

**THE CAMPING EXPERIENCE IN WESTERN
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL PARKS:**

**EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
PEOPLE AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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ABSTRACT

Despite the natural environment being valued as an integral part of human life, there is an growing physical and emotional disconnection from nature manifested as increased health problems, lack of environmental awareness and social dysfunction. National parks are valued both for conservation of biological diversity as well as enabling people to get closer to nature, with camping a popular way of achieving this. The aim of this study was to examine the experiences of campers in Western Australian national parks, with a particular focus on the meanings they attributed to these experiences. A total of 29 in-depth interviews were undertaken on-site with campers in two national parks. The camping experience was identified as diverse and of great importance to campers' lives beyond a physical immersion in nature. Camping motivation and experiences on-site were connected with higher order meanings including re-creation, recreation, reconnection and reaffirmation. The increased knowledge of these experiences and meanings provided by this study contributes to redressing the imbalance of the people-natural environment relationship as well assisting in enriching peoples' lives.

Keywords: Camping, natural area tourism, national parks, experience, meanings, benefits

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“We modern humans, increasingly competent about making our way through the natural world, have been decreasingly confident about its values, its meanings. The correlation is not accidental. It is hard to discover meaning in a world where value appears only at the human touch, hard to locate meaning when we are engulfed in sheer instrumentality, whether of artefacts or natural resources. One needs a significant place to dwell.” (Rolston III, 1988, p. xii)

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