect the mountains. Researching the lessons that visitors learn over time in wildlands may enhance our understanding of the role of physical interaction with the setting in developing relationships to place.

In both the survey data and the field observations we found evidence suggesting that some park visitors may seek interactions with the setting by exploring off designated trails. Jane, an overnight backpacker, and her companions hike off-trail to create a sense of wilderness when in less remote places of the Park providing a concrete example of how and why exploring away from designated trails is an important part of her experience.

I have spent a lot of time at Glacier Gorge, probably more than anywhere else . . . what else comes to mind, a lot of places that I really couldn't name that are sort of off-trail . . . finding our own sort of routes. [We] tend to hike with a photographer. We just go off when we go looking for places that interest us, and not necessarily [on trail]—actually done very few peaks and stuff. When I think of wilderness, it's not necessarily a matter of remoteness, really sometimes almost what we bring to the experience. Soon as you get off the trail no matter how close the trail might be it feels more wilderness-like. Walking unguided . . . [with] maybe a topo [graphic] map and a sense of where you are, but basically not following the sort of point A to point B version of doing things. But, just getting out into it . . . and it doesn't necessarily have to be all that remote to be wilderness.

Visitors and their companions interact with one another and the backcountry setting at the Park in diverse ways, and meanings of place accumulate during the course of experience. Next, we describe in more depth how past experiences and interactions with and within a place can affect visitors' place relationships and identities.

Place, Self, and Others. Some interviewees talked about themselves, other people (companions and unrelated visitors), and the place in ways that illustrate a more integrated story of how place relationships and identities evolve and how these can affect behaviors. Jack, visiting with his spouse and another couple, highlights how his personal relationship with wildlands has changed through experience and learning from his companions.

Speaking from your experience, how would you describe the relationship between people and wilderness? . . . my first instinct was to be positive, and say 'Ah, there's a very good relationship.' . . . then reality kicks in, and I think of all the carvings in trees I've seen, all the cigarettes, all the gum, the things that—my pockets are full [of] when I leave here everyday with litter I pick up . . . it's not that they don't like it . . . it's ignorance, is what it is, and I was there too, once. And, that comes with experiencing it, you become—a love for it or respect for it, just like people, you go into a relationship

with it. So, it saddens me, but yet it really doesn't because people are people, and I just hope and pray that you grow out of it—I'm a teacher . . . I truly believe [that] you're who you are at the core, but you can add to that . . . I think one thing is respecting this place more . . . I hate seeing the people in their Velcro shoes, or even their polo shirts, and they're hiking into this place . . . 'Wow, I just wish they learned more about it before they did it.' But, hopefully by wearing those Velcro shoes they realize they need to change that a little bit next time, and that's part of the growing experience. I sure didn't know what to expect here, luckily I'm with someone who did, and they helped us.

Jack also explains how others can grow in their relationships with wildlands, similar to how people grow in interpersonal relationships, through lessons learned about how to properly behave at and respect these places. As longer-term place relationships develop, individuals may become more respectful and concerned about the protection of the Park. Picking up litter dropped by others, for example, may be an indicator that a stewardship-oriented relationship is developing.

Jack also recognizes that other visitors may relate to the Park differently than he and his companions do when he compares the behaviors that he sees on the part of others to his own. Kim, backpacking with her spouse and infant daughter, is also keenly aware of the presence and the actions of nearby visitors who she perceives as being completely unaware of the weather conditions and ill-prepared for a mountainous setting.

Could you please list . . . all the feelings that you have when you visit the wilderness at the Park? . . . when I get in a crowd, I tend to do more . . . sort of the tourist watching I guess . . . like, 'Oh, what are you doing?' Not that I find myself—higher than anybody else, but then I find the things people do are ridiculous to me. Could you give me an example of some of these ridiculous behaviors? (Hearty laugh) Oh sure. Okay, a couple days ago, we're hiking up the trail and the sky is dark, I mean it's going to rain, you can tell. It's coming down the valley and it's going to rain, and here come a group of about fifteen people walking by, and all they have are little white paper lunch bags . . . their lunches. And they're about two miles from the trailhead, and that's all they have. And you just know that they're just going to get dumped on, and cold and sick, and you just have to go, 'Well, okay. Maybe they'll figure it out.' . . . Hiking with their purses—that just cracks me up. Almost like they're at Disney World. Yeah exactly . . . it's a lot like an amusement park.

Some visitors may see evidence of their own place relationships and their broader environmental concerns contrasted or mirrored in the behaviors of others that they witness (or perhaps while reflecting on their own past behaviors). Through a type of social comparison with others combined with introspection, a park visitor might come to understand how his or her place relationship has changed over the life course. For Pete, a seasonal resident and long-time visitor, stewardship sensitivities develop and actual behaviors change as knowledge and understanding of the physical place and its features increase.

What are the limits to human uses of wilderness? . . . Oh we absolutely know how devastating motorized vehicles can be. I have to admit I used to ride dirt bikes [during my] younger years up in national forest in Wisconsin. I wouldn't do that now; my son used to build and operate all-terrain vehicles, he

doesn't do that now. I think it has to be limited to particular activities that minimally impact what we have here . . . It took me a long time to realize how little replacement growth occurs at these higher elevations. You have to understand that when you start getting off the trails and damaging this environment—you know how fragile it is—It's not going to grow back like California in two years after the fire—you have green again. That doesn't happen. In 1978 you're up here and you see the damage that the fire did, and you barely have overgrowth up here, in all those years . . . I think it's got to be limited. There has to be rules; there has to be self-discipline. You bring out what you take in, you keep it to cooking stoves, and I would not care to see open fires anywhere. I think overnight tent camping—I think that's certainly a permissible thing. As long as you get farther into the wilderness areas, there's a real sense of self-esteem achieved, I think, when you go and live off the land for a number of days or even a weekend. I mean when—I had a younger family—we would spend ten days hiking in national parks around New England and the northern Midwest and Arizona. My children now—they love it, now they take their children . . . going around the country kayaking and tent camping and backpacking. So, what would have happened if there had been no rules from the very beginning?

Pete describes growth on his part and for members of his family that has developed with experience at the Park and at other wildlands. Place identity and family history are portrayed as evolving for Pete, and socialization of children is evident. Acceptance and practice of low impact recreation indicates respect, care, and concern for the perceived fragility of the Park.

To summarize, relationship to place emerges as a complex function of the self, others, and the physical place (Gustafson 2001; Kyle and Chick 2004). In figure 1, the self-place intersection describes physical interactions between visitors and the setting; the self-others intersection describes social interactions with companions and perhaps unrelated visitors encountered; the intersection between others-place can be thought to describe interactions between other visitors and the setting that are observed by the self and internalized, but which do not socially involve the self (this conceptual intersection is least well-developed); and the central overlap in the Venn diagram of self-place-others describes *relationship to place*.

Future Considerations

Our analysis identified a number of sub-dimensions of relationship to place that should be considered important research topics by social scientists interested in people-wildland relations. In addition, managers at the Park should consider developing new strategies, and adapting current visitor management and education, that is guided by the following non-exhaustive list of characteristics of a place relationship process, perhaps finding ways to facilitate these within the bounds of society and resource protection.

1. Time and Experience Accumulated in Place
 - a. Ritualized activities
 - b. Return visits and annual trips
 - c. Extended overnight stays
2. Social Interactions in Place
 - a. Family history in place

- b. Socialization of children
 - c. Conscious and unconscious informal training
 - d. Strengthening interpersonal bonds with companions
 - e. Conversation and shared experience
3. Physical Interactions in Place
- a. Lessons learned in both “good” and “bad” physical experiences
 - b. Exploring away from designated trails
 - c. Adventure, discovery, thrill-seeking, etc.
 - d. The role of physical contact and tactile experience with setting attributes

Conclusion

This paper contributes to the body of research knowledge on place and the wildland visitor experience by focusing on relationship processes for a segment of visitors rather than the behavioral outcomes of place attachment for the average visitor. In doing so, we address an important “need to reconsider concepts and methods premised upon leisure as an enduring still-life photograph” (Stewart 1998: 399).

Relationships with the Park, for a segment of visitors, are ongoing and multidimensional, characterized by the accumulation of place meanings and the evolution of place identities (Manzo 2005). How having such a place relationship influences a visitor’s satisfaction with a given visit to the Park is not well understood. Moreover, how committed and satisfying relationships with the Park affect visitor behavior is in need of additional research.

The quality of the visitor experience, or satisfaction, has often been measured by comparing how well a recreation activity or a setting is perceived by a visitor to meet his or her expectations for a single trip (Williams 1989). Fournier and Mick (1999) concluded that consumer satisfaction goes beyond the one-time purchase of a product to include an active dynamic process, a social dimension, meanings and emotions, and broader quality of life aspects. These closely reflect dimensions described for place relationships in this study and in the literature. To learn and to communicate a more complete story of wildland visitor satisfaction, research and management might refocus on the visitor in his or her subjective experiences through time rather than studying the visitor as a receiver of messages and a judge of setting attributes for a given visit.

This analysis, integrated with the literature, provides a more complete understanding of the dynamic and multidimensional nature of relationship to place and the quality of the experience, though much remains to be learned. The take home message is: some visitors may see the Park as a beloved relationship partner for the long-term rather than a set of useful attributes, scenic facilities, opportunities for outdoor recreation and leisure, or other commodities.

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