

The Wilderness Knot

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Haydn Grinling Washington

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DEDICATION

For Angorawa, for Baiame Cave, and for Nullo – those *genii loci* who have guided me. And for Dyagula (the Lyrebird), my totem and teacher, whose voice I still hear. May you remain forever wild!

*'I hearing get, who had but ears,
And sight, who had but eyes before;
I moments live, who lived but years,
And truth discern, who knew but learning's lore.*

*Now chiefly is my natal hour,
And only now my prime of life;
I will not doubt the love untold
Which not my worth or want hath bought,
Which wooed me young, and woos me old,
And to this evening hath me brought. '*

Thoreau, as quoted by Emerson (1862)

'If we turn our regard for nature more and more into clever philosophical word games, if we begin to think that we are intellectually creating nature rather than physically participating in it, we are in danger of losing sight of the real wolves being shot by real bullets from real aeroplanes, of real trees being clearcut, of real streams being polluted by real factories.'

Bryant (1995)

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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(Haydn Washington)

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ABSTRACT

Over the last thirty years the meaning of the word 'wilderness' has changed in Australia, and it has come under sustained attack on philosophical, cultural, political and 'justice' grounds. Why has this happened? Why have wilderness campaigns drastically slowed? Why do some people no longer use the term? How has the term become so confused? What could be done to reduce this confusion? This thesis investigates the 'Wilderness Knot' – the confusion and tangled meanings around 'wilderness'. In the literature this 'knot' is comprised of at least five strands; philosophical, political, cultural, justice and exploitation. Normally people focus only on the last of these strands, its economic exploitation. 'Wilderness' as a term is in a unique philosophical position, being disliked by both modernists and many postmodernists alike.

The methodology is qualitative, involving participatory action research (PAR) and hermeneutic phenomenology. The PAR was done with the Blue Mountains Wilderness Network near Sydney, which investigated the confusion around 'wilderness', and sought to reduce this by entering into dialogue with supporters, critics and community members interested in wilderness issues, notably the local Aboriginal Traditional Owners (TOs). Eleven in-depth interviews with scholars (including critics) of wilderness were carried out to feed into this PAR. The hermeneutic phenomenology made use of the wilderness journals of five of the Network, and sought to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of wilderness itself, and also the lived experience of encountering the wilderness knot.

The PAR provided many insights into the knot, especially regarding the need for dialogue to reduce the confusion. It demonstrated the delicacy needed to gain meaningful dialogue over an issue which raises real passions about social and environmental justice. It took three years to develop meaningful dialogue between TOs and conservationists. Recognition of such sensitivities is an important part of understanding why dialogue often fails, and confusion remains. There was also insight into the complexities and difficulties of collaborative efforts to promote dialogue.

All the scholars interviewed agreed that large natural intact areas (*'lanais'*) should be protected, though some did not call them 'wilderness', but used other terms (for example; quiet country, core lands, wild country). Clearly some scholars do not know the formal definitions of wilderness as basically a large natural area, or if they do they prefer to use their own personal definition or meaning. Some of the confusion around 'wilderness' is actually a smokescreen when one finds out what people really mean. Although there are differences or sticking points between conservationists and TOs, none of these appear so great that both groups would not work together to protect 'wilderness as lanai'. The spectra of issues entangled in 'the land' and 'wilderness' are presented textually and diagrammatically, as are the ways forward to untangle meanings and reduce confusion. The political naivety of academia is discussed in regard to 'wilderness as lanai' (considering increasing threats). There is a need for greater rigour in identifying *which* meaning of 'wilderness' is actually being referred to. There is also merit in promoting recognition that 'wilderness' is in fact a *tribute* to past indigenous land practices, not a disregard of indigenous history. The idea of shared 'custodianship' or stewardship is suggested as a way forward.

The wilderness journals demonstrated that the power of the wilderness experience is deeply felt, and many profound qualities were covered by the participants. They also expressed the loneliness of a wilderness advocate embedded in consumer culture, as well as the frustration, anger and despair around reconciling the reality of such places with what is said about 'wilderness', and the fanaticism involved in various positions on the issue. However, there is also the quality of dialogue as a positive response, where finding common ground reduces confusion and untangles some of the meanings – and brings hope for the future of such areas. The wilderness knot *can* indeed be loosened, as this thesis demonstrates. However, it will be an ongoing project for all those involved. The art to keeping 'wilderness as lanai' is not just 'eternal vigilance', it is an eternal ongoing dialogue about its meaning and values.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. The Wilderness Knot

In 1974, I first walked down the Colo river in what is now Wollemi National Park, north-west of Sydney. I fell overwhelmingly in love - and became a wilderness advocate. However, over the decades since then, I have seen the meaning of 'wilderness' change, while the number of criticisms of 'wilderness' has increased dramatically, and action to protect wilderness decreased (Muir 2004). In recent time, the term 'wilderness' has been criticised. Soule (1995) explains that the existence and essential reality of wilderness is being questioned. Peepre (1999) and Orr (1999) have noted it is under attack in Canada and the US respectively. Nash (2001, p. ix) notes that wilderness preservation has been attacked recently as 'an outdated, elitist, even dangerous, component of environmental thought'. In the 1990's there was increasing academic criticism of the term 'wilderness' in Australia (Flannery 1994, Langton 1996, 1998). The campaign to protect 'wilderness' slowed significantly. In 2003 there was an unsuccessful proposal by some Aboriginal people to remove the 'wilderness' listing from Namadgi NP in the Australian Capital Territory. In 2004, the Commonwealth Government decided to de-zone the wilderness area on Heard Island in Antarctica.

The Director of the NSW Colong Foundation for Wilderness now believes that wilderness protection has slowed to a crawl, and has stalled outside NSW (Muir 2004). Recently, several public servants in the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) have independently informed me that few staff members there now use the word 'wilderness', due to perceptions that it might offend some Aboriginal interests (DEH, 2004 pers. comm.). In 2006, all zones within Kakadu NP (including the former wilderness zone) were proposed to be removed in the new draft Plan of Management. What is happening here? After decades of hard-fought public campaigns to protect wilderness, why are there now so many criticisms

of the word, and so many different views of its meaning? Where do these criticisms come from? This thesis tries to understand what is happening in regard to the confusion over the term ‘wilderness’ (formally defined as essentially *large natural areas*), and to take action to address this ‘wilderness knot’ through participatory action research and hermeneutic phenomenology.

This introduction presents the problem, the confusion we as a society have become mired in around the term ‘wilderness’. I have called this confusion the ‘**wilderness knot**’. Why does it seem so extensive, and (to pursue the metaphor), of what is it knotted? Why has wilderness as a term stirred up such passionate debate? Why is ‘wildness’ as a term seen by some academics as acceptable, but wilderness as less acceptable (Mulligan 2001, Burton-Christie 2003)? I have seen this confusion grow over the last twenty or so years, wondering ‘what is going on?’. What are the *real* points of contention in the different views of the term ‘wilderness’? As Oelschlaeger (1991) has pointed out, we cannot discuss the wilderness ‘idea’ without fundamentally discussing the relationship between humanity and wild nature. Lyon (1992) similarly points out that: ‘in the wilderness battle is involved the whole issue of how we conceive of ourselves and our powers’. Is this why we have entwined ourselves into such a knot over the term wilderness?

Wilderness seems to be situated in an interesting space, as it is anathema to philosophical ‘modernism’ (Oelschlaeger 1991), yet equally it is not popular with many streams of postmodernism (Cronon 1996, Callicott 2003). Modernists view wilderness as merely a resource to *use*, while some streams of postmodernism seem to see it as a suspect metanarrative in its own right (Cronon, 1996). Also, some streams of ecofeminism see wilderness as similarly tainted, though this time by patriarchy (Vance 1997). Within the philosophical debate, there is the problem of the *meaning* of wilderness. This meaning has changed over historical time, as noted by Oelschlaeger (1991), Cronon (1996) and many others. What do we mean by wilderness? Wilderness definitions are legion, but all include the idea of *large size*, *naturalness*, and sometimes *remoteness* (to human development). Perhaps the most universally accepted definition comes from the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN 1994):

A large area of unmodified or slightly modified land, and/or sea, retaining its natural character and influence, without permanent or significant habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition

However, this definition is not necessarily the meaning many people attribute to 'wilderness'. There remain today many different meanings of the word. Some (for example, conservationists) see wilderness as 'large, natural areas', while others see it as a purely Western colonialist concept. There is also the problem of the perception of *reality*. Some postmodernists in particular have a suspicion of reality, which seems to spill over to the natural world.

Wilderness also falls foul to some extent of the ideologies of major political parties. The wilderness debate generates great passion, and this in part arises from concern over social justice (such as dispossession of Australia's indigenous peoples), as well as 'environmental justice' (justice for the nonhuman world). Cronon (1996) and Langton (1996, 1998) appear to argue that for social justice reasons we should allow development of wilderness to help the poor, or to create an economic base for dispossessed indigenous peoples. There are thus interesting questions here of whether 'environmental justice' is even recognised by some scholars, and whether social justice should over-ride environmental justice (or vice versa) - or whether there might be a middle path. There is also the aspect that the understanding or use of the term 'wilderness' varies from culture to culture. It is well understood in English-speaking countries such as the US, UK and Australia, but less well understood in many other cultures around the world.

The desire to profit economically by exploiting the resources of wilderness is motivated by the ideology of 'resourcism', where the whole natural world is seen just as resources for human use. Are the tangled meanings and confusion around 'wilderness' fostered by powerful economic interests who wish to continue the modernist drive to exploit the remaining wild areas, as Luoma (1992) argues? There are thus many interesting questions that revolve around wilderness, questions which touch on the very fundamentals of humans, and their relations to the natural world. This makes the topic an interesting and rich one for a Ph.D. thesis. A number of authors (Harper 1995, Thomashow 1996) view wilderness as having an important

role to play in letting people *see society in perspective*, acting as a ‘reality check’ to break down conceptual chains (such as modernism or postmodernism). The continuing existence and experience of large, remote, natural, wild areas (the formal definition of ‘wilderness’) is thus seen as playing an important role in *transforming* people and their worldview, so that they act in an ecologically responsible manner. Wilderness is also seen as important in showing people they *are* part of nature. This understanding of wilderness probably first gained its expression in the seminal writings of Thoreau, followed by Muir and later by Leopold.

As part of this introduction, it should be recognised that the decline in wilderness activism has occurred along with a decline in overall activism. Figgis (1999) notes that a ‘dampening of the fires’ of environmental activism occurred in the ‘90s, and attributes this to the triumph of market economics, a deadening of romanticism and spirituality, and an increase in fatigue and apathy. Other scholars (Putnam 2000) argue this decline in activism was even broader, being not just for environmental activism, but for all social activism. Participants at the Fifth Australian National Wilderness Conference (September, 2006) acknowledged there was some truth in this view, noting the decline in activism even within the Scout movement. It has been suggested that one cause for the decline in environmental activism may have been an increase in anthropocentrism within our society (EPA 1997).

Accordingly, is the decline in wilderness activism just part of a general social malaise? I believe the criticisms of wilderness, and the recent lack of action to protect ‘wilderness’ in Australia, go deeper than this. The decline in wilderness activism has been the most extreme decline of them all. It went from being *the* key green issue during the Franklin campaign in 1984, to intense criticism in the 1990s, to suffering something from a code of silence since then within bureaucracy and academia. The causes of this go beyond increasing anthropocentrism and the triumph of economic rationalism. As the literature review will establish, the problematique around ‘wilderness’ is more complex and interwoven.

The wilderness knot is thus comprised of meaning, values, philosophical movements, communication (and ignorance), political ideologies, cultural perspectives, justice,

and exploitation. It goes to the heart of the way human society views and values the natural world. For some people, wilderness is something precious, the last remnants of a natural world ravaged by modernism. For others it is romantic, escapist, dualistic, colonialist baggage. There is a world of difference between the interpretations of wilderness listed in some academic criticisms found in the literature, and that of Thoreau or Muir. It seems the term 'wilderness' has come under fire for a whole variety of reasons, many of which have little to do in reality with the conservation or management of 'large, natural areas'. Of such strands is woven the 'wilderness knot'.

2. Situating my own involvement with 'wilderness'

I have been involved with wilderness issues and conservation for more than thirty years, especially of Wollemi National Park to the north-west of Sydney. Wollemi is the second largest national park (502,000 ha) in NSW, and contains the largest declared wilderness (361,000 ha) in that state (also known as the Colo Wilderness). In 1974, at the age of eighteen, I first walked for five days through the heart of the Colo wilderness, which changed my life. Shortly afterwards I became the Secretary of The Colo Committee, and spent the next five years campaigning to create Wollemi National Park. Since then I have led around a thousand people walking into the Colo wilderness. I later worked (both voluntarily and paid) in the Australian Conservation Foundation (Executive Councillor for four terms), the Wilderness Society (TWS Media Officer), and the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (Director). I worked on 'wilderness', as well as many other issues, such as the NSW rainforest campaign, South West Tasmania (Franklin River) and on the Daintree (Wet Tropics) campaign in Queensland. I also lobbied for a year (working for TWS) for the creation of the NSW Wilderness Act, 1987. In August, 2006 I was appointed to the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Advisory Committee. My background has thus given me a broad understanding of what is happening in the conservation movement, both strategically and tactically, in NSW as well as nationally.

As a plant ecologist, I have been especially interested in the biodiversity and nature conservation values of 'wilderness'. I served four years on the Board of Management

of Mutawintji National Park near Broken Hill (which contains a declared wilderness area), finishing in June, 2004. Mutawintji was the first national park ‘handed back’ to Traditional Owners (TOs) in NSW for ‘joint management’. I worked with the Paakintji TOs during this time, and it was interesting to get their various perspectives, not only regarding ‘wilderness’, but also regarding vegetation surveys, feral goats, and threatened species (Washington 2003). This has given me some practical experience in regard to differing cultural perceptions of natural values, and the complexities of cross-cultural dialogue.

I have spent much of the last 30 years walking in the Colo wilderness, botanising, listening to it, learning from it, and identifying with it. For the last ten years, I have lived on the edge of this wilderness, near Rylstone, NSW. Over the last two decades, my puzzlement over the criticisms of the word ‘wilderness’ has grown, as has my concern about the impact of such criticisms, in terms of retaining the *physical reality* of large, natural areas such as Wollemi. That passion led directly to this thesis, where I have had to seek to be a wilderness ‘scholar’, someone who sought to understand *why* (and what could be done about it), rather than simply campaign.

At this point in my life, my love for large, natural, remote areas (wilderness) has led me to undertake a Ph.D. that seeks to examine the ‘wilderness knot’, and perhaps in part unravel it. I find that my understanding of wilderness (and that also of other conservationists) is at odds with some of what has been written in academia. It is apparent that the word means *different things to different people*, despite its various formal definitions. How did we get into such a semantic and hermeneutic knot over wilderness? I have seen the re-emergence of debates on wilderness that we had (and won in the public arena) 25 years ago. Must each generation go over the same ground, seeking to understand the values of wilderness?

During the writing of ‘A Sense of Wonder’ (Washington 2002), I realised the extent to which wilderness had transformed my life, as well as that of others. I realised that wilderness could continue to act as a means to sweep away the cobwebs of modernism and postmodernism, as long as we actually *keep* wilderness. Originally, I considered doing my thesis on ‘wilderness transformation’, due to this interest. Yet

how to ensure that we retain wilderness? Certainly the confusion needed to be examined, and a process entered into towards *loosening* the wilderness knot. For this reason, my thesis has focussed on the ‘wilderness knot’ itself.

Since I first started taking people to the Wollemi region during the campaign to create a national park, I have always seen wilderness as a means to view our society in perspective, ponder our world-view, and acknowledge the reality and wonder of our wild world. This thesis arises out of my lived experience of seeing wilderness change *both* myself and my companions. It is thus grounded in the experience of wilderness as a real, independent, more-than-human entity. It is also based on the experience that wilderness *is* a catalyst that can transform people, that the wilderness experience can reach past the anthropocentrism seemingly inherent in modernism and some postmodernism. My thesis seeks to understand the wilderness knot and its various strands, and to work with a team to reduce the confusion around wilderness, striving to ensure these areas survive into the future. Perhaps the real question we should ask ourselves (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 327) is ‘not whether wilderness has a tomorrow, but whether *Homo sapiens* has a future without wild nature’?

3. Outline of thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters. Chapter 2 is a review of the relevant literature. It covers the essential background, such as wilderness definitions, history, values, and the transformative power of the wilderness experience. There are at least five strands involved in the knot – philosophical, political, cultural, justice and exploitation. The philosophical strand covers modernism, romanticism, postmodernism, anthropocentrism and the vexed ‘humans are part of nature’ debate. The extent to which some streams of postmodernism have impacted on the wilderness debate is reviewed. The focus on language, dualisms, criticism of reality, attacks on grand narratives and reason, and the limitation of the ‘other’ to humans are reviewed, along with concerns by other scholars about postmodernism. Specific criticisms of ‘wilderness’ are then considered.

Chapter 3 covers the methodology and methods. Two qualitative research methodologies are used, participatory action research (PAR) and hermeneutic

phenomenology. I chose qualitative research, as I believed it might allow me to more deeply comprehend a complex and tangled debate. Hence I sought to work with a group of colleagues through the PAR process to seek to more fully understand and address the wilderness knot. I made use of a cyclic PAR process, where each cycle is made up of *planning/ action/ reflection*. This process went through five cycles, with each cycle teaching us more about aspects of the wilderness knot. My PAR group embarked on an extensive program to seek dialogue about ‘wilderness’ through articles, seminars and workshops. Part of this process was being informed by detailed interviews with scholars and critics of ‘wilderness’ (Cycle 4). Hermeneutic phenomenology was undertaken in an attempt to understand more deeply the *lived experience* around this debate. The ‘phenomenon’ under investigation here was of two related parts. The first was what the ‘wilderness experience’ was like. The second was the experience of actually living through the confusion involved with the wilderness knot. The method used was the wilderness journal, undertaken by five members of the Network.

Chapters 4-6 cover the results of the PAR. Chapter 4 covers PAR Cycles 1-3, which were about setting up the Network, running the ‘Wilderness Resurgence’ seminar, and three forays into the public sphere. These cycles showed the extent of the confusion and passions around wilderness. They also showed how essential *meaningful dialogue* was, but how difficult it was to attain.

Chapter 5 covers in-depth interviews with 11 key scholars, some of whom were critics of ‘wilderness’. I asked them about their views on past clearing of native vegetation, on the ‘humans are part of nature’ debate, on intrinsic value, sacredness and respect for nature. I also asked them about the tension between social and environmental justice. I raised the term ‘wilderness’ and asked about definition, why it had become a problem word, and various criticisms such as ‘human exclusion’ and ‘human artefact’. The ‘reflection’ section of this cycle encompasses the Network’s key meeting to discuss the interviews, where interesting insights into the wilderness knot emerged. These insights informed the PAR in terms of how we then proceeded to gain further dialogue.

Chapter 6 continues the ‘promoting dialogue’ theme of Chapter 4. This cycle goes through four meetings, one of which was a ‘talking stick’ meeting which allowed deep personal and profound perspectives on the wilderness debate to emerge. It built respect and trust between the parties. The cycle culminated in one of the most successful workshops (‘Finding Common Ground’) ever held between conservationists and TOs in the Blue Mountains. It identified that there was indeed substantial ‘common ground’ to protect the large natural areas of the Blue Mountains. It also showed there were differences, but that if we listened and showed respect, we could respect such differences and understand them through further ongoing dialogue.

Chapter 7 details the results from the hermeneutic phenomenology, specifically key extracts from five wilderness journals kept by participants for around two years. Containing both prose and poetry, they demonstrate the *power* of the wilderness experience, as well as the many qualities that contribute to this. They also describe the lived experience of dealing with the wilderness knot, as well as associated thinking about the issues involved.

Chapter 8, the discussion chapter, commences with the process of entering into ‘meaningful dialogue’. It demonstrates the need for true listening and mutual respect, but shows how easily miscommunication can occur. The insights from the interviews are divided into those that cover relationships with the land in general, and those that are specific to wilderness. ‘Mind-maps’ show various spectra of issues that go to make up our mind-set about wilderness. I suggest that ‘dialogical activism’ can shift the debate in a positive direction to protect wilderness.

The phenomenological discussion covers qualities of the wilderness experience, the qualities of experiencing the wilderness knot, and the contributions from the journals to understanding the wilderness knot. The qualities of the wilderness experience show the *power* of this experience, and why it may be transformational for many people. The qualities of experiencing the wilderness knot include loneliness, frustration, anger and despair, as well as hope from positive dialogue.

The final part of the chapter discusses how the wilderness knot is anything but trivial; it is tied in with some of the most critical philosophical and ethical issues of our times, such as intrinsic value, ecological consciousness and environmental justice. It is centrally involved in the critical nexus between social and environmental justice. It is involved in society's whole worldview, and whether (and how) humans see themselves as being part of nature. The way forward is described by use of a third 'mind-map', where dialogical activism seeks to shift society's mind-set towards respectful use and ecological sustainability. It concludes that the art to keeping 'wilderness' will always involve an ongoing dialogue.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

When one speaks of ‘wilderness’, one perforce speaks of humanity’s relation to, and perception of, *nature*. There is thus a wide range of aspects that need to be discussed to situate the wilderness knot. The prime focus here is to examine what the wilderness knot is comprised of, and how it can be recognised and addressed. However, to do this it also needs to cover background aspects, such as wilderness definitions and *meaning* in Australia and overseas over the last two hundred years. What is ‘meant’ by the word is actually a very significant issue in its own right, especially in the philosophical debate. There is also a need to discuss recent definitions and concepts relevant to the wilderness debate, as the context is still changing.

The strands of the wilderness knot have their origins in past history. If this history is not understood, then we don’t understand the knot itself. Similarly, it is necessary to discuss the importance of wilderness *values*. The transformative power of wilderness will also be briefly discussed, as this is integral to any discussion of the phenomenological experience of wilderness. However, the main section is the last section, which discusses the strands which make up the wilderness knot, and the criticisms made of wilderness. It should be noted that the wilderness debate generates a lot of ‘statements’ about wilderness which are not backed up either by reasoned argument or explanatory examples.

1. Wilderness definitions

1.1 International definitions

It is important to understand the distinction between formal definitions of wilderness, and concepts or meanings *ascribed* to wilderness. These are often very different. For

example, Rose (1988) uses a meaning of wilderness from Sierra Club Director Brower, who once humorously described wilderness as ‘where the hand of man has never set foot’ (that it has never been visited by people). Such popular meanings confuse the formal definitions. It has been said that there is a legal definition of wilderness, and that otherwise, wilderness is ‘whatever people think it is - potentially the entire universe, the “terra incognita” of people’s minds’ (Hendee et al. 1978). They note that in the USA, the meaning of ‘wilderness’ has evolved from that of a ‘repulsive landscape’ to a valued cultural resource. Others agree that wilderness is an elusive concept with many layers of meaning, and that the early European idea of wilderness was of a ‘landscape of fear’, and that this only started to change in the late eighteenth century, primarily in the USA (Hall 1988, p. 27).

‘Wilderness’ has been said to have a rich texture of ‘allegorical, metaphorical and literal meanings (Hawkes 1992), and to be linked semantically with a constellation of terms such as ‘paradise and garden’ and ‘heaven and hell’. Thus wilderness may be a place or a spiritual condition. Hawkes concludes that wilderness is an unstable concept beset with ambiguity. The ‘wilderness’ of one generation in one nation may not be the same in symbolic terms as the wilderness of the next generation. She points out that for over a hundred years in Australia, ‘wilderness’ was seen as a menacing place, and that it was the arrival of romanticism that changed this. Given this menacing place is not what formal definitions now mean, the meaning of the word has changed substantially over time (Oelschlaeger 1991). The word ‘wilderness’ is derived from the old Saxon/ Celtic words ‘wyld’ meaning wild, ‘deor’ meaning animal, and ‘ness’ meaning nest, lair or territory (Hendee et al. 1990). The word and its variants were used in old and middle English, German and Dutch to denote any land that was wild and uninhabited by anything save wild animals (Hall 1988, Robertson et al. 1992). The word appeared in mainstream English literature in the thirteenth century, and was widely used in early translations of the Bible into English (Nash 1967). This early meaning of wilderness referred to barren desert, later expanded to cover mountains or sparsely inhabited wasteland considered hostile to people (Hendee et al. 1978, Robertson et al. 1992). This view of wilderness was in fact that of Neolithic agrarian society, a very different view

from that of Paleolithic society, for whom wilderness was home, part of the *Magner Mater* or 'Great Mother' (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 2).

In the Middle Ages, the Christian view of wilderness was that it was land over which God had placed an obligation on humanity to transform and make productive (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 70). However, with the rise of the Industrial Revolution, and the huge changes this brought, there was a shift to an appreciation of wild land. This romantic movement was led by Wordsworth and Coleridge, who loved the 'sublime' (ibid., p. 110). This new view of wilderness became a part of 'transcendentalism', a movement which emphasized intuition as a means to knowledge, and the importance of the search for the divine. This came to America along with the Puritans (ibid., p. 133). Ralph Waldo Emerson was a key American transcendentalist who brought together a group of people in Concord (Massachusetts), notably Henry David Thoreau. However, Thoreau's writing actually went far *beyond* Emerson's transcendentalism (ibid., p.134). The writings of Thoreau, Muir and Leopold generated strong support in America for wilderness as something *positive* which should be protected.

The 20th century has seen a changing view of wilderness from being a feared *wasteland* to being something of value. The international definitions of wilderness have been summarised by Robertson et al. (1992). Most definitions have in common the themes of *large size*, *naturalness*, and *remoteness* from human development. Marshall (1930), one of the founders of the US Wilderness Society, used the word wilderness to denote:

A region which contains no permanent inhabitants, possesses no possibility of conveyance by any mechanical means and is sufficiently spacious that a person in crossing it must have the experience of sleeping out. ... This means that all roads, power transportation and settlements are barred. (quoted in Hendee et al. 1990)

The US Wilderness Act (1964) states:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognised as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or habitation, and which:

- (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with man's imprint substantially unnoticeable;*
- (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;*
- (3) has at least 5,000 acres of land or is sufficient size to make practicable its preservation;*
- (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, and historical value.* (Robertson et al. 1992)

It has been argued that this definition is 'one of the two greatest ideas of the 20th century' (Esbjornson 1999). There has been extensive debate over the meaning of the word 'untrammelled', in terms of how this definition is interpreted. A trammel was originally a 'kind of net', and untrammelled means 'unrestrained' or 'unrestricted' (Scott 2002). The New Zealand Wilderness Advisory Group (1985) defined wilderness:

Wilderness areas are wild lands designated for their protection and managed to perpetuate their natural condition and which appear to have been affected only by the forces of nature, with any imprint of human interference substantially unnoticeable.

McCloskey and Spallding (1989) prepared the first world level inventory of wilderness for the Sierra Club. They define wilderness as:

Most simply, wilderness is land without permanent human settlements or roads and is land that is not regularly cultivated nor heavily and continuously grazed. It is likely however that most of this land has been lightly used and occupied by indigenous peoples at various times who practiced traditional subsistence styles of life.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN 1994) has defined wilderness as:

A large area of unmodified or slightly modified land, and/or sea, retaining its natural character and influence, without permanent or significant habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition.

Four 'objectives for management' were identified by IUCN, being to maintain natural attributes over the long term; ensure future generations can experience wilderness; permit non-motorised public access that maintains wilderness qualities; and to enable indigenous human communities living at low density and in balance with available resources to maintain their lifestyle. This last objective remains an ongoing debate, given the definition also states that wilderness is to be 'without permanent or significant habitation'.

It can be seen from the above definitions that there are a number of elements in common, being *large size*, *naturalness* or wildness, and sometimes *remoteness* from human development, and management to retain the area in a wild condition. Understanding these repeated elements is important to being able to analyse the criticisms made about ‘wilderness’.

1.2 Australian definitions

Australian definitions of wilderness are catalogued by Robertson et al. (1992). It can be seen over time that there is a trend *away* from emphasizing wilderness in terms of time travelled to cross it (an anthropocentric approach) towards the importance of wilderness as a large natural areas where natural processes continue (an eco-centric approach). There is also a trend to greater clarity in the definition that wilderness was once (or continues to be) the homes of native peoples (and does not overlook this history), and that wilderness is defined as an absence of the impact of modern technological society.

Dunphy (1934) defined a ‘primitive area’ as being:

An area of primitive wilderness, compact in shape and extensive, so that one may be able to travel on foot in any direction for at least a full day without meeting a road or highway. It must preserve its natural characteristics and adjuncts – plant life, wildlife – in every way, and must be roadless, but not necessarily trackless.

Helman et al. (1976), Feller et al. (1979), and Russell et al. (1979) all defined wilderness as:

A wilderness is a large area of land perceived to be natural, where genetic diversity and natural cycles remain essentially unaltered

Clearly the authors here wished to avoid any debate on what is ‘natural’, stating that wilderness is ‘perceived to be natural’. Kirkpatrick and Haney (1980) state:

Remoteness and naturalness are the two intrinsic qualities of wilderness, and therefore define wilderness as “land remote from access by mechanised vehicles, and from within which there is little or no consciousness of the environmental disturbance of western man.

The NSW Wilderness Act (1987) defines wilderness as:

Land identified as wilderness by the Director of NPWS must be substantially unmodified 'by humans and their works' or capable of being restored to that state; of sufficient size to enable its maintenance; and capable of providing solitude and self-reliant recreation.

The Wilderness Society (TWS 1990) defines a wilderness area as a:

large tract of land remote at its core from access and settlement and substantially unmodified by modern technological society or capable of being restored to that state, and of sufficient size to make practicable the long-term protection of its natural systems.

The Land Conservation Council of Victoria (LCC 1991) defines wilderness as:

A large area with landforms and native plant and animal communities relatively unaltered or affected by the influence of the European settlement of Australia, and of sufficient size and shape and location with respect to adjacent land uses to make practicable the long-term protection of its natural systems and primitive conditions; which is managed to maintain and enhance wilderness quality values

Robertson et al. (1992) propose:

A wilderness area is an area that is, or can be restored to be:

- *of sufficient size to enable the long-term protection of its natural systems and biological diversity;*
- *substantially undisturbed by colonial and modern technological society;*
- *remote at its core from points of mechanised access and other evidence of colonial and modern technological society.*

In summary, it is clear that virtually all the major wilderness surveys in Australia have defined wilderness as *large, natural areas remote* from disturbance by modern technological society. Similarly, many definitions make explicit the recognition that the term 'wilderness' does not ignore prior Aboriginal history, and that these areas are free of the disturbance of 'modern technological society', *not* that they have never been influenced by indigenous peoples.

1.3 Recent definitions related to wilderness

There are some more recent terms that are related to the concept of wilderness.

'*Rewilding*' or 'restoration of wilderness qualities and intact food webs' (Noss 2003a) is a term used for wilderness restoration that has become popular in the USA.

It is a term promoted by the US Wildlands Project (Soule and Noss 1998, Wolke 1999, Locke 2000), which aims to protect wilderness areas, but also to seek to encapsulate the idea of '*connectivity*', of connecting wilderness areas together with less wild areas, so the whole spectrum is a 'wildland' (Soule and Terbough 1999). A cynic might describe rewilding as 'romantic', but it is actually scientific realism 'if our goal is the long-term integrity of the land' (Soule and Noss 1998). Rewilding is seen as protecting wilderness and remnants for their intrinsic value.

This concept has also been supported in Australia by the Wilderness Society in its 'WildCountry' Project (TWS 2002) which seeks to 're-wild Australia'. WildCountry has been described as a 'forever framework', a proactive vision for a long term future for biodiversity (McDonald 2004). Campaigns to reserve areas will end up as pyrrhic victories if more attention is not paid to connectivity (Soule et al. 2004). The question of what to call wild areas not large enough to be formally declared as wilderness has been discussed by conservationists in Australia. In Victoria, TWS (1990) used a threshold definition of wilderness of 25,000 ha, but suggested that areas smaller than this should be called '*primitive areas*'. However, this usage does not seem to have been taken up outside Victoria in recent time. The history and application of the term '*marine wilderness*' has been discussed (Sloan 2002). The terms '*historical wilderness*' and '*storied wilderness*' have been coined, where humans commit themselves 'not to erasing human marks on the land, but rather to interpreting them so that visitors can understand just how intricate and profound this process of rewilding truly is' (Cronon 2003). Cronon appears to support restoration or rewilding of such areas, while arguing that the human history of such areas should not be forgotten.

There have been suggestions that perhaps we should find another word for wilderness. The idea of focusing on *wildness* rather than wilderness has also been suggested 'in order to bring conservation home to more people' (Mulligan 2001). Similarly, Burton-Christie (2003) has said that we should focus more on '*the wild*' and less on wilderness:

This is why some ... urge us to think less about wilderness – at least in the sense of a carefully demarcated “zone” – and more about that fundamental mystery that so fascinated Thoreau: wildness.

‘Wild’ means for animals that they are free agents, for plants that they are self-maintaining, and for land that it is a place where the original vegetation and fauna are intact and pristine. ‘Wild’ has been argued to come close to being ‘sacred’. It is worth noting, however, that since ‘wild’ is defined by Burton-Christie as land where the original vegetation and fauna are intact and pristine, this is very similar to definitions of wilderness. The omission is the fact that *large size* is not spelled out, though many ecologists argue that this is necessary to keep flora and fauna intact and pristine (Soule and Terbough 1999). Also, the idea of ‘wild’ as *sacred* is very different to other ideas of wild, as ‘natural’, or as ‘savage’ or ‘lawless’ (Rose 2004).

The term ‘*peopled wilderness*’ has also come into use, which is stretching the term beyond its previous usage (which excluded permanent human habitation). For example, this is used by some to refer to the American continent at the time of the European invasion (Wolf 1990). The term has also been used in contemporary times in Australia, where Cape York is described as a ‘peopled wilderness’ by the local Development Association (<http://www.cypda.com.au/tourism>). The Wilderness Society refers in its website to Cape York as not being an ‘unpeopled wilderness’ (www.wilderness.org.au/campaigns/northernaustralia/capeyork).

The question of permanent settlements in areas designated as wilderness has also been left open by IUCN, whose objective for wilderness areas allows for ‘indigenous human communities living at low density and in balance with the available resources to maintain their lifestyle’ (IUCN 1994). This objective *could* allow permanent settlements in areas called ‘wilderness’, but only indigenous ones. Such a definition of wilderness would also come close to other defined reserves in Australia, such as Indigenous Protected Areas (Figgis 2004). It should be recognised that defining areas which contain human settlements (of any sort) as ‘wilderness’ is a substantial change in the definition of the term, as well as the management of the area. This change would allow greater human impact on large natural areas. The change in the meaning of the term can be seen at the international level in a recent ‘wilderness survey’ that defined wilderness as having *no more than 5 people per square kilometre*, and

contained only 70% of the same kind of habitats they had 500 years ago (Kleiner 2003). Using this extremely broad definition (with a low degree of ‘naturalness’), they found that 44% of the Earth’s surface was ‘wilderness’.

The debate continues around having permanent settlements in large, natural areas and whether it would be better to call such areas ‘wildland’ or wild country. This debate emerged at the recent 8th World Wilderness Congress in Alaska (where Alaskan gazetted ‘wilderness’ actually *does* contain indigenous villages). The consensus then was to leave the IUCN definition unchanged. The debate also raises questions, however, of whether by allowing such settlements in large natural areas, we are just continuing the historical trend of clearing and fragmentation that has escalated drastically over the last 200 years. This debate is yet to be resolved.

2. The history of the wilderness movement

2.1 International history

The wilderness movement was born in modern times primarily in the USA. The changing appreciation of the value of wilderness worldwide is clearly related to its scarcity (McCloskey 1966, Nash 1982, Hendee et al., 1978, 1990). It has been observed that:

Untamed nature begins to figure as a positive and redemptive power only at the point where human mastery over its forces is extensive enough to be experienced as itself a source of danger and alienation. It is only a culture which has begun to register the negative consequences of its industrial achievements that will be inclined to return to the wilderness. (Soper 1996, p. 22-34)

The US wilderness movement arguably originates with Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) and John Muir (1838-1914), two contemporaries in the USA in the mid 19th century. Thoreau was arguably the greatest nature-writer of the last few centuries, and was far ahead of his times (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 170). He was a strong advocate of wilderness as something of intrinsic value, and saw humans as part of nature. In his essay ‘Spring’, Thoreau (1854) says:

We need the tonic of wildness ... We can never have enough of Nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigour, vast and Titanic features, the sea-coast

with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and decaying trees ... We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander.

In his essay 'Walking', Thoreau (1862) says:

And what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the world. Every tree sends its fibres forth in search of the Wild. ... Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him ... Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps.

About the term 'wilderness' itself, it has been suggested that Thoreau referred more to 'wildness' than wilderness (Mulligan 2001). However, regarding his major work 'Walden', he used the two words quite interchangeably – wilderness was the place where you found wildness. The writings of Thoreau went on to inspire many other modern wilderness advocates around the world. So also did the writings of his contemporary, John Muir, though he has been largely overlooked by modern philosophers (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 175). Muir founded the Sierra Club in 1892, one of the first wilderness conservation groups in the world. Muir (in Teale 1954, p. 312) states: 'the clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness'. Muir (in Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 185) says:

When I entered this sublime wilderness the day was nearly done, the trees with rosy, glowing countenances seemed to be hushed and thoughtful ... and one naturally walked softly and awe-stricken among them. I wandered on, meeting nobler trees where all are noble, subdued in the general calm, as if in some vast hall pervaded by the deepest sanctities and solemnities that sway human souls.

Muir (1890, p. 317) wrote: 'in God's wildness lies the hope of the world ... The great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off'. This seems to suggest that Muir also saw wilderness and wildness as interchangeable. Muir really came to advocate 'a profoundly insightful evolutionary pantheism' and 'a comprehensive wilderness philosophy' (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 173). This positive view of wilderness was further built on by Leopold, who co-founded the US Wilderness Society in 1935. It has been said that Leopold's greatest contribution to contemporary wilderness philosophy has been his 'land ethic'. The land ethic states that humans ought to act to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of natural systems, and argued that land should be loved and respected as an extension of ethics (ibid. pp. 205-207). Leopold (1949, p. 239) wrote of the land ethic in 'Sand Country Almanac' that it:

simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land ... A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these 'resources', but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state.

Leopold attempted to 'synthesize three rival and often conflicting perspectives on the land: the ecological, ethical, and aesthetic'. The attempt to marry the ethical with the scientific is one of Leopold's key contributions, one we are still grappling with today (Oelschlaeger 1991 pp. 238-242). The first movement for wilderness preservation was started by Muir in the Hetch Hetchy Valley in the 1910's. The first area in the US to be designated as wilderness was the Gila National Forest in New Mexico in 1924. Lobbying for wilderness legislation in the US started in the 1950s, resulting in the US Wilderness Act of 1964. In 1992, nearly 500 wilderness areas had been designated in the USA, comprising about 37 million ha of public land (Robertson et al. 1992). Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia and Zimbabwe have also been active in wilderness protection (Robertson et al. 1992). The recent 8th World Wilderness Congress saw 1200 delegates attending from around the world.

However, the campaign *against* wilderness was also growing. The wilderness idea in Canada has been under attack since 1989, when the 'representation science' (representativeness) side of biodiversity became the key government focus, which 'twisted conservation science in an attempt to marginalise wilderness values' (Peepre 1999). In the US, it has been predicted that in the current climate, someday soon there will be 'urgent calls to undo the US Wilderness Act of 1964, and release much of the land it now protects' (Orr 1999).

2.2 Wilderness history in Australia

The word 'wilderness' was brought to Australia in 1788 by Europeans. There are no strictly equivalent words in Aboriginal languages, though there were 'taboo' areas, sanctuaries and 'quiet country' (Rose 1996). In the early years of the colony, wilderness was still used in its biblical '*wasteland*' sense by some writers such as the surveyor Thomas Mitchell in 1832 (Robertson et al. 1992, Hawkes 1992). However, over time the use of the word shifted more to the valued, positive sense. As

wilderness became more scarce, the use of the term reflected a new appreciation of the need to protect such areas (Frawley 1989, Ramson 1991). The use of the word has been seen as reflecting a 'growing respect for the rights, needs and contribution of indigenous people' (Robertson et al. 1992). There has not been a lot written about the early wilderness movement in Australia (Hall, 1988), with perhaps the best known accounts being Mosley (1978), Green (1983), Mosley and Messer (1984), Robertson et al. (1992), Prineas and Gold (1997), and Mosley (1999).

In the 1920s, Myles Dunphy led the campaign for 'primitive areas' in NSW (Thompson 1986). Australia's first primitive area was Tallowa Primitive Area in 1934 (now Morton National Park). This was only ten years after declaration of the Gila Wilderness in the USA. In 1944, Kosciuszko State Park allowed up to 10% to be set aside as a 'primitive area' (Robertson et al. 1992). The Australian wilderness reserve movement developed spontaneously to meet a local need, but was also aware of the success of the campaigns in the USA (Mosley 1978). Wilderness reserves were promoted because they provided greater protection than national parks. Mosley (1978) believes wilderness provisions in NSW influenced other States, and that the wilderness reserve concept was 'fairly entrenched in Eastern Australia' (where the greatest threats existed) but not elsewhere. A wilderness survey of eastern NSW (Helman et al. 1976), later enlarged on by the Wilderness Working Group (1986) in NSW, was influential in the campaign to save such wilderness areas as Wollemi (Washington 1984, 2004). The Helman survey was followed by similar surveys in Victoria (Feller et al. 1979) and Tasmania (Russell et al. 1979). The books by Peter Prineas 'Colo Wilderness' (1978) and 'Wild Places' (1983) greatly assisted the wilderness campaigns in NSW, which led the NSW Wilderness Act (Prineas 1988). A national survey of wilderness was first undertaken in 1986 (Prineas et al. 1986).

There was a move to focus on '*wilderness quality*' (rather than on wilderness areas), begun by in Tasmania (Kirkpatrick and Haney 1980), and substantially developed by in South Australia (Lesslie and Taylor 1983). This was taken up by the Commonwealth, and a national survey of wilderness quality was commenced in 1986; the National Wilderness Inventory (NWI) (Robertson et al. 1992). Wilderness quality (using the Lesslie methodology) assessed distance from roads and

development, as well as a factor called 'biophysical naturalness'. The value of this technique was that it allowed the wilderness quality of *all* areas to be surveyed, so that the most natural areas in any landscape could be ascertained, and possibly protected, even if they are not deemed to be actual 'wilderness' (Mackey et al. 1998a). There has been some criticism of this methodology, due to the fact it overemphasizes distance from roads, and does not adequately assess 'biophysical naturalness'. Despite such problems, the NWI is the only national approach to wilderness quality, useful in any assessment of wilderness. The NSW Wilderness Act was proclaimed in 1987. Victoria has National Park legislation that allows dedication of wilderness areas, and South Australia now has a Wilderness Act. Most recently in October 2005, Queensland proclaimed a Wild Rivers Act (though it still has no wilderness legislation).

Doyle and Kellow (1995, pp. 9-13) claim that Australian conservation bodies such as TWS and ACF have directed their energies and 'dominated proceedings' so as to place wilderness on top of the environmental agenda, 'almost ignoring other environmental issues', and then later trying to justify their beliefs. They argue that the urban environment has suffered due to the campaigns on wilderness, but do not substantiate this (given the huge number and success of urban bushland groups around Australia). They go on to claim that some 'biological determinist supporters' of wilderness have denigrated humans within environmental thought, and are 'antihumanist'.

In his influential book 'The Future Eaters', Flannery (1994) made a strong criticism of wilderness, arguing that wilderness as defined by IUCN 'simply does not exist in Australia'. In 1996, an even stronger criticism of wilderness emerged:

Just as Terra nullius was a lie, so was this European fantasy of "wilderness". There is no wilderness, but there are cultural landscapes ... Like the legal fiction of Terra nullius which imagined us out of existence ... popular culture also imagines us out of existence ... the Australian use of the term 'wilderness' was a mystification of genocide. (Langton 1996)

Whether as a response to the above or not, the mid-1990's marked a decline in wilderness protection. Muir (2004) argues that wilderness protection has now stalled across Australia, and that in the last ten years, no wilderness area has been

proclaimed outside NSW. Marr (2004) from TWS questions this, arguing that large natural areas were protected, but were just not *labelled* ‘wilderness’. It seems likely that the criticisms of wilderness by Langton and Flannery (and others that followed) contributed to the decrease in the use of the word, and in action to protect wilderness. TWS now focuses on Wild Country, and uses the word ‘wilderness’ less than it once did.

3. The importance of wilderness

Given that the wilderness knot is in part a question of *values*, it is essential to discuss the importance of wilderness in terms of how people have valued it. Leopold (1949, p. 279) argues that wilderness is essential for humans to find a durable set of values and to give meaning to human lives:

Ability to see the cultural value of wilderness boils down in the last analysis to a question of intellectual humility. ... It is only the scholar who understands why the raw wilderness gives definition and meaning to the human enterprise.

There are many values attributed to wilderness, and many Australians value the continued existence of wilderness (McHenry 1975, Hall 1988, LCC 1991, Robertson et al. 1992). A survey of 1059 adults in 1996, found that 98% agreed that ‘We have a duty to future generations to conserve wilderness areas’, and 86% agreed with the statement ‘Wilderness areas should be conserved for their own sake, not because people want to use them’. Only 18% agreed with the statement ‘We can afford to lose a few wilderness areas’ and 12% agreed that ‘Economic development is more important than conserving wilderness areas’ (Morgan 1996). Wilderness values have been discussed by Hendee et al. (1978), Hall (1988), and Robertson et al. (1992). The role of wilderness in nature conservation has been extensively reviewed by Mackey et al. (1998a), who indirectly discuss the values of wilderness. Nelson (2003) lists 30 ‘arguments’ that have been used in support of wilderness, which in places touch on values.

3.1 Intrinsic value

The idea that natural areas have *intrinsic value*, a right to exist for themselves, irrespective of their use to humanity, was probably first raised in the literature by Thoreau and Muir in their many writings (Oelschlaeger 1991, pp. 133-204). Leopold (1949 p. xvii) argued for the ‘minority’ of humans who find delight in wilderness and believe in intrinsic value:

There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot. These essays are the delights and dilemmas of one who cannot. Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. ... For us of the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chances to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech.

The ‘deep ecology’ movement recognises that nature has intrinsic value, that we have an obligation to protect it (Naess 1973, Smith 1998). It has been argued that a central assumption of Western moral thought is that value can be ascribed to the nonhuman world only in so far as it is good ‘for the sake of humans’ (Godfrey-Smith 1979). Our attitude toward nature thus has a decidedly anthropocentric bias. It is an unquestioned axiom of our present code of ethics that the class to which we have obligations is the *human* class. There is thus a need to challenge the anthropocentric assumption, so as to develop an ethic of ecological obligation which widens the moral community to include the land. A first step in recognising an enlarged moral community is the evolution of *empathy* (ibid.). The intrinsic values and rights of nature are recognised in the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN 1980), which declares that because humans have become a major evolutionary force, they are morally obliged to act prudently in the interests of other species (Robertson et al. 1992). Regarding intrinsic value, Rolston (1985, p. 30) argues ‘such values are difficult to bring into decisions; nevertheless, it does not follow that they ought to be ignored’. The Australian National Conservation Strategy accepted that ecosystems have intrinsic value (VDE 1987).

It has been said that ‘inherent worth’ is *distinct* from intrinsic value (Taylor 1986), as inherent worth means that something ‘has a good of their own’, and is a moral agent that has worth, regardless of any instrumental value to humans. ‘Intrinsic value’ is said to be when humans value the experience of something, because it is enjoyable.

Our whole moral universe is shaped by our concept of inherent worth (ibid., p. 79), though Taylor does not apply inherent worth to the non-living world. However, a distinction between inherent worth and intrinsic value does not seem to be generally accepted in the literature. Taylor also distinguishes between respect for nature and ‘love of nature’; we should respect nature even if we don’t ‘love’ unattractive parts of it (ibid., p.123). To change our culture, he thought we needed an inner change in our moral beliefs, from anthropocentrism to biocentrism and respect for nature (ibid., p. 312).

The recognition of the rights of other species and ecosystems to exist for themselves can be seen as an acceptance of *humility* (Noss 1991), and as a gesture of planetary modesty (Nash 2001, p. ix). The theme of intrinsic value clearly has roots in the romantic movement led by Wordsworth and Coleridge (Oelschlaeger 1991, pp. 110-121). The question of the ‘rights’ of the nonhuman world has been examined by Nash (1989). It has been argued that ‘autopoietic entities’ (those that self-renew) are deserving of moral consideration in their own right (Fox 1990 in Eckersley 1992). It has also been observed that the people who ‘care profoundly about toads and liverworts may always be a minority in our society’, as the rest of the world is concerned with business and TV (Noss and Cooperrider 1994, p. 339).

There is not a large literature on the intrinsic values of wilderness. Some people have argued that the intrinsic value of wilderness is obvious: ‘the idea of wilderness needs no defence. It only needs more defenders’ (Abbey 1977). Similarly, Wilson (1992, p. 103) maintains that ‘wilderness has virtue unto itself and needs no extraneous justification’, meaning that we shouldn’t have to justify an ethical stance of not humanizing 100% of the Earth’s surface. However, given the continuing loss of wilderness around the world, clearly it *does* in fact need justification, if it is to survive. However, others argue that wilderness is preserved and managed ‘for the benefits and values it provides people (Hendee et al. 1978). They say that legislation to protect such areas was created ‘not just for the sake of nature’, but under the assumption that it benefits humans.

It has also been argued that if we have respect for nature, we will approve the setting aside of wilderness areas as part of ‘restitutive justice’ (Taylor 1986, pp. 297, 305). The intrinsic value of wild areas has been acknowledged (Naess 1989, Goodin 1991). It has also been maintained that it is in the recognition of intrinsic values that wilderness is *unique among land uses* (Robertson et al. 1992). Intrinsic value differs between indigenous and non-indigenous cultures in Australia, where Aboriginal people may regard species as having ‘intrinsic place in value systems’, but not regard them as having an intrinsic value of their own. This may be because of a spiritual understanding where animals and landscapes are seen as not separate from oneself. Wilderness protection encapsulates a philosophy about what the role of humankind within the environment should be, and reflects a movement towards an ‘ethic of responsibility’ (Brown 1992).

However, others have claimed that intrinsic values have been overlooked in the patriarchal conception of wilderness, and that: ‘wilderness exists not for itself but for the ... needs of humans’ (Vance 1997, p. 60). However, she does not explain how her attack on wilderness will in fact *aid* the intrinsic values of large natural areas, or their retention into the future. It has been argued that the compassionate ideology of humanitarianism is part of the problem, as it denies nature’s intrinsic value (Soule 2002). Intrinsic value has been assumed (not proven) by environmentalists, argues Nelson (2003), who urges environmental philosophers to ‘begin dealing with and answering questions about how we ground the claim that putative wilderness has intrinsic value’. The need for ‘holistic pluralism’, an ethical theory that asserts intrinsic value for all aspects of reality, is argued by Gorke (2003). Clearly, intrinsic value is still currently at the *cutting edge* of ethical and philosophical issues today.

Most of the values of wilderness in the literature have in fact been listed as *values to humanity*. These have been called ‘instrumental values’ (Robertson et al. 1992). Conservationists have often made use of such values to try to convince the public to save a threatened species or wilderness. However, Lines (1998, p. 124) and Gorke (2003) argue that anthropocentric arguments are ultimately self-defeating, as such interests tend to override non-anthropocentric interests (which require more restraint

in development). The remaining values discussed here are instrumental values of wilderness to humans.

3.2 Scientific values

There are many scientific values ascribed to wilderness. The world's biodiversity carries out *ecosystem services* that maintain our soil, provide clean air and water, provide pollinators for crops, and so on (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1981). Another key value is *the protection of biodiversity* and the reservoir of genetic diversity within species (sometimes called 'gene pools') (Hendee et al. 1978, Feller et al. 1979,). In general, the amount of native species an area can support is related to the fourth root of the land area (Wilson 1988), thus if you double the area, the species number goes up 10-20 percent. Large natural areas (a.k.a. wilderness) thus have an important role in protecting biodiversity (Robertson et al. 1992, Soule et al. 2004). The question of large reserves (such as wilderness) versus small reserves has sometimes been referred to as 'SLOSS' - 'single large or several small'. A review of wilderness conservation values concluded that 'in most circumstances, larger reserves will typically support a greater diversity of habitats, contain more species ... than smaller reserves' (Mackey et al. 1998a). Reserves are the essential core of biodiversity conservation, but the smaller the reserve the higher the extinction rate (Wilson 2000). Natural areas are the source of 'bioresources' such as drugs, ancestors of food plants, and many other species useful to humans (Wilson 1988). Wilderness has minimal 'edge effects', such as changed fire regime, exotic weeds, feral animals, rubbish dumping, changed water tables, and so on (Mackey et al. 1998a).

The *integrity of ecological processes* is seen by Robertson et al. (1992) as the most basic value of wilderness, maintaining the 'way in which patterns of geological, climatic, and biological development occur and interact'. The wilderness concept is being challenged internationally, especially as a cultural concept that 'has no empirical and hence scientific basis' and is thus irrelevant to nature conservation. However, Mackey et al. (1998b) note that the validity of such criticisms is very dependent upon *definition*, and note that large natural areas 'may contribute significantly to the long-term integrity of ecological systems'. They recommend that wilderness should 'form the core of a dedicated reserve network'.

The importance of large natural areas in *maintaining natural evolution* is seen as a key value (Mackey et al. 1998a, Berry 2000), as so many exotic species have been introduced elsewhere that the evolution of these communities has been radically changed. It is argued that ‘high wilderness quality landscapes retain evolved vegetation communities which may represent the maximized primary productivity given prevailing environmental conditions and disturbance regimes’ (Mackey et al. 1998a). The evolutionary importance of wilderness has been explained: ‘without a wilderness core, a biosphere reserve could not fulfil its function of maintaining the full suite of native species and natural processes’ (Noss 2003b). Similarly, large reserves unquestionably offer the best prospects for the long term maintenance of ecosystem processes and integrity. About 50 percent of an average region needs to be protected as wilderness (core areas) and lightly used buffer zones (Noss and Cooperrider 1994).

Wilderness has importance due to its moderation and *minimisation of global changes* caused by humanity (Robertson et al. 1992). The most obvious of these is the threat that rapid climate change poses to biodiversity. Protected wilderness areas represent natural areas with the greatest integrity, often including high ecosystem and climatic diversity, and providing some of the best guarantees of species viability (AHC 1990). Undisturbed forests in wilderness help maintain the atmospheric and climatic cycles to which life is currently adapted (Robertson et al. 1992). One of the priorities for carbon retention lies in ‘preserving natural ecosystems in national parks and reserves’ (ESD 1991). Because wilderness areas by definition are relatively large ‘they will span a range of climatic gradients and therefore potentially provide refugia for certain species’ (Mackey et al. 1998a). Wilderness also has scientific value as a *benchmark for baseline ecological studies*, so that changes elsewhere can be compared to areas which change minimally (Hendee et al. 1978).

3.3 Social, educational, recreational and cultural values

A number of authors have written of the value of going to the wild to reflect on their society, and see it in a different perspective. Thoreau in part went to Walden Pond to do just this (Oelschlaeger 1991, pp. 133-171). There is a stream of thought in the

Bible (the 'Abraham' stream) which sees wilderness not as a wasteland, but a place where one went to ponder the ills of society (ibid., pp. 49-50). Wilderness provides society with numerous benefits and services, such as biological, physiological, personal, societal, educational, and research (Ewert and Shellman 2003). As well as seeing society in perspective, there is also the value of seeing *oneself* in perspective in wilderness. Thoreau (on Mt Katahdin) certainly experienced this (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 149). Wilderness is seen as a place of humility (Tempest Williams 1999). It is sometimes seen as an essential retreat from the pressures of modern life, a place to recharge one's batteries, an important sanctuary or refuge (Hendee et al. 1978). This refuge value of wilderness has been criticized by Cronon (1996) as 'escapism'. The importance of solitude in wilderness is another value discussed by Thoreau (1854), and by others (Robertson et al. 1992, NPWS undated). 'Freedom' is another important value of wilderness (Dasmann 1966, Stegner 1969, Nash 2001) for retaining a free human spirit. The ACF wilderness position of the 1970s describes wilderness as 'an essential freedom' (ACF 1975).

There are *educational values* to wilderness also. It can be viewed as a 'living museum' which provides many opportunities to teach about biodiversity, geomorphology, ecology, and other topics. There are relict or threatened species found in wilderness, perhaps the most famous of which is the Wollemi Pine discovered in 1994 (Woodford 2000). Another significant category of values is what one might term '*recreational*', as wilderness has physical health benefits derived from bushwalking, climbing, canoeing, liloing, canyoning, skiing, and so on (Duncan 1998). These are increasingly important as our lifestyle becomes more sedentary. There are also cultural or artistic values to wilderness, both visual (photography, painting), and literary, such as poetry and nature-writing (Prineas 1997, Tredinnick 2003). There is also the importance of *indirect enjoyment* of wilderness, such as enjoyment from looking out over wilderness from lookouts, from seeing films, wilderness photography, books, and videos. Hence it is important to recognise that wilderness is valued by people who rarely or even never go there, but who value it as they believe that wilderness has the right to exist for itself. Wilderness is also important for the *cultural identity* of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (Robertson et al. 1992).

3.4 Spiritual and psychological values

Closely related to social values are *spiritual and psychological values*. The ‘wilderness experience’ is a key theme in wilderness literature (Hendee et al. 1978). Marshall (1930), the co-founder of the US Wilderness Society wrote: ‘wilderness furnishes perhaps the best opportunity for ... pure aesthetic rapture’. What earlier was called ‘seeing yourself in perspective’ can also be called ‘self-realisation’ or personal transformation, where the wilderness experience can have a strong effect on how you see and understand yourself (Ewert and Shellman, 2003). It is argued that ‘we need the wilderness for our inner life, not simply for itself’, and that without this we are ‘shrivelled up in our souls’ (Berry 2000). Berry goes on to say ‘the loss of wilderness is a loss of dynamism and creativity’. Wilderness can be valued as a place which restores one’s ‘sense of wonder’ in life (Washington 2002). This can also be called a re-enchantment of the land (Tacey 2000). Part of this sense of wonder is a feeling of being *one* with the land, of belonging (Thomashow 1996). Wilderness has been seen as a source of inspiration and insight (Hendee et al. 1978), and has often been described as a ‘cathedral’ or temple, a place for reflection (DPWH 1991).

Another important spiritual value is *healing*. Wilderness ‘may well have more psychological importance than hundreds of beds in a mental hospital’ (Nash 1967). Wilderness can provide therapy, and even be of help to schizophrenics (Hendee et al. 1978). ‘Wilderness practice’ has been applied as a term for the process where wilderness heals people psychologically. Harper (1995) argues:

People have always turned to wilderness to become whole again. We need only think of the many primary cultures that use intensified wilderness experience as a rite of passage to see these healing qualities at work. ... we may find that wilderness holds the potential for transformative experiences that were perhaps never possible before.

Lopez has also stated that landscapes can ‘give one hope’ (in Tredinnick 2003). Others are bewildered that conservationists have made nothing of ‘this evidence for the healing value of wilderness’ (Roszak 2002). However, the healing power of the land has figured in nature-writing:

When I got back home, I came up here ... to connect with an order larger than myself, larger than the human. To become whole again. This country heals me. Land can do

that. It is possible to participate bodily in landscape, even though it cares nothing for us in any sense we understand as human. We can be intimate with it. We can love it.
(Tempest Williams 2003)

Lastly, wilderness is a place where it is easy to let down the barriers we create in society, where we can listen to the land, to *contemplate*. This ability is called ‘dadirri’ by Ungunmerr (1995), and ‘witness’ by Tredinnick (2003), and is highly valued by many other authors (Tempest Williams 2003). Of course such a quality is not limited to wilderness areas, but is certainly an important part of the *wilderness experience*.

4. The transformative power of wilderness

Essentially, the transformative powers of wilderness means that it can *change* people, that the spiritual, psychological and social values above can transform people. The fact that wild nature can change people is testified in the nature poetry of many cultures. This is not focused on ‘wilderness’ alone, but sometimes on less wild areas (such as the poetry of Wordsworth). Thoreau in the mid-19th century was perhaps the first modern writer to explain the transformative powers of the wild. Some of his writing was done at Walden Pond, a wild area near Concord. In ‘Sounds’, Thoreau (1854) writes:

I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house ... I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance ... Instead of singing like the birds, I silently smiled at my good fortune.

In ‘Solitude’, Thoreau (1854) writes of his essential identification as being one with nature:

The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature – of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter, - such health, such cheer ... Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?

Later in ‘Solitude’, Thoreau writes probably one of the most moving passages of what might call a ‘hierophany’ or epiphany with nature (Oelschlaeger 1991) or a ‘transcendent moment’ (Washington 2002):

I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very patterning of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary ... that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.(Thoreau 1854)

Clearly, Thoreau's visit to the mountain wilderness of Mount Katahdin in Maine was a transformative experience, which has been described as 'surely one the two most remarkable pages of prose ever penned by Thoreau' (Oelschlaeger 1991, p.148). In 'Maine Woods', Thoreau (1864, pp. 93-95) writes:

*And yet we have not seen pure Nature, unless we have seen her thus vast and drear and inhuman ... Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful. I looked with awe at the ground I trod on, to see what the Powers had made there, ... It was the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth, as it was made forever and ever ... It was Matter, vast, terrific ... There was clearly felt the presence of a force not bound to be kind to man. ... Talk of mysteries! Think of our life in nature, - daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it – rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the solid earth! the actual world! The **common sense!** **Contact!** **Contact!** **Who** are we? **Where** are we?*

From this passage, we can see how wilderness can fundamentally change a person, and lead them to re-evaluate not only their own life, but the meaning of existence itself. Similarly for John Muir, who started as a devout Christian, and over the years came effectively to espouse a 'wilderness theology – a profoundly insightful evolutionary pantheism' (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 173). In 1864, Muir was in a swamp near Lake Huron in Canada when he came across a cluster of rare white orchids (*Calypso borealis*), and wrote:

I never before saw a plant so full of life; so perfectly spiritual. It seemed pure enough for the throne of its Creator. I felt as if I were in the presence of superior beings who loved me and beckoned me to come. I sat down beside them and wept for joy. (in Fox 1981 p. 43)

Muir (1916, pp. 211-212) also wrote of intensely personal moments of transformation:

To lovers of the wild, these mountains are not a hundred miles away. Their spiritual power and the goodness of the sky make them near, as a circle of friends ... You cannot feel yourself out of doors; plain sky, and mountains ray beauty which you feel. You bathe in these spirit-beams, turning round and round, as if warming at a camp-fire. Presently you lose consciousness of your own separate existence: you blend with the landscape, and become part and parcel of nature.

However, there appears to be something of a gap in the literature from Muir and Thoreau to more recent times, in terms of people writing about transformation by the wild. One of the next great writers to speak of this is Lopez (1988, p. 5), writing how the ‘interior landscape’ of a person is shaped by the exterior landscape:

the shape and character of these relationships in a person’s thinking, I believe, are deeply influenced by where on this earth one goes, what one touches, the patterns one observes in nature – the intricate history of one’s life in the land ... the shape of the individual is affected by land as it is by genes.

Lopez (1986, p. 279) believes that: ‘for some people, what they are is not finished at the skin, but continues with the reach of the senses out into the land’. Wilderness transformation is something that is by its nature *intensely personal*. Harper (1995) argues: ‘wilderness is a way and a tradition in its own right. If we are willing to be still and open enough to listen, wilderness itself will teach us’. He also speaks of his own life after a breakup of a long term relationship when walking to Big Sur (California):

gradually I was overcome by the strangest sensation of webs of light extending out of me to every living thing and from them to me. I was sustained by all that surrounded me. The experience slowly dissipated as we climbed to the summit of the ridge, where I stood smiling, sweat in my eyes. And although I still had more grieving to do, the experience stands out as a clear turning point in my healing process, as well as in my life.

He goes on to write of the wisdom in wilderness that teaches us and allows transformation from within: ‘when we are truly willing to step into the looking glass of nature and contact wilderness, we uncover a wisdom much larger than our small everyday selves ... Wilderness is a leaderless teacher ... The only personal transformation that occurs arises from within ourselves’ (Harper 1995). Wilderness was thus transformative not only of himself, but also of many other people of all ages. Similarly, Thomashow (1996) carries out what he calls ‘ecological identity’ work with people, where they keep an ecological identity journal. He notes the importance of contemplation of the wild to carving a personal vision:

After 15 years of reading these journals, what I have found is that for many environmentalists, the direct experience of wild places has a transformational quality. Most of my students can distinguish an event, a time in their lives, or a critical series of incidents in which different strands of their lives seemed to converge, helping them carve a personal vision. Frequently, these events encompass the contemplation of the wild, or what they perceive as being “immersed in nature”.

Pondering his experience in Nepal with a lammergeier, Abram (1996, p. 24) wrote:

And then I felt myself stripped naked by an alien gaze infinitely more lucid and precise than my own. I do not know for how long I was transfixed, only that I felt the air streaming past naked knees and heard the wind whispering in my feathers long after the Visitor had departed.

It has been said that: ‘humans need to see their lives in a larger context, as embedded in, surrounded by, evolved out of a sphere of natural creativity that is bigger than we are. Humans who cannot do this never know who they are and where they are; they live under some other and inadequate mythology’ (Rolston 2001). Esbjornson (1999) has a slightly different view on *cultural transformation* and wilderness: ‘the repressed yearning for wildness that I believe resides in the hearts of most humans may ... enact the necessary comprehensive cultural transformation ... In wildness humans may recover their deepest humanity, and in wilderness the diversity of life may flourish’. Wilderness is thus seen as a catalyst that might transform not just the person but the whole culture. Similarly, rather than being anti-human, wilderness is rather a place where we *recover our deepest humanity*.

There is surprisingly little discussion in the literature of what *distinguishes* a ‘wilderness’ experience from a ‘non-wilderness’ experience in a natural area – what is special about wilderness? The importance of wilderness in terms of its *size* is raised by Harper (1995), in terms of the amount of time one spends walking through it. He points out that trips of several days or weeks enable people to ‘achieve a certain feeling of belonging’. In wilderness, there is the aspect of sheer size of the natural area, ridge upon ridge, creek upon creek, all these special places linked together, all of which have something special to impart, and which in collectivity add up to a greater experience of wild nature. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This is something that bushwalkers sometimes comment on (Jones 2004 pers. comm.) but is not something much documented in the literature to date.

5. Strands comprising the wilderness knot

In order to refer to the confusion and criticism around the word ‘wilderness’, I have coined the term the ‘wilderness knot’. One can discern *at least* five strands to the wilderness knot, being philosophical, political, cultural, justice, and exploitation.

Generally, people seem to discuss only the last strand – exploitation. However, much more is involved.

5.1 The philosophical strand

One of the key strands to the wilderness knot concerns how it has been considered by philosophical movements. It has been observed that:

If the hypothesis that the idea of wilderness is linked with the developing character of human existence is cogent, then contemporary wilderness philosophy represents more than an extolling of the recreational value of wild nature, retrograde romanticism, or mystical escape from an overpopulated industrialized anxiety-ridden polluted and violent world. (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 5)

However, as we shall see, ‘wilderness’ has not always been seen so charitably by philosophical movements. The four categories of wilderness in history have been suggested by Oelschlaeger (1991, p. 4) – Paleolithic, ancient, modern, and postmodern; who provides evidence showing just how far back extend the issues involved with the wilderness knot. There was a fundamental schism between the ‘Paleolithic’ and ‘ancient’ views of how humans viewed *wilderness*, and this only continued to worsen in Medieval times and into the ‘modern’ age. We cannot ever fully know the way primitive humans viewed the wild long ago. However, we *can* examine the archaeological evidence of their art and lifestyles, as well as current ‘Stone Age’ peoples still surviving until recent times. The term ‘posthistoric primitivism’ has been coined to describe the worldview of Paleolithic humanity. Rediscovering this attitude may be the way forward:

By clearing away the undergrowth that obscures our connection with the archaic we may discover vital relations between wildness and human beingness ... This does not mean that humankind can go back to the Paleolithic or to the old ways, for that is impossible. Rather, we might fashion an old-new way of being. (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 7)

The Paleolithic view of wilderness as ‘home’ (being part of the Great Mother) makes up most of our human history as a species. This Paleolithic view of wilderness continues to linger even today. The tangled history of the idea of wilderness begins with the ancient Sumerians and Egyptians. The Neolithic agricultural view of wilderness in the Mediterranean was one where they desired a humanized landscape where ‘Man’ dominated nature, but recognised that some forces were beyond human

control (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 32). The Bronze Age saw the rise of ‘logocentrism’ or Greek rationalism, which abandoned ‘mythopoetry’ for explicit theory. Later, the New Testament of Paul used the theoretical edifice of Platonism to ‘create the concept of humanity and nature that has ruled the west for nearly two thousand years’, where Judeochristianity and Hellenism in combination viewed nature as ‘valueless until humanized’ (ibid., p. 33). The medieval mind similarly did not see wilderness in a positive light. Rather, it saw nature as an abode over which humans were given dominion by a beneficent God. Humans were ensconced in this ‘vale of tears’, and had to toil in order to bring forth the fruits of the Earth. Medieval Christianity held that wild nature had to be tamed, and that wilderness was the ‘horrid desert of wild beasts’, which had to be civilized and brought into harmony with Divine Order (ibid., pp. 70-72).

Modernism

‘Modernism’ is central to how humans treat wilderness today. It is a historical movement that ‘begins with the Renaissance and extends to the present’ (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 68). Modernism continued the humanization of wild nature initiated by the early agriculturists, and operated through science, technology and liberal democracy. It consists of several processes that intertwine, being the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the democratic, industrial and scientific revolutions (ibid., p. 68). Modernism arguably underlies the emergence of a ‘profound homocentrism’ still dominant in the world, where nature is conceived of as ‘nothing more than matter-in-motion’ (ibid., p. 69).

The Renaissance brought forward the idea of the secular state, while the Reformation proclaimed the central place of the individual. Humans increasingly looked through ‘economic rather than religious spectacles’ so that the consumer society lay just around the corner (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 74). No aspects of modernism have had a greater effect on the idea of wilderness than *science* and *economics*. Galileo’s new science, Bacon’s new logic, Descartes’ mechanistic reductionism and Newton’s physics are central, and represent a paradigm shift so radical ‘that the very meaning of the word nature was changed’ from an organism to a mechanistic paradigm (ibid. pp. 76-77). Nature in effect became an object of scientific study, and the idea of

nature as animate and living was replaced with the idea of a cold and lifeless mechanical nature. Descartes proposed that mind (*res cogitans*) and matter (*res extensa*) are distinct, and that the natural world is a machine (Godfrey-Smith 1979, Abram 1992), while Newton gave a logical and ostensibly absolute understanding of the natural world, where natural change was reduced to an illusory status, being rather the mechanical repetition of predictable phenomena (Oelschlaeger 1991, pp. 85-89). This approach has also been described as the 'Linnean' or imperial approach, though Worster (1994) notes that within ecology there was also another stream of thought, being the 'Arcadian' or naturalist approach. It should not be forgotten that this other stream exists, as arguably it is responsible for the scientists who *do* speak out on behalf of nature (for example, Ehrlich 1986).

Economics is another key component of modernism. Adam Smith (1776) wrote 'The Wealth of Nations', and argued that 'progress' was a law of nature, and that consumption was fundamental to human well-being. Smith built 'that modern shrine to the Unattainable: infinite needs' (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 92). Unlimited growth was the ethical justification for capitalism. Smith thought 'human beingness' lay completely with culture, and nature played no part, so that 'the wilderness condition was something repugnant in which humans lived mean and savage lives' (ibid., p. 93). Consumption and never ending growth were deemed to be good. This reduction of the wild to mere resources, and the total rejection of intrinsic value, is a key aspect of the wilderness knot. Modernism has transformed the idea of wilderness, and thus completed 'the intellectual divorce of humankind from nature'. It draws 'a boundary between an objective or scientific and a poetic or aesthetic view of nature' (ibid., p. 95-98). There is no single alternative paradigm to modernism, though there have been a number of challenges.

Romanticism

The Romantic writers valued an immediate personal and affective relationship to nature. Romantics saw nature as *alive*, created by divine providence, and the idea of 'mere matter' was sterile to them (Oelschlaeger 1991 p. 99). The poetic view leaned towards nature's wild and mysterious aspects. *Romanticism* can be understood as an aesthetic reaction to mechanistic materialism. For romantics scientific nature was

devoid of taste, sight, sound and feeling, while poetic nature was alive, subjective, an aesthetic delight. Wilderness appealed to those bored or disgusted with the Industrial Revolution (ibid., p. 110). Romanticism had far-reaching implications for wilderness, as its sublime mystery and chaos were now coveted. There was an ‘enthusiasm for the strange, remote, solitary, and mysterious’ (Nash 2001, p. 47). However, romanticism was more than this:

*the Romantics were concerned with affective immediacy: they followed a direct intuitive path to a realisation of the unity of nature. ... As the work of Alfred North Whitehead illustrates, the influence of the Romantics on philosophical thought is consequential. In fact, there is reason to think that the Romantic poets went through a philosophical door that Kant opened in this Critique of Judgement. So viewed, the Romantic poets **are not tender-hearted nature lovers but address issues of fundamental philosophical import** – concerns central to the nineteenth-century idea of nature and humankind’s relation to it. (my emphasis) (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 113)*

This view is in sharp contrast to the extensive criticism of romanticism and wilderness by some postmodernist scholars (such as Cronon 1996).

Postmodernism

Modernism saw wilderness as a ‘resource’ for human use. There were a number of streams of criticism of modernism in the late 20th century, which have now collectively come to be known as ‘*postmodernism*’. I examine postmodernism in some detail, given its central importance to the philosophical strand. It is a *geography of ideas* that developed in opposition to modernism. It is not readily defined, and in fact appears resistant to being defined, as noted by Butler (2002) and Heartney (2001). It has been suggested that:

There is hardly a single field of intellectual endeavour which has not been touched by the spectre of ‘the postmodern’. ... the debate around the postmodern has never properly been engaged. The term itself hovers uncertainly in most current writing between – on the one hand – extremely complex and difficult philosophical senses, and – on the other – an extremely simplistic mediation as a nihilistic, cynical, tendency in contemporary culture. (Docherty 1992)

It has also been reported that postmodernism contains conflicting concepts: ‘the term “postmodernism” is deliberately kept flexible and enchanting - so rich with connotations that it dissolves on direct contact with reality’ (Silverman 1990, p. 56). It is important to realise that the term mainly came from art and literature, and that the modernism it is said to ‘come after’ is more the art movement, rather than the

philosophy described by Oelschlaeger (1991). It has been argued that ‘postmodernism abandons the entire epistemological basis for any such claims to truth. Instead of espousing clarity, certitude, wholeness and continuity, postmodernism commits itself to ambiguity, relativity, fragmentation, particularity and discontinuity’ (Crotty 1998). The lack of clarity in postmodernism is highlighted: ‘it is the thousands of echoes and adaptations, and unsurprising misunderstandings, of their obscure writings that have made up the often confused and pretentious collective psyche of the postmodernist constituency’ (Butler 2002). There are many streams to postmodernism, and poststructuralism can be seen as a subset of postmodernism (Crotty 1998). Some themes need to be listed as background to the wilderness knot:

- There is no absolute truth (Nietzsche 1871, Foucault 1979)
- There is no absolute meaning, and language is suspect (Nietzsche 1871, Derrida 1966, De Man 1973), and language constructs all human conceptions of reality (Bynagle 1997)
- There are no grand metanarratives (theories purporting to disclose overall meaning) (Lyotard 1984, 1992)
- There is no history or ‘human condition’ (Derrida 1966, Foucault 1979)
- There is no ‘progress’ (Lyotard 1984, 1992, Baudrillard 1983, 1993)
- The grand tradition of metaphysics and philosophy is at an end (Derrida 1966, Foucault 1979, Hoy 1985)
- When one writes, language takes over and the author is dead (Barthes 1977)
- ‘Reason’ as defined by Western society is itself suspect (Nietzsche 1871, Derrida 1966, Foucault 1979, Barry 1995, p. 65)
- It is impossible to prove the real from a ‘simulacra’ (Baudrillard 1983, 1993).
- Concern for the ‘other’ (Levinas 1989, Kristeva 1992).

Perhaps postmodernism makes greatest sense in terms of a broad reaction against ‘The Enlightenment’, and *against rationalism itself*. From the above streams - language, metanarratives, reality, reason, and the ‘other’ are quite relevant to the wilderness knot, and will be discussed further. The wilderness protection ethic has been described by Brown (1992) as a manifestation of what Birch (1990a) calls a ‘postmodern ecological worldview’. It seems to have been expected that postmodernism *would* embrace wilderness as part of a new paradigm to replace modernism, that it would apply the ‘other’ to the non-human world (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 320). Postmodernism was thus at one stage hopefully seen as a champion of wilderness, as a paradigm that would replace modernism, and acknowledge the rights of wild nature. Such a view seems also to be that of Abram (1996). However, these authors wrote *before* a series of postmodernist criticisms on wilderness. Gare (1995)

called for a 'new postmodernism', one which embraced a 'polyphonic' grand narrative to solve the environmental crisis.

A key source of postmodernist criticism of wilderness seems to lie in the importance given to language, and ourselves as beings who use language (Derrida 1966). Meaning, it is argued, is only mediated by socially constructed discursive practices (Munslow 1997). A second possible source appears to be a 'fixation' that dualisms really need one another, and always imply the other (Butler 2002). A third source is the intense scepticism (or even 'paranoia', Butler 2002) about the real, and the claim that we live not inside reality but inside our representations of it (Baudrillard 1983, 1993, Butler 2002, Heartney 2001, Massey 1994). A fourth possible source is an intense suspicion of romanticism and its influence on the conservation movement and the term 'wilderness' (Cronon 1996). A fifth source is the suspicion that wilderness itself may be a 'metanarrative' that needed to be broken down (implied by Cronon 1996). A sixth source may be the suggestion that wilderness ignores the history of occupation by native peoples, and that it is not only a western concept, but a colonialist one (Langton 1996, Adams and Mulligan 2002).

Due to their centrality in wilderness criticisms, some of these will be discussed in greater depth. In regard to *language*, there is suspicion of wilderness as a European term and concept, with inherent European perspectives. The first philosopher to seriously question language was Nietzsche (1871). Jacques Derrida later became one of the most influential writers on art criticism and literature, with whom the concept of 'deconstruction' is principally associated. Derrida (1966) argues that no meaning is certain in language, and that we are trapped by the concepts and terms within our language. He takes issue with the fundamental dualism of culture versus nature, and points out that the opposition of nature and culture is congenital to philosophy. Derrida (1976) is oft-quoted as saying 'there is nothing outside the text'.

Postmodernism has been defined as '*a credulity of metanarratives*' (Lyotard 1984), that it is becoming increasingly difficult to subscribe to the great metanarratives which once organised our lives. These are codes which in their abstraction deny the specificity of the local, and malign it in the interests of the global homogeneity

(Docherty 1992, p. 48). Examples of such metanarratives (or grand narratives) are listed as Marx's 'emancipation', Freud's 'psychoanalytic theory', and Darwin's 'evolution'. Such metanarratives are seen as becoming coercive and normative (Docherty 1992). Cronon (1996) seems to interpret 'wilderness' as a metanarrative (or at least a dominant discourse) which should be deconstructed, though he does not specifically state this.

Regarding questioning *reality*, Baudrillard (1983) argued: 'all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. ... the real is no longer real'. He concluded that it is now impossible to 'prove the real'. Clearly, he has in mind society's fascination with images such as TV and film. However, he referred to 'all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it' as not being real, including the national parks and wilderness. The thrust of his argument was undoubtedly aimed at culture, but his words have been taken to include wild nature as well. It has been said that 'it is now difficult to sustain a position of "naïve realism"'. In scholarly circles it is difficult to suggest that the world exists outside our construction of it' (Reason and Torbert 2001). In regard to the physical reality of the world, Massey (1994) defines 'space' in terms of the 'multiplicity of social relations', implying that human society is the key determinant in defining space (when writing about London suburbs).

Concerning the scepticism about *reason*, Derrida (1972) argues the white man mistakes his own mythology for the universal form of 'reason', and that 'reason' is racist and imperialist, as we use only one specific 'inflection of consciousness' (Western philosophy). The West is 'reasonable' because it says so, it is the definer of reason, hence the ideas of the West will inevitably be 'reasonable' (Docherty 1992). However, it has been pointed out that it is dangerous to abandon the ideal of communicative or indeed consensual rationality (Habermas 1987). Poststructuralism 'distrusts the very notion of reason, and the idea of the human being as an independent entity ... its torch of scepticism burns away the intellectual ground on which the Western civilisation is built' (Barry 1995). There is also a 'deep irrationalism at the heart of postmodernism – a kind of despair about the enlightenment-derived public functions of reason', and postmodernists tended to

believe that reason itself, particularly in its alliance with science and technology, is incipiently totalitarian (Butler 2002). Accordingly, it has been argued that ‘a paralysis of reason’ is one legacy of postmodernism (Wheen 2004). In regard to wilderness, it needs to be considered that if one takes a strong postmodernist stand about rationality, this might explain why some authors do not feel the need for rational explanations for their criticisms. We end up with many ‘statements’ about wilderness, without examples or reasoned argument to back them up.

In regard to acceptance of *the other*, this has always been a central concern with postmodernism (Levinas 1989, Kristeva 1992, Butler 2002), and seemingly arises out of a compassion for those ‘others’ ignored by modernism. This has been said to be essentially an argument for ‘multicultural pluralism’ (Butler 2002). This theme of ‘the other’ has on occasion been applied by some authors to the more-than-human world (Abram 1996), however for many postmodernists this concern with the ‘other’ seems to have been limited *solely* to particular oppressed human groups. Wilderness has occasionally been seen in a positive light in regard to the ‘other’, where ‘a theory of mutuality’ would recognise wilderness as the ‘domain of the uncolonised other’ (Plumwood 1993, p. 163). Other scholars take a more negative view, claiming wilderness in fact *denies* the other, is thoroughly ‘colonized’ and does not correspond to wilderness and the uncolonised other (Vance 1997). She does *not* show how or why wilderness is ‘thoroughly colonized’, nor why she defines it as ‘a place apart from humans’.

The need for us to extend ‘the other’ to wilderness has been argued:

we humans, dominant though we are, want to be part of something bigger ... This we do precisely by recognising the otherness of wilderness ... where we will not remain, which we will not trammel. (Rolston 2001)

Later, Rolston points out: ‘otherness is not, ipso facto, a bad thing. We do not want a humanized nature, shore to shore, ocean to ocean, pole to pole’. Similarly, Soule (2002) argues that ‘we need a broader compassion – an ethic that makes room for the “others”’. An argument has also been made for ‘holistic pluralism’, for a ‘humble appreciation for the otherness of nature’ (Gorke 2003), demonstrating that ‘the other’ even today has still not been applied to wild nature. There are thus radically different

views of ‘otherness’. Rolston (2001), Soule (2002), and Gorke (2003) are seeking to *extend* the postmodern view of the ‘other’ to the non-human world. Vance (1997) however is claiming that ‘wilderness’ does not represent the uncolonised other.

Concerns about postmodernism and the environment

Given its importance in the philosophical strand, consideration is given to the concerns raised about postmodernism, especially in regard to the environment. There have been a number of general concerns raised about postmodernism, such as Butler (1984), Ellis (1989), Tallis (1988), Washington (1989, no relation), Lehman (1991), Gare (1995), Nagel (1997), Heartney (2001), Kitcher (2001), Lines (2001), Willers (2001), Butler (2002) and Wheen (2004). There are also critics who point out the impact of postmodernist theory directly on wilderness, such as Soule and Lease (1995), Orr (1999), Locke (2000), Willers (2001), and Rolston (2001).

The postmodernist idea that language is a cultural creation, a device we use to give meaning to reality, has been questioned by Lopez (1986, pp. 277-278), who believes: ‘language is not something man imposes on the land. It evolves in his conversation with the land’. The negative side of deconstruction has also been noted:

the dangers of deconstruction are at least two. First there is a tendency to lose sight of the thing being interpreted ... Second, in that deconstruction constantly undermines understanding ... meaning comes to be seen as meaningless, and hope, beauty, and creative enterprise are replaced by hopelessness, mediocrity, and nihilism. (Seamon 2000)

In a review of ‘the not-so-great wilderness debate’ it was claimed that ‘postmodernism provides no realistic foundation for a workable or intellectually robust environmentalism’ (Orr 1999). The ‘postmodern foes’ of wilderness have been listed, suggesting their arguments power the exploitative attitude towards nature:

Chief among postmodern foes of wilderness are philosophers J. Baird Callicott and Alston Chase, and historian William Cronon. Together, these three have framed much of the argument that lends support to the industrial, expansionist and utilitarian attitude toward nature. (Willers 2001)

Interestingly, postmodernists such as Callicott (1991) and Cronon (1996), while critical of ‘wilderness’, both hoped their remarks (in Callicott’s words) ‘will not be

construed to deny or undermine the importance and necessity of wild lands'. However, their criticisms have been seen as being at best 'naïve'. Gare (1995) has produced a detailed analysis of the relationships between postmodernism and environmentalism. He notes that poststructuralists have contributed to the insights of Nietzsche and Heidegger by revealing 'the drive to domination in Western thought' (ibid., p. 90). He also argues that poststructuralism has been useful in explaining the Western consumption ethic. However, he is also highly critical of aspects of postmodernism, stating that while it has shown many problems with modernism, it has been *powerless* to oppose them. He describes postmodernism as consumerist, stopping opposition to mainstream modernist culture, and having a tendency to 'nihilistical decadence'. Soule (1995) has similarly described postmodernism as 'nihilistic monism'. There are a number of other concerns about postmodernism, grouped here into five themes. Concerns about the postmodernist attitude to 'language', to 'reason' and 'the other' have already been discussed.

Opposition to grand narratives

Postmodernism has been defined as 'credulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard 1984). However, it has been argued that poststructuralism *does* have a grand narrative of its own, and this is that 'language is not the mirror of reality' (Butler 2002). The lack of any grand narrative in postmodernist society makes environmental opposition to modernism so ineffective as to be useless (Gare 1995). Postmodernists, through their opposition to grand narratives, are unable to comprehend a global environmental crisis, as 'they are bound by assumptions which make the idea of global environmental crisis incomprehensible' (ibid., p.99). Postmodernism opposes any environmental 'grand narratives', and their loss are 'threats to the efforts of environmentalists' (ibid., pp. 1-2). Postmodernism has been characterised as a 'fraudulent radicalism' whose attack on wilderness is 'actively contributing to ongoing exploitation' (Hay 2002, p. 337).

A grand narrative (which enables all other discourses to be understood) *is* an imperative, and a new grand narrative for our society is needed (Gare 1995, p. 113). It is necessary to reorient our thinking, not only from the mechanistic view of those

who at present dominate society, but also from the ‘woolly-minded relativism and consumerism of postmodern culture’ (Gare p. 163). It has been argued that there is a planetary interest in maintaining the integrity of biological systems which transcends the vagaries of cultural perception, and that this is a ‘grand narrative’, a totalising claim that we need (and one that postmodernism denies) (Sessions 1996). This new environmental grand narrative could also be what Berry (1999) calls ‘The Great Work’.

A failure to take action, and increasing alienation and ‘rootlessness’

It has been noted that: ‘the associated severance of culture from the quest for an orientation for action ... accounts for the characteristic depthlessness of the postmodern sensibility’ (Gare 1995, p. 33). The postmodernist response to this is to ‘make a virtue of and celebrate disorientation, the absence of any fixed reference points. ... the derealisation of experience are savoured rather than struggled against’ (ibid., p. 34). It has been further argued that ‘radical social movements, infiltrated or dominated by postmodern thinking ... have done almost nothing to advance their causes’ (ibid., p. 35), and that they ‘merely dissolve the opposition to mainstream culture’ and leave no alternative to modernism (ibid., p. 108). When proposing their ‘participatory’ paradigm, Reason and Bradbury (2001) similarly note the problems of a postmodernism that alienates people from the nonhuman world:

While postmodern/poststructuralist perspectives help us immensely in seeing through the myth of the modernist world, they do not help us move beyond the problems it has produced. ... we are even more alienated if all we can do is circle round various forms of relativist construction: any sense of a world in which we are grounded disappears. ... Our concern is that the deconstructive postmodern sentiment will exacerbate rather than heal, the modern experience of rootlessness and meaninglessness. ... We need to find a way of acknowledging the lessons of the linguistic turn while not ignoring the deeper structures of reality.

Fixation on dualisms

Another concern with postmodernism has been the apparent fixation on the problem of dualisms (or dichotomies or binaries). It has been said that postmodernism ‘welcomes the disappearance of the dichotomy between the natural and the artificial and indeed between all dichotomies’ (Borgmann 1995). It is also argued that

Derrideans have a 'Freudian obsession' that apparent opposites really need one another and always imply the other (Butler 2002). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse whether all dualisms *are* inherently bad, but it is important to realise how the claim that 'wilderness is a dualism' is impacting on the dedication and management of large, natural areas. Fashionable strategies such as that of Haraway (1997), which focus on blurring the boundaries between nature and culture, have problems. A mine in a natural area may help 'break down the boundaries', but is not a cause for celebration (Plumwood 2001).

Problems with reality

The apparent postmodernist loss of contact with the 'real' concerns many authors. It has been pointed out that 'the landscape is not inert, and it is precisely because it is alive that it eventually contradicts the imposition of a reality that does not derive from it' (Lopez 1986, pp. 277-278). Deconstructionists use 'nihilistic monism' to deny nature's reality, and claim that wilderness is illusory (Soule 1995). It has also been argued that postmodernism involves a 'loss of contact with any reality beyond language and texts' (Gare 1995). The problem with questioning reality is that 'people have been deprived of the fixed reference points by which they previously oriented themselves ... They have been "de-natured"' (ibid., p.27).

It has been contended that postmodernism's foundational concept is '*cultural relativism*', the notion that there is 'no standpoint beyond human cultures', that reality is nothing more than separate perceptions through prisms of different cultural lenses (Sessions 1996), or that 'beliefs and values are merely relative and have no validity other than their own invention' (Spretnak 1997 in Willers 2001). Thus nature is reduced to being a social construct, with no overriding claim to our care or reverence. Others note that 'the ontological existence of nature-in-itself is an indisputable fact' (Barry 1994, p. 391), and point out that there is a real physical world which exists, whether or not humans are aware of it. We perceive this, and that perception is shaped by our senses and culture. We thus 'construct' our own *perception* of the world and nature, but 'that construction does not of itself alter the physical world. It only alters what each of us thinks it is'. It has been noted that:

if we turn our regard for nature more and more into clever philosophical word games, if we begin to think that we are intellectually creating nature rather than physically participating in it, we are in danger of losing sight of the real wolves being shot by real bullets from real aeroplanes, or real trees being clearcut, of real streams being polluted by real factories. (Bryant 1995)

A criticism of the scepticism of the real is implied by Abram (1996), when he calls for ‘intersubjectivity’, where the real world is seen as an ‘intertwining matrix of sensations and perceptions ... lived through from many different angles’. He argues ‘it is this informing of my perceptions by the evident perceptions and sensations of other bodily entities that establishes for me the relative solidity and stability of the world’. Even postmodernists Callicott and Mumford (1997) note that while we model the world different ways: ‘the real world is one’. It has been said that for postmodernism: ‘reality is repudiated as an outmoded convention’ (Heartney 2001) and that a ‘real-world’ tangible realm of nature is denied by postmodern deconstructionism (Hay 2002). Some feel that ‘according to postmodernist logic, our descriptions of reality are our own creations and therefore fail to represent reality correctly’ (Willers 2001). Others wonder whether the intertextuality of postmodernism might ‘even be a moral and political failure to engage with the real in society’ (Butler 2002). Of course, failing to engage with the real in *society* does not necessarily imply that they fail to engage the real in wild nature. It does suggest, however, that the scepticism with the real might also spill over to wild nature. The nature-writer tends to attribute to the land ‘an authority and identity that is quite independent, finally, of any perception of it’ (Tredinnick 2003, p. 431).

It has been said that postmodernist constructivists see *all* ways of framing and interpreting the world as human constructions framed by language, whereas we should acknowledge that ‘meeting with the elemental properties of the living world ... *cannot* be confused with our symbolic constructs’ (Reason and Torbert 2001). It has been stated that a sceptical despair about the reality of politics and society has led to a ‘peculiarly paranoid strain in Postmodernist theory and art’ (Butler 2002, p. 112).

It may well be possible that our descriptions of reality *do* fail to represent reality totally, but this is not the same as stating that there is no reality except that which we

create in our own minds through language. There is a fundamental problem in refusing to accept the reality and truth of the wild natural world, as everything just becomes a function of language and cultural relativism (Willers 2001). Similarly, if wilderness is just a function of language in one's mind, then surely this leads to relativistic anthropocentrism (Soule 1995)? There is also the question here of whether many scholars who write about it, *actually physically visit* the reality of wilderness: 'I didn't think you could write about the wilderness idea, unless you'd spent quite a bit of time out there?' (Nash 2004).

Inability to understand science

It has been maintained that: 'Callicott simply fails to appreciate the difference between natural selection and artificial selection, ... But then, biological science, which treats wilderness as an "essential" is the enemy of postmodernism, which views wilderness as a human invention' (Willers 2001). This is a comment supported regarding science in general by Butler (2002, p. 39), who quotes physicists Sokal and Bricmont (1998) as arguing that postmodernists create mystification, deliberately obscure language, confuse thinking, and misuse scientific concepts. According to Butler, postmodernists often simply don't understand science and are ill-informed. He believes this may be why most postmodern theorists 'don't seem to be very interested in constructive dialogue with anyone but each other' (ibid., p. 40). Postmodernism's ignorance of science is also raised by Wheen (2004), who cites Irigaray (1987) as denouncing $E=mc^2$ as a 'sexed equation' since it 'privileges the speed of light over other (less masculine) speeds that are vitally necessary to us'.

Humans as part of nature

There are many meanings to 'nature'. The word 'nature' has some 66 meanings, so that to some it: 'connotes what is natural, to others what is real, to others what is right, to others the material world, and so on – the confusions are endless' (Lowenthal 1964). Marx and Engels (1965) claimed that 'first nature' (the nature that preceded human history) no longer exists. This 'death of nature' theme has been taken up more recently by McKibben (1989) and Giddens (1994). It has been suggested that 'nature' is now old hat, that we have moved past the time when the

concept is useful (Haraway 1997). However, it has also been argued ‘if those who tell us that “there is no nature” are denying its reality ... then they are committed to a form of idealism which is clearly incompatible with ecological argument – and incoherent in itself’ (Soper 1996). A society pressing its ecological limits ‘requires some concept of nature, whatever the language they may use to express it’ (Plumwood 2001).

Much of the problem in the ‘humans are part of nature’ debate is due to the fallacious concept of independence as complete separation, for example, we can influence people without ceasing to be independent (Plumwood 2003). Similarly we can be part of nature but still see it as independent. Plumwood refers to what she calls ‘*nature scepticism*’, which is the view that there is no such thing as ‘nature’, as it is really under human control. There is also reference to a hyper-separated concept of nature, where ‘nature’ requires human absence, and leads to terms such as ‘true nature’ or ‘nature proper’ or ‘pristine nature’ or ‘virgin wilderness’ (Plumwood 2003). Wilderness has sometimes been seen as being important to help humans realise they are ‘part of nature’ and belong. However, wilderness is also seen by others as in opposition to humans being *part of nature*. It seems impossible therefore to discuss wilderness without sampling this debate.

There are at least two approaches to the ‘humans as part of nature’ debate, though they are related:

1) The key argument revolves around the idea of what it means to be *part of nature*. It is often argued on the one hand that wilderness makes people realise they are part of nature, while on the other hand it is argued by others that the concept of wilderness somehow *separates* humans from nature, by excluding humans. In ‘Walking’, Thoreau (1862) argues that he would have ‘every man so much like a wild antelope, so much a part and parcel of Nature ... Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest’. Muir’s conclusion is that wilderness *broke down* the human/ nature split, so people could feel ‘part of wild nature, kin to everything’ (quoted in Hendee et al. 1978). The Earth has been elegantly described as a living organism, of which humans are a part: ‘not the owner, nor the tenant, not even a

passenger' (Lovelock 1988). Humans have been asked 'do we dare think that we are nature watching nature?'; is humanity is ready to realise it is a self-aware part of nature, watching itself (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 350).

However, others argue that there *is* a dilemma deciding if man is a member of nature or its conqueror: 'if man is an exploiter and conqueror of the land community, then he is not a plain member and citizen of it' (Fritzell 1987). There is no explanation of why humans cannot be a part of nature *and* also recognise that we are a self-aware part of nature with a powerful technology we need to exercise ethical restraint over. It has been argued that nature and culture are inseparable: 'any definition of nature that excludes people and their works has always been indefensible, as has any definition of humanity that excludes nature. Wherever we stand, in the Gila Wilderness or in Times Square, we stand at the intersection of nature and culture' (Dobb 1992). Similarly, it has been argued: 'we are therefore a part of nature, not set apart from it. Chicago is no less a phenomenon of nature than is the Great Barrier Reef' (Callicott 1992). Neither author explains why wilderness sets humans apart. Rather this seems to be taken as a given truth. Bragg et al. (2006) similarly insist that culture and nature are inseparable, though they do not discuss what this means.

It has been held that 'environmental discourses are written as if "nature" in its ideal form (as in wilderness) is separate from human existence' (Davies 2000), whereas what we think of as nature is 'saturated by desire'. This is desire for a particular kind of embodiment or a particular kind of landscape, and is 'illusory and elusive and reflects our longing as much as what is actually there'. Some environmentalists 'imagine an ideal "nature" untouched by humans' (ibid.). It has similarly been said that 'Wilderness is a value-laden notion well established in some cultures and irrelevant in those in which people believe in the spiritual unity of humans and nature' (Sloan 2002). Callicott (2003) argues:

At the philosophical level, the wilderness idea perpetuates the pre-Darwinian myth that man exists apart from nature. ... Measured by the wilderness standard, all human impact is bad, not because human beings are inherently bad, but because human beings are not a part of nature – or so the wilderness idea assumes.

He goes on to argue that if we are natural then what we do is natural: 'if we are a part of nature, then we have a rightful place and role in nature no less than any other

creature'. He admits however that most of what humans do in and to nature *is* very destructive, but argues that elephants too can be destructive. However, Callicott (1991) points out that while human changes to the Earth may be *natural*, they are 'unprecedentedly rapid' and thus not normal. Callicott (2000) adds that 'all that is natural is not necessarily good'. In none of this is it explained why wilderness either *excludes* humans, or *why* the wilderness concept assumes humans are 'not part of nature' (given that many conservationists and nature writers such as Thoreau and Muir argue the exact opposite).

In response to the arguments of Callicott (and others) above, it has been pointed out:

The reality is that as the twenty first century begins, civilised humans are no longer thinking or acting like a part of nature. Or, if we are, it is a cancerous one, growing so rapidly that it endangers the larger whole. (Nash 2001)

Similarly, Willers (2001) says:

Callicott's most fundamental argument (that because people are part of nature, anything they do is "natural") is faulty simply because it is beside the point. ... the more fundamental question would revolve around how to function within our uniqueness.

The problem of cultural evolution has been raised: 'the problem of our estrangement from nature may lie in the increasing dominance of cultural over biological evolution ... This cultural-biological schism also requires that we take measures to protect wild areas' (Noss 2003b). It has also been contended that 'Western civilisation is faced with a basic rift between the way 'nature' and the way 'culture' are conceived' (Gare 1995, p. 107). A melding of nature and culture has been suggested, one that accepts the importance of both:

Philosophers ... are calling for a postmodern science based on a process view of the world ... What they are arguing for is a conception of nature which allows humans to be conceived of as essentially cultural beings, while still seeing them, or us, as part of and within nature. (Gare 1995, p. 109)

In support of this, it has been maintained that there is a useful contrast between nature and culture. By recognising the 'other' of wildness, we bring culture and nature together: 'wildness is a place where humanity is absent, not completely, but nearly enough to allow independence. Humans need to see their lives in a larger context, as embedded in, surrounded by, evolved out of a sphere of natural creativity

that is bigger than we are'(Rolston 2001). This idea of bringing nature and culture together, but acknowledging their differences, is reflected also in the arguments of Plumwood (1993, 2002b), who states that 'humans are part of nature ... but they, like all species, also have their own distinctive species identity and relationship to nature' (Plumwood 2001).

The debate around humans being 'part of nature' will continue. For conservationists and wilderness psychologists such as Harper (1995), the transformational power of wilderness lies in the fact that it allows humans to realise they *are* part of nature. This home-coming and sense of belonging can change peoples lives. Others are arguing that by drawing a boundary and naming a natural area as 'wilderness', we are somehow distancing ourselves from nature. For those who seek to make use of the resources in wilderness for human exploitation, the latter argument has its attractions.

2) There is also the debate about a 'continuum' or spectrum, which contrasts wilderness at one end and 'humanity as part of nature' at the other end. This is primarily put forward by Callicott et al. (1999), who describe a conservation continuum where one end is 'native species populations ... in naturally structured biotic communities' (equivalent to wilderness), while the other end of the continuum is where humanity is part of nature (and is grounded in sustainability, ecosystem management, adaptive management and rehabilitation). Some scholars appear to accept Callicott's argument: 'the wilderness idea is but one point on a conservation continuum ranging from strict preservation to humans as part of nature' (Sloan 2002). The idea of a continuum where wilderness is set as one end and 'humans in nature' and sustainable use is set as the other end is in contrast to the idea of a 'natural lands continuum' where wilderness is the least disturbed area and the city is the most disturbed (Washington 1983, 1991, Borgmann 1995, Plumwood 1998). Callicott's continuum implies that somehow wilderness is *not* grounded in sustainability, ecosystem management or rehabilitation, whereas the natural lands continuum concept assumes that wilderness *is* integral to all three, and is the wildest end of a whole spectrum of conservation land uses from wilderness to the city itself (Hendee et al. 1978).

The overall debate is clearly somewhat confused as to what it *means* for humans to be 'part of nature'. One aspect is that if humans are natural, then all our actions are natural (with sometimes the suggestion that this means they are ethical). Others point out that we are self-aware, have a powerful technology, and have an ethical responsibility to exercise restraint. Rolston (2001) points out that we are cultural animals, but that we never leave the womb of nature. There is an unresolved debate here on the environmental ethics of what it means to be self-aware.

Anthropocentrism

The question of anthropocentrism (or homocentrism) is central to the wilderness knot. It has dominated modern societies since the sixteenth century (Smith 1998). How can we understand wilderness if we are totally absorbed in our own species? There is a clear tendency for philosophers to focus on the human mind. Descartes after all observed 'I think therefore I am', situating his ground of being within the mind, rather than seeing the self as being part of a larger natural world (Taylor 1986, p. 143). It has been claimed that by being human 'we can only be anthropocentric: we seek our own good, not what we suppose is nature's' (Lowenthal 1964). However, Taylor (1986, p. 67) points out that humans *can* take an animal's standpoint 'without a trace of anthropocentrism', and make judgements of what is desirable from that standpoint. The term 'anthropocentric fallacy' has been coined, which maintains that just because we can only perceive nature by human senses does *not* mean we cannot attribute intrinsic value to it (Fox 1990, Eckersley 1992). Males and whites are quite capable of cultivating a non-sexist or non-racist consciousness, just as humans are quite capable of cultivating a non-anthropocentric consciousness (Fox 1990, p. 21). To understand the environment will always involve human imagination, but Smith (1998) asks does this mean that 'humans should always be the measure of all things?'.

In terms of the general debate around anthropocentrism, it has been argued that most forms of human knowledge are inherently anthropocentric, and incapable of acknowledging ecosystem importance (Naess 1973). The very posing of a question 'what is the use of wilderness' reflects an anthropocentric system of values (Godfrey-Smith 1979). From a genuinely ecocentric point of view, this question

would be as absurd as the question ‘what is the use of happiness’. Western culture is ingrained with a ‘doctrine of inherent human superiority’ over other species, and this has become ‘an unfounded dogma of our culture’ (Taylor 1986, pp. 134, 153). Taylor argues for a ‘biocentric outlook’, but notes that this *cannot be proven*, since world-views are not deductive systems or theories (ibid., p. 167). If one takes this biocentric outlook, then it can readily be justified, but first one must take that view. It has been noted that if we conceive of nature as a machine, then the human mind retains a god-like position outside of the world. If mechanism rose to prominence in the 17th century due to its compatibility with a divine creator: ‘it remains in prominence today largely due to the deification of human powers that it promotes’ (Abram 1992).

Paleolithic humans viewed wild nature as the ‘Magna Mater’ (Great Mother), of which they were a part (Oelschlaeger 1991). Modernism however took a strong anthropocentric view of the world, as a resource for human use. Nature had no sentience, or spiritual value of its own in modernist eyes. Nietzsche (1871) reacted against this modernist anthropocentrism, stating that man’s procedure is ‘to apply man as the measure of all things’. However, while Nietzsche might be called the ‘father’ of postmodernism, one can legitimately ask whether many of the postmodernist streams of thought have been any less anthropocentric? Some postmodernist attacks on wilderness appear to share an anthropocentric view, similar to that which a number of authors (Taylor 1986, Oelschlaeger 1991, Marshall 1996, Reason and Bradbury 2001, Abram, 1996) ascribe to Descartes. For some postmodernists, wild nature as an independent entity appears to be reduced to just a discourse operating within human minds (Baudrillard 1983, 1993). This is very similar to the ‘disembodied minds’ of Descartes, arguably the father of mainstream *modern* philosophy.

Similarly, the postmodernist definition of ‘the other’ seems all too often to be limited to particular groups within the human species, rather than being applied to the rest of the ‘more-than-human’ world described by Abram (1996). Many of the criticisms of wilderness covered later seem to spring from an anthropocentric world view. The ‘instinctive ecological compassion’ to defend the existence rights of wilderness (in

precedence over human-use rights) has challenged possibly the most fundamental tenet of western civilisation - 'the belief that moral standing is strictly a human quality', and that humans can behave as they wish towards the non-human world (Hay 2002). Hay goes on to note that there is currently something of a backlash against ecocentrism in favour of anthropocentrism, with greater emphasis on social justice and emergent democracy. Humanism has been linked to anthropocentrism, arguing it affirms the human side of the nature/ culture pair, and that humanism must come to terms with the denied nonhuman side (Plumwood 2001). Humanism has arguably helped us to lose touch with ourselves as beings who are also natural and embedded in the Earth. Hence anthropocentric culture often portrays nature as passive or dead, lacking agency and meaning (ibid.).

Summary of the philosophical strand

It can be seen that there is no lack of richness (along with confusion) philosophically associated with the word 'wilderness'. On the one hand 'wilderness' is a place modernists want to exploit, as they see no intrinsic value to it, and often dismiss its instrumental values. On the other hand, wilderness is a concept that some streams of postmodernism have great trouble with also. Certainly, the issue of 'wilderness' and postmodernism brings forth many deep philosophical questions about *how* humans relate to nature, and is rich material for discussion. Part of the problem lies in perceptions of the physical reality of the land, and a suspicion of whether the land has an independent reality. Part of the problem lies in the postmodernist opposition to grand narratives (and the suspicion that 'wilderness' may be one). A significant part of the problem lies in the claim that wilderness is a 'dualism', rather than the end of a spectrum. Another part seems to be the failure to extend the 'other' outside of the human species. However, I do not mean to suggest that *all* streams of postmodernism and poststructuralism are hostile to 'wilderness', nor that all postmodernist scholars *must* be hostile. In fact Lincoln (2006) is a poststructuralist expert on qualitative research, who has made it clear that there *is* a material reality to wilderness that has intrinsic value, and which must be protected. Clearly, postmodernism as a theory is just as much a part of the problematique concerning the wilderness knot as is modernism. Apart from an oft-criticised romanticism, 'wilderness' thus remains something of a philosophical orphan.

5.2 The political strand

There are many issues of political ideology and practice with regard to the wilderness knot. It has been pointed out that:

Extremists at both ends of the wilderness debate promulgate myths to further their political goals. Both the far right and far left hate wilderness on the grounds that it excludes human economic uses. I would argue that economics is not the only value worthy of our human devotion (Soule 2002).

Capitalism is based on modernism and a resourcist view of nature. Adam Smith (the ‘father’ of economics) transformed the ‘first world’ from which humans came to a ‘standing reserve of resources - a nature of significance only within a human matrix of judgment, devoid of intrinsic value’ (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 93). In regard to Marxism, Marx saw wilderness as ‘first nature’, which was transformed by human labour into ‘second nature’ (Eckersley 1992, Hay 2002). Marxism, like capitalism, is thus fundamentally resourcist. It has been argued that:

The trouble with Marxism lies in Marx’s fanatical humanism. Marx was the nineteenth century’s most vociferous ... opponent of Malthus. Why? Because Malthus dared imply that humans were embedded in nature ... For Marx, labour created man and through labour humans created their own humanity and the world. ... Yet, the Marxist point of view has been enormously influential, determining the worldviews of people who haven’t even heard of Marx. (Lines 2004, pers. comm.)

It has been claimed this Marxist influence may explain why there is such a divide between biologists (trained in ecology and evolution, and thus less vulnerable to human chauvinism) and intellectuals from the humanities, with their heavy emphasis on human ‘creating’ (ibid.). Gare (1995, p. 107) argues similarly, but also points out that there is a ‘strong environmentalist stream within the tradition of Marxism’, particularly that led by Bogdanov (ibid., p. 80). He notes however that: ‘Marx himself seems to have conceived the future in terms of a mode of production which will be even more successful at dominating nature, giving rise to considerable debate among Marxists about whether and how Marx’s ideas should be revised’ (ibid., p. 86).

The philosophical strand demonstrates the richness involved in postmodernism. A number of authors have pointed out that postmodernism also has strong historical links to Marxism, and that it arose after the failed Paris Revolution of 1968 (Merquior 1986, Butler 2002, Wheen 2004). Specifically, it is argued that most of the French postmodernists were pessimists, haunted by lost Marxist revolutionary hopes, and that the beliefs and art they inspire are often negative rather than constructive (Butler 2002). The Marxist influence on some streams of postmodernism may thus tend to influence it towards a resourcist view of nature.

Due largely to the dominant resourcist ideologies of capitalism and Marxism, there is political discomfort about 'wilderness' apparent in the stances of the major Australian political parties, none of which take a strong stance on wilderness. For example, after the 1986 Federal election, where Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke came to power on votes due partly to the Franklin River campaign, the Labor 'machine' tried hard to discount the importance of this issue (Lambert, 1986 pers. comm.). It has been argued that Labor is often no better than the Liberals and Nationals in regard to conservation of the environment:

Labor is just as zealous about conquering nature as Liberal or National ... Unsurprisingly, Labor premiers often come out of the same highly educated doctrinaire left ... that now supports the Greens ... And Labor, particularly the Labor Left, provides a poor and frequently antagonistic base for conservation. (Lines 2003)

It can thus be argued that no major political party is a strong supporter of *wilderness*, due to the political history and ideology of the Left, as well as the 'progress' mentality and exploitation drives of the Right. Certainly, many conservationists have come to realise that *both* the Left and the Right adopt a resourcist view of wild nature, though the Left seeks greater equity in the distribution of wealth (Marr 2004 pers. comm.). It has also been suggested that the Australian Greens Party is also paradoxically not strong on some conservation issues:

Much party thinking runs in terms of class, gender, race, ethnicity and rights. These superstitions make it virtually impossible to talk intelligently about life on this continent. Understanding requires thinking in terms of flows, cycles, connections, exchanges and populations. Typically, people on the left are intellectually ill equipped to offer intelligent analysis of the human assault on the planet. (Lines 2003)

He goes on to argue that the Greens are primarily a *social justice party* (and not a conservation party), who fail to address key environmental problems such as population. It is interesting in this light to note that the Australian Greens key policy statement ‘Care for the Earth’ does not mention wilderness. The outcome of the political ideologies of the Left and the Right (and also arguably of postmodern influence within the Greens) is that ‘wilderness’ has also become something of an orphan politically.

Perhaps the most promising approach to wilderness politics comes from ecocentric political theory (Eckersley 1992). The emphasis on ecosystems leads to ‘empathy’, and a greater sense of compassion for other life forms. The magnitude of the environmental crisis is seen by ecocentrists as evidence of an inflated sense of human self-importance. Ecocentrists advocate the setting aside of wilderness, regardless of whether such areas are useful to humanity, in contrast to anthropocentrists, who only support creating wilderness if it has value to *humans* (ibid.). It is arguable that the campaigns for wilderness have generated the most radical philosophical challenges to assumptions about our place in the scheme of things, and have forced theorists to question the moral standing of the nonhuman world (Eckersley 1992, Hay 2002). A new way of thinking - ‘ecologism’ – is needed, one based on a set of assumptions which displace humans from the central position they have occupied in social and political evaluation (Smith 1998). The rise of ecologism might bring wilderness in out of the cold politically.

5.3 The cultural strand

There are major cultural differences in how wilderness is viewed. For example, there is no word for wilderness in Spanish (Rolston 2001), nor a strong tradition in Spanish-speaking countries of thinking about (or protecting) such places. Wilderness is a word of Anglo-Saxon/ Celtic origin (Hall 1988, Robertson et al. 1992) and has no strict equivalent in other languages. Even in Europe, there are many countries where the wilderness concept is poorly understood. In Aboriginal cultures, there was no specific word for wilderness, however there were *sanctuaries* where there was no hunting or gathering, and there was ‘quiet country’ (Rose 1996). It has been

suggested that these represent a bridge across to the idea of wilderness (Player 2005 pers. comm.), though this link is rarely acknowledged.

‘Cultural relativism’ is a strong belief of many postmodernists, that everything is relative, and linked to the culture from which we come. Wilderness is often lumped in with other ‘Western’ concepts as being an idea only of European civilisation. Leopold (1949, pp. 262-279) however argues that wilderness has cultural value:

Ability to see the cultural value of wilderness boils down in the last analysis to a question of intellectual humility. The shallow-minded modern who has lost his rootage in the land assumes that he has already discovered what is important ... It is only the scholar who understands why the raw wilderness gives definition and meaning to the human enterprise.

Wilderness, as a concept where humans visit but do not remain permanently, has at times come into conflict with the Aboriginal idea of custodianship, where one needs to *live in country* to look after it. It has been argued that:

Aboriginal people see caring for country as an integral part of living on their land. Caring for country forms part of the relationship individuals have with each other and with the land. From this perspective the most important issues are land ownership and access to land, so that Aboriginal people can care for their country. (Rose 1995).

It has also been argued that the European idea of ‘untouched wilderness’ is country that Aboriginal people consider as ‘properly cared for’ (Rose 1988) and that ‘Aboriginal people think of “wild country” as country that has not been cared for’ (Rose 1996). She illustrated this point with a story of visiting a site eroded by excessive grazing in the company of a local Aboriginal man: ‘he looked at it long and heavily before he said “it’s the wild. Just wild”’. By contrast, he described ‘quiet country’ as ‘country in which all the care of generations of people is evident to those who know how to see it’.

Others also comment on the cultural nature of wilderness: ‘wilderness is a value-laden notion well established in some cultures and irrelevant in those in which people believe in the spiritual unity of humans and nature’ (Sloan 2002). She does not explain *why* wilderness is not part of a belief in the spiritual unity of humans and nature, given that Thoreau and Muir (and other authors) have argued the opposite.

Regarding European ethnocentricity it has been said ‘at the historical level, we are beginning to realise that wilderness is an ethnocentric concept. Europeans came to what they called the “New World” ... they thought it was a pristine wilderness’ (Callicott 2003).

Part of the problem is a myth that ‘misdiagnoses the cause of human callousness, blaming it on culture’, when the real problem is human greed, which is more fundamental than culture (Soule 1995, p. 148). Another difficulty in this debate is *distinguishing* between the fact that the term ‘wilderness’ undoubtedly *derives* from a European culture; and the reality of large natural areas (and how they should be managed or protected). For example, Rolston (2001) notes: ‘such critics have so focused on wild as a word taken up and glamorised in the term wilderness, that they can no longer see that wild and wilderness do have reference outside our culture’. He points out that indigenous cultures did not have words either for DNA, photosynthesis, or plate tectonics. None of these terms were present in prescientific vocabularies: ‘nevertheless, these constructs of the mind enable us to detect what is not in the human mind’. Not all cultures will value wilderness, and probably those cultures where the poor are struggling to survive will value it least, unless it is seen as having strong spiritual value. Large, natural areas exist on all continents of the world, irrespective of the culture which lives there. Their existence is thus not culturally relative or a cultural creation, but their perception (and the value ascribed to them) *is*.

5.4 The social justice/ environmental justice strand

There are also issues of environmental and social justice involved in the wilderness knot. In fact there is a tension between the two concepts, though this is not often spelled out. Environmental justice here is defined as justice for the nonhuman world, just as social justice is justice for the human world. It has been pointed out that due to the power of the social justice movement, today’s management policies for wildlands are guided more by postmodern humanism than conservation biology (Soule 1995). Langton (1996, 1998) argues that for social justice reasons we should

allow development of wilderness to create an economic base for dispossessed native peoples. Cronon (1996) states:

The preservation of wilderness ... would seem to exclude from the radical environmentalist agenda ... problems of toxic waste exposure ... problems of famine and poverty and human suffering in the "overpopulated" places of the earth – problems in short of environmental justice. If we set too high a stock on wilderness, too many other corners of the earth become less than natural and too many other people become less than human, thereby giving us permission not to care much about their suffering or fate.

However, he uses the term ‘environmental justice’ here for what is really ‘social justice on environmental issues’, as his examples are about problems of *human* suffering due to environmental degradation, not destruction of the intrinsic value of the nonhuman world. He does not explain why you can not be a wilderness advocate and also be concerned about social justice. It has been reported that between 1994 and 1997, society’s attitudes changed so that ‘there is stronger support for humanity’s right to rule over nature and have priority over plants and animals. Faith in nature’s ability to cope and in human ingenuity to control nature and ensure a livable earth has also been accentuated’ (EPA 1997).

Social justice for dispossessed Aboriginal people in regard to national parks and wilderness has been argued:

The consequence of this simple fact is that the notion of ‘wilderness’ and the institution of the National Park must be radically redefined in response to indigenous demands for ownership and control of land and resources. The oldest and most ecologically stable human groups are at risk because of the colonising effect of the expansion of national parks. (Langton (1996)

She further states:

*It is difficult for an indigenous Australian to ignore the presumption and arrogance in the arguments of many environmentalists ... It seems to us that they are **usurping the Aboriginal right of stewardship of the land**, its ecological systems and biodiversity, in their anxiety to assert the supremacy of western resource management regimes over indigenous culture. (my emphasis).*

The argument seems to be that social justice, particularly ownership and control of land for dispossessed native peoples, should override concerns for the environment and the land itself. Similarly, she seems to maintain that *only* Aboriginal people have ‘right of stewardship’ over the land. This is tied in to questions of just what

‘ownership’ is – possession and control – versus the idea of custodianship of land, to which we belong. The idea of possessive ownership of the land complicates this issue, as this is actually a Western idea. For Aboriginal people: ‘the issue is less one of ownership than of caring; the traditional concern is not who ‘owns’ the country, but rather who ‘takes responsibility’ for it’ (Brown 1992). However, it is noticeable (in terms of anthropocentrism) how rarely in such debates it is ever conceived that the land might ‘own’ *itself*, and does not ‘belong’ to any human group (Washington 2005).

A different view is that of Pat Dodson (1997) of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, who said that ‘concepts such as wilderness, Indigenous ownership and joint management of national parks, and the need to ensure the survival of species have lead to differences between the two groups. These differences are not irreconcilable if we sit down in the bush together, let the land speak to us and give ourselves time to understand each other’. A Victorian Aboriginal man, Stewart (2004) has similarly observed that:

As an Aboriginal person I look at Land-rights concerns. However I strip away all the political rhetoric, the egos and power controls because it should be interpreted as ‘RIGHTS OF THE LAND’. Reconciliation in Australia today should not dwell solely on reconciliation between black and white and our shared histories, but be seen, as the vital need for us all to... RECONCILE OURSELVES BACK WITH THE LAND.... Our belonging (emphasis in original)

Social justice concerns have led to support for settling indigenous and other people within national parks, but the result ‘is a disaster for nature’ (Soule 2001). A unity of *both* types of justice has been called for: ‘people must have food and shelter, yes, but a world where material welfare is the only acceptable value will be a lost world, morally, spiritually and aesthetically. Wild areas must be the centrepiece for the survival of nature ... to achieve both social justice and inter-species justice’ (Soule 2002). There is a tendency for social justice to win out over environmental justice:

Some humanitarians hold that social justice should always trump the needs of non-humans, and they refer to flora and fauna as ‘resources’... It denies that nature has intrinsic value or that future generations of human beings will judge us harshly for the biotic cleansing of the Earth. ... We should reject the common accusation that untrammelled wild places, free of human economic exploitation, are ‘misanthropic’ or ‘racist’. (Soule 2002)

This illustrates a key problem with this strand – intolerance. Those who promote one form of justice often will not listen to the arguments of those who believe in the other. More positively, it has been argued that the ‘wilderness ethic’ provides a new sense of balance, and has ‘much to share with, and, especially, to learn from Australia’s traditional Aboriginal law’ (Brown 1992). The early years of conservation in Australia may well have seen intolerance (or at least an overlooking) of social justice for Aboriginal people. Certainly today, all too often the reverse occurs, and conservationists who argue for intrinsic value are suggested to be ‘racist’ by those concerned primarily with social justice or cultural relativism (Soule 1995, p. 150). There is also the question of whether social justice is paramount over environmental justice, not just in the formal ‘Left’ of politics, but in *all* political parties, arguably including the Greens (Lines 2003).

Clearly the debate over this tension is unresolved. A key part of loosening the wilderness knot must involve having *both* social and environmental justice, without one dominating the other. This means addressing the anthropocentrism which goes very deep in Western society (Oelschlaeger 1991). Brown (1992) argues that ‘based in respect for living country, today’s non-Aboriginal wilderness ethic provides a unique foundation for a cultural bridge with Aboriginal people’. It still remains to be seen however, how well the bridge will be built on such a foundation.

5.5 The exploitation strand

In any discussion of the wilderness knot, it must be recognised that there are strong interests who wish to exploit the resources in wilderness. Logging, mining, grazing, 4WD vehicles – all these interests have lobbyists who are seeking to exploit wilderness economically. This strand is traditionally seen as the main threat to wilderness, hence the previous four strands by and large have received little discussion. To what extent are the criticisms of wilderness (and the confusion surrounding it) a product of lobbying by exploiters? It is difficult to document the extent of this influence, as all too easily one slips into conspiracy theories. However, the Mineral Policy Institute of Australia (www.mpi.org.au) has documented a number of public relations campaigns aimed at exploiting natural areas (Burton

2002). There is also documentation of the strategies of the 'Wise Use' movement in the USA, which is a key source of criticisms about wilderness, and has strong links to the mining lobby. Wise Use has produced a book 'The Wise Use Agenda' which demands that 'all "decaying" forest (meaning old growth) be logged immediately and that all public lands, including wilderness areas and national parks, be opened to mining!' (Luoma 1992). The Wise Use Agenda specifically states that 'national park and wilderness areas should be open to multiple uses, including mining "in the interests of domestic economies and ... national security"' (ibid.). Many such bodies are funded by resource businesses to 'educate' the public on the 'damage' wilderness causes:

the Wise Use organisations are generally industry sponsored. ... For instance, the Elko, Nevada based Wilderness Impact Foundation, sounds like it is devoted to learning more about natural areas; in reality, it is an organisation funded by mining, forestry, cattle, and recreational vehicle companies. Its mission is to 'educate the American public about the damage wilderness causes society, the economy, and even wildlife'. (Luoma 1992)

The Wise Use movement argues that because nature is dynamic, human disturbances such as logging and mining and grazing are good for ecosystems (Soule 1995). There is some similarity in the above to the criticism in Australia that wilderness is full of ferals and weeds and is degraded (Cochrane 2004). Such criticisms often come from country groups, and clearly originate from the wish to allow exploitation or horse-riding into wilderness. There have been claims that the arguments of postmodernists such as Cronon and Callicott *play into the hands* of those who wish to exploit wilderness, that they 'have framed much of the argument that lends support to the industrial, expansionist and utilitarian attitude toward nature' (Willers 2001). It is maintained that those who insist that Cronon wished only to 'be provocative and to stimulate debate with his essay' are being naïve.

When considering the desire to use resources in wilderness, it needs to be recognised that this is *not* limited merely to big business. The Aboriginal Land Rights movement also lays claim to land and resources for Aboriginal people to gain social justice (and an income stream). It has been contended that 'the notion of "wilderness" and the institution of the National Park must be radically redefined in response to indigenous demands for ownership and control of land and resources' (Langton 1996). It is said

wilderness must be exploited due to the ‘need for indigenous people to establish economic options to ensure their survival in the modern world’ (Langton 1998). Examples of ‘sustainable’ activities suggested by Langton are cattle-raising and bio-prospecting for minerals. No doubt such management of land and resources by Aboriginal people would in most cases be more ecologically sustainable than exploitation by big business (indeed Aboriginal communities have expressed this desire). However, given that most Aboriginal people also use modern technology and are no longer ‘hunter-gatherer man’ (Kirkpatrick 2003), such land use will have a far greater impact than traditional Aboriginal lifestyles. This is especially true given the high unemployment levels in Aboriginal communities, and the urgent need for an income stream of some sort. For example, Traditional Owners (TOs) at Mutawintji are interested in taking 4WD tours for the public through the gazetted wilderness area in the park (though arguably this would breach the NSW Wilderness Act). There thus remain tensions around what such ‘demands for social justice’ might mean in terms of exploitative uses and increased mechanised access into wilderness.

6. The Wilderness Knot – specific criticisms

There are many criticisms of wilderness. It is ironic that ‘attacks on the idea of wilderness have multiplied as the thing itself has all but vanished’ (Orr 1999). Three postmodern myths are listed by Soule (1995). Five ‘critical myths of wilderness’ have been listed by Soule (2002); the sceptics myth (wilderness doesn’t exist except in the minds of elitist conservationists); the postmodern myth (wilderness is a cultural creation, a product of human cultures); the social justice myth (wilderness is a sandbox for yuppie bushwalkers); the property rights myth (wilderness areas are human exclusion zones that unfairly limit the exercise of the free market); and the biologists myth (wilderness is not essential for nature conservation and is a distraction). Soule (2002) answers each of these myths, and points out that ‘extremists at both ends of the wilderness debate promulgate myths to further their political goals’.

As discussed earlier, ‘modernism’ ignored most of the values of wilderness, and viewed it purely as a stack of resources for human use (Oelschlaeger 1991). It did not

so much criticize wilderness as *refuse to acknowledge its existence, independence or value*. The focus here on postmodernist criticisms is thus not meant to suggest that postmodernism is more antagonistic to wilderness than modernism (indeed the reverse is probably true). However, postmodernism was seen as a revolt *against* modernism, and the way it sees the world, so it might be thought of as something of a surprise that it too is highly critical of ‘wilderness’. However, postmodern deconstruction has been said to be the product of French, urban intellectuals, few of which had any contact with wilderness (Soule 1995). Moreover, there can be a bias among postmodernists against ‘privileged’ fields such as science and natural history, and in favor of the rural poor ‘excluded’ from national parks. Postmodernism is thus a revolt that has not significantly improved the situation in regard to the philosophical strand of the wilderness knot (so that wilderness is perceived negatively by *both* philosophical movements). There are quite a number of specific criticisms of wilderness that derive from some streams of postmodernism. There are also other criticisms of wilderness which do not readily sit under such a label, and are grouped here under ‘other criticisms’.

Criticisms deriving from some streams of ‘postmodernism’

- wilderness creates a dualism between wilderness = good nature, and non-wilderness = bad nature, which is inherently bad, as it creates a barrier to recognising the values of nature in non-wilderness areas (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992, Cronon 1996, Mulligan 2001, Adams and Mulligan 2002)
- wilderness is the same as terra nullius (Flannery 1994, Langton 1996) and is a ‘mystification of genocide’ (Langton 1996)
- wilderness does not recognise that such areas were ‘home’ to native peoples (Langton 1996, Cronon 1996, Adams and Mulligan 2002)
- wilderness are human-exclusion zones (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992, Cronon 1996, Adams and Mulligan 2002)
- wilderness is a state of mind, a concept, not a place (Lowenthal 1964, Nash 1979, Cronon 1996, Johnston 2003)
- wilderness is the idea of rich, white, chauvinistic males, and an icon of the frontier (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992, Cronon 1996)
- wilderness is the enemy of the poor, as it prevents the use of land for productive agriculture (Cronon 1996)
- wilderness is a colonialist term (Cronon 1996, Vance 1997)
- wilderness is a ‘flight from history’, a romantic, escapist retreat (Cronon 1996)
- idealizing wilderness means not idealizing the environment in which we live (non-wilderness) (Lowenthal 1964, Callicott 1991, Cronon 1996)
- wilderness is part of patriarchy (Vance 1997).

Other criticisms

- wilderness is a human artefact or cultural landscape, (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992, Graber 1995, Adams 1996, Rose 1996, Langton 1996, Flannery 2003)
- wilderness stops other uses (or multiple use) (Cronon 1996)
- wilderness is the recreational preserve of yuppie bushwalkers (Recher 2003)
- wilderness is not essential for nature conservation (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992, Recher 2003)
- wilderness is an idea based on outdated equilibrium ecology (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992, Adams and Mulligan 2002)
- wilderness is an outdated model, while the ‘biosphere reserve’ is a better model (Callicott 2003)
- wilderness is in conflict with the protection of endangered species (as these must be intensively managed) (Cronon 1996).
- wilderness ignores the perspectives and knowledge of rural populations (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992)
- wilderness is overrun by ferals and weeds, and is degraded (Cochrane, 2004).

Only the key criticisms that have had the most impact will be examined in detail below.

6.1 Criticisms deriving from streams of postmodernism

Many of these criticisms derive from a paper by Cronon (1996), where he actually stated that he is not arguing against the setting aside of large tracts of wild land. Interestingly, seven years later he supported the ‘rewilding’ of areas, and while he coined the term ‘historical wilderness’, he did not attack the term ‘wilderness’ itself (Cronon 2003). Perhaps his views have modified over the years.

Wilderness as dualism

Wilderness has been described as a dualism where ‘the unlivable city is abandoned for the wilderness ... In concentrating on the wilderness, we turn our backs not only on the rest of nature, but on man himself’ (Lowenthal 1964). It is not clear *why* we must only do one or the other, why they are not both part of a spectrum. It has also been seen as an area free of people: ‘mountains, deserts, forests and wildlife all make up that which is conceived of as “wilderness”, an area enhanced and maintained in the absence of people’ (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992). Similarly it has been held that the wilderness concept perpetuates the pre-Darwinian Western metaphysical

dichotomy between ‘man’ and ‘nature’, and that the US Wilderness Act definition ‘enshrines a bifurcation of man and nature’(Callicott 1991). There is no explanation why it does this. It has similarly been maintained that:

Wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural ... To the extent that we celebrate wilderness as a measure with which we judge civilization, we reproduce the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles. We thereby leave ourselves little hope of discovering what an ethical sustainable honourable human place in nature might actually look like. ... Any way of looking at nature that encourages us to believe we are separate from nature – as wilderness tends to – is likely to reinforce environmentally irresponsible behaviour. (Cronon 1996)

Others claim that non-wilderness was seen as ‘not-good nature’: ‘thus ecosystems that have been heavily influenced by human activities ... are doubly inferiorized. In the nature-culture dualism, they are not-culture; in the wilderness-domesticated dualism, they are not-good-nature’ (Vance 1997). Others similarly believe: ‘this tradition tends to foster a conceptual separation between humans and nature and between nature and culture, which creates both moral and practical dilemmas’ (Adams and Mulligan 2001). Callicott (2003) maintains:

Measured by the wilderness standard, all human impact is bad, not because human beings are inherently bad, but because human beings are not a part of nature – or so the wilderness idea assumes ... The wilderness idea is half of an either/or dichotomy: either devote an area to human inhabitation and destructive economic development, or preserve it in its pristine condition as wilderness.

None of these authors however, adequately explain just why wilderness *must* be a dichotomy, rather than part of a land use spectrum, nor why naming a large natural area as ‘wilderness’ devalues other non-wilderness areas (any more than calling an area ‘urban bushland’ would do so). None of these writers has tried to demonstrate that the majority of conservation or community effort is *actually* spent on wilderness, or that conservationists devalue and do not try to protect non-wilderness areas. Some wilderness advocates lament the human/ nature split, but don’t see wilderness as part of this:

In our heart of hearts, wilderness isn’t part of anything. It is the overarching reality that transcends all our plans and creations. We cannot go ‘beyond wilderness’ – the Universe is wild. We can only go beyond our paltry dichotomized worldview (Lyon 1992)

A positive view of 'wilderness' is taken by Noss (2003b), who responds to Callicott (2003) by saying: 'Callicott's alleged dichotomy ... is false. The reserve network model applied by the Wildlands Project recognises a gradient of wild to developed land, but encourages a continual movement toward the wild end of the gradient over time'. There is a possible solution to some of the criticisms of wilderness as dualism in Plumwood's (1993) theory of 'mutuality', where she acknowledges a human continuity with nature, but also a difference with human culture, hence the two can be integrated. This is the hope of other scholars such as Rolston (2001). The dualism argument thus remains a recurrent criticism of wilderness, and is in part tied into the debate about whether humans are 'part of nature'.

Wilderness – terra nullius and a 'mystification of genocide'

In the US context, one criticism of Nash's (1967) book on wilderness was that he 'skates over Indian complaints that the very concept of wilderness is a racist idea' (Callicott 1991). Why it was racist was not explained. In Australia, the focus has been more on 'terra nullius', where Langton (1996) has argued 'like the legal fiction of terra nullius which imagined us out of existence ... popular culture also imagines us out of existence ... the Australian use of the term "wilderness" was a mystification of genocide. Where Aboriginal people had been brought to the brink of annihilation, their former territories were recast as "wilderness"'.

The above is oft-quoted, and was probably influential in slowing action to protect wilderness. The legal doctrine of terra nullius in fact stated *not* that 'nobody lived there' (terra nullius in Latin means 'empty land'), but that they 'did not own the land' (as they were deemed to be barbarians). It has been explained that terra nullius meant 'no one's land' or 'wasteland' (Prineas 1997), and that Scott (1940) contended a 'wasteland owned by no man could be claimed by a sovereign state'. Thus the old biblical meaning of 'wilderness as wasteland' has been historically linked to terra nullius. The literature is full of confusions concerning terra nullius, where most people refer to its 'empty land' meaning (Langton 1998) rather than its legal meaning. Langton does not show *why* terra nullius is related to 'wilderness' (or to which meaning of 'wilderness') or how wilderness 'imagines Aborigines out of

existence'. Similarly, she does not explain why the concept of wilderness as large, natural areas is a 'mystification of genocide', though clearly she is of the opinion that the word 'wilderness' means humans have never lived there. One response has been that:

'wilderness' today does not represent a perpetuation of the notions of 'wasteland' and terra nullius that have been so effectively and tragically used by Europeans to overcome Australia's Aboriginal societies. (Brown 1992)

Support for wilderness today reflects the rediscovery by non-Aboriginal people of an objective that has never ceased to be a fundamental Aboriginal concern - 'caring for country', or fulfilment of responsibility toward community and land (ibid.). The particular meaning of wilderness as 'pure nature' has been said not to recognise the prior presence and agency of indigenous people in the land, suggesting there has been no human influence (Plumwood 2002). However, the same scholar later clarified that terra nullius 'denies both nonhuman nature and indigenous humans as prior and constraining presences', so that neither are valued (Plumwood 2003)

Wilderness – the home of native peoples

As noted earlier, most indigenous languages have no word for 'wilderness', and rather the land was their home, part of the Great Mother (Oelschlaeger 1991). It was not until humans had set themselves apart from nature to some extent (and large natural areas were decreasing) that the word 'wilderness' would be created. Similarly, the concept of 'ownership' is foreign to many first peoples. Rather they were custodians or occupiers (traditional occupiers?). It has been argued that 'the myth of the wilderness as 'virgin' uninhabited land has always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home' (Cronon 1996). Cronon assumes here that wilderness is 'uninhabited', though this is not its modern definition (e.g. IUCN 1994). The presence of indigenous people in wilderness arguably may have increased their 'wildness' to European explorers (Nash 2001). Humans living in a low tech, subsistence lifestyle (with no permanent settlements) need not be considered as being excluded from wilderness. Of course, historically this rarely seems to happen, as first people also tend to make use of modern technology.

The quote by Cronon (1996) also raises the question of whether native peoples were *actually* asked (or forced) to move away from areas which were then labelled ‘wilderness’, or whether this designation was applied after they had moved for other historical reasons. Cronon (as a historian) does not provide historical examples of forced migrations due to a desire to create wilderness areas. It is similarly argued: ‘the popular definition of ‘wilderness’ excludes all human interaction within allegedly pristine ‘natural’ areas, even though they are and have been inhabited and used by indigenous people for thousands of years’ (Langton 1996). The question is raised here of what ‘pristine’ really means. Similarly, there is no explanation of *why* wilderness excludes ‘all human interaction’, when this is contrary to all common definitions. Wilderness in terms of its IUCN definition does not exclude nomadic hunters and gatherers, just permanent settlements. It is of interest that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission made a ‘cultural definition’ of wilderness as ‘land without its songs and ceremonies’ (Langton 1998). This is quite divergent from the IUCN definition of wilderness as basically large natural areas, and illustrates the confusion around the term.

It has been suggested that ‘even when conservation action has involved resistance to imperial, utilitarian, views of nature ... It has often been imposed like a version of the imperial endeavour itself, alien and arbitrary, barring people from their lands’ (Adams and Mulligan 2002). This raises the question of what *their lands* means, in terms of ownership. Do humans actually philosophically ‘own’ the land, no matter how long they live in an area? We may belong to the land, but does the land belong to us? This is part of the unresolved debate over ownership versus custodianship. ‘The sceptics myth’ is said to be the idea that hunter-gatherer people perceive of wilderness as ‘home’ and not a place apart, whereas the modern term ‘wilderness’ is Western ethnocentrism that ignores both the role of humans in shaping nature, and vice versa. A response to this has been:

This myth was actually correct when the global human population was a tiny fraction of the present total, and when all people were hunter-gatherers. But when we started to farm, log, mine, live in permanent settlements, ... nature became the enemy, something to conquer. Now we can see what has been lost – materially, aesthetically, and spiritually. We must save what little of the wild is left. (Soule 2002)

It has been pointed out that when indigenous people adopt the technology and economic behaviour of Western society (such as guns, TV, cars) and forget their language and customs, there comes a point along this path where they are no longer ecologically indigenous (Nabhan 1995). As such it can be questioned whether they should continue to be accorded the social immunity vested in the term 'indigenous'. Indigeneity alone might not be the important aspect, but whether a group demonstrated 'ecological indigeneity'.

This debate remains a central criticism of wilderness. Indeed, concern over this perspective of wilderness has led many public servants in the Commonwealth Dept. of Environment and Heritage to cease using the term 'wilderness' (DEH 2004, pers. comm.).

Wilderness as 'human exclusion zones'

Claims that wilderness are 'human exclusion zones' appear regularly in the literature, despite the fact that no current wilderness definition *actually* excludes humans. Wilderness excludes mechanised access and permanent settlements, but not human visitation as such. There are variants of this human exclusion argument commonly used in Australia, which claim that wilderness 'locks out' the disabled or horse-riders. It has been argued that the American idea of wilderness is based on the fiction that land is only truly 'wild' when humans are absent (Wolf 1990). Others argue that wilderness is 'implicitly misanthropic' (Callicott 1991) and that 'the concept of wilderness as an area without people has influenced thought and policy throughout the development of the western world' (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992). Cronon (1996) states:

If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall. The place where we are is the place where nature is not. If this is so – if by definition wilderness leaves no place for human beings ... then also by definition it can offer no solutions to the environmental and other problems that confront us.

He does not explain why wilderness 'leaves no place for human beings', nor does he address the writings of Thoreau, Muir or Leopold, or explain *why* the solutions

proposed by people inspired by large natural areas are irrelevant. He goes on to say: 'if wild nature is the only thing worth saving, and if our mere presence destroys it, then the sole solution ... would seem to be suicide'. Given that no conservationist argues for 100% of the land to be wilderness, the claim that advocating wilderness means we should all commit suicide seems extreme. Similarly, it has been argued 'if wilderness is pure nature, and if it is defined by the absence of humans, it follows by inference that humans can exist independently of nature' (Vance 1997). Later she added 'to define wilderness in terms of human absence, rather than, say, in terms of ... healthy ... ecosystems ...'. There is no explanation of how wilderness is defined by an absence of humans, or that 'naturalness' (healthy functioning ecosystems) *is* in fact a key component of most definitions. Another statement is that 'we must surrender the idea of wilderness' and accept that human presence is universal, and 'invest our care and hope in civilization' (Robinson 1998). Callicott (2003) criticises wilderness not just for excluding people, but for excluding 'compatible human residence and economic activity'. This is essentially an argument for multiple use (or exploitation) of wilderness, and raises the question of the extent to which 'human exclusion' claims may derive from a hidden agenda of multiple use.

In reply to such arguments, it has been pointed out that 'we do belong, but not everywhere' (Nash 2001), and that 'neither the Wilderness Act nor meaningful wilderness designation requires that no humans have ever been present, only that any such peoples have left the lands "untrammelled"' (Rolston (2001). The 'denial of human presence' is thus a classic instance of the setting up of a 'straw man' argument to be knocked over (Hay 2002). The 'human exclusion' argument is usually put forward by those seeking to 'exploit natural resources for job creation and profits', where such capitalists see wilderness as unfairly limiting the exercise of the free market (Soule 2002). Soule explains that 'with rare exceptions, such as in the former Soviet Union in the late Twentieth Century, wilderness areas do not exclude human uses'. It has been reported that the myth of human exclusion is used to:

justify the occupancy and economic use of the last wild places. Some governments in South America – under pressure from humanitarian activists – are now encouraging people to settle in National Parks. This policy will destroy nature reserves because of the high birth rates of agrarian people and because indigenes will all be infected by

globalization and consumerism. The wheel of road building, clearing, farming, loss of fertility and abandonment turns, churns, and kills the land community. (Soule 2002).

It is our technological culture that per force excludes permanent modern settlements from wilderness:

The idea that wilderness can include all primates except for the genus Homo is ridiculous. It is not ridiculous however to exclude people living profligate ... lifestyles (including Callicott and me) from permanent habitation in wilderness areas. Even to exclude "native" people from some reserves is not ridiculous when these people have acquired guns, snowmobiles ... It is not exclusion from these reserves that separates us from nature; it is our culture and our lifestyles, which had already separated us long before we began designating wilderness areas. (Noss 2003b)

The 'human exclusion' criticism is possibly the most common one made about wilderness, often by those who either seek to exploit wilderness resources, or gain access for vehicles and horses. It relates to the debate on whether humans are 'part of nature'. To be 'part of nature' has been seen as a justification for modern technological settlements and motorised access into wilderness, without any consideration of the impact these technologies cause. 'Exclusion' is of course a very strong word, used deliberately to give the feeling that people are being *victimised* and actually 'locked out' from relating to nature. There is a reflection here on our increasingly sedentary society, where many people seem to view access as automatically involving the 'mobile unit' (car or motorboat). Also, there is the implication that if you can't live somewhere *permanently*, then you are 'excluded', no matter how much of your life you may in fact spend there.

Wilderness as a concept

It has also been said that wilderness is just a *concept*, a state of mind rather than a place. This has strong links to the postmodernist scepticism of reality and its arguments for cultural relativism, so that 'wilderness is not, in fact, a type of landscape, but a congeries of feelings about man and nature' (Lowenthal 1964).

Wilderness cannot be defined objectively it is said as 'it is as much a state of mind as a description of nature' (Tuan 1974). It has been argued that 'wilderness does not exist. It never has. It is a feeling about a place ... wilderness is a state of mind' (Nash 1979). It has similarly been stated that 'wilderness is a cultural concept, not a place, and is extremely difficult to define with an precision' (NPWS 1980). In fact, Cronon

(1996) argues: ‘there is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness. It is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear ... The romantic legacy means that wilderness is more a state of mind than a fact of nature’. Wilderness has been equated with the wilderness experience: ‘wilderness is related to the individual’s spiritual experience, thus its boundaries rest in the mind’. Thus, what is wilderness to one person is a ‘tamed landscape’ to another (Hodges 1993, pp. 81-84).

None of these authors explain why wilderness as *large natural areas* do not exist, why they are *purely* concepts, any more than national parks are (which are also real places). There seems to be a confusion here between the wilderness experience (which may not always occur in formally declared wilderness) and the gazetted wilderness itself (as the material reality of a large, natural area). There also seems to be a postmodernist *reluctance to draw boundaries* tied up in this debate, as these are seen as separating areas and creating dualisms. Wilderness as a ‘concept’ appears acceptable to some above, but drawing boundaries and defining a mapped wilderness seems to be tainted to others. Such beliefs of course would make it impossible to actually identify and effectively manage wilderness to ensure its survival into the future. Wilderness being seen as purely a ‘concept’ also seems to ignore any eco-centric or biogeographic arguments for the design and boundaries of large natural areas (Soule and Terbough 1999). It has been noted that wilderness exists in the public imagination ‘and on the ground’, that it is ‘self-willed land’, that part of the landscape where other species flourish (Locke 2000). Wilderness ‘is an identifiable place where wildness is achieved’ (Berry 2000). Nash (2001, p. viii) now notes of wilderness that ‘a state of mind was involved, but so was an environmental condition’.

6.2 Non-postmodernist criticisms

Wilderness as a human artefact

There is significant debate about wilderness (or the land itself) being a ‘*human artefact*’, much discussed in the Australian context. A key problem here is the distinction between *influencing* a landscape (as all indigenous peoples did) and

creating it (which is anthropocentric, placing all the emphasis on human creation). 'Landscape' is a term beset with as many meanings as 'wilderness' and needs some introductory discussion. A view in some academic circles is that 'the very idea of landscape implies separation and observation' (Williams 1973). Landscape has been defined as a 'cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings' (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988). The activities of human beings 'orientate apprehension of the landscape and create it as human' (Tilley 1994). Landscapes are seen as images which are created, verbal or non-verbal texts. The 'landscape' is then defined as the physical and visual form of the Earth as an environment, as a setting in which meanings are created and transformed. The 'appearance' of a landscape can be described in terms of relief, topography and so on. He concludes that it is a 'natural' topography linked to the 'Being' of societal space. It has similarly been argued that 'landscape encompasses both the conceptual and the physical', and that the very ambiguity of the concept of landscape makes it useful. It stretches between the 'physical shape of the land to the human use and conceptions of that land' (Gosden and Head 1994).

The impressions of the first peoples of the landscape they experienced have been said to 'create' the landscape for subsequent human use (Tacon 1994). Similarly, it has been said that 'landscape is the work of the mind' as its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock, that we have 'made landscape out of mere geology and vegetation' (Schama 1995). It is our shaping perception that makes the difference between raw matter and landscape. It has been claimed that: 'terrain is transformed into landscape by the meanings we attach to it, the images we make (on film, paper or words), and the thoughts we attach to those images' (Adams 1996). This may explain the use of the term 'human-crafted landscape', as Adams seems to imply that landscape is how humans interpret the reality of the physical 'terrain'. It would thus seem that *any landscape* may be seen as 'human-crafted', as we are the ones who attach meanings to terrain to make landscape. Such a terrain/landscape definition however is by no means universal. 'Landscape' as a term will thus continue to be used loosely. For some it means the physical terrain or topography. For others it means the terrain once imbued with human perception and meaning.

The Macquarie Dictionary (1981) defines ‘artefact’ as ‘*any object made by man with a view to subsequent use*’. An artefact is thus a made thing, a thing made by humans. Jones (1969) refers to Tasmanian sedgeland as a ‘human artefact’, yet elsewhere refers to landscapes as being ‘heavily modified by Aboriginal burning’. He does not appear to distinguish between a modified landscape and a ‘created’ one. It has also been argued ‘the land was not ... as God made it, but as Aborigines made it’ (Hallam 1975). Some argue that human impact has become so all-encompassing that nature itself has become a human artefact (McKibben 1989). It has also been maintained that human use of fire creates artefacts:

virgin forests and wilderness areas are in part artefacts of previous burns, both natural and anthropogenic ... tropical forests are “both artefact and habitat”
(Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992)

It has been said that landscapes are shaped by human action, and are ‘human products’, yet at the same time plant communities are described as ‘affected by a long history of management practices’ (Gosden and Head 1994). The ‘natural world is itself a construct based on our values, beliefs and perceptions’ (Proctor 1995). Tim Flannery is one of the key Australian protagonists in this debate, through his book ‘The Future Eaters’ (1994) and the essay ‘Beautiful Lies’ (2003). Flannery (1994) argues:

wilderness as defined by the IUCN simply does not exist in Australia. For the entire continent has been actively and extensively managed for 60,000 years by its Aboriginal occupants. To leave it untouched will be to create something new, and less diverse, than that which went before.

He does not explain *why* the recognition and protection of large natural areas (wilderness) would create a less diverse environment. It has been similarly argued that wilderness is purely a managed landscape:

Wilderness has taken on connotations and mythology ... a landscape that is managed to reveal as few traces of the passage of other humans as possible ... This wilderness is a social construct. (Graber 1995)

It has also been said that the diversity of life that existed in Australia 200 years ago was the direct ‘product’ of skilful traditional Aboriginal land management (Bowman 1995). Areas where TOs have not been able to burn traditionally (hence the plant

community changed) have been labelled the ‘new wilderness’ (Langton 1998 quoting Bowman 1995). A related argument by Rose (1996) is that:

Aboriginal peoples land management practices, especially their skilled and extensive use of fire, were responsible for the long-term productivity and biodiversity of the continent. In addition to fire other practices include selective harvesting, extensive organization of sanctuaries

She does not explain how their practices were responsible for the productivity and biodiversity. It is interesting she also refers to the extensive Aboriginal organisation of ‘sanctuaries’, which have a parallel to wilderness, in terms of being free from hunting.

The term ‘cultural landscape’ has been popularised by its inclusion as a category under UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention (Posey and Duffield 1996, www.whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape/), which states:

There exist a great variety of Landscapes that are representative of the different regions of the world. Combined works of nature and humankind, they express a long and intimate relationship between peoples and their natural environment. ... these sites, called cultural landscapes, have been inscribed on the World Heritage List. Cultural landscapes -- cultivated terraces on lofty mountains, gardens, sacred places ... testify to the creative genius, social development and the imaginative and spiritual vitality of humanity.

It has been stated: ‘there is no wilderness, but there are cultural landscapes ... those of Aboriginal people, present and past, whose relationships with the environment shaped even the reproductive mechanisms of forests’ (Langton 1996). While not as strong as Flannery’s statement, it still places the emphasis on *human* shaping. The term ‘human-crafted landscape’ is also used:

The ‘natural’ habitats of the countryside have a history, and it is a human history, for they form a human-crafted landscape ... Conservation therefore has to be conceived of in terms of the choices to be made between patterns of landscape and ecology, each of which is a human creation. (Adams 1996)

It has further been argued that the ‘healing wilderness’ was as much the product of culture’s craving as any other imagined garden, and that regarding Yosemite: ‘even the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out to be its product’ (Schama 1995). Langton (1998) cites a cultural values statement by the Jawoyn people about Nitmuluk NP in the Northern Territory:

Nitmiluk is not a wilderness. It is not pristine or untamed: it is a human artefact. It is land constructed by us over tens of thousands of years – through our ceremonies and ties of kinship, through fire and through hunting over countless generations of our people.

Flannery (2003) continues the artefact debate:

Indeed, if we look at the fossil record, its not an exaggeration to say that Aboriginal fire and hunting literally made the Australian environment that the Europeans first encountered. It was a vast, 47,000-year-old human artefact, designed to provide maximal food and comfort to its inhabitants in the most sustainable manner.

What replies have been made to these strong statements that the land has been ‘constructed’ and ‘created’? In response, it has been pointed out that the claim humans ‘invented the forest’ ignores the species geographical distributions determined largely by ecological tolerances, geological history and climate (Soule 1995, p. 157). Wilderness is not simply a cultural construct ‘devised to mirror our own broken nature’ but is a home to all that is wild, a blank space on the map ‘that illustrates human restraint’ (Tempest Williams 1999). Regarding Yosemite, only a small part of the park has been influenced sufficiently to be called a ‘humanized landscape’, while the majority has not been (Vale 1999). Wilderness ‘created itself long before civilisation ... wilderness a state of mind? Wilderness is what there was before there were states of mind’ (Rolston 2001). Rather:

it seems that the main idea in nature is that the natural is not a human construct. Intentional, ideological construction is exactly what natural entities do not have: if they had it, they would be artefacts. The main idea in nature is that nature is not our idea. (Rolston 2001).

He goes on to question how much native peoples *actually* changed ecosystems:

Is there any designated wilderness in which, on regional scales, the fundamental ecosystemic processes today are recognizably different from what they would have been had there been no Native Americans? ... having posed that question repeatedly to various ecologists, I have not yet identified such an ecosystem.

Some scientists similarly place the human impact on ecosystems in perspective:

*palynological evidence suggests that the influences of people on the ecosystems were subdued, in comparison to the influence of climate change, until the invasion of agricultural *H. sapiens* in the late eighteenth century (Kirkpatrick 2003)*

It has been pointed out that Gondwanan rainforests and the depths of the oceans and Antarctica are not human artefacts (Hay 2002), though Hay does not seem to distinguish between ‘influence’ and ‘create’, in that he describes the button grass plains of Tasmania as ‘social creations’. However, Hay asks an *essential* question in regard to this debate:

Why should it be assumed that the smallest incursion of culture into nature constitutes the end of nature? It is just as logical to argue the opposite – that because trees grow in London’s parks ... London has ceased to be part of the realm of culture, and has become nature. The fact is that there are natural processes and there are cultural processes, and in any place the mix is likely to be uneven. (Hay 2002, p. 22)

It would seem the failure of many scholars to acknowledge the natural/ cultural process mix is a key source of the confusion around this debate. Hay goes on to point out that, far-reaching though human modifications may be, they cannot be said to be the defining constituents of the Earth’s biophysical systems. It is philosophically misleading to talk about humans ‘constructing nature’ in any general way (Plumwood 2001). Construction implies that ‘what is often mere influence or impact is actually control’ and suggests that because we can ‘affect’ the biosphere we can produce the outcomes we want. It also suggests we can reconstruct it, when ‘we cannot even reconstruct a bird’s feather’ (ibid.). The human artefact argument is a ‘fashionable myth’ that threatens conservation:

people did not construct nature. They did not invent the flora and fauna of Australia, for example, although human activities such as burning and hunting may have slightly altered the genetics of some species, and permanently altered the distribution and abundance of others. (Soule 2002)

The scientific basis for Flannery’s arguments has been questioned by several paleontologists, archaeologists and plant ecologists (Sheehan 2004). Plant ecologist Benson (2004), argues:

Flannery asserts that this frequent burning changed the previous vegetation into open grassy woodland and grasslands. ... However, it is not supported by much scientific evidence and it is likely that the hypothesis is wrong. Climate change over millions of years was the main director of vegetation change in Australia. Fires have raged on this continent for millions of years, including during the times of the mega-fauna.

He dismisses Flannery’s ‘annual burning’ argument, and pointing out that all areas could not have been ‘intensively managed’:

I agree that Aborigines may have regularly patch-burnt some grassy woodlands, grasslands, areas around camps and access routes. However, shrubby places such as Wollemi National Park are so low in nutrients it is doubtful that many Aborigines could have survived there other than for short visits, let alone intensively managed the whole 500,000 ha area. (Benson 2004)

In his response, Flannery (2004) stated it was ‘attempted character assassination’ rather than scientific debate. He thus failed to refute any of Benson’s extensive arguments in regard to fire being overstated as an agent that formed a ‘human artefact’. The problem of ‘nature scepticism’ has earlier been noted, which maintains that ‘everything is a human product’ (Plumwood 2003). Concerning Flannery (2003), Plumwood says he rejects wilderness in its meaning of ‘denial of human presence’, but that his alternative leads to ‘an even bigger lie’, that Australia is a human product, which denies forces older and more powerful than the human in shaping the continent.

Wilderness versus multiple use

Wilderness has also been portrayed as stopping other uses, principally economic ones. Cronon argues for ‘responsible use’, while Callicott argues for ‘compatible economic activity’. Such uses are generally known as ‘multiple use’. Multiple use is in effect a modernist argument for resource use, which seems to have slipped across into some postmodernist thought (often portrayed as needed for social justice reasons, or to somehow aid ‘sustainability’). It is claimed: ‘the wilderness dualism tends to cast any use as ab-use and thereby denies us a middle ground in which responsible use and non-use might attain some kind of balanced sustainable relationship’ (Cronon 1996, p. 17). Others argue that Biosphere Reserves allow ‘compatible human residence and economic activity in and around reserves’ (Callicott 2003). Multiple use has been adopted in some countries under the rubric of ‘biosphere reserves’, with associated problems due to poor enforcement of protection measures (Soule 2001). Wilderness is in fact *essential* to working out how to live sustainably in other more developed landscapes:

how are we to figure out how to manage resources ... without wild areas as benchmarks and blueprints? How are we to show restraint in our management of resources ... when we don’t have enough respect to set aside big, wild areas for their own sake? (Noss 2003b)

Wilderness as the recreational preserve of bushwalkers

Wilderness has been claimed to be the recreational preserve of bushwalkers, being ‘elitist’:

I would argue that wilderness recreation “re-creates” more than the self: it also recreates the history of the conquest of nature, the subjugation of indigenous peoples, the glorification of individualism, the triumph of human will over material reality, and the Protestant ideal of one-on-one contact with God (Vance 1997).

There is no explanation of how people bushwalking in natural areas do this, given that many (such as Thoreau, Harper 1995, Thomashow 1996) argue that walking in the wild builds bridges to the natural world. Some believe recreation is the key aim of wilderness: ‘the whole concept of wilderness in Australia is a recreation concept. It’s a bushwalkers concept’ (Recher in Woodford 2003). This would seem to make light of the problem of roads in natural areas, given that ‘roads are always the beginning of the end for nature protection’ (Soule 2001), and that:

the key to long-term protection of natural heritage values is the absence of roads and roadlessness is a virtual synonym of wilderness. Roads are daggers in the heart of the wild. They facilitate fires, the spread of invasive species and pathogens, illegal logging and the bush-meat trade, the elimination of keystone species and - most destructive of all – settlements and development. Wilderness designation is virtually the only barrier to the proliferation of roads. (Soule 2002)

Recher and Lunney (2003) make the elitist bushwalkers claim, but do not elucidate why wilderness is *only* about recreation, though presumably they are claiming that the wilderness areas created were only those that were the favourite walking areas of bushwalkers. Such a claim appears to ignore the eco-centric focus of Australian wilderness campaigns such as the Franklin, the Colo (Wollemi), Washpool or Daintree.

Wilderness – not essential for nature conservation

Wilderness, it is claimed, is not essential for nature conservation. This is an important criticism, as in part it denies the ecological values of wilderness:

‘wildlands ... are presented to the public as natural-resource banks of biodiversity ...

yet they represent mostly urban beliefs and aspirations. All too often they do not correspond with scientific findings or first hand experience of how the world works' (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992). The authors then list examples of how tropical forests are not totally wild, yet do not explain why wilderness is not in fact a 'biodiversity bank'. It is claimed that: 'in many cases the traditional land-use practices of the rural sector are responsible for maintaining and protecting the biodiversity of our wilderness and have often provided the genetic diversity that strengthens the worlds major food crop varieties' (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992). Five authors are listed in support of this claim, however, all these articles are in fact about crop diversity and agroecosystems, rather than about biodiversity in wilderness.

Another argument is that 'what is threatening about national parks and wilderness is the belief that they will prevent the loss of biodiversity. It is this belief, and particularly the emphasis on wilderness, that pushes governments to create a system of reserves without significant long-term benefits for nature conservation' (Recher and Lunney 2003). However, later in the same article the authors state: 'a system of conservation reserves must embrace large areas of land across the entire landscape and be flexible enough for evolutionary processes to proceed'. They would thus appear to criticize 'wilderness' but support large natural areas being linked together. The nature conservation values of wilderness are listed in a report to Environment Australia (Mackey et al. 1998a). The authors quote Noss and Cooperrider (1994), who maintain that large reserves unquestionably offer the best prospects for the long term maintenance of ecosystem processes and integrity. It has been explained that the 'ice and rock' claim is often made about wilderness areas, that they are not useful for conservation, because they are 'on lands too cold, dry, or unproductive for settlement, farming or logging' (Soule 2002). The diversity of such places is said to be low. Soule refutes this:

The above statement had some truth until about 75 years ago. It is still valid in some places, but for decades now conservation-oriented biologists have been instrumental in establishing declared wilderness and national parks in regions of high productivity and natural diversity. (Soule 2002)

This debate thus seems to have three parts. Firstly, that wilderness has not been applied representatively enough across the landscape (which Soule notes was true 75 years ago). Secondly, that wilderness is often declared on areas of low biodiversity (though this is not always true, as the Blue Mountains is highly biodiverse). Thirdly, that isolated reserves are not enough, and that there must be *connectivity* between reserves such as wilderness areas and national parks. The third point has arguably been the vision of the Australian conservation movement for at least 30 years. However, it is not an argument against wilderness, merely something else we need to do *as well*.

Wilderness - based on outdated equilibrium ecology

Wilderness is said to be an idea based on outdated equilibrium ecology, one which believes that there is a 'balance of nature' and that nature is not dynamic. This is important in that it also seeks to deny the ecological values of wilderness areas: 'today few ecologists defend the equilibrium and climax concepts. Non-equilibrium models now influence ecological theory, and nature is increasingly perceived as being in a state of continuous change' (Gomez-Pampa and Kaus 1992). Ecology in the mid-twentieth century has maintained that natural communities tend towards equilibrium (Soule 1995). It has been contended that 'human actions are part of the web of influences on ecological change, not external equilibrium disturbing impacts. Gone therefore are the days when conservationists could conceive of nature in equilibrium and hence portray human-induced changes in those ecosystems as somehow unnatural' (Adams 1996). It has also been claimed that 'the demise of equilibrium ecology has led to a paradoxical situation in which a deeper understanding of complex processes involved in ecosystemic formation and change can give humans a new sense of control over nature, while at the same time, reminding us that stability is an illusion' (Adams and Mulligan 2002).

These authors further claim that wilderness conservation is imbued with 'an ideology of preservationism resisting human-induced change' (Adams and Mulligan 2002). Conservationists are seen as afraid of change, as conservation theory is 'based on the time-honoured concepts of equilibrium ecology, although research is rapidly

revealing the non-equilibrial characteristics of ecosystem change'. It is said that 'wilderness preservation has often meant freeze-framing the status quo ante, maintaining things as they were when the "white man" first came on the scene. Hence the wilderness ideal ... represents a conservation goal that would be possible to attain, paradoxically, only through intensive management efforts to keep things the way they were in defiance of nature's inherent dynamism' (Callicott 2003). The 'intensive human management' recommended by Callicott strongly resembles arguments for multiple use. The above authors do not give examples to show that a preoccupation with equilibrium ecology has *actually* influenced the conservation movement.

By way of reply to the claims on 'freeze framing', Willers (2001) refers to Taylor's (1996) 'rule of non-interference', saying 'Taylor reveals an appreciation of evolutionary process in wilderness that postmodernists such as Callicott insist on ignoring, and thereby counters the postmodernist contention that wilderness advocates wish to "freeze frame" conditions in some imagined frontier past'. It has been claimed that Callicott is trying to subvert natural selection:

It is in the area of evolution that Callicott fails most completely, because his "sustainable development alternative" to wilderness, with its "invasive human management" is the very antithesis of natural selection. ... Callicott simply fails to appreciate the difference between natural selection and artificial selection, and that difference is very basic biology indeed. (Willers 2001)

There are a number of other authors who disagree with the claims that equilibrium ecology theory dominates conservation, or who point out that the debate is far more complex than some have argued. One of the leaders of the 'intermediate disturbance' theory was Connell (1979), who argued that equilibrium was seldom attained in rainforests and reefs. However, he emphasized that the disturbances that maintain high diversity are *natural* ones to which species have evolved, whereas large scale removal of tropical forest, pollution by biocides, heavy metals and oil are 'new' disturbances against which most organisms lack a defence. It has been noted that Callicott writes as if wilderness advocates had 'studied ecology and never heard of evolution' and seek to prevent natural change (Rolston 1991). A detailed study of equilibria and disequilibria theories within ecology was made by Worster (1994), who pointed out that such theories often tie in with the worldviews of their

promoters. Using a principle of ‘historicism’, we can ‘approach recent ecological models that dramatize disturbance with a sense of scepticism and independence’ (ibid., p. 428). He wonders if they are the ‘mere reflection of global capitalism and its ideology’. In regard to nature’s dynamism:

Nature, ecologists began to argue, is wild and unpredictable. Nature is in deep, important ways quite disorderly. Nature is a seething, teeming spectacle of diversity. Nature, for all its strange and disturbing ways, its continuing capacity to elude our understanding, still needs our love, our respect, and our help. (Worster 1994, p. 420)

It has been argued in reply to Callicott that ‘no ecologist interprets wilderness in the static, pristine, climax sense that Callicott caricatures it’ (Noss 2003b). To expand on this point:

the knowledge that nature is a shifting mosaic in essentially continuous flux should not be misconstrued to suggest that human-generated changes are nothing to worry about. Instead, “human generated changes must be constrained because nature has functional, historical and evolutionary limits. Nature has a range of ways to be, but there is a limit to those ways, and therefore, human changes must be within those limits”. (Noss 2003 quoting Pickett et al. 1991)

There are also questions as to how relevant the debate on disequilibrium ecology truly is for wilderness. For example, the role of ecological theories in regard to wilderness was reviewed by Mackey et al. (1998a), which did not mention disequilibrium ecology. In fact they focused on ‘resilience’ theory, which tended to support the protection of large, natural areas. They concluded ‘wilderness areas and places with a high wilderness quality, all other things being equal, will provide for larger reserves, support larger or better connected metapopulations, reduce extinction risk, be less fragmented, and possess greater resilience’.

Wilderness versus Biosphere Reserves

While Callicott and Mumford (1997) acknowledge that biodiversity core areas, equivalent to wilderness, are an integral part of a biosphere reserve approach, Callicott (2003) proposes ‘biosphere reserves’ *instead* of wilderness. This would appear to be an argument for multiple use:

We find the appropriate alternative in the concept of biosphere reserves ... A policy of invasive human management – by means of, say, prescribed burning or carefully planned culling – is cognitively dissonant with the wilderness idea, but not with the

biosphere reserve idea. Indeed one of the signal differences between the old wilderness idea and the new concept of biosphere reserves is a provision for compatible human residence and economic activity in and around reserves. (Callicott 2003, p. 440)

In response to this, Noss (2003b) points out that it is not a question of either/ or:

Biosphere reserves are not, however, an alternative to wilderness. In fact wilderness is the central part of the biosphere reserve model: the core area. Without a wilderness core, a biosphere reserve could not fulfil its function of maintaining the full suite of native species and natural processes ... wilderness areas will have much to teach us about how we might dwell harmoniously with nature in the buffer zones.

6.3 Putting criticisms in perspective

Clearly, there are a large number of criticisms of ‘wilderness’ in the literature. Some of these derive from modernism, and quite a few from various streams of postmodernism. Some of the twenty criticisms found in the literature are rather shallow, obscure, or not central to the debate, and have been omitted from detailed discussion, due to lack of space. Others are both more common, more detailed and more lasting in terms of their effect. Many of these criticisms are *statements* rather than argued positions. However, despite the fact that some criticisms are not rationally argued, they are *not* fading away. On the contrary, in the last decade they have strengthened.

One task of this thesis is to ask why it is they have had such an effect, and been so tenacious. The discussion of modernism and postmodernism already offers insights. Wilderness has become entangled philosophically, culturally and politically, and has been overlooked in the recent focus on social justice. A multitude of authors have pointed to the human/ nature dualism as the key problem in how the West thinks about nature. Unfortunately, wilderness seems to have been associated with such a view, even though wilderness advocates such as Thoreau, Muir and Leopold clearly felt that the wilderness experience taught them they *were* part of nature. The passion amongst scholars to break down the human/ nature split has thus been deployed against the term ‘wilderness’. Similarly, the recognition of the ‘other’ by postmodernism is long overdue, but this very much remains an unfinished work, for the compassion that motivates this has largely failed to extend ‘the other’ to the

nonhuman world and wilderness. The questioning of reality in postmodernism has also flowed over into our interactions with the natural world. The attack on reason by some postmodernists also has made it harder to *rationaly* analyse such criticisms. The focus on social justice in the last two decades is most welcome, but again our view of ‘society’ or ‘community’ has not extended to the whole community of life. Rather, social justice has been the focus, without it seems any corresponding attention to *environmental justice*.

We should not forget that politically we still live in a *modernist* world, where resourcism dominates. The forces seeking exploitation of wilderness are as strong as they ever were. It is of interest to see that this modernist criticism seems to have also passed over to some postmodernists (for example Cronon and Callicott), who also argue to exploit the diminishing areas of land called wilderness. ‘Lock out’ from wilderness is still one of the most common criticisms of wilderness in country areas of Australia today. Given all of this background, it is easy to see why criticisms such as human exclusion, dualism, overlooking indigenous history, terra nullius, and the human artefact debate remain very much alive, and do not fade away. We also need to consider the point made by Oelschlaeger (1991), that the ‘long and tangled history of the idea of wilderness’ goes back to Paleolithic times, while each successive age has added more tangled meanings. The criticisms deriving from the strands of the wilderness knot are thus not going to disappear in a flash of rational enlightenment any time soon. They remain worthy of further research in terms of their current expression in the Australian context, and what (if anything) can be done about the resulting wilderness knot. In the next chapter, I turn to the question of *how* this research might best be carried out.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

1. Methodology

I am carrying out qualitative research on wilderness, specifically on the wilderness knot and how to engage with it. This topic is not something readily amenable to quantitative analysis, hence qualitative research was deemed more appropriate, as it was hoped we could examine the topic at a deeper level. I chose two methodologies – *participatory action research* (PAR) and *hermeneutic phenomenology*. I am interested to explore how to loosen the wilderness knot with a group of people knowledgeable about wilderness. This means that PAR will allow me to *learn* about the wilderness knot, and what to do about it. ‘I do’ rather than ‘I think’ is the appropriate starting point for epistemology centred around action (Reason and Torbert 2001). PAR will allow me to *act to do something*, by working with a group of colleagues, whereby we all learn as we think (and feel) through aspects of the knot. Secondly, the phenomenological understanding of the wilderness experience and the wilderness knot is central to understanding its nature. Understanding the lived experience of wilderness, and how it can transform people, is important in gaining an understanding of the passions involved. A descriptive phenomenological approach is thus valid, in order to understand the wilderness experience. Equally, understanding the lived experience of the wilderness knot is important to the research. I am interested in *making meaning* out of such experiences and interpreting them, so *hermeneutic* phenomenology is most appropriate.

In terms of my research philosophy, epistemologically I appear to fall into the gaps between ‘objectivism’ and ‘constructivism’. I recognise *one reality* in the world (ontologically), but different people can perceive it differently, to some degree, as Barry (1994) points out. This is quite a different thing from claiming that there are

‘multiple realities’. On the one hand I find objectivism to be far too restricted, while on the other hand it seems constructivism and subjectivism both ignore the independent reality of wilderness, which is what I am studying. However, there is also another stance, which is ‘**participatory**’, and whose ontology is based on ‘participative reality, a subjective/ objective reality, co-created by mind and given cosmos’, whose epistemology is ‘experiential, propositional, and practical knowing’, and whose methodology is ‘political participation in collaborative action inquiry; primacy of the practical’ (Lincoln and Guba 2000).

When proposing the participatory paradigm, Reason and Bradbury (2001) point out some of the problems of postmodernism in regard to the ‘deeper structures of reality’. Their ‘participatory’ epistemological approach may serve as a bridge to go *beyond* the limitations of objectivism, constructivism and subjectivism regarding the real, natural, wild world, a world which exists independently of the human mind (Barry 1994). Accordingly, the *participatory paradigm* comes closest ontologically and epistemologically to underpinning my approach. This paradigm is also inclusive of hermeneutic phenomenology, which can be seen as part of the ‘extended epistemologies’ proposed by Reason and Torbert (2001), particularly ‘experiential learning’ and ‘presentational learning’.

1.1 Participatory action research

Concerning PAR, it has been argued that:

the purpose of inquiry is not simply or even primarily to contribute to the fund of knowledge in a field ... but rather to forge a more direct link between intellectual knowledge and moment-to-moment personal and social action, so that inquiry contributes directly to the flourishing of human persons, their communities, and the ecosystems of which they are part. (Reason and Torbert 2001)

They also argue that the primary purpose of research is a ‘*practical knowing*’ which is participative. The purpose of knowledge is ‘effective action’ in the world, and also that knowledge is always gained ‘through action and for action’. The inquiry process, which in modern science is idealized as a ‘dispassionate one carried out in reflection’, is in action science ‘a passionate embodied and emotional process (as well as an intellectual process)’ (Reason and Torbert 2001). It has also been suggested that:

An action science would concern itself with situations of uniqueness, uncertainty, and instability which do not lend themselves to the application of theories and techniques derived from science in the mode of technical rationality. It would aim at developing themes from which ... practitioners may construct theories and methods of their own. (Schon 1983)

I believe the wilderness knot is such a situation. It is unique that large, natural areas (wilderness) seem to be caught up in a cultural, philosophical and political maelstrom that affect their future. There is uncertainty involved here, both in how the knot developed, but also in how to research it, and how best to try to resolve it. There is an element of instability, as the meaning of wilderness is changing, and this is affecting management. In action science, experiential encounter:

is prior to both description and the object described. "Reality" can be seen as approached and constructed through the interplay of different qualities, types or territories of knowing – "extended epistemologies". (Reason and Torbert 2001)

They describe four extended epistemologies, which are *experiential knowing*, *presentational knowing*, *propositional knowing* and *practical knowing*. 'Experiential knowing' is knowing 'through participative, empathic resonance' in direct encounter, a knowing that articulates reality through 'inner resonance with what there is'. 'Presentational knowing' clothes the encounter in the metaphors and analogies of aesthetic creation. 'Propositional knowing' is knowing in conceptual terms, 'knowledge by description' expressed as statements, theories and formulae. 'Practical knowing' is knowing how to *do something*, and presupposes a conceptual grasp of principles. It brings the three prior forms of knowing to 'fruition in purposive deeds'.

It has been argued that these four forms of knowing can be seen as aspects of human intelligence, and are ways through which we 'dance with the primal cosmos to co-create reality' (Heron 1992 in Reason and Torbert 2001). *Experiential knowing* clearly has similarities to phenomenology. Language plays a role (though a constructive one) in both *presentational and propositional knowing*. Reason and Torbert (2001) would thus seem to situate themselves epistemologically as not agreeing either with the 'naïve realism' of objectivism, or the argument of it 'all being in the mind' found in constructivism. Action science thus seems to

acknowledge a *real reality* which we interpret (through language) – and it is in this way that we ‘co-create reality’.

Research has three audiences: ‘all good research is for me, for us, and for them’ (Marshall and Reason 1994). These have also been called *first* (researcher himself or herself), *second* (face-to-face co-operative inquiry group), and *third* (wider than face-to-face group) person research (Torbert 1998, 1999a, 1999b). Good action research should address all three (Reason and Torbert 2001). First person research addresses the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, and clarify the purposes of the inquiry. Exploration of such issues contributes to *critical subjectivity*, where we acknowledge our primary subjective experience, are aware of that perspective and of its ‘bias’. It is thus a ‘self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing’ (Reason and Torbert 2001). Second person research starts when we engage with others in a face-to-face group to enhance our first person inquiries, such as co-operative inquiry with co-researchers. The validity of co-operative inquiry can be assisted by systematic research cycling, balancing reflection and action. Third person research creates a wider community of inquiry, and includes those who cannot meet face-to-face (*ibid.*).

It has been argued that the criteria of excellence in social research such as PAR are no longer primarily methodological (Reason and Torbert 2001). They argue rather that we should ask what is the ‘quality of knowing’ within the practice of this person and community, and what are the appropriate measures, narratives and other data to demonstrate claims to quality. It has been said that: ‘the aim of participatory action research is to change practices, social structures, and social media which maintain irrationality, injustice, and unsatisfying forms of existence’ (McTaggart quoted in Reason and Bradbury 2001). Another researcher concluded he was ‘an educator and activist exploring alternative paradigm research as one tool in the multi-faceted struggle for a more just, loving world’ (Maguire quoted in Reason and Bradbury 2001).

I am especially interested in researching the apparent irrationality surrounding the world ‘wilderness’, as well as exploring questions of the tension between social and

environmental justice. I too am interested in a ‘more just, loving world’, but do not limit this only to the human world. While it is true that the carrying out of PAR in regard to wilderness is a program of social action (as for any human group seeking to change the world), the focus of the action here is on the ‘more-than-human world’ (Abram 1996), that is wild nature. The desired outcome is not just a benefit for human society, but also for the wilderness. The research methodology here makes use of a series of spiral cycles of action, and is one of collaborative and participatory control. However, the subject matter is really more a ‘practice of the wild’, or a social practice to retain wilderness. The research here is thus PAR in the *broader* rather than the stricter sense. In terms of the definitions of Grundy (1982), the research here could most correctly be called ‘practical’ action research.

1.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology

I am interested in *interpreting* and making meaning out of what people lived and felt in wilderness, and while experiencing the wilderness knot. It has been said that phenomenology is the ‘study of essences’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. vii), and that the word ‘essence’ is often misunderstood by poststructuralists, that it is really a description of a phenomenon (Van Manen 1997). All phenomenology is arguably *hermeneutic*, as all description is ultimately interpretation (Van Manen 1997, p. 25). However, others such as Silverman (1984) disagree with this, arguing there *is* a purely descriptive phenomenology. Certainly, in this thesis, I am interested in the interpretation and meaning given to these experiences – thus it is hermeneutic phenomenology under either definition.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a ‘philosophy of the personal, the individual’ (Van Manen 1997, p. 7). Phenomenology asks ‘what is this or that kind of experience like?’, attempting to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, before we classify or abstract it (ibid., p. 9). A person cannot reflect on experience while living through that experience. Phenomenology is thus not introspective but *retrospective* and recollective (ibid., p. 10). It involves the understanding and description of things as they are experienced, and is about the relationship between ‘Being and Being in the world’ (Tilley 1994). If we suspend our theoretical awareness, so we don’t experience the world as disembodied

intellects but ‘intelligent sensing animals’, we find we are *not* outside the world, but entirely within it (Abram 1992). Our sensory relation to the world is thus not that of a spectator to an object, but participants in a dynamic shifting field. Perception is a communication between ourselves and the living world, an intertwining between ourselves and what we perceive.

Phenomenology can be seen as the interpretive study of human experience (Seamon 2000), where its aim is to clarify human situations, events, meanings and experiences ‘as they spontaneously occur in the course of daily life’ (Von Eckartsberg 1998, p. 3). The goal of phenomenology is a rigorous description of human life as it is lived and reflected upon in all of its first-person concreteness, urgency, and ambiguity (Seamon 2000). Any object, event, or experience that a person can see, hear, touch, smell, taste, feel, intuit, know, understand, or live through is a legitimate topic for phenomenological investigation. Thus, anything that presents itself to consciousness is potentially of interest to phenomenology, whether the object is real or imagined (Van Manen 1997). The study of the wilderness experience, and the ‘wilderness knot’ itself is thus an appropriate (if two-faceted) topic for phenomenological research.

Through ‘phenomenological reduction’ we circumvent ‘taken-for-grantedness’ (Seamon 2000), and bring to the lifeworld a directed sympathetic attention (Spiegelberg 1982, p. 118). The heart of phenomenological reduction is ‘phenomenological intuiting’, where the phenomenologist works for an openness in regard to the phenomenon under study. This means to work in as free and unprejudiced a way as possible, where the hopeful result is ‘moments of deeper clarity’ in which the phenomenologist sees the phenomenon in a fresh and fuller way. This deeper clarity (or insight) has been called *phenomenological disclosure* (or the ‘aha!’ experience). Unlike positivist empirical inquiry, the phenomenologist does *not* know what he doesn’t know, the phenomenon is an uncharted territory (Seamon 2000).

The aim of phenomenological research is to use descriptions as a ‘groundstone from which to discover underlying commonalities that mark the essential core of the

phenomenon' (Seamon 2000). Seamon discusses the idealist (postmodernist) and realist (objectivist) divisions between *person* and *world*, and argues that phenomenology supplants these with a conception 'in which the two are indivisible – a person-world whole that is one rather than two'. What is needed today is a *middle way* between absolutism and relativism 'if we are to adequately understand, plan, and build a socially pluralistic and ecologically appropriate environment' (Mugerauer 1994, p. 94). This phenomenological position is of interest, as it has close similarities to the position of Heron (1992) and Reason and Torbert (2001) derived from action research. Thus researchers from *both* areas have argued for an epistemology which acknowledges *reality* as well as the fact that humans interpret it.

A major phenomenological challenge is to describe this person-world intimacy in a way that legitimately escapes any subject/ object dichotomy (Seamon 2000). Phenomenology can be described as empirical (= radical empiricism), as it is study through first-hand grounded contact with the phenomenon experienced by the researcher (ibid.). I am mindful of the issue in phenomenology which Van Manen (1997, p. 46) raises, which is the problem that phenomenological inquiry is 'not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much'. He points out that our assumptions and scientific knowledge can predispose us to interpret a phenomenon *before* we come to grips with its significance. For example, I already knew a large amount about 'wilderness' when commencing this thesis, hence it was important I did not let that knowledge get in the way of the phenomenon itself. Similarly, one could argue that it is important that one does *not* let one's background and knowledge get in the way of truly listening to the land. However, my experience has been that wilderness experiences are of such *power* that such assumptions and preconceptions get 'blown away' quite rapidly. Something similar has been noted by Harper (1995), when taking groups of people into wilderness.

It can be argued that phenomenology is a 'human science', rather than a natural science, as the subject matter is the structures of meaning of the lived *human world* (Van Manen 1997, p. 11). This is of interest in terms of anthropocentrism, as while it is the humans who are experiencing wilderness, it is the more-than-human world that

they are engaging with, and which is changing them (or ‘speaking’ to them). Van Manen (1997, p. 12) accepts that ‘thoughtfulness’ most aptly characterizes phenomenology, or as Heidegger (1962) put it, a ‘heeding’, a ‘caring attunement’. It is this *caring attunement* to the non-human world of wilderness that is being researched here. To argue that hermeneutic phenomenology of wilderness is *only* accessing the ‘human world’ would be thus something of an oversimplification, as it rules out our human ability to ‘witness’ the wild (Tredinnick 2003), for it to *sing reality* to us (Bachelard 1969) and through us. To believe that hermeneutic phenomenology can only be a science of the human world would thus ignore the fact that the nonhuman world can communicate to us. Hermeneutic phenomenology of wilderness at its best would thus be a study of *both* the human and nonhuman worlds, as we humans have learned by listening to the wild. This is certainly the aim of the phenomenology here.

Hermeneutic phenomenology arguably has as its ultimate aim the ‘fulfilment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are’ (Van Manen 1997, p. 12). This may on the surface imply anthropocentrism, yet it has been suggested by some soldiers (Thoreau 1854, 1862, Rolston 2001) that only by relating to wild nature do we in fact *become* truly human. Rolston (2001) argues that those who are never embedded in the wild ‘never know who they are and where they are’. To this extent, a hermeneutic phenomenology of wilderness may indeed allow us to become more fully ‘who we are’. In regard to wilderness, Casey (1993, p. 104) argues that *place* is a central ontological structure of being in the world. Engaging phenomenologically with physically powerful places such as wilderness will thus mean that we engage with a central ontological structure in the world, that the wilderness experience is in fact *how* we are grounded in being.

A clear phenomenological procedure is suggested by Cameron (2000), where phenomenology is made up of:

- 1) opening oneself to the experience and setting aside everything that one takes for granted,
- 2) writing about this in a way that conveys the experience, without the focus being on ‘I’,

- 3) critically reviewing the descriptions of the phenomenon, to ensure it reflects fresh experience, and not accepted theory or received opinions.
- 4) drawing out *essential themes* that characterise the phenomenon.

To which I would add a fifth part in regard to hermeneutics, being:

- 5) making meaning out of this and interpreting it.

It is planned that the hermeneutic phenomenology in this thesis will pass through these five steps for participants. Phenomenological ‘themes’ may be understood as the *structures of experience*, the experience of focus, of meaning (Van Manen 1997, pp. 79, 87). The search for themes is thus an analysis of the phenomenon, looking for the experiential structures that make up that experience.

Concerning interpretation and reliability in phenomenology, the phenomenologist’s interpretations are no more and no less than interpretive possibilities (Seamon 2000). From a phenomenological perspective, the issue of reliability first of all involves *interpretive appropriateness*, an accurate fit between experience and language. Four qualities to judge the trustworthiness of phenomenological interpretation are suggested by Polkinghorne (1983, p. 46), being *vividness* (a quality that draws readers in), *accuracy* (believability, in that readers can recognize or imagine the phenomenon), *richness* (aesthetic depth and the quality of description), and *elegance* (descriptive and elegant disclosure of the phenomenon). However, while these qualities may make the phenomenon more ‘believable’, they do not on the face of it serve as an obvious indicator of ‘trustworthiness’. Thus, as for any research, there are questions as to the rigour of the research. For human science (such as phenomenology), it is rigorous when it is ‘strong’ or ‘hard’ in a moral and spirited sense (Van Manen 1997, p. 18). He argues that ‘a strong and rigorous human science text distinguishes itself by its courage and resolve to stand up for the uniqueness and significance of the notion to which it has dedicated itself’. This is the aim of the hermeneutic phenomenology here.

In phenomenological studies, one can ‘work the text’ in a number of ways (Van Manen 1997, pp. 167-173). I will approach the hermeneutic phenomenology in a ‘thematic’ and ‘analytic’ way, though such analysis will focus on ‘qualities’ of the experience.

2. Methods

2.1 Participatory action research

During the course of my thesis, I initiated the formation of the Blue Mountains Wilderness Network (hereafter called ‘the Network’), a diverse group of people from many fields of life, all of whom were interested in wilderness. The Network is made up of scientists, teachers, writers, artists, ex-staff of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), TAFE college outdoor educators, bushwalkers, professionals, and conservationists. Most are in the Blue Mountains, but some are in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Goulburn.

In regard to PAR, it has been noted that ‘action science focuses on creating conditions of collaborative inquiry in which people in organisations function as co-researchers rather than as subjects’ (Argyris and Schon 1996). As there is a great wealth of knowledge and ability in the Network, it is far more appropriate to consider the members as *co-researchers*. PAR with the Network involved discussion, attempts to act on the issue, and reflection on our success or failure. The Network itself determined the direction the action research headed in. ‘Strict’ action research consists of ‘analysis, fact finding, conceptualization, planning, execution, more fact-finding or evaluation, and then a repetition of this whole circle of activities; indeed a spiral of such circles’ (Lewin 1946, 1947). Definitive conditions for action research have been suggested:

(a) the project takes as its subject matter a social practice, regarding it as a strategic action susceptible to improvement, (b) the project proceeds through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, (c) the project involves those responsible for the practice in each of the moments of the activity, widening participation in the project gradually to include others affected by the practice and maintaining collaborative control of the process. (Grundy 1982)

In a similar vein, Kemmis (1992) notes that PAR is ‘a plan for a program of social action’. PAR was carried out broadly according to Lewin’s Action Research Cycle (Lewin 1946, 1947, Kemmis and McTaggart 1992, p. 29), except the cycles were made up of three stages, being *planning*, *action*, and *reflection*. There was no ‘observation’ stage, as this was considered somewhat artificial, being either part of

the action or the reflection. It is also not always possible to observe *during* the action itself, when one is part of it. The system could also be described as following the strategy of Dick (1991), which is *intend, act, review*, which Dick describes as being the equivalent of Gummesson's (1991) 'hermeneutic spiral'.

Interviews with scholars

In addition to the PAR with the Wilderness Network, there was also a series of one-on-one interviews with eleven 'scholars' who have a special interest in wilderness, especially those who have been critical of wilderness in the past. These included conservationists, Aboriginal people and scientists. The aim of these interviews was to engage with those who have a differing view of wilderness, in a proactive and constructive way. These interviews were fed back (by tape and transcript) to the Network to inform their discussion.

The methods here interweave the *first, second* and *third* person research practices of action research. Most practices of inquiry focus implicitly on only one of these, while optimally researchers should in fact interweave all three (Reason and Torbert 2001). Thus, the phenomenological strand uses first person research, while the Network makes use of both second person research (a collaborative inquiry group meeting face-to-face) as well as third person research (corresponding by email with members outside the Blue Mountains). The interviews with people outside the Network are also an important part of third person PAR research, seeking to broaden the interaction to some who are critical of wilderness. The PAR interviews also interacted with the hermeneutic phenomenological research (as they influenced the lived experience recorded in the wilderness journals).

2.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology

The 'phenomenon' I am studying is actually in two related parts. The first is the actual wilderness experience, which may be in formal gazetted wilderness or in smaller natural areas. I am interested in how the wilderness experience has influenced or transformed people, and how they make meaning from their lived wilderness experience. Secondly, I am interested in how people experience dealing

with the different strands of the wilderness knot, and the ideas involved. These are not separate phenomena, in fact the first part is actually a key part of the second. The hermeneutic phenomenology interwove well with the PAR being undertaken, as it allowed me to experience the wilderness knot more fully, and allowed me to interact with other people who visited wilderness and were engaged with the wilderness knot (and who thus could write journals about it).

The hermeneutic phenomenology was carried out through *wilderness journals*, my own and four others from the Network. I invited the Network as a whole to be part of a more intensive and reflective input into the thesis via wilderness journals. As phenomenology was foreign to most of them, I provided them with a simple summary of what was being aimed at, that I was seeking to capture their lived experience about wilderness and the wilderness knot. Despite busy commitments, four Network members joined me in the writing of such journals. The PAR carried out by the Wilderness Network also fed back directly into the wilderness journals, as did the interviews with scholars, as these added to our lived experience of the wilderness knot.

CHAPTER 4

PAR CYCLES 1-3

1. PAR Cycle 1 - Setting up the Network and the trip to Gooches Crater

1.1 Planning

This cycle involves the formation of the Network as well as the determination and completion of its first task, a group camp seeking dialogue about ‘wilderness’. The Network is a group that came into existence partly due to this thesis, and partly as a spontaneous action by a diverse group of people interested in wilderness (some of whom have more than thirty years involvement). I have referred to them here by pseudonyms (such as ‘Noah’, ‘Aldo’), except where they have asked for their real names to be used (Peter Prineas). The genesis of the Network came on Dec 6th, 2003, when journalist James Woodford of the Sydney Morning Herald published an article titled ‘Hunters and Protectors’. I had been advised by the Colong Foundation for Wilderness that this might take a negative view on wilderness. I thus read this newspaper article with interest, and was especially concerned about the apparent equation of wilderness with terra nullius. It galvanized me to send an email out about the wilderness issue and the confusion around it. This started an email ‘cascade’, as people sent it on to others, and soon there was quite a flood of responses. Clearly I had touched a nerve. This was a process which showed the *richness and passion* involved in the wilderness knot. It was a process I was keen to continue. This richness in the debate comes across in the voices of the emails that flooded in to me, as follows.

‘Henry’ (former NPWS staff and now a consultant) replied to my email (18/12/03), saying:

*At a philosophical level, and speaking of being defensive, I think we have to accept that although **people like us** acknowledge, welcome and support the indigenous community's long attachment to country, and do not see the concept of wilderness in any way detracting from that, (a) we are not the mainstream community and (b) indigenous connections have been done a disservice in how wilderness was promoted in years past when we were all less informed.*

Henry's point is that in the past conservationists have focused too much on the recreational (anthropocentric and instrumental) side of wilderness and not on the eco-centric side and intrinsic values. He suggests that perhaps in the past conservationists *did* overlook social justice in the imperative to save wilderness.

'Ron' (a vet and avid bushwalker) expressed particular concern (19/12/03) about the confusion about wilderness amongst the Aboriginal community:

No wonder wilderness is under siege - it is the antithesis of the artificial human world. Letting nature go about its business without overwhelming human influence is an anathema to many parts of society ... It disappoints me that the waters have been unnecessarily muddied about the relationship between Aborigines and wilderness. The result is numerous missed opportunities for concurrent advancement of indigenous issues and nature conservation.

'Aldo' (a retired engineer and a keen walker) commented (21/12/03) on possibly *finding another word for wilderness*, though he concludes that to date he hasn't found one:

There is however a deep suspicion (and in some cases hatred) of wilderness, simply because of conceptions about 'terra nullius' and 'lock-out' Rightly or wrongly, there is a problem with the word, and it will not go away easily. For some years I have been inclined to think it would be good if we could come up with a better word - after all, what matters is the country and how it is managed, not the mere word that describes it. However, I haven't come across a better word, and I don't think a tokenistic made-up word will do.

Bill Lines (a political scientist and writer) responded to my original email on 22/12/03, arguing that we need to argue for wilderness forthrightly and fearlessly:

The cause of conservation has never been and can never be advanced through dodging issues and compromise. Forthrightness, truth and fearlessness are the only defence of nature ... for purely pragmatic reasons: these means work and they are among the few means available to minority and relatively powerless conservationists. They should not be sacrificed or compromised. Fortunately, you at least recognize that there are inherent conflicts in these matters. These conflicts (of justice and truth, for instance) are non-resolvable and incompatible. One finally must make a choice. Are we to further advance human interests or attempt to save what little wildness remains in the world? I know where I stand. There can be no compromise.

'Max' (a long time ACF Councillor and wilderness advocate) argued (23/12/03) for a seminar that took a positive approach:

I agree with Haydn. We cannot just sit back and let people run all over the wilderness! ... it would be best if the Conference/ seminar took a positive approach ... (i.e. an informed view about wilderness against which many criticisms would be exposed as having no tenable basis). The best subject would be something like 'The benefits of wilderness for the community'.

Bill responded again (7/1/04), arguing that there is a need for confrontation over some stances on wilderness, rather than dialogue:

Except for your and Max's defence of wilderness I am concerned at the responses of the other participants ... Their conciliatory, compromising, and complacent attitude suggests an inability to appreciate the major stakes at issue here. Attacks on wilderness are also attacks on conservation in general ... Wilderness has always been under siege. Aboriginal and postmodern claims are simply among the latest assaults. ... The proper response to these circumstances then is not compromise or even dialogue but an amplification of the issues. As the great David Brower argued: never avoid confrontation. Confrontation clarifies by making clear what is at stake. And surely we always need clarity, especially now when wilderness foes and post-modernists are determined to muddy the argument. If this involves confrontation then so be it. Sure, confrontation involves risk but when the stakes are high (literally a matter of life and death in this case) you can't avoid risk. To quote Brower again: 'A ship in harbour is safe, but that's not what ships were built for'.

The question of confrontation versus dialogue was clearly a central interest to the group. Confrontation may be necessary and may work, but alone is unlikely to let us reach a resolution. Conversely, dialogue does not necessarily mean compromise. These issues would seem fundamental to addressing the wilderness knot. Max agreed with Bill (8/1/04), saying:

I agree totally with his suggestion i.e. confront with amplification (i.e. positive messages about benefits and in this context deal with the nature of attacks). We probably would not need wilderness and other kinds of protected area if a large part of our world was not completely hostile to their existence. The fact that wilderness reserves still exist demonstrate that there also exists a powerful opposite streak in human nature ... Wilderness reserves, the national parks, and wild animals roaming free are amongst the greatest achievements of our contemporary civilization.

Max raises the issue that if we were all hunter-gatherers and not an exploitative society, then there might not be an over-arching imperative to save the wilderness remnants before they disappeared, simply because no society which saw wild nature as 'sacred' would have let itself clear and fragment so many natural communities.

'Rachel' (a long time ACF Councillor and conservationist) responded on 8/1/03 to Bill's emails, taking issue with his call for confrontation:

I felt I must respond to your comments ... First of all I reject it on moral grounds. 'Indigenous rights' are not just something made up by enemies of nature. Indigenous people have and in many cases do occupy many of the lands which remain in best condition ... It is undoubtedly a difficult issue but I feel the defenders of wilderness will quite literally marginalise the issue and confirm existing prejudices if you go down this path. Indigenous people and their supporters are potential allies, and conservation will not be served by ignoring and dismissing their interests. Second, I disagree on practical political grounds. I think to put the wilderness lobby in head on confrontation with indigenous rights is divisive political suicide and quite frankly will NOT lead to greater protection of nature.

Rachel had highlighted an interesting tension, one between questioning dubious claims, and working within the '*Realpolitik*' of our society, where to be marginalised politically means you may fail *practically* to protect natural areas. Each side seems to suggest that the other might be selling wilderness short. Should we be intellectually rigorous and possibly tread on 'sacred cows' and offend some stakeholders in the debate? Alternatively, does not the end justify the means (if that end is the protection of wilderness?) – even if the means are questionable? Surely there might be a dialogue that follows a middle path that is *both* intellectually rigorous but acknowledges sensitivities?

This debate continued for a couple of weeks, and it became clear that there was a group of some eight people in the Blue Mountains (and a similar number elsewhere) who shared concerns about wilderness (as well as some disagreements). 'Noah', a former NPWS scientist and bushwalker, has struggled with the confusion around wilderness for many years. He suggested we meet at his house (14/1/04). Present were professional conservationists 'George', and 'Lofty' (*ex officio*). There were also another seven from the Blue Mountains who attended. There was 'Henry', an ex-NPWS staff member and environmental consultant; 'Aldo', a bushwalker and former engineer who had fought to protect the Grose river; 'Dick', an outdoor educator; 'Ron', a vet and keen bushwalker; 'Bob', a horticulturist; 'June' a botanist; and 'Kersten', an artist.

We talked across a broad range of topics; the SMH article; the merit of changing the name of 'wilderness'; Traditional Owners and the need for *real* meaningful dialogue; the need for education; and the possibility of a seminar. 'Traditional Owners' (TOs) is a term (under the Land Rights Act) for Aboriginal people who can demonstrate

that they are the descendants of those who lived in a particular area. There was a positive energy to the meeting that was both encouraging and promising. There was a lot of experience present, people who knew a lot of the conservation history of the mountains, and were already thinking through the issues. Thus the Network was born. It subsequently became the PAR group for this thesis. The Network identified a number of possible themes for action:

- Campfires and overnight camps to discuss issues
- A seminar – invitation only, to be sent to TO's, conservationists, walkers, educators (no media) on 'wilderness renewal' or 'wilderness resurgence'.
- Possible open conference later in the year (Max's suggestion), on a positive theme re wilderness
- Education of:
 - Primary (such as the Earth Journeys project of Noah)
 - Secondary
 - TAFE
 - University
 - Key groups such as media, politicians and bureaucrats
- Bushwalks to actually get people *into* wilderness.

George spoke against the idea of a public conference (and Henry agreed that we could easily get into a fight in full view of the media), but the value of an in-house seminar was agreed. It would be a seminar with a *positive* theme, to be held in March. However, it was pointed out early on in our first meeting that a seminar is rather an impersonal and 'whitefella' thing to do, and that a *campfire* would be better to get real dialogue with Aboriginal people. Accordingly, we planned an overnight campfire at Gooches crater (Newnes Plateau). Dick and Henry asked TOs they knew. I asked other conservationists who might be interested.

1.2 Action - Overnight campfire at Gooches Crater (21-22/2/04)

It was a hot February day when we met at the car park of the Zig Zag railway on Newnes Plateau. From there we were to drive in past Bald Hill Trig, and then park and walk for some 45 minutes. Noah and Sally arrived, followed by George, then Kersten and myself, and 'Frannie' (from a conservation group)) and her two children. We waited. Noah said that Dick had told him that one TO definitely couldn't come, and that while he had asked another, the response has been a

humorous ‘what – go out with all those mad white bushwalkers?’. After a wait, we agreed we had all that were coming (though one conservationist was going to walk in later by following directions). We drove and walked through a sweltering hot day, and it was with relief that we reached Gooches Crater and the shelter of the cool overhang. That night, Dick turned up unexpectedly at last light, and told us that he had met Peter Prineas walking back *out*. He was the conservationist who had come later (using directions), but had been misled by a newly made ‘trail’ created by trail bikes.

The smallness of the group worked *against* a deep dialogue about the issues, since most of us held similar stances. The nature of Gooches Crater itself also made deep discussion somewhat difficult. It is a spectacular overhang (with a few red ochre hand stencils) in a beautiful forested valley. At its head lies another cave with a sandstone arch with a window in it. Such surroundings tend to encourage wonder and ‘listening’, rather than talking about the strands of the wilderness knot. We were happy *just to be there*, to experience the wilderness. Talking about it seemed rather peripheral to the experience itself. Frannie’s children also kept us busy entertaining them. Also, it was a time to catch up on bits and pieces of people’s life stories. There were also the actual physical necessities of camping that needed to be done; lighting a fire, organising camp and cooking dinner. Campfires tend by their nature to be informal, so it was difficult (or certainly artificial) to try and raise particular issues. There *was* some discussion around the fire, largely about how we might get real discussion with TOs about ‘wilderness’. There was also frustration that those TOs who had been invited had not come, precluding any real dialogue.

1.3 Reflection

This cycle is about the setting up of the Network, as well as its first action. Reflection should examine its successes as well as its failures. Given how busy conservationists are, it was extraordinary that many deeply-committed people were interested enough to sacrifice valuable time and join the Network. In fact, such a knowledgeable group had *never* previously got together before. The Network was thus something ‘new’, and potentially valuable. In that regard it was an outstanding success. It showed that concern about the ‘knot’ went deep in the hearts and minds of

others. In part, my own long involvement around wilderness may have stood me in good stead in terms of people joining, for they *knew* I was not just a ‘Johnny come lately’, but had three decades of activism behind me.

The depth of concern came out in the email exchange that led to the Network’s formation. Key issues were raised by knowledgeable people. The exchange between Rachel and Bill highlights a dilemma between political expediency and academic rigour. It was of interest to see that each of them in fact argued that the other might be selling wilderness short. Henry raised the issue of how past wilderness advocacy might have helped to cloud the issue. Max pointed out the threat of exploitation, that we would not *need* the term ‘wilderness’ if much of the world was not hostile to the existence of wild nature. Aldo spoke of how there is suspicion (and in some cases ‘hatred’) of the term ‘wilderness’ amongst some Aboriginal people. Ron spoke of how the confusion around wilderness has led to missed opportunities for concurrent advancement of indigenous issues and nature conservation. These were all key aspects of the wilderness knot. So the formation of the Network was a success in terms of the people it attracted, and the quality of the discussion it generated. It clearly both touched a chord and filled a need.

Our rather hastily organised campfire at Gooches Crater was a failure in terms of gaining informal dialogue with TOs. It was not a total failure in terms of the Network, as such days together in a wonderful place are never wasted. There was some reflection on the knot. My past experience is that some very astute philosophical observations about wilderness and humans can come out in bushwalks, but that it comes at its *own time*, and cannot be forced. So, why had the action *not* gone as planned? In part the event had just been organised too quickly, but there was also a certain *naivety* in our approach. It turned out that there was a serious problem of a history between a key TO and a key conservationist. That conservationist hadn’t really thought it *was* a problem, but the TO apparently did. In hindsight, and despite long talks (with both myself and another Network member) it had proved impossible to allay all concerns. Thus, no TOs turned up for the campfire.

Why else was it that the campfire failed to attract TOs? There were a number of other reasons that were brought forward on the day, and later through emails (and at the next meeting). One was the weather, it was a very hot week, and the thought of walking even a short way was too much for some. There was the question of feared conflict or ‘having a barney’. Could one leave if there was an argument, could one find the way back out? There were questions of fitness, of being seen to be out of condition. There were questions of comfort, and ‘roughing it’ out in the bush. One should not assume that all TOs actually *like* sleeping rough by a fire in a cave, even with sleeping mats and bags. There were also questions of cultural views on bushwalking, which is not a big thing culturally in many contemporary Aboriginal communities. I have encountered the same thing at Mutawintji NP, where some TOs don’t mind visiting places but don’t like camping overnight. For whatever of these reasons (or all of them), the Traditional Owners we had been trying to have a dialogue with voted with their feet, by not turning up. This readily demonstrated to us the problems of getting effective dialogue regarding the confusion about wilderness.

There was frustration among some participants, that several of us had tried to get people to come, but to no avail. There was some head-scratching as to just *how* one actually could get dialogue. I was keen to do something, to ring up TOs, to organise a meeting where we went to them (on their ground) to have a cup of coffee. Noah was willing to come along with me, but Aldo and Henry told me to ‘take things softly’. Forcing yourself onto others, forcing debate and possibly causing confrontation can lead to failure, just as much as asking people to a camp, and having nobody turn up. In effect I was being reminded that ‘fools rush in where angels fear to tread’. There is also the aspect of understanding the politics between the different Aboriginal groups. If you ask one group, you may offend another. I was also reminded that for many Aboriginal groups, wilderness is not necessarily in the forefront of their minds. They have other things to focus on, such as gaining recognition and protecting heritage. I found this more than a little frustrating, but accepted that this advice was based on many years of informal dialogue around this issue. It was later pointed out that in other similar dialogue situations with indigenous people, it may take three (or more) attempts before people decided you

were in fact ‘serious’. The Network reflected that the forthcoming seminar would provide another chance to seek dialogue.

2. PAR Cycle 2 - The ‘Wilderness Resurgence’ seminar.

2.1 Planning

Following the recognition of the failure to get dialogue with TOs at the campfire, the next meeting of the Network continued the organisation of the seminar planned for March, 2004. This would be another chance to gain dialogue, and raise the profile of wilderness. This was to be a *positive* seminar on the values of wilderness, and a celebration of those values. I organised a ‘welcome to country’ by ‘James’, a Dharug TO, and invited several TOs to the seminar. I also asked a Wiradjuri TO ‘Seamus’ to give a paper on his views on wilderness, to which he agreed. We also needed to engage with the sensitivity of knowing *who* to invite from the Aboriginal communities in the World Heritage Area, as not all TOs feel comfortable appearing together. I took advice from a member of the Dharug people as to just who would be both acceptable and productive at the seminar, as well as who should actually give the welcome to country. Noah also offered to give a ‘welcome to wilderness’, to put the case for the non-human world. There was a lot of work organising the day. Much of this fell on me as secretary to the Network, though the lunches and teas were organised by Kersten and her friend ‘Beryl’. A lot of work was done to try to make the day as positive as possible. One of my most onerous tasks was writing the draft of the *Wilderness Resurgence Statement*, and then editing this so it could be signed by those who came to the seminar. We realised that attempting to write such a statement by committee on the day would take too long, and be effectively unworkable. Accordingly, I produced a draft, which was reworked seven times, until everyone in the Network was happy with the result.

My partner Kersten and fellow artist Beryl, as well as Henry and Noah, all brought in art-works and photos, which adorned the walls. Kersten and I had spent the previous weekend down at Canoe Ck junction on the Colo River in the Wollemi wilderness. This is a wondrous place, where the river goes through a hairpin bend in the gorge. I have visited this place more than 30 times, taking many groups of people walking

there (including Premiers Wran and Carr, and also businessman and aviator Dick Smith). By ‘being there’ the weekend before, I was trying to put myself in as positive and productive a frame of mind as possible. I think I succeeded in this, as the place worked its calm magic upon me.

2.2 Action – ‘Wilderness Resurgence’ Seminar

The 28th of March, 2004 was a fine day at our venue, the Blackheath Heritage Centre. One of the first people to arrive was a TO ‘Gavin’, whom Kersten knew. He had been involved in the World Heritage Postcard Project with primary schools from the area, a project she had worked on around Dunns Swamp (north-west edge of Wollemi). He took me aside as I was unloading gear and said ‘it’s a wonderful thing that you are doing here today!’. That seemed to set the positive tone for the day. Some forty people attended the seminar. There were seven speakers. James, the Dharug TO set the scene for dialogue by observing that previously he didn’t think:

people cared for this place as much as he did, but from reading and looking at the paintings – that’s not the case at all. Which is why I think we are among friends.

James also observed in regard to wilderness in the Blue Mountains that ‘these places were probably even more sacred to them than their ancestors’ as so much had been cleared in the last 200 years. He concluded that we need to ‘walk together for conservation’. Noah then gave a ‘welcome to wilderness’, and rather than clashing in any way, the two ‘welcomes’ blended together beautifully. He spoke of the need for *celebration* of wilderness. He spoke of his bond with the wilderness, and the need to remember our histories in wilderness, and celebrate the relationship with the wild, the sheer wonder and enjoyment of being there. By celebrating our links and histories, we welcome ourselves to wilderness. Wilderness says ‘come to us, understand us, be with us’.

Peter Prineas is a long time wilderness advocate and author (Prineas 1978, 1997) who gave the inaugural speech about wilderness and its values, and the need for a resurgence of action on wilderness. He noted how interesting the word ‘resurgence’ (or in Italian ‘risorgimento’) was. This reminded him of Garibaldi in Italy, who with his Red Shirts led the resurgence in that country. He then presented me with a red

shirt with the embroidered words '*wilderness risorgimento 2004*' sewn on it, in a humorous linking of the two types of resurgence. He observed that to get a resurgence of action on wilderness we might indeed need to march on government and bureaucracy. He spoke about the history of the environment movement from the 1960s to 1980s, which then had a strong focus on wilderness. He noted that wilderness was a borrowing from the US, but that this had then been adapted here. He observed that at that time there was no strong criticism of wilderness from the Aboriginal community. The conservation movement to his knowledge had in fact *always* acknowledged Aboriginal history and management, and in fact saw Aboriginal cultural history as a positive that increased the conservation value of national parks. He pointed out that the most important thing is keeping the areas *themselves*, along with appropriate management, and was not too worried about calling these places other names (such as 'Wild Country'), provided that the management was the same. However, we also face attempts to change the management of such areas (for example by roads and permanent settlements).

I then spoke about what I had found about 'the wilderness knot', especially in regard to literature and philosophy. I discussed twenty criticisms made of wilderness, and the philosophical underpinnings behind these, and mentioned the continuing threats to wilderness, noting 'let us not kid ourselves that the attempts to exploit wilderness have gone away!'. I concluded my talk with a recognition of the strong passions that surround this issue, and a plea for us all to extend to each other those key characteristics put forward by Professor Mary Clark (2004); '*mutual respect*' and '*profound attentiveness*'. I urged us all to truly listen to each other: 'we are *all* custodians of the wild here'. Bill Lines spoke next about true 'patriotism' (a loaded term in the Australian political context), which he believes should mean protecting the original land – wilderness. He observed the importance of *being with nature* as a child, as all the conservationists he knew had had a childhood contact with natural areas.

Only an hour before he was due to speak, we found that 'Seamus' would not be attending. This meant we could expand the open forum, which was chaired by Dr. John Cameron from UWS. This proved interesting, but was in reality still not long

enough to cover everything people would have liked to raise. The focus was very much on dialogue. As John noted: 'dialogue enables differences to be expressed'. He also asked people to bear in mind the question 'what would it take to get a resurgence of wilderness activism'?. A strong theme in the open forum was education. Noah spoke about the 'Earth Journeys' project in the Blue Mountains, which was a program for primary school children, where they read sections from three books ('My Place', 'Home' and 'Walking the Boundaries'). They then went on a day trip to the edge of the wilderness. The program also sought to involve secondary students as mentors for younger students. It was pointed out from the floor that direct contact was not the *only* important aspect of education, however. Education in a 'layered way' was needed.

I raised the idea that it was around age 12-15 years that people became 'fixed' in how they relate to nature, so that education around this time was crucial, along with more 'nature writing' that really brought the wild to life. 'Bob' observed that today's generation was isolated from the bush and from wilderness. He concluded that formal education is often a turn-off for students, but 'experience' is not, and that by experiencing wilderness, they actually learn from it. However, our youth have to realise that wilderness *is* accessible by foot, that it is easy to go there. John observed the importance of ecological literacy in regard to education, along with the value of education from local place-related activities. Professor Stuart Hill (UWS) observed that people learn in different ways, from seeing, hearing, feeling, and practical activities. There is thus a need for a diversity in learning. He recalled trying to communicate ideas about ecology to a group of female students wearing a lot of make-up. He got them to rub a piece of paper over their faces and look at the mites from the enlarged pores in their skin. His story of one student's realisation was a light moment in the open forum: 'bugger me, I am habitat!'.

We then moved on to activism. Aemon from TWS spoke about the 240,000 ha Tarkine wilderness in Tasmania, which included a large myrtle rainforest component. The conference was overwhelmed by the importance of this area, the threats, and the lack of support politically within Tasmania to protect this area from logging. It was agreed that the Tarkine deserved a national focus. George was the

last speaker of the day, and spoke about the progress (or lack of it) in wilderness campaigns in NSW. The Colong Foundation for Wilderness lists 52 wilderness areas of the coast and tablelands of NSW that total about three million hectares. Of these, 23 are mostly declared, 11 are partly declared and 18 are not declared at all. Only 1.9 million ha is thus declared and protected – *only 63% of wilderness in NSW*. He argued that the situation was a crisis, but that there was a growing awareness of the problems confronting wilderness, and problems of management. He believed we needed to motivate passions, to rekindle interest in wilderness, and that the Tarkine wilderness in Tasmania was an ideal national focus.

One comment from the floor at the end of the day was that we had left the campaigning part till the end, when we should have been working on campaigns earlier (especially in the light of plans to film a blockbuster movie ‘Stealth’ in the Grose wilderness). A number of campaign motions were then put forward and received unanimous votes of support. The Wilderness Resurgence Statement was then signed by 28 of those attending. The statement called on government to undertake various actions, but before that it included 13 dot points, of which four key points are included below:

- Large, natural, wild areas have a right to continued existence into the future. Such areas are the remaining ‘original and best of Planet Earth’, the product of millions of years of evolution, and are only slightly modified by modern technological society. In many cases they have been (or are still) the lands of indigenous people, who may have influenced these areas, but did so without destroying their ecological integrity. The intrinsic, eco-centric values of these areas need to be recognised as having critical importance.
- The remaining wilderness areas in Australia are a tribute to (and a celebration of) the connection to country of the Aborigines (the First Australians). The term ‘wilderness’ as we use it here today acknowledges the long-term history of Aboriginal involvement in the land. Compared to the wholesale destruction and fragmentation of native vegetation in the last 215 years (under European ‘management’) – traditional Aboriginal land practices have only ‘slightly modified’ (in reference to IUCN definition of wilderness) such areas. It is thus appropriate to refer to large, natural areas of the bush in Australia as ‘wilderness’.
- Co-management of wilderness areas with Traditional Owners can acknowledge the rights of traditional custodians, while also protecting wilderness values (and recognising how little of it remains in NSW). We urge all groups to work towards this goal. We also support programs like the Indigenous Protected Area program that can complement a wilderness protection system, and support other indigenous efforts to conserve and protect their lands.
- Wilderness is the wild end of a spectrum of land use that stretches from wilderness to the city. It is misleading to assert (as some Postmodernist academics do) that to

speaking of 'wilderness' is to create a 'dualism', which ignores other areas that are not wilderness. There is a need for nature conservation action right across the whole spectrum, and this is the aim (and practice) of the conservation movement in Australia. However, wilderness as the *least modified* wild end of the spectrum deserves a *special focus* to protect such areas before they disappear.

That night after the seminar finished, seven of us camped on Newnes Plateau. At the campfire, there was a sense of achievement, but also a sense of fatigue at the effort expended. The last thing we wanted to do was to further discuss the knot itself. Rather, we talked about the events of the day, and who was doing what. Next morning we ring-barked exotic *Pinus radiata* that were invading the bushland from a nearby pine plantation. Later, Noah and 'Derek' (from Canberra) and I went on a walk to Deep Pass. After that, Derek and I sat on the top podium of Bald Hill Trig, which lies near the edge of the wilderness. Derek had never visited Wollemi, and was deeply moved (even by this very brief trip) as we stared north over the wilderness. It had always been one of his goals to visit Wollemi, one that had been increased by reading my book 'A Sense of Wonder' (Washington, 2002). Sitting on the top of the trig itself, we stared across to a series of stepped pagoda rock formations along the course of Bungleboori Creek and the Wollangambe River, their orange sides glinting in late afternoon light. Heathland, swamps and forests were apparent as a mosaic between the pagodas. Aspects of the wilderness knot emerged in our conversation. We shared our sense of frustration about how the *reality* of this magnificent place might be threatened by ideas or fads in philosophical movements. We talked about the need to ensure that such a view across wilderness could still be seen in a hundred years (or ten thousand). How might we ensure that? How indeed.

2.3 Reflection

Several people commented that they thought people at the seminar were really trying to listen to each other, and that they found this positive. While it was true that the planned TO speaker did not turn up to speak, Dharug TO James had given a most positive 'welcome to country' to open the session. There was a positive energy, a sense of stimulation, and 'getting something done'. There were also valuable outcomes from the seminar. The proceedings of the seminar were taped on a mini-disk, and made available on tape to the Network. Papers produced by the speakers stimulated discussion, and most have since been uploaded onto the Colong

Foundation for Wilderness website (www.colongwilderness.org.au).

According to Toulmin and Gustavsen (1996) in PAR, conferences themselves *are* the first, second and third person research practice. The ‘knowing’ resides not in the written reports but in the conference dialogue itself, and the subsequent discussions and actions undertaken. In this regard the papers produced may not be as important as the dialogue on the day. However, on both counts, the outcomes of the seminar were positive. It was an effective learning experience, and everyone agreed to be involved in action in the future. Links to two TOs were strengthened on the day (and in follow-up emails). The comment at the end of the seminar that we had not spent enough time on campaigns seemed to suggest that to some of the participants the philosophical and ethical need for a resurgence in wilderness activism was ‘obvious’. Perhaps the seminar was only talking to the converted? And yet, in reality it was deliberately designed to be an ‘in-house’ seminar, focusing on problems around wilderness. If the converted are better informed about wilderness, its history, its criticisms, the confusion, then it allows them to become advocates who can answer such criticisms. There was again some pondering within the Network about the fact that the main TO speaker failed to attend the seminar. There was frustration about this (as he had assured several members that he *was* in fact coming), which again illustrated the problem of gaining effective dialogue.

Thus, dialogue problems had emerged at both the campfire and the seminar. The Network’s experience so far demonstrated the delicacy involved in gaining productive dialogue regarding an issue containing real passions over both social and environmental justice. We had learned that it is one thing to say ‘let’s have dialogue’ and quite another to actually *get* this, given the sensitivities, politics and passion surrounding these issues. The Network as a whole was strongly supportive of continuing to seek to build better dialogue.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the difficulty of talking about the bush while actually in it! This came out in Cycle 1 at Gooches Crater, and at the campfire on Newnes Plateau after the seminar. At neither venue did we talk much about wilderness. Certainly, after the seminar many of us (especially me) were quite

exhausted mentally, we did not want to rehash the issues again. However, there is more in play than this. First is the immediacy of just ‘being there’ in a beautiful wild area. Your senses are engaged with the beauty and wonder of the place, *all* your senses – sight, sound, smell, touch. It is not so easy to sit back and ‘cerebralise’ about it. In fact to talk about it is to distance yourself a bit, and feels almost rude, ceasing communing with the place to talk about what humans *think* about it. In wilderness there is always something going on, whether the play of light on rock, the movement of wind in the trees, the flight of birds and their calls, or just the things you actually need to do just to live, such as lighting a fire and cooking food. Part of the wonder of the wilderness experience is this immediacy, this unpredictability, this collage of continual enchanting change. To talk about wilderness while there, is in fact asking that we stop our wilderness experience to discuss the merits of wilderness. The totality of the wilderness experience mediates against analysing it. This is not to say that it cannot be done (see Chapter 7), but to acknowledge that it is not always natural or easy to do so.

3. PAR Cycle 3 - Forays into the public sphere

Where was the Network to proceed after the seminar? A key interest for the future was the planned interviews with selected scholars about wilderness (Cycle 4), however these would take many months to organise, carry out and transcribe for the Network to discuss. In the meanwhile, events were moving, the Network and myself were being asked to attend conferences and contribute input about wilderness. We were also realising the need to submit *new* articles about wilderness. This cycle is made up of four Mini-cycles, each one a different foray into the public sphere about wilderness issues. Each Mini-cycle had its own value, and contributed to the Network’s understanding.

3.1 Mini-cycle 3a - Feedback from articles

Planning

One issue that the Network had discussed over several meetings was the lack of current articles about wilderness in journals (compared with the situation 20 or even 10 years ago), so that many younger people had not been exposed to the debate.

There was a need to produce new articles about wilderness for journals and magazines. A number of people volunteered to write articles from within the Network for various publications.

Action

In September 2004 I worked on a draft article entitled 'The tragedy of the wilderness knot', arguing that it was a tragedy that the protection of large natural areas was being blocked by the wilderness knot. In October I sent this draft out to the broader Network (including internet members). This produced some interesting debate. I then reduced the size of my overly ambitious article, and narrowed the theme to 'Wilderness, social justice and 'ownership'', which was published in the NSW National Parks Journal in February, 2005. I was especially interested in exploring the question of 'ownership' versus 'custodianship', in terms of how we treat the land (Washington 2005). Interestingly, most of the other promised articles from the Network never actually eventuated, as people were too busy, or thought my article had already 'covered the ground'.

Reflection

There was substantial feedback on my draft article. Perhaps the most interesting thing to emerge from this email discussion was the concern that I was 'overstating' the case that wilderness was under attack. Max (22/10/04) replied:

I think your thesis has a fairly shaky foundation. You imply a crisis and say (in different places) that wilderness is "stalled" and "going backwards". I think that in your desire to make worthy comments on wilderness and the future you have presented a picture of the present situation which is not quite true ... The situation at Kakadu is not really as you present it. All zone names in the management plan have been replaced by numbers for some time, not just wilderness ... I think it would be better if you based your discourse on the fact that wilderness has come a long way and is alive and well in so many places but the wilderness system is not expanding at the rate at which it should be expanding (e.g. where is the National Wilderness System?). As you say there are so many enemies of wilderness, and your negative portrayal of the situation could encourage them.

Later (26/10/04) Max added:

I do not think I explained myself well enough. I DO NOT DOUBT that we have a problem with wilderness as a term and concept, because there are so many people attacking it, but I believe it is inadvisable to broadcast our concerns in the way you propose because that could play into the hands of the enemies of wilderness. They

could say 'look at Haydn Washington's writings, even the movement has concerns about the term'. This is not really true of course because your aim is to answer the concerns and vouch for the term, but people are very selective in their use of quotations.

On the same day, George responded to Max, saying:

I do not agree with you on Kakadu and refer to the following review of 'Kakadu the Making of a National Park'. We can sing in the rain and say its all OK, good strategy, but the facts about wilderness and Kakadu are that wilderness is not popular up there (according to David Lawrence's book) ... I admit to being the source of this negative perspective on Kakadu and Namadgi and I think the facts support my position. I agree it may not be good tactics to telegraph our weaknesses, but we do not want to 'do a Jonnie Howard' when writing an academic work.

Peter Prineas also contributed to the debate, suggesting that people can give too much significance to academic criticisms of wilderness, and that more attention should be given to the writings of wilderness advocates in the 1970s and 1980s. My response was summed up in a (condensed) email (1/11/04) below:

Peter, you ask if there is any evidence that the public opinion on wilderness is in fact changing? ... The Wilderness Society (Alec Marr/ Virginia Young) accept that the term is under attack (they speak now more of 'wild country' than wilderness). Three senior people in the Commonwealth Dept. of Env't. and Heritage have told me the term is hardly used there these days. James Woodford's article and Tim Flannery's much publicized attacks are out there in the media ... My point is that there is enough evidence to show that there IS a need for wilderness resurgence if we want large natural areas to be given a high conservation and management priority in the future. Max, I still have problems seeing how what I write can play into the hands of anti-wilderness lobbyists? Yes things can be quoted selectively. However, by far the greatest danger in my view is in NOT responding at all, not analysing the often spurious attacks on wilderness, not arguing the values and benefits of wilderness?

In regard to these comments, this debate is ongoing, and has already emerged in the planning for the Colong Foundation for Wilderness's planned 2006 Conference. Does one accept that while wilderness may not have a problem with the public at large, it does have a problem with some parts of academia, bureaucracy and some Aboriginal people – and do something about it? Or do you in fact endanger wilderness by acknowledging there *is* a problem, and thus legitimize the criticisms that should perhaps just be dismissed? This is an important debate not just within the Network, but within the conservation movement as a whole in Australia (hence its inclusion here). The Network by and large has chosen to accept that there *is* a problem, and try to respond to it by meaningful dialogue. This approach however may not sit well with all conservationists.

In my shorter article ‘Wilderness, social justice and ownership’, I made the point that ‘part of the problem is around the idea of “ownership” or possession. There is a potential tension between the anthropocentric idea of human possession or ownership, and the *ecocentric* idea of custodianship’. Peter Prineas commented that he thought my article was just what the National Parks Journal needed, being personal and reflective. However he noted that I was sticking my chin out, so I shouldn’t be surprised if someone took a swing at it. On 25/2/05, someone did indeed ‘take a swing’ at me. I received a letter from a heritage consultant in the Blue Mountains, whom I shall here call ‘Harvey’, who was doing a Ph.D. on Aboriginal land management. He stated that my article was full of ‘old fashioned misconceptions’ and that I had ‘learned nothing from what Aboriginal people have said and written on the subject’. He said he would see his supervisor and see what could be done to ‘alleviate your ignorance’.

I replied to Harvey, pointing out that the thrust of my article was *not* about Aboriginal environmental impact, but about custodianship as opposed to ‘ownership’, about gaining *both* environmental and social justice. I also explained my commitment to ‘profound attentiveness’ and ‘mutual respect’ – provided others granted that to me also. I requested any relevant references. I later received a response (30/4/05), where Harvey stated that he totally supported ‘large natural areas’, but that ‘wilderness management was actually harmful to long term conservation goals’ (he did not say why). He included his supervisor’s card, whom he said ‘may have the patience to exchange information’ with me (though he had apparently been equally ‘appalled’ at my article). I read out the letters to the Network, where there were a variety of responses. Noah said ‘you could make these two letters into a brilliant bloody article’. Aldo observed that Harvey ‘won’t communicate to me at all!’. George told me that he wouldn’t have responded, that ‘it will just enrage him. You don’t want to make enemies’.

In terms of critical subjectivity, it is certainly valid to reflect and ask myself and the Network ‘what if Harvey is right?’. Do we in the Network have closed minds? Are we ignorant? Are we really listening? One test would be to ask who is initiating

dialogue, who is trying to reduce the confusion, who is sharing information? Harvey has never referred me to any academic works to actually educate my alleged ‘ignorance’, nor has he sought to continue a rational debate about a difficult and confused area. As long as the Network seeks dialogue, shares information and seeks to reduce confusion, it certainly makes it difficult to have totally closed minds. All people have biases (Reason and Torbert 2001), it is when they become prejudices or dogma that they reflect a closed mind. The Network’s biases are out in the open for all to see, they believe that large natural areas, formally defined as ‘wilderness’, have value and should be protected. We understand that others don’t attach the same meaning to ‘wilderness’, and it is this confusion we are trying to discuss.

Many in the Network felt that it was a waste of time trying to communicate meaningfully on the issue with people such as Harvey, who hold a very polarised position. However, they were operating on the basis of a previous history of failed communication. In terms of real dialogue, the exchange of letters with Harvey did end up a failure. However, it generated dialogue within the Network, and it did serve to illustrate part of the problem. There are limited options for dialogue when the correspondent will not discuss the issues raised, and just relegates one to the realm of the ‘ignorant’. It served to illustrate just how powerful the polarisation on these issues can be. It also showed the urgent need to try and short-circuit such a polarised situation, whereby potential protagonists (including Network members) really start to *listen* to each other, and show mutual respect.

3.2 Mini-cycle 3b - World Heritage Institute seminar

Planning

For some time there had been a proposal under discussion by individuals, government departments and universities to set up a Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (GBMWHI) to promote research within the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. The Institute was formed as a non-profit organisation with links to government departments and universities. In October 2004, they called for papers on various topics. George suggested to the acting Executive Officer that I should write the paper on wilderness. Accordingly I

submitted this on behalf of the Network. On 12th November 2004, participants met at the Australian Museum in Sydney.

Action

At the GBMWH Institute meeting, there were five Network members present, at different tables. A number of other conservationists were also present. We found it quite hard to get the word ‘wilderness’ raised at all as a topic for research. This was despite the fact that formal wilderness currently makes up 54% of the World Heritage Area. One participant actually referred to wilderness as a ‘human exclusion zone’. Apparently this was misreported as the group’s ‘findings’, but was never later corrected. Tacon (an anthropologist) commented to his table that ‘Wollemi is not a wilderness it is a cultural landscape’, but later referred to roads as the major threat to natural areas. Lunney (a mammologist) seemed generally hostile to wilderness, and referred to ‘landscape ecology’, which he seemed to think in some unspecified manner removed wilderness from the picture. Lenore Lindsay (World Heritage Officer, NPWS) said that we needed an indigenous view of the land which ‘breaks down the distinction between nature and culture’. What this might mean was not explained.

At my own table, there seemed to be an attempt to avoid any debate about wilderness, though this did not come from the two Aboriginal TOs present, but rather from the chairperson and one or two academics. With the assistance of two consultants, we did manage to get the word *wilderness* mentioned a couple of times. Other tables were not so fortunate, with the word ‘core’ tending to be used, instead of referring to the gazetted wilderness areas. I certainly was left wondering later (after thirty years of political lobbying experience) if the meeting had been deliberately planned to isolate those who supported wilderness. Other Network members were unsure about this. I went over at the end and spoke briefly with Paul Tacon, the anthropologist who has worked on the recently discovered ‘Eagle’s Reach’ site in Wollemi NP. I discussed *cultural landscapes*, and we agreed to swap emails and references. The rapport we had was improved dramatically when I told him about ‘Baiaame Cave’, an art site I had found on the edge of Wollemi NP, which had 34 small charcoal Baiaame figures, all holding hands. Baiaame is chief of the Sky

People in Aboriginal mythology in eastern NSW. I spoke of how I ‘knew’ while walking there that there was an art site nearby, and was *guided* to it (see Chapter 7). This was something which resonated very strongly with his own experiences, and almost certainly made it easier for him to concede me ‘mutual respect’ and ‘profound attentiveness’.

Reflection

The events of the day generated discussion within the Network, especially regarding the developing debate with Tacon (now at Griffith University). I sent an email to Tacon on 26/11/04, where I raised the problem of ‘landscape’:

So is Wollemi a cultural landscape? Yes. Is Wollemi a natural landscape? Yes. It is both, depending on your point of view. It is a cultural landscape as it has significant cultural heritage in places ... It is a natural landscape or wilderness as it was formed by natural processes over millions of years and is clothed in native species that evolved over all that time also. It is a large natural area, which is what wilderness is defined as (in almost all definitions) ... My problem is with those who insist it must be one or the other ... What does this mean? Are there no natural processes there? Is nature being subsumed as a subset of culture? Often the next step is to claim that it is a human artefact, which seems both egocentric and anthropocentric to me?

Tacon responded (1/12/04) with a friendly email, suggesting maybe we could publish papers together one day. He asked me to take part in the Wollemi Cultural Project in 2005, where we could talk further (though sadly this never eventuated). In regard to the Baiame Cave art site (having sent photos) he said ‘the art site you found is indeed a special place. And your response to it speaks much about you. I believe you are a great human being in terms of your sensitivities toward other people (indigenous and otherwise) and toward Nature’. Tacon responded to the wilderness/ cultural landscape debate by saying:

In general I agree with most of your conclusions and believe people such as ourselves should unite, especially to protect wonderful and special places such as the Wollemi. The only major point of difference is that I consider Wollemi National Park a wild, rugged place with tremendous biodiversity (and cultural heritage) rather than a wilderness. I truly do not believe that pure ‘wilderness’ has existed on planet Earth for a long time. People have been modifying, marking, mythologised and mapping every part of the Earth for hundreds of thousands of years ... I agree the resulting impact of humans on the environment has been devastating and areas like the Wollemi need maximum protection (especially from roads!).

Tacon went on to say:

Finally, everyone keeps going on about how we have to manage wilderness areas like the Wollemi. But once areas of land, no matter what their size, are managed, by white or black, by definition (mine at least) they cease to be wilderness. Indeed, how can any area be wilderness if it is managed by humans? On the other hand, if we do not act strongly to manage and protect areas of biodiversity now then how can wild places and biodiversity survive? And as you point out, how do we best balance environmental and social justice? White man need to stop being so greedy!

It is interesting to note Tacon's perception of wilderness as 'pure', so that if we accept *any* influence by humans then it can't be wilderness, even if it is only slightly modified. Once there is any management (even minimal disturbance management) he seemed to believe the area can no longer be wilderness. His definition of wilderness is thus at odds with the IUCN definition. However, his positive email promised fruitful future dialogue. These emails were circulated to the Network. One of the most interesting comments came from Max on 6/12/04:

All I can deduce from this correspondence is that Paul Tacon for some unclear reason is so set in his convictions that he is incapable of taking in what you are saying to him about the meaning we are attaching to wilderness. You say something is white but he insists on basing his comments on his false belief that the thing in question is black. It is as though you are talking about the needs and behaviour of pigs but he is talking about sheep. You are talking about hares but he relates his comments to rabbits.... So what is the point of talking to him? I can only think of one reason or topic: viz. to probe why he is not prepared to conduct a debate around the widely accepted definition of wilderness as a protected area concept and reality. He might have some overriding humanitarian or social justice reason for ignoring what we are saying.

Following on from this meeting of the Institute, Noah took Institute staff out to Deep Pass on the edge of the Wollemi wilderness for a day walk. Many management issues presented themselves during the day, such as over-use (the pump-out toilet was overflowing). As 'Ron' observed (16/3/05 Network meeting) in regard to getting wilderness issues across to people: 'to be in the bush with people just makes it a hell of a lot easier'. It is at this personal level, while actually in or next to wilderness, that one can actually get meaningful dialogue on the realities of large natural areas, their values and their management.

3.3 Mini-cycle 3c – Ecopolitics XV conference at Macquarie University

Planning

This conference (13-14/11/04) was held two days after the Institute meeting. I was there in part to meet eco-philosopher Dr. Val Plumwood (with whom I had lunch), and partly as I was at the time lecturing in the ‘Green Politics’ course at UWS. I was also there to hear a paper on Fraser Island by a philosopher from UNSW, here called ‘Sam’, which spoke of a ‘wilderness dogma’. It was not a planned action in regards to the wilderness knot and the Network, but events proved otherwise.

Action

It turned out that Sam had also been at the Institute meeting at the Museum. In his talk, Sam argued that dingoes were used as icons of wilderness, and that wilderness ignored historic human and dingo interactions. He said wilderness was analogous with terra nullius. He saw wilderness as over-riding other peoples voices, and conservation groups as being powerful lobbies who drowned out these other voices. He aligned himself with the human artefact view of the land put forward by Langton (1998). Thus in question time I asked him how he could see the Colo gorge as a human artefact, but time for questions ran out. I then sought to spend lunch with Sam and a Visiting Fellow from his faculty. His colleague in particular made mutual respect difficult, as she was too busy putting her own post-structuralist view (based on a very selective reading) to actually listen to any other view. She also showed what I can only describe as a great zeal to destroy the term ‘wilderness’, without any apparent thought for the consequences for large natural areas in the real world. Theory seemed more important to her than reality. In hindsight, I wished I had the session on tape, as the polarisation was intense, as was the confusion and mis-translated meanings. Sam was more amenable to dialogue, though he did subscribe to both the ‘terra nullius’ and the ‘human artefact’ views of wilderness. However, he could not explain to me why either of them were valid. He did tell me ‘you guys are not going to win!’ and seemed to think there was some ‘new wave’ of rejection of wilderness sweeping across society. Much of their ideas seemed to revolve around ‘destroying the nature/ culture dualism’. What this actually *meant* was never explained, nor why wilderness was not part of getting rid of such a dualism. I was told I was ‘strategically naïve’ while I told

him he was being 'politically naïve' if he really wanted to protect large natural areas. Time precluded more discussion, but I got his card to continue the debate via email.

Reflection

After several days reflection, and some discussion with Network members, I sent 'Sam' a long email (26/11/04) detailing five points for discussion. I did not receive a response to this email. John Sinclair, (who led the fight to save Fraser Island from sandmining in the '70s and '80s) had heard of Sam's paper from Max, and contacted me for a copy. Presumably he also passed his own views on to Sam. I sent both my email to Sam (and his Fraser Island article) out to the Network, which provoked discussion. Noah (25/11/04) sent Sam an email saying he found the paper 'less than helpful' and 'almost indigestible'. Noah then asked 'I would appreciate a rather short précis of the important points and the real evidence that supports them or otherwise'. Sam responded with 'I'll get back to you when I have time but in all honesty I suspect we'll get nowhere until you open yourself more to other perspectives/discourses. The feedback I've had from others of all colours (i.e. scientists, humanities scholars etc) contradicts yours'.

Sam raised a valid question, might it not be *us* (the Network) who are missing things? Given the intricacies of debate around wilderness, this is always a valid question to ask oneself. What does it mean to open yourself to other perspectives and discourses? Was Noah, the long-time biologist and bushwalker, failing to open himself to Sam's poststructuralist discourse? Was Sam failing to open himself to the understanding of wild places that Noah has? The Network had discussed postmodernism at some length, and they had read my draft literature review and know of Cronon's and Callicott's key arguments. They understood what had been said, and by and large they didn't agree, or they saw that the purported criticism of 'wilderness' was actually about an association tagged on to wilderness, and not about wilderness as a large natural area. Further, they saw such criticisms as threatening the *reality* of large natural areas that are still under increasing threat. The concern from Noah over Sam's arguments were in fact a scientist's or rational scholar's concerns - to do with rigour, with backing up arguments with evidence or examples. He could not see a self-consistent framework to support what Sam was arguing, so

he asked for a précis of the evidence. This is what one is meant to do in science, as everything is arguably under test. Sam in response did not take up this chance to explain his position, rather he told Noah that Noah needed to 'open his mind to other perspectives'.

Ron's (22/11/04) comment on Sam was 'messianic zeal indeed. Understanding what drives it may well play a big part in unravelling the wilderness knot. I am surprised that people do not back-peddle away from the terra nullius bullshit, given how easy it can be refuted'. Max (25/11/04) stated: 'Sam appears to be another case of someone with a 'down' on wilderness who has not bothered to examine what the wilderness concept really means in terms of the case put by those who have championed it. Instead he turns for wisdom to the critics of wilderness; how very insular'. Noah was so perplexed he sent me a poem on 28/11/04:

*People of all time
May well have been merely a subset of the attitudes
And pseudo intellectuality
We are witnessing
In this Knot debate*

*Even the cave men
Would have had the developers
And quasi pragmatists
Who probably had no real understanding of the
Shaman and witches who held
Then not only the medicinal keys
But the magic and the connection to the land
I venture to say that
All indigenous cultures had the doubters of the wisdom of the elders
And the processes from which this was derived*

*Not all people of all or anytime in human existence
"get it" even when they are living in the wilderness
But as we have become more and more urbanised and dependent on city living
and the disconnection from nature becomes the norm
It is too easy to accept anthropocentricity as the norm and
As the abundant and dominant condition of consciousness.
And that such a consciousness overrides the sub or unconsciousness of other life.*

*In a nutshell, there have always been those who don't get it
Who don't sense the wonder - and many who never will.
Is there something different about those humans who do?
Perhaps there is.
From my experience many do get it when they are guided to it,
But they must "be open" to the experience.*

On 30/11/04 Henry weighed into the debate about ‘Sam’s’ paper with his own scathing polemic:

On the other hand, I completely agree with your assessment of ‘Sam’s’ Fraser Island piece. In fact you have been too kind. It’s arrogant. It’s naïve. It’s frightening. I have never in my life read such a pile of unsubstantiated conjecture, sloppy research, jargonistic drivel and cobbled-together nonsense masquerading as intellectual rigour. Its a feral dog in dingo’s clothing and an insult to anyone in the 2 groups he clearly despises (greenies and NPs) - as opposed to the honourable residents of Fraser Is who are the very embodiment of enlightened views, moral honour, environmental wisdom and liberal thinking. This is a dangerously subversive polemic and not a genuine piece of research. Has he even been to Fraser Is? Has he ever talked to anyone ... I scarcely know how to start listing the shortcomings, exclusions and obfuscations.

I have included this discussion at some length because it is such a good illustration of the difficulties of dialogue, and the passions involved (my own included!), and the misunderstandings of what wilderness means. Probably all those involved dislike and lament the human/ nature dualism, and see humans as part of nature. Yet Sam and his colleague clearly see that any mention of ‘wilderness’ supports the idea that humans are *not* part of nature, whereas the wilderness experiences of conservationists are some of the most profound events of their lives, which taught them that they *were* part of nature. How does one get dialogue when faced with a polemic, or when faced with something more than zealotry, a fanaticism based on a different meaning of wilderness to that formally defined, and with which wilderness conservationists work? No doubt Sam would characterise my five points to him also as a polemic, and by so doing dismiss them? However, I would really have welcomed a response to my points (even if strongly worded!), so I could understand what motivated his comments. Bill Lines has suggested to me that I didn’t get a response because he *couldn’t* answer those points rationally. This may or may not be true – the dialogue ceased then, so we do not know. Noah points out that some people just don’t ‘get it’, and that those with a close bond to the land have probably been a minority in all societies, including indigenous ones. Both these points are probably valid, yet as it stands the two sides remain polarised, hardly conducive to listening to each other or extending mutual respect, and hardly conducive to actually protecting the remaining large natural areas (a.k.a. wilderness) into the future. The difficulties of dialogue are highlighted by these events.

3.4 Mini-cycle 3d – The ‘Two Fires’ Festival

Planning

After my interview with philosopher Val Plumwood in December 2004, she asked me if I would like to appear on a panel at the Two Fires Festival in Braidwood on 19/3/05 to discuss the wilderness debate. This festival was a tribute to poet Judith Wright’s life’s work, and had a strong progressive and social activist theme. We discussed my forthcoming talk at the Wilderness Network meeting of 16/3/05. There was some concern at *how* wilderness was being portrayed by the organisers (the session was originally to be called ‘the wilderness chasm’), and I was warned by Ron that I might be somewhat ‘isolated’ on the day itself.

Action

The panel at Two Fires was to consist of philosopher Val Plumwood, anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose, journalist James Woodford and myself. Uncle Max Harrison of the Yuin people came along to the session with Deborah Rose, and also spoke at the end. Professor Stuart Hill of UWS chaired the session. We only had fifteen minutes each, which precluded many questions. The name of the session was now entitled ‘Judith Wright’s legacy – the wilderness debate’. Dr Brendan Mackey of ANU Forest Ecology (prime author of ‘The role of wilderness in nature conservation’, Mackey et al. 1998a) was there, as were ‘Rachel’, and Don Henry, Director of ACF.

Val Plumwood spoke first, stating that Judith Wright had believed that wilderness accepted ‘terra nullius’, and had resigned from conservation groups on that basis. It is of interest here to note that Max from ACF, who was a contemporary colleague of Wright’s, disputes this, as does Peter Prineas, and also Don Henry. The ACF meeting minutes (sent to me by Max) in fact show that Wright resigned over a decision she thought did not strongly enough oppose the Concorde plane visiting Australia. Max also referred me to her paper (Wright 1980) on wilderness, where she certainly does not equate wilderness with terra nullius. This raises the problem of differing recollections when one can no longer ask the person referred to. Val spoke on two themes, the first being the ‘purity’ and ‘absence of humans’ doctrines of wilderness, and secondly that if we believe in reconciliation, we can’t expect *only* wilderness and

national parks to be the areas that are handed back (as this is unfair and may degrade them). Deborah Bird Rose spoke of how she lives in 'other people's country'. She was socialised into this country by Yarralin Aboriginal people. She spoke of 'quiet country', which showed the ecological signature of the care of people. She sees 'wild' as *without law* (lawless), as losing ecological integrity. 'Bunyu' is a word that means 'good' or 'healthy' or 'lawful', all the stuff that makes life flourishing. She argued that we should protect 'flourishing' areas, but she doesn't like the word 'natural'. Nature is not what you got when you take away people, 'damage' is what you get when people are no longer allowed to 'take care of country'. She thought it was incumbent upon us not to use words that come out of a colonising tradition, such as wilderness. Rather we should find terms that respect Aboriginal people and that honour country. If we in Australia can't find better words than 'wilderness' to talk about flourishing country, then she would despair completely.

Next came James Woodford, who in some ways was responsible for the Wilderness Network being formed, due to his article on wilderness in the Sydney Morning Herald (Woodford 2003). He gave a deeply personal and thoughtful history of why he had for a time stopped using the word wilderness, but that he had been grappling with the issue for some weeks, and had decided that wilderness *was* a really important concept. He thought that developers would be rubbing their hands with glee that Aboriginal people and conservationists were at odds over this. He thought the wilderness issue was 'like a dolmade wrapped up in a stinging tree leaf, with an angry funnel web spider inside'. It had been his favourite word for ten years as a Herald writer, a 'word worth a thousand pictures'. He first came across criticism of wilderness to do with rock art in Wollemi, when a TO had rung him up and said he didn't want him to use the word (as it was seen as another term for terra nullius). It was said instead that Wollemi had been a 'working forest'. He had given it a lot of thought, and had started at one stage to drop the use of the word. He said he now believed it *was* a precious word, one that was extraordinarily useful, and that conservationists don't see wilderness as terra nullius. The meaning of the word needed to be expanded. He wasn't sure however if the word was 'big enough to survive that', but he personally hoped it was. He said that most Australians would say that a wilderness is a place where there are *no people*. We needed education

about this. Like a lot of difficult things, he thought there could be something ‘special’ that could come out of this debate. Conservation he thought was about realising that there was not a separation from nature, about understanding that we need to come to terms with how to live better in the world.

I focussed on criticisms of wilderness, and the key confusion of the old Biblical ‘wasteland’ meaning, as opposed to the newer valued ‘large natural area’ meaning. I discussed what ‘untrammelled’ meant, that it had not been cleared and degraded, and that we get too caught up in what ‘slightly modified’ in the IUCN definition might mean. I pointed out we needed to focus on the *reality* of large natural areas, whether you call it wilderness, biocultural landscape or large areas of ‘quiet country’. It was time for those who love the land to move beyond the confusion, so that all custodians (black or white) have a responsibility to large natural areas, whatever you call them. Uncle Max Harrison of the Yuin tribe spoke next, though he seemed rather confused about what wilderness *was*. He noted that what we call wilderness were named places, such as Marramarang, that spirit of place is important. So when you put the word wilderness in that patch, because it looks good, that’s not what wilderness is. Wilderness is how the land talks to you. We buy the land and we think we own it, but we don’t. Right through Australia there are names, different names. All the parts of the land, plants and animals are our relations, we live with them. He said ‘people want to take one little bit away and call it wilderness so it can be used and abused for economical purposes’. People want to make wilderness ‘one special place ... It’s important that we don’t just isolate a place and call it wilderness. It’s one.’. He concluded by asking how could we hold onto separate places and call them wilderness, when the whole of the universe is one? He didn’t explain *how* wilderness was ‘abusing’ the land for economical purposes. Lack of time stopped any further dialogue, which was a great pity (as Val Plumwood noted to me the next morning).

Reflection

In terms of the narrative around wilderness, several interesting things emerged from this brief debate. The first was the difference between the positions of interviewees in their relaxed interviews, versus a formal ‘talk’ situation. This was most apparent with Deborah Bird Rose, whose stance on wilderness was far more *polarised* in her

talk than in her interview. Perhaps talks and formal papers tend to lend themselves to polemics rather than to dialogue? Another was in regard to journalist James Woodford, who had clearly done a bit of soul-searching. I spoke briefly with James after the talk, and he expressed an interest in going for another wilderness walk at some stage. He agreed that most of the debate was a 'smokescreen' that needed to be blown away. Finally, there is the issue of extreme sensitivity around the issue. I made the comment to one of the panel in an email that I didn't think Uncle Max Harrison 'had been listening to what I had been saying'. It was intended to refer to what I had been saying about the formal definition of wilderness as *large natural areas*, and had been said to underline my desire for further dialogue to try to understand his point of view. However, the panel-member took exception to this, seeing it as confrontational, and it was only once my meaning was explained that the matter was resolved (though rather shakily). The deeply felt passions around this issue were highlighted, and it showed just how easily one can be misunderstood, and how underlying strong passions can then overwhelm attempts at dialogue.

CHAPTER 5

CYCLE 4 - INTERVIEWS WITH ‘SCHOLARS’

1. Planning

This Cycle includes eleven in-depth interviews with a variety of ‘scholars’ (philosophers, anthropologists, Aboriginal people, biologists, conservationists). They were carried out from December 2004 until the Mt. Tomah Network workshop on 31/7/05. It thus overlaps to some extent the previous Cycle. Each of the interviews was a major undertaking that involved travel, interviewing and recording scholars, transcribing them, and sending tapes and transcripts to Network members (for their discussion), some of whom then commented by email. In some ways, each interview could be seen as a cycle of PAR, as it involved planning, action and reflection. However this would mean that there would be eleven separate cycles, which is too unwieldy, so I have chosen to treat it as one large PAR cycle.

I wished to have interviews with a variety of scholars with insights into the wilderness debate, some of them critical of ‘wilderness’. I mailed off a thesis synopsis and a consent form to a selected group of ‘scholars’. This had to be updated as time went by. For example, key critic Prof. Marcia Langton never replied (nor did two other prominent Aboriginal people), and another Aboriginal Cadigal man had to pull out due to ill health, so other Aboriginal people were approached, with success this time. My involvement with the World Heritage Institute led me to meet Dr. Peter Ampt from the FATE program at UNSW, who suggested that Prof. Mike Archer would be ‘really keen’ to talk about this, and accordingly I approached him. Some interviews needed to be planned many months in advance, such as that for Dr. Tim Flannery at the South Australian Museum. There was growing appreciation in the Network that these interviews in themselves represented meaningful dialogue about

the knot. At the meeting of 16/3/05, Aldo believed 'it was an excellent dialogue', Ron commented that I was 'the mediator of the group'.

My first interview was with a Dharug TO 'James'. I had met him through a 'welcome to country' at a UWS Residential. I met James at Springwood railway station, where he was selling Aboriginal artwork, and we did an interview in the bush nearby. I presented him with a 'thank you' copy of my book 'A Sense of Wonder' (Washington 2002), which I gave to all interviewees. In return he gave me a small artwork for my artist partner Kersten. It became clear immediately we started that the 'setting the scene' questions were an excellent idea, as it allowed us to focus on what was really important to both of us, before even 'wilderness' was mentioned. This was my first interview, so its positive outcomes were immensely reassuring to me as a researcher. We had so many interesting side-streams to the interview that after we finished the formal interview, I had lunch with him, discussing the volatile issue of 'fire' from ecological and indigenous perspectives.

My next group of interviews were around Canberra in December 2004, being conservation biologist Dr. Rob Lesslie; philosopher Dr. Val Plumwood; and conservationist Virginia Young from the Wilderness Society. Dr. Rob Lesslie is someone I have known for around twenty years through my wilderness advocacy. For his Ph.D. he had developed a methodology in South Australia to measure 'wilderness quality'. This was done by measuring the distance from roads or development. Mapping wilderness quality means that it makes it easier to determine boundaries for wilderness. Also, wild areas that may be too small to be formally designated as 'wilderness' can be identified and protected. This methodology was used by the Commonwealth Government to map wilderness quality across Australia. Lesslie is now working at the Bureau of Rural Sciences in Canberra, but is also a member of the WildCountry Science Council established by TWS. Time constraints meant that we had to talk in his office in Canberra, rather than in the bush. Rob Lesslie is rather a quiet, thoughtful scholar, one who can be somewhat hard to get to speak freely. Accordingly, I found myself having to talk a lot, and apologised for talking *too much*. However, he clearly preferred to let me state something, and then

would tell me whether he agreed or not. His systems and landscape ecology approach to the issue certainly provided insights.

Next day I drove out to Braidwood to visit 'Plumwood Mountain'. Dr. Val Plumwood is a well-known 'eco-philosopher' and ecofeminist who has written prolifically on many issues around wilderness and nature. She became famous with the media many years before by surviving a crocodile attack in Kakadu. She also has a long history as a forest activist. Plumwood had emailed me instructions on how to find the key to her gate, but I could not find the right rock (under which lay the key). A bit of lateral thinking was required, as it was several kilometres to her house. I noticed that the padlocked chain was only looped over the post and held there by some barb wire. I was thus able to untie the barb wire and lift off the chain and enter. The drive in to Plumwood's retreat was glorious, through tall forest and moist heath. The house is located in an old clearing amongst temperate rainforest.

She greeted me and asked if I would 'like to go for a walk?'. She took me to a small clearing with a stunning view clear to the coast and to offshore islands. Asked if I wanted to see the old *Eucryphia*, the plumwood (also called pinkwood) trees after which she had taken her surname; being a plant ecologist I gave an enthusiastic 'yes!'. We entered some wonderful rainforest, and visited the multi-stemmed trunks of these ancient moss-covered trees. If any area could be seen as such, these groves seemed part of Tolkien's 'Old Forest'. We talked, not incessantly, but in intense patches. The *Eucryphia* and the waterfalls were places where one needed to be quiet. Finally we came back to have lunch after spending all morning away, and did the interview at a table in the clearing. Plumwood had a wealth of knowledge around the issue, so it was fascinating to delve into her perspectives about the wilderness knot. We maintained correspondence afterwards.

Next day I met up with Virginia Young, Director of the WildCountry Project of TWS at their headquarters in Canberra. The morning I arrived (15/12/04), the Tasmanian logging company Gunns had just announced it was suing TWS for millions of dollars, not only the Wilderness Society, but a number of individuals as well – including Young! I had to wait in the office while she was in a crisis meeting with

the Director and others. Finally she emerged, and we drove to Mt. Ainslie to sit in the woodland and talk about the wilderness knot. Young quickly put the legal action to the back of her mind, so we could cover her views about wilderness, and especially about how TWS's new 'WildCountry' initiative fitted in with this.

My next interview was with Professor Mike Archer from UNSW (31/1/05). He had been a critic of 'wilderness' in the past, and I had just read his book 'Going Native' (Archer and Beale 2004), which at one point said wilderness was only found on the 'surface of Pluto or the centre of the Earth'. Three days before this meeting, there was a Network meeting, where I was given a great deal of advice on how to conduct the interview. Noah was especially thoughtful, saying that we need to approach people such as Archer as 'educators', to get them to think about their role in education, and that maybe we shouldn't even ask them direct questions, but work around the issue of education and the bush. I got to the interview early, and was conscious that I was not there either to convert or to argue, but to *learn*. I was a little worried that I might get into an argument about some of the things in his book. The value of the 'setting the scene' questions was again highlighted. Archer initially clearly had his prepared position on wilderness, one he was keen to defend. Other Network members commented on this also after listening to the tape. The 'setting the scene' questions were of inestimable value in moving the debate away from perceived and prepared positions to what one really thought about large natural areas and their values. I think in the end both of us were surprised at just how much commonality of belief existed between us. Archer even suggested I might like to move across to UNSW to finish my thesis there, and agreed to go for a bushwalk in Wollemi.

Anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose (2/3/05), was my next interview. She is author of 'Nourishing Terrains' (Rose 1996), 'Country of the Heart' (Rose 2002) and 'Report from a Wild Country' (Rose 2004). I had read the first and the last of these (very different) books, and was keen to meet her. We met at ANU and sat in a noisy and windy open air cafeteria, which made transcription of the interview quite difficult. She is a person of deep passions about the land and its peoples. She described herself as a person who was 'about justice' for both. What interested me here was her

understanding of the ‘human artefact’ debate, but also her use of the word ‘wild’ in terms of meaning ‘savage’ or ‘lawless’. I was only two thirds through the time I thought I had when she said she was would have to stop soon. I rushed the last few questions, and interestingly, some of the best material actually came out at this point.

My next interview was with Ms. Penny Figgis, former Vice President of ACF and now Vice Chair for Australia and New Zealand of IUCN’s World Commission on Protected Areas, and author of a monograph on Australia’s national parks (Figgis 1999). I have known Figgis since around 1977, when I met her at an event where I spoke about the Colo wilderness campaign. She joined the Colo Committee, and I later worked alongside her in ACF for many years on wilderness and rainforest issues. We had lost contact in the last few years. The previous time we met had been at the wake for legendary conservationist Milo Dunphy, at Government House in Sydney. On that day, Premier Bob Carr spoke of the achievements of Milo, who had been a friend to all three of us. Prior to that, Figgis and I and Rosemary Hill and Max in ACF had been through a difficult process working on the ACF ‘Wilderness and indigenous cultural landscape’ policy. There had been a struggle there between social and environmental justice, one fraught with strong passions, misunderstandings and frustration as we searched for a path that allowed *both*. I interviewed Figgis at her home in North Sydney, and she articulated some very interesting conservation history.

The next group of three interviews were part of my trip to South Australia and Melbourne in April 2005. I went to Adelaide to interview Dr Tim Flannery, one of the key critics of ‘wilderness’ in the Australian literature. While getting coffee beforehand, we chatted over solar energy and the greenhouse issue, now his main interest. I think I was particularly aware during this interview of the need for dialogue, that I was there to try to understand, not persuade. There I was with ‘the’ Tim Flannery, one of the main critics of the term ‘wilderness’, who arguably had done more harm to the protection of wilderness than anybody else in Australia. It could have been seen as my chance ‘to set him straight’. Yet I realised then that I really *was* there as a scholar, and not a wilderness advocate. It was the desire to

learn, to understand, that drove my relaxed manner. I was not there to chastise or convert, but to understand *why* he took a certain position. In fact we got on well, and my first comment to Kersten on emerging was ‘I have been charmed!’.

Kersten and I spent a week at Kangaroo Island after the Flannery interview. Part of this was in the Flinders Chase Wilderness Protection Area, where we walked 18 km along the western coastal cliffs, with no shade and no water but what we carried. The terrain was treacherous broken karst limestone, and Kersten had a couple of falls, while I twisted my ankle. The interwoven mallee just back from the cliff’s edge was almost literally impenetrable. The only way to travel was next to the cliff in the prickly heath. This was a place where one could certainly understand how people had seen the land as hostile, an enemy to subdue. It was also a fascinating place to think about the human interaction with the land, as Aborigines had died out on the island 4,000 years before, and never returned (it became known as ‘The island of the dead’). We visited the Pelican Lagoon Research Station, where we spent a very intense day talking to the directors Dr. Peggy Rismiller and Mr. Mike McKelvey. Mike (now in his 60s) had lived in 27 countries and spoke seven or eight languages, and had been an early wilderness photographer in Tasmania. He had known Olegas Truchanas, the ‘father’ of wilderness photography in Australia. Peggy is the world expert on the echidna, and their research station hosts some of the most interesting multi-disciplinary research I have seen. Mike’s perspective on the wilderness knot was thus of great interest, and we kept up the discussion afterwards by email.

On our return to Adelaide, Kersten flew to Sydney, while I flew to Melbourne to interview Dean Stewart, Aboriginal Liaison Officer at the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, as well as Dr. Rosemary Hill, head of ACF’s Northern Lands Program (both on 29/4/05). I knew Stewart from my friend Jeannie Baker, the well-known children’s book artist. Her most recent book was ‘Belonging’ (Baker 2005), and she had asked Stewart to write an essay ‘We Belong’ for her exhibition catalogue (Stewart 2004). Jeannie had sent this on to me, and I became interested in his perspectives on custodianship, and ‘rights of the land’. We sat below a huge river red gum in the Botanic Gardens and spoke of the wilderness knot.

Later that afternoon I went by tram to the ACF's new 'green' energy-efficient headquarters in Carlton to meet Dr. Rosemary Hill. It was fascinating to actually see this building, given that several years before (while on ACF Council) I had been involved in discussions about its design. Hill and I had known each other since the ACF Wilderness Conference in Katoomba in 1983. I had been giving a paper on Wollemi, she had been giving one on Daintree in Queensland. I had immediately seen the significance of the Daintree and Cape Tribulation rainforest wilderness areas, and lobbied as an Executive Member in ACF (and within TWS) to make Daintree a *key focus*. Hill and I had worked fairly closely in the following years for protection of these areas in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. However, through her involvement with the Wet Tropics campaign, Hill had become increasingly concerned about *social justice*. The last time we had been on ACF council together, there had been a tension between us as ACF redrafted its wilderness policy. I was especially keen to get her perspective on why she was critical of some aspects of the wilderness debate, and why she mostly no longer uses the word 'wilderness' in the Northern Lands Program - having originally started out as a wilderness advocate.

My final interview was with Professor Harry Recher, well known ecologist from the University of New England and Edith Cowan Uni. I drove to Brooklyn on the Hawkesbury River on 22/7/05, and he picked me up in his dinghy and motored us across to his home on Dangar Island. We had planned to conduct the interview some months earlier, but Recher had had to cancel to have tests in hospital. Any Australian ecologist of my generation is aware of the work and reputation of Professor Recher. His book 'Ecology, a Natural Legacy' (Recher et al. 1986) was a classic of its time. The last time I had seen Recher had been at the NCC Conference in the late '90s, where he was a guest speaker. He was then highly critical of wilderness, primarily as vehicle access to his research programs in Nadgee NP had been stopped when it was gazetted as a wilderness. I remember 'George' angrily interjecting 'bullshit!' during Recher's talk. Afterwards, I went up to Recher and said I was quite concerned at the polarization around wilderness, and that we needed dialogue rather than confrontation. I recall saying to him that 'you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar!'. Hence, several years later, I was keen to carry on that conversation – and *catch* some of those flies.

2. Action – the interviews

The literal voice of the interviewee is in italics. I have used bold to emphasize words of special importance.

2.1 ‘James’, Dharug Traditional Custodian, 2/12/04

James was very definite about the importance of protecting the remaining natural areas in the Blue Mountains:

These last areas, particularly in Dharug Country, these are places that still have the handprint of the Creator on them. In fact the Grose Valley, even though it was a hugely strong spiritual place for our ancestors, it takes on a preciousness now that perhaps it did not have then.

In regard to ‘ownership’ of the land, he had not met an Aboriginal person who thought they ‘own’ the land. He also noted that even with ownership or custodianship of land came all these *rules of what you can do with it*. Regarding custodianship, he noted his family supported the idea of joint custodianship of both black and white, where we both share the custodial responsibilities. Concerning the land, James believed in a Christian religion, where there is *a bigger reality than this present world*, but feels that we still have to act as if this land is **all** that we have got to look after. James related a story from an ‘uncle’ in the Kimberleys in regard to how **all** people come from the land:

But I did have a conversation about spiritual stuff with an old Uncle there. He said ‘well out in the bush they have the Wungad (Wungarr?) waters, the living waters, and that is where the spirit children come from, and that people, women when they go past these places (or even men), these spirit children enter into them. I said ‘right, I had heard that Unc, but is it true for white people’? And he looked at me and said ‘where do you think all the people in Derby come from? Yeah. They go out in the bush, and then ... took.’ I was wrapped in that.

Regarding social justice, if we applied ‘justice’ as a general thing, there would not be a tension with environmental justice. He stressed the need for both:

The country won’t be right until its set with the people, and because of that close association you can’t divorce the two.

However, until society became sustainable, he acknowledged there probably **will** be a tension, and that he would like *to err on the land side*. He observed that we were lucky in Australia that Aboriginal culture was supportive of the natural world, as otherwise he wouldn't be jumping so loud about social justice. Because Aboriginal law goes hand in hand with a new ecological awareness, he thought we should take advantage of that. Regarding the hand-back of national parks to Aboriginal people he cautioned:

What would freak me out, like say they gave the parks unreservedly over to Aboriginal people ... I would not be confident that the land would come off well. I am much happier with the process that we try and work out best land practices, like the World Heritage Forums.

James believed the land **did** need humans:

I still think people are needed in land, I think the land suffers if it doesn't have people looking after it. I know that's a rather anthropocentric view of things.

The importance of an area being 'managed' came up several times. He referred to an unmanaged area (which might be wilderness) as *neglected* or *abandoned* country. 'Neglected' was *like there has not been fire run through*. Concerning the human artefact debate, some confusion seemed evident:

Didn't create it. Morally, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, I believe in a Creator, and we are part of creation. Yeah, we can be responsible for areas ... Again I would not say we 'created'. When I say 'responsible', our ancestors were responsible for the land like it was two hundred years ago, we were responsible for that. You can see when its left, the bush changes, gets all scrubby and needs cleaning up, which fire does. ... Our place in the landscape is to conform with what we have been given, not to go and shape it.

About 'wilderness':

I used to say there is a big difference between the Western and Aboriginal way in that the whole continent was occupied and thus the wilderness idea where humans visit into it is opposed to this, but then on reflection I thought 'no' - there are areas that we are not supposed to go into, and also there are rules and regulations over those areas, Aboriginal rules and regulations. So – this sort of got me thinking that the idea of managing areas that have special limitations over them is quite appropriate - now that is aside from the appropriateness of who gets to state that.

However, he derived much comfort from a place being designated a 'wilderness' because it made it harder for the government to *do a slippery thing and change the legislation, and bang its gone*. Wilderness was a new concept about the land, but that

doesn't make it a bad concept. When asked to define wilderness, James referred to a 'popular' definition which is *an area with no people, where it is left to natural forces*, and later he said *for most people wilderness implies an area 'untouched by man'*:

But I think it is a bit of an aberration if people aren't involved in that. I think the Aboriginal example is beautiful, as you see Aboriginal people living in that landscape without disturbing it ... There are good managed areas and poorly managed areas, the worry again with wilderness in the popular definition seems to imply that well-managed areas require less human interaction than what you describe as non-wilderness.

When asked if there was a better word for wilderness, he said that there probably **was**, but couldn't think of it, saying that it depended on the interpretation of 'wilderness'. Concerning human exclusion, he thought that idea was in the 'popular' definition, but that we could manage wilderness and *it need not exclude humans*. He was very proud that there were areas in his tribal area that are defined as wilderness. James had a problem with the word 'wild' and did not like the term 'wild country':

The tricky part is with 'wild' – implies no constraints ... but humans in my belief are supposed to be under 'law'. And I think the Earth is our home, so wilderness doesn't cover that, if there are people there then they are meant to be under law, because we are a little bit dangerous otherwise. If they are not under law then they are wild.

In regard to Aboriginal law, he thought that today it might have to evolve:

It will be a modified thing, it won't be the way the old people did it ... In fact its not even a case of taking the old law and applying it now, as we have to consider the new environment that we have, and that involves thousands of people.

When asked why wilderness had become a problem word, he responded that *people had different agendas*, the worst one being the exploitation agenda. He thought 'wilderness' **does** ignore Aboriginal history, given the 'popular definition', and people's experience of wilderness as 'no people there'. He noted if there are tensions that arise, *it would be just the dramas that are set up by those misleading understandings*. James took a strong negative view on vehicular access to wilderness. He could see that there could be a reason for a TO (particularly an Elder) to use a vehicle to *look after country*, but that if it was up to him there would be 'caretakers' who used a walking track, and there would be no roads. He decided however that:

I don't think the purists will win out on that, there are a lot of Aboriginal people and they have a lot of say on this, and they like their cars.

At the same time he noted that there was sometimes a *one- upmanship amongst Aboriginal people* in terms of being seen to protect the land's integrity. James did not support any 'post-contact stuff' in wilderness, such as roads and cars. Regarding multiple use he thought it would be *okay for our mob to go in there, take ochre, cut spears, use firewood*, but nothing that deviated from traditional practice. In regard to finding a way forward in the debate:

Like having these conversations with you, having to think about concepts of wilderness and stuff. Its brought me to a better understanding, and if it's not discussed it sleeps there as a concept that people only react to if it interferes with their plans, so its worth it, even if its contentious, contention is not a bad thing.

He also saw the wilderness movement (along with multiculturalism) as being supportive of Aboriginal culture as:

Now natural areas are held in esteem by scientists and ecologists, and they are presenting policies to protect them and that, Aboriginal culture is not seen as a nutty-type primitive thing.

2.2 Dr. Rob Lesslie, conservation biologist, Bureau of Rural Sciences, 13/12/04

We met in Canberra at Lesslie's office. He was very definite about the whole range of values of large natural areas:

there are a whole range of benefits from the fundamental process-type reasons - there is a lot of carbon tied up in vegetation for instance - but right through to biodiversity conservation, water quality, catchment condition, recreational values ... the large intact areas are pretty significant, because they really offer a special and unique opportunity to absorb large scale perturbations on the landscape that the smaller areas can't.

Concerning humans and nature:

Well humans are a part of nature, but for me the distinction is the level of the technology employed by society. That's the distinguishing thing. You can mount a pretty convincing argument that a lot of indigenous societies, even though they use powerful tools like fire to alter landscapes, did it in a way that you could argue is consistent with nature, working with nature.

Concerning anthro/ eco-centrism, he thought that he had become more biocentric due to his science viewpoint, that his values have *been informed by some of the science*. He sees himself as a custodian of the land. In regard to a question about ‘rights of the land’, the interesting comment was made:

I am interested in the idea ... whether there really is a fundamental obligation that humans owe the environment ... that kind of transcends or is above culture ... I think there is, I am not sure I can articulate it. ... But given that there is, concessions have to be made regardless of culture ... everyone has obligations. ... Globally ... all societies have obligations.

Regarding the human artefact debate, he did not seem very interested - *it doesn't preoccupy me*. When I first asked him about the difference between ‘influence’ and ‘create’, he said:

Well when you asked the question I thought of the Pilliga Scrub, well that's an artefact - from what I gather, the evidence I have read anyway. ... You hear of stories of places up in the wet tropics ... they are largely a relict of the pre-European management/ burning, that is likely to disappear if it's left.

I then asked him if humans actually **created** the landscapes and **evolved** the species:

I think we just played our part, like any other organism. Did the bison create the Great Plains of the US? I don't know ... Created? Well ... I don't think we 'created' anything, but we played a role.

In response to a quote from Flannery about Australia and Aboriginal management, he replied *I don't think it was a finely balanced human artefact*. We then talked about the debate about ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ landscapes, to which he responded – *It's both! ... this is where I am coming from too*. We then got on to ‘wilderness’:

There probably is a better word. ... 'Wilderness' is so loaded now. ... because of the political dimension of the word, sometimes it's a barrier to people's thinking, and it creates a lot of preconceptions in people's minds. ... I have found the term 'wilderness' not to be helpful when discussing those issues ... I just use 'large intact natural areas' ... I think it ... pointless to get into an argument about the word. I would rather talk about reality, and if I have got to change the word to do that, then I do that.

Lesslie mused that *I don't think you can untangle it in a way*. He said that people ascribe many things to wilderness, but what they really meant was the *impacts and influences of modern technological society*. I then asked him if saying ‘large intact natural areas’ got around the confusion. He responded that it was helpful, that it

dodged it. He then related how what he was doing in landscape ecology was pointing out that ‘large’ is important, ‘catchment’ is important – *words that are simple but have some resonance in conservation biology*. He pointed out that by using the word ‘wilderness’ you might offend Aboriginal people, but also some scientists who would otherwise be supporters of large natural areas. He suggested that wilderness isn’t just a concept, it’s *a whole lot of different meanings that have been ascribed to the word*. He hadn’t heard of Aboriginal concerns about the word ‘wild’, but was sure they would occur. Regarding the human exclusion debate, he noted that there was a bit of an overtone of exclusion, that wilderness was ‘nature’s realm’. He saw wilderness as part of a spectrum, **not** a dualism. When asked about wilderness being a ‘purity fetish’ he vehemently denied this: *‘Doesn’t mean anything to me at all!’*. In regard to management, he believed the paramount management objective is the protection of remoteness and naturalness. He noted that if you look at indigenous attitudes to wilderness in Australia, by and large they would be negative, but that this was not the same all around the world. The Saami in Norway gladly appropriated the word when they found that it referred to ‘areas with an absence of modern technological society’. In regard to wilderness ignoring Aboriginal history, he noted that:

They (Aborigines) are thinking a) ‘we actually live here for a start’, and b) ‘we manage it’. ... And you can’t get away from it too, that in Australia there is this issue of terra nullius – that has got to be a sore point. The whole rationale for the way the continent was settled by Europeans denied the fact that they were occupying the land.

If you take the view that wilderness is ‘absence of human impact’ (though he himself did not) and follow that line through, then he can see *the whole line of argument that follows from that about the word being offensive*, and that it does reinforce the terra nullius concept. In regard to wilderness and biodiversity, he referred to the ‘rock and ice’ argument in the USA, that wilderness areas are just the unproductive, species-poor areas that society did not want. When I pointed out that that this wasn’t the case for the Blue Mountains, he said he personally was not arguing it, and that ideas were changing:

Even in the last few years there has been a real change in nature conservation science. ... it’s landscape ecology, but also an interest in resilience, ecological integrity, the concept of naturalness, (which again is a bit loaded). But the whole idea

of resilience in systems, and scale. ... There is a growing recognition that these large intact natural areas have really fundamentally important nature conservation value.

When I asked where the scientific ‘baggage’ attached to wilderness came from, he noted it was the ‘old issue’ ... *that it doesn’t encompass areas like biodiversity ‘hot spots’*. He concluded about conservation biology that there had been a neglect of ‘systems aspects’ and ‘functional aspects’. Of the ‘new understanding’:

It’s large scale. ... where you have an opportunity to evolve ... process aspects at a really large scale are ultimately really fundamental to nature conservation, and that wilderness, the big areas ... just by virtue of being large, have a really important role to play.

He was not a fan of ‘multiple use’. He was in favour of *multiple use landscapes but not areas*, and pointed out that all natural areas actually **are** multiple use, in the sense that they provide many ecosystem services. Regarding finding a way forward:

I think things are moving. There is another wave happening, of support for wilderness protection. And it isn’t going to be bushwalker-driven, I think it is going to be driven by science. And it isn’t the conventional conservation biology science, it’s system science. ... And in some cases it will use wilderness – why not? ... the arguments are there now.

He explained that there is a lot of criticism now of the ‘CAR’ (Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative) approach to nature conservation – especially on the ‘adequacy’ front - *this adequacy aspect, the ‘A’ part of CAR, what is adequate?*

When you started to get into the ideas of resilience and integrity:

Inevitably you can’t get away from things like wilderness and large areas ... Unless you have a handle on the large scale ... you are going to lose the battle on the smaller scale processes. So that’s why the scale thing ... is where wilderness is going to have its resurrection in the science of nature conservation.

He then made a fascinating observation about reaching an understanding of what ‘wilderness’ is :

If you could ... somehow get past the labels and look at the attributes that people think are important - the actual ‘drivers’, the things that matter in terms of ... making the natural world go. If you could get down to those fundamentals ... and almost work backwards ... and then you say ‘by that I mean wilderness’, and then ‘oh, well if that is what you mean by wilderness then I will give it a tick, but its not what I mean by wilderness’. You got to go through that process, you almost got to reverse-engineer the thing. But you never do, people come in from the other way. And they will end up with big fights.

He concluded about the future of wilderness (or large natural areas):

I think that will reassert. I think we have been through the worst ... like the pendulum really swung, it swung big time ... It'll come back, and these things come back slightly different to how they were before, which is fine. But the basics are going to come back strong, I reckon.

2.3 Dr. Val Plumwood, environmental philosopher, ANU, 14/12/04

Plumwood immediately made two important points about humans being part of nature:

I don't think 'natural' ever establishes an ethical claim, so if you conclude that everything humans did was natural, it certainly would not follow that it was okay. And secondly, what is wrong is that if humans are part of nature it does not follow that they are an indistinguishable part of nature, or that there aren't different parts of nature that go on in different ways, or that there are not other parts of nature that shouldn't be humanized.

She then referred to her term 'hyper-separation', and how this can be applied to both 'nature' and 'wilderness':

You know people will say 'well its not natural due to human influence', so there you are getting back to the same concept of absolute hyper-separation again. ... setting ourselves apart from nature, we don't understand ourselves in ecological terms and as ecological beings. That's on the one side, and on the other side of course we don't understand other non-human beings as beings that require our compassion and care and respect. So this is the hyper-separation.

Plumwood supported the idea of 'intrinsic value', but thought it didn't take you very far, *just to the gates of the city*. Rather, she thought philosophy was stuck in the intrinsic value debate, when it needed to move on and actually consider other species - *we do need to share the Earth with others, non-humans*. She saw 'ownership' of land as a very bad model, as it assumes the land was empty when we came, it *assumes a terra nullius view*. About ecocentrism versus anthropocentrism, she saw all '*centrisms*' as a repressive structure, where there is a centre that dominates the periphery. However she agreed that if not ecocentric per se, she shared an 'ecological consciousness'. Regarding 'respect for the land' she thought we needed a *lot closer relation than that*, more a sense of responsibility, an understanding of connection with it, and the way it supports you. Society has separated 'respect' and 'use', while she argues for **respectful use**. 'Sacred' she believes is a tricky concept,

as not everywhere can be sacred, so sacred is 'exception land' ... *we have to make use of the land, and therefore we can't think of it as 'beyond use'*. Concerning social justice:

I don't think ultimately any of us can afford a sense of justice that is designed without reference to the non-human world ... I don't see them as in opposition, we have to understand them as linked. ... you can usually do both. ... ultimately the assumption here is that there is a self/ other choice, that there is a choice between human and nonhuman welfare ... but in general I think that choice doesn't exist and we not only can, but need to do both.

Ethically, we all need to reduce conflict, and she spoke of conflicts that can't be reconciled, and the need to protect large natural areas for nonhumans ... *as we don't have a culture where there won't be conflict between humans and nonhumans*. Given that all conflicts cannot be negotiated, she felt we have got to make separate space for others ... *space that is for nonhumans*. We then got on to 'wilderness':

I will start by telling you what I have got against the concept of wilderness. ... the first thing I would point out is that 'property' is based on a certain concept of wilderness ... the idea that the land was completely 'wild' ... So the land was completely wild, the nonhumans didn't own it and it didn't own itself.

She noted this was the 'negative' concept of wilderness, and that then people such as Thoreau tried to reverse this concept. The problems of 'reversal' are noted by 'post-colonial theorists'. People take the downtrodden side and reverse it:

I see this problem of reversal appearing in this wilderness thing in the same way. ... We have pure 'self' versus pure 'other', that kind of construction. So it's pure human versus pure nature.

To counter the terra nullius (as 'empty land') assumption, she thought we needed to recognise prior presences ... *human indigenous ones, or they may be nonhuman*. She thought the main problem with wilderness is the concept of wilderness as '**pure nature**' ... *a completely polarised or hyper-separated concept of pure nature*. She feels a better way to go with wilderness is to say that wilderness is an area for nonhumans, *where nonhuman interests come first*. So we move from:

The idea of wilderness as an absence, which is always a colonialist problem ... to the idea of wilderness as a presence, okay, a place for nonhumans ... I am very happy with 'wilderness' if it means space for nonhumans.

However she didn't believe that that is what most people usually mean. She thought many people meant 'absolute otherness', which is the *villainous* concept of wilderness she is trying to ditch. She saw this as an 'absence of the human', without human influence, so that it denied indigenous presence. One avoids this if one treats wilderness as a *positive presence of the nonhuman*, as that is compatible with having humans there also. In terms of a better word for wilderness, she preferred the term '**nature**', as it allows for more of a spectrum – though she admitted *wilderness sceptics tend to be nature sceptics*. Another alternative term she used was 'large areas of nonhuman presence'. Regarding statements that we can have conservation without wilderness, she didn't think that we could do it *without large natural areas, or without areas where the non-human presence comes first*. Concerning the human artefact debate:

It's true that there are not many areas of land that don't have some human influence. But it doesn't follow from that that these are human. You know if I influence you, it doesn't follow that there is no difference between us. And yet very often this argument is used to argue that there is no such thing as 'nature' ... human influence is not the same as human construction, and yet they are often confused. And this is one of the big bases of 'nature scepticism'.

Plumwood argued that the systematic effort to render invisible the 'agency' of nature is to facilitate commodification and be a justification for annexation, *for if yours is the only agency then you can annex something*. She went on to describe Flannery as very 'human-centred', and that he *systematically overestimates human agency right through his work*. Of 'cultural landscapes' she observed:

We should think about these not as cultural landscapes but as biocultural landscapes. They are always biocultural landscapes, they are never just cultural landscapes ... We should never allow the contribution of nature to be forgotten ... that is part of what has gotten us into the mess we are in.

She recognised that humans nearly always exaggerate the extent of human influence so as to render nature's collaboration invisible. She thought that the argument that 'wilderness is just a concept' was *a remarkably silly thing to say, because everything is just a concept*. About the 'pristinity' aspect of wilderness:

Virgin, pristinity, there is a whole series of cult words that get introduced there ... Particularly in the newspapers They had a pristine fetish. I think that's a problem, and I do think it's a problem with at least parts of the conservation movement.

About the ‘human exclusion’ debate, if we mean wilderness as areas where nonhuman interests come first, then its not excluding humans. An ‘absence of humans’ concept excludes them by definition, whereas a **positive presence of nonhumans** only excludes those humans whose presence is incompatible with the nonhuman, such as oppositional forms of human culture. She noted of ‘dualisms’ that they are hyper-separations, *a radical and emphatic separation that involves denying overlap*. She thought ‘nature’ is part of a spectrum, whereas ‘wilderness’ itself is *not a spectrum word but a dualised concept*. Of ‘wildness’ she thought:

One way to try and depolarise the concept of wilderness is to try and take the Thoreau route and talk about ‘wildness’ ... Birch’s point is ‘wildness’ can be construed as a spectrum concept

Some interesting observations were made about custodianship or **communicative** relationships versus **mastery** relationships:

There are two contrasting ways you can claim a special connection with the land. One is by claiming a special connection, claiming a communicative relationship, the other one is by claiming some kind of mastery relationship, by clearing it and making it productive – and that’s the one that chimes in with the colonial view. ... I think perhaps some indigenous people might have mistakenly taken up the more Europeanized position there, rather than the other. ... Or some indigenous advocates ... it is more common amongst advocates. I think you can see this rather clearly with Rhys Jones original work. ... Aboriginal people had ‘title’ to the land because they had farmed it. So this directly appeals to a very European colonial conception of ‘ownership’.

About anthropocentrism, she spoke of the agency of the nonhuman world, whereas anthropocentrists want to claim all agency for themselves, but that this is not the case for many indigenous cultures:

Land in indigenous culture can do all kinds of things, it can call to you, it’s very active in whole range of things ... I think acknowledging nature’s agency is a big part of moving away from human-centredness.

Given my past history in conservation, there was some spirited discussion of a possible ‘wilderness fixation’ by the conservation movement. She felt that for much of the past the movement had *been overly focussed on wilderness*, particularly in the ‘60s and ‘70s:

Oppositional thinking is part of what lies behind the idea that wilderness is the only issue, or the only real issue, the others are somehow secondary issues.

‘Wild Country’ was seen as an interesting positive concept, though a big change in direction for TWS. She thought it an attempt to tackle the scepticism with which the concept of wilderness is now seen ... *it’s an interesting piece of double terminology there*. She dismissed the arguments for conservation ‘triage’ (that there is only so much energy, so we must focus on the strategic ‘musts’). Different people bring different energy to different issues, she thought. Concerning wilderness and ‘theory’:

I am inclined to think that theoreticians have a lot to answer for in a lot of ways. ... the theoreticians have produced a theory which really produces a lot of opposition between human forms of environmentalism and nonhuman forms, and it’s really pretty unnecessary in my opinion ... So I don’t necessarily take the side of the theoreticians at all, I think they often distort these issues and produce unnecessary false oppositions. So maybe this impression (wilderness fixation) has partly been given because of bad theorization, that is quite a possible argument for you to run there.

She thought many of the theorizations in the past had been over-focussed on wilderness. About the ‘wilderness fixation’ claim, she felt conservationists need to *tell a more complex story there rather than just denying it*. Concerning the effect of the confusion:

It’s helping to discredit the concept of wilderness, and unfortunately at the same time as that – areas being dedicated as wilderness. It’s bad news.

Towards a way forward, she thought there were *a lot of silly confusions behind this*, and that it was important to get things clear and defend wilderness, which she thought was *absolutely vital*.

2.4 Ms. Virginia Young, Director WildCountry Project, The Wilderness Society (Australia), 15/12/04

Young immediately said that ‘WildCountry’ was a step that the Wilderness Society (TWS) had taken to:

Move away from just being focussed on protection and promoting and preserving wilderness, to acknowledging that what we are really on about is all biodiversity ... The whole spectrum ... the reason we adopted WildCountry was partly in recognition of indigenous concerns around the term, and indigenous communities talking about their ‘country’. So it was a bit of an attempt to step over the barriers or misconceptions.

She qualified that by saying that they hadn’t dropped their attachment to ‘wilderness’, and that it had a *central role in that vision*. All things being equal, the

bigger the area reserved the better, and the less disturbed - the better. She noted that she had not come across **any** adverse comments to the term 'Wild Country' with the Aboriginal 'mobs' that they were working with. About the wilderness concept she said:

We decided that the wilderness concept (as it was currently framed) wasn't going to be sufficient to deliver the intellectual framework we needed for large scale conservation planning in Australia.

TWS in general tend to refer to *absence of modern technological impact*, not an 'absence of people'. She thought there is an **emotional** understanding of wilderness and a more technical understanding (size, disturbance). The emotional is subjective, and means different things to different people – *it's not something that's right or wrong*. On social justice:

We recognise the 'rights' (if you like) of indigenous communities in Australia, and (where we can) we try to work to two sets of goals. That's just the reality of life. A lot of northern Australia is indigenous land ... there is a tension, and all we can do is struggle with it, and (where possible) we certainly try to deal with problems equitably. ... we will always look for a solution.

TWS has adopted the UN Earth Charter, to facilitate a socially equitable and economically workable outcome. Young felt 'intrinsic value' of nature was a fundamental belief, *that things have value in their own right*. Philosophically she thought the land belonged to itself, and that we are a part of it, and interdependent on it, yet she also referred to Aboriginal land as 'their land'. About 'respect for the land' she was unsure, describing it as a 'strange' word; *you can be in awe of it, you can respond emotionally, you can love it, you can be attached to place ...* but she thought 'respect' was not deep enough. She also thought 'sacredness' wasn't quite right, that landscapes move her and are *spiritual places*. She spoke of the wilderness experience as you move into the heart of the wilderness, *where the land, nature is in control*. Young was particularly concerned about the lack of academic rigour about the term 'wilderness' (especially Rose):

I have read some of the stuff she has written, and it's so shonky! 'When did you inquire?' ... 'When did you last read any of our written material?'. Very lazy. ... not that Deborah Bird Rose and I have ever met ... She hates wilderness. She hates the concept of wilderness ... certainly unfairly in that she hasn't thought to talk to anyone in TWS or do any recent research. ... I think some of the indigenous concerns are valid about how the term was developed and used. But people have moved on from that, and it has a new meaning now. Certainly for conservation groups it's not about

terra nullius. It's by no means denying the role or rights of ... indigenous people in the landscape.

The main problem with the word 'wilderness' she thought came from parts of the indigenous world, and some of the science community. Evolution and evolutionary processes are something that have influenced her greatly, and it's one of her key drivers – *I want to ensure that at least evolutionary processes continue*. Evolution tells her where she belongs in history, where she sits as a species. Young agreed that wilderness is a 'concept', just as Sydney or a tree is one, but not **just** a concept. She also thought that there was some historical validity to claims about wilderness being seen as 'absence of people', given a thread running through the early history of wilderness writing - the poetic literature from the USA that *was pretty much based around the absence of humans*. She recognised that this would have raised concerns in the Aboriginal community. Regarding the claim that TWS still see wilderness as the 'absence of humans':

We haven't thought that way for a long time. ... You know we went through the Malimup process ... And that was a good process to build understanding about the concept, and our use of the term doesn't exclude people or indigenous rights.

If you want the landscape to function normally, then that means excluding modern industrial impacts like roads. Wilderness is accessible, but not to everyone, and she thinks most people are happy with that. In regard to Aboriginal law, TWS is trying to come to grips with the concept of two laws in indigenous land, and developing a conservation strategy around that. Probably the reason some native species are going extinct in northern Australia is due she thought to changed fire regimes. She also spoke of the Aboriginal spiritual custodianship idea of maintaining the land being a direct human responsibility for *keeping the land the way it is* (thus ceremonies are seen as maintaining the land). She thought a lot of people believe in a 'balance of nature' which means natural systems are static, but that they are in fact **dynamic**, and will get more so with climate change. She wasn't sure that she knew what 'natural' meant, but that there were 'layers' of human induced changes. She had an interesting insight into whether the biodiversity value of wilderness was being overvalued:

It's almost the reverse - that wilderness has been dismissed for its ecological value ... and instead the focus has been on patches that are rare or vulnerable or endangered. And there has been this 'patch-based' focus in recent years from many organisations

in government ... the whole CAR stuff ... they consistently fail to address the 'adequacy' criteria, which is where wilderness, and largeness and integrity come in. ... This has helped relegate wilderness to being the 'poor cousin' in conservation, and it's one of the things that Wild Country should help rectify.

She saw wilderness as being part of a spectrum, and thought that humans only ever **influence** the landscape, not create it. She qualified that with reference to Aboriginal creation stories, where that mythology tells a story of the creation of the land. She truly hated the idea of conservation trade-offs, and did not believe in a 'triage' argument. She said she refused to be put in a 'choice' situation, but *asks how she can do both?* Regarding wilderness access, she thought tension about 4WDs and horses was because there hasn't been enough active management for those forms of access. She was especially interested in 'Wild Sea', what wilderness means in the marine environment. Concerning a way forward, WildCountry will, she thinks, lead to a much better appreciation of the role of large natural areas for biodiversity conservation. She concluded:

In some ways I think that all of this in terms of the general community is a false debate, that is why we don't engage in these debates very much, because we are a very practical organisation. ... We are not going to fuss about whether something gets called 'wilderness', we will fuss about how it is managed. But we are not going to fuss too much about labels. ... And I think wilderness has power in the community ... So we will use terms which resonate with the community to achieve conservation goals.

2.5 Prof. Mike Archer, University of NSW, 31/1/05

Initially, Archer was keen to immediately discuss the *problems* of 'wilderness'. However, he then relaxed into the setting-the-scene questions. He lamented what had happened to Australia's vegetation over the last 200 years, and argued for replanting native vegetation on at least 12% of Australia already previously cleared. He supported keeping large natural areas, but with the qualification:

Should they simply be walled off and maintained for intrinsic reasons, without any other consumable type use? I am not sure about the answer to that.

He believed that 'humans are part of nature', but that agriculture enabled us historically to overproduce our species *beyond the long term capacity of the environment to maintain us*. One of the saddest things about humanity he felt was that each generation accepts an increasing loss in natural places. He was depressed about the steady erosion of things of intrinsic worth, but that intrinsic value can be

perceived **both emotionally and intellectually**. For him the intellectual side had value because he knew the larger the ecosystem the greater the stability and viability. He spoke of the evolution of his own values:

My personal emotional bond to living things drove me to focus on the life sciences for a career ... Monitoring the loss (of biodiversity) ... led me to ask questions about what we should be doing to ensure that what we have now ... is conserved for the future. ... it soon became evident that in the long run humans will only conserve that which they value.

Archer saw anthropocentrism as a ‘disaster’, but had not heard of ‘ecocentrism’, which is closer to his own view of *systems resilience*. He described anthropocentrism as *a disease of biodiversity ... and ultimately a prescription for self-destruction*. He looked at the question of land ownership through the eyes of hunter-gatherer communities, *who generally don’t see the sense in individuals ‘owning’ land*. Regarding custodianship, he thought we should all see ourselves as **dependent** on the land, but that didn’t mean each of us in Sydney were custodians of the land. He thought ‘respect for the land’ was an emotive word, that we had to understand what is required by the land *for in perpetuity survival*. He didn’t see the land as ‘sacred’ (though maybe as ‘vital’) as he didn’t believe in Gods or miraculous ‘creations’. Concerning social justice:

I don’t think there is an absolute right or wrong here in terms of the social justice of land use. ... Maintaining intergenerational equity in terms of the resilience of the land, however, does have social relevance in that failure to maintain or improve this resilience jeopardizes the future of that society.

Regarding land management and ‘the land needs humans’:

It can be demonstrated by unintentional experiment that the land does need people. For example, in Kakadu ... Indigenous people have progressively been walking off the land and moving into the towns. In their absence the ecosystems are changing, evolving into new seral stages that were not part of the original environments. These changes don’t suit some of the animals that thrived there when Indigenous people were managing the land.

With reference to the ‘human artefact’ debate:

I think creation is a bit bold ... I have never actually mentally distinguished the difference between ‘influenced’ and ‘created’ ... I would have to be pressed about how I would distinguish between create and influence. I am not sure that I would, it’s a continuum after all.

When I asked about whether humans created the biodiversity and productivity of Australia he replied:

We know humans stepped into Australia ... I see nothing frankly in the post-human biotas that is not presaged by the pre-human biotas. Humans didn't impact ... on the animal biota till about the last 200 years ... a rapid and massive drop in biodiversity as well as loss of environmental resilience.

Later he concluded that what we are talking about is 'long-term influence'. One interesting aspect he raised was that of creationism in Aboriginal communities:

Soon after the whites arrived, missionaries began an assault on traditional cultural heritage. They replaced it with Christian fundamentalism. Many (certainly not all) now swear by the Genesis account of the creation of their land and its biological riches. These culturally-transformed individuals, when asked about the many-million year old fossils evident in the rocks on their land, see the whole thing as the result of Noah's Flood. They tell me what we will find in these rocks - which were actually formed many millions of years before humans were a twinkle in Africa's eye - the skulls of bad humans who were drowned in the Flood.

We then moved on to 'wilderness', where there was an evolving discussion about what wilderness **was**. It was especially hard to get away from his idea of wilderness as being a 'human exclusion zone', and there was confusion between human exclusion and human use. When asked to define wilderness he first said:

I think it's a phantasm of the mind. I don't think it has any meaning, any pragmatic meaning to human beings, it's a concept, a construct of a world without humans.

When I referred to the IUCN definition of wilderness as a 'large natural area', he replied:

To the extent that they don't disallow that humans could be part of these systems, I am comfortable with them. ... It depends on how you define it. ... where people are recognised as a natural part of 'wildernesses', yes wilderness makes sense and is something we should strive to conserve. But, that said, there are 'wildernesses' that have healthy, viable relationships with humans and those that don't. To me, a healthy type is where you find remnant hunter-gatherer communities interacting with their environment sustainably

Later he said the notion of setting up areas that humans are excluded from living within and interacting with and sustainably using is the 'kiss of death', because systems of less than 300,000 square kilometres are going to decline, as they don't have long-term viability. The only way they could expand beyond that was if you maximised conservation capacity on private land. Later, however he stated:

Thinking about the concept of 'wilderness' that I first brought to this interview, you make me feel guilty, for I (like a lot of biologists I know) have tended to assume that when most people said 'wilderness' they meant a place that excluded humans. I now accept that I should allow that 'wildernesses' can have future resilience because they can indeed have the benefit of conservation through sustainable use strategies managed by humans.

When I added that I always translate the word 'wilderness' in my mind as 'large natural areas', he asked: *'so its not to do with presence or absence of humans?'*. I replied 'no', and his response was *'then your wilderness, mate, can be my wilderness. I am quite happy with that'*. When asked, however, if he saw wilderness as a 'dualism', he agreed, but then actually talked about the human/ nature dualism in terms of the Garden of Eden parable, and not specifically 'wilderness' as dualism. He did make the interesting observation that *the trick now is to find the gate back into the Garden of Eden - to reintegrate humans and the natural world for the benefit of both*. Regarding wilderness and biodiversity, he said his main argument was to expand the native vegetation zones between the remaining 'protected areas' (wilderness and reserves). When asked about the view in his book 'Going Native' about harvesting national parks, he admitted to being a bit 'provocative'. About biodiversity:

As long as we take the 'broader' view of wilderness (that is areas that enable humans to coexist and mutually value/ depend on the rest of the biota), we will be increasing the net amount of conservation capable land in Australia..

He was not comfortable with roads in natural areas, particularly regarding dieback fungus. He spoke of many problems with roads, *all of which add up to the fact that roads intruded into ecosystems often have a large, deleterious outcome*. Towards finding a way forward:

I need to be careful in future when I respond to questions about 'wilderness'. I am still labouring under the illusion that to most people the concept 'wilderness' involves removal of humans and their influence from the land involved. And clearly, as you point out, this view is a bit of an anachronism for many (if not most) environmentalists, who accept that humans have an important role to play in managing - if not occupying - wilderness.

2.6 Dr. Deborah Bird Rose, anthropologist, ANU, 2/3/05

We met in a noisy cafeteria at ANU. Regarding ‘humans are part of nature’, she commented:

Nature dreamed us up ... I agree that what humans do is natural, but I would say that saying that something is ‘natural’ doesn’t make it good. Humans do really bad things.

Rose believed profoundly in ‘intrinsic value’, and referred to the Chinese phrase ‘The myriad of living things’. She follows Freya Mathew’s argument about everything that exists is ‘present’ in the world and thus has a ‘presence’ in the world. Connectivity and connections were a major interest. Rather than talking about ‘belonging’ she preferred to:

Look for connectivities and recursions. ... to see it as a process rather than a state of being, and to see it as a connectivity rather than ‘belonging’. I certainly have very strong connectivity relationships with places that I would never use the word ‘belonging’ with ... priorities should be with the kind of connectivities that overcome fragmentation and lead to resilience and that foster nurturers and ‘love’.

Rose made the interesting comment that the Aboriginal people she has worked with **don’t** see it as being good to have *some kind of connection to everything* (as in the ecological dictum ‘everything is connected to everything else’). There are things you are connected to and responsible for, your country and your dreaming, and things you are not responsible for. Concerning spiritual connection, she made use of the word ‘**flourishing**’. She argued for extending what is ‘flourishing’ outside the boundaries, rather than just treasure isolated pockets that we will *refrain from raping*, and which may shrink to death. There was extensive discussion around the ‘land needs people’:

People’s care of country really sustained a diverse and flourishing country, it sustained connectivity, it overcame kinds of fragmentation that could be caused by major run-away events like bushfires. People named the places, sang the songs, told the stories and hunted and died and danced and made love all over it. ... I accept that there are lots of places in Australia where Aboriginal people haven’t been able to care for country the way they used to. But I still think for most areas it’s the case that when we see country that is flourishing, we are seeing country that is still bearing the traces of Aboriginal care. So in that sense it’s not ‘natural’. The usual sense of natural is where human beings haven’t been in there mucking things around.

She also thought that hunting and gathering can be ‘good for country’. Rather than ecocentrism, she supported multicentrism. Regarding ‘respect for the land’ she

wasn't sure if 'land' was a good term, preferring respect for any particular flourishing part of 'country'. Rose also distinguished problems with language when talking about these issues, as some of our language can head us off down paths where she didn't want to go, and a lot of tension arose out of framing these questions wrongly. 'Sacred' was a word she had difficulty with, as she knew that it mattered but didn't have a good definition of it, perhaps *inherent significance that isn't mine to take away*. There are 'hot spots' of such significance, but she didn't think that meant the rest of it was effectively inert. The whole idea was 'bullshit' that *if you use something you can't respect it*. She thought this idea, however, was embedded in philosophy. About social justice:

It won't work by saying we have got to sacrifice more of the world in order to make things work for humans in the way we are doing it, because we are not making things better for humans. ... my longer term perspective would hopefully move beyond the 'rights' discourse. ... it already seems to presume a separation of interests ... 'should it be social justice or should it be environmental justice' presumes they are two separate things that have to sort of battle it out ... we should be able to see them as connected and find ways of having them flourish together.

She went on to speak of past injustices to Aboriginal people and the reparations owing, but thought rather than 'rights' it was more about *restorative justice*. In Australia there is the possibility to actualise justice around land rights, sacred sites, endangered species and ecosystems. About custodianship, she was unsure if it was the right term, and thought 'carer' was a better term, as custodianship had possessive connotations of being *given into our custody*. She did acknowledge that custodian has a sense of being ongoing from generation to generation. About wilderness:

I started thinking about it when it was acceptable to think about wilderness as a place where people weren't. ... it was splattered all over ... 25 years ago, over a lot of literature. It was very much what wilderness was all about ... hadn't been bugged up by people, which meant that people hadn't been there, or had lived there so lightly that they might as well of been invisible. ... It's not a place without people, it's not a place without a history, not a place without human love, not a place without human action, and therefore I thought it's just not acceptable to me to call it 'wilderness'. And to a large extent I just can't get over that hurdle. For me, new and better definitions of wilderness don't make me feel happier really.

She also felt uncomfortable that 'wilderness' is a definition that only makes sense to white people, where they go not to see *crappy, colonising, destructive, modernising development junk in their face*. Rose made it clear that she is not against the retention of large natural areas, just with the terminology, which she didn't think is good

enough. She thought that in wilderness you want to see nature **without** people. She liked to speak of 'caring for country' as this is where an understanding of Aboriginal interactions with country really makes sense. She thought wilderness is *our term we need apparently because we need it*. She saw alternatives to wilderness, such as *restoring country that is bugged up*. We need to get at what is 'flourishing', where life is happy, where there is resilience, where we are not impeding life's own capacity to organise itself. As an alternative word she wondered about creating enough charisma around a '*large flourishing area*'. She also spoke of 'quiet country'. She thought we should throw as many words into the pot as we can. She was sure that 'flourishing' needed to be defined, *but that can be done, so let's try it*. About 'wilderness' overlooking Aboriginal history:

The answer to that is I do. I think absolutely we have to acknowledge the feet of people who have been there before us. Some people have said to me 'where we are living now, we are camping on the blood and bones of our ancestors', and they are including people who have been murdered and massacred and stuff. When we walk there we are walking on the blood and bones of their ancestors as well. So that has to be acknowledged.

Regarding the term 'wild', I asked her about Daly Pulkara's quote (in Rose 1996) that a cattle-degraded property was seen as 'wild'. She admitted he was making a leap from 'wild people' to 'wild country', and that most Aboriginal people would be more likely to speak instead of 'bugged up' or 'rubbish' country. We are in a situation of coexisting but very different views of what constitutes 'wild', but she liked the concept of 'wild' she was working with as being **lawless**. She enlarged on this:

What we need to understand is that we were born under a law that puts us into responsibilities of mutual flourishing of a thousand and one myriad living things. And 'wild' doesn't really fit into that, for me.

She spoke of being in Cape York in 2004, where an Aboriginal man got really worked up about 'wild rivers'. He said they were not 'wild', they were his rivers, they were his father's rivers, they were his grandfathers rivers, and *they have been taken care of all those years*. Enlarging on 'lawlessness':

The kind of 'lawlessness' that won't accept feedback, that won't see 'something is going wrong here', won't stop itself. ... we are born under a law already, and Aboriginal people have 50 or 60 thousand years ... to articulate that law, to localize it

... to make it work ... so they are very conscious of being born under a law that is responsible to and responsive to ... Earth.

She felt that humans have too much capacity for destruction, Aboriginal people too. So it is incredibly important that we recognise that we are conscious of being born under a law (and that Jewish and Christian law isn't good enough). In terms of the law 'evolving', she noted in the north that Aboriginal people have become more restrictive about sacred sites, treating them with a 'hands off' approach. Older people have said they used to camp there, but younger people think they shouldn't go there. She said that could be *law evolving or devolving*, but even though it came from respect, the long-term effects will be to decrease people's experiential contact, knowledge and interactions with place. Hence she thought it a lousy idea. Rose made a fascinating comment in regard to cross-cultural communication:

There is a lot of really interesting cross-cultural communication issues here ... somebody could say 'what you call wilderness I call home', and they could say that as a real confrontationist thing, and ask you not to call it wilderness any more. Or they could say 'here we have got two different words for the same thing – you call it wilderness, I call it home'. ... I would hope that at least we could be reasonable enough to consider that when he says 'home' and she says 'wilderness' they are talking about the same place, but they are not saying the same thing.

There was also some interesting insights on the vexed issue of 'fire'. The one thing that came up again and again, and which tallies with all the evidence she had seen was that Aboriginal people would *never ever start a fire if they didn't know exactly where it would stop*. They would 'sing' country first to visualise where it was going to stop. She also referred to the extensive burning in Kakadu, where TOs say 'that's what we always used to do'. She pointed out that what hasn't come down traditionally was:

The full context of burning, the full pattern of land use, and you have got this horrible situation, like we have in Arnhem land, where they say 'but after the rain we always went out and started fires'. They always did, but they didn't go in Toyotas and go everywhere and set everything on fire.

Concerning the abuse of 'country', she didn't see technology as the problem (as the cause of degradation), but rather *people's unrealistic expectations of what they want out of country*. She thought they want a whole lot of stuff out of little areas, they wanted it to solve more problems than country can really solve. Regarding national parks in a hand-back situation she thought it was *essential not to expect too much*

from parks. As for dualisms, she thought *we can have difference without dualisms, surely?* About the ‘human artefact’ debate:

I mean that building is a human artefact, that tree isn't. Lets be honest. ... Obviously Aboriginal people did undertake actions that had effects. And a lot of those actions were really, really good, from a biodiversity perspective. ... but does that make it a human artefact? It makes it an Aboriginal place, is what I think.

When discussing anthropocentrism she was critical of *that kind of postmodern view that because we express our view of the world primarily through words, that somehow the world is a product of our words*. She thought that was ‘bullshit’, and described herself as an ‘environmental realist’. In regard to a ‘way forward’, she thought that the ‘wilderness knot’ was interesting as it:

Forces people to really examine their ideas about things, to talk about ideas with others ... And consequently it keeps important matters alive for us, because we have to keep talking about them, because we don't agree ... I would hope that it would keep us asking ‘what do we really value here from an ecological point of view, really, what is it about this place that makes it special?’.

2.7 Ms. Penny Figgis, former Vice President of the Australian Conservation Foundation, 22/3/05

The importance of large natural areas was to Figgis *a bit of a ‘no brainer’*, as the larger the area the more likely you are to be able to defend it as your ‘core lands’.

We then got on to wilderness definition and history:

I entered the environment as a wilderness conservationist. I wrote my thesis in 1979 on wilderness conservation, on the issue and the movement. ... To me it has extremely positive connotations. So it's a bit of a theme of my life, which is the struggle between the head and the heart. Because the heart still says this is a beautiful word, and it captures a great number of things that are profound values to me, but on the other hand I do understand the intellectual debate.

Figgis highlighted the importance of getting large areas of land managed for conservation, which she would call ‘wilderness’, but if this belonged to indigenous people who wanted an out-station where they went occasionally, then she would see that as *a very small compromise for a very large gain for conservation*. When questioned about whether there should be permanent settlements in wilderness, she acknowledged that the argument was:

Whether you keep 'wilderness' meaning what it has traditionally meant (... where you don't have permanent settlement or signs of industrial man), or whether you expand the notion of wilderness basically to cover large intact ecosystems where there may be minor modifications but they don't fundamentally challenge the health and integrity of the whole.

Wilderness has been an incredibly important word for some people because it *summed up everything they hold dear*. She commented that the conservation movement had tended to say of wilderness that this is a 'place for nature' and not a place for humans, and thus it was *not terribly surprising that Aboriginal people saw that as against their interests*. She had some interesting insights on the need for dialogue:

whatever your cultural constructs, surely at the end of the day we can all accept that we are living on the same planet, that this planet is under profound threat, and that it is in all our long term interests that we conserve its health and its ecosystems? And what name you attach to those ecosystems, to me there should be mutual respect?

She went on to speak of people's *guilt*, who feel they have got to redress the wrongs done to indigenous people, but are putting that cultural imperative before any other. Reconciliation is not one side prevailing, it's a true acceptance of the rights of wherever you are coming from. The wilderness advocate felt the full spectrum of values, and therefore was closest to the indigenous perspective that doesn't differentiate between science and aesthetics and spirituality, *but just says the land is everything*, spiritual home, source of law, philosophy, and goods and services:

So for me the greatest tragedy in all of this is that these two groups of people (who should have most in common) in fact have been wedged apart. ... What we have in common is this deep multi-valued respect for the land.

Figgis supported the notion of 'custodianship', as it tends to put the human into a less anthropocentric position, it says the land is bigger, we are temporary visitors, the land goes on - *you will hear indigenous people often saying this, but it's what you and I feel as well*. In terms of an alternative word for wilderness, if she used one, she tended to use *large intact areas* or *core lands* or *core conservation lands*. About 'humans are part of nature', she pointed out that we were not **always** part of nature (as humans evolutionarily have been on Earth only a short time). Also for most of that time our technology was low impact, whereas in the 21st century nature is rare and humans are abundant and technological impact severe. To argue that humans are

‘natural’, so we should reintroduce them into all our wilderness areas, *seems to me an absolutely nonsense argument*. About social justice:

It’s an inevitable and very profound tension ... But it’s a short term/ long term thing ... I think it is one of the great - both dilemmas and challenges of international conservation ... in an Australian context, I can’t think of too many actual examples where you actually get to that crunch point, if people of good will go into the debate.

She then spoke of a conflict such as a major Aboriginal tourism facility in a national park, where she hoped that relationships would be good enough that one could *just battle it out*. She gave an insight to how social and environmental justice might have come to be seen as in conflict:

Ironically ... for the way the debate has developed ... the vast majority of the people I know who are wilderness advocates are also people who passionately care about social justice ... But I do think that our mind-set at the time was principally focussed on ‘nature in danger’. And I have admitted to you ... that I wrote my thesis in 1979 on wilderness conservation, and I did not have one single word on indigenous people and their rights, and the juxtaposition of the two.

Wilderness became a problem word in the ‘80s, with the tremendous rise of indigenous issues and the desire to correct past wrongs. She spoke of the problems of past literature, and of John Muir’s attitude in ‘First Summer in the High Sierras’, where he spoke of native Americans as rag tag bands of ‘once noble people’. She had become conscious of *how seldom we did appear to overtly acknowledge indigenous issues in many of our debates*, and how the conservation movement under-integrated those issues. She also pointed out that there has been over-reaction in the other direction. Figgis related how at the Durban meeting (World Parks Congress) many wilderness advocates were feeling extremely angry, because they felt the ‘human rights/ human needs’ dialogue was *completely juggernauting across the conservation intrinsic rights argument*. She also referred to fellow conservationists bailing her up against a wall and saying she was to ‘stop walking the fence’, and decide which side she was on, *and I find it very difficult as I don’t see it as ‘sides’*. She accepted that the history with the term ‘wilderness’ had been problematic, but didn’t accept we should *now abandon a term of great portent, with great philosophical resonance*.

Figgis felt intrinsic value was central to her philosophy – *the birds don’t sing for us*. She didn’t think the land belonged to humans, and felt that stewardship and custodianship were the most appropriate words. She agreed she was ‘ecocentric’, but

that she was also a pragmatic idealist, *a very political animal and I want results in my life-time*. Even though she is a secular person, she liked the word ‘sacred’, as it implied profound love and respect. It is a cultural value that has protected sacred mountains and forests. When she goes to such places, they *fill up the jug of my soul*. About ‘respect for the land’, she spoke of how this is now embedded in sustainability strategies, that we can use natural resources and still regard them as special. She acknowledged the battles over what ‘natural’ means, and uses the term ‘ecological health’:

Where things are thriving, that the life that belongs there is in good numbers, good health, where the vegetation is in good health, where the freshwater systems are functioning and clean.

Regarding management, we live on a populated planet, so all wilderness will ultimately have to be ‘managed’. She agreed that ‘wilderness’ as a term was not just a philosophical issue, but was *about management prescriptions in the real world*. About connectivity, she is very committed to a vision of **ecosystem networks**, of joining up the islands of conservation. This relates to the ‘Man in the Biosphere’ concept, which used the term ‘core’ for the pristine areas, from which you spread conservation out onto other lands. She tended to think of wilderness as within that framework. Figgis commented on the criticism that wilderness areas and national parks were ‘not enough’ for nature conservation:

Look I don’t get this, I understand that we need more than national parks, but surely the whole concept is of taking conservation out from the core, not taking development into the core?

Regarding any ‘wilderness fixation’ by conservationists, she pointed out that ACF had been concerned about sustainable agriculture for decades, and that wilderness campaigns had been:

A strategic focus, because what we were talking about was protecting the best, protecting the strongest. ... we were always on about wilderness as the heartland ... but always with the notion of building out. The Australian environment movement, of which I have been an active member for 30 years was never just on about wilderness.

As for wilderness being ‘just a concept’, she responded with ‘bollocks!’, wilderness wasn’t just in your mind, not what she meant by wilderness. She then softened this by saying that those critics must perceive a large intact area as a physical place, but

that one *called* it ‘wilderness’ only if you accept the wilderness concept. Regarding wilderness becoming a problem word:

Well this is where we may differ. I do believe that there is some validity to the argument that the traditional advocates of wilderness, going right back to John Muir ... and certainly to our own advocates, Myles Dunphy, even Milo, to ourselves, you and I and the people who were advocates in the ‘70s and early ‘80s. We had a particular discourse, and if you look at Dryzek’s work on discourses, a lot of us had what I would call a ‘survivalist’ discourse, we had a profound love of nature ... Almost transcendental, spiritual ... We saw nature as fundamentally threatened, so our prevailing motivation was to help nature, to save nature. So we were very nature-oriented, the problem was humans, particularly modern humans, but our concentration was ‘how can we save nature’.

She enlarged on this to say that if any Australian conservationist of her (and my) era had been questioned as to ‘whether Aboriginal people matter’, all of us would have responded that obviously we accepted that Aboriginal people were in these lands:

I don’t think that we ever intended to say that people had never been in these lands, that it wasn’t full of rock carvings, full of the artefacts of past and present indigenous people. I don’t think we ever intended that. But I do not think we were explicit enough in that acceptance.

Figgis explained that most people (especially the young) don’t understand the historical dimension to this debate, that people do things at a particular time, with a particular social discourse. In the ‘50s and ‘60s the argument in NSW was that most Aboriginal people were gone near the coast. That is what she grew up with. In part due to this falsehood, they did not figure much in the conservation debate. She said that as a Network member, she was interested in my thesis, that it showed an evolution in understandings about ‘wilderness’, *there are ebbs and flows, and there are some people who want to polarize the debate*. She thought it was admirable that I was trying to ‘intellectually and ethically’ interrogate myself, even though my heart and soul had been in the wilderness issue. About criticism of the word ‘wild’:

Maybe in some areas in some languages, the term ‘wild’ means something negative, but to extrapolate that and impose that on an international word, an accepted international word – ‘wildlife’ is used all over the world. ... No I am sorry, I listen to that debate and I must say that in my mind I was pretty dismissive about it.

She added that Aboriginal people were perfectly capable of understanding that while some of them may have a negative view of ‘wild’, when we conservationists speak of ‘wild’ it has a different meaning (= natural). About the ‘land needs people’:

I was thinking exactly of the Wollemi, and if we are honest about it, human use has been gone for several hundred years, and it still seems to be in good shape. ... what people are thinking of ... is things like the argument in central Australia that the reason why so many species are diminishing is the retreat from firestick farming and mosaic burning. So that's an argument that says if you want to conserve nature or wildlife then it actually requires that human management that has created that landscape.

About wilderness as dualism, she said she didn't get the argument, as *in any spectrum, the spectrum has two ends*. Wilderness is simply a way of talking about the most intact, the most natural, the most unmodified by modern industrial man – *and that's all it means*. She could not see how this could devalue other things. In terms of a landscape approach, we need a spectrum from core to sustainable agriculture and cities. She saw the human artefact debate as '*reductio ad absurdum*' as it says humans have an impact on everything, so therefore all human impacts are okay? The land predates any human settlement, so it is *simply not true that any aspect of the landscape is determined by human beings*. She was certain that indigenous people had impacts, perhaps profound impacts, but the landscapes are the culmination of hundreds of millions of years of evolution. Regarding the effect of the confusion:

One of my profound frustrations in this whole debate is that indigenous people and wilderness advocates are probably the closest philosophically of all people. And this whole argument is ... a tragedy ... I feel it's a very unfortunate diversion, and it keeps people, who have a great deal in common, further apart than they should be. ... whether we call them wilderness areas or not, we can get a shared understanding that an important, critical part of the conservation suite that we need is large intact areas of land managed first and foremost for nature, with very few inroads of modern living.

2.8 Dr Tim Flannery, Director South Australian Museum, 20/4/05

Regarding humans being part of nature, he thought this was demonstrably true, as everything people do is 'natural':

So are volcanoes, volcanic eruptions are natural, tsunamis are natural, and everything else. ... 'natural' means we are part of the world, we are not supernatural

He went on to say that you can't attribute a moral value to that. While believing that nature must have value to humans, his 'values' were quite wide-ranging, such as waking up to the sound of a lyrebird call. He didn't think one can imbue nature with its **own** values, because if you did that you then set up an opposition between

humans and nature, and you could start seeing them as separate. Better he thought to see it all as *through the lens of human intellect*. About humans being part of nature he spoke of New Guinea:

Some people ... live in tiny tribal groups in the middle of the forest. ... semi-nomadic. For them home is the forest ... As human population densities increase ... they live in settled villages, where they have cleared garden plots to live on. ... They still go into the forest to hunt, they still have very strong links to the forest, but in their minds a duality has already started to develop. And people talk about the forest as separate. ... in the highland valleys, you get very dense populations of people ... the forest for them is ... home of the demons. ... And that seems to encompass the entire human spectrum of experience of nature. ... For those who live within it – it is them, and they talk about it as if it is them. They are deeply embedded. You take a step outside that and you start setting up a duality, while they are comfortable in nature they actually live outside it, so there is a duality. Once humans start dominating the landscape, you start getting this sense that nature is alien and hostile ... So, you ask me is nature separate from humans – it depends on the human mind that is perceiving it.

It wasn't the word, but the way people think about nature, and their place in nature. He emphasised seeing nature through the human mind, *it's what we think that counts*. Flannery said he had thought long and hard about this issue and did not think nature had 'intrinsic value':

I suppose I have a set of deeply entrenched humanist views about the value of people, and if there were no people on the planet the issue of 'nature' would be irrelevant. ... We only perceive the world through the lens of our human brains, so we are the ones who create and give value to all of that stuff. So even if we ... set aside a wilderness, and humans will have 'nothing to do with it and will never touch it'. We only do that because we perceive a value in our human minds to doing that. So I think that for me the way forward ... is to always realise that it's people and their thoughts and values that are uppermost in this. And we have to look at the world through that human lens So nature doesn't have a value on its own, it's only when it is perceived through the human mind.

He qualified this however by saying that once you thought through it, you realised the immense interdependencies, and *the idea that people could allow a species to go extinct becomes a tragedy*. He said he was driven by a deep human satisfaction at pristine bushland, he had seen it in New Guinea, and people appreciate the cleanness of it, that *it's not spoiled by people, it's not over-crowded*. Regarding 'sacred' he thought it was an essential belief. He saw a teaching role for natural areas, especially in terms of spiritual connection to the land. He compared modern Western society with being like cows in a feedlot, *where power comes down a tube and our shit is taken away in another tube*, so we just fatten and reproduce, it's a 'sick lifestyle'. He saw the ultimate problem being that people don't *understand* their place in nature

and thus what they **are** anymore. About ‘respect for the land’, he said it wasn’t his word as he had to ‘use’ nature:

I have to chop firewood, I have to fish ... I have to build a house on that spot. ... I am not the sort of Jainist Hindu. ... You have to kill things sometimes. What can I say? I don’t think in those sort of terms.

The land was seen as ‘sacred’, as it received our bodies when we die. When you look at the long period of interaction, you can see the marks of those who came before us, the accumulated impacts. It’s sacred also in the sense that it’s all interconnected, and those connections remind you of your place in the world. About social justice:

This is the great human dilemma, it’s not just in our society. And I suppose my view of that is that it’s going to take the generosity of the true humanist to overcome that ... Well we have to look at how we equitably provide for justice in this generation, and how we do it for the next to come.

He thought traditional indigenous societies had beliefs that allowed them to live sustainably, but once you took that away, there was nothing you could replace it with - not rational debate, not ‘serving the next generation’, *none of it is powerful enough*. He didn’t identify with ‘custodianship’, as he was ‘part of the land’, and it was custodian of him, and he thought the term was putting him as the *most powerful element*.

We then got on to ‘wilderness’. Despite citing the IUCN definition in his books, when asked to define wilderness he said:

Someone else’s country. ... because you don’t understand it, you don’t have any roots, you don’t have that connectedness. Our view of wilderness in Australia came quite literally from being in someone else’s country, being transported from the Northern Hemisphere into Australia. And all of a sudden we were confronted with this hostile and alien and un-understandable, unintelligible world. And that was ‘wilderness’. ... but it’s country you don’t understand.

He spoke of Pacific islanders in Australia in the early days of settlement, who perished as it was ‘someone else’s country’:

They simply can’t see the resources. And they would call it a ‘wilderness’, even though they are surrounded by people. That’s the concept I am sure that is out there. Country that is hostile to them, they don’t understand it, their ancestors weren’t part of it.

He then qualified this by saying that sometimes it's not necessarily a **living** somebody, it could be the ancestor's country, or the spirits' country. He said there are occasions when it's nobody's country, land where no one has lived – *a true wilderness*. By way of explanation, he said the real value to him was that Wollemi was 'Haydn Washington's country', and it *can't really be wilderness as it's your country ... and through your interaction with that country, you have brought the most fabulous important ideas through to society ... what it means to be Australian*. Flannery said wilderness was a symptom of our history, we didn't want to recognise that wilderness was someone else's country, because of terra nullius. Concerning 'country' he thought we have to nurse and value it and survive within it, so we have to use it, but then said – *Oh God, I don't know ... use it in its entirety?* About wilderness and biodiversity, he saw managing large natural areas and managing farmland as being equally important. About biodiversity management:

If you look at the challenges of maintaining the biodiversity values of that wilderness area, they are pretty profound. Because first of all they mean eliminating or suppressing introduced species, reintroduction of species that were there 100 years ago, instituting some sort of fire management regime. And that adds up to a lot of intensive effort.

He thought that the 'benchmark' argument for wilderness was a valid point, except for the fact that wilderness **itself** was changing (through climate change for instance). Concerning the biodiversity value of wilderness being overstated:

I do actually. I think that there is a real conflict there. It may be that the best biodiversity conservation practices would involve more human intervention than you might want. If we really want to maintain biodiversity in the wilderness, we would want a very intensive fox and cat baiting program, we would want a pretty intensive re-introduction program ... Weed reduction programs.

He agreed that the biogeographic value of large natural areas was 'axiomatic', and wondered if the best solution might be to keep the wilderness for its values, and maintain biodiversity elsewhere. He made the startling comment that the Greenhouse situation was *so bad that we have probably lost most of our biodiversity*, and that the national park system could be rendered useless. When I raised the importance of wilderness in terms of continuing **evolution**, he agreed, and said that was an important view that he hadn't really thought about. Regarding wilderness being 'just

a concept', he said it was a concept that came out of the human brain, a concept that applies to place. About wilderness management:

the idea that we could just 'leave it as it is' and it would always stay the same was very worrying to me, because all these ecosystems are very complex and there are all these interactions ... And I don't think that's necessarily true, in the history of management.

As to whether wilderness ignored Aboriginal history, he said that when he wrote the 'Future Eaters' he was *deeply concerned at the lack of respect that wilderness had implied*, and that was the thing that upset him. Regarding the 'land needs people' debate:

This land is changing so phenomenally rapidly that without some sort of human intervention we will create something radically different, and I think of less value. For me, the wilderness concept as it seemed at the time ... it's probably moved on now ... but it seemed at the time that if you leave it alone it will be okay. That to me was a severe threat to these areas.

We then moved onto the 'human artefact' debate:

No we created it, every bit as much as an Englishman's park has been created ... we have changed soils by fire, and water patterns, we have changed climate ... There is terribly strong evidence for creation ... So for people to change the Australian landscape in that sort of way suggests the most profound influence imaginable, on nutrient recycling, on overall productivity ... you see that there is good evidence that rainfall patterns have changed over Australia as a result of changing vegetation communities.

He thought a case could be made that 45,000 years ago humans changed Australia's climate, based on mangrove sedimentation, off-shore pollen deposits, and ratios of carbon-3 and carbon-4 photosynthesis plants (as recorded in emu egg shells), which show the changing food sources. Thus we are seeing *this incredible revolution where we are re-making the continent in a way that has never been*. When queried about this 'human focus', he said that any human artefact starts with nature ... *I mean stone is natural*. He didn't see that by referring to a human artefact, he was down-playing the importance of nature's role. Rather, he thought he was trying to open people's minds to the profound impact people had:

I would argue that the impacts people have had in Australia in terms of creating a new environment are far greater than those of Europe or North America. I mean the emerging picture we are seeing is where people have changed the climate of this continent, they have changed the way nutrients and resource are cycled through the

system, they have created new estuarine environments, they have reshaped the fauna, they have taken out all of the big grazing and browsing species.

He thought that Aboriginal management was every bit as important as what the Europeans have done:

In fact the European cessation of that management in my view has had a much more important impact than anything Europeans have themselves done continent-wide. ... It's the cessation of Aboriginal management that is leading to most of the problems we face. Not all but most.

When I pointed out that only 4.4% of NSW could be considered to be in a wilderness condition, he agreed *it's not a real lot*. He thought roads had a big impact on natural areas, so if you put them into wilderness you had better *do a full bloody accounting*. He wanted to know how we would feel if Aboriginal people had survived in the lower Hawkesbury beyond the 1840s, how our sense of place would be? He thought his view and relationship to that country would be very different:

For me the answer is no, and so even for my life, I have to admit that my sense of country and my sense of approaching it has been informed by terra nullius, by this view that I didn't recognise previously – the ownership of people.

He thought the history of 'wilderness' had been 'unconstructive', where from the first settlement we didn't recognise other people and their right to ownership of land, and their management of land. And so this belief system of 'wilderness' grew up, which had benefits, *but has had the effect of alienating people*. Wilderness for Flannery had two groups of opponents, the first being indigenous people plus those who *see the bigger history*, the second being developers. He has been trying to articulate the need to develop a new sense of what it means to be 'Australian':

And what it really means to be Australian is to, in one sense banish this concept of 'wilderness' as someone else's country ... We somehow have to embed deeply into people's psychology that this is all our country, that we will do or die on this country, it's the only one we will ever have, and that somehow we need to get on with the job of becoming true Australians. And that means giving ourselves a long term future in Australia, and that means living sustainably ... I can see the wilderness movement as a step along the way ... I don't know quite how we do that? ... Being true Australians ... we need to live within it, we need to really own it and understand what that means.

2.9 Mr. Dean Stewart, Wemba Wemba and Wergaia Traditional Custodian, and Aboriginal Education Officer, Melbourne Botanic Gardens, 29/4/05

Stewart thought that humans were an intrinsic part of nature and the land, just like the kangaroo or river red gum, but that things like Christianity have meant that *we have set ourselves outside of that*. ‘Respect for the land’ was a big thing, but something a bit deeper was needed, to be **involved** with it. When you respect something, you can stand outside, whereas we need to be part of the process and to listen to it, not just audibly but internally as well. Regarding the land being ‘sacred’, the ideal world would be where the whole land is sacred. There are levels of sacredness (such as men’s business areas, birthing areas, songlines). About social justice:

Both are required ... I use the analogy, when I first started doing my walks, I was trying to weed out those European weeds, and here I am still doing the same thing, but it’s the stereotypes that I am trying to get rid of. ... I think the only way we can move forward in the reality of today ... we are all part of this place now, including the governmental authorities. That’s the only way for me, for us, to go forward, in a way of collaboration.

Stewart pointed out that there is a link between cultural and natural heritage, and that rejuvenation of our cultural connections with the land has to happen as much as environmental rejuvenation. He saw conservationists as being stewards and custodians of the land as well, working in a way that is parallel to the way Aboriginal people view themselves with the land. Defining wilderness:

As an area ... that has been allowed to do its own thing, with very little modern human impacts ... Areas where the ecosystems are relatively intact, and they are able to sustain themselves, whether humans disappear off the map tomorrow

The term ‘wilderness’ or something being ‘wild’ for Stewart had that *sort of colonial element* or slight connotation of something they didn’t really understand, yet for him also wilderness was something *incredibly inviting and amazing*. He acknowledged that wilderness was just a word, and that it evoked a lot of different meanings.

Enlarging on this:

The term wilderness within itself has the connotation that it's ... big teeth and sharp claws sort of thing, but for me it's the Earth, it's just another terminology for the Earth and the land.

There was definitely a swing towards acknowledging that the land wasn't terra nullius, and that cultural heritage was part of going into a wilderness area. Despite his earlier definition of wilderness, he referred to city vacant blocks covered with weeds, and how to him *that is a wilderness*. Relating to dualisms, he mused that for some people in urban environments the term 'wilderness' almost created a demarcation and a separation between them, and that *wilderness may be even a little bit scary*. Regarding 'wild country', he thought the term created more of a detachment than 'wilderness' did, though he was unsure why. He works with school groups, and thought most kids would see 'wild' as something out of Tarzan, with big teeth and big claws. About Aboriginal connection to the land:

I mean just because you are Aboriginal doesn't mean it is empathically generated within you. We have had some major dramas with Aboriginal people chopping down trees so they can make some money on their land. ... Aboriginal people in Vic today have just as much got to reconnect themselves. I have many Aboriginal people coming on the Aboriginal heritage walk to start connecting with their culture again. ... as Aboriginal people today, we also have to look at redefining and rediscovering those connections ourselves.

As for wilderness being 'just a concept', he thought *it's very much a reality*, though he then said that it was around us, right there (in the Botanic Gardens). For Stewart, you could say 'environment' or 'Earth mother' or 'wilderness', they all meant the same thing. He supported 'sanctuary' areas which are *just there for themselves*. He saw a huge need for society to get back to nature, and that people were becoming more aware of the importance of those areas we are terming 'wilderness'. Regarding the 'human exclusion' argument, he thought it didn't make sense, he supported sanctuaries with minimal impact and inclusion of people. He saw the need for restoration as being as vital as wilderness protection itself, and spoke of the need for the extension of wilderness areas. Regarding the human artefact debate:

The greatest influence was the burning, the mosaic burning of the land, which changed the nature of the plants. But again, traditionally, as far as the local Kulin people were concerned, everything was actually created, including the Aboriginal people by Bunjil, personified by the Wedge-tailed Eagle. ... And human beings were players brought into reality as a result of a larger creative entity, and we're just part of that whole thing. ... And so they certainly had influences on the land, mosaic burning was an example, but it was a reciprocal thing. Things also came back as well.

Wilderness areas are natural repositories for spirit and soul, and are a way to recharge the soul, where you can experience *those pivotal moments that can totally change your viewpoint and the way you look at things*. He thought 4WD access was really inappropriate in wilderness. He noted that horses spread weeds, and *Phytophthora*. He referred to the ‘voice’ of places such as wilderness, and that the more of those areas that are lost ... *the harder it will be for that voice to actually come out*. Concerning dialogue, he thought you could get caught up in terminologies:

But if it inspires dialogue about areas of great beauty, then by that very thing, it's actually inspiring some thought about those areas. ... it can make people think more about different ways of looking at things. ... And I think that it's the same thing with the wilderness, the more that its spoken about, whether in a conflict ... I mean everything is challenging, it actually reinforces and heightens what it actually means.

2.10 Dr. Rosemary Hill, 29/4/05, ACF Northern Lands Project Officer, and former ACF Councillor

About humans being part of nature:

I think humans are definitely part of nature ... I take an evolutionary biologist's perspective on life on earth, that's my perspective, and that means humans have arrived relatively recently, so there has been a long history of nature without humans. I also ... realise that not everyone shares the evolutionary biologist view

She pointed out that something being ‘natural’ did not make it reversible, sustainable or good for humanity. Regarding ‘ownership’, she thought the concept of humans owning anything seemed very short-lived and *not real* to her, as when you die you own nothing:

The Earth and the land exist, and we are on it for a period of time ... I guess I feel a very strong sense of connection to parts of the land, and I do feel that that connection is deeply felt by all humans, albeit in very different ways.

When asked about ‘custodianship’ she said she had had some pretty negative responses from Aboriginal people, that it was ‘just another form of dispossession’, and that they **owned** it, it was ‘their land’. She said she respected Aboriginal rights over land, but that *they were not unfettered*. I then asked if ‘rights over land’ was the same as ‘ownership’, and she responded that ‘they think it is’. She spoke of her role as a conservationist in northern Australia:

I have tried to explain sometimes to Aboriginal people my sense of responsibility and obligation, that as a whitefella, somehow I have gained knowledge about the consequences of our actions which not all people in my society have ... therefore I also have an obligation and responsibility to land, which I can't walk away from.

Hill was uncertain about being 'ecocentric', and thought some North American philosophers, who claim they see the world as indigenous people see it, were mistaken. She saw things as *relationships* rather than 'centrisms'. 'Respect for the land' meant a lot to her, but she talked about connections – *to me that's love*. When asked about the land being 'sacred':

What I see in industrialised society ... you have areas that are completely trashed, its all been cleared and filled up with exotic biota, and other areas that are off limits and sacred ... this deification process (of nature) has happened to a certain degree. ... And I think there is a way that those things can be held together, a utilitarian value and a spiritual value for the land. And certainly that was the Aboriginal tradition as I understand it, that land held both utilitarian and sacred uses.

She thought the Australian conservation movement had come out of (and responded to) industrialisation, that like any group of humans, its thinking was affected by context, so that its thinking has been wound up in the imperial project. She thought that as we move into the a post-colonial world, the thinking was changing. She was suspicious of romanticism and the 'holiness of nature', as it *seems only possible when it's associated with a trashing of nature*. You could only say something was like a church when you had something else to use. It was fundamentally impractical for the whole of the landscape. About social justice:

Social justice was not the driving force of conservation but it is the important means of shaping, of delivering of conservation happenings. So these things stand alongside each other. It's like the means doesn't justify the ends. You can't make war to achieve conservation, you can't override human rights to achieve conservation. ... They stand side by side, and I have felt this for a lot of my life, people have been saying to me 'you must choose ...'. And I feel that's false, you don't have to choose. You can pursue both these things.

When asked about wilderness definition, she said she guessed she used the term, but found it 'un-useful' for her work in northern Australia, as they are **peopled landscapes**. Hill believed wilderness did seem to have this concept built into it about 'not being peopled', even though we talk about wilderness including low impact non-technological societies. She knew that wilderness does not exclude recognition that people have been there, but she thought it *does tend to have a concept that*

people haven't had a strong imprint on the land. She made a fascinating comment on how indigenous people view the land:

What I have come to understand in working with indigenous people is that what they see is the imprint of those people on the land, and that is the thing that is held to be of most significance to them. And that imprint is in the stories, it's in the knowledge, it's in the history, that is the most significant meaning of the land to those people. And somehow the word 'wilderness' doesn't carry with it that meaning, that this is a landscape which is 'our mob place', where my grandmother's grave is, where my story of my people is. So for me it's an inadequate word for the landscapes that I work with. It's sort of one dimensional.

She qualified this by saying that the wilderness experience (if not area) was dear to her. She also wondered if anyone was going to look at the definition other than her and I, and others like us:

Words we know are symbols and metaphors ... it doesn't matter really what you say in your thesis, or really what I say – words will evoke a response ... because the meaning of words doesn't come from dictionaries, it comes from people using words.

Evolution was an important word to Hill, though she had worked with a lot of indigenous people *to whom evolution is 'just another story'*. The question of access by Elders in 4WDs to wilderness in order to teach law (and lore) came up, and she asked herself *who am I to decide what should happen with that knowledge?* She concluded that she valued large natural roadless areas, but she also valued the culture that went with them. When asked if there was a better word than wilderness, she said TOs are happier to talk with them about 'natural integrity' and 'ongoing natural processes'. She had never had Aboriginal people talk to her about 'quiet country', but they have talked about concepts like its opposite, country that is not being looked after properly. When I asked her if the word 'sanctuary' might help, she said the term has been bastardized politically in Queensland, due to an anti-Aboriginal hunting campaign known by that name. Talking of meaningful words, she said that '*sharing*' was good, *sharing country, sharing culture*. When asked whether wilderness was just a concept:

I am one who thinks there is a real world out there ... I do remember being at a workshop once, when I was joined by one of the social landscape people, who sat down and said 'all landscape is socially constructed'. And I said 'oh yeah, tell us that the next time you fall down a cliff, mate'. That's my response to that. ... It is a concept, but the world is real. ... It's a concept about place.

When I raised the ‘human artefact’ debate, she responded that as an evolutionist she knew the world was here before us, and will be here after us, so she didn’t think it *depends on humans to construct it*. Having done a Ph. D. on fire changes in Queensland, she concluded:

This transformation that Tim Flannery talks about, I believe is complete nonsense. I don’t think there is any ecological evidence for it. ... When you look at the fossil pollen evidence ... the current vegetation patterns were established in the Neocene, certainly in the beginning of the Pleistocene. I think it’s very unfortunate that that concept has been popularised, it’s very frustrating that we haven’t been able to do anything about it ... A persistent myth. And it’s a pity.

She didn’t think humans ‘created’ landscapes, as they were here long before us, and vegetation was largely determined by environmental factors, primarily climate and soils. There was scientific evidence for a ‘fine scale patterning’ influenced by human fire practices, and this was important for some communities like rainforest patches on the savannah. Hill had an interesting slant on what some Aboriginal people such as Professor Marcia Langton might mean when they spoke of ‘creation’:

I think what Marcia is actually talking about there is that when Aboriginal people look at that landscape, they are seeing the human landscape, they are seeing the people, the stories, the grandmothers ... But I don’t think it’s a human-created landscape ... when we look at Paris we see the human history. When they look at the landscape they see the same thing. I have come to really feel that Aboriginal people ... when I see the trees, they are not seeing the same thing, they are seeing ‘oh this is where my grandmother’s baby was born’ ... they are seeing the human history, and for them that is the most important thing about that land. ... I think they are saying something different when they say it’s a ‘human artefact’.

When asked why ‘wilderness’ had become a problem word:

Because it seems to be profoundly disrespectful, as it doesn’t respect the indigenous occupation and experience of this land. And I do feel like it’s tied to the colonial project. So even though ... those definitions do recognise the occupation, the word is inadequate in describing the meaning that it has to those people.

She enlarged on this to point out that ‘we’ look at the land and don’t see this human story, but indigenous people look there and saw **mainly** the human story. Thus the word doesn’t have the richness to bring forward that human story, and when that’s the most important thing for Aboriginal people, she felt it was disrespectful.

Wilderness does take on board that people have lived there, but doesn’t recognise the stories and meaning – *it’s ‘bare’*. She concluded that the word wilderness was not this dispossession thing it is often perceived as, but neither is it the reinforcing,

supporting, and acknowledging of richness thing she feels is required to work together. She thought 'Wild Country' was a bit better than wilderness, but still doesn't take on board 'what Aboriginal people have been saying'. She thought 'wild' doesn't recognise that the most important aspect of that country to people was its expression of Aboriginal society. In regard to fire:

What emerges when you talk to Aboriginal people is that only Aboriginal people can do Aboriginal burning, because only those people will have the right customary obligations and right cultural knowledge to actually burn country.

'Caring for country' was extensively discussed, and that while it was about physical things, it was also importantly about **relationships**, about who's doing what according to customary law, honouring the cultural values, the story places.

Concerning permanent out-station settlements:

A lot of Aboriginal people will tell you they really want to get back on their country, ... they want to 'go home' ... But when it comes to the reality of doing that, a lot of times the reality of people's lives means they are tied to mortgages, jobs, kids being at school, which means ... that it is probably not going to happen.

She pointed out that Aboriginal connections to country are at the small scale, so when it comes to saying 'this area is zoned wild', but you can live over 'there', this doesn't help when your connections are with the first site. She thought this zonation was a problem between our industrialised way of living and traditional occupation of country. She pointed out that ACF in northern Australia was trying to protect large scale *processes* and not necessarily large scale 'areas'. They aimed to protect rivers, and vegetation cover, but then have human occupation and 'compatible uses' within it. She thought that generally if one followed customary law, then uses of land were sustainable. She thought the problem wasn't so much the technology or tools (such as cars and guns) but the concentration of numbers. She agreed that some indigenous people strongly believed that the 'land needs people', and that what has gone wrong with country is *they are not there*:

And it makes a lot of sense to them, they are not there and the country has gone really bad. ... have you seen Bruce Rose's work when he talked to old people about why animals had disappeared, and it was from their point of view because they were not doing the ceremonies any more ... Not doing the 'increase ceremonies', not doing those stories, so it makes perfect sense to them.

She didn't have any *scientific, rational, fully formed ideas* as to 'why' this might be, except the suggestion that people were once 'top predator' in the system, so their removal caused a *trophic cascade through the system*. Regarding 'human exclusion', she cited Antarctica as the most wilderness landscape on Earth, *because no one has ever lived there*. She said that Figgis had talked to her about the 'true' wilderness of Macquarie Island and Antarctica. Hence she felt there **was** a bit of an exclusion idea to 'wilderness'. She herself did not feel excluded however, and felt she could walk in wilderness. Regarding cultural sensitivities, she quoted working with an Aboriginal mob in Queensland (where ACF was encouraging them to get rid of cattle). However, cattle had historically been a way to independence (as cattlemen were not sent to Palm Island Mission), so telling them to 'get rid of those cattle' was a bit like saying *get rid of your grandmothers*. It was not well received. About wilderness as dualism, she observed:

There is no doubt that a lot of our planet has been converted, a lot of it is monocultures and urban landscapes ... People like Cronon, I don't know if he is being very realistic. I don't think you create the duality, it's there. Anyone can look at and see that there are converted landscapes and non-converted landscapes. ... they get a bit carried away, thinking that words are everything and not really looking at the experience people have of the world.

When asked if the value of large natural areas for biodiversity was overstated:

I definitely don't believe that. I feel like we have taken a bit of a wrong turn over the last 20 or 30 years because of this emphasis on biodiversity 'representativeness' ... it's very clear that natural integrity and ongoing natural processes are really critical to biodiversity. It means large areas, it means protecting the major natural processes, it's about wild rivers, it's about intact vegetation cover, it's about fire regime being able to operate in a reasonable way. I don't think its being overstated at all. We understood this in the '70s ... then it disappeared in this Biodiversity Convention and this side-track that we went on.

When speaking of the effect of the confusion, she said she was frustrated by the *lack of words* for what we are talking about, *we need better words and better symbols and better metaphors*. ACF in the past tried 'the land belongs to the people, the people belong to the land', but it didn't really work. She was hoping that some brilliant minds might come up with something better. Regarding a way forward:

No I haven't given up on large natural areas. But that word (wilderness) itself I don't use a lot. I feel like absolutely it's working together in a respectful way, learning from each other ... I think that's the only way to go, and I think by doing that, I think there is so much to be gained both by indigenous people and conservation.

2.11 Prof. Harry Recher, 22/7/05

Recher felt the continent had been grossly abused by pastoral activities. About ‘humans being part of nature’, he observed we are *one species among a billion or more*, so we are just as ‘natural’ as the rest. He never used ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’, just ‘anthropogenic activities’. All species are driven by evolution, and all seek to maximise their resource use. He thought there probably **was** a confusion that natural is good and therefore humans are unnatural *because so much of what we do is not good*. Concerning ‘intrinsic value’, all species (not individuals) have an equal right to exist and to achieve their evolutionary potential. Humans have no right to bring any species to extinction, and we have a responsibility to ensure that our activities don’t affect other species adversely that have *their own intrinsic value*. He used the words ‘share and care’ – we need to share the world and care about other organisms. He pointed out that we have a society that doesn’t care for the land.

Recher believed the rights of a species to exist and to evolve **transcend** the rights of any individual or cultural grouping. He had never believed in private property rights, land belongs to the ‘commons’, *all human beings ... and all other organisms*. Recher suspected he was an ‘ecocentrist’, though he believed the majority of ecologists would *come down on the side of anthropogenic activities*. He respected the land and all other organisms, but didn’t have a problem using resources (even hunting whales), provided it was done sustainably. He referred to the ‘tragedy of the commons’ as being part of capitalistic society. He didn’t like the word ‘sacred’, as he thought it implied religious feelings, and he felt *when you die you rot*. He did empathize with the landscape and even hugged trees. He had a sense of wonder and found it calm to ‘commune with nature’, as it was *fulfilling to me intellectually*.

About social justice:

There are times when humans as individuals and as societies are going to be disadvantaged in a variety of ways, economically, socially, culturally, in order to safeguard the rights of other species to exist. ... There is no reason for those tensions to exist in most cases. We have got ourselves into this situation through our technology, because we have allowed the human population to grossly exceed the capacity of the planet to sustain it ... we are consuming far in excess of 60% of the world’s Gross Primary Production. This is where the conflict comes from.

He defined wilderness as ‘large blocks of land relatively free of human disturbances’. He thought:

It’s probably a European construct, as indigenous people occupied most of the landscape right across the whole planet. So to suddenly say that they don’t belong in that landscape as part of the ecosystem is a bit up ourselves. ... It’s a recreation activity, wilderness. People seek wilderness for their own personal enjoyment, it has nothing to do with any other species or organism. Strictly human-centric.

He preferred to use the term ‘wild country’ or ‘wildlands’, *meaning minimum human presence*. Wilderness and biodiversity figured prominently in our discussion. Recher agreed that any areas of predominantly native vegetation were very important for biodiversity conservation, however:

It’s not necessary to have wilderness in the defined sense to conserve biodiversity. There are probably no organisms that require wilderness for their survival as species. There are organisms that require freedom from disturbance by human beings – but that is different. ... if you want grizzly bears or polar bears ... then you need substantially large areas – but you don’t necessarily need ‘wilderness’.

You have got to separate the value of large natural areas from the wilderness concept, he insisted. He argued you can have large natural areas which are heavily utilized by human beings, and that State Forests are a good example. He continued:

Making an area wilderness doesn’t do anything to improve its value for biodiversity conservation and species. All it does is provides a recreational or ‘spiritual’ value if you like ... Making a wilderness out of a nature reserve at Nadgee was blatantly stupid. The same thing with taking a national park and calling it a wilderness.

If you took the argument to its logical conclusion, that wilderness is needed for the survival of natural systems and species, then *why not exclude human beings completely*, and in particular non-essential activities such as bushwalking? He believed that *removing human presence entirely* is not necessarily beneficial, such as at Nadgee, where vehicle access was closed (thus limiting fox control). Recher insisted Nadgee was *not a wilderness when I can hear boats on the ocean*. He noted that in the ‘70s the Scientific Committee would not protect areas in the Sydney Basin because they were not ‘undisturbed’. He referred to then NPWS Investigations Officer Peter Hitchcock as *being preoccupied by forests, wilderness and wild rivers*. When asked if the biodiversity value of wilderness was overstated:

Grossly. You don't need wilderness for biodiversity conservation. ... You need large natural areas, predominantly natural areas, but I am making a distinction between that and wilderness, which as I have said is an anthropogenic recreation concept. ... Wilderness carries limitations which make it difficult to manage biodiversity. ... Large natural areas are probably essential for biodiversity conservation ... It's not necessary to designate them as wilderness. Wilderness is a thing for people, not for biodiversity. ... There is no scientific demand for wilderness.

It was particularly difficult to determine exactly what Recher meant in regard to roads, which he seemed to think had virtually no environmental impact. He agreed there **were** places where roads were inappropriate because of internal fragmentation, but that for most of Australia this was not an issue:

Is there a difference between someone taking a 4WD vehicle down a dirt track and someone walking down a dirt track wearing Rossi boots and a state of the art backpack? Philosophically there is no difference. ... What's the difference between a mountain bike and a bushwalker? ... If a 4WD track has an impact on native Australian fauna and flora, then almost by definition so does a walking track ... a walking track has an impact, a walking track and bushwalkers are equally likely to transport seeds and to provide corridors for exotic fauna such as foxes and rabbits.

He said he didn't see the difference between a walking track and a typical two wheel drive road. I then asked if he meant a 'made' walking track like at the Three Sisters, and he replied *the minute you put people across a track*. When I asked 'even just a pad in the bush?' he replied 'yep'. Finally, he agreed that when you have a bitumen road *then it probably does have an effect*. Wilderness had become a problem word in part due to the political process. Premier Bob Carr he thought had masqueraded as an environmentalist and used wilderness *as a way of cloaking his other activities*. He set aside wilderness areas which were already actually protected (national park, state forest), then did nothing about *this huge amount of land clearing going on*. We got on to the rainforest debate, and Recher thought the only problem with rainforest logging was that it wasn't sustainable. Regarding a 'wilderness fixation' by conservationists:

Land-clearing only became an issue very late in the game. Yes once they got on to it they had a big impact, but we probably lost 10 to 20 years advantage because of the preoccupation on forest and wilderness. ... that is not the most important environmental issue confronting the country ... Water management is far more important, land clearing is far more important. ... they just were not pushed, promoted, or advertised or made media issues. Whatever the environment movement was doing about them, they did not have the same priority as these other issues.

When asked if wilderness ignored Aboriginal history, he said Aboriginal people say that ‘all the time’, and that his first response would be that wilderness advocates haven’t given due recognition to that. Regarding Aboriginal land management he said they had a huge impact:

If you are going to take a wilderness definition that excludes human impact or minimal human impact - and deny that Aborigines screwed the vegetation of this continent, then you are deluding yourself mate. ... If you look at the middens, they had eaten their way down through the kangaroos and were eating the possums. They had gone past that particular component of carrying capacity because they had a huge food resource base both from the aquatic environment, and from some of the rich alluvial soils on which they could grow crops.

He thought if Aborigines had had steel they *would have done the same thing we did*. He did not think that Aboriginal law would have controlled them, and referred to reported traditional practices of hunting possums by lighting a fire at the base of the tree – *that’s not exactly brilliant land management*. He said that one of the significant differences between their society and ours was the rate of change, not necessarily the magnitude. The magnitude of change over 40,000 years could well be equal to that of Europeans over 200 years. The slow change meant however that *you wind up with a pretty functional biota*, though probably a very different biota from 80,000 years ago. Asked whether the word ‘wild’ ignored Aboriginal history, he said that the WildCountry Project was *trying not to*. When I said that wilderness advocates had tried unsuccessfully for thirty years ‘not to’, he said that for him wild country was *imbued with indigenous presence*. Regarding human exclusion he concluded that if human presence had an adverse impact on wilderness, then that meant **any** human presence (including bushwalkers). When asked about settlements in large natural areas, he agreed they should be excluded, *there is no need to occupy 100% of the planet*. He hadn’t thought about ‘dualisms’, but thought wilderness had been promoted as being ‘better’ than non-wilderness. Regarding the ‘human artefact’ debate:

It’s presumptuous to say we created it, we certainly affected it or influenced it. ... We affect the landscape, we influence the landscape, we don’t create the landscape. We can transform the landscape, we can change it, we can make it totally different, and I guess in that sense you could say we have created a moonscape.

He thought bushwalkers had spread *Phytophthora* (dieback) through the bush because they were *too fucking lazy to clean their feet*, and that they also spread the *Giardia*

parasite to *almost every creek on the east coast*. He supported multiple use if it was sustainable, with the qualification that there were *probably biodiversity reasons to have areas which are little used by humans*. About the TWS WildCountry project:

I think what we are hoping is that by identifying the need for connectivity, that a large part of the process (and we are talking about hundreds of years) will be not so much the protection of connectivity but the creation through restoration of connectivity

At one point he downplayed the importance of large natural cores, saying that restoring a few square kilometres of cleared land was ‘just as important’, though later he did agree that such cores **were** very important, as that’s where the gene pool was. Regarding WildCountry:

It’s a paradigm shift. It’s moving away from the idea that we are going to conserve continental processes and biodiversity by setting aside national parks or wilderness. ... It’s a whole of landscape approach. ... by itself national parks could not possibly save continental biodiversity ... What I am saying is that you have to do something different to just having those core areas if you are going to achieve your goals. And we haven’t been doing that until now.

Recher also spoke of his own special focus, that WildCountry was **independent of government**, and could be done through private initiative, *using capitalism to defeat capitalism*. In concluding, when asked about working with the Wilderness Society:

They are struggling to come into the 20th century, the Wilderness Society. You can tell Virginia I said that.

3. Reflection

This cycle covers a period of eight months. It was interesting during this long period to see the emergence of issues that actually *surprised* both myself and the Network to some degree. Such issues were the meanings of ‘wild’ (natural and savage and lawless), the two different meanings of ‘responsibility’ (obligation to care for and protect vs. the need to control), the depth of debate around ownership and custodianship, the impact of creationism, the idea that Aboriginal people primarily see ‘human history’ in the land, the two different ways to understand ‘human artefact’ (literally and in terms of social construction), and the interesting ‘the land needs people’ debate, which arose out of the Rose and James interviews. I think that our surprise about the latter debate was in part because it was new and unexpected.

Partly it also came from the ‘sense of perspective’ of wilderness bushwalkers. A key teaching of wilderness is *humility*, so the argument that the land *needs* humans cuts right across this sense of humility, and indeed can generate some anger *on behalf of the land*. It is one ongoing fascinating part of the dialogue.

The Network had been progressively listening to and reading the transcripts of interviews for some eight months. One of the problems of my PAR group was that they were quite busy individually. Although there was talk (meeting of 27/1/05) of us all ‘going bush’ on some date to have a chat, it was hard to organise any workable date, so it did not happen. My reflective comments on the tape after that meeting pondered this inability to commit to meetings within a Network of active people. However, this was a fact of life that I had to work around; if it was a weakness it was also a strength in that their unavailability came from being so active.

When the first ten interview transcripts had been disseminated, I suggested at the meeting of 1/6/05 that we meet for a day to discuss what we had learned. This was in the knowledge that there was still probably one more interview to come (Prof. Recher). I said I thought we would need a full day to discuss the material and bring out the insights. Bob was kind enough to offer the meeting room at Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens. A date was set (31/7/05). This was no good for Aldo unfortunately, which was a loss, since he was something of a ‘devil’s advocate’ in the group. However, no date would suit everybody, so we confirmed this date. A few days before the workshop, Sally contacted me to ask if I had heard that ‘Noah was not coming?’. I hadn’t, so I rang him ... and clearly things had just become ‘too much’. Noah had decided he needed to *actually go* into the wilderness, instead of ‘talking about it’. Instead, he was there in spirit at Tomah, and via text message. At lunch on the day he messaged us on what the regrowth in a past ‘control burn’ looked like down in the Grose wilderness.

I produced three documents for the Network. The first was a three page table of interviewees responses to 23 interview questions. This had a brief summary paragraph:

*All interviewees value large natural areas, all believe humans are part of nature. All see an intrinsic value for nature except for Flannery. Nobody believed humans really owned the land except perhaps for Flannery. There was strong support for both social and environmental justice, and a belief that we must do both. There was poor understanding of the formal definitions of wilderness (outside of conservationists). Alternative words to wilderness were **large natural intact areas, core lands, quiet country, flourishing country, nature, natural areas, country + natural integrity**. There was only moderate support for 'wild country' as a term instead of wilderness. All agreed that wilderness was a place as well as a concept. There was good support for 'custodian' or 'carer' instead of owner. There was roughly equal support on whether 'wilderness' currently ignores Aboriginal history, but most thought it might have in the past. No one (except Flannery) believed that the land was literally a human artefact. Only Flannery and Recher thought the value of wilderness to biodiversity was overstated. Everyone except Archer saw a spiritual significance to wilderness. Only Archer and Flannery thought there possibly should be resource use in wilderness.*

The second was a 17 page 'key quotes' document, organised according to the headings in the draft literature review. Finally, there was a 22 page document listing 20 possible 'themes' I had distilled from the interviews, which included quotes, plus some of my comments on these. Network members thus had a lot to digest for this meeting. The main aim was to get reflection from the Network. The list of 'themes' was expanded during discussion in the meeting. The meeting needs to be put in the perspective of a long-running discussion about the Network's involvement with the forthcoming Colong Foundation Wilderness Conference in Sept 2006.

To commence, I put up the overhead of the table of interviewee responses. It became clear that with such a knowledgeable group (teeming with things to say) it was impossible to avoid interruptions that sometimes clarified issues, but sometimes sent us off on tangents. I mentioned that Flannery didn't believe in 'intrinsic value', which took us into a 'knot' of our own about what this *was*. The Network itself really didn't understand it. I referred to the 'anthropocentric fallacy' of Eckersley (1992), an example being that Flannery thought humans could not attribute value to the nonhuman. However, Network members got caught up in the humans doing the valuing, as opposed to what they attributed value to. George was immediately concerned when I used the word 'evaluate' in regard to the themes, saying he didn't understand what he was meant to be doing. He wanted to know what to evaluate them *against*, seeming to think that they must be evaluated against particular criteria. There was confusion about 'evaluate' as opposed to 'valuing' arising from a recent meeting he had attended. However, George also came up with interesting ideas, such

as the proposal that wilderness needed to be seen as an '*electron cloud*' of ideas and positions. Henry asked if the themes would be discussed in the thesis, and I confirmed they would form a basis for discussion.

Having (I thought) clarified the day, we then proceeded. Ron brought up the absence of 'geodiversity' in most of the interviews (apart from Plumwood's and Rose's) and the very strong focus on biodiversity alone. The discussion then moved to the 'land needs people' debate, and Henry commented that in fact this hadn't been discussed much anywhere he was aware of. Rose's interview, and her problem with 'wild', were then raised, where the meanings approached 'meaning-reversal'. We talked about the different meanings each of both 'wild' and 'wilderness'. There was recognition that 'ownership' was ingrained in how we talk, even if we don't *believe* in this philosophically. Bob wondered if interviewees saw a contradiction when they spoke of not 'owning' land, when in fact they *did* own land legally. The philosophical view versus the legal fiction of 'Torrens Title' we live with was raised. The Network thought that the tensions between social and environmental justice were definitely *poorly understood*. Figgis's comments on John Muir were discussed. George had read a great deal of Muir, and pointed out that Muir was alive at a time when Indian wars still raged, so that this affected his outlook. It was thus agreed that we needed to situate people *historically*, that comments such as Muir's needed to be seen within the context of their times. The 'human exclusion' debate then dominated discussion, with George claiming that Rose's comments were in fact an intellectual thing about exclusion, rather than actual exclusion.

We then moved on to the interviews themselves. James comment that Aborigines never *owned* the land philosophically was referred to. Bob raised Jared Diamond's (2005) book 'Collapse', which he argued claimed that ownership was a good thing, as the impacts come back on the owners. Words such as 'owner' or 'owning' slip into our language and are hard to avoid. It was pointed out that 'Traditional Owners' (TOs) are now enshrined in legislation, when it would be better philosophically to use *Traditional Custodian*. Henry believed that Aborigines liked the word 'owner' as it establishes their prior right to the land. Others pointed out that Aboriginal Elders didn't really hold with 'ownership', while more recent Aboriginal speakers use the

term due to the land rights debate. 'June' (of Maori descent) said she had always thought that indigenous people thought they *belonged to the land*, so how was it now turned around? One suggestion was that the Elder's view of the world was now shifting as they were bombarded with the Western ownership idea. Henry suggested that the Aboriginal view has *always* been diverse. Ron spoke of 'rights balanced by responsibility', that this was *custodianship*. We discussed 'responsibility', how this could be seen two ways, an obligation to care ... or an adult *looking after* a child.

Regarding Lesslie's interview, all were impressed with what he had to say. However, when he spoke of a 'new wave' of protection of large intact natural areas, Henry thought that this was just Lesslie 'speaking as a scientist', and might not be realistic. Ron maintained our role was to raise wilderness awareness so as to make it easier for Lesslie to make use of the word. Lesslie's observation of the neglect of systems and functional aspects in ecology was important to Henry's mind. It was agreed that we needed to keep raising the IUCN and legal definitions of wilderness again and again and 'hammer them in'. The Network needed to come up with key phrases about wilderness, phrases which we should publicize all the time.

We then moved to the Plumwood interview, especially her point about presenting wilderness as a positive presence of the nonhuman, and not the negative absence of humans, which Henry thought was excellent. We all agreed that it was a major task to de-link wilderness from terra nullius. In regard to Plumwood's reference to the term 'biocultural landscape', Henry wondered why we don't just come back to 'landscape'? There was recognition by others that we can't, that 'landscape' as a term had now been taken over. At this point George brought up 'evaluation' again, that he needed 'tools' to evaluate the interviews. Sally explained that we were seeking *ideas* of how to follow through, and that it was not needed to have a checklist of 'good' or 'bad' points. Returning to Plumwood's interview, George said he was worried that her comments on horseriding showed she didn't understand the dynamic interactions around exotic animals. It was agreed that we don't have to agree with everything said in an interview. I raised the idea that perhaps everyone has their 'tragic flaw', or a certain blindness ... and that it made me wonder what *mine* was?

‘If everybody likes large natural areas - then is disagreement over management only?’ George wondered. It was pointed out that definitions and management are *rational* things whereas the wilderness knot is actually about *irrational things*, that each person has their own baggage that clouds their view. The problem of things being ‘labelled’ or stereotyped and then ignored was also raised. Bob noted that this was polarising language. Even though Plumwood referred to *herself* as an ‘ecofeminist’, should we label her as such? I responded that we do need to understand the history behind people’s positions. It was then asked ‘why is a dualism an inherently bad thing?’ We agreed it was a good question, and that we couldn’t see why it *was* inherently bad. It was agreed that the wilderness knot is actually the mass of stuff *in the middle* between the ends of the spectra of issues. George suggested this ‘seeing the ends and not the middle’ should be in the ‘themes’.

We moved on to Young’s interview, and her focus on *all* biodiversity, and on connectivity. George made a particular point of saying he was *horrified* that TWS had ‘abandoned wilderness’ as a word, and that this is why wilderness is not advancing in northern Australia. He said he can’t separate his view of this reality on the ground from the intellectual stuff. Bob pointed out this was mixing the impact of the philosophy with the philosophy itself, that we needed to concentrate on the ideas. This discussion became quite serious, with George being quite frustrated with TWS’s perceived lack of action, that ‘he couldn’t sit in an armchair and read it’. He said the concept of ‘WildCountry’ was fine, as long as you contextualise it, and say ‘I am still going to talk about wilderness’. He made a special request that his words be noted. I spoke of how it was important that we acknowledged the frustration and anger within us, and that the interviews had in fact been healing for me, and had made me realise how angry I had been. However, I had now realised that anger was not a very useful way forward. George went on to say the strategic decision that TWS had made to back away and not *use* the word ‘wilderness’, had led *directly* to the wilderness knot. In a debate, you have to engage the other side, if you pull back, the ‘forces of darkness’ advance. George said that TWS may talk about wilderness in their publications, but they put no actual resources (staff, funding) into wilderness in either NSW or Queensland. We then moved on to Archer’s interview. Henry did not

think there were many insights in this, and wondered why he maintained his underlying resource philosophy, why he thought we can not value what we use? He thought Archer was confused, and that ‘confusion’ needed to be added to our ‘themes’.

Deborah Rose’s interview was next. Henry said ‘law’ was a ‘web of responsibilities and obligations’. Ron thought Rose ‘moulded language’ to suit her view, as in ‘wild’. He also wanted to know where in Australia people were actually living as they had been 200 years ago, where they were part of the ecosystem, as now ‘Toyotas are everywhere’. The similarity of ‘wild’ as natural, and ‘flourishing’ were discussed, as was the almost *inverted meaning* of wild as natural and wild as lawless. June thought ‘flourishing’ enabled evolution and system processes. Henry thought Rose came from an American perspective, with a non-science academic background. However, Rose’s views on cross-cultural communication were seen by all as being of value. Regarding Penny Figgis’s interview, Henry agreed conservationists were *not* aware of Aboriginal issues 20 years ago. George however thought Figgis was a very conservative conservationist, while Henry thought she ‘saw all sides’, and Ron noted he ‘learned a lot from her’. We moved on to Flannery’s interview, where wilderness was seen as ‘someone else’s country’. This definition really surprised Henry. George thought Flannery ‘made up stories’ and really ‘wrote fiction’. Ron wondered if ‘humanism’ meant you were inherently anthropocentric? There was some debate about what humanism was. Bob actually went and got a dictionary, which described ‘humanism’ as ‘human interests predominating’. Given this rather negative definition, Henry wondered if humanism was related to nature scepticism (as Plumwood argues). Regarding Stewart’s interview, Henry thought he was coming from an educator’s viewpoint and was thus both quite balanced, and a realist.

Concerning Rosemary Hill’s comments on TOs primarily seeing *human history* in the land, Henry thought that that’s ‘just what they talk about’ (so that it didn’t mean they didn’t *value* the land). Bob thought it was basically a human trait to link stories to the land, and that **all** humans do this (thus TOs are not special, just living with the land for longer). George raised the problem of an ‘idealised past’, and asked ‘what about the present?’. He thought the tools from the Dreaming were outmoded today.

There was some discussion of the law *evolving*, and George thought wilderness was part of that evolving law in a new world. Ron thought this was a key insight, that law might have to evolve to protect wilderness, and that it needed to be added to the ‘themes’. The question of Aboriginal ‘no go areas’ or sanctuaries was raised, and how these have a link to wilderness. Hill’s ACF ‘process’ approach for northern Australia was discussed, and Henry noted that it was not mutually exclusive with an ‘area’ approach, and that ACF should push *both*. George observed that large scale processes *need* large areas to operate. Henry thought a process approach alone was basically a multiple use strategy.

We then got on to the twenty themes I had distilled, going through them one by one. About the definition of wilderness, there was discussion around ‘permanent settlements’. If an area has them then should we call it something else – not ‘wilderness’? We agreed that ‘peopled wilderness’ was a contradiction in terms. Ron pointed out that there were very few traditional sustainable-use societies around the world today. Ron also made the observation that ‘theory twists one’s view of reality’. About terra nullius, we all agreed with George that it was a key problem. Bob raised the point that terra nullius included the ‘law’ argument and ‘land needs people’ argument. If the ‘law’ is cultural teachings, then wilderness has been *under* law for the last 200 years, and is under it today. Because of land rights and terra nullius, wilderness is getting ‘devalued’, as people still believe they need to attack terra nullius. ‘Looking after the land’ had been used to disprove terra nullius (to show people *did* manage the land), but had also been used against wilderness. We agreed they were separate arguments that were getting confused, that wilderness had become ‘collateral damage’ to the disposal of terra nullius. It was observed that Aboriginal people and conservationists have ‘more similarities than differences’.

Regarding wilderness literature, George raised the past history of the wilderness movement, and explained that Myles Dunphy in NSW was on about ‘a lot more than recreation’. It was agreed by all that former wilderness advocates did *not* mention Aborigines much in their writings. There had indeed been a conservation argument that focused on wilderness recreation, Henry thought. This he felt was reflected in the wording of the NSW Wilderness Act, and was a ‘vulnerable point’ for

conservationists. Henry also wondered what 'looking after land' really meant, and what they wanted to *do* with the land now? Around the 'land needs people' debate, Ron thought that 'looking after country' rested on assumptions that traditional Aborigines 200 years ago *consciously* managed the land to 'look after it' - when in fact we don't know, as technology at the time forced 'ecological constraint'. It was suggested that the Aboriginal view of looking after land was essentially doing ceremonies at Bora grounds, and that there was a 'non-intersection of ideas' around 'looking after country'. We were 'not talking about apples and oranges' in regard to meanings. It was noted that many themes can be skewed towards ecocentrism *or* anthropocentrism, depending on activism and education.

Concerning the 'humans are part of nature' debate, Henry observed we are 'a part of nature and *apart* from nature'. The planet was now so controlled that debate on anthropocentrism was virtually irrelevant, Bob thought, as we must protect and manage. The question was raised of what 'natural' is, but George argued we *can* tell what natural is, that we all really know what it means (this related to Flannery's comment about 'unspoiled bush' in New Guinea). About wilderness management, Henry questioned if there was a 'management mania' that asserts human control (as Plumwood implied), and thought I would need to demonstrate this in the thesis. He wondered if it was being argued that if wilderness was 'managed' then it was not 'wilderness'. We said 'yes, it is', and he wondered why this should be, *why* management means 'not wilderness'? 'Evolution' was another theme, that Henry thought was important, as landscape evolution is 'the story of the land'. George thought it easy for people to be inconsistent about evolution and creation. Ron wondered at people's blindness, why some people 'just cannot process information presented'. Others replied 'we can't tell people they are dumb!'. Discussion followed about people being *in denial*, and Ron thought this was an important part of the knot. We then returned to the 'human artefact' debate, though lunch was near and this section was rushed. George thought Flannery was 'just being provocative', wondering if he actually *denied* factual information. Bob observed that his 'creation' arguments were having a big impact on people.

In terms of ecological sustainability, George could not understand how some could argue wilderness was *not* part of sustainability, when ecosystem services were essential. There was some discussion as to why conservationists tend to use instrumental values for wilderness, and not intrinsic value. Is this just because we need to influence selfish people? Concerning access by Aboriginal Elders to wilderness to teach law, George thought this a reasonable thing, and said he was 'tolerant' about it, though once taught, he thought 'the youngsters could walk in'.

The final theme was on dialogue. Bob thought the way forward was not dialogue but was '*Realpolitik*', and forming a coalition to protect wilderness. George thought it was *both* dialogue (though not with 4WD people) and *Realpolitik*. Sally took him to task on ruling out the whole 4WD movement, saying 'you just need the right section'. There was debate that both dialogue and reconciliation don't mean surrendering your position. There was some discussion about 'sticking points', that these don't necessarily mean you *both* don't want to protect wilderness (for example the 'Stealth' film in the Grose wilderness was opposed by both TOs and conservationists). It was agreed that we needed to keep using the word 'wilderness', and keep on campaigning to protect it. George thought that the Australian Left think *all* Aboriginal people are conservationists, but really only 10% are, like the rest of the population.

We then moved on to draft diagrams of the spectra of things influencing our understanding of both the land in general, and wilderness in particular. At this point we were seriously running out of time. Some thought I had 'miraculously captured the heart of the themes' while others observed it was due to a lot of hard work. George told me that I needed a model that 'provided solutions', and that my mind-map didn't have a political element. He suggested I add a '*magnet of activism*' and asked 'how do you influence reality, how do you change the electron cloud to something more favourable to wilderness?'. The 1980s had been very positive, and we now needed a tool (more effective activism) to solve the problem.

Henry thought my wilderness mind-map should be labelled 'wilderness concepts'. He also said that 'wilderness is a theory and land is a fact'. It was pointed out that

my mind-map mixed up philosophies and things like roads in wilderness. I agreed it was eclectic. ‘What would happen if the wilderness knot *was* loosened, what practical effect would it have?’ asked George. The response was that we might not have to fight about 80% of the stuff we do now, and we might find an underlying *commonality of purpose*. Identifying ‘sticking points’ (such as the land needs people/ looking after land/ hunting/ Elder access) was one thing we agreed had to be done. It was argued that you can’t get media to turn up for dialogue, while George observed that *confrontation sells issues*. There was some discussion that the media was responsible for the academic view that conservationists had a *wilderness fixation*. All this reflection on the interviews had been quite involving and tiring, but also very productive.

The last thing we did that afternoon was discuss ‘*where we go from here?*’. Could we do something before the Colong Conference in September 2006 in the light of what we had found? George wanted to do something with education, or to go away with TOs to ‘talk about wilderness’. Bob wanted to link wilderness to the curriculum, though we recognised this was a big task. He thought we should lobby the Board of Studies. George was worried about putting negatives about wilderness into the minds of young people. Kersten said we needed to present a program to schools that ‘has outcomes for all ages’. She was also very reassured from the interviews that most people wanted to keep large natural areas, and also wanted dialogue. Ron raised concerns with my acronym of ‘lanai’ (**large natural intact areas**), that it seemed to be a replacement of wilderness and thus ‘played into the hands of the Wise Use movement’. He was reassured when I said it was not a replacement but a ‘meaning clarifier’. Sally noted that the Network was ‘part of the process of whether wilderness survives as a term’. In the end we did not make a decision as to what we did next, but confirmed that we would be involved with the Colong Foundation conference in September 2006.

We then spent the last 20 minutes talking about plans for this conference. Previously, the theme was said to be a ‘Celebration of wilderness’. We thought then that dialogue would be a major part of the conference, and that the Network would determine the workshops. This discussion was not such a good idea when we were

all tired. The effect of the next twenty minutes was to somewhat cloud the productive side of the day. However, it did show how *miscommunication* can lead to dissonance! A key email had been sent out the week before in a format where several of us did not see the attached revised program, which changed the aims and structure of the conference. Some of us were thus quite surprised. This miscommunication led to both confusion and some friction. It became clear that the conference was probably *not* going to be a major forum for dialogue. At the next Network meeting (14/9/05), I proposed, and it was agreed, that the Network do our *own* workshop on dialogue before the Colong Conference.

What can be said about this huge cycle overall? Certainly it produced many results. Interviewing so many key scholars was productive in itself. It got the researcher out of his 'comfort zone' to interact with scholars with different views. I was lucky they were happy to allocate time for such an interview. Perhaps never before had such a range of scholars been deeply quizzed about what they really felt and meant about 'wilderness'. Virtually every interview raised fascinating insights into the knot. Here were some of the most influential scholars in terms of what had been written in Australia on natural areas and wilderness. I certainly built bridges on a personal level to many of them, bridges that have already stood me in good stead in terms of follow up discussion.

Interviewing these scholars was in many ways a learning process. For a start, it taught me what it meant to interview, that I was there to *learn*, not to lecture. I wanted to understand 'why' they felt as they did, not convert them. It was also positive for me personally. There I was, travelling around Australia, talking to key stakeholders, and teasing out what they really thought about nature and 'wilderness'. It showed me there *was* a large amount of commonality involved in this debate, even if the stakeholders tended to focus on their differences. This was beneficial in terms of dealing with my own frustration with the knot. Regarding the interviews themselves, the juxtaposition of so many different views on this topic was invaluable. It made me realise that most interviewees had a background (philosophical, ideological, and so on) that predisposed them to see some things about the 'knot' and to miss others. Earlier I was so bold as to call this a 'blindness'.

Surely we *all* have such blindnesses, and it led me to reflect on what my own was? Certainly we all have a history, and this mediates how we approach this issue.

Another point that fascinated me was how people were critical of each other, yet might actually be quite close when they described what they really valued. Some of these people have never sat down together and actually communicated. It made me realise that perhaps *I* could be a bridge on some of these issues in the future. It was interesting to see what the Network made of these detailed interviews, and how they were able to analyse and add to the themes raised. The cycle was thus a great success. Despite the fact that Network members were busy, they did in fact take the time to think and comment productively.

What were the limitations of Cycle 4? Very few in hindsight. A few of my questions to interviewees could have been ‘tweaked’ to improve them, though overall they reflected the extensive thought that went into them. A question to tease out what people meant about ‘terra nullius’ would have been of value. Getting more scholars out into a natural area to do interviews would also have been good. There were also time limitations for Network members, so not all could attend the Mt. Tomah meeting. This cycle produced surprises both for myself and for others in the Network, which are of great value to researchers, as they tell us what we don’t know about what we supposedly ‘know’. Surprise is about learning, and this is what PAR is about, action that also helps us to *learn* about the issue. In this sense, this cycle was tremendously creative and productive. Here was a cycle that produced more than twenty insight ‘themes’ on the wilderness knot, of which perhaps seven could be described as a surprise to some degree. The interviews provided an excellent underpinning for one more cycle in the cyclic spiral towards reaching meaningful dialogue about the sensitive and difficult issues surrounding the wilderness knot.

CHAPTER 6

CYCLE 5 – PROMOTING DIALOGUE

Cycle 5 covers the build-up to, and the day of dialogue itself: ‘Finding Common Ground’. It covers a period of four meetings over five months to organise the day, stretching from 9/11/05 to when the workshop was held on 7/5/06.

1. Mini-cycle 5a – First joint meeting to plan a ‘day of dialogue’

1.1 Planning

At the end of Cycle 4, the Network was keen to continue to promote dialogue about ‘wilderness’. We realised that the focus of the Colong Foundation Conference in September would be ‘Celebrating wilderness’, and thus somewhat different from the theme of gaining dialogue. We also thought that our ‘day of dialogue’ could feed into this conference. The Network at its meeting of 14/9/05 decided that it would seek to do a workshop around dialogue, and also that we should *jointly* run this with another organisation, so as to widen the audience.

We decided the organisation to approach should be the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute, given that the wilderness in the Greater Blue Mountains was largely within the World Heritage Area. The Institute describes itself as ‘an independent non-profit organisation that supports the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area’. It is formed by a partnership of NPWS/ Royal Botanic Gardens/ Sydney Catchment Authority/ Blue Mountains City Council/ USYD/ UNSW/ UWS and the Australian Museum, who each contribute funds annually. Its aims include acting as a ‘knowledge broker’ by bringing together academic, regulatory and community interests, addressing the socio-cultural dimensions of conservation and sustainability, fostering dialogue, and

staging public forums. On the 18/9/05 (following a previous phone discussion) I sent an email to 'Renalda' of the Institute suggesting the joint workshop, along with suggested dates, and some points about how it might be structured. Next day she replied by email, saying the Institute was keen to work with the Network in organising the forum.

In our previous phone conversation, she had spoken of how she recognised that there seemed to be two groups of people who loved the land, conservationists and TOs. They seemed to have so much in common, but did not seem to always agree over wilderness. We swapped a couple of emails about her coming on a day-walk down Cedar Ck near Nullo Mountain, where I was taking some fauna experts for a study. This was a place she said she had always wanted to visit. This would have given us a chance to discuss the 'partnership' and how it would work informally, while actually *in* the wilderness. Unfortunately, we could not organise this before I left for the 8th World Wilderness Congress in Alaska at the end of September. We agreed however to meet to discuss the idea in November. We met at the Institute in Katoomba. It would be a joint meeting, which would hopefully endorse the idea and actually start planning the day.

1.2 Action

This was the first meeting where the Network and the Institute came together to discuss the idea of a partnership to run a workshop on the confusion around the term 'wilderness'. The day was well attended by the Network. 'Renalda' and 'Veronica' came from the Institute. Renalda was keen to involve the Aboriginal community right from the beginning, but only one TO 'Greg' attended, along with two friends who were interested in the issue ('Pedro' and 'Dermot'). Outside the building, the afternoon was also well attended by a riot of sulphur-crested cockatoos, and the tape of the meeting echoes with their background raucous calls. Renalda chaired the meeting, and at first the discussion was general. I explained what the Network had been doing, and my thesis aims. I then asked if people thought a workshop on dialogue was 'worth doing'. Renalda said that in her discussions, most people had thought a dialogue was well worth pursuing, and that there was extensive support for it within the Institute.

There was some discussion about numbers, how many did we want on the day? Renalda and I suggested 70 people maximum (to keep it manageable), while ‘Dick’ thought there would be no problem going to 250 if we wanted to. This was not fully resolved. There was also discussion about how much it would focus on wilderness ‘management’ as opposed to the wilderness knot. It was agreed to focus on the knot, rather than on management. George was concerned about the possibility that the workshop might ‘run wilderness down’. I argued that we *could* do this right and discuss criticisms without necessarily running wilderness down. While there may well be criticisms of some meanings of ‘wilderness’, we in the Network needed to be ‘big enough’ to acknowledge and discuss such. It was agreed that we had to have some ‘ground rules’, as well as mediators, for the day. The need to have the ‘ground-rules’ spelled out in the invitation was agreed, it would be an event for those who adopt a positive approach, adopt mutual respect, and are willing to listen.

George said that he thought that the most important people to talk with were indigenous people, that he wanted to build on those relationships. He suggested that in the future, perhaps TOs might want to hold a cultural workshop, to which conservationists were invited. This ‘day of dialogue’ on wilderness and country thus might be just the *first* of several workshops around dialogue. George pointed out that the World Heritage Area was moving towards Aboriginal co-management. Renalda agreed that TOs were the key group to ask to the workshop. Noah reflected his disillusionment with the academic literature on wilderness by adding forcefully that the TOs and conservationists might ‘cut straight across that crap’ to deal with reality. We agreed that it would be a good outcome if this happened on the day, if we did bypass the literature in favour of dealing with the reality of large natural areas. Renalda suggested that the speakers should be there to ‘set the scene’, then the local people in the workshops would discuss the nitty-gritty. Bob agreed that contentious issues should be up front in the talks, followed by a workshop session together to talk about our common values.

After some further discussion, we developed objectives:

- To share different understandings of the meaning of ‘wilderness’ and to find common ground through productive dialogue;
- To increase understanding and mutual respect between diverse interest groups;
- To create a community-supported framework for wilderness.
- To build stronger consensus over management of wilderness areas and to influence legislative change to policy that better embodies the common interest.

We then came back to the question of whom to invite. It was agreed we would invite *all* the Aboriginal community. Greg pointed out that we might only get five or ten Aboriginal people who actually came to the day. Dick said it would be a real pity to exclude anybody who wanted to come, but it was agreed we would invite a list of key people, and then (depending on numbers) we might throw it open to the public. The question of needing to train the facilitators for the workshops was raised by George. Others thought we had the skills within the Institute and the Network to provide ten facilitators for the workshop groups. There was then discussion as to *why* we wanted dialogue, and how it related to decision-making. Ron pointed out that we want better communication, so that at the end of the day we get better decisions and better protection of the wild. We agreed that *making* the decisions themselves was not going to be part of the day – that that would be a different process and workshop. George said he wanted to develop both understanding and relationships in the workshop, so for him the aim was a better consensus to protect wilderness through untangling the knot. I agreed we wanted to work out common cause to work together, rather than criticizing each other, as sometimes happens.

The idea of having a BBQ regularly just to talk to each other (TOs and conservationists) was raised, in order to build respect. Greg said they were doing such things already within the Aboriginal community. Noah asked ‘am I hearing an invite here?’, looking towards Greg, who nodded. Everyone agreed a social BBQ was a great idea, but along with the workshop itself. ‘The problem in the Blue Mountains is that there is no wilderness framework, one supported by the community, and *that* is why we have problems defending these areas!’ argued Noah. ‘That is a very astute remark’ responded George thoughtfully. ‘We are all happy at our separate fires, but we need to bring them together, as they are made of the same wood and they produce the same ash’ concluded Noah emphatically. There was then

some general discussion (without conclusions) about what a wilderness community-supported framework would be. George exclaimed, in terms of its many meanings ‘you know, wilderness is a monster!’. He then observed that I had been tackling such meanings for a long time.

After some discussion of the practical problems of Easter and school holidays, the date was set for a weekend day early in May. Bob brought the discussion back to having a BBQ: ‘social events would engage more people to actually come to the day’ he mused. Greg suggested we have one in the park in ‘The Gully’ (the most significant Aboriginal campground in Katoomba), just behind the Institute. Dec 4th, 2005 was chosen for the meeting, to be followed by a social BBQ in the park outside. At the BBQ, Network members and TOs would be able to meet on a *social* basis, rather than across a table.

1.3 Reflection

The Network was thrilled by the success of the meeting, and the positive response from Greg and his friends. The first hurdle had been crossed, everyone had agreed such a day *was* worth organising. More than that, we had set up objectives, and started planning. There was also a feeling that dialogue was long overdue. Dermot came up later after the meeting and shook hands and thanked me for initiating the dialogue. Similarly, Greg said that he already thought ‘we were on the same side’. Noah’s passionate comment that maybe TOs and conservationists might ‘cut straight across that crap’ (the confusion in the academic literature) was interesting. Several people nodded, indicating that there was support to talk about the *reality* of large natural areas, rather than what academics might say in their ivory towers. In terms of a growing recognition of the problem we faced, it was interesting to hear such a passionate wilderness advocate as George exclaim that ‘wilderness is a monster’, in terms of its many meanings.

In discussion at the restaurant after the meeting, the Network was a bit concerned that there had not been more TOs present at the meeting, given we all agreed they were the central group with which we wanted dialogue. We hoped that the BBQ at the next meeting might improve this. Upon reflection, it was clear that George was

still arguing for a shift of focus towards wilderness management, though when questioned he agreed that reducing confusion and gaining better dialogue were the key objectives for the day. His concern came from a desire to gain more ‘practical’ outcomes in terms of wilderness protection. The suggestion from Dermot and Greg for the social BBQ was a significant step forward. When Noah asked about the BBQ invitation, and Greg nodded, it seemed the process had just stepped up a gear. There was certainly a sense that something important had just been agreed to. Break throughs in dialogue can thus arise from simple things.

2. Mini-cycle 5b – ‘Talking-stick’ meeting and BBQ

2.1 Planning

In planning the following meeting, the minutes written up by Renalda brought to light a problem; differences in recollection of what was ‘decided’. Certain things appeared that I had no recollection of. In part, this is a function of working by consensus decision-making, when one person takes the minutes (which are not later checked and agreed on). This is a problem of the *process*, rather than any reflection on the minute-taker. Most of these differences were not important, and of course I had the tape and could always check (if I wished to take the time). Another issue developed, one of *changing* decisions made at the meeting. Renalda emailed me saying she had been chatting to George and to the NPWS Regional Manager after the meeting, and they had cut the number of objectives down from four to two. I was concerned that objectives agreed to by the meeting should not be changed later by any small sub-group. In fact, following extensive email discussion, only the last objective was dropped, as it did not reflect what people apparently meant.

These teething problems in the ‘partnership’ may seem (and are) quite petty, but *do* have an impact in terms of organising an actual event aimed at effective dialogue. Such issues need to be recognised, as they can be frustrating and time-consuming. Another aspect of the situation was that while I was working almost full-time on this project as part of my Ph.D., Renalda only had a certain amount of time she could put in to it, as she had many other projects in hand. Sometimes I felt that a document I sent off would then disappear into the void, without feedback. This was unavoidable,

as the two of us were the key people from the Network and Institute who needed to coordinate things to make the process work. Again, this is a tension of partnership that makes planning ‘interesting’, and time-consuming.

It had been agreed (after the meeting and through several emails between Renalda and myself) that the main focus of the second meeting would be *social*. We were all keen to involve many more TOs in the process, and Renalda invited several along. It was only the day before the meeting (3/12/05) when Renalda and I spoke about her ideas to change the meeting by making use of a ‘talking’ stick, and also by doing a ‘visioning exercise’. The talking stick would pass around the circle, with each person speaking. There would be three basic rules, speak from your heart, be brief, and no discussion. I thought that the talking stick sounded good, but was concerned about how long it would take to do the visioning exercise, given that we wanted the day to be mainly a social meeting. Renalda said there were going to be eight TOs attending. I also got the strong impression from what she was saying that one of the TOs had been telling people that the Network (and myself also) were ‘biased’. The suggestion of *bias* did hurt somewhat, given that we were the group who was initiating the dialogue process, and making the effort to try and reduce the confusion. Perhaps my thirty year involvement with wilderness and Wollemi had also led to me being stereotyped as a ‘one-eyed greenie’?

The day before the meeting I recorded my thoughts on tape, noting that I was ‘quite perturbed’ and rather depressed. In my conversation with Renalda, there had also been the suggestion from a TO that the Institute should be the one to take charge of things, as they were ‘unbiased’. Reading behind the lines (and relating this to past history as told to me by several people), I was concerned that one TO might be seeking to influence other TOs *against* the process. Of course, Renalda was caught in the middle, seeking to keep everyone happy. In my thoughts recorded at the time, I wondered if there were in fact people who were ‘anger junkies’ who want things to stay polarised, who don’t want to have dialogue. I wondered whether this was because polarisation in some way gave them a power base. I asked myself whether this might be why people had given up trying to get dialogue in the past. This aspect worried me for many reasons. Apart from anything else, it put me in a negative state

of mind at a time when I needed to be as positive as possible for the meeting. I also felt that things were moving too quickly, that too much had been happening, so that I was not fully prepared for the meeting. I remembered the positive energy of the last meeting, and hoped it might occur again. Renalda and I had talked about how the message stick process should be used to keep things as positive as possible. Maybe this would happen?

The morning of the meeting itself (4/12/05) I received an email from Renalda saying she was not doing the visioning exercise, just the talking circle. Given this was a 'partnership', I was concerned about *who* in fact 'decided' *what*. My recording on tape at the time expressed weariness and worry about the process, but I noted that 'we have to try'. I also noted my perception that the Institute seemed to exhibit a tendency to 'take over' the joint process. I was also concerned that several of the Institute came from a university faculty strongly influenced by post-structuralism, (and that thus they themselves had their *own* biases). I was hence quite worried and depressed going in to the second meeting. I observed at the time on tape however that this was the 'nitty gritty' of actually *doing* action research.

2.2 Action

Early next morning on 4/12/05, I stopped the car at the view on little Nullo Mountain, and my dog Jessie and I got out to look east across the vista of northern Wollemi. There was Mt. Kerry and Mt. Coriaday and Mt Coricudgy (the highest mountain in the northern Blue Mountains). There were the three peaks of the Keekelbons, including Bare Rock Bluff, a place with its own wonderful view. I asked Wollemi for its *blessing* on what we were trying to do that afternoon. I also remembered Mt. Denali (literally 'The Great One') in Alaska. I asked Denali also for its blessing for that day.

At the meeting, five TOs turned up, two of whom I had not met before. Auntie Joan of the local Dharug people gave a lovely 'welcome to country'. Renalda chaired the meeting, explaining that we were going to use a message stick, which would pass around the circle twice. Each person would speak from the heart with respect for others, but only for a few minutes. She also said it had been requested that there be

no recording of the meeting. If this meant that people felt they could speak freely, then it was of course worthwhile. However, it was a loss for this thesis, as there were some wonderful things that people said. I could therefore only base this write-up on my memory, plus that of others in the Network, assisted by the recording of my thoughts whilst driving home after the end of the BBQ. Renalda had brought a 'talking stick', but Greg produced his own, which was a beautifully shaped piece of wood made in the Northern Territory by 'clever men', and had also been worked on by Aboriginal singer Jimmy Little. It was carved with the symbol of 'the way to water', which was filled with ochre from Uluru in central Australia. We agreed to use this beautiful object.

My comment on the tape after the meeting was a rather stunned 'everything went so well!'. The contrast between my energized, happy voice *after* the meeting and my weary voice of the day before was dramatic. I observed that while my fears of the day before were perhaps not totally groundless, the blessing that I had asked for while gazing out over Wollemi *was there*. It really did feel as though we were blessed. A positive energy built up, where nobody was critical of anybody's position. Some people talked about 'wilderness', some people talked about 'the bush', some about 'country'. It didn't really matter what we called it, what mattered was that we had this commitment to places that we *loved*. There were a few people with tears in their eyes at the end of the meeting. George said he felt like crying, and Noah also. The second time the stick came around, Renalda choked up and couldn't speak for a minute. Auntie Joan was quite concerned for her. As for myself, I felt more inspired than tearful. When people were speaking of their bond with the Blue Mountains and the need to protect it, it was wonderfully affirmative for me. It felt like what we did that day was the start of something really worthwhile. As I noted later, it was 'such a buzz!'.

A lot of deep stuff came out. Auntie Joan spoke movingly about growing up in 'the Gully', and how a 'shadow' used to walk with her to the edge of the Gully when she went to school. It would stop at the edge, but be there to walk her home when she returned. When she spoke of this to her family, she had been told that she was blessed. She said the shadow no longer came once the site was developed, and the

recreational complex was built. Several people spoke of how wilderness taught them things. Renalda spoke of the need to protect natural areas, and how we needed to learn from Aboriginal people. Sally made the heartfelt observation that if we in the Blue Mountains couldn't get it right to protect the land, then 'what hope has the rest of the world?'. Others echoed that sentiment. Noah said he hoped he lived to see people 'working together' to honour that place. Ron spoke of the experience of almost dying from heat exhaustion in Kanangra, and how the wilderness had taught him humility. George spoke of a time when he was working in the Northern Territory as a young man. An Aboriginal man handed him a shield and spear. George said he didn't want to take it, indicating it was not for him, but the man had been definite and passed them over to him. George was very definite that this had been *real*, and it was only later that he said it was a real event that happened while he was asleep. Greg said he had a friend who had a similar dream, and that 'we are *all* family'. 'Seamas' (TO) said the first time around that we should be 'thinking about what was good for the bush'. The second time around he opened by speaking in Wiradjuri (which most of us did not understand), and then spoke (in English) of how being an Aboriginal person means you have 'certain responsibilities'. He then passed the message stick to Noah, who then proceeded to open in Welsh, later explaining in English that 'Wales was a wild place'. This brought smiles to many there. 'Warren' spoke of how we can approach the land by using 'two toolkits', a black one and a white or scientific one, and that we need to use *both*. 'Ben' (a TO) chose not to speak in the first round, but in the second round spoke of the need for 'spiritual healing of the land'.

When it came to me, I found my voice shaking a bit with emotion. I spoke of how my 'way to water' had been at age 18 and first walking down the Colo River, where I fell totally and irrevocably in love with the place. I spoke of how I woke to stare for a long moment into the eyes of a Lyrebird. I was also the first to raise the word 'love', that conservationists and TOs shared a love and respect for the land, though mainstream Australian society sadly did not. I argued that if we are going to change our society, we have to work together, out of respect for the land. We needed to work together to reduce the confusion around 'wilderness', in its meaning of *large natural areas*. I also said I saw wilderness as a tribute to traditional Aboriginal land

practices. The second time around I spoke of how I too felt the need for spiritual healing, of how the idea of two ‘toolkits’ (white and black) raised by Warren was a useful idea. I spoke of how positive it was to hear people saying ‘we can get it right’ in the Blue Mountains, and how important ‘respect for difference’ is.

Afterwards I was relieved but drained. This was partly in coming down from the meeting’s ‘energy’ (a word several people used), partly from the deep emotion that we had shared, partly because I had been so worried about it the day before, and partly because I was trying (I later realised) to act as a *conduit* for the Wollemi wilderness itself to ‘be there’ through me – to bring the blessing to that place. All of us there (and what we said) together added up to something that was really worthwhile. In terms of action research, this really made me feel as though we were *getting somewhere*, that we were getting dialogue, that we respected each other enough to respect our differences – that ‘I’ may call it wilderness and ‘you’ may not, but that it doesn’t matter if ‘we’ both love the land.

2.3 Reflection

After the event, I was tired but elated that a whole lot of people could see the value of working together. Kersten reflected on how Greg had said he was a ‘Casuarina person’, that ‘putting story into things’ was important, and that the responsibility of relating to a totem was a great idea. She agreed there was an energy to the meeting, and that the message stick was a fantastic idea. She was in fact tired after just the first round of passing it around, because while it was exciting, it was exhausting. ‘Profound attentiveness’ is in fact pretty tiring. Kersten reflected that at the meeting we learnt things about people in the Network we hadn’t known before. I felt afterwards that people had been truly ‘touched’, and that we had gone past the point where any negative individual could stop the positive dialogue.

Passing the talking stick around was clearly a brilliant idea. It stopped polemics, it stopped anyone dominating the conversation. Renalda had also worked hard to ensure that TOs actually turned up to the meeting. Sending the stick around twice was important, as people loosened up the second time. Talking to Warren afterwards, I discovered the common feeling we shared about Aboriginal sites. His idea of the

‘scientific toolkit’ and the ‘Aboriginal toolkit’ was a useful one. I told him how I felt like a *custodian* to Baiame Cave (see Chapter 7), and raised the sense of ‘kinship’ I also felt, to which he agreed. I told him ‘look it probably sounds like heresy’ but the message from that site for me is that its not about ‘race’, it’s about who you are as a person, that is what decides whether you are suitable to be a custodian. I had expected to be told that this was a bit ‘way-out’, but actually Warren seemed sympathetic.

While ‘Ben’ (TO) had started the day with somewhat defensive body language (he did not greet or speak to any non-Aboriginal person), he had spoken later of the need for spiritual healing of the land. I went up to him at the BBQ and said I had felt the need for this since I was a child. I spoke to him of the need for ceremonies, and how I felt Baiame cave ‘wanted’ a ceremony. His attitude then changed, and he relaxed and talked about bringing people (including those from different cultures) to do ceremonies in various places to honour the land. He seemed to accept then that I too was a person who loved the land, and hence was worth talking to. There were thus many good contacts made on the day, and bridges built, or at least begun.

After the reflection of a few days, I sent an email (6/12/05) out to the Network entitled ‘A landmark meeting’ which opened with:

We could not have had a better Xmas present than the meeting we had on Sunday with 5 TOs and other interested parties (at least 20 of us all up, including NPWS Regional Manager). Those that were there will remember the special 'energy' of the meeting, which I would go so far as to call a 'blessing'. I am only just coming down from it! There were tears in a few people's eyes at the end.

Bob replied on 7/12/05:

Haydn it is your energy on this project which I feel has drawn us all along on this journey. I know there are many more steps to be taken, hopefully together. I feel we are on the right road and that there are many things we could do to help.

Rachel replied (7/12/05):

Other commitments keep me from being part of your process but I am watching and listening with great interest. I am so full of admiration for the journey you are all taking. It is great that the traditional owners are responding to the sincerity of your approach. The complexity of defending the natural world in ways which recognise both cultural and social factors is the key challenge for modern environmentalism.

Noah later (15/2/06) replied that:

I wrote after the round circle talk:

*"There's a voice in the wilderness
Sounds from black, sounds from white,
With rainbow calls converging
Cross the gorges and flowing through the night."*

As many 'deep' things have a personal significance, many of those at that meeting did not want to talk too much about it afterwards. We had revealed our souls to each other (or some of us had), and perhaps there is always a lurking fear that someone might laugh? So, while I include some reflection here from the Network, much of the reflection here is my own, or Kersten's. It was noticeable to me later, that when I spoke of the day to people, they tended to go a bit quiet, and speak of it with a distinct tone of respect. The paucity of Network reflection is also partly due to the fact that we had no formal Network meeting soon after the event.

I truly felt there was a blessing, which was important to the outcome. Perhaps it was Auntie Joan's 'shadow' responding to all the love for the mountains that was brought together in that one room? There was also a certain humility, a sharing of deep confidences. The sense of being part of something new and powerful was wonderful, something really *needed* for the world. This was real action, meaningful action, not just physical - but spiritual as well. Profound attentiveness and mutual respect were really present. As I said later 'it gives me hope – and that is precious'.

3. Mini-cycle 5c – The third meeting

3.1 Planning

I was really grateful to Renalda and the Institute for thinking of the idea of a talking stick. It showed just how much thought she had put in to trying to make that meeting a success, one that would include the TOs as well. I was a bit ashamed of my earlier suspicions, and wanted her to know how much I appreciated her efforts. Thus on 6/12/05 I sent her an email:

Just a note of personal thanks for the energy and thought you put in to making Sunday such a worthwhile day. The energy there I can only describe as a blessing. There were a few people there with tears in their eyes at the end.

It was something of a surprise when I got an email back on 7/12/05 which said that she had spoken to a consultant and mediator ‘Jane’ (well-respected in the Blue Mountains), who was very clear that the Institute should be seen as the facilitator of the workshop and the process, as the Network was seen as ‘not being impartial enough’. She said that while she and I would jointly plan things, the ‘driver’ of the process should be the Institute, with the Network as participants. What had happened to the idea of a joint partnership? We had just had arguably the most successful and positive meeting ever held between conservationists and TOs on ‘wilderness’ in the Blue Mountains, but now we were to drop this partnership so that the Institute should run things? I was perplexed partly because it had been said so casually in an email. How could anyone think that it would not cause offence? Rather than respond in kind, I took a mental step backwards, and sent an email entitled ‘Down from cloud 9!’ off to the Network, asking what they thought. I set forth some points I thought I *could* have replied with. I also discussed the question of whether or not everyone had ‘biases’, not just the Network. However I finished off my email by saying:

*I shouldn't shoot from the hip on such a matter? So I throw it open to you all as to how we should respond? As you can see I am annoyed that the Network is apparently to be sidelined by the Institute, when we initiated the process and asked them as an equal partner. ... On the other hand I am open to being persuaded that maybe we **should** be sidelined - but only if most of you think it will be more productive to loosening the wilderness knot? ... So ... thoughtful views please?*

There was a lot of feedback, but nobody thought we should abandon our partnership, especially in the light of the recent positive meeting. George thought we should immediately draft a letter of complaint to the Chairperson of the Institute. He also questioned whether ‘Jane’ really believed what was being attributed to her. Peter Prineas responded that nobody was ‘impartial’, including the Institute, which had its own set of values to promote. He was quite definite that the Network should *not* take a backseat. I knew that the future of our joint partnership might rest upon my response on behalf of the Network, so I put extensive thought into it. Already there was some discussion amongst Network members about ‘going it alone’. Having myself a history within the conservation movement of having had to deal with

‘empire builders’, I was wondering (and Noah also) if that is what we faced here? Was this an attempt to take the process over? Clearly I was fearing the worst.

I sent a reworked draft response off for comment from the Network (8/12/05). Bob thought it was a ‘bit aggressive’. I then rang up ‘Jane’ (9/12/05) to find out *her* views first hand. She thought it was truly wonderful that the second meeting had been so positive. I then raised the question of whether she thought the Institute should become the sole driver, rather than a partnership. She responded by saying she definitely wanted a partnership, but that the chairpersons must be seen to be impartial (as the partners had already agreed). So, apparently there had been a breakdown in communication regarding Jane’s comments. My supervisor then pointed out at a meeting (8/12/05) that my draft response had not focused on the *positives* of the talking-stick meeting we had just had. Surely this was the best argument for the success of the joint partnership? This provided the angle I had been looking for to write a far more positive response (12/12/05), in which of course we wanted the partnership to continue - as things were going so well. Renalda’s response (14/12/05) said that if the Network felt strongly against her proposal, then she was happy to proceed as we were, on an equal basis. She thought she had just been passing on Jane’s idea. So, rather than being on the brink of the partnership collapsing, it seemed things were back on track. Of course such an episode has an impact. One casualty is the degree of trust. I found myself (rightly or wrongly) on the alert for signs of ‘empire-building’. I spent time reworking the draft program, and the list of draft questions for the workshops. I also worked again on the invitation we would send out to people for the day.

Around this time, I accidentally met Seamus and Greg (TOs from the second meeting) in the main street of Katoomba. Seamus and I had a friendly talk about the possible importance of Spinifex (*Triodia*) sites on limestone country in the Capertee Valley, while Greg said he would talk to me about a possible trip to Baiame Cave at the meeting on Feb 4th. This chance meeting seemed to reflect the positive outlook left over from the second meeting. Another incident then occurred, for on 30/1/06 George sent me an email saying:

For your records, this exercise will be a disaster. I also know you are determined to go through with this.

Initially I thought he meant the meeting on Feb 5th, then realised he meant the ‘Day of dialogue’ itself. I asked him why it would be a disaster, and on 31/1/06 he responded:

I know you believe in dialogue but I do not. ... You may be right. I just believe it will not work because things operate on political lines, not through dialogue. And as you may suspect I support Max’s objections regarding positive action v dialogue and his concern about the negative focus of the whole dialogue exercise. ... However: ... I won’t stand in the way of your shot at successful dialogue, be assured of that. I will not be passively negative either, I will give it a shot, but your odds are 100 to 1 against and there are better ways forward in my book. The Network is willing to give dialogue a go; maybe it’s a softer way forward - that can broaden wilderness support? I would like to see more actual campaigning done than dialogue at this time in the political cycle. Outside NSW, wilderness is not progressing. Inside NSW there is a chance - and a bit of campaigning wouldn’t go astray.

I replied that we should discuss it after the meeting on Feb 5th. In the week prior to the meeting, I was aware that I was quite ‘wound up’, and was concerned about how I might react on the day, when we needed to work positively together. I asked Kersten to ‘keep an eye on me’. On 31/1/06, my concerns about empire-building were in fact laid to rest, when Renalda emailed me to say she assumed that I was happy to chair the meeting, since I ‘had my head around the issues’.

3.2 Action

On the day, we got there early, so that ‘Brigit’ (a visiting Alaskan conservationist) could catch up again with George (who had stayed with her at the Wilderness Congress). On the way, I stopped to show Brigit the cave at ‘Blackfellows Hand’ on the edge of Newnes Plateau in the ‘pagoda country’ (beehive-shaped rock formations). We parked at the bottom, and I took her to pass through the two ‘guardian brother’ trees at the base of the steep track leading up to the cliff-line and the cave. We were then astounded to see a 4WD bouncing and crashing down the steep rocky walking track, smashing bushes and saplings as it came. A man was walking down ahead of it, and I said angrily ‘this is a walking track only!’. He responded sheepishly that ‘It’s not my car’. As the 4WD ground slowly past, I shouted sarcastically to the driver ‘can’t you walk a hundred metres?’. The young driver just grinned at me and drove on. Given that Blackfellows Hand is probably the

major Aboriginal art site on the whole south-western side of Wollemi, and is certainly a 'sacred' place, I found this event most disturbing. When we went to the cave, all I could say to it was 'sorry', apologising for somebody I had never met, yet was of my 'race' (or at least species), and for something I had not done, but could not prevent.

Sadly, at the meeting, none of the five TOs from the second meeting turned up. On the other hand, two local Aboriginal people 'Lillie' and 'Kate' *did* turn up, and made a positive input. Lillie also observed that if you invite a hundred TOs, you might actually get five coming along, and that many were reluctant to come to 'yet another meeting'. 'Jim' (a former CSIRO scientist) also turned up from the World Heritage Association. The meeting agreed that the date for the workshop would be 7/5/06

We agreed to ask Auntie Joan and Auntie Mary to give the welcome to country. We discussed the need for an introductory 'why have dialogue?' talk to establish the vision for the day, and considered speakers who would best set the scene. Warren suggested we have both a man and a woman TO speak, and Lillie agreed to discuss who these might be with Auntie Joan, and get back to us. The need for a Chair for the sessions to keep them on time was agreed upon. Warren raised the question (which seems to crop up repeatedly at such meetings) of whether Aboriginal speakers have to be from the area or whether Aboriginal people who have a lot of wisdom from 'outside' can be asked? This is clearly an ongoing debate in the Blue Mountains. Lillie was quite passionate about this: 'we *do* really have people here who can do it!'. Warren agreed 'we don't want to make waves now'. Someone observed that the issues to be raised on the day are in fact far wider than just the mountains themselves. There was a suggestion of having a politician to speak, perhaps from the Greens (Bob Brown or Ian Cohen), but people were divided on this. 'What do we need a politician for?' queried Henry spiritedly 'they just push their own barrow!'. Others thought someone of the standing of Bob Brown would be inspirational. The idea lapsed. The need to discuss the legal framework of wilderness was suggested, but we thought one of our existing speakers could do this.

Discussion of the workshop part of the day followed. ‘You can’t expect people to sit through two hours of workshop!’ was Aldo’s comment, so we agreed to split it into two sessions, with lunch in-between. The question of training facilitators beforehand was left hanging. The Network had worked out seven questions for the workshops, but we wondered if all groups should work through all the questions. ‘These are too tightly focused or even loaded’ argued Jim. Warren argued ‘this workshop needs to bubble and fizz, but also have some structure’. We agreed the groups could choose how many questions they would actually discuss, and that they might also rather choose to focus on questions that arose out of the talks in the morning session. Everyone who came to the day would get the list of questions, but these would only be ‘prompts’ to aid the workshops.

I noted that we wanted to learn from the workshops what contributes to the confusion, and how we can reduce the confusion, so we can protect our natural areas. George queried ‘isn’t the purpose of the meeting to build consensus over management of wilderness areas?’. I thought the purpose of the workshops, in terms of our objectives, was to assess where this confusion had come from, and talk about reducing it. This was different from getting consensus on *management* of wilderness. It was agreed that the consensus on wilderness management would be a later phase. Lillie pointed out ‘the Aboriginal community will want to talk about practical management and practical things’. She said that Aboriginal people ‘are becoming a little impatient with the process’ and they would probably ask ‘what do you propose to do about that?’. She expressed some frustration when referring to the NPWS World Heritage forums, which addressed lots of things, but ended up being seen as ‘having no result’. Lillie thought that Aboriginal people would want to walk away with some feeling that ‘something had happened’. It was suggested by Lillie and Kate that we actually needed an Aboriginal person in *each* workshop group. We agreed we would have to allocate people into workshops to be sure to do this.

‘What would we like to see actually coming out of the day?’ Jim asked. This turned into a central debate of the meeting. Ron said that he wanted to form and strengthen relationships, so that later he could find out more about wilderness. George argued ‘consensus’ is what we are trying to gain on the fundamental issues on which the

management of the park is organised. He argued that these parks are based on wilderness, so developing consensus about what 'wilderness' *is* flows into management. He thought many people did not have a good idea of what 'wilderness' was. I pointed out that the Blue Mountains sits on the edge of the nation's largest city, which is putting pressure on those natural areas. 'What I would like to come out of the day, by extending mutual respect and listening to people' I argued 'is an understanding of the common ground about natural areas that we love'. One understanding would be that when conservationists say 'wilderness' they mean *large natural areas*, not 'terra nullius', 'human exclusion zones', or other meanings. If we get to a common ground that we *love the land*, then we can actually work together to protect it into the future? I concluded: 'the outcomes are thus understanding confusion, improving dialogue, plus the idea of a community framework to work together to make sure these natural areas continue to exist'.

Warren suggested that our objectives were really the 'vision', which we move towards through consensus (though this may need several other cycles). We agreed to have a panel at the end of the day to review outcomes. Kersten proposed: 'let's tape the panel discussion and give it to a radio station for broadcast?'. We thought this was a great idea. The question of having 'rules' of behaviour in the invitation was briefly discussed, so that if people were not willing to listen and show respect, then they shouldn't come. Aldo believed the invite should go to Land Councils, local TOs, plus other Aboriginal people. We agreed we should provide some money for TOs for petrol and transport to get there. People would be invited on a joint letterhead of the Institute and the Network. We would also invite Advisory Committee members, rangers, and catchment management bodies such as the Sydney Catchment Authority.

On 13/2/06, I received another email from the Institute which presented another challenge to joint partnership. Their representative had discussed things with the Director of the Institute (who had not been at previous meetings), and they came up with a number of suggested changes. Some of these seemed to cut across decisions already made at our joint meetings. I went back to the tape to check my recollections. One was whether to ask a politician or not (the consensus had been 'no'). Another

was about having ‘ground rules’ of *mutual respect* and *listening* included in the invitation (we had agreed they were needed, but the Institute wanted something more simple). A third was about facilitators for workshops (the meeting had agreed they should come equally from the partners, but the Institute now suggested they come solely from them). They had also suggested extra speakers (when these had already been agreed on). Such changes were more than cosmetic, and there was also the aspect of changing what I had thought were agreed decisions made at joint meetings. I sent the email around to the Network for comment. Henry responded angrily by email (13/2/06), being particularly incensed by the inclusion of a politician after we had ruled out one, even from the Greens. He concluded:

It would be quite appropriate to be up front about these fears with the WHI. They should stop playing games. If this chance to achieve informal dialogue is stuffed up, there may not be another. I think the WHI is demonstrating a lack of understanding of both what this is about and what is at stake. We should be contemplating a pullout.

Noah’s response (13/2/06) was that: ‘I want to walk away from it - into a real wilderness. I gave up playing games to walk in the bush and now this! It ain’t acceptable’. Rachel (13/2/06) had previously apologised that she could not come on the day, but now said that in the light of recent emails about this: ‘I’m not so sure I’m sorry to miss it!’. After a response by me and others, Henry (13/2/06) added:

I’ve been counselled that perhaps the issues that are arising are due to simple misunderstanding and the WHI is just trying to be helpful. I guess we all know that the most common culprit is mis-communication rather than conspiracy! ... The WHI has certainly put a lot of work in, for which we should be thankful, but I’m very worried the whole thing is drifting away from what we were trying to achieve ... Maybe its all getting a bit too big, formal and unsteerable and we should review our original objectives (and certainly clarify them with WHI!).

‘Grant’ (a writer who had joined the Network after Cycle 2, and had not been able to attend the joint meetings) responded (15/2/06):

Sorry to be a heretic in all this. I know I haven't contributed much to past debates ... Can I simply say - what's most important? surely the outcome? By being either overly suspicious ... the Network risks having the Institute abandon this process, leaving the Network to run its own event and agenda ... but I would suggest not without real losses for a wider engagement and tangible rapprochement.

Henry replied (16/2/06):

I absolutely agree the outcome is what matters. But my view is the initial outcome we are looking for is pretty low-key and softly-softly, where the stakes remain quite small

... I'm hoping for a frank exchange of views and exploration of ideas, so we can all better understand where everyone is coming from

On 13/2/06 I had sent a list of points off to Renalda, indicating my concerns about what I saw as joint meeting 'decisions' being altered. I also flagged what was urgent (inviting the politician and having 'ground rules' in the invitation) and suggesting one last meeting before the day of dialogue, so we could jointly finalise the rest. The Institute replied (15/2/06) that they honestly had not realised that these were 'final immutable decisions' being made, and had come up with some suggestions on how they thought the program could be improved. They also indicated that if we didn't want to address management matters in the workshop, it would be hard for the Institute to justify its involvement. I responded (16/2/06):

Yes - teething troubles! This is to be expected I suppose in terms of a joint partnership and different understandings of what was 'decided'? ... I don't see things as being set in stone, but I did sort of think once a joint meeting had agreed on something, we would move on. ... If the Institute wants to revisit things then lets do that at our final organising meeting? ... My concern is not that I don't want to address the management issues, but that they not take over.

On 1/3/06 I spoke to Renalda on the phone, as I was conscious that the use of email might be adding to miscommunication (something Henry also later commented on). I thought we then worked things out happily through this talk. We set a date for a final organising meeting on 9/4/06. I then sent out an email to the Network saying everything had been worked out. That night I got a call from Noah. I started to tell him happily that I had spoken to Renalda and everything was fine. There was a pregnant pause and he said: 'Oh ... you haven't seen her email? I think you had better get on the Net and ring me back!'. I then found (1/3/06) an email:

Given the Institute's position, I feel we cannot justify formal representation with the May 7 workshop, and that the invitation should be from the Network only. Also, as I said weeks ago, I am not comfortable with the wording and the pre-amble. e.g. The "we" begs the question who is "we"? Feedback is that the invitation detracts Aboriginal people and those involved in management, and both of these "groups" wish to move from dialogue to on-the-ground practical issues. Perhaps the best thing is that the network run this day, and then a subsequent event can be organised with focus on implications for co-management.

This was a bolt from the blue for me. I found it difficult to reconcile our phone conversation that morning with the email that afternoon. I also clearly had not understood the key significance of the invitation wording to the Institute (though I

had sent off a draft to them seeking changes). I thus immediately emailed the Network and organised an emergency meeting for the following Tuesday to discuss this. This time it was I who suggested we should write to the Institute Board, given that it was my understanding that *they* had approved the joint partnership, yet the decision to pull out was seemingly being made by one staff member. The Network was divided on the wisdom of this. While George had previously urged us to write to the Board, this time he cautioned us not to. Feedback from Noah was that it was being said privately that I was somewhat difficult to work with. I too was thinking the same thing about the Institute. Clearly there had been a major breakdown in communication.

At this point I had *personally* reached the end of my tether. I told Noah and Henry so, and after some thought they got back to me saying they would try to organise a meeting to visit the Institute's Director on Tuesday morning (7/3/06), before the Network meeting that evening. I was feeling fed up about the whole thing, and realised I was losing my sense of perspective. I was also becoming somewhat annoyed with comments from some Network members. As I said to Kersten: 'I am afraid I will say something I will later regret!'.

I then decided to head off to the Colo for three days, and leave the Network to work out the issue. So I took my draft literature review and walked into the Colo in the heat of early March. There I sat in the shade on a sandbank and read what had been said about 'wilderness'. Then I would look up at those huge purple and orange cliffs, and take in the reality (a fascinating exercise!). I also sat in the river, being massaged by the current below a rapid, and suddenly realised that there were far too few people seeking to 'speak' for wilderness to bear any grudges. It seemed to me I could hear a voice saying 'why would you think this about your friend?'. Immediately my sense of perspective returned, and my frustration evaporated. I thus returned in an immeasurably more positive state of mind, to find that the meeting of Henry and Noah with the Institute had gone well, they had agreed on the wording of the invitation, and things were back on track. A positive meeting of the Network had also been held, which had thanked me (in absentia) for all my hard work. Indeed this

was a notable test for the Network, which showed it did have the depth of commitment to function perfectly well without my involvement.

3.3 Reflection

It had been interesting in the third meeting that after I made my clarifying statement to Jim about my view of the outcomes of 'Finding Common Ground', there had been a quiet pause and many people nodded. The feedback from the Network afterwards to me was that my clarifying statement had been an excellent summary of the problem, and that really that should be my talk on the day itself (hence my record of it in some detail). On tape I reflected on the meeting afterwards, how things in fact went fine with the Institute, and that my fears of a 'takeover' were misplaced. I recognised that I had been too 'wound up' about the whole thing the week before. The 'this is going to be a disaster' email from George had also worried me. On the day of the meeting, however, my concerns about empire-building proved unfounded. I reflected at one stage that perhaps my fears had even been a bit paranoid? Certainly, I had let past history with other people in other organisations lead me to expect the worst, which was unfair. Perhaps a clash of personality or style may also have contributed? My brother also reminded me of what I tend to forget - that some people can find my physical size and passion for the wild somewhat 'overwhelming'.

I was again tired after the meeting, which I suppose shows just how much importance I placed on the process, and reflects my deep concern about the knot. On the tape afterwards, I was relieved but reflected on the old adage that there are still 'many the slip twixt the cup and the lip'. I reflected also that there was an awful lot of organisation still to be done. I did raise George's 'disaster' email at the dinner after the meeting, to gain feedback from other members. Aldo's response was 'I think we have moved on since then!'. Ron agreed. George laughed and said it was just the concern he had raised from the beginning. It seemed the rest of the Network who meet regularly were pretty rock solid in their commitment to dialogue. George's concern of course came from being a practical full-time conservationist, and from a fear that the day might produce negative statements about wilderness, and thus negatively influence some who came along. The rest of us didn't see it that way. I raised this issue with Ron on the phone, observing that while it may not necessarily

help, I could not see how it could *hurt* to have this dialogue. ‘It has already helped dramatically to improve understanding of ‘wilderness’ with TOs in the Blue Mountains’ replied Ron emphatically ‘just by having the meetings so far’.

The episode of miscommunication with the Institute serves to demonstrate how (even after three positive meetings) things can easily almost go off the rails. As Henry observed, this might be because of miscommunication, or because people think they are actually being helpful. Upon reflection, the teething troubles we experienced were due to a variety of things. Firstly, any partnership needs to have it clearly worked out *who* is going to do *what*. Secondly, in a consensus decision-making process, minutes need to be recorded which clearly show what was actually agreed by the meeting, not one individual’s view. Such minutes need to be confirmed at the following meeting. Thirdly, it needs to be made clear right at the beginning of the partnership whether representatives at the meeting have the power to make binding decisions on behalf of their organisations, or whether decisions made at joint meetings need to be referred back to their organisations for later approval. Misunderstanding this last point can lead to major problems, where the other partner thinks ‘hey but we agreed on this already?’. Fourthly, it needs to be made clear *where* both organisations need to agree, and where it’s fine to disagree (as they inevitably will!). Certainly, organising anything by joint partnership is a time-consuming and wearying process. It is clear that miscommunication can lead to differing parties taking offence, which may even lead to walk-outs. I think both partners learned that in the future they would organise things differently.

4. Mini-cycle 5d – The day of dialogue ‘Finding Common Ground’ (7/5/06)

4.1 Planning

Things were back on track. I emailed out the invitation worked out with the Institute to a database of interested people I had developed. I mailed out printed versions to Aboriginal Land Councils and other interested groups. Our final organising meeting was planned for 9/4/06. This came at a time when I was deeply involved in writing up the research and discussion chapters. The weight of responsibility and worry about the day of dialogue on top of this sometimes felt ‘too much’. I started to get

serious headaches, along with a general sense of fatigue. I then found I had high blood pressure. In an email to 'Rachel' I commented 'I can't wait till this thing is over!'. However, I could not miss the final meeting, so I drove down to Katoomba, and went through it feeling like I was swathed in cotton wool. The Director of the Institute came to this meeting, and we all worked positively to go through outstanding issues. We gratefully accepted an offer by the NPWS to provide trained facilitators who were not involved with any group. The main issue of concern was in regard to TO speakers, as Lillie had not been able to follow up with the Aunties as to whom should speak representing the TO community. Given that we were speaking in a borderline area between Gundungurra and Dharug tribes, we particularly wanted a speaker from each, and we also wished one to be a woman speaker. I drove carefully back to Kandos, conscious that I was 'pushing the envelope' in terms of my health at that time, as I really should not have been driving.

Talking to Noah a few weeks before the day, he said he was a 'bit depressed', and that he wasn't sure whether many TOs would *actually* turn up on the day itself. I acknowledged the possibility, but replied: 'we can only try!'. I observed that everyone involved in such dialogue is sometimes subject to depression. The remaining weeks required a lot of phone calls, even some involvement to seek to smooth over inter-tribal politics (one TO said his people might walk out if a certain other TO was present). One person would be suggested to speak, then drop out, then I would try another. It thus took a lot of energy to bring the day together. Many people were still unsure if they would come, including key TOs. The importance of *enthusiasm and respect* in such personal contacts was critical. It was only in the last week that it came together fortuitously that we were sure we *would* have three TOs speaking. Many people had indicated they were coming but had not actually registered, and NPWS seemed concerned at our low formal registration numbers. There was also a lot of work organizing billets for our key speakers from Canberra, along with the sheer logistics of a meeting – projectors, tables, white boards, teas and lunch.

I thought back to the Wilderness Resurgence seminar, where Kersten and I had gone walking the weekend before to Canoe Ck. I thus resolved to return to Gooches Crater

with a friend, David. I was still feeling ‘as weak as a kitten’. However, I wanted to get myself in the most positive frame of mind that I could, to cast aside any lingering anger or intolerance, and seek its blessing, so that TOs and conservationists might come together in dialogue. The walk is along a ridge, and gives a view across the headwaters of the Wollangambe River to Clarence Colliery and a sandstone quarry (soon to be dwarfed by an approved new mega-quarry). We camped in that wonderful huge cave, but we could hear the rumble of the distant conveyor belt, and trucks backing and filling till midnight. In the middle of the night I woke and thought through issues involved in the knot, where we had come from, and what might come from the following Sunday. In my waking vision I kept seeing flashes in my mind’s eye of a large lyrebird head looking at me enquiringly. Elder Bill of the Wiradjuri had told me that the Lyrebird was the ‘great communicator’, as it can speak all other languages. I thus asked its help, so that all of us might communicate on the following Sunday.

However, it seemed to me that the Lyrebird was also wondering if *I* had done enough to speak for this place. I found myself trying to explain to the cave why I could not stop the approved huge sixty-metre deep quarry nearby. I felt sorrow in the admission of failure, but explained that so far in my life I had managed to keep the heart of the Colo protected. I felt strongly that I was sleeping in a sacred enclave, but one very much under threat. I felt ‘called on’ to speak for this place, and also felt somewhat lacking, that despite submissions and letters, we (and I) had failed to stop this planned future quarrying assault on the land. Having those feelings, when I came back from there, I felt moved to suggest to George that we put up a motion to the day of dialogue to stop this quarry. He then sent me several other draft motions, which I sent off to the Network. It was a mistake on my part, as campaigning motions were *not* what the day was about. My concern for Gooches Crater had caused me to overlook this, and urged me to try and ‘do something’. Interestingly, the commitment to dialogue within the Network emerged strongly, as several members (such as Henry and Peter Prineas) pointed out my error. I acknowledged the truth of this, and withdrew the proposal.

On the day before the day of dialogue I walked along my cliff on Nullo Mountain, asking for the blessing of the wind-tossed drooping she-oaks, and of the view stretching fifty kilometres to the west. I then stopped again at the lookout that looks east across northern Wollemi. I asked those mountain peaks again for their blessing, and I asked it also in my mind of the Colo at Angorawa junction, and of Gooches Crater. In town I printed out the last pages to be handed out on the day. I was at last ready. As Ron had said to me in an email – it was now ‘in the lap of the Gods’.

4.2 Action

Saturday night I had arranged to have dinner with Val Plumwood and Deborah Bird Rose from ANU, along with Ron. This went well, with both of them being interested and positive about the day. Next morning I drove up early to Blackheath and picked up the four door-panels I had left at Noah’s. These were covered in a huge photo of the Colo river, and had been produced by the Colo Committee in the late 1970s. Noah and I then headed off to the hall to set up. These panels were really useful. The Colo became a *presence* up on the stage, and people kept talking *to* this giant photo that symbolised the wilderness. I was pleased to see Greg arrive (as I had been unable to contact him), who then came over and said: ‘thanks for setting this up, we all sometimes need a bit of a push!’. Later, when speaking, he turned to the huge photo and spoke of how he had been there recently, and how a great wedge-tail eagle with a cross on his chest had examined and assessed each of them in turn in his party.

It turned out that we had at least 55 people, of which 13 were TOs. This was the largest number of TOs ever to turn up to a meeting with conservationists in the Blue Mountains. Auntie Mary of the Gundungurra and Carol Cooper of the Dharug gave the ‘welcome to country’. After that, consultant Lorraine Cairnes spoke in concert with Greg (Wiradjuri TO) and James (Dharug TO) about ‘why it’s important to have dialogue’. Greg noted ‘we have a fire within, we *are* the fire, so being here is important’. Then came our seven speakers. ‘Jocelyn’ (Dharug TO) noted the importance of connectivity to the bush and the need to strengthen this. She spoke of how Bill Neidjie spoke of ‘no touch zones’ in his book ‘Kakadu Man’ (Neidjie et al. 1986). She said we needed to *be* in the land and argued ‘if you damage a tree you damage yourself’. Val Plumwood’s talk was quite even-handed, talking about both

the negative and positive sides of 'wilderness'. She noted the word was over-polarised in Australia, while in the US there were actually Native American wilderness areas. She argued that we were caught up in the ambiguity and historical baggage (human absence or *terra nullius*) around the word. She wondered if it was not better to speak just of 'nature', which is a more graduated concept. However, she also thought we should see wilderness as a positive presence of the nonhuman. She noted that ecocide and genocide go together, that colonialism is a war against indigenous people *and* nature. She concluded that we can't abandon large areas of nature.

Peter Prineas spoke of how wilderness is a special level of protection beyond national parks, one that stops resorts such as Thredbo in the Snowy Mountains. He also spoke of how wilderness should not be blamed for dispossession: 'wilderness is no more to blame for dispossession than are cricket grounds - we needed to look at all land tenures'. He pointed out that (contrary to Plumwood's belief) use of the term 'wilderness' in NSW went back long before the 2nd World War, to Myles Dunphy and Marie Byles. He urged TOs not to 'upset the apple cart' which had protected these areas for many years. A number of TOs thanked him for his presentation afterwards.

The printed paper that Seamus (Wiradjuri TO) read out was quite negative towards wilderness, though in discussion on the day itself he was far more conciliatory and open to dialogue. The paper took a strong postmodernist line (quoting Callicott), that wilderness was a cultural construct based on the idea that wilderness was separate from human existence. The interesting thing on the day was that when I looked around at other TOs I knew, they looked rather embarrassed at this negativity. Many of them knew the effort the Network had gone to, knew that the olive branch had been proffered, knew that the Network was both offering respect and listening. By going on the attack when everyone else was listening and showing respect, the paper may have been seen as not being constructive. Quite remarkably, rather than sparking anger, this negativity just seemed to vanish amidst the day's positive feeling.

During questions after the first group of speakers, Auntie Mary said that she used to walk down from the Gully in Katoomba to the wilderness, and that ‘the wilderness was where she got her food’. She clearly had no problem with the term. George (in a question) pointed out that they had nearly lost the Wilderness Act several times in the NSW Parliament, due to attempts to destroy it coming from the development lobby. The Act had only survived by a few votes. He asked TOs and the morning’s speakers passionately ‘do you wish wilderness to go away?’. There was a deep silence to that question. Nobody shouted out ‘yes!’, nobody laughed. The question was clearly being deeply pondered. The morning Chairperson, Dr. John Merson from the Institute, said he would take that as a statement, and leave it for people to think about.

Deborah Bird Rose’s talk was quite muted compared to her talk at the Two Fires Festival. She still didn’t like the word ‘wilderness’, as her Aboriginal teachers had not liked it. She asked us to find out what we ‘really valued’ about these areas. She spoke of ‘flourishing country’, where Aboriginal people care for it, but agreed we needed to hang on to all ‘undamaged’ country. David (Gundungurra TO) spoke of how plants give a cultural identity, that wilderness teaches us how to care for land. He argued ‘don’t talk of management, talk of the *land*’. He spoke of the value of the whole land, of how everything is connected. He had some concern at making boundaries and naming things, and was concerned for all land across the country. As Bob commented later, David also actually ‘encapsulated the idea of island biogeography in a few words’. When I spoke on the ‘wilderness knot’, I ended on a statement made to Prof. Stanner by Aboriginal people about what had happened to Australia in the last 215 years:

*your people do not know what they are destroying. They **cannot** know. If they did they could not want to destroy it* (in Brown 1992)

I then concluded my talk:

Is not recognition of the intrinsic value of ‘wilderness’ (and the desire to protect it) a sign that some whitefellas have now learned to feel a caring for, an obligation to, the land? For many, wilderness is thus an iconic word that encapsulates such a caring worldview. If ‘wilderness as lanai’ is to exist into the future, then surely it will need all those that love it to work together?

‘*Lanai*’ is my shorthand for a ‘large intact natural area’. I looked across to Auntie Mary, whose eyes were shining, and who was nodding in agreement. The speakers for the last section of talks then came back to receive questions, and David’s young daughter Kelsie (perhaps ten years old) came with him. Lorraine asked her: ‘if there is one thing *you* would like to see happen for the future, what would it be?’. Kelsie replied: ‘that all the things you are taking about have actually happened!’. Clearly she meant the *positive* things, the working together to protect wilderness and country. Such wisdom was greeted with a general appreciation that actions do indeed speak louder than words.

Seamus asked me a question about ‘how we move away from terra nullius’, to which I replied ‘well I think it’s up to the collective wisdom of all those here’. ‘Florence’ from TWS (who had just arrived) then asked me a somewhat surprising question, which seemed to suggest that I did not see TOs as being involved in ongoing management of the World Heritage Area. I was rather shocked and responded ‘that is a given!’. Ron told me later he had pointed out to her that the dialogue occurring that day *was* largely due to my efforts. Unfortunately, she left right after morning tea, so I could not find out what motivated her question. It was left to me to explain to those present the ideas behind the WildCountry Project of TWS (which many were not fully aware of). There was a certain irony (given my long past involvement with TWS) that this negativity on the day came not from a TO, but from a representative of TWS. Yet this negativity too disappeared in the general positive attitude.

The workshops were interesting, as the participants immediately immersed themselves in the debate. We asked them three main questions; what the common ground was, what the differences were, and what was the way forward? The ‘prompt’ questions we provided were not needed, as people had heaps to say. In my later summary of their workshop dot points I identified the *common ground* as agreement that TOs and conservationists share a passion and caring for the land (and wilderness), a concern for its future, and must share the land with other species. Group 3 focused on the need for both a ‘whole of landscape strategy’ *as well* as a wilderness strategy. The threats to such areas were acknowledged, and we agreed we shared an opposition to unconstrained economic development. Communicating and

avoiding divisiveness was seen as essential. In regard to *differences*, there was less agreement. It was agreed that people heard different things when they heard ‘wilderness’ (that it had multiple meanings). The difference of political objectives was noted – wilderness versus ownership (land rights). What would traditional ownership mean for wilderness in the World Heritage Area? There was the question of wilderness being seen as ‘removing’ people from the land. There was the question of lack of trust, and fear that the security of such areas will be lost if we lose the wilderness name (and management under the Act). There is the question of the role of ‘power’ and its use. Group 3 pointed out that Aboriginal knowledge is not yet integrated into management, and that landscape and wilderness strategies need to be integrated. The problem of what ‘modified’ means in the Wilderness Act was raised. Access was raised by Group 4 as a difference, as were differences over specific issues such as fire.

Regarding the *way forward*, it was agreed we needed to think of future generations, but also acknowledge the differences we have (and respect them). We needed to promote a message of responsibility and respect for all land, including wilderness. Part of this is sharing knowledge, and the education of new generations. There was strong support for ongoing dialogue (at all levels), and support for a united front between TOs and conservationists, where we settle differences internally and seek to ‘walk in each others shoes’. This was in response to the huge power of the development lobby that both groups faced. Such dialogue would be better done informally, such as in a campfire situation. It was agreed we should value our common ground, as well as cherish our differences (hence we don’t have to all agree if we have respect). It was agreed that we needed to have specific dialogue on certain issues such as fire. The need to integrate Aboriginal knowledge with Western management was seen as an important way forward. The need to have both a wilderness strategy and a landscape conservation strategy integrated together was also emphasised. One group made the specific suggestion of broadening the meaning of wilderness under the Wilderness Act to incorporate Aboriginal values. A desire to find all the elements of our common ground was expressed, as well as for us to learn a common language in regard to management. It was suggested we find common actions to pursue together to protect the World Heritage Area.

I was surprised at the dynamics of some groups, where certain otherwise loquacious people such as Noah sat back and mainly listened. Inevitably there were also dominant personalities. When speakers were asked to respond to what came out of workshops, I noted that dialogue was hard, but that I was ‘tired but inspired’, that this was a really good step forward. This session went overtime and the meeting was so interested in leaving time for the final session that they waived afternoon tea. The final session was chaired by Prof. Stuart Hill from UWS, and ended positively. The Institute flagged future ideas for future events, such as an art show on the wild (‘what wilderness and nature mean to you’), and other forums on specific issues such as co-management, fire, access. A social meeting on a regular day each month was proposed, though Jocelyn thought this was a bit much. The need to bring biological and cultural values hand in hand was raised, as was the need to integrate Aboriginal knowledge with science. Everyone left feeling positive and wanting more dialogue.

At the end of the day, Greg and Jocelyn gave me hugs, and David and James said they were most appreciative. Jocelyn noted: ‘yeah, the TOs and the conservationists need to work together. There is no one else. The sooner the mobs realise this the better it will be!’. This implied a recognition that there was also a conservation debate going on within the TO community, where not everybody necessarily leaned towards conservation. Renalda and I gave each other a big hug also at the door after everything was packed up. I observed: ‘its been a long road, but we got there!’. As we came out of the hall it was dusk, and a cold rain was falling. In a season of drought, this reflected the day, it was a blessing. Peter, Kersten, Deborah Rose, Val Plumwood and myself then went out to dinner. A measure of the good spirits and the good food was that Val jokingly proposed to the Indian chef! Debbie and Val too gave me a big hug at the end of the night, and wished me well - so bridges had been built there also. It was a wonderful action with which to finish this major part of my thesis. We had indeed *found* common ground.



Figure 1. At 'Finding Common Ground', TO David (Gundungurra) speaks in front of the Colo Committee display. This shows the Colo River at Canoe Ck Junction.

Figure 2. At the end of 'Finding Common Ground' a group celebrates. This includes a Traditional Owner, conservationists, Dept. of Environment staff, World Heritage Institute Staff, and anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose (I am second from the left).



4.3 Reflection

We had come a long way from the first attempt at dialogue at Gooches Crater. Noah and I agreed that this was undoubtedly the most significant meeting ever held in the Blue Mountains between TOs and conservationists. This was really ‘action’! It was a major step forward. David (Gundungurra TO) emailed (11/5/06) me saying:

I was amazed and totally freaked out by the quality of people you had at the day which is a credit to you, as I normally don't see people of that calibre in the same room at the one time. From the responses I got from the indigenous people it was another great aspect as they seem inspired in their own way by the day, which again I haven't seen in a long time. It was special to see Seamus, Greg, Jocelyn and myself working as a group even though we have differences - so another notch on the belt for that one. Maybe it could happen again.

Greg (Wiradjuri TO) also commented (11/5/06):

great event on Sunday with all the people contributing well. Have told many people about the event on Sunday and they have asked if there is a recording of the event and if there can be copies made.

We did tape the speakers and final session and will make CDs for later distribution.

Facilitator Lorraine Cairnes (8/5/06) wrote:

It was a simply brilliant day yesterday - so many highlights keep running through my mind. Congratulations to you, and all in the Network and Institute who made it happen. An indicator of success must have been the large number who stayed right to the end. I am sure that there will be a great roll-up if you ever run a "Part II". Having such a large number of Traditional Owners was also an element of it's success, and I am sure that they would have found the day worthwhile. We are now a lot closer to untying that Knot!

Bob commented (10/5/06):

I really enjoyed the day and feel we made a lot of progress in communication. Congratulations to Haydn and all the others who worked so hard with the organising of the day. Also to all those who worked on the day. I left feeling really positive.

‘Rachel’ commented (10/5/06) on my email about the day’s positive results:

Congratulations to all involved. The easiest path is avoidance, engagement is the hardest and longest but hopefully the most rewarding.

Renalda from the Institute wrote (8/5/06):

just want to congratulate you on such a successful day! The hard yards which you put in to pull it all together certainly paid off. ... It came together, everybody rallied and

shared the load, and I hope it wasn't too taxing on you and your blood pressure! I really enjoyed the whole day, I think the range of speakers was brilliant, I particularly liked Deborah Bird Rose, but they were all valuable in their own right. Feedback from everyone has been so positive. I felt so good and relieved last night! I bet you did too!

On a personal level, every time I saw a distant peak in Wollemi, I kept saying 'thank you!'. I sent thanks also to Angorawa, and to Gooches and Nullo. It could so easily have gone awry – but it didn't! But there is a reaction from putting in such energy. I was drained. Again partly it was from seeking to bring a *blessing* to the meeting, to be a conduit. I think that huge photo of Canoe Ck also proved to be a conduit for the wilderness *itself* to be there. However, I would not be in a hurry to organise such a meeting again. I would think twice about a joint partnership, as it is very time-consuming. It made me realise that this may be why dialogue sometimes stops, organizers burn out and refuse to take it on again. This has indeed been my experience over several decades in the conservation movement also, that such events drain one's energy and enthusiasm. If you have these two things then you can get things done. And while you may get a great result, you don't get that energy back, you have to recover it slowly yourself.

So, reflecting on the whole of Cycle 5, it most certainly *did* help promote dialogue. To have Greg say 'I already feel like we are on the same side' was a positive gain early on. To organise the social BBQ idea was a positive step forward. Indeed each meeting had been positive (even if things become more problematic in between in terms of communication glitches!). In fact probably nothing could be more positive than the second meeting, where we had the message stick. That is probably one of those 'once in a lifetime' events. When I look back to when the Network was formed, I can see how far in truth we have come regarding dialogue; from nobody turning up to Gooches Crater, to 13 TOs turning up for a meaningful day of dialogue, and being keen to have other campfire meetings in the future. They now realise that there *are* others who share a deep love of these places as well, and feel an obligation to protect them, and who want to work together to this end.

This cycle has raised a number of problems in terms of the 'nitty gritty' of getting action. At a couple of stages it seemed that the partnership between the Network and the Institute might even collapse. Yet it didn't. Running a joint partnership thus

shows up problems of miscommunication, of trying to organise something on a joint basis, of ‘who runs what’, and whether somebody might take it the wrong way. Miscommunication can lead to offence, so dialogue may decline until communication is re-established. Such ‘teething troubles’ are not edifying, and may not make ‘good reading’, but they are *real*, and they are part of getting ‘action’. Dialogue is not an easy process. It brings people out of their comfort zones. It is not easy for everyone to give up their prepared positions or preconceived ideas regarding other people’s ideas or motives. It is not easy to provide true ‘profound attentiveness’, to really listen to what someone else is saying. Apart from anything else, it is quite *tiring*. It is not always easy to advance mutual respect either. It is far easier to take refuge in the old adage that ‘they are all mad except thee and me, and even thou is a little strange’, or to simply label the other as ‘the enemy’ and thus remain polarised. I have had to accept that I too have an aspect of intolerance, that perhaps everyone does, and it can take quite a lot of work to shake ourselves free from this.

It was significant in this process that at a critical stage I had to bow out of a meeting, due to having ‘had enough’. This provided the opportunity for other Network members to take a leading role, which they executed with notable success. I realised later that part of my exhaustion was from trying to do too much, and part was unavoidable work required for the dialogue to succeed. Recognising the difference, and being able to delegate responsibility are important learning outcomes if one is to undertake sustainable activism. Of course, other Network members were busy, and Henry later acknowledged that they had tended to leave everything to me. I thought I understood the need to delegate after thirty years of activism. Yet a symptom of such overwork is that one does not recognise the state one is in. It could be likened to David Suzuki’s ‘boiled frog’ parable, where the water temperature is slowly raised, but the frog keeps telling people it is fine, until the water boils and the frog dies (Suzuki 1989). I was not aware it was becoming ‘too much’ until it actually *became* so, and I had to have a break.

One thing this process has taught me is that dialogue is *not* for everybody. Not everyone will listen or show respect. And for those people, you probably can’t have

dialogue. Some people don't want dialogue, for their own reasons. Not everyone asked actually did turn up to 'Finding Common Ground', and that is just the way it is. But those who turned up, did listen and respect each other, and advanced the debate substantially. They may go on in future to reduce the confusion, find common ground, improve future dialogue, and work together to protect the large natural areas (a.k.a. 'wilderness') of the Greater Blue Mountains. In those terms, this process and Cycle *has* been a real success. Dialogue is occurring, common ground is being found, relationships are being forged, trust is being increased, and the chance of coordinated action is more likely. It is, I believe, an ongoing process for all those involved. This is not the end. The Network will meet in a few weeks and talk about where to go from here. 'Finding Common Ground' however was a most wonderfully positive way to finish a thesis. I have a sense of fulfilment, of having done something worthwhile in my research. Yet these cycles do not end with this thesis, they go on. They are not an ending, merely a good beginning.

CHAPTER 7

HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY – NETWORK WILDERNESS JOURNALS

Five members of the Network (including myself) wrote wilderness journals as part of the hermeneutic phenomenology. The other writers are represented by the same pseudonyms used in the PAR. The phenomenon investigated here was *both* the wilderness experience and the experience of dealing with the wilderness knot. All journals have been substantially edited for relevance. The longest series of excerpts from these journals is my own, which is hardly surprising, given that I was dealing every day with aspects of the wilderness knot, and the literature around it.

1. Wilderness Journal – ‘Ron’, vet and bushwalker

Ron is in his forties, with an athletic build. He is a keen bushwalker with a passion for the wild, and a passion for his family, and for dialogue and justice at all levels.

June 2004, Wollemi Range, Wollemi NP

For Ron, ‘being there’ in the wilderness at sunset is an event of ‘cosmic proportions’. It arouses his senses and excites his imagination. He is enveloped by a powerful lived experience he is keen to share with his baby daughter.

Lying on the rock platform above a sandstone cliff. Awed by the grandeur and immensity of the Colo gorge. A cool breeze crops up, cooling my face, followed a moment later by the rustling of leaves. The last glow of sunlight is receding towards the horizon. Venus has the immense stage of the sky to herself; there is not even the hint of a glimmer from any stars. How strange? What has happened to the stars tonight? This is really exciting! I know that a display of cosmic proportions is going to shortly fill the sky ... The first star has just become visible. ... I am going to show our little Elata (my daughter) the wonder of stars bursting forth.

27/12/04 Coorongooba Ck, Wollemi NP

Ron's experience as a young bushwalker emerges, the sheer energy and physicality of charging through the bush. Ron ties this in with thoughts on managerialism as opposed to spirituality.

Coorongooba Ck, in the mighty Wollemi. In the 'gung ho' phase of my bushwalking I well remember charging along through the deep sand that characterizes this water course. Back then a wilderness experience was much more of a physical experience. There is an intangible pleasure in pushing yourself hard while in your prime, above and beyond that which you feel when older. The energy bursts forth from you. There is redundancy – more available than what is required. Perhaps there is more redundancy in nature than we recognise. Why would nature be bound by the ultra 'efficient' linear managerialism that is currently in vogue? A petal that is a more vivid yellow than required to attract a pollinator, an aerial diversion that in no way contributes to survival of a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. Then again, such antics may promote the spiritual well-being of the bird?

For Ron, it is a 'privilege' to be in wilderness. Also, central to his wilderness experience is his state of mind and sense of wonder. Part of this is being 'tuned in', part recognising there is a 'sporting' component, as well as a more meditative 'wonder' side that emerges at day's end.

It's a tremendous privilege to be on an extended trip in wilderness, like the one I am currently enjoying. Although the temptation is to concentrate on route finding to canyons and charging rapidly through the bush. Appreciation of wilderness is compromised by such diversions. It is more about state of mind than geographical location: one person can be more tuned in to wilderness in a readily accessible location than another person in the heart of Wollemi. ...

Different states of mind and experiences can have surprising spin-offs. The state of mind that leads to canyoning in remote country impels you into nooks and crannies in remote wilderness country that you would otherwise bypass. At the end of a day's canyoning, perched on a sandstone lookout, the sporting drive subsides. Then you can better appreciate the wilderness that has been your playground. The landscape impacts on your mind – my mind – quite differently. The 'sense of wonder' becomes paramount.

The depth of Ron's experience is mediated by the many layers to wilderness - sound, rhythms, discontinuities. Anger also emerges at the damage our society has done to the Australian bush.

Bellbirds and other birds in the evening chorus. The crackling of the fire and buzz of mosquitoes. There is so much depth to this place, this patch of wilderness. My knowledge about it is miniscule, and the same applies to the knowledge that society has about wilderness. The rhythms, ebbs, flows, discontinuities. The things we can pick up with our unaided senses ... But what about the human relationship with

wilderness, our well-spring? A lop-sided relationship that sanctioned the obliteration of wilderness from the temperate woodlands of Australia.

Faulconbridge, Grose River catchment, late 2004

As part of the wilderness knot, Ron seeks to deal with a certain bewilderment about the focus on language as it relates to the reality of wilderness.

It's funny how the sandstone cliff I am sitting on ... the birds calling in the distance – concrete parts of wilderness – are so entwined with language. Of course this was not always the case. Wilderness existed for all but the last instant in the absence of language. It is not alone in predating language, yet somehow this fact gets dropped from discussions.

Wilderness gives Ron the experience of the 'resilience' inherent in wild nature.

What a contrast there is between the three dimensional and resilient woodland that I am sitting in, in comparison to the two dimensional monoculture that would be strived for if this land were 'developed'.

Mt. Colong, May 2005

Frustration emerges as part of Ron's wilderness experience – for how do you explain the enormity of the wilderness experience to people who 'just don't get it'.

A strong glow of orange sunlight is bursting from the western horizon. Clouds with feathery projections pointing towards the ground. Inverted flames without the flickering. Only a moment earlier one of my companions had directed our attention to the sunset. Now we are in a phase of rapid dimming, but the clouds are really lit up. They now have a dark background as the sky turns from blue to black. 'You just can't describe this to people in the city. They just don't get it'. Words fail my friend as she makes a hand gesture in a vain attempt to describe the enormity of what we are experiencing.

As part of experiencing wilderness, Ron examines his own dependencies, and what he relies on in the bush. He also gains a feeling of the stability of the wild, compared to human systems.

I am only able to be comfortable for extended periods in wilderness due to reliance on the products of society. ... The tucker in my bag is sourced from cultures around the world ... The myriad relationships within and between suites of interconnected ecosystems confer buffering capacity and redundancy, which results in long term stability. Such stability does not exist for the human systems that produced my rice, manufactured my knife ... So who is clever? The bushwalker sucking his chocolate or the Lyrebird snatching up animals uncovered by his scratchings?

Mt. Werong, August 2005

Ron uses an analogy of his own fall while running, to express his anxiety about what humans have done to Australia. Have we learned to live in a way where an independent wilderness might survive?

And what of our treatment of the Australian landscape? We have clearly stumbled, fallen and injured ourselves. Yet we continue on the same destructive, short-strided cycle. When will we be able to bound in better harmony with the bush? And, when this transition is made, how much of the bush will be wilderness? That's an important question, because only in wilderness can roos bound to their full potential. And rocks 'rock', and ants get on with 'anty' matters.

Language continues to vex Ron in regard to the *meaning* of wilderness, leading to frustration as to why it is so hard for others to understand its meaning as 'large natural areas'.

*Wilderness too is about recognition: it is the name applied to the best of what's left ... The fact that some meanings of wilderness are **different** does not detract from the legitimacy of the above idea. Part of the confusion and machinations around the word 'wilderness' arise because all of the diverse meanings that it has are lumped together and ascribed the one label. ... There are many meanings of the word wilderness. Thus it is pointless to discuss understanding of the word 'wilderness' without stipulating ... the meaning of the moment. Having honed in on the specific meaning, the scene is set for dialogue about understanding ... Why then is there such a problem around understanding the concept of wilderness as **large natural areas**?*

Sorrow emerges in Ron's writing with the confusion around the wilderness knot, when he believes most people can agree that large natural areas are valuable.

*I think a significant reason is that frank acknowledgment of comprehension ... is avoided because of the fear that it will be construed to imply agreement. Such a pity! ... a specific meaning of wilderness ... narrows the field of possible criticisms. A battery of criticisms can be legitimately levelled at the whole gamut of wilderness meanings ... Surely the sensible thing is to agree that large natural areas are scarce and incredibly valuable **for many reasons**. ... Such specificity is mandatory for wilderness because it is a word that covers too many diverse meanings to lend itself to generic discussion: differences among meanings far outweigh their meanings. In fact some meanings of wilderness are contradictory.*

Blue Gum Forest, Grose River, 11/12/2005

The sheer sense of vitality in wilderness emerges, along with its healing power. Ron thus understands *why* people become so passionate over 'wilderness' (writing from a historical 'icon' area of wilderness campaign history).

Whip birds, cicadas, luxuriant new growth, succulent flowers, dragonflies, butterflies. Life and vitality have returned to the bush. It's therapeutic being here, soaking it up. No wonder early conservationists were passionate about protecting this place. How appropriate that I am writing one of the last instalments in my wilderness journal at Blue Gum Forest.

There is a melancholy tone in his response to what is happening to the land. Ron writes of the tragedy of climate change, when he loves what is there *now*, which may pass away.

*Climate change is a tragedy unfolding in our gaze. No wonder it is a recurring theme of this journal. ... What will the Blue Mountains vegetation be in 2050? Will it resemble vegetation currently found inland and to the north? Or will there be quite distinct assemblages of species? The fact that many Eucalyptus species have a narrow climatic envelope is of particular concern to me, because I love the assortment that is in the World Heritage Area **now**.*

The 'wholeness' of the wilderness experience emerges for Ron, along with the intrinsic value of the wild (including non-living geodiversity).

*I think a key thing for me is something to do with **wholeness**. The notion that gains for humans result in loss of geobiodiversity. And that the loss is of great consequence, the magnitude of which is independent of appreciation by people.*

2. Wilderness Journal of 'George', professional conservationist

George is an athletic campaigner and bushwalker, with a profound love of wilderness, and a frustration with all who threaten it.

3/10/04 Glenbrook Ck

For George, the wilderness experience brings freedom, though he makes explicit this is *not* oblivion.

As you leave suburbia your perspectives roll over from urban-saturated thought to the bush: like a Kline bottle it depends on the 'inside' you are on whether you are 'inside' the bush or not. Have you left or just arrived? ... you habitually forget everything that is worrying you, cares drop off me one by one, without even the effort of not thinking about them. Don't make the mistake of thinking its oblivion; or a stoned teenager's second-guess for becoming conscious of the more-than-human world. Welcome to the bush.

4/10/04 Glenbrook Ck

The wilderness experience is also an escape or a refuge from the office and the city.

Thoroughly saturated with bush. Bubbling streams and morning bird calls. Slept well and feel relaxed after the stress of a hard walk on Sunday. Escape from the office is complete.

Frustration emerges in George's writing about wilderness definition, so he uses science fiction character Dr. Who to define it. He focuses on 'fearful bureaucrats'.

The Supreme Time Lord of the Universe Dr Who's advice on Wilderness:

'Wilderness is defined as a large essentially natural area which has not been substantially disturbed by modern technology so that its ecosystem functions remain as they were before the advent of the internal combustion engine.'

*Wilderness criteria are necessary to identify these areas where nature is pre-eminent and all these rely on concepts of remoteness, naturalness and in some cases self-reliant recreation. As nowhere is actually 'remote', or if they are they may not be natural, the key criterion is **naturalness**, not remoteness or offering self-reliant recreation. In other words, an arbitrary cut-off on what is natural is applied in determining what is wilderness, and many a good wilderness has been lost to the Universe by the fearful bureaucrat unable to see the wilderness in the landscape. ... Sometimes bureaucrats are turned into political zombies, and see only what they are told to see. I have seen wilderness disappear and reappear in their eyes with the passage of political paradigms.*

Mysterious discoveries present themselves to George's experience of the wild.

Discoveries on Tobys Brook – 25 metre tall Acacia elata (Cedar Wattle), 25 metre tall Backhousia – it's true I swear. An amazing place, even found dry firewood in a rainforest in the pouring rain (must have been Turpentine wood?).

30/10/04-2/11/04 Grose River – alone

The healing power of wilderness, an 'acute therapy for grief and loss', manifests itself.

Nothing could be more difficult than to resign from work after 16 years, unexpectedly after falling out with a work colleague. A planned bushwalk seemed to look like an ironic joke, a coda, a goodbye to all that. ... Spent the rest of the day and the one following 'numb', walking at what I thought was an incredibly slow pace. The drama of the scenery and the river affected me. I was not impervious after all and by lunchtime of the third day I was suddenly happy. There is none so happy as those who have been recently sad. Was it the pot of tea? The hard work? The environment? The third night was full of the amusement of keeping dry. This was a good wilderness trip, but unexpected. Wilderness as acute therapy for grief and loss. It worked.

15-17/11/04 Colong Caves, Southern Blue Mountains

The frustration of trying to explain wilderness to the media reappears; he is forever wondering if the answers are 'good enough'.

Recording sound for an ABC 'Radio Eye' feature. Sean is asking 'so is this a wilderness? Is this a wilderness camp?', etc. Der – I suppose? ... The camp site below the caves is amazing. Lots of wildlife that night ... fire-flies darting around. Colong caves has two big Red Cedars standing in front, and a Figure The atrium has the usual stalagmites and stalactites. But the ambience is very impressive. A large 'stage' stands in the centre ... giving a view over the forest canopy. ... The camp site has ancient vines large as the torso of a dog, and Sand Paper Figs. An amazing rainforest, probably 'warm temperate', with ferns and vines. ... Next morning up top at Colong caves, and more interviews with Henry about his wilderness photography and more 'so what is wilderness?' questions, and the value of wilderness. I hope the answers were good enough?

27/11/04 Bell Canyon

The challenge of the wilderness experience is also apparent, of seeking a hard walk to immerse yourself within. George also writes of how it feels to 'return' from wilderness, where it's 'too big' to take in.

We were after a wilderness experience in a greedy and desperate way, at one session all at once, with no time to spare. One solid immersion without the niceties of collected thought or reflection – just being well and truly 'there' and no thought for wilderness. The gift of a risk and challenge to remove the externalities, and return you to that animal you must rely upon to get you along and through. ... we climbed a cliff pass, me needing a rope because I could not get up the steep pitches without a pull up or a hand up, using the rope for security, but maybe my 48 year old body needs that, and you don't want to discover the 'hard way' that all is vanity and time has conquered you. ...

*I was exhausted, and how 'Lofty' drove back without even a cup of tea is a mystery to me. ... Sleep, solid sleep, without any interruption that ends the day. And in the morning you wonder if you really were there, and your body says 'yes!', but your mind can't take it all in – there was too much and it's all too **big**, bigger than you could ever be.*

Anger at postmodernist questioning of reality springs forth. The apparent denial of the existence of the wild 'totality' frustrates George.

How many critics could give up their soul and travel through the wilderness like I did yesterday and still hold on to their precious ideas of crap? There's so much data, so integrated, and the totality can kill you - and yet people deny it exists. They are mad and nobody can tell them, nor can it be helped. Leave them behind and move on to the next generation, who will discover that wilderness is the future and the past all in one.

13-23/2/05 A ten-day solo trip in the Southern Blue Mountains

Sorrow is evident about his much-loved Nattai wilderness, now invaded with exotic weeds, pigs and sewage. There is also melancholy evident when dealing with continuing threats.

But with the beauty comes the Tradescantia – and other weeds – so I’m glad to be further downstream on the edge of the wilderness at a place called Flora Gully, which is below a planned massive hard rock quarry that may happen one day. ... So down the Nattai – my old friend. And he ain’t looking too good – the pigs have got to him and then the weeds. Anything that the Government has said about upgrading the Mittagong Sewage Treatment Plant is pure crap. The Nattai River is polluted so much more than 15 years ago.

The ‘unpredictability’ and mishaps of the wilderness experience emerge, which bring unexpected outcomes. George also touches on ‘being there’ in the wilderness experience.

*The beauty of all those mishaps is that I saw some really beautiful sights, and made better acquaintance with my old friend the Nattai wilderness – wilderness No 1 under the Wilderness Act – and sort of a Mecca for me. ... fairly boring basic thoughts seem more like blow-flies than what I am here for. I don’t think of anything much in wilderness, most of the time. I’m just there, really **there**.*

George lists the positive and negative experiences for his ten day solo trip. These involve personal challenges, as well as feeling that it is his birth place. Sorrow again returns as he ponders whether wilderness will survive there, and whether the feral pig problem can be fixed. This anxiety even stretches to ‘hatred’ towards those who release feral pigs into the wilderness (to build up a population for hunting).

Positives

- *Strengthening body and mind*
- *Confronting my personal demons in a high stress environment – like hot days, making choices and living with the consequences of them*
- *Really good grounding in the Southern Blue Mountains after my trip overseas*
- *Deciding my place of birth is ‘Angophora Lands’, not Arncliffe as it says on my birth certificate*
- *The integrity of the Upper Blue Mountains above the Cox River, and also the Boyd Plateau are outstanding. ...*

Negatives

- *I do swear as a habit when under high stress! ...*
- *The rivers – Wollondilly, Nattai and Cox are badly degraded with all sorts of weeds*

- *Pigs – not many, but they are everywhere, but much more importantly the damage pigs cause*
- *The difficulty of the trip and the weight of my pack*
- *Wet boots and socks.*

Will wilderness survive? Only in a degraded condition unless the pig problem can be fixed. I remember pre-pig – how can pigs just ‘happen’? I hate the ‘pig doggers’ who brought them in. I will really have to berate the Government on the pig issue again.

He feels despair also, as a conservationist dealing with wilderness degradation, and dealing with ‘burn out’.

*My main thing is to take it more easily and stop trying to do it all myself (have you ever seen someone else do it for you?). I wish I could say ‘if I don’t do it, someone else will’. I **know** no one else will – I wish it wasn’t the case. If only I knew a way to make it not the case? ... The priority is to establish more groups of individuals interested in protecting wilderness. Even if they are one-person groups. Building empires up is for fools – it’s the individual that always counts.*

23-25/4/05 Anzac Day Long Weekend, Grose River near Faulconbridge

Seeking wilderness as a *refuge* appears again in George’s writing, even when sick – just to get away from Sydney.

I was feeling crook from 2 p.m., so I stopped early. No wonder, because I was in bed 3 days with the flu. Stupid me thought I would be OK. Feeling giddy coming down through the cliff at Faulconbridge Point. I must be mad or sick of Sydney, and probably one caused the other?

Evidence of despair can be seen as George interrogates himself as to wilderness, whether it will survive, asking if wilderness advocates are outmoded?

Does the concept of wilderness suffer the same problem? Is it adaptive? Or will it die out? Are we out-moded? Or is it that times change and we are at the nadir of individualism and soon people will come to meetings, join in, go bushwalking and rekindle the bush-fellowship? The irony of me alone in the Grose wilderness (where it all began!) does not escape me.

George ponders ‘too much isolation’ but also his need for wilderness, his ‘best friend’. Despair also emerges as he wonders where the other wilderness campaigners have gone?

Too much isolation is bad for the soul, but I cannot get enough wilderness into me. It is my best friend, and perhaps I wish that it wasn’t so. Where are the stalwarts, do they all hate me or is it just that JW Howard killed them all? Who knows.

15/5/05 Erskine Creek

‘State-of-mind’ is also important to George (as for Ron), as it is central to the experience of wilderness.

It was a slow walk but touched me, as the bush does (wilderness), and many of those who had walked (and who had the experience of wilderness) were touched. And for them travel was light and easy. It is a state of mind to walk in the bush and feel carefree, and know that the bush is for that, part of that is you. For the others to whom the bush was a stranger, the going was hard and disconnected.

10-13/6/05 Coolah Tops

The politics of wilderness campaigning frustrates George.

This is the model applied to the icon Coolangubra, Deua, Buckenbowra wilderness parks. Wilderness must fit in around the edges of this political apology to appease rednecks and turn parks into comfort zones for the aged baby-boomers who wanted them. Is this what it all comes to?

29/12/05 to 2/1/06 Jagungal wilderness

Wilderness as an experience for George is important in developing (and testing!) human relationships.

Wilderness and flies and heat. Take one new relationship, go on a bushwalk in the heat and flies; you will soon find out whether it will work out for more than a month. It was a very stressful hot walk, and one night I was driven to distraction. My new friend ‘Jessica’ forgot the Aeroguard. I wore shorts (unlike Jess). I was bitten to extremes! A March Fly every ten seconds all day, and mozzies all night. I coped with that and Jess and I got on really well. Wilderness ‘road-tested’ relationship – trial One!

3. Wilderness journal of ‘Sally’, consultant, former NPWS officer

Sally is a long time walker of diminutive height but great determination. She has done extensive consulting work on conservation in the Blue Mountains. She has five children, whom (along with ‘Noah’) she has introduced to the mysteries of the wild. She opens with an old poem written in the middle of the Wollemi wilderness, which celebrates the secrets of the wild.

4/10/1992 Gospers Mountain, Wollemi NP

A postcard from the wilderness ("Wollemi Sally", 4/10/1992)

*Today I awoke with the mountains of Wollemi.
The ancient basalt of Coricudgy, Monundilla, Coriaday.
The broken sediments of an ancient ocean
The rainforest
The open forest
The Apatophyllum and Pultenaea
The lyrebirds and wombats
The secretive quolls that lurk in the
Gullies and leave nothing but scats
To mark their passing through this
wild place.
Who dares to walk this wilderness?
Who dares to unlock its secrets?*

*The rock wallabies sit quietly in their
Hiding places and smile.
They know their secrets won't be revealed.*

3/10/2004 Blackheath

Sally's passion for justice appears, along with her worry about her children, their future, and their relationship with the land.

*Although not conscious of it at the time, my life's work has centred around the desire to right the wrongs of past generations. Will my children continue that journey? ... Recently in conversation with my daughter (on some other topic), she announced that sometimes when she's out with mummy and daddy she just wants to 'keep on going'. When I asked what she meant, she said that when she walks in the bush she doesn't want to stop – she wants to see what's 'out there'. Almost all of her bushwalks have been in the Blue Mountains. To her 'the bush' means 'wilderness' – because that's what's all around her ... She **knows** this is her country. Sometimes she is afraid of it (more of that later), but it is part of her being. Like it or not, she has chosen that journey.*

Sally reflects on the meaning of 'wilderness' to her. She ponders the reality of wilderness as opposed to the wilderness experience. She raises the importance of solitude, and how wilderness shows us we are but one species among many.

*So **what does 'wilderness' mean to me?** Long before I was aware of any formal definitions, I had a sense of what it was – a large, natural area where the impact of humans was minimal, where natural forces were the primary determinant of the landscape. At that time – in my teens – I didn't think too much about the impacts of past human presence on those natural areas. All I knew was that they were large, beautiful, now uninhabited, and essentially 'untrammelled'. Images of the wild, mountainous terrain of southwest Tasmania, along with the vast dissected Blue Mountains sandstone plateaux were the images that defined wilderness for me. At that*

time both areas were under threat – mainly for hydroelectric development – and I learned early that these areas needed active protection and management. ...

At university I became familiar with some of the formal definitions of wilderness ... I also learned about the debates over whether wilderness was a physical entity (i.e. 'a large natural area') or a product of the human mind ... While there was some logic on both sides of the debate, what made most sense to me was that wilderness fitted at one end of a spectrum of natural areas ... By their very nature they also catered for one end of the spectrum of human use, i.e. they were not a place for roads or vehicles or permanent dwellings, but a place where humans could experience a sense of 'solitude'. The realisation that humans had inhabited those landscapes for perhaps tens of thousands of years in no way degraded that sense of solitude. In fact a wilderness area helps to define our place in the world – we are but one species among many and we depend on the natural environment as much as any other species.

Sally grapples with the worry about what humans will lose if we lose wilderness.

*If we lose wilderness areas we lose all perspective on our **real** place in the world. We think we can live in a wholly artificial 'man-made' environment, but it is only when we learn to live off the land in a sustainable way, like the previous indigenous inhabitants, that we can have any hope of long-term survival*

She also ponders how radically the pattern of inhabitation (white or black) has recently changed in Australia, and deals with the recognition that we can never turn back the clock.

Some time ago I watched a documentary about Jon Muir's solo walk across Australia from south to north. ... Much of the country he walked through would satisfy formal definitions of wilderness ... But indigenous people would not call those areas wilderness. Jon found ample evidence of Aboriginal occupation throughout his journey, so this country had been 'lived in'. But ... most of the country he walked was no longer 'lived in'; even with the return of large areas to traditional owners, the country was no longer occupied or used in the same way as it had been in the past. Nor would it ever be used in the same way, on the same scale, as in the past. ... 'Living off the land' now means something very different (e.g. grazing, ecotourism, etc). In other words, the clock will never be turned back ... We are not the same as we were thousands of years ago, nor are the indigenous people the same people who walked this land thousands of years before European settlement. We all have different expectations, different attitudes, and different needs.

A sense of urgency emerges in Sally's journal as she ponders social and environmental justice, and how to find a 'new way of living'. Clearly, concern for future generations motivates her.

By any objective measure, humans have seriously damaged not just this continent but this planet in the very short space of a couple of centuries. ... In the face of this alarming picture, how can any of us afford to say that social justice must over-ride other factors, including 'environmental justice'? Social justice will be irrelevant if our planet can no longer sustain us. The priority for every single one of us must be to live sustainably. I don't believe we will achieve this unless we also have respect for our

fellow human beings – whether black, white, or multi-coloured! So the challenge for all of us in the 21st century is to find a new way of living, based on an intelligent understanding of the limitations of our natural environment ...

So what does this all mean for the future of wilderness? Do we take the Harry Recher line and say that all areas of the planet should be equally available to utilise as part of that sustainable future? No. Or do we recognise that large intact natural areas have an important place in ensuring the future of this planet and the diversity of species it supports? Yes. ... Whatever view we take, we must consider the consequences of our actions and decisions on the generations to come – not just our children and grandchildren, but their grandchildren's grandchildren. Social justice is not just about justice for the present generation. We have to find a way to right the wrongs of the past, but we simply can't afford to do that at the expense of the rights of future generations. No can we do it at the expense of the natural environment which sustains us all.

While Sally feels concern about the wilderness knot, this does not become a deep anguish, as she also recognises the *common ground*, and can see how we can move forward and avoid the need to abandon the word 'wilderness'. The real sticking point she feels is the role of humans in those landscapes (past and present).

*Reading through the wilderness interview transcripts, I can't help but be struck by how much common ground there is. Sometimes you have to read between the lines to find it, but essentially the points of agreement outweigh the points of difference. Wilderness areas (that is large intact natural areas) are seen as having value. It is the role of humans in those landscapes – both past and present - that provokes discussion/ debate. This is where discomfort about using the 'W' word arises. But I don't think you stop using the term 'wilderness' just because some people misunderstand it. James Woodford's talk at the Two Fires Festival comes to mind here. He was almost ready to abandon the word despite its power and special meaning to him. No, we shouldn't abandon it. We should strengthen its meaning by continuing to use the 'W' word, and being strong advocates for the values of wilderness – but at the same time being aware of sensitivities about its use. If we demonstrate that we **do** acknowledge past human presence and that we want to work co-operatively with indigenous people in caring for wilderness into the future, then there is no need to abandon a word that has meaning to so many people who have been advocates for wilderness at a time when many others would destroy it.*

Sally experiences a deep human spiritual connection to the land. She also wonders about the 'land needs people' debate in the context of the wider discussion of wilderness management.

Management of wilderness/ land needs people? *I have long thought of this as one of the major challenges regarding wilderness. There were many discussions and differing viewpoints expressed during my 14 years with NPWS. ... One area of agreement was that these areas could not simply be left alone or they would likely degrade over time (everything from invasion by weeds and ferals to loss of species). In that sense, the land **does** need people – unless we are prepared to take a longer term evolutionary viewpoint and say that the land will ultimately survive regardless of whether we as a species survive.*

*My own view is that humans have a deep spiritual connection with 'the land' and the species which have sustained our existence for millennia (though many – e.g. Archer may not allow themselves to acknowledge this). Maintaining that connection will ensure that our actions sustain the land rather than exploit it for short term gain. But does maintaining connection require permanent settlement or regular visitation? Not if that ultimately results in degradation of the environment and wilderness qualities, which it almost certainly will if we want to impose the high impact lifestyle the majority of us currently live. We are already so dependent on motorised transport and high impact dwellings – expanding these into the relatively few remaining intact natural areas is simply not compatible with **big-picture** environmental sustainability.*

Facing the 'unknown' is part of the wilderness experience, meeting nature on its own terms. For Sally, this creates a respect and responsibility towards nature.

*If we are serious about maintaining physical and spiritual connection with the land, we have to meet nature on its own terms, rather than taking all the paraphernalia of the modern world into the wilderness. ... all of us (black and white) have something to learn from experiencing wilderness on foot. ... It is not until we step out of the comfort and security of our modern life and face the challenge of the 'unknown' that we will really understand our place in the world. Hopefully that **real** understanding will bring with it a sense of respect for other species and a sense of responsibility about our unique role in protecting and managing large natural areas.*

Sally writes of experiencing fear of the wild, and how it challenges us. She speaks especially of her daughter's fear, reflecting Sally's own worry for her children.

I made reference earlier to Kittani's 'fear' of her country. It's big and unknown and there are thunderstorms out there! Perhaps we all have that fear of the unknown. ... one reason is the fear of facing new challenges. We are too attached to the comforts of the familiar. We are also too attached to the idea that modern technology is essential in all situations.

Sally experiences the wilderness knot in terms of 'management'. The importance of spiritual connection to country emerges, how a five week walk was a spiritual journey that transformed her. Frustration emerges regarding 'white' and 'black' approaches, given they have much to gain from working together.

The basic principle of wilderness management should be to allow natural systems to operate and evolve without adverse impacts from any one dominant species (i.e. us). For millennia indigenous people had a special role to play in maintaining 'natural' systems but it would be foolhardy to suggest that this unique relationship is essential now and that we can and should try to duplicate it.

I agree with 'Warren' ... when he said we have to make use of the 'white toolbox' and the 'black toolbox' in future management of natural areas. It is arrogance to think that any one of us has all the answers when there are forces much greater than us at work (e.g. global climate change). An important/ fundamental component of the black toolbox is their spiritual understanding of country and the role of ceremony in

*maintaining connections with country. White people have much to gain from developing our own spiritual understanding – as many of us have done and continue to do. For me the five week Greater Blue Mountains Heritage Walk was primarily a spiritual journey which has strongly influenced my thinking and management style in the years since. Likewise, both white and indigenous people have much to gain from developing their scientific understanding of natural systems. The two approaches can and should and **must** be used together.*

Concern about the wilderness knot metamorphoses into determination to acknowledge past mistakes, find common ground and move forward to protect the land together.

*I hope the debates about wilderness will fade away if we concentrate on our common goals and values in relation to natural areas. If we need to say 'Sorry' to indigenous people for excluding them from their country and making them feel there was no place for them in wilderness, then let's say it loud and clear, then get on with our common purpose. I don't want to see continuing 'territorial conflicts' that have resulted in the degradation of natural environments and human societies throughout the world. **No one owns the land.** We **all** have to live cooperatively and sustainably to ensure our future, and I strongly disagree with the economists who argue ...that you only care about, and care for, what you own.*

4. Wilderness journal of 'Henry', consultant and former NPWS officer

Apart from his professional consultancy background, Henry is also an energetic and thoughtful bushwalker and climber who has travelled to many places around the world. He is also a keen photographer and writer.

8/9/04 Kanangra gorge

The challenge of wilderness is important for Henry, but here he experiences first hand its role as a refuge for biodiversity, opening a window on what Australia might have been like before the feral cat and fox.

Yesterday Tom and I went climbing in Kanangra Gorge. It was a crazy but intriguing plan – an attempt to scale a narrow rocky spur ... But the most impressive aspect of our spur was the amazing quantity of animal droppings. Seemingly every metre or so was another fresh pile – wallaby, brush-tailed possum and other species unknown. In several places the stench of animal urine was powerful. This did not seem to be specially good habitat. Sure it was bush, but it was steep and bony land, severely limited in extent by deep ravines to either side – dank, dismal and dripping, and unassailable to man or beast (at least anything larger than a rat). Possums might scale the summit walls of the ridge, but there is no way wallabies could. So why so rich in life? I have a theory. This diversity is perhaps how all Blue Mountains bushland should be, and once was? But this narrow rocky spur in the depths of a craggy gorge has become a sanctuary. ... From foxes ... And so the importance of

wilderness. These refuges, whether buffered by miles of bushland or just by a narrow zone of unbreachable cliffs, are critical to our wildlife.

The sheer ‘unpredictability’ of wilderness (and its surprise) is a central part of the wilderness experience for Henry.

Much, much later we scrambled up steep broken rock, on an unknown route back to the car. The rain came down and swirls of mist streamed past the beetling crags all around as dusk faded towards darkness. It was a wild, wild place! With the faintest glimmer of light left we groped, exhausted and soaked through, towards the top of Kalang Falls and stumbled onto the tourist track. Had we failed? Absolutely. But we’d won some things intangible. Such is the way of wilderness – you can have all the expectations in the world, but so often entirely something else happens!

3-6/11/04 ‘Footsteps of Caley’ Walk, Devil’s wilderness, Blue Mountains NP

Henry takes part in a historical re-enactment of botanist and explorer George Caley’s trip across the ‘Devils Wilderness’. The challenge of wilderness comes forth here, but also its diversity.

Our enthusiastic team of eight ... set off on a 4 day walk in George Caley’s 1804 footsteps (with three strong men and a small dog). It would take us across the heart of the Grose Wilderness – still in much the same state as Caley found it. ... Delays meant we made it into Dark Ck just before dark and found an excellent ‘rock house’ in which to pass the night. The day’s highlights included brilliant red Callistemon in the swamp ... a lovely gentle valley with alluvial flats, a small waterfall, lots of water and fading waratahs and a superb expanse of rock on the rim of Dark Valley

The aspect of fear in the wilderness was evident in Caley’s party two hundred years before. Henry laughs and swims where Caley’s men found it so dangerous that it ‘affected the men’s minds’. This contrasts their different states of mind about being there.

We lunched and swam and laughed and filmed where Caley’s crew felt so oppressed that they hastened directly up the daunting ascent of the other side. A wonderful place, Caley’s ‘Devils’ wilderness, perhaps the finest of the journey. ... The ascent was certainly steep, with a sloping cliff-line low down forcing us to zig-zag out to the right through small steps and ledges deep in leaf debris. Caley said his ascent was so dangerous that it ‘affected the men’s minds’! Heaven knows how the dog coped

25/3/05 Boyd Plateau, Kanangra Boyd wilderness

The numinosity of the bush, where wonderful things ‘happen’ is central to Henry in his experience of the wild.

It's wonderful what happens, what shows itself when you're alone and quiet. When I was pottering around in a wet creek glade of tall tea-trees, taking photos, I moved a little down the slope and there was a sudden and massive flapping overhead. I looked up to see a huge owl taking flight out through the low canopy, involuntarily cowering down at the sight. Then I noticed a second owl staring down at me, just three metres above my head, and holding in its talons the unmistakably fluffy tail of a Greater Glider. Undoubtedly they were Powerful Owls. Then it too lifted its wings and was gone. Further down the creek, a Brown Goshawk flushed from low in the forest, and much later as the light was fading and I was walking quickly through the last of the open granite forest to the road, Gang Gangs were winging through the trees in all directions, cackling and screeching. It was one of those days.

The regenerative and restorative power of the wild is a positive and hopeful thing for Henry.

The wet forests at the head of Kanangra Ck are extraordinarily rich and varied. There are some massive trees, yet still much of the area has been logged. Old snig tracks are overgrown and barely recognisable, and sawn off stumps are weathering back into the ground, dappled with lichens and mosses and etched with rot. Here, it is easy to remember that this place was marked for elimination of its bountiful forest. Saved by people of a different view, it is now on the slow but relentless road to recovery, as a living part of the Kanangra-Boyd Wilderness.

28/1/06 Mt Victoria

A rueful recognition emerges of the past history of the conservation movement, yet for Henry this is an important part of coming to terms with the wilderness knot. This means acknowledging that the past rhetoric (and ignorance of Aboriginal issues) of wilderness advocates was partly to blame, but equally acknowledging that these were sins of omission, *not* of malice

After many months of cogitating ... the nature of the 'wilderness knot', it's time to put a few ideas down on paper. Firstly, it's clear that our favoured term 'wilderness' has some problems. For some people, it invokes negative connotations to do with human exclusion, 'dualism' and indigenous disenfranchisement. Unlike many conservationists, I think the past rhetoric of wilderness defenders is partly to blame. We were all more ignorant of indigenous perspectives than we are now, and Aboriginal people and issues were not politically 'visible'. The notion of natural purity was strong (and still is) and easily misinterpreted. In fact, many issues around wilderness are subtle and complex, and therefore open to misinterpretation. But whatever the sins of wilderness enthusiasts might have been, they have been sins of omission and lack of awareness rather than malice. Those who subscribe to the view that wilderness is a hand-maiden of cultural genocide are indulging in confrontational race politics rather than reasoned analysis.

The fear of wilderness returns again, this time the current 'fear and loathing' of nature in Western society, how we still 'fear the wolves at the edge of our vision'.

I am more interested in the vehement opposition that emerges from within our own Western white culture. Over the past year or so I have noted in current events in the media numerous echoes of what I regard as a profound and entrenched antagonism to nature as the ancient and archetypal enemy of humanity. This fear and loathing is manifest in the debates about bushfire, logging, Aboriginal land rights, even sharks (most recently). Many people simply cannot abide the idea of nature complete unto itself, and not bent to human will and utility. The homocentric viewpoint is incredibly widespread and powerful in our culture. We still fear the wolves at the edge of our vision.

As part of the wilderness knot, Henry grapples with how postmodernism relates to ‘wilderness’, especially the dualism versus spectrum debate. He also considers intrinsic value, where land deserves protection, irrespective of whether humans are part of that landscape.

And of course the postmodernists have a great deal to answer for. Whilst the idea of perception being culturally ‘constructed’ is a wonderful philosophical tool for the analysis of ideas ... transferring a post-modern approach to the real world (as anything more than a philosophical exercise) is delusional fantasy! The idea of wilderness versus nature as a ‘dualism’ is equally bankrupt. In fact, humanity is virtually irrelevant to our concept of wilderness! Whether humans are part of a landscape or not, it still deserves protection. Wilderness is merely one end of a spectrum.

Hope emerges for Henry in terms of nature’s resilience and regenerative power. He recognises however the central importance of the **size** of areas to biodiversity conservation.

I have recently, in the course of earning a living, spent some time in what I perceive as highly damaged landscapes – areas fragmented with roads, powerlines and other incursions, and invaded and changed by excessive fire, logging, weeds and dumping. And yet, in between I have been frequently impressed by the survival of ‘mini-wilderness’ – everything from hectares to a few square metres of what appears to be intact nature. Truly, every organism and organic community has been changed by human activity, yet the resilience of nature inspires hope. ... However, as important as these damaged places are... they lack the overwhelming power and presence of natural ecosystems functioning on a wider scale. For non-human biological conservation, wilderness is the ‘sine qua non’.

Anger at postmodernism is again present, particularly in terms of its relativism and lack of rationality, and how this is allowing creationism to gain ground in education.

Returning to those bloody postmodernists, I note that they are corrupting not only conservation effort, but the fundamentals of science and education. Within the current debate over intelligent design/ creationism in schools ... a number of states have applied the postmodern approach, declaring (officially) that science is ‘culturally constructed’, only one view of the world amongst many ... just because Newton’s laws of physics were ‘culturally constructed’ and gender-determined ... does not mean they are wrong, or that any other culture has come up with an alternative. ... This

frightening woolly thinking about the facts of nature leave the education system utterly exposed to the inclusion of creationism or any other wacko, unsubstantiated philosophy from alchemy ... to witchcraft. In this climate it is entirely 'natural' for nature to be assigned no special value, and therefore devalued

Frustration is evident at the profound ecological ignorance of the political Right (as well as the public). This is both a 'not knowing', but also a deliberate denial and refusal to learn.

*Another interesting dimension of the 'wilderness knot' is the role of left/ right politics ... the writer John Birmingham declared that a fundamental difference is that the left regard people as basically good, whereas the right don't. ... In the same vein, there is absolutely no doubt that the environmentalist 'left' regard nature as good and worthwhile, but the 'right' see it as the enemy and unworthy. On both issues, humanity and nature, I often feel that the attitudes of the right are founded on profound ignorance. But I don't mean necessarily that they **don't know**, more that they **won't see**. ... When it comes to nature, I do believe ignorance explains a very large percentage of negative/ 'right' attitudes. Urban dwellers with only limited exposure to and understanding of how the **real world** works are totally dominant in our culture. Most value the aesthetics of nature (e.g. birds in the garden, trees in the street ...) but few have the foggiest how it all works, or how fast the wheels are falling off and why.*

5. Wilderness journal of Haydn Washington, ecologist and conservationist

This journal captures my thoughts both when actually in wilderness, and while thinking about being in wilderness (such as at my home on Nullo Mountain), as well as my thoughts when engaging with what has been said *about* 'wilderness'. It is a journal of both feeling *and* thinking.

7/10/03 Diamond Waters, Laurieton ('Watermark' Nature Writers Muster)

The transformative power of wilderness and the sense of wonder are clearly important aspects for me. I also touch on the aspect of empathy.

when I was eighteen I walked down the Colo for five days, through the middle of the State's largest wilderness... the Colo stunned me with its size and naturalness – there I could let my guard down and truly empathize – contemplate, dadirri, witness the wild. I woke to find a Lyrebird standing next to me – we stared into each others eyes and for a long, long moment, were each other. The impact, the sense of wholeness, the unity, the love were all such that I have called it a 'transcendent moment'. Not transcending the Earth to a transcendent God, but transcending usual feelings to a state of exaltation.

The need to listen to the 'voice' of wilderness emerges, as well as the importance of the cumulative effect of the *size* of wilderness in terms of its transformational power.

*I had walked the bush for years, yet nothing impacted on me like that did, to brush aside the cobwebs and see the world as it is in all its intricacy and glory. That was something very special the Colo gave me - it taught me to **listen**, it made me realise that the Lyrebird had no human voice. ... the Colo was ridge upon ridge, catchment upon catchment, mountain upon valley, repeated again and again. The whole was a very large organic whole – and the impact it had because of this was more than a smaller area. ... The power of this experience can shock us out of our tramways ... Rather than reinforcing dualism (as Cronin argues), wilderness breaks it down and shows us we are one with life – a fact few of us later forget.*

20/10/03 Zig-Zag car park, Newnes Plateau

Experiencing the wilderness knot meant that I had to deal with the postmodernist idea of wilderness being a dualism, and how I related this to the reality of such places.

Dualism is something that still preoccupies me. Clearly there is a confusion here with the perception of an end of a spectrum of 'wildness' or naturalness. To be aware of a superlative in anything is to be in danger of being called one who creates a binary or dualism.

24/10/03 Cedar Ck, Wollemi NP (Wollemi wilderness)

Humility is an integral part of the wilderness experience; I was welcome in such places, but I was not the master.

I myself love humanity. But ... we need limits, we need to see our own boundaries transgressed, we need to see that while we may be self-aware nature watching nature – we are part of nature. As I think Abram said – it is in relating to the nonhuman or more-than-human that we become truly human. Wilderness shows us our limits – that we are one among many beings. I am welcome here – but I am not master (and don't want to be!).

Love is also central to my lived experience of the wild, as is listening and empathy. I feel myself surrounded by love. I feel frustration that love is seen as a taboo word.

*So how to get people to listen? And not just listen with their ears. To listen with their essence. Of course, listening, 'witness', Dadirri, empathy, contemplation, prayer (whatever you want to call it!) – all involve love, the giving of your love as well as the receiving of love. I am surrounded by love where I lie on my thermorest in my overhang. I think Wordsworth was on to something when he wrote how a kind of light shone forth from himself and illuminated all around him and then came back to him. Sometimes he wrote that he would almost swoon at the beauty. We might call it the 'power of the place' ... but here and now I will call it **love**. Love isn't just in the air – it's in the water, the cradling overhang, the trees and Cissus vines, the spreading hands of leaves on the Cedar ... Of course 'love' is a taboo word in our society I recall that it was said of Jeffers that he had 'fallen in love outwards' – such a wonderful phrase. How to get others to do this also? Well, a key part of it is keeping wilderness – the catalyst that can brush aside the cobwebs of modernism! Without wilderness we lose this opportunity of seeing ourselves and our society in perspective.*

Puzzlement turns to frustration when dealing with the postmodernist criticisms of wilderness, and relating them to their reality.

*How can any doubt the reality of where I am? It's not a computer game or a video simulacra – it's the living land! It seems to me that some postmodernist theorists have lost touch with reality and the land. Everything is **not** relative! Cultural relativism goes only so far – it is built on the reality of the land, from which we came. Have we become so self-involved as a society that we **only** exist inside our minds?*

The sense of wonder is certainly a central feeling for me (as for Ron), while my poem again reflects the unpredictability of the wild.

Light really is fading now – whip birds are giving me the evening serenade. A Lyrebird is giving his metallic 'bounce' call around the corner ... I can hear the Gang Gang cockies giving their 'going to bed' call as day ends and they roost on trees nearby. I was going to write some poetry – and instead have gone on about wilderness!

*We never step in the same river twice
Coming downstream is not the same
As walking upstream ...
Heraclitus was right!
Best of all is when the land has fun
And shows that it can joke.
So take no place for granted
For each and every one,
Is always just becoming ...*

21/11/03 Nullo Mountain

The unpredictability of the land is evident, where 'secrets' abound (as Sally noted).

I wasn't insignificant in this landscape, but nor was I special or dominant. It moved to the beat of a different drum. It was still in the Dreamtime. Cockatoos screeched, a Satin Bowerbird came to rest next to me while I ate. At times I patted the huge boles of eucalypts, thinking 'What you must have seen!'. I also felt humble that I had not walked fully along this scrubby ridge – which led to wonderful pagodas. I had taken my own back yard for granted – and I shouldn't have. It is a wondrous and mysterious place. ... I am minded of what someone said at a party recently of his own country on the Goulburn River – 'that country is full of secrets!'. Indeed – it always is, if we but listen!

The ability of the wilderness experience to 'live on' in my mind is important to me. I also experience a 'calling' from place.

I also think of a comment in Mark's thesis where he says 'believe it or not, country can live on in your mind for months after visiting it'. I wrote next to it – not months but years! In truth it is decades! It is 30 years since first I walked the Colo and the Lyrebird opened my eyes for good! That trip still lives with me – lives on in me –

flashes of it still come to my mind. ... I remember the magic of Angorawa Ck junction – that huge wild pool. I remember the junction of the Capertee and Wollemi to form the Colo – and waking to stare into a Lyrebird's eyes in wonder. These places call to me. I yearn. ... I yearn because that place is my spiritual home.

2/11/03 Ridge to west of Nullo (Wollemi NP)

Like Henry, I felt angry and frustrated when dealing with postmodernist criticism of wilderness. I ponder just *why* I am angry.

*Yesterday I felt I had to get away, to flee from the morass of words written about nature, wilderness and humans. Gee – we really like to talk don't we? Yesterday I actually felt anger – and I thought I had better come out here to think why that might have been? Why was I angry – and what about? Sometimes I feel that my love of the wild – and more the need to **do** something - will make me burst. A terrible restlessness, an impatience with arguments that threaten the essential reality and beauty of places such as this. ... I think I feel angered because I read the words of those who do not know this land as well as I do, who haven't spent a lot of time walking and listening – and yet whose words in academia are having an effect on whether these places survive and are managed as wilderness. They don't know it, they don't appear to love it, yet they are happy to judge it and its value. Also – they did nothing to try and protect it.*

5/12/03 On Wollemi Ck, just above Colo Junction (Wollemi wilderness) - alone

Needing to *talk* to place, and to listen to its voice, is central to my experience of the land.

It was 30 years ago I woke to see the Lyrebird staring into my eyes – that moment that catalysed my life – changing it forevermore. 30 years. Hard to believe. It's funny – I expected to cry, but it didn't happen right away. It was only when I walked to the actual confluence of the two rivers and saw the mixing of the black Wollemi (tea-coloured) and the slightly turbid Capertee – the swirling turbulence that created the Colo River. ... I found myself telling the river that my father ... had died, and that my dog Tara had died too. Strange no doubt ... but it felt right ... I found myself telling the river that 'I had fought for you'! Was I expecting it to pat me on the back and tell me I was a good boy? No, chiefly I think I wanted to tell it that I had heard its voice, I had realised it had no human voice to defend it – and that I had tried hard to do so ... and was still trying.

The ability of places to 'call you' also again emerges in my journal.

It is strange how certain places can call to you. Apart from where I am now, I have been thinking a lot of Angorawa Ck Junction – a huge lovely pool with a small sand island in the middle. The original Rainbow Serpent pool, but friendly and so, so beautiful. Beautiful enough to make you cry ... or laugh in wonder.

Anger returns again as something one must live through when dealing with the wilderness knot – it can actually feel like it threatens one's sanity.

*I had to go walking for a day ... I had to take stock of myself and realise that I **had** to control that anger and frustration – that my own sanity relied on it. This in a way is the rub of such a deep love of this place – when I read rather shallow words that seem to threaten this wilderness (or any wilderness) it causes me real anguish. ... I realise that one can be **too much** the empath ... one can feel like one is going to explode.*

6/12/03 Boorai Ck Jn with Colo River (Wollemi wilderness) - alone

Fear is clearly also a part of the wilderness experience for me that must be acknowledged, in both prose and poem.

I have been thinking about fear too. Fear of being alone, fear of heights, etc. I realise I am not as fearless as I once was! There is some trepidation about being here alone, even though I know the way out well – it is only one and a half km to the end of a firetrail! I realise my fear of heights has gotten worse ... Yesterday I got to the top of the Dinosaur's Back (Crawford's Lookout), a place I had been up and down many times – and I thought 'Christ!' when I saw it.

Fear (extract)

*What is it that we fear?
Extinction? Unbeing? Pain? Shame?
Perhaps we fear most –
Not being loved?
Yet all around me
In the rising cliffs
And rushing wind
In the growing trees
And flowing river
Is love made visible! ...
The Brown Pigeon calling
Does so not in fear –
But in love!*

Feeling humility is an essential part of my experience of the wild.

*Is it the immensity and power of this place? Terry Tempest Williams speaks of how her land does not love her 'in any way a human would recognise'. I can see the truth in this at this moment. Do I feel saddened that I did so much, fought so hard – and there is no apparent welcome? Am I hurt that the Colo seems to have forgotten me? Maybe I am a bit if I am totally truthful. And yet, seeing this place is its own reward. I know that it is older, truer, and wiser than I am. We are not equals – the Colo gives short-shrift to egocentrism. I identify with it and love its wild beauty, but it will live on serenely **without me**. How else can it be?*

8/12/03 Lawson

Along with humility (and a perspective on my relative importance) comes a strong feeling of the *independence* of wilderness.

*Like Thoreau at Ktaadn, I got a bit of a shock. It was not that I felt the Colo was indifferent to me – yet quite like Thoreau, this place was happy to live on quite without humans. We were not needed. **I** was not needed. I had not been missed and to be*

*honest that hurt. I had missed it so terribly over the years! I am trying to put my finger on the right word. Perhaps it is 'independence'? This place was so independent! It was also far larger than I. Perhaps I was being taught humility – a humbleness towards the immensity and power of life in the wild, a wild eternal being that lives on quite independently of me. It loves yes – it is made of love – but its love is almost impartial. ... So it is with a feeling of humility I return, just as Thoreau did from Ktaadn. I have seen my limits transgressed. It is not indifference or irrelevance that I feel or even impotence in front of such a place. Perhaps it is **relative importance**. This intelligence is of a different order to mine. Yes – older, truer, wiser but also non-human and **more immediate**. It has never ceased to 'seize the day'. I have, but it has not. Perhaps this is something special about wilderness – it demonstrates the more-than-human because it is so different. It is one thing to **talk** about humility. Quite another to feel it.*

12/1/04 Nullo Mountain (after travelling down Rocky Ck Canyon)

A sense of blessing or grace is also a part of the wilderness experience, which can wash away despair.

I must say that at the moment that blessing has washed away any feeling of despair or frustration ... I am doing something ... I am trying to get constructive debate on wilderness, something long overdue. As long as one can feel there is hope, then there is no reason for despair! That canyon recharged my batteries – blessed me. For a moment at least I am in a state of grace!

21/2/04 Gooches Crater, Newnes Plateau

Dealing with the wilderness knot can also bring forth a strong experience of *loneliness*. Here I recognise also that my obligation to the land means I am driven to speak for the wild.

At times this understanding and passion for wilderness can be a lonely road. It seems that so many scholars are self-absorbed in the human world. Who speaks for wilderness? Well I am one who feels driven to do so. Someone observed that I was 'possessed by the Colo wilderness' (when I told them of my past) at the recent UWS Residential. But while I agreed, I pointed out that this was a 'possession of love'.

4/3/04 Gooches Crater, Newnes Plateau

I experience 'being there' as part of the wilderness experience – not thinking, just being.

*I have to interrupt my thinking to **feel** – it's late and the arch is side-lighted and the Brown Barrel leaves are glittering and stirring in the light breeze, with a pagoda behind them. I had a surge of wonder which sort of burnt away all my thoughts on postmodernism! Wondrous fair! This is a very friendly place – what joy to be alive! All my thoughts seem so petty in the face of the 'eternal now'. I am smiling – in sheer admiration of this moment. Even writing is a distraction! There is so much just to **see**. A feast of the senses. There is so much love here. A happy magic. A magic of harmony.*

Inside this arch it is like being inside the intelligence of place – but that is too sterile an image. It is a wholeness, a unity here.

When dealing with the wilderness knot, I had to live through my perplexity at some streams of postmodernism, especially the failure to extend compassion for the other to the nonhuman world.

*My point before was that in many ways I feel sympathy for the concerns of postmodernism – it's just that they have become a dogma, a manifesto – and they are so anthropocentric and egocentric ... Also there is the failure to extend the 'other' to the more-than-human world – a failure of compassion. One can only applaud the questioning of the establishment inherent in postmodernism, as one can applaud the concern for the other of women/ gays/ different races. It's long overdue. But it must not stop there! It must not stop only with human minorities. Postmodernism is the creation of the city ... a creation of humans. It has little relevance to wilderness – it does not understand it, ignores its reality, ignores its independence, and egotistically writes it out of existence. ... So – I am not urging that we cease questioning metanarratives or remove concern for the 'other' as human minorities. I am pleading that we go **beyond** these, and extend the 'other' to the wild.*

21/3/04 Canoe Ck (Colo River)

A need to explain, to 'sing', wilderness is also part of my wilderness experience. The aspect of being 'called' is also reflected in my poetry.

Later the thought came to me that if I really wanted to save wilderness, then I had to inspire people – and what I needed was the gift of tongues. It struck me then that who could be more apt to bestow this than the Lyrebird, the master mimic of them all! Again, if I really want to 'sing' this place, then who better to teach me than 'Chakola', the Lyrebird? One has started singing in the distance just now – as I wrote this. Synchronicity. Serendipity. Numinosity.

Wild River (extract)

*An endless voice calling
Water racing over
Random worn stones
Wild river
Lying between the mountains and the sea
Crescents of sandy beach
Wild rumbling rockpiles
Sheltering groves of trees
Luminous rock faces rising
In an orange and mauve and green
Patchwork wall of animate stone ...*

10/4/04 Far South, Tasmania ('Sense of Place' Colloquium)

The power of despair and grief in the lived experience of the wilderness knot emerges strongly within my psyche. In fact it leapt out and surprised me, showing me just how worried I truly was.

*Phew! I think that Hopkins said there were 'mountains of the mind, cliffs of fall ... no man-fathomed'. And it is true for the emotions as well. I have just discovered one such. I had seen 'Wildness' the video once before, the story of Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis (wilderness photographers), and while it affected me deeply, it was not such a deluge as now. We have just watched it in Truchanas Lodge – and I could not stop crying at the end. It was agony waiting for a chance to get out. People wanted to analyse the film, to cerebralise about it, to talk. For me it was a time for **grief**. At last I could escape and flee down to the point and the water – such a storm of emotion took me quite by surprise. Why was I crying my eyes out? Why was I in despair? Why was I trembling? ...*

*I was grieving for a world that was in danger, an independent wild world, a world shrinking and being torn apart, as much by **ideas** as machines. I was crying out of powerlessness, impotence – for I so wanted to save these areas, and I didn't know **how** to do it. There was such **need**, and I couldn't really answer it. ... Clearly I am deeply and powerfully troubled about the wilderness knot and the future of wilderness. ... 'Crying in helplessness'. I must remind myself that **all** long journeys start with a first step – and I can only do what I can do!*

12/4/04 Hobart

Sorrow and loneliness (verging on despair) appear at the indifference towards 'wilderness' shown by some who actually do love place. I also wrestle with my perplexity around race and spirituality.

Then there is the underlying indifference of others to the word 'wilderness', as though we conservationists are dinosaurs using archaic terms, and the 'true cognoscenti', the real knowing ones have moved on. ... I guess in the end it means that others see the world in a different way. It seems to me sadly that this has always been so during my life. Yet it is sad that in a gathering of place scholars, so few share my vision. It is isolating. Wendy said something of the same to me. If sense-of-place scholars will not speak out for wild nature – who will? ...

*I was telling them of two wonderful waterholes in Mutawintji, and how I wanted to take Paakintji TOs back to these places, as they felt sacred to Kersten and I ... Mary immediately cut in and said 'That's your story!' – as though I could not **possibly** feel that, as I was white, while only TOs would really know the truth, as they were black. Such a premise is fundamentally one of race – that Aborigines have a greater spiritual connection than whites, and must do so due to their race, which has been here 40,000 years. This to me is as blinkered as apartheid. ... We are all born anew here. We were all born in this land – black and white. ... To suggest that I as a white person who has listened to the land for all of my life cannot possibly feel sacredness is in fact a very bigoted view.*

10/5/04 Kandos – after a trip to ‘Dingo Dreaming’ near Angorawa Ck

Here I experience a ‘pilgrimage’ to wilderness. I also wake in the night to ‘talk’ about the wilderness knot with the ‘intelligence of place’.

Below a three metre waterfall, with natural steps and a natural stone bridge and wonderful pot-holes. There on the right hand side was the cave! I lay down my pack and stepped forward! I kept thinking of Judith Wright’s poem ‘Egrets’ - ‘Once in a lifetime, Lovely past imagining ...’. That was all I could remember as I completed my pilgrimage to this amazing place! For my heart was full! There were four dingos, what looked like a Diprotodon, a huge ‘Thunder Bird’ like figure, two wallabies, and two Tiger quolls – all in faded charcoal. ... I felt the deepest calmest joy, the joy of pilgrimage to a sacred place. ... At our last campsite in that lovely flat cave – I woke and lay awake for an hour – going over everything I knew of the wilderness knot – a sort of fevered sorting of ideas and thoughts. I guess I was trying to ask advice of the intelligence of place, trying to gain an insight or an answer as to what to do. There was no simple answer of course – but sharing helps, and I slept again.

Social justice emerges when experiencing the wilderness knot, and how this is experienced as predominating over environmental justice.

Wilderness is losing out as those with a conscience are preoccupied with social justice – with little time to think of environmental justice. The desire to make up for past wrongs means that many white Australians are willing to hand over all national parks and wilderness to Aboriginal people – no matter what management occurs. The trouble is, nobody wants to live as hunter-gatherer man ... We all want to live like princes and princesses – and the Darkinjung of Dingo Dreaming did not live like this. Probably the accumulated wisdom of the years encouraged the elders not to move beyond true sustainability. But we have – our whole society – be they whites, Dharug, Darkinjung, or Paakintji. We want our comforts – all of us. Should we bulldoze a road down to Dingo Dreaming so that those of Darkinjung descent can visit it without a day’s hard walk each way? No we should not – for to do such would be sacrilege to a sacred place.

The need for our compassion to encompass all of life emerges. I also experience the urgent need to communicate the wild, and my understanding that ‘love and wonder work better than anger and despair’.

*So how to let the compassion encompass **all of life**? ... How to get human compassion to see the need for environmental justice – to keep wilderness wild, to realise that if we take our 21st century technological lives to wilderness, we degrade it. I felt this so strongly walking in Angorawa – but how to communicate this? In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is **not** king! How to teach them to **see**? I asked Angorawa this in the deeps of the night. All I know is that love and wonder work better than anger and despair!*

14/9/04 Nullo Mountain.

In terms of 'justice', I experienced a quite painful internal debate - flipping from acknowledging social justice one day to environmental justice another. Anger (on behalf of the land) springs forth at the human idea of 'ownership'.

The first is social justice vs. environmental justice – and how I have been flipping from one to the other. One day I see the justice in one, another day the justice of the other. ... So I feel a fire in the belly to right such wrongs. I want justice for a dispossessed people. I want reconciliation. But not at the expense of the land, of the wilderness, of the recognition of it as something we do not own – any of us. There were people living here when Europeans came But they didn't own the land, just as we don't own it now. The land belongs to itself – and we can belong to it. We can listen to it, learn from it, belong to it. We cannot possess it or own it ... All any of us can do is to be good stewards or custodians ... black or white or green or polka dot. ... The legal fiction of ownership is not important, the management of the land is. Keeping large natural areas is environmental justice, it celebrates the traditional land management of Aborigines.

The 'calling' of the Colo returns to me, this time (rather uncomfortably) through my dreams. This relates to custodianship.

Recently I had a dream which recurs at times over the years. It was that there was a road into Boorai Ck, houses, holiday flats, masses of campers – the place was just another suburb. It was a nightmare. When I woke I had to reassure myself that I had been down to Boorai recently, and was going to lilo from Canoe to Hungryway in December – and that things were 'okay'. I have had this dream in different forms over the years. It leaves me disturbed – with a need to go there and check that everything is alright. I think it is the Colo calling – telling me it is too long since I have been there, been part of this place. If Colo calls and I hear – then am I not a custodian and guardian of this place?.

A horror of anthropocentrism is evident in my journal, a feeling it is a literal 'madness'. I reflect also on how this is evident in some postmodernism.

Anthropocentrism is a form of megalomania – a literal madness. It is the idea that 'man is the measure of all things', that humans are the centre of everything. It is the bane of wilderness, as it gives it no value, no intrinsic value or right to exist. Anthropocentrism is also insidious, it creeps into philosophies. ... If I am critical of postmodernism, it is because it is antimodernist, but anthropocentric antimodernism. If I worry about the land rights debate and wilderness, it is because it is anthropocentric – land rights for a human group. It is not about 'rights of the land'. How do we break humans from their self-absorption?

27/9/04 Pagodas to the west of Nullo Mountain.

The peace of wilderness is important for me in the wilderness experience. The calling of the Colo through dreams returns.

*Ahh – as many have said – the wild is where I ‘get back to myself’. ... There is peace and wisdom here. I need this today – last night I had another dream about the Colo – this time it was Tambo Ck junction, and there was a phone line that went up the creek to a set of apartments! I know these **can’t** be there and are **not** there – but I feel a sense of unease nevertheless. I guess if one calls oneself a ‘guardian’ – one may be called on to guard?*

17/10/04 Towinghy Ck (near Dunns Swamp)

My anxiety and sorrow about theory dominating reality crystallizes into a feeling of ‘tragedy’. The need to ‘sing’ the wilderness again is evident.

I still don’t get it. Don’t such academics think strategically? Don’t they see the ongoing tragedy before our eyes? Must reality be subverted in the cause of theory? ... Yet it is so sad – lots of people love the land, but so few can agree to fight for those large natural areas that remain. I tell this place that I can but try. Yet I feel lacking – almost an undutiful son. If only I truly had the voice to speak of such things – the muse to bring the wilderness alive!

18/10/04 Nullo Mountain.

The trip to Baiame Cave art site brings forth a feeling of grace or blessing, and reconfirms the ability to be ‘called’. Custodianship and kinship figure centrally.

*It is rare to write from within such a state of grace. The sense of wonder is so strong. The feeling of being blessed – of shared love is so great. ... There seemed something drawing me ... Then we came to this pass at the end, and something told me this was the ‘right place’ to go. Even then I was wondering about songlines or dreaming tracks. As we went down this pass, the sheer power of the place hit me. Kersten heard me saying ‘Its so beautiful’ – the sandstone walls, the almost staircase arrangement of rocks, the beautiful lines of the trees ... I kept looking for an art cave – as I ‘knew’ this was a sacred place, a gateway. My sense of wonder kept rising, my feeling that there ‘was something there’ kept growing. At the bottom there was a small cave – but nothing there. I felt a pull to the left and walked around the corner to the big cave ... suddenly I saw that low down below chest height was a row of Baiame figures in charcoal, around six inches high – stretching along this band of rock. There must have been 30 of them, some part-erased by seepage. This was a gallery! ... There is no doubt in my mind that we were **led** here. There is no doubt that I could feel this place **before** I reached it. There is no doubt of the joy and love I felt there! This is a special place, a sacred place. I had touched the Dreamtime. ... This site was so welcoming, so loving, so happy that we were there.*

*The power of such places is real. ... So am I feeling the power of the place or the power of the cave? ... Both I think. That pass was amazing in terms of its ‘reality’, its beauty, its specialness. It was like stepping back into the morning of the world or into the Dreamtime! I felt like this when first I went down the Colo, and in a few other places, such as those two pools at Mutawintji. The pass had power and must surely have figured in a dreaming story ... The cave seemed to call out with a warmth of dozens of others who had loved this place. It was a most friendly feeling – one of love and companionship and **kinship**. Deep kinship ... as though we too were brothers and sisters to those who had loved this place. So – does the love and experiences of people*

*who love this place live on? Indubitably. Without a doubt! Perhaps I may wonder the more as the weeks go by, but for now I have **no** doubt. But I am not black. Does this make a difference? Not a bit – we were so very welcome here. Does this mean I have an Aboriginal soul? Do souls have colour or race? Are they not above such things?*

Out of this experience comes a deep questing to acknowledge the synergistic ‘intelligence of place’ or *genius loci* that led me there, and what it might be (Ron called this a ‘wholeness’). In particular I muse on the relevance of ‘race’.

*To what extent is the ‘intelligence of place’ operating here?, or did it nudge me along to be there at the right time? ... One thing I do know – that race has **nothing** to do with it. If one is assessed or judged by an intelligence of place, then it is done on one’s merits as a being – not as a person of any particular ‘race’ ... This is the knowledge gift from this place. I listen, I acknowledge, I love and respect. And I am accepted and loved in turn. ... It sounds like much of what I have written might be interpreted as me being guided by the past Wiradjuri elders and custodians. Yet isn’t this a bit anthropocentric? ... I suspect it is more complex than humans or land. It is both. If I was lead here, it was by the intelligence of place. This is made up of the patient rocks, the growing green, the animals in their movement and the memories of those ... who shared this place ... So the intelligence of place is a synergism, a collectivity, a wholeness. The sense I get is ... that the land wholeness ... guided me there. In other words, the emphasis is **not** on the human (= anthropocentrism) – but that humans are a loving, valued part of this synergism. The wonder of this place is not just the history or ceremonies of man, it is the beauty of it all – the coming together of it all as a tribute to life!*

19/10/04 Nullo Mountain

Here I feel the social justice nexus has become a tragedy for wilderness, where respect for past (and present) Aboriginal custodians has been twisted to argue against the protection of large natural areas as wilderness. My experience of the intelligence of place tells me that it supports protection, not desecration.

*But the land is greater than us. These people were not megalomaniacs – they did not think they possessed the land. ... Custodianship flows to those who love and listen and respect the land – irrespective of race. I feel this to be an essential truth today. Could I abrogate my custodianship to a group of other people whose only claim is racial descent? **Should** I do so? To me to do such would be a betrayal of the land – and of the Wiradjuri custodians who loved this place before me. So – I argue for wilderness – as a tribute to the love of those who came before. But it is such a tragedy to me – that respect for Aboriginal people has been twisted around as an argument **against** wilderness. We are all being duped. Those who came before – animal/ plant/ rock/ human are in support of wilderness – stopping the land being degraded by roads and houses and farms. The intelligence of place has told me in no uncertain terms that the ‘wholeness’ of the place supports keeping Wollemi ‘wild’ – free of desecration.*

20/11/04 Downstream of Eagles Reach, Colo River

Frustration bubbles up regarding 'wilderness' and 'country' (aren't they the same thing?). Anger also comes out that people are not being humble and recognising its independence.

And I needed this – the last week has shown me just how serious the wilderness knot is – just how zealous and messianic are those who seek to destroy the word wilderness ... Aren't we talking about the same thing? Isn't 'country' wilderness? For me it is – but without roads and settlements. ... There is a huge difference between loving and being a custodian of a place and managing it in a Western sense. ... But this land belongs to itself – and if we listen we can belong to it. It doesn't belong to us – it is independent, free – wild. A 'ness' of the wild, a place of the wild (as John suggested). ... How can anyone in all humility call this wondrous immensity a human artefact? It does make me angry – as there is no recognition of an independent 'other' in this.

My lived experience leads me to a strong feeling of the 'primacy of the land'. I feel frustrated with zealotry, the lack of communication this causes, and my inability to sing the land. I also express poetically my feeling of 'being there'.

*The primacy of the land. The land is paramount. Not us. It is hard not to get angry at the intolerance and zealotry of those who twist reality to conform with theory ... But I don't want to be angry. What I want is to be able to 'sing' this place, its story, its value, its right to be! To sing the wilderness! And I want to listen to others – and to be listened to ... The primacy of the land, the impossibility of ownership, the essentiality of custodianship, the need for compassion for this wild 'other' ... I love this place. This is my spiritual home, my heart's ease. Those who came before did likewise – they loved this, they kept it 'wild' (not tamed) – if only they too could sing to those who come to Eagles Reach – and sing away the wilderness knot – sing that wilderness and country are one, and **all** custodians must work as one!*

*So glad to surrender
Tumultuous thoughts
So good to be centred
To truly 'be'. ...
Enough to feel ...
Put away the cerebral
And honour the land.*

21/11/04 Angorawa Creek! Colo River.

Finally I return (on pilgrimage?) to Angorawa Junction on the Colo, and the wonder and peace of being there, where I talk not just to place, but even to a Bull-ant ... and I am heard!

Back in this wonderful cave on the rainbow serpent pool. Mist in gorge – but diffuse and gentle. A Red Bull-ant sizes me up, but when asked respectfully - leaves me alone! Bubbles rise from off the rock shelf amongst the Vallisneria. Alas for the sand island – it has gone the way of the world! Cliffs reflect in muted orange off this almost

still pool. Last night the sound of rushing water bemused me – I see it is Angorawa Creek telling us it is flowing again – burbling down a steep rockpile into the Colo ... Ah Angorawa – it has been a need in me to return here for a long time! Thank you! Namaste!

24/11/04 Nullo Mountain.

Here the lived experience of Kersten (as well as myself) brings home to us that place (Baiaame Cave) can also express anger at things you do.

Martin's knee was playing up, so we decided to go out along the creek to the road. Due to some blackberries we had to detour closer to the cave than I wanted to – and went across what we now realise was the Bora ground. ... then Kersten went fast across the creek – and only on the other side did she tell me that she felt her throat was closing up. I had inadvertently led the women across the Bora ground. This definitely had a 'feel' to it – one very different from the pass or the cave. It certainly did not like women crossing it. Whatever memories of men's ceremonies linger there – they made it clear they did not like women passing over the Bora ring. So there are three things – pass, cave and Bora ground. All with a different feel.

24/11/04 Nullo Mountain.

Experiencing the zealotry involved with the wilderness knot while at the Ecopolitics Conference results in both bewilderment and frustration.

I was willing to offer profound attentiveness – but 'Sue' was not. Indeed the intolerance and ignorance shown was quite breath-taking! How do you fight zealots? How do you even communicate with them? These two events together were pretty depressing. Could I be wrong? Am I missing something?

24/11/04 Nullo Mountain.

'Talking' to place again comes out as a key part of my wilderness experience. There is also the experience of *returning* from wilderness, being in two places at once, and the melancholy this brings.

*It was so wonderful to be there – to see Tambo Crown and Angorawa, to stand by the deep waters of the serpent pool at Angorawa junction, to walk up the rock shelves of Angorawa – and put these deep questions to these places. ... I stood on the rock shelves at Angorawa and posed these questions to the intelligence of place. I asked it to give me voice so that I can truly **sing** the wilderness, so that I can give it voice. Nothing numinous happened then, though my heart lightened and I felt more serene – content to just 'be' in the place. That night on the Wollangambe, verging on sleep I saw a woman's face, and two – no four children. They were Aboriginal and they were smiling. The children's hair was bleached almost blond. It was just a flash, but it carried a warmth I remember still. Next morning Bruce told me he had dreamt of four children. So we called the cave 'Four Children Cave'.*

The last few days I have been in two places at once. Those images of the river return to me again and again. It is only now I feel I can write. ... How to reconcile the

tawdry consumerism with the sacred places I have been? There is no connection. It is not grief as such, maybe a gentle melancholy – but these images keep popping up in front of my eyes. I hope they always shall – at least at times! When I arrived and we were bathing in the rapid at Canoe Ck – I asked the Colo to speak, to sing – to my two companions. I hope it did, for here were two more people who loved place!

3/12/04 At Kandos.

Here the full meaning of returning to Angorawa comes to me (living on within me), as I feel I step into the Dreamtime. I talk to place, but more than that – I *share* – even feel I need to *report*. A weight lifts off my shoulders and I know peace. Yet I also experience the need to show respect to place.

I realised from this that I have not given enough space to speak of Angorawa in terms of what it meant to me – phenomenologically and spiritually. ... We came late in the day to Angorawa ... I was a fair bit ahead and shot the small rapid that brings you to the pool. Wide (300 metres?), dark with rising bubbles and swirls of fish. To the east was the slanting purple-orange rock face with its myriads of bands and ledges. At the base, approachable only by water was the cave, now hidden by vegetation. I was concerned about whether it was a 'fit' place to camp (sometimes its full of mud!) – and I did not stop to welcome the pool. A fair way across I suddenly felt trepidation and my heart quailed a bit. I was here alone on the Rainbow Serpent pool – deep and dark – and worthy of respect, which in my haste I had not given. It was only a moment – the concern for my companions urged me on. ... Why had I quailed for a moment? After all I had dreamed for long of being back here in the heart of the Colo. I had had worrying dreams of houses and phone lines on the river ... And here I was – a son returning. This pool was 'deep' in many ways and 'large' in many ways also. There is a serene immensity to it. It is interesting how many times the word 'heart' turned up both in my own speech and in Bruce and John's. I think for a moment the immensity of its 'being', its essence made me feel like a mote floating in God's eye (or the Goddess's eye? Or Rainbow Serpent's eye?). ...

*I had dreamt for many years of seeing again the rock shelves above the junction. Angorawa. I came to them. I realised that I wanted to **share** my perplexity at the wilderness knot, my sadness at the confusion, my longing for **all** custodians to unite to protect the land (which is sacred). I stood at the end of a pool, looking at a burbling fall of water – with the most amazing cliffs above me. I guess I came with a troubled heart, a need to share – almost a need to **report**, a need to explain that I was trying to fight for this place and others like it. Yet I was only human, I was limited in energy and abilities, subject to doubt, depression, illness and despair. I found myself asking for help – coming to the heart to ask a 'boon'. 'What would I ask?' I spoke out loud as I pondered. Who was it who said we have always come to such places as 'supplicants'? Rolston? I would ask (I said) for the voice to sing this place, to communicate, to give expression to such beauty and wildness, to be a true voice for the wilderness. And I asked for peace, to **not** live in frustration and anger. And I asked for health, that I might continue to 'sing' this place and be able to come back to this place.*

... there were tears in my eyes when I turned away. I felt a weight lift from me – for I truly had shared. I had shared my pain and despair, I had asked for healing. I felt at peace. There in that place I was truly whole and content. The longing had been with me for so long to stand again here and here I was! I had fulfilled my custodial feelings

and duty. I had come back to the heart of Colo. I see it in my mind's eye now as I speak! And I smile. In a sort of happy daze I ambled back along the rock shelves. In my mind's eye I could see children playing here and jumping into the pools ... A weight had been lifted off my shoulders, and off my heart. Illuminated. At peace. Fulfilled? For a time perhaps – in that timeless place. Relieved? Yes, vastly. Relieved to be back. Tremendously. Restored or rejuvenated? Yes. Back home. Belonging.

25/7/05 Baiame Cave, near Dunns swamp

I return to Baiame Cave, feeling I am called (as a custodian) to do a ceremony. I 'talk' to it about intelligence of place and ask forgiveness for inadvertently angering the Bora ground. Peace comes with carrying out the ceremony, and key phrases repeat within my mind.

*I am at Baiame Cave alone ... I sat in that wonderful energetic happy pass and asked it why it was so sacred and special? ... The only answer I got back was 'does it matter?' – in other words accept it for what it **is**, honour it, love it. I also collected sprigs of eucalypt and wattle and geebung from below the pass. I walked to the edge of ... the old Bora ground. I sat and made a tiny fire and placed them one by one on the flame. I asked pardon for bringing women over the Bora ground I also asked for 'increase', for the life and love of the pass to spread across the land ... Earlier I sat below curved old Peppermints and asked them – who knew so much – to teach me the 'law'. I explained that I was not Dabee (Wiradjuri) by blood descent ... but that it should judge my heart and essence. One phrase sticks in my mind – 'is blood more important than love?'. Later ... another thought stuck in my mind – 'much has changed, but the love goes on'. This kept going through my mind. ... Night time now – I have just come back from my own personal 'ceremony of increase' ... under the stars of winter at the Bora Ground ... I wished that this land might live and that the people who live here now might love it more and honour it. ... I tried. I felt this place wanted a ceremony – and I have had a ceremony of one! ... I asked that I be accepted as a custodian of this place – I am **already** a carer. I feel at peace.*

27/7/05 Nullo Mountain

My loneliness and sorrow at mainstream Australian society emerges at Baiame Cave. I asked for renewal, for rain, and for respect for the land.

*I also found myself speaking of our society. First I said 'my people' – but I changed that, for I do not feel they **are** my people, and never have been I do not and never have felt I fitted in to mainstream Australian society. Always I was more interested in walking the bush – listening and learning. So I changed what I meant to say from 'my people' to 'my society'. I sat below the vibrant living pass and told it 'my society is mad – they do not listen to and love the land'. It was a sad and sorry thing to have to say ... So renewal from the drought was not the only thing I was asking – it was a renewal of the heart, the sense of wonder. A rebirth of the soul! I asked that the love and aliveness of that pass spread out across the land ... A reaching out, a call to love, ... All that day clouds gathered, and last night – back at Kandos – it rained, a gentle, gentle rain! No rain had been forecast – but still it fell to Earth. It felt good. It felt fitting.*

I experience again the place ‘living on inside me’, while the custodial phrase keeps running through my mind: ‘much has changed but the love goes on’.

The place still lives on inside me. I can see the curve of the tree against the sandstone I slept under. I can see the pass and the old, old trees around a natural rock slab I sat cross-legged on. I found myself addressing them as ‘grandfather’, for they were so old and had seen so much. Really my overall feeling of the trip was ‘acceptance’ – that I was comfortable there – welcome, even though I might not know the words, and dressed strangely. I came in reverence to learn, and it seemed to me I was accorded respect. I keep thinking of that phrase ‘much has changed but the love goes on’ – and I was part of that love going on.

28/7/05 Nullo Mountain

Hope and joy are also part of working through the wilderness knot, as finding common ground is healing. An understanding is evident of a certain blindness in many involved in the debate.

*The thesis process over the last few months has been most positive for me. ... has been an excellent dialogue process ... There was a commonality that was encouraging – even if many of them did not understand how close together they were. In a way – as an outsider I can see that most interviewees have their ‘tragic flaw’ if you like? Their failure in understanding, perception, research, history, feeling – that leads them to miss something or misconstrue it. And on a humbler note – I wonder what **my own** ‘tragic flaw’ may be? What am I missing?*

I experience a realisation that my past position was rather ‘defensive’, and that anger is the enemy of understanding, whereas compassion builds bridges.

*I used to get annoyed in the early days of the thesis when people said I was ‘defensive’. I remember quoting from Stuart Hill that ‘there is such a thing as justified anger’. And there is. But anger is the enemy of understanding. It does not lead to insights on the problem. Compassion does. I read my thesis proposal recently and realised that I **was** being unnecessarily defensive, and that that anger was a turn-off to a rational analysis of the knot – to seeing a way forward. And I **can** see a way forward. I have built bridges to many people*

My experience of wilderness, and my sense of belonging and custodianship react strongly against the ‘land needs people’ claim.

*People need the land, and the land enjoys the love of custodians – but it does not need us – that is my teaching. It may remember us? It will **not** die without us. It is one thing to celebrate the value of the bond between human and the land – that wonderful loving symbiosis... but it is quite another thing for us to conceive that the land needs us ... This debate spills over into responsibility and to ‘looking after the land’. There is a world of difference between feeling an obligation/ duty to respect and honour and love the land – and feeling responsible like an elder brother to a child. The land is not a child to be organised. It is something older, larger and wiser than us. ... Debbie points out that Aborigines talk to country, seek counsel from country, send it news.*

You don't do that just to an offshoot of humanity – you do that to an equal – or to something greater than yourself.

I reach a recognition that I can both stay true to my beliefs and also seek common ground, along with respectfully acknowledge the 'sticking points'.

*I am not going to abandon the word wilderness or resile from defending it. But I am going to seek commonality, put forward facts, try and depolarise and reduce confusion. But in the end there may be sticking points – and 'the land needs humans' and the 'human artefact' debate are two that I see – where I am going to say 'I think this is wrong'. ... We might all argue that large natural intact areas ... should be protected. Then at least we know we are allies against the development onslaught – though we differ on whether the land needs humans – it does **not** need to be logged, mined or turned into a resort!*

14/10/05 Anchorage, Alaska

At the Wilderness Congress, I again experience something approaching fanaticism from two researchers speaking from a poststructuralist perspective. This brings forth anger, but also sorrow, on behalf of the land.

*They **stated** (not argued!) that wilderness was based on dualism, and that wilderness in Australia was based on terra nullius! And that Australia had only recently included the idea that Aborigines had lived there in its definitions. I replied that I was concerned that 'theory was taking over reality', that the argument that wilderness is based on dualism is a postmodernist position, **not** a given truth, and that wilderness as lanai had nothing to do with terra nullius. They showed the same zealotry as at Ecopolitics. ... the same commitment to the postmodernist manifesto – even if it hurts lanais. It is misplaced fanaticism – and the saddest thing is this idea that they are on a crusade to change the world – when all they are doing is repeating theory – bleak dead theory ... Can theory really brain-wash people so badly?*

20/10/05 Taipei, Taiwan

I experience disgust at a Western society so divorced from the land, and I engage in a dialogue with Mt. Denali (McKinley) in Anchorage.

*This is madness. The night before last I sat on the balcony of the Snow Goose in Anchorage and watched the last light on Denali and Mt. Foraker. Then I would look at the mad rush of Anchorage – and catch the muzak playing in the background. Then I would look again at Denali – 'The Great One'. I felt very close to it – and will miss it to be honest. I talked to it ... My sense of isolation from that society was so deep. How could they do that to the land? I asked Denali how we could touch their hearts? I suppose in a way I was entreating – begging – the 'Great One' to reach out and touch the hearts of white Alaskans, to curb their profligacy, their wastefulness, their uncaring rush to progress. ... I know I will keep those images of Denali and Foraker in my heart forever They are a shield for my soul, my caring, my love, in a dry and dead society ... I think we are talking about **collapse** here? No society can sustain such a development rush for so long – no society can be so divorced from the land, so almost '**hateful**' towards it. No society can forget to listen to the natural flows that*

sustain them. ... It's just that we need to make sure wilderness survives this madness, this sacrilege, this mania of consumption.

29/12/05 Kandos

My lived experience has brought home to me the sad realisation that not everyone will *want* dialogue.

*there will always be some who **don't** want to have dialogue, who want confusion, who want to ferment suspicion and even hatred for their own ends, because perhaps this gives them greater power? ... some will not step outside their prejudices and grant me mutual respect, or really listen to what I am saying. So for those there can really be no dialogue – for a mind has to be open to have dialogue. ... So it is a fundamental truth – you can't have dialogue with everyone – just those who will meet you half way! My only hope is that those who have closed minds might isolate themselves in the end, while the rest of us who can love and respect and listen get on with saving the wild!*

14/5/06 Nullo Mountain

I am exalted and exhausted after 'Finding Common Ground'.

I have been exalted but also exhausted. It is only now that I can write. The spirit of dialogue graced us yet again. Imagine – nobody walked out, nobody yelled out 'rubbish!', nobody got angry. There was one negative paper, yet that disappeared in the general positive energy. And people wanted to continue dialogue. That is surely a litmus test of success? ... It is a weight off my shoulders, though I am still drained. Yet every time I see one of the peaks in Wollemi (that I asked for a blessing from) – I still send it my thanks. There are so many things that could have gone wrong – yet they didn't! I feel the deepest thanks that we were indeed blessed, and things went so well. It's such a good beginning!

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION

This thesis is the culmination of years of intense activity by the Network, journal-writers, and myself. The two methodological approaches integrated well, with insights from one feeding into the other. I will discuss the PAR work in Cycles 1-3 and 5, then discuss the insights gained from the eleven interviews with ‘scholars’ in Cycle 4. Next, I will discuss the results from the wilderness journals. Finally I will examine the big picture and examine how we might find a way forward to loosen the wilderness knot. Although it has been mentioned in passing, I should reiterate my condensation of ‘large, natural, intact area’ to ‘lanai’. I thus speak of the ‘wilderness as lanai’ meaning of wilderness. These areas are ‘self-willed land’ (Nash 2001), or land that is self-managed (Foreman 2004) in the sense that the majority of ‘agency’ of actions is by the non-human and not by people. Providentially, ‘lanai’ is also a Polynesian word meaning ‘an outdoor living area’. This seemed appropriate, if the ‘living’ is understood to be that of the nonhuman as well as the human.

1. Participatory Action Research

1.1 Cycles 1-3 and 5 – In search of meaningful dialogue

Wilderness provokes strong passions, for when we discuss it we touch on humanity’s deepest relations with nature. It is at the centre of many debates within society. I shall try to elucidate some of the less well-known debates, however space precludes detailed analysis of all of these. The passions around such debates can lead to polarisation and a loss of communication. In regard to the exploitation strand, however, there is not necessarily any real breakdown in communication, more a clash of very different worldviews. Even for those with similar worldviews, Cycles 1-5 have shown just how difficult it is to develop *meaningful* dialogue about such a charged term as ‘wilderness’. Initially, people were not ready to listen, or to offer to

show respect to each other. They were probably suspicious whether the attempt at dialogue was genuine. It was only in Cycles 4 and 5 that the Network succeeded in making headway. Even then, it was clear how easily communication could fail if others used a different meaning of ‘wilderness’.

In Cycle 1, I found that others shared my uneasiness about the wilderness knot, which led to the formation of the Network. Even in that first cycle, centrally significant issues emerged, such as the debate between Bill and Rachel on confrontation versus dialogue. This brought out an interesting tension between confronting questionable claims, versus working within the ‘*Realpolitik*’ of our society to protect natural areas. They both agreed that wilderness should be protected, but differed radically as to the best methods. Cycle 1 included the Gooches Crater camp, which failed to build bridges with TOs, partly due to hasty planning, and a certain naivety in our approach. There was also the question of cultural differences, as bushwalking and camping are often not a strong aspect of contemporary Aboriginal society. It was later pointed out that in other similar situations, dialogue with indigenous people may take *three* (or more) attempts before people decided you were ‘serious’. This process showed that some things cannot be hurried.

Cycle 2 was a fairly ‘predictable’ action, we ran a seminar: ‘Wilderness Resurgence’. There were some interesting talks, and a positive ‘welcome to country’ by TO James. Sadly however, the main TO speaker Seamus pulled out at the last moment. Nevertheless, a number of people at the seminar spoke of how positive it was, that people seemed to be ‘listening’ to each other. Reason and Torbert (2001) maintain that in PAR, the ‘knowing’ in conferences resides not in the written reports but *in the dialogue itself*, and the actions undertaken. In this regard, the seminar succeeded. However, Cycles 1 and 2 showed that some TOs did not feel comfortable in an overnight campfire role, or in speaking at a formal seminar.

Cycle 3 was a series of forays into the public sphere. These forays highlighted *communication* problems about ‘wilderness’. Mini-cycle 3a generated some debate within the Network about whether I was *overstating* the case that wilderness was in

trouble and ‘going backwards’. This illustrated a recurring concern amongst one section of the Network. Wilderness may not have an image problem with the ‘public at large’ (as shown in the poll by Morgan 1996), but should we not recognise that it *does* have a problem with some parts of academia and bureaucracy, and some Aboriginal people? Or do you in fact endanger wilderness by acknowledging there *is* a problem, and thus legitimize criticisms that should perhaps be dismissed? This remains an important debate within the conservation movement. The majority of the Network decided to tackle the problem and promote dialogue so as to reduce the confusion. A certain negativity towards dialogue by the Australian conservation movement may in part explain why it has not previously produced an assessment of the wilderness knot.

My article in Mini-cycle 3a demonstrated the commonness of *intolerance* to differing views within this polarised debate. It also provoked reflection about what constitutes a ‘closed mind’. Did the Network have a closed mind? Were we ignorant? Were we really listening? By what standards can one judge this? The test I concluded would be ‘who’ is initiating dialogue, who is trying to reduce the confusion, who is sharing information? As long as a group seeks dialogue, shares information and seeks to reduce confusion, it makes it difficult to have *totally* closed minds. It should be recognised that all people have biases (Reason and Torbert 2001). In fact it is people’s biases which drive the passions in this debate. It is when biases become prejudices or absolute dogma that they reflect a closed mind. Nobody is truly a dispassionate observer (myself included) – but we can learn what others mean and what motivates their actions.

Mini-cycle 3b, (establishing the World Heritage Institute) demonstrated the degree to which some people will go *not* to mention the word ‘wilderness’, as it was seen as being ‘politically incorrect’. Instead, people spoke of ‘core’ areas, with only sparse reference to wilderness. In follow-up emails with anthropologist Tacon, it emerged that his definition was that ‘pure’ wilderness must have no sign of human influence or human history, and that it ceases to be wilderness if it receives *any* management (no matter how minimal). This resonates with statements such as ‘wilderness management is a blatant contradiction in terms’ (Nash 2001, p. 339), but is

problematic, as it rules out even ‘minimum intervention management’ or ‘active caring’ (Soule 1995) aimed at removing threats from outside such as exotic weeds. ‘Management’ thus covers a multitude of terms and philosophies. ‘Control’ of wilderness may be a blatant contradiction, since wilderness is self-willed land, but minimum intervention management to help it remain ‘self-willed’, I would argue is *not*.

This first highlighted the problem of different meanings of wilderness. In order to have meaningful dialogue, one needs to know *which* meaning of ‘wilderness’ the other person holds. Mini-cycle 3c (Ecopolitics XV Conference) included a lunchtime discussion with two poststructuralist philosophers who believed that any mention of ‘wilderness’ supported the idea that humans are *not* part of nature. How does one reach dialogue when faced with something approaching fanaticism, based on a different meaning of wilderness to that formally defined? The wilderness experiences of conservationists are some of the most profound events of their lives, which taught them that they *were* part of nature, that there is a value in understanding nature which goes beyond what language can convey. There was a prevalence throughout this debate of an intolerance which seems to stop people from hearing what others are saying. It seemed to render impossible the giving of respect. Part of the problem here may be explained by Butler’s (2002) argument that postmodernists rarely communicate outside their community. Possibly the same is true for other groups (such as anthropologists and conservationists)?

In the final Mini-cycle 3d (Two Fires Festival) I noted the difference between the stance of interviewees in their relaxed interviews (see Cycle 4), versus in a formal ‘talk’ situation. This was most apparent with Deborah Bird Rose, whose stance on wilderness seemed far more polarised in her talk than in her interview. Talks and formal papers seem to lend themselves to polemics, rather than to dialogue. The criticisms of wilderness in the literature might be partly a function of the medium of the ‘paper’ itself. This Cycle also provided an example of the extreme sensitivity around this debate. It was only once the real *meaning* of a careless comment about a TO was explained, that a conflict with a panel-member was resolved, and

communication resumed. In such a debate, miscommunication can set off such strong passions that dialogue is simply swamped, and people give up.

Cycle 5 saw the development of a joint partnership to hold a workshop: ‘Finding Common Ground’. It demonstrated the bridges that need to be built if people are going to listen and show respect. The events in this cycle also demonstrated the pitfalls of jointly organising something in partnership. Despite three positive planning meetings, enough miscommunication occurred *in between* these meetings that the partnership almost fell apart. This can be portrayed as a miscommunication/ dialogue spiral, as shown in Figure 3.

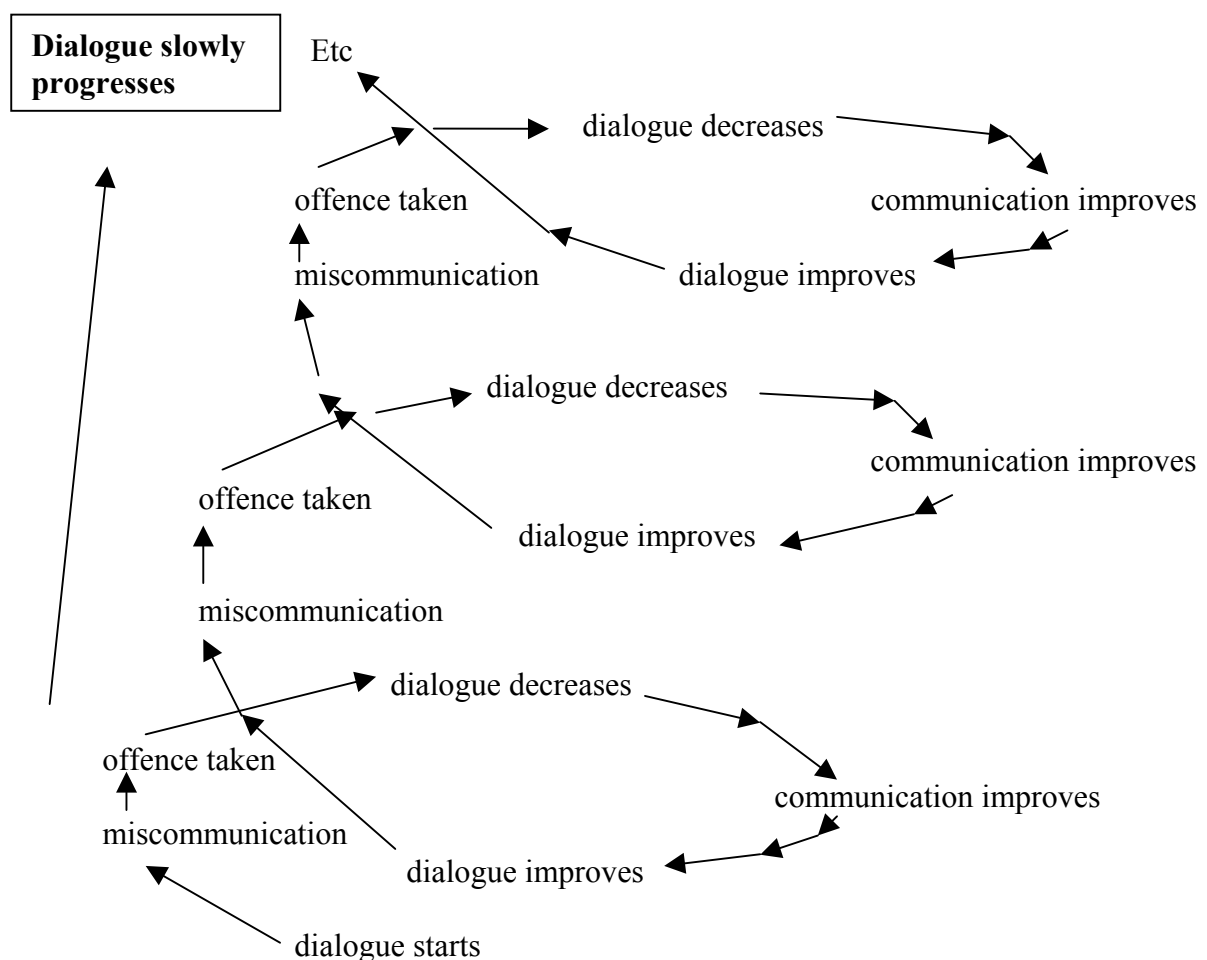


Figure 3. The miscommunication/ dialogue spiral

Several such cycles occurred, though dialogue slowly advanced with each spiral. This miscommunication spiral has interesting parallels with the cyclic spiral of PAR itself (Lewin 1947). One miscommunication source was emails, as these do not convey the tone of spoken words. Another source was that people are busy with their

own concerns. As someone at the workshop noted, we need to ‘walk in each other’s shoes’ more often. Another key source of friction was a failure to initially establish *how* the partnership was to operate (for example, do decisions at joint meetings need to be ratified by the partners?). Another issue is that people have different styles of doing things. In general, meetings were the means whereby communication improved, with ‘Finding Common Ground’ being the most recent step forward in improving dialogue.

Seemingly trivial issues need to be dealt with if one is to gain ‘action’ on something. Another insight from this cycle was the value of a ‘talking stick’ meeting (see Chapter 6). This got people to speak on what they *really felt* about the Blue Mountains. I believe that without this meeting, the workshop ‘Finding Common Ground’ could not have been a success. The talking stick meeting allowed groups to see others as real people, and to understand some of the stories and feelings behind their actions. It allowed them to accept that the ‘other’ was indeed worthy of respect. The energy in that meeting generated a sense of having ‘shared’ something, and was invaluable in terms of building a degree of trust.

‘Finding Common Ground’ was the culmination of the dialogue process. Rather than the ‘disaster’ predicted by George, it was a success. To be able to discuss such issues without people cutting across each other, without anger, without anyone walking out – was a notable achievement. People *did* show respect for each other, and did listen. People agreed that we shared a love of the land. People agreed that TOs and conservation groups should seek to work together. People agreed that there *was* common ground, even though there were also differences. We can (and should) *respect* those differences. Most importantly, people wanted the dialogue to *continue*. It showed us that we were on the right track, that we can indeed reach meaningful dialogue through respect and listening. In that regard, it was an excellent beginning for future ongoing dialogue about ‘wilderness’.

What then had we learned about how to gain meaningful dialogue? What points emerge from this process that have more *universal relevance* to the wilderness debate? When we started, we believed that dialogue needed to involve everyone.

However, it became apparent that dialogue may fail between wilderness advocates and those who follow a strong resourcist and exploitation agenda, as their worldviews are too different. It is better to focus on those whose worldviews are similar (such as TOs and conservationists). Even then, this research showed that dialogue is *not* in fact for everyone. Some people, for their own reasons, do not want dialogue, and will resist or oppose it. However, it also became clear that you don't *need* to have dialogue with everyone to actually 'act'. The respectful, listening majority can leave the polarised group behind, and together act to change things.

To do this however, we all need to move past our own individual and group intolerance. This is often difficult, and thus polarisation continues. Each polarised group then tends to conduct an internal monologue within itself (justifying its position). People tend to dismiss the other, and label them as 'the enemy'. Successful dialogue involves stepping outside comfort zones and 'given truths'. This requires an effort on everyone's part. Less common but more serious is 'fanaticism', defined as 'extreme and unreasoning enthusiasm' for a cause (Macquarie Dictionary 1981). The fanatic is almost inevitably intolerant of any differing view, as he or she does not apply rational thought. I am not speaking just of devotion to, or enthusiasm for, a cause. Most activists rightly feel such zeal, it is when it ceases to be amenable to rational argument, that it becomes fanaticism. This can be manifested on any side of the issue. Something approaching fanaticism was evident in a couple of cycles, where people *refused* to communicate any further about 'wilderness'.

As noted in Figure 3, miscommunication is common, and is the enemy of dialogue. It happens easily, the other person may take offence, and dialogue slows. Of course, this applies primarily to situations where groups actually do share common views. In contrast, many exploiters actually *do* understand what wilderness advocates mean – they just don't agree. Dialogue may thus fail if world views are radically different. Lastly, *persistence* is essential to reach meaningful dialogue. It is no use having just one meeting, and then walking away because it did not go as you envisaged. Dialogue takes time, energy and enthusiasm, which makes it *tiring*. The load needs to be shared around, otherwise the key organiser may burn out. Accordingly, you need a committed group seeking dialogue, so that tasks (and expertise) can be

shared. We were gifted with that in the Network and Institute. In summary, dialogue about ‘wilderness’ is difficult even for those with similar worldviews. The process above has demonstrated certain ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ towards reaching meaningful dialogue about wilderness.

1.2 Cycle 4 – Insights from interviews with eleven scholars

Within the 11 people interviewed in Cycle 4 were some of key scholars who have written about, and sometimes criticised, the term ‘wilderness’. These interviews were a major vehicle of *dialogue* in themselves. I was able to come far closer to grasping what these scholars really ‘believed’ than I ever could by just reading their papers. My decision to open with ‘setting the scene’ questions was valuable to get interviewees out of their ‘prepared positions’.

In overview, *all* of the interviewees lamented the large scale clearing of native vegetation in Australia. All of them also valued lanais (though Recher wanted roads through these). Given the breadth of viewpoints, it was remarkable (and hopeful) that they did *all* value lanais. All believed also that humans are a part of nature, even if they pointed out that ‘natural’ does not mean ‘good’. Apart from Flannery, all interviewees believed in an *intrinsic value* to nature. This too is notable, given our society’s antagonism to intrinsic value. Nobody other than Flannery seemed to believe philosophically that humans really *owned* the land. There was good support for the term ‘custodian’ or ‘carer’, instead of ‘owner’. There was also strong support for *both* social and environmental justice, and a belief that we must have both. It was very obvious that there was poor understanding of the formal definitions of wilderness outside of conservationists. Interviewees came up with a number of alternative words to wilderness: *large natural intact areas*, *core lands*, *quiet country*, *flourishing country*, *nature*, *natural areas*, and *country + natural integrity*. There was only moderate support for ‘wild country’ as a term instead of wilderness. All of the interviewees agreed that wilderness was a place as well as a concept. There was roughly equal support on the question of whether wilderness ignores Aboriginal history. Most seemed to think that it might have *in the past*, even if it did not today. No one (other than Flannery) believed that the land was *literally* a human artefact, though there was extensive confusion around the meanings of ‘influence’ and

‘create’. Only Flannery and Recher thought the value of wilderness to biodiversity was overstated. Everyone except Archer saw a spiritual significance to wilderness. Only Archer, Flannery, and Recher thought there possibly should be resource use (multiple use) in wilderness.

It soon became clear when considering the insights that emerged, that some so-called ‘wilderness’ issues are in fact much broader, and are about the *whole landscape*. This is hardly surprising, as the literature review showed that whenever we talk about ‘wilderness’ we in fact talk about how humans relate to nature. Other insights are indeed specific to wilderness. I shall discuss insights gained under these two headings, first ‘the land’ and then ‘wilderness’.

The land

So how can we visualise all these interacting insights, and the spectra of thought involved with them? Figure 4 shows the many spectra of thought operating within what we loosely call ‘the land’. I do not suggest that there is necessarily a ‘right’ or a ‘wrong’ side of this figure. Nor do I believe that these are ‘dualisms’, they are *spectra*, and it is the multitude of positions in the middle (or ‘electron cloud’ as George put it) that make up the tangled meanings around ‘the land’. However, every spectrum has two ends, so I will speak of these ends, and refer (for example) to ‘ecocentrism as opposed to anthropocentrism’. This is not thinking dualistically, but merely distinguishing the two ends which form the spectrum of many middle positions. We can see this figure as a ‘mind-map’, and the many possible positions within it as ‘mind-sets’. It is essential that we see the *middles* as well as the ends, for they make up society’s collective ‘mind-set’. In other words, all these spectra can be involved when people speak about wilderness and the land. The use of mind-maps here to map spectra of thought in the wilderness debate is new, though Skolimowski (1992) makes use of such mind-map figures to describe ‘ecological consciousness’, though he calls them ‘mandalas’.

There is a lot going on in Figure 4, a testament to the tangled meanings around our views of ‘the land’. People in the Network have pointed out that some of these are concepts, others are theories or philosophies. I don’t suggest that each spectrum is

Dialogical Activism

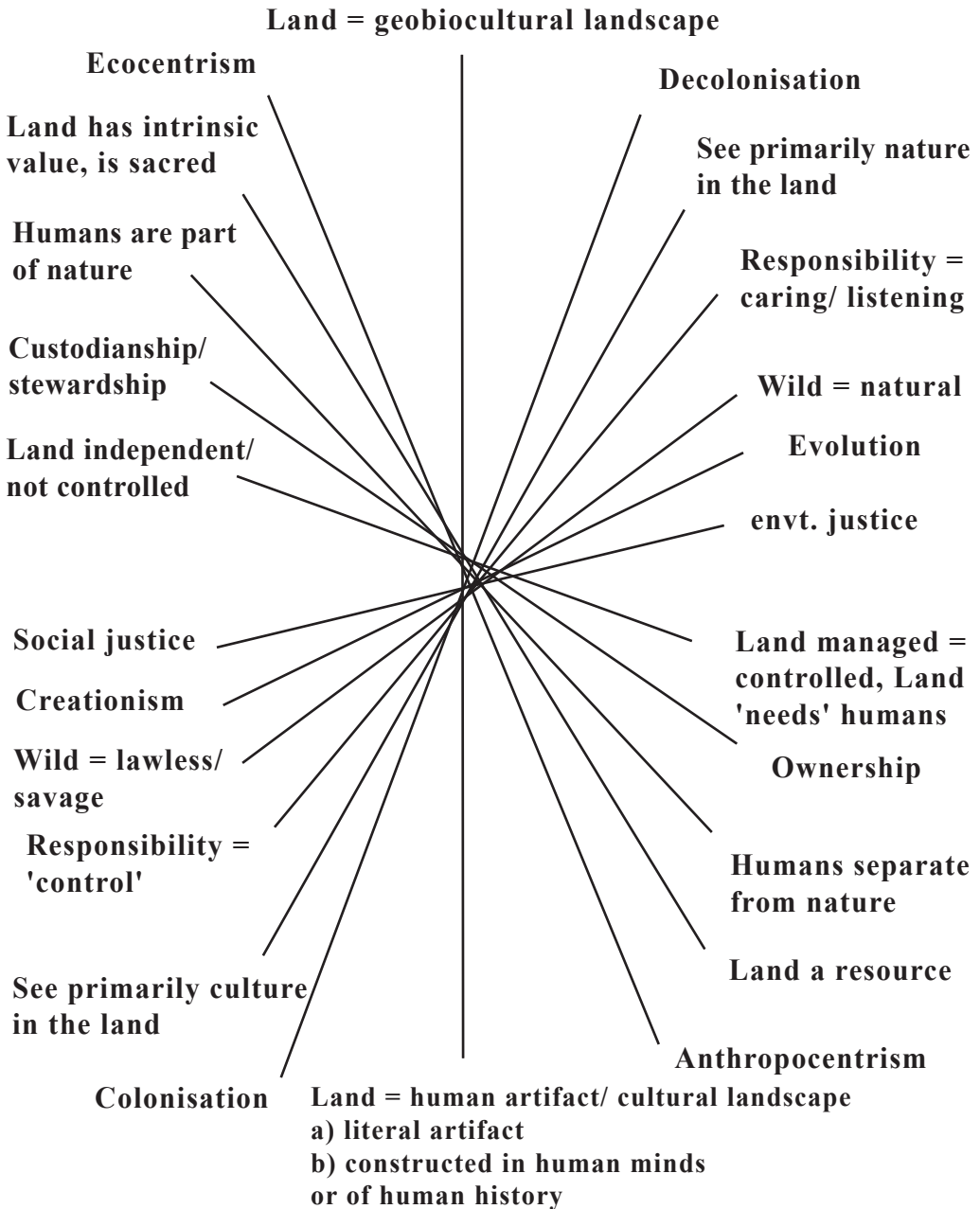


Figure 4. Mind-map of the spectra of 'wilderness issues' to do with the land

equivalent, just that we recognise that all these things can be interacting in people's minds, and contributing to the confusion. I propose '*dialogical activism*', an activism that seeks meaningful dialogue, seeks to move past polarisation, intolerance and fanaticism. I suggest dialogical activism as a promising approach to reduce confusion and untangle meanings. Such an activism, I would argue, seeks to shift society's mind-set more towards the top end of these spectra. It would not rule out confrontation (as this may be necessary for media and politicians), but would not rely *only* on confrontation. I do not mean to suggest that all spectra should be shifted all the way to the top. For example, Plumwood, Rose and Hill argue for *respectful use* of the land, where we are talking about a *balance* between seeing the land as sacred and seeing the land as a resource. A dialogical activism would however seek to move the mind-set away from seeing the land *only* as a resource. Similarly, I am not suggesting that we see only nature in the landscape, but that we see *both* natural and cultural influence. Similarly, I am suggesting we need *both* social and environmental justice. I will discuss spectra and insights below, particularly considering the middle grounds, and how hopefully dialogical activism might be able to shift these.

Are humans part of nature?

The question of whether 'humans are part of nature', and what this means to how people relate to the land, is central to the wilderness debate. The observation by Plumwood that humans are part of nature, but not an *indistinguishable* part of nature is, I believe, central to much of the confusion. Given that we are self-aware (with the powerful technology noted by Lesslie), means we are distinctive. Similarly, being 'part of nature' does not mean nature is thus *human*, or that the other parts of nature should be humanised, as Plumwood noted. Lesslie thought it obvious we are 'part of nature', but that this wasn't really the point, because the distinction was the level of the technology employed by a society. However, another aspect is the fact that humanity has not 'always' been a part of nature (as Figgis and Hill noted), in terms of our short evolutionary history. They were keen to acknowledge the long evolutionary history *before* humans evolved.

Interestingly, none of the scholars here seriously questioned whether 'nature' existed, and Hill and Rose described themselves as 'environmental realists'.

Plumwood (2003) writes about academic ‘nature scepticism’, and the literature review has listed several arguments that ‘nature’ no longer exists. The oldest of these arguments comes from Marxism (Smith 1990), while another group comes from postmodernism (Sessions 1996, p. 33). These are largely ideological, but Hay (2002, p. 22) points out that a third group of such arguments comes from within environmental thought itself (McKibben 1989), chiefly due to concern over human impact on the Earth. While acknowledging the extent of human impact, scholars interviewed in general had no trouble distinguishing that even while humans were part of nature, there was a ‘nature’ that represented the nonhuman world. The interviewees *did* seem to know what ‘natural’ meant, that it was about nonhuman nature that maintains ecological integrity, so that ecosystems can flourish and thrive, and have not been (as Hill put it) ‘converted’ by commodity culture.

There was some concern over ‘natural’, with Rose expressing concern about what this meant, preferring to use the undefined term *flourishing*. Similarly, Figgis acknowledged concern about ‘natural’, preferring to use ‘ecological integrity’. Lesslie also noted that ‘naturalness’ was ‘a bit loaded’. This concern seemed to arise out of a belief that use of the term ‘natural’ implied you don’t think humans are a part of nature. However, Plumwood pointed out this need not be the case. Scholars such as Rose and Figgis are clearly casting around for a replacement word (‘flourishing’, ‘ecological integrity’, ‘thriving’), but these *equally* are not adequately defined. It would seem to me more sensible to keep using ‘natural’, whilst specifying that humans are indeed a (distinctive) part of nature. We would thus avoid any need for a replacement word, which might itself later suffer the same fate. The interviewees here thus believed in the reality of the non-human world, though a certain reticence amongst some to mention ‘natural’ probably does reflect the ascendancy of nature scepticism within academia.

Several scholars noted that humans were setting themselves apart from nature, and that we don’t understand ourselves in ecological terms (including our ecological dependencies). Several noted that just because humans are ‘natural’ does not mean that everything we do is good or ethical. Figgis noted that the ‘humans are natural’ debate had been used to argue settlements should be introduced into wilderness, which she thought was a ‘nonsense argument’. This conforms with experience of

introducing people into national parks in South America (Soule 2002). Stewart noted what Nash (2001, p. 86) has also pointed out, that while we are a part of nature, we are not *acting* like this, as ‘we have set ourselves outside of that’. In Figure 3, I am not suggesting that dialogical activists are seeking to see *only* nature in the land, but that they see *both* nature and culture in the land (whereas in recent times culture has dominated, as in the term ‘cultural landscape’).

It would seem the desire to break down the culture/ nature dualism is having a major impact on the wilderness knot. The poststructuralist philosophers I encountered during this project seemed to feel that breaking down this dualism meant getting rid of the concept of ‘wilderness’. They could not explain to me *why* this was so, however. Certainly, breaking down the boundary between nature and culture is the aim of philosophers such as Haraway (1997). Plumwood (2001) however has warned that it depends totally on how you do this. Some scholars seem to take this stance because they do not work with the ‘wilderness as lanai’ meaning, but rather with the ‘human exclusion’ meaning of wilderness (for example the poststructuralist scholars at Ecopolitics XV). It is thus unfortunate that ‘wilderness as lanai’ seems to have become ‘collateral damage’ in the move to break down the nature/ culture split. Some politicians in the Left seem to adopt this view also, perhaps explaining a notable reluctance to speak of ‘wilderness’.

A hopeful middle ground in terms of Figure 4 would be to acknowledge that humans *are* a part of nature, but that we are a distinctive part of nature. Similarly, being part of nature is an evolutionary description, not an ethical ‘carte blanche’ to do whatever we like with the world. Gare (1995, p. 109) has argued for ‘humans to be conceived of as essentially cultural beings’, while still seeing themselves as part of nature. Rolston (2001) and Plumwood (1993, 2003) have argued similarly. The middle ground would be to accept that human culture *is* distinctively unique, though it is indeed ‘part of nature’. We can thus keep both terms without seeking to conflate the two, and without any need to dispense with words such as ‘nature’ or ‘natural’, which recognise the nonhuman world.

Intrinsic value, sacredness and respect

Another spectrum is that of land having *intrinsic value* versus being a value-less resource. Most interviewees seemed to believe in intrinsic value. Plumwood thought philosophy needed to move on past this debate, and actually consider other species. Both Archer and Lesslie felt their intellectual understanding of the natural world had *added* to their appreciation of its intrinsic value. Thus our knowledge can give us greater understanding and love of nature. If this is the case however, one can only wonder why *more* scientists do not actually speak out about such love of nature? It was of interest that biologist Recher's (and perhaps Lesslie's) intrinsic value, like the 'inherent worth' of Taylor (1986), seemed to be limited to the *living* part of nature. This reflects a position where value is attributed only to that which is formally 'alive'. 'Geodiversity' (Dixon 1996) was thus not granted intrinsic value, though both Plumwood and Rose clearly believed it merited this.

Flannery was the exception to the others regarding 'intrinsic value', saying he did not think nature had intrinsic value. He said he had 'deeply entrenched humanist views', and that we only perceive the world through 'the lens of our human brains'. Hence for him nature had no value on its own, only when we perceived and valued it. This argument is an example of what Fox (1990, p. 25) and Eckersley (1992) call the 'anthropocentric fallacy'. Flannery maintains that because we perceive the world through the human mind and give value to what we perceive (which is true) – we cannot attribute an intrinsic value to nature. This is no more rational than maintaining that 'I' as a white male can not possibly attribute value to a black female. Eckersley (1992, p.55) explains that it conflates the identity of the perceiving subject with the content of what is perceived and valued. If 'I' attribute value to Wollemi, it will be a *human* value, but that doesn't mean that I cannot believe this value to be intrinsic to the nonhuman of Wollemi, irrespective of whether Wollemi is of instrumental value to me or other humans. To argue nature has no intrinsic value would be to ignore the presence in humanity of both compassion and altruism (Menon and Sakamoto 2002). It also disputes the essential truth that 'the natural world has value', whether or not humans benefit from it. In fact, one could argue that it is *because* a human (as a self-aware part of nature) *does* perceive the beauty of the natural world, that he or she attributes intrinsic value to it. Skolimowski (1992) notes

that ‘the natural condition of the human being who is alive is to be enchanted by the world’. In the light of the discussion by Plumwood (2001) of the anthropocentric tendencies of humanism, it is interesting that Flannery identified his own strong humanist views. In his interview I did try and raise the issue of the ‘anthropocentric fallacy’, but while he became thoughtful, he did not respond to this. At our Mt Tomah review in Cycle 4, many of the Network also had problems with the same issue, so clearly it can cause confusion.

Related to intrinsic value is the question of whether ‘*the land is sacred*’. Quite a few scholars have difficulties with ‘sacred’ and its definition. Plumwood thought ‘sacred’ was a tricky concept, as we have to use the land, whereas sacred tends to be seen as ‘beyond use’. Archer and Recher thought that ‘sacred’ implied organised religion. However, while Figgis was also not religious, she liked the implication of respect implied by the word ‘sacred’, a cultural value which has protected sacred places. For Flannery, the land was sacred for *human* reasons, as it ‘receives our bodies when we die’. Stewart noted there are levels of sacredness (such as songlines). Hill believed the Aboriginal tradition was that land held *both* utilitarian and sacred uses. However, she was also suspicious of romanticism and the ‘holiness of nature’ (similar to Cronon 1996), for she thought this only seemed possible when it was associated with a ‘trashing of nature’.

Related again to intrinsic value is the question of ‘*respect for the land*’. Plumwood thought we needed more a sense of responsibility, an understanding of the way it supports us. We as a society have separated ‘respect’ and ‘use’, so she argues for *respectful use*. Stewart also noted that we needed something deeper than respect: ‘we need to be part of the process’. Flannery thought respect ‘wasn’t his word’ as he has to *use* nature. He did not say why he could not respect something he used. Rose thought it ‘bullshit’ that you cannot respect what you use, though this idea seemed ‘embedded in philosophy’. This relates to Skolimowski (1992), who argued that society’s technological consciousness had ‘de-sacralised’ the world. Indeed, why can’t our mainstream society respect what we use, not seemingly only areas we set aside from use? Oelschlaeger (1991) explains that modernism is the cause, yet Gare

(1995) argues postmodernism has done no better. This may be because in both cases the 'other' has not been expanded to include the nonhuman world?

A hopeful middle ground regarding this spectrum would be moving towards a belief in intrinsic value, moving towards a deep respect for nature, which ensures 'respectful use' of *all* resources. Such a move is arguably critical in solving the whole environmental crisis. Nature would thus be seen as 'sacred', but would still be used, though special areas of high sacredness would be exempted from resource use, which would not occur everywhere. In this middle ground, the protection of wilderness as *lanai* would *not* go hand in hand with a 'trashing' of the rest of nature. Rather, an acknowledgment and respect for the sacredness of the whole landscape would ensure respectful use of resources in some areas, but total conservation in others such as wilderness.

Anthropocentrism and ecocentrism

The dominance of anthropocentrism in society, and the environmental problems it causes, has been noted by Naess (1973), Taylor (1986), and Smith (1998). Anthropocentrism misses the point of our human place in the world, as part of the web of nature. No scholar interviewed identified themselves as 'anthropocentric'. Plumwood, Rose and Hill did not like the term 'centrism', but agreed that if not ecocentric, they shared an 'ecological consciousness'. The variations on the ecocentric theme were interesting, with Lesslie and Recher seeing themselves as 'biocentric' (seemingly discounting geodiversity). Flannery did not identify himself as being either anthropo- or eco-centric, though he did say he held 'humanist views about the value of people'. He emphasised 'it's what we think that counts'. However he then noted that he did not like the word *custodian*, as he was part of the land, and 'it was custodian of him'. He thought the term custodian was making him 'the most powerful element'. This seemed to be a criticism of humans being placed centrally, even though elsewhere he commonly seems to argue this. Plumwood (2003) has argued that Flannery was very 'human-centred', but it would seem from his interview he is somewhat ambivalent about anthropocentrism. Recher interestingly observed that while he himself was an ecocentrist, he believed the majority of

ecologists were not. This comment resonates with that of Noss and Cooperrider (1994, p. 339), who in the epilogue to a biodiversity conference noted that: ‘the people who care profoundly about toads and liverworts ... are a minority even in this room’. This seemed to reflect a disillusionment with biologists, suggesting many don’t believe in intrinsic value. Although the authors argue they are ‘optimistic’, it seems to express a certain despair that anthropocentrism and resourceism are still dominant within science.

Related to this debate is the idea that if humans have *any* involvement or influence over nature, it thus becomes ‘human’. We saw this issue earlier in Cycle 3 with Tacon’s comments, where any area managed by humans could not be defined *by him* as ‘wilderness’. Plumwood (2003) has discussed this issue, and it also relates strongly to the human artefact debate, as well as the earlier discussion about the drive to break down the human/ nature dualism. Plumwood noted in her interview that human influence is not the same as human construction, though they are often confused. It also relates to what has been described as the ‘management mania’ of managers (Lyon 1992). Due to its ambiguity, where some see it as equivalent to ‘control’, there seems to be a general dislike of any ‘management’ (Nash 2001, p. 339), no matter how minimal (such as exotic weed management).

The positive middle ground of this spectrum would see dialogical activism trying to move society towards ecocentrism, not in an anti-human way, but through an extension of compassion *beyond* our own species. Part of this might be the further explanation of the ‘anthropocentric fallacy’. Another part of this might be development of an ‘ecological’ humanism (Skolimowski 1992), one which cares for the nonhuman world. Similarly, since the term ‘centrism’ is criticised on philosophical grounds, the use of ‘ecological consciousness’ might be more appropriate. Ongoing education about anthropocentrism within our society remains essential.

Ownership vs. custodianship

Most scholars interviewed were negative about the philosophical idea that people could ‘own’ the land. Flannery was the only one claiming to believe in ownership. Plumwood saw ‘ownership’ of land as a very bad model, as it assumed the land was empty when we came, a ‘terra nullius view’. James noted that he had not met an Aboriginal person who thought they ‘owned’ the land. Both Aboriginal scholars interviewed supported the idea of *joint custodianship* of the land by black and white. This sample of two cannot indicate that most Aboriginal people disagree with Langton (1996) that conservationists were ‘usurping’ the Aboriginal stewardship role. However, it does show that there is an alternative view which sees the need for white and black people to feel joint custodianship. This diversity of Aboriginal views was also pointed out strongly by TOs at ‘Finding Common Ground’, but does not seem to have been readily acknowledged by academia in Australia, though acknowledged for Amerindians (Nabhan 1995). However, not everyone preferred the word ‘custodian’ to ‘owner’. Rose (and James partly also), preferred the term ‘carer’. Rose thought ‘custodianship’ had possessive connotations, and ‘carer’ was used as it seemed to lack these.

This debate also intersects with restorative justice and the land rights debate. For example, when asked about the term ‘custodianship’, Hill (as an ACF campaigner) reported that she had received negative responses from Aboriginal people. Some saw the use of the term as ‘just another form of dispossession’, and some Aboriginal people said they *owned* it, it was ‘their land’. In this regard, Plumwood made the interesting observation that:

I think perhaps some indigenous people might have mistakenly taken up the more Europeanized position there ... Or some indigenous advocates ... I think you can see this rather clearly with Rhys Jones original work. ... Aboriginal people had ‘title’ to the land because they had farmed it. So this directly appeals to a very European colonial conception of ‘ownership’.

There is also the question of whether ‘rights over land’ is the same as ownership. When I asked this, Hill responded that Aboriginal people ‘think it is’. However, the High Court’s decision on ‘native title’ in Australia accepted that there are rights over the land (for example visitation) which are separate from legal ‘ownership’. Hill

believed that Aboriginal rights over land ‘were not unfettered’, and she too had ‘an obligation and responsibility to land’. This question will be returned to in the phenomenological discussion.

Part of the problem in this debate lies in the failure to distinguish between ‘philosophical’ ownership and the legal construct of Torrens title we use to parcel up the land (Washington 2005). It is quite consistent to argue philosophically that nobody really ‘owns’ the land (that we are all just custodians), yet support Aboriginal land rights for restorative justice reasons. It is also consistent to argue as non-indigenous custodians that the land must be protected, due to our *own* feelings of custodianship. As Plumwood points out, falling into the philosophical pitfall of possessive ownership is a central part of the problem of how mainstream Australian society sees ‘the land’. She also points out that using only the remaining natural areas and lanais to bear the brunt of restorative justice, in a hand-back of national parks and wilderness, is itself unequal. This creates a possible future conflict for management, as such communities are seeking to find an income stream, while society is only handing back undamaged natural lands. There was some recognition of this conundrum at ‘Finding Common Ground’.

The positive middle ground to this spectrum would thus seem to lie in making the distinction between the fallacy (in philosophical, geological and evolutionary terms) of human ‘ownership’ of anything, and the reality of the legal constructs governments use to parcel out land or ‘rights’ to land. Dialogical activism would thus seek to move the mind-set well towards custodianship in a philosophical sense. It is important to recognise however, that supporting joint custodianship does not mean one does not support restorative social justice and land rights – just that whoever legally ‘owns’ the land should act as a custodian and carer of it. Some Aboriginal interests are clearly worried about the term ‘custodian’, that it might be used to fight against land claims. Dialogical activism needs to overcome this misconception. It might help if the legal term ‘Traditional Owners’ in legislation was changed to ‘Traditional Custodians’? The idea of joint custodianship (where everyone has obligations of care for the land) would seem a useful one to advance protection of wilderness as lanai.

Social and environmental justice

A majority of scholars acknowledged there *can* be a tension between social justice and environmental justice, but equally argued that we need *both* forms of justice. Most scholars focused on ‘social justice’. James observed interestingly in regard to unreserved ‘hand back’ of national parks that: ‘I would not be confident that the land would come off well’. This reflects a concern for environmental justice and the ‘rights of nature’ (Nash 1989). It also raises the clear need for sympathetic management, irrespective of who formally ‘owns’ the land.

Figgis pointed out that most wilderness advocates are also passionate about social justice. The focus on social justice in the interviews seemed to reflect its current dominance in intellectual circles. On the other hand, the broad support for *both* types of justice would seem a promising sign, a recognition that these two things are linked (as Plumwood and Rose argue). Part of the problem here is that much of society has trouble seeing that there *is* something beyond social justice, where (as Soule 2002 argues) human compassion needs to be extended *beyond* our species to the rest of the world. Those who do not recognise nature’s intrinsic value are unlikely to acknowledge any ethical need to be ‘equally just’ to the nonhuman. There is an ongoing question of what ‘rights of the land’ might actually mean. At a minimum I believe this would be a ‘right to be’ and to be protected. A wider discussion of ‘rights’ is found in Nash (1989).

In philosophical postmodernist circles, to date there seems not to have been any key figures who have argued forcefully for the extension of compassion for the ‘other’ to the nonhuman world, though Oelschlaeger (1991) and Abram (1996) have contributed to this idea. The spectrum of social and environmental justice, and its relationship to ‘terra nullius’ remains of critical importance to the wilderness knot. Part of the problem seems to be the failure to acknowledge that there *is* such a thing as environmental justice. To date, few academics, or even conservationists, actually use the term. Given that passions around *social justice* have arguably been a reason for the decline in the use of ‘wilderness’, further research here would be valuable.

Productive middle ground would be where all agree we need *both* types of justice, that they have to go together. However, this means overcoming the inherent anthropocentrism in our society. There has now been a long overdue acknowledgment of the need for social justice and reconciliation in Australia. However, so strong has this been amongst the Left and the socially progressive element of society, that (even within conservation groups) this seems to have overwhelmed a commitment to environmental justice. Dialogical activism would thus seek to ensure that *both* forms of justice work hand in hand. This means arguing clearly for the ‘rights of the land’ as well as ‘land rights’.

The land – independence, control, responsibility, ‘looking after’ and ‘need’

There are two spectra that relate here, one is that around the meaning of responsibility and the other is that around independence versus management. The phrase ‘looking after the land’ brings up two words repeatedly – ‘responsibility’ and ‘obligation’. Lesslie makes an interesting point:

*I am interested in the idea ... whether there really is a fundamental obligation that humans owe the environment ... that kind of transcends or is above culture ... concessions have to be made **regardless** of culture ... everyone has obligations.*

Clearly, many people feel an obligation to care for the land. One could call this obligation a ‘need’. Obligation generally proceeds *one-way*, where you are obligated to do something. ‘Responsibility’ however can be seen in *two* different ways. It can be seen as this obligation to care for the land, but it can also be seen in an anthropocentric way, as in a senior ‘looking after’ or *controlling* a junior. ‘Responsibility’ is also used as a political word in terms of land rights, in that TOs seek to gain responsibility (= ownership) for ‘their’ country. Clearly, while James recognised that his statement that the ‘land needs humans’ sounded anthropocentric – he actually meant the ‘obligation to protect’ meaning. I asked him ‘what you are saying is - being part of the land, that interaction, that love between the human and the natural *has* to be there?’, and he agreed. I think it is important to realise that responsibility has these very different meanings. The term responsibility was used a

lot at 'Finding Common Ground', where most (if not all) users seemed to mean the 'obligation to care for' sense.

The Western desire to control the land is well known, and has roots that arguably go back to Greek rationalism and Judeo-Christianity (Oelschlaeger 1991). However, associated with this debate is also the question raised by Aboriginal people of whether '*the land needs people*'. The extreme form of this debate seems to argue that without humans the land dies, though no scholar here argued this. Few conservationists or scientists would agree that the land dies without humans. After all, Antarctica was in places teeming with life when first visited. Similarly, Aboriginal people died out on Kangaroo Island 4,000 years ago (when the sea cut the island off from the mainland), however the land did not lose its vitality. Its species mix did change however (Flannery 2005, pers. comm.). Similarly, a 'paradise' without humans teeming with biodiversity has recently been entered by humans for the first time in Papua (SMH 2006).

The 'land needs humans' debate did not figure prominently in the literature review. Little has been written about this, though (Mullet 1992) argued 'we as Aboriginals belong to the land, we're part of the land, so the land needs our presence ... We can bring the spirit back to the land'. In contrast, it has been noted that all humans tend to destroy the very resources on which they depend, especially with rapid population growth and technological and social change (Soule 1995). The 'land needs humans' debate emerged frequently in the interviews. James felt the land 'suffers' if it doesn't have humans to 'look after it'. Similarly, Rose thought that 'flourishing land' showed the traces of Aboriginal care. Archer noted that ecosystems changed in Kakadu when human influence changed (disadvantaging some species), arguing this showed that the land does *need* people. Flannery argued similarly, that humans *need* to be there to maintain biodiversity. Recher however, didn't think that indigenous people had 'any great ecological understanding of land management and conservation'. Hill and Figgis were more sceptical of the actual 'need' for humans. Figgis noted that Wollemi NP hasn't had traditional custodians for a long time: 'and it still seems to be in good shape'. Hill noted that for many Aboriginal people, changes in ecosystems

are seen as occurring *because* they are not doing the ‘increase ceremonies’, not singing those stories: ‘so it makes perfect sense to them’.

It seems there is a confusion of ‘need’ with the fact that humans can *influence* ecosystems. Thus, changing such influences (for example when humans are no longer present) will affect some species. Such changes actually show that certain species need particular fire regimes (or other practices), rather than that the land ‘needs’ humans as such. There also seems to be something of a confusion between *caring* for the land (including ceremonies), with the idea that it ‘needs’ us. Many TOs in fact seem to be talking about this deep connection and caring when they speak of the land ‘needing’ people. A degree of rubberiness is thus involved with this phrase and its meaning. There are also of course different kinds of ‘need’. ‘Need’ can mean a ‘necessity’, a ‘want’ or ‘lack’, or an ‘obligation’. The phrase ‘the land needs humans’ generally means it is a *necessity*, that the land *must* have humans. However, possibly the other meanings are also involved. It is quite a different thing to argue that the land ‘wants’ or ‘lacks’ humans than that they *must* be there. There is great difference between recognising that if people live somewhere, they *need to feel* an obligation to care for the land; and arguing that humans *must* be there. Similarly, there is an even bigger gap between needing to feel an obligation to protect the land, and thinking that humans are needed to *control* the land and its biodiversity (as Archer and Flannery suggest).

The confusion is compounded here because the *independence* of the land (and wilderness) is important to conservationists (Borgmann 1995, p. 35). Natural land is seen as ‘independent’, it is not ‘our’ garden, we do not determine where things grow. As Nash (2001, p. 381) has noted ‘pastoralism is a form of control’, and what results is no longer ‘self-willed land’. Conservationists thus honour and value this independence, and tend to see the ‘land needs people debate’ as a denial of the land’s independence. This rubberiness can thus create both confusion and offence, when in fact both parties may be closer in outlook than they realise. I will return to this in the phenomenological discussion.

It also raises the question of what ‘looking after land’ really means for Aboriginal people. This seems to comprise a spiritual and a physical side. The spiritual side is the ‘ceremonies of increase’, and the singing of the songlines. It is for this reason that James said the land *suffers* if people don’t look after it. The physical side is most often seen as *fire*, often seen as ‘cleaning up’ the bush (as James put it). However, unlike Western Society, which sees spirituality and physicality as being totally separate, traditional Aboriginal worldviews may view these as being more intimately connected. Rudder (1999) explains how traditional Aboriginal society believed in an ‘inside reality’ and an ‘outside reality’, where the Wangarr (heroes) came ‘outside’ to ‘transform the earth into the way it is ... to give the ceremonies’. He points out that when Aboriginal people speak of ‘dreaming’, they are not speaking of a long distant past ‘but of a happening in the “Inside” dimension that has been experienced in the “Outside” dimension’ (Rudder 1999, p. 37). A cultural belief in a closer unity of spiritual and physical sides might well contribute towards a worldview of ‘respectful use’ towards nature. Further discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, but would merit further research.

The meaning of responsibility as ‘caring’ is likely to be espoused by those who believe in intrinsic value. Similarly, the meaning of responsibility as ‘control’ is likely to be used by those who hold a view of resourceism. In terms of a productive middle ground, dialogical activism would seek to encourage the idea that responsibility means ‘an obligation to care for’. Activism will similarly seek to acknowledge the independence of natural lands, and while most activists may agree that ‘benign neglect’ is no longer possible (Soule 1995), and agree with Figgis that such areas must be ‘managed’, none of them (Figgis included) are likely to see this as meaning ‘control’. As Plumwood (2001) has pointed out, humans tend to overestimate their own ‘agency’ and importance. Anthropocentrists tend to see management as control, whereas wilderness activists tend to see this as hubris, as humans do not know enough to actually ‘control’ the land (and probably never will). In terms of actual on-the-ground conservation, however, the ‘land needs humans’ debate need not divide TOs and conservationists, especially if put in context of our common goals – to respect and revere nature. It may be an interesting point to debate respectfully, but should not actually affect the two groups working together to

protect wilderness as lanai. Both groups seem to agree that wilderness as lanai needs to be conserved, whether or not they think the land ‘needs’ humans (and in which way they mean this). Recognition of this may help reduce confusion.

The human artefact debate

Many of the above spectra relate to the human artefact debate, much discussed in recent times (Flannery 2003, Benson 2004). This ranges from seeing the land as a human creation, to seeing the land as what I term a ‘geobiocultural landscape’. Many scholars demonstrated a confusion between whether the land was ‘influenced’ by people or actually ‘created’ by them. There were major differences in views. All agreed humans had ‘influenced’ the land. Archer, Lesslie and Young had trouble distinguishing between ‘create’ and ‘influence’, demonstrating that the words are used quite loosely. Plumwood noted that ‘human influence is not the same as human construction, and yet they are often confused’. It was only when I asked people if they thought that humans had *created* the actual landforms and *evolved* the species, most clarified that they did not.

An example of the confusion is that Lesslie called the Pilliga Scrub an ‘artefact’, but then made clear that ‘humans had played a role’. Similarly, Figgis referred to ‘human management that has created that landscape’, yet also said it is ‘simply not true that any aspect of the landscape is determined by human beings’. James did not believe humans created the land, but also said that TOs were ‘responsible for what the land was like’. Young and Archer seemed to think that the distinction between ‘create’ and ‘influence’ was rather trivial. Others such as Figgis didn’t seem to realise that they were using both terms. However, Plumwood pointed out that equivalence of the two *is* a basis for ‘nature scepticism’, leading towards anthropocentrism.

Accordingly, the distinction I believe is essential. If the land is actually a human artefact, then some will believe they can do what they like, as it’s ‘theirs’ to control? However, by accepting that any area is on a spectrum of *natural plus cultural* influence, we can assess what is most prominent in certain places. In wilderness, natural agency exceeds cultural agency. The extent of the confusion around ‘create’

and ‘influence’ in this debate does not seem to have been previously recognised by academia.

One interesting slant on this debate is raised by Hill:

*I think what Marcia (Langton 1996) is actually talking about there is that when Aboriginal people look at that landscape, they are seeing the **human landscape**, they are seeing the people, the stories ... they are seeing the human history, and for them that is the most important thing about that land. ... I think they are saying something different when they say it's a 'human artefact'.*

This suggests that some ‘human artefact’ claims are really claims that the *human history* of the land is paramount. The discussion of the term ‘landscape’ in the literature review has previously shown that some scholars (such as Adams 1996) distinguish ‘landscape’ as terrain that has been interpreted by humans, and imbued with human values. Such a view may thus see *any* landscape as a human artefact. When some people speak of the landscape being ‘a human artefact’ they are not necessarily saying that the topography was physically ‘created’ by humans, but rather that there is an added dimension of human history, or human perception, interpretation and valuation. This adds to the complexity around this debate.

Flannery was the only scholar who believed humans *literally* ‘created’ the land, that we are seeing this incredible revolution or ‘re-making the continent’. When queried about this ‘human focus’, it was interesting that he replied that any human artefact *starts* with nature ... ‘I mean stone is natural’. He didn’t believe that by referring to a ‘human artefact’ he was thus down-playing the importance of nature’s role. Hence, perhaps when Flannery speaks of ‘creation’, he too might actually mean ‘influence’, as he accepts that there *was* something natural, which we strongly influenced (‘created’ in his words) to make something modified. However, there seems to be no acknowledgement by Flannery (2003) that Australia included places that were heavily influenced, and places that were *not* heavily influenced by people (as noted for Yosemite by Vale 1999).

As an ‘evolutionist’, Hill knew the world was here before us, denying that it ‘depends on humans to construct it’. She did her Ph.D. on fire changes to vegetation in Queensland (Hill 1998). Hill concluded that Flannery’s ‘transformation’ was

‘complete nonsense’, a ‘persistent myth’ without any ecological evidence.

Vegetation was largely determined by environmental factors, primarily climate and soils, with a ‘fine scale patterning’ influenced by human fire practices (important for some plant communities). Many other scholars (Plumwood, Rose, Recher, Archer) were also critical of Flannery’s view that we literally ‘created’ the land.

A related issue is that of the land being a ‘cultural landscape’. In Australia, this term seems to be used to emphasise the human influence on the landscape, which some anthropologists apparently thought was being denied (Langton 1998, p. 73).

However, Plumwood makes the point that it is never ‘just’ a cultural landscape: ‘we should never allow the contribution of nature to be forgotten’. She suggests the term ‘biocultural landscape’. This itself overlooks the contribution of geodiversity, the non-living part of the ecosystem (Dixon 1996). In this regard I suggest the term ‘geobiocultural landscape’. This term acknowledges that there is a physical geomorphology, acted on by living things, which later included human cultural influence. While in no way ignoring cultural influence, it accepts that in terms of ‘agency’, in lanais human cultural influence is generally the least important of the three influences.

In terms of a positive middle ground, there needs to be greater rigour in regards to what is meant by ‘influence’ and ‘create’. The physical topography of the land will (for humans) be interpreted by human minds. This does not mean (as Plumwood pointed out) that it then becomes a ‘human’ landscape. Humans have had significant negative influence on the world’s ecosystems, to the extent that the Earth’s situation has been described as an environmental crisis (Aplin et al. 1995, Hay 2002) or ‘ecocide’ (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1991). Environmentalists are thus not denying the overall significance of human influence on the world. Nevertheless, anthropologists’ concerns about human cultural influence on nature being ignored, seem to have caused the ‘pendulum’ to swing too far in the opposite direction, denying nature’s central role.

The middle ground in Figure 4 is a recognition that *any* physical landscape will be the result of natural and cultural influences. As the World Heritage Convention

acknowledges, even formal cultural landscapes are ‘combined works of nature and humankind’. The Convention certainly equally accepts that there are also *natural* landscapes. As Hay (2002, p. 22) points out, ‘there are natural processes and there are cultural processes, and in any place the mix is likely to be uneven’. Dialogical activism would thus seek to abandon terms such as ‘human artefact’ as being an anthropocentric over-statement. The term ‘geobiocultural landscape’ accepts that there are three key influences on the land, but that in natural areas, human influence and agency will be the least significant of the three.

The multiple meanings of ‘wild’

There are very different meanings of ‘wild’; wild as ‘natural’ (as in wildlife); wild as ‘savage’ (as in a wild storm); and wild as ‘lawless’ (without restraint as in ‘outlaws running wild’). The ‘wild as savage’ meaning reveals the lingering fear people feel towards independent nature, what Tennyson (1850) called ‘a nature red in tooth and claw’. The ‘wild as lawless’ meaning is less common, mainly used in terms of there being ‘no restraint’. However, it is this last meaning which anthropologist Deborah Rose (2004) has focused on. In her interview, Rose clarified that her oft-quoted Aboriginal friend Daly Pulkara (Rose 1996) was making a leap from ‘wild people’ to ‘wild country’ when he referred to cattle-degraded land as ‘wild’. Rose (2004) does not discuss the main ‘natural’ meaning of wild. When I asked about this, she replied that she had considered it, but preferred to work with the ‘lawless’ meaning.

Rose is clearly seeking to promote the idea that we all need to live under a *law* that brings responsibilities for the ‘flourishing of a thousand and one myriad living things’. It is for this reason that she likes the meaning of wild as ‘lawless’ land, which she says is also ‘wounded space’ (Rose 2004), in the sense of having been savaged by Western society. However, given that conservationists (and the public) will continue to use the predominant ‘natural’ meaning of wild, we are approaching *meaning-reversal* for these different meanings. When TWS talks about ‘wild country’ they are talking about country that is *natural*, but which has also been ‘cared for’ as Aboriginal land. Yet in using Rose’s ‘lawless’ for ‘wild’, one would assume that ‘wild country’ is in fact ‘lawless land’ that may also have been savaged

and degraded. Thus, unless you specify your meaning of 'wild', you will slip into deep confusion. This was highlighted by Rose reporting how a Queensland Aboriginal man argued that 'wild' rivers were not 'wild', they were his father's and grandfathers rivers - 'and they have been taken care of all those years'. Yet conservationists don't see 'wild' as excluding the care and ceremonies of Traditional Custodians. The irony is that wilderness as *lanai* is *not* the 'wounded space' which Rose (2004) speaks of. Rather, it is the 'flourishing areas', the undamaged country - which she too holds dear. Presumably, no meaning of 'wild' is likely to disappear any time soon, but such very different meanings lead towards confusion.

There is thus an urgent need for far greater *rigour* in terms of clarifying what one means by 'wild'. Of course, wild areas and wild animals can also be 'savage' towards humans, and certainly their independence means they do not operate under human restraints or laws (as in legislation). There is thus the sense of a middle ground in which *all* three meanings can be true for natural areas such as wilderness. However, this does not mean that they are not under Aboriginal law (which Rose points out is for both people *and* the land). It also certainly doesn't mean that people don't feel an obligation to care for and 'look after' such places. In Figure 4, I have therefore argued that dialogical activism supports the use of the most common meaning of wild = natural, rather than 'lawless' or 'savage'. Use of the other meanings approaches 'meaning reversal', and causes confusion.

Evolution versus creationism

Archer noted the prevalence of creationism in some Aboriginal communities, where at one site they insisted that rocks dating from before humans evolved were seen as formed in Noah's Great Flood. 'Evolution' was a very important idea to conservationists and biologists interviewed. Archer's example was of Christian creationism leading to a denial of evolution. However, this could perhaps also come from *any* creationism, any literal interpretation a creation story, including indigenous Dreamtime religion.

Does this matter? Well, Christian creationism comes from a Judeo-Christian view of the world, where the world was seen as being ‘valueless until humanised’ (Oelschlaeger 1991, pp. 33, 70). This easily led the West into anthropocentrism, and the associated cultural approach of ‘controlling’ nature. When Hill cites Aboriginal people saying that evolution is ‘just another story’, it is possible we may be witnessing a form of ‘Dreamtime creationism’ in Australia, a literal interpretation of Aboriginal religions, where creation stories are seen as *literally true*. Such a creationism would come from a different philosophical perspective than Judeo-Christianity, where the land is not seen as ‘valueless’, and where creation is seen as ongoing (Rudder 1999). However, the idea of evolution, of change over large periods of time, where humans are just one species that has evolved amongst many, tends to put humanity in perspective, to give us humility (Leopold 1949, Noss 1991, Tempest Williams 1999).

Evolution thus works *against* anthropocentrism, showing that humans were not centre-stage over evolutionary history. Its denial by literal interpretation of creation stories may thus impact on how people see the land. If the land was ‘created’ by somebody, then it can be seen as having less agency or significance in its own right. I am by no means arguing against the revival of traditional Aboriginal religions and creation stories (in fact I relate strongly to these). However, I do believe we need to recognise the potential problem posed by any too *literal* interpretation of creation stories, especially one that denies the detailed scientific evidence for long-term change over time, both in landscapes and species.

In Figure 4, I contrast dialogical activism as supporting evolution rather than creationism. Many Christian environmentalists may take issue with this, and some will have reconciled the two (and believe in both). There is thus an extensive middle ground. For example, it is quite feasible to interpret the creation stories as *myth* that enriches our understanding and connection to the land, while still acknowledging the tapestry of the evolution of the Earth (see Baiaime Cave in Chapter 7). Dialogical activism would thus tend to seek acknowledgement for evolution, without asking people to abandon their religious convictions regarding creation.

Connectivity and connections

Other issues emerged from the interviews that were not spectra of thought, but nevertheless impact on how we see the land. One was connectivity and connections. This was not only biodiversity connectivity between lanais, but also between people and the land. This focus on connections extends back to Thoreau (1864), who on Mt. Ktaadn wrote: ‘Contact! Contact! Who are we? Where are we?’. For Rose, connectivity and connections were a major interest. She preferred to look for connectivities and recursions, rather than ‘belonging’.

Rose made the interesting comment that Aboriginal people don’t see it as good to have ‘some kind of connection to everything’ (whereas Commoner 1971 argued ‘everything is connected to everything else’). There are things you are connected to and responsible for, your country and your Dreaming, and things you are *not* responsible for. In regard to spiritual connection, she used the word ‘flourishing’. Flannery thought the land ‘sacred’, in the sense that it’s all interconnected, which reminds you of ‘your place in the world’. The need for rejuvenation of our cultural connections with the land (for white *and* black), along with environmental rejuvenation was noted by Stewart. Hill also talked about connections: ‘to me that’s love’. She spoke of her obligation and responsibility to land ‘which I can’t walk away from’. It seems that whether these *connections* are described as ‘love’, ‘respect’, ‘responsibility’, ‘obligation’, ‘a sense of wonder’, or ‘law’; the importance of personal reconnection to nature repeatedly emerges in the interviews.

Aboriginal law and Aboriginal perception of the land

Rose argued that people were born under a law that puts us into responsibilities towards living things. Aboriginal Elder Bill Neidjie (Neidjie et al. 1986) has stated: ‘law never change. Always stay same’. James however seemed unsure whether the law *could* stay unchanged: ‘it’s not even a case of taking the old law and applying it now, as we have to consider the new environment that we have, and that involves thousands of people’. Part of the reason for this is that there has been so much change in Dharug country (on Sydney’s doorstep). James seemed to be pondering whether Aboriginal law may need to *evolve* for this reason. The Network at Mt

Tomah thought this a profound insight. Since so much land had been cleared, the law *needs* to evolve to protect the remaining lanais. As James noted, areas not seen as precious 200 years ago may now take on far greater importance. Rose noted that Aboriginal law had changed in the north of Australia, where younger Aboriginal people did not visit sacred sites their parents used to camp at. Rose said this could be ‘law evolving or law devolving’, but the long-term effects would be bad, as it decreased people’s knowledge and interactions with place. If Aboriginal law in the Blue Mountains did change to give greater value to lanais, this might prove a powerful cause to unite TOs and conservationists. On the other hand, it needs to be recognised that this is a very sensitive area, and must be something that comes from the TO community.

Another interesting issue was regarding the perception of the land by Aboriginal societies, in terms of what ‘law’ meant. Can they be said to be ecocentric (or at least to have an ecological consciousness)? Rose stated they are ‘conscious of being born under a law that is responsible to and responsive to ... Earth’. Figgis argued that the indigenous perspective believes ‘the land is everything’. While not being exactly ‘ecocentric’, these views of Aboriginal societies imply the land *is* centrally important. Langton (1998) has argued that TOs would not send a species extinct, as due to their totemic affiliations this would be offensive. However, conservationist Hill (speaking of northern Australia TOs) argues:

when I see the trees, they are not seeing the same thing, ... they are seeing the human history, and for them that is the most important thing about that land.

This is an interesting question. It would hardly be surprising for any community that lived somewhere for a long time to develop stories about the land that add meaning. Indeed are these not the song-lines and creation stories of traditional culture? One way of acknowledging this may be the use of Cronon’s (2003) ‘historical wilderness’ or ‘storied wilderness’? Because of the importance in Australia of songlines and creation stories, *storied wilderness* would seem most appropriate. At Mt Tomah, the Network thought the longer a culture lived in an area, the more important those stories would become. However, Rose (2005 pers. comm.) felt Hill overstated the significance of the human history, compared to the land itself, and the ‘law’. It is I feel important to acknowledge the difference which varying perceptions of human

and natural history can make to our view of the land, though their significance may vary geographically.

By acknowledging that all these spectra can operate when we talk about '*the land*', we can appreciate that the wilderness knot is a subset of the 'land knot', the tangled meanings around 'the land'. Given that a number of Aboriginal people (such as Uncle Max at the Two Fires Festival, and David at 'Finding Common Ground') are concerned that the term 'wilderness' might be seen as *removing* it from the rest of the land, it is quite relevant that an analysis of the issues has shown that wilderness *is* indeed a part of the land. Many so-called 'wilderness issues' are thus in fact issues to do with the *whole of the land*. However, there are also issues that relate specifically to wilderness.

Wilderness

There are also seven spectra that are specific to the term 'wilderness', as shown in the mind-map in Figure 5. These are not dualisms, they are spectra. In fact one spectrum is that of seeing wilderness as a 'dualism', as opposed to seeing it as the end of a wilderness spectrum. Nor are all spectra equivalent categories. The question of roads and settlements is a management issue, while the fragment versus landscape ecology spectrum are two different approaches to biodiversity conservation. Others are concepts or meanings, such as the wasteland meaning and valued lanai meaning, or seeing wilderness as the absence of humans versus the presence of the nonhuman. However, all these different things can be operating when we talk about the term 'wilderness', just as all the themes covered under 'the land' are *also* operating for wilderness, which highlights the complexity of the situation.

I am suggesting in Figure 5 that dialogical activism tends to seek to move society's mind-set upwards toward the new positive valued 'lanai' meaning of 'wilderness'. Instead of focusing on a negative 'absence of humans' or the fallacious claim of 'human exclusion', we should focus on wilderness as the *positive presence of the nonhuman* (a vital point Plumwood makes repeatedly). Also, rather than seeing wilderness as being a dualism, we should see it as the wild end of a spectrum of land uses stretching from wilderness to the city. Similarly, we need to recognise that the

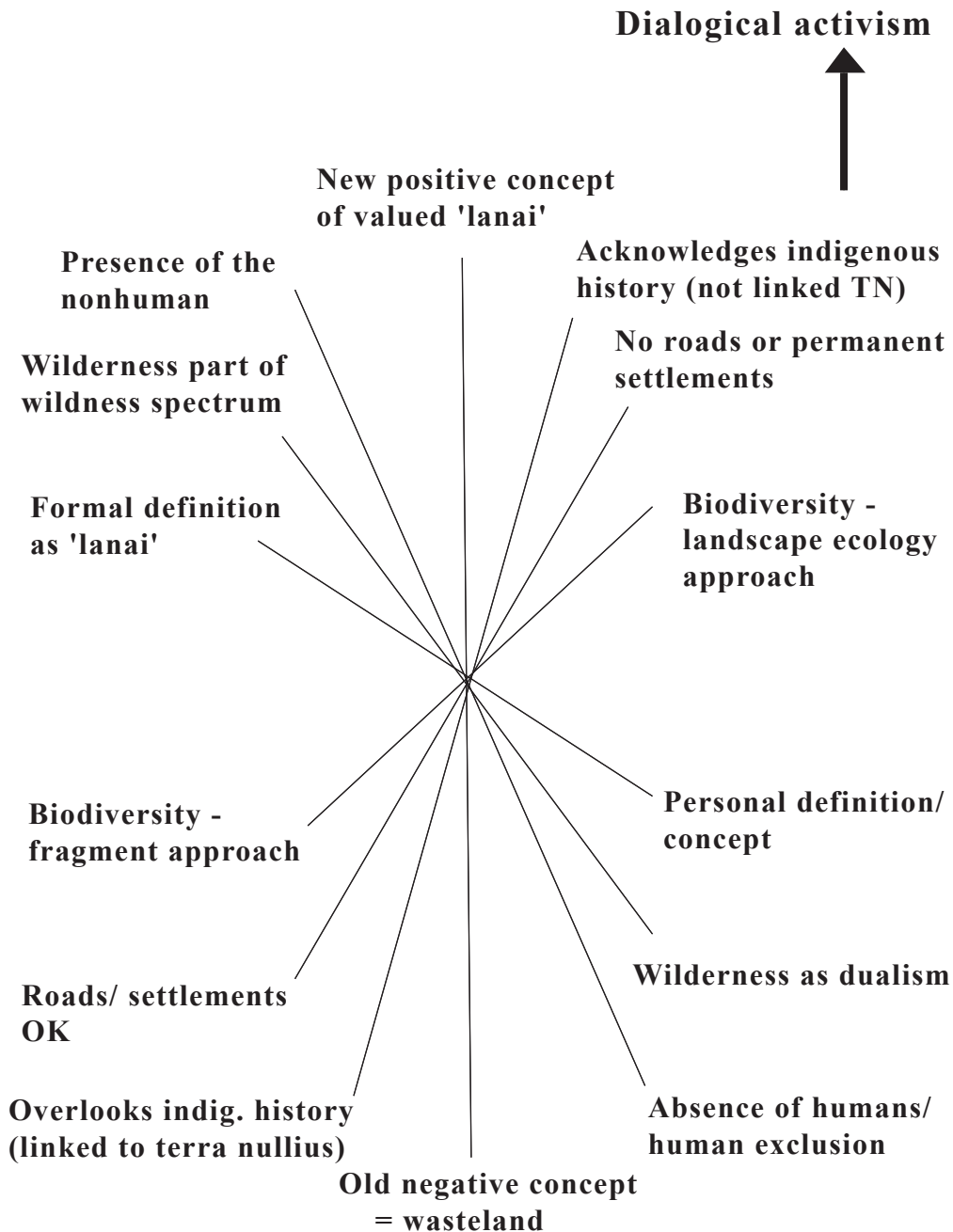


Figure 5. Mind map of spectra involved in our mind-set about 'wilderness'

new wilderness as lanai meaning acknowledges (indeed celebrates) the Aboriginal history and long-term occupation of Australia. Dialogical activism seeks to keep roads out of 'wilderness as lanai', due to the impact they cause. The same applies to permanent settlements. I do not mean to suggest that all activism seeks to move the mind-set all the way to the top of the figure. For example, people do go to wilderness for solitude, so part of the wilderness experience will involve 'absence of humans' other than your own group, it is thus about *relative* absence, so people can gain solitude. Similarly, I do not mean to suggest that we ignore biodiversity fragments totally. The seven key spectra of thought are discussed below in terms of the interviews.

The formal definition versus private concepts of wilderness

It has been noted that apart from the legal definition, wilderness is 'whatever people think it is' (Hendee et al. 1978). Many people don't know or ignore the *formal* definitions to speak of their own particular concept. For example, Flannery (1994) cites the IUCN definition in 'The Future Eaters', yet when asked to define wilderness in his interview, he called it '*someone else's country*', country that you don't know and that is hostile to you. Flannery did not think that any country that one knew and loved (such as Wollemi in my case) could be called 'wilderness'. Thus for him, wilderness was both *terra incognita* and seemingly *terra formidolosa* ('land which causes fear', similar to the historical 'landscape of fear' described by Hall 1988). Another personal definition was that of Rose, who acknowledged that she grew up where wilderness was portrayed as a place where 'people are not', and that thus she 'just can't get over that hurdle'. Archer also originally thought wilderness meant human exclusion, though he also seemed to blur the distinction between human exclusion and human *use*. James referred to a 'popular' definition of wilderness which is 'an area with no people'. Plumwood thought that what most people meant by wilderness was an 'absolute otherness' or purity of nature, which meant the absence of humans. Stewart used the term loosely, and seemed not to recognise the 'large size' descriptor of wilderness. Recher defined wilderness as 'large blocks of land relatively free of human disturbances', but then later insisted it was 'purely a recreational concept'.

The scholars interviewed thus showed a significant confusion about wilderness's *formal* definition, and many had their own private meanings. The Network concluded there was no point discussing 'wilderness' unless you identify *which meaning of wilderness you are talking about*. Wilderness advocates in Australia basically work with the formal 'lanai' meaning, a lanai (or self-willed land) without roads and permanent settlements. Wilderness advocates tend to find it difficult to understand just how poorly the formal definition of 'wilderness as lanai' is actually understood. Indeed, when I spoke at the 8th World Wilderness Congress in Alaska, an activist was concerned that I might be seeking to replace wilderness with my word 'lanai'. I pointed out that I wasn't trying to cease using 'wilderness', but that wilderness advocates needed to continually state what they meant by 'wilderness' (that is 'wilderness as lanai'). However, we also needed to recognise that this is *not* the meaning many other people are working with. Many of the criticisms in the literature review, and probably all the criticisms of 'wilderness' made by interviewees here, are *not* criticisms of 'wilderness as lanai', but of other meanings - human exclusion, wasteland, terra nullius, or 'pure' nature. The poor understanding of the 'wilderness as lanai' meaning is a significant finding of this research.

Dialogical wilderness activism must seek to educate others about the formal definition of 'wilderness as lanai', otherwise private meanings may make dialogue impossible. In terms of a positive 'middle ground', it is certainly not an either/ or situation. Wilderness will indeed form its own personal meanings for people (this is part of the wilderness experience), as long as people also understand the formal definition of 'wilderness as lanai'.

The two key different meanings of wilderness

Just as 'wild' had disparate meanings, so does wilderness. Wilderness has the old biblical negative meaning of a 'wasteland' that was feared, but it also has the modern meaning of a lanai that is valued. Hall (1988) noted that early Europeans saw wilderness as 'a landscape of fear', and that it was Thoreau and Muir who began to

change this. Hawkes (1992) similarly noted that until the arrival of romanticism, wilderness was seen as ‘a menacing place’.

I would argue for a shift *totally* toward the ‘wilderness as lanai’ meaning. There is no value in retaining the old ‘wasteland’ meaning of wilderness. In terms of the wilderness knot, it is notable that many of the other meanings of (or associations attached to) ‘wilderness’ are in fact associated with the old negative *wasteland* meaning, rather than the positive lanai meaning. Historically, terra nullius was linked to wilderness as ‘wasteland’. Similarly, the wasteland meaning does tend to create a dualism between the useful land and the biblical ‘horrid desert of wild beasts’ (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 70). In like manner, a wasteland tends to exclude humans by its very barrenness. The land in the ‘wasteland’ meaning is not *valued* for itself, so exploitation can be totally justified. Sadly, it seems that in general people do not distinguish between these very different meanings, and lump all meanings of the word together under the title of ‘wilderness’, a central cause of the wilderness knot. ‘Wilderness as lanai’ has suffered ‘collateral damage’ from the attacks on other meanings, especially that of ‘wasteland’.

Terra nullius and overlooking indigenous history

Figgis noted that conservationists never intended to overlook the indigenous history of occupation, but were not explicit enough in stating this. Henry in the Network agreed with this, but pointed out these were ‘sins of omission’, not of malice. In Australia, this debate relates to the vexed issue of ‘terra nullius’. Terra nullius was used as the legal excuse to annex Australia to the British Crown. It also has two meanings, often confused. Its translation from Latin means literally ‘empty land’, and it has been assumed that the British were claiming there were no people in Australia when they arrived. However, the legal meaning of ‘terra nullius’, as made clear by the Mabo High Court case (www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/cth/HCA/1992), is ‘land belonging to no-one’. Aboriginal people were deemed to be barbarians who did not have recognisable agriculture, and supposedly there was an ‘absence of law’. Archer, Lesslie, and Stewart use the ‘empty land’ meaning of terra nullius.

Plumwood uses both meanings, as does Flannery. These two meanings of *terra nullius* thus get mixed up, adding to the confusion.

The Network saw the claimed ‘*terra nullius* = wilderness’ link as a key problem, one which must be de-linked. Prineas (1983) noted there *is* a link between the wasteland meaning of wilderness and *terra nullius*. However, I have been unable to find any link between the modern positive meaning of wilderness as *lanai* and *terra nullius*. Indeed, why should there be a link between a *lanai* and a discredited doctrine that nobody ‘owns’ the land, so that it was deemed ripe for colonial conquest? If anything, the ecocentric thinking behind the wilderness advocacy movement of the last few decades is based on intrinsic value, which tends to view that the land ‘owns’ itself (or at least that we should talk about stewardship not ownership). Certainly Brown (1992) from TWS saw contemporary ‘wilderness’ as a rediscovery by non-indigenous Australians of ‘caring for country’, and not a perpetuation of *terra nullius*. Prineas (2006) has pointed out that the wilderness parks in NSW (such as Wollemi) were created mainly in the 1970s or later, *not* the 1870s. Conservationists were thus making use of the valued *lanai* meaning of wilderness, not the wasteland or *terra nullius* meaning of the prior century. Despite this, the existence of *any* link between ‘wilderness’ and *terra nullius* means that the word remains suspect to some. To date, the Australian conservation movement has been singularly unsuccessful in de-linking the two. An attempt was made to do this at the ‘Finding Common Ground’ workshop in May, 2006. Such a topic remains a fertile area for future research.

Spectrum rather than dualism

None of the three conservationists, or Lesslie, thought wilderness actually *was* a dualism. For example, Lesslie and Figgis saw wilderness as part of a spectrum, with Figgis noting ‘any spectrum has two ends’, with wilderness being the *wild* end. Plumwood probably saw wilderness most strongly as a dualised concept, though she has written that we *should* see wilderness as part of a spectrum (Plumwood 1998, p. 669) as suggested by Birch (1990b). She feels the term ‘nature’ is a more graduated concept, though she also defends the protection of large areas of nonhuman nature. Plumwood tended to see the dualised version of wilderness as being ‘pure nature’ or

‘pure otherness’. Rose had no problem generally in seeing ‘difference without dualism’, though she did not translate this specifically to wilderness. Rose’s comment relates to Plumwood’s arguments on humans being part of nature, in that we *are* a part of nature, but are also ‘apart’ in that we are a *distinguishable* part. Plumwood (1993) argues there is a human continuity with nature but also a difference with human culture, and that the two can be integrated. Thus we can recognise ‘difference’ without having to split something off entirely, and label it as a dualism.

Neither of the TOs saw wilderness as being a dualism, though Stewart expressed slight concern that the term ‘wilderness’ was a demarcation between people and the bush. Similarly at the Two Fires Festival, Uncle Max seemed to see ‘wilderness’ as a word that *separated* wilderness off from the rest of the land. At ‘Finding Common Ground’, while TO David supported the protection of wilderness, he also had concerns about making a line and separating any area off from the rest of the land. Thus in some Aboriginal circles, ‘wilderness’ still has something of a dualistic connotation, or at least a perception that it is *separate* from the rest of the land. This may reflect a concern that by identifying special areas such as ‘wilderness’, we may then forget to value and protect other areas. Certainly participants at the ‘Finding Common Ground’ workshop thought we needed a ‘whole of landscape conservation strategy’ as well as a wilderness strategy. As an active conservationist for decades, Figgis argued that the conservation movement *has* always been on about the whole spectrum of nature conservation, not *just* wilderness. I agree with her. However, projects such as TWS’s ‘WildCountry’ and ACF’s ‘Northern Lands Program’ are certainly making it far more explicit that the conservation movement is about the whole spectrum of naturalness. However, wilderness advocates such as George worry that a campaign priority to protect the remaining unprotected wilderness may disappear within the larger focus of projects such as WildCountry. This is important, especially in the light of the ‘cross-cultural confusion’ about nature and culture discussed later. It remains to be seen if the conservation movement can get the balance right – connectivity *and* wilderness.

For Hill, the dualism was actually between converted and unconverted bush: ‘a lot of our planet has been converted ... I don’t think you create the duality, it’s there’. However, she also noted: ‘this zonation is a problem between our industrialised way of living and traditional occupation of country’. ACF in northern Australia was about ‘trying to protect large scale processes and not necessarily large scale areas’. This seems to reveal something of a negative view about the need to protect *areas*. Henry at the Mt Tomah meeting (who has visited Cape York extensively) argued that it should not be a case of one or the other: ‘you need to do *both*’. A process approach alone he thought basically ended up as a ‘multiple use’ strategy. George at the same meeting argued that to protect large scale processes, you *need* large areas. I tend to wonder about the ACF strategy; whether there is an influence of postmodernist theory here, a dislike of drawing boundaries because these are seen as creating dualisms, along with an argument that we need to blur any existing boundaries (Haraway 1997).

Certainly, conservationists such as George believe the move *away* from protecting ‘areas’ is a strategic mistake in terms of politically effective conservation. The WildCountry Project of TWS could be perceived as moving away from an ‘area’ focus (though TWS literature argues for doing both). Whether such an approach works in the world of political decisions (where boundaries are needed for effective land management) is yet to be seen in terms of results. However, Peepre (1999) has argued that abandoning the ‘large area’ approach in Canada *was* a mistake. This led to a focus on processes and fragments, which has meant that many lanais in Canada remain unprotected.

The dualism debate is clearly not about to go away. Greater academic rigour, in terms of which dualism is referred to, would help reduce confusion. In terms of a positive middle ground, this again is where dialogical activism seeks to move it almost all the way towards the ‘spectrum’ end, as there is no positive value in seeing wilderness as a dualism. Why is wilderness a dualism, any more than is a State Forest, or a piece of urban bushland (all of which also have boundaries marked on maps to enable management)?

Human absence or nature's presence?

All three conservationists interviewed acknowledged in part that the use of the absence of humans meaning had been a problem in past literature, even if it was not what they meant *now*. In the current debate, most commonly it is claimed that wilderness areas are 'human exclusion zones', which is incorrect for any formal wilderness area (Soule 2002). This claim seems to confuse human 'visitation' with human settlement and exploitative use. Lesslie thought there was a 'bit of an overtone' of exclusion, that wilderness was 'nature's realm'. However, Plumwood *wanted* us to see wilderness as nature's realm. If we see wilderness as areas where nonhuman interests come first, then it's *not* excluding humans. A 'positive presence of nonhumans' only excludes those humans whose presence is incompatible with the nonhuman, such as oppositional forms of human culture. This recognition of wilderness as a positive presence of the nonhuman was acknowledged by the Network as an essential part of moving forward.

Lesslie observed that the issue was not human presence but technological impact. Noss (2003b) similarly comments: 'it is our culture and our lifestyles which had already separated us long before we designated wilderness areas'. Thus a traditional *nomadic* tribe would not be incompatible with a wilderness definition, operating at an ecologically sustainable level. They would not build roads or permanent settlements. However, as Ron observed at Mt Tomah: 'where in Australia is anyone living a totally traditional lifestyle?'. When a formerly nomadic tribe settles down, it wants houses, powerlines and roads. The environmental impact of these mean you can no longer call such an area 'wilderness'. Many of these impacts *do* become incompatible with parts of the nonhuman, due to introduced plants, feral animals, noise, pollution, and so on. It seems there remains something of a confusion of social/ environmental justice around this issue. Those concerned primarily with social justice argue if indigenous people were there then, then they have a right to be there *now*. They also often point out that it is the tribe's 'right' to settle down and have the same services as other people. This is undoubtedly true. However, they also tend to downplay the environmental impacts of such a move, and seem to ignore any 'rights of nature' (Nash 1989), given so much other country has already been

degraded. The missing factor in such debates seems to be the acceptance of *environmental justice* as having equal weight. As Soule (2002) has pointed out, the well-meaning attempt to move people into national parks in South America could well destroy them.

Thus some scholars felt there was an overtone of human exclusion to wilderness, though none thought formal wilderness areas *actually* excluded people. The confusion between human visitation and human exploitative use or settlement was evident with Archer, also found in academia where the ‘human exclusion’ argument is used loosely. This confusion is often employed by those seeking to exploit lanais, claiming they are being unfairly ‘locked out’. To answer such claims, Plumwood’s point seems most cogent, if wilderness is where the nonhuman comes *first*, then that only excludes humans (and human activities) that are incompatible with the nonhuman. The problem seems to be that some people think they have a right to do anything anywhere, or as Plumwood points out, our mainstream society *does* have an oppositional culture towards the nonhuman. However, if one believed in intrinsic value and ‘respectful use’, then excluding activities incompatible with the nonhuman in wilderness would surely come naturally.

Biodiversity – the fragment and landscape approaches

This spectrum relates to the criticism that wilderness is not essential for nature conservation. There was a divergence of views about this. Flannery argued from a mammologist’s perspective that controlling feral animals in wilderness might need more intrusive management than conservationists would like. Lesslie, Figgis, Hill, Plumwood and Young took it for granted that wilderness as lanai is *essential* for biodiversity conservation. Lesslie noted a growing recognition that lanais have ‘really fundamentally important nature conservation value’, that when you consider resilience and integrity, you can’t get away from lanais. Lesslie, Young, Figgis and Hill also thought conservation biology had taken a ‘wrong turn’ by focusing so strongly on the ‘representativeness’ of fragments (as did Peepre 1999 in Canada), rather than on the adequacy and viability of biodiversity protection over time. Thus, biodiversity conservation had put too much emphasis on ‘representativeness’ and not

enough on ‘adequacy’. This had led to wilderness being (as Young put it) the ‘poor cousin’ in conservation. McNeely (2005), the Chief Scientist of IUCN, recently agreed with them, describing the need for wilderness as a ‘no brainer’, being obvious. This battle within conservation biology between ‘representativeness’ (focusing on fragments) and ‘adequacy’ (focusing on landscape and systems ecology) does not seem to have been well articulated to date in the broad wilderness literature, though it does relate to the ‘single large or several small’ (SLOSS) debate (see Mackey et al. 1998a). From the interviews, Lesslie’s and Young’s belief that landscape and system ecology will bring the focus back on to lanais would seem to be a hopeful sign for wilderness as lanai.

However, support for landscape ecology does not necessarily translate into support for ‘wilderness’. In Chapter 4, Lunney from the Australian Museum espoused landscape ecology, but was also negative about ‘wilderness’, as he is in the literature (Recher and Lunney 2003). Of the scholars, Recher was the most strongly negative about the biodiversity value of ‘wilderness’. He defined wilderness as ‘large blocks of land relatively free of human disturbances’ and agreed that for biodiversity conservation you need ‘large natural areas’, but then insisted that these were *distinct* from wilderness, which he saw purely as a recreational concept. He also seemed happy to have a network of roads (as well as exploitative uses) within lanais, discounting their environmental impact. In this regard he seemed to come from a resourcist perspective, having no problem with harvesting whales or logging rainforest, as long as it was done *sustainably*. This is of interest, given that he also espouses intrinsic value, and the two viewpoints are often seen as mutually exclusive. Recher seemed out of step with other interviewees, and also with other biodiversity experts such as Mackey et al. (1998a) and Soule (2002). Interestingly, he seemed to draw the line at having permanent settlements in lanais.

In Figure 5, dialogical activism is shown as trying to move away from the fragment or representativeness approach, towards a ‘whole of landscape’ or systems ecology approach. Protecting small ‘representative’ natural areas, which are not viable in the long term, is not effective conservation if it is the only thing you do. However, the productive middle ground to this spectrum is that you need to do *both*. This is

implicitly accepted by conservationists who support wilderness and also support (for example) protection of roadside vegetation. Remnant vegetation (and its protection) is indeed a biodiversity priority. In fact it has had a larger focus in the NSW conservation movement over the last 20 years than has wilderness. The productive middle ground in this case is to bring the mind-set to the middle. Dialogical activism would not try to pull the mind-set just one way, but to ensure we do *both*. Either one alone is not enough.

Roads and settlements

Wilderness is basically defined as a lanai that excludes roads and permanent settlements. Access issues are often labeled ‘lock out’ by those who wish to increase access. Neither Aboriginal scholar interviewed wanted roads in ‘wilderness’, though James acknowledged that the Aboriginal community ‘like their cars’. Young, Archer, Flannery, and Figgis noted the impact of roads, arguing they should be excluded from lanais. Recher was the exception, arguing that roads had virtually no impact. He saw no difference ‘philosophically’ between a 4WD going down a dirt road and a bushwalker down a track. Recher’s support for roads seemed to have originated in the creation of a wilderness area in Nadgee NP, which stopped access by vehicle to his research sites. He thus takes the interesting position of supporting lanais (but not wilderness) but also supporting a network of roads throughout lanais. He then discounted their environmental impact, as noted by Mather (1990), Noss (1990) and Soule (2002).

A related issue was whether TOs should be able to use management roads in wilderness. One particular desire is for Aboriginal Elders to take young TOs to sites to teach them the law (and lore) of that area. Hill noted that Aboriginal cultural diversity and knowledge are as much threatened as biodiversity, and that thus 4WD access on firetrails into lanais may be needed to teach law, while those Elders are still alive. James thought there could be an argument for a TO (particularly an Elder) to use a vehicle to *look after country*, but that if it was up to him there would only be caretakers using a walking track. At our meeting at Mt Tomah, conservationist George thought special access by Elders into wilderness to teach was a reasonable

thing, that he was 'tolerant' about it, though once taught, he thought: 'the youngsters could walk in'. There would thus seem to be fertile ground for future dialogue about this issue between conservationists and TOs. The broader issue of TO access by road to hunt or gather in wilderness remains a more difficult issue. This would seem to depend on the area, and has already been negotiated for the declared wilderness in Mutawintji NP.

The question of permanent indigenous settlements in wilderness is more complex. Figgis acknowledged the debate was whether to keep out permanent settlements, or whether you 'expand the notion of wilderness basically to cover large intact ecosystems where there may be minor modifications'. Hill noted that ACF is about trying to 'protect rivers and vegetation cover', but then 'have human occupation and compatible uses within it'. This leaves the door open as to whether there will be permanent settlements (and their impacts) as well as 'compatible uses' within lanais (possibly multiple use?). Most scholars interviewed were not supportive of permanent settlements in lanais. Archer expressed support for sustainable indigenous use of natural areas, though he admitted that this had not happened at a site he was involved with, where the TOs 'took over the white man's strategy ... by running cattle - doing precisely what the whites had done'.

One response to this debate by conservationists is to agree that reserves which include permanent indigenous settlements *are* clearly needed, but that they should not be called 'wilderness' but something else, such as 'Indigenous Protected Areas', which already exist in Australia (Figgis 1999). The category 'wildland' is another possible name (as is wild country)? While still pertinent in terms of permanent out-station settlements in lanais in northern Australia, settlements are nowhere near as contentious in NSW as the question of horse and 4WD access.

Historical literature and historical context

There were also specific insights beyond these spectra of issues. One was the past emphasis of wilderness literature on the 'absence of humans'. Young thought that there *was* some historical validity to claims of wilderness being an 'absence of

people' in the early history of wilderness writing. She recognised that this would have raised concerns in the Aboriginal community. However, she noted: 'we haven't thought that way for a long time'. Figgis believed the conservation movement had argued wilderness was a 'place for nature' and not a place for humans, and thus it was 'not terribly surprising that Aboriginal people saw that as against their interests'. This background might explain why 'human exclusion' is an enduring meaning that people associate with wilderness. The focus of past wilderness literature on the absence of humans is not something that seems to have been readily acknowledged, and certainly has not been obvious to me from a reading of Thoreau, Muir or Leopold, or studies of their works, such as Oelschlaeger (1991). It is also something that I personally have been reluctant to acknowledge during this thesis, possibly because in my own mind I always use the 'wilderness as lanai' meaning. George in the Network made a similar comment. Perhaps this could be called our own personal 'blindness'? Perhaps also most scholars have their own particular blindness to aspects of the debate?

Another important insight acknowledges that conservationist views about wilderness were set in the *context of the time*. Figgis points out that conservationists had a 'survivalist' discourse oriented toward saving threatened nature. The conservation movement never intended to argue that indigenous people had not occupied Australia, but were not 'explicit enough in that acceptance'. The younger generation don't understand the historical dimension to this debate, where people do things at a particular time, within a particular social discourse. In the '50s through to the '70s the accepted story was that most Aboriginal people had disappeared, especially near the coast. She herself admitted her own blindness, that when she wrote her thesis in 1979, she 'did not have one single word on indigenous people and their rights, and the juxtaposition of the two'. Henry in the Network also acknowledged this past oversight. A greater understanding and appreciation of conservation history (and intent) might thus assist in reducing confusion.

The wilderness experience

The 'wilderness experience' is sometimes distinguished from wilderness itself. People speak of a wilderness experience in what is not declared 'wilderness' (being wild but too small for formal declaration). Such a wilderness experience reflects a deep feeling of being part of nature, of something sacred and independent, a strong sense of connection, 'belonging' and custodianship. These are all elements that can be found in natural land in general (as shown in Figure 4), so it is hardly surprising people speak of 'wilderness experiences' in places other than formal wilderness. However, I believe it is a testament to the *power* of the experience found in formal wilderness areas, that describing a 'wilderness experience' found in non-wilderness as a 'land experience' or 'a sense of place' experience seems rather inadequate. The phenomenological discussion will also discuss the aspect of *size* in the 'wilderness experience'.

Some interviewees touched on the 'wilderness experience'. Young spoke of moving into the heart of the wilderness: 'where the land, nature is in control'. Hill said that the wilderness experience (if not the area) was dear to her. Stewart thought wilderness areas are 'natural repositories for spirit and soul, where you can experience 'those pivotal moments that can totally change your viewpoint'. Clearly the experience of lanais had strongly influenced most of the scholars, and was a strong motivator, just as it was for Thoreau. Whether the wilderness experience can be said to have been 'transformative' (Harper 1995, Thomashow 1996) for most of the scholars (in the context of their whole lives) is unclear. I did not specifically ask about this. From our interviews, however, I suspect it was for several, in terms of how they spoke of nature, or experiences in the bush. This was certainly true for the conservationists (Figgis, Hill and Young), but there was a strong sense that it had equally been so for Stewart, Plumwood and Lesslie - for example Stewart's 'pivotal moments' that changed him. Equally, Rose's experience of 'quiet country' and its custodians had also greatly influenced her world view. Wilderness (or place) 'transformation' remains an ideal area for further research.

A 'fixation' on wilderness, and the impact of 'theory'

Plumwood and Recher argued there *was* a wilderness fixation in the conservation movement (as do Doyle and Kellow 1995), while Figgis explained that there was a 'strategic focus' on protecting wilderness before it disappeared. As I was also part of that strategic focus, my memory supports Figgis. ACF, indeed the whole conservation movement in Australia, has never 'just' focused on wilderness (even the Wilderness Society worked on non-wilderness forests and rainforests). The environment movement in my experience has always had a vision of conservation *right across* the land-use spectrum. The motions of the Annual Conferences of the NSW conservation umbrella body, the Nature Conservation Council show this. In 2003, there were 66 motions put at this conference, but only three were about wilderness (NCC 2003). Some scholars do not seem to understand how politics and the media work. It takes a major campaign to get the media to take up an issue, so this has tended to be on a strategically important focus (wilderness or rainforest). However, conservation activity on urban bushland or forestry issues did not cease, for example, during the huge Franklin River campaign in the 1980s. Of course, the rise of the WildCountry Project (and other connectivity campaigns) is a more explicit recognition of the need for a 'whole of landscape' conservation approach, which includes wilderness, but goes beyond it.

There was some discussion of how wilderness gets caught up in theory, especially postmodernism. Plumwood noted:

I am inclined to think that theoreticians have a lot to answer for in a lot of ways. ... I don't necessarily take the side of the theoreticians at all, I think they often distort these issues and produce unnecessary false oppositions.

Postmodernist theory in particular was recognised as a problem. Rose stated she did not agree with the postmodern view that 'the world is a product of our words'. Figgis argued that postmodernist relativism was 'baloney', as it maintains 'there are no realities, it's all a great shifting spectrum'. Hill argued: 'people like Cronon, I don't know if he is being very realistic ... thinking that words are everything'. There was thus questioning of the postmodernist antagonism to the reality of nature, the focus on language, relativism, as well as dualisms. We remain awaiting a postmodernist

philosopher to emerge as a *champion* of ‘wilderness as lanai’. This would certainly assist in bringing ‘wilderness’ back in from the cold, so that it does not remain a philosophical orphan.

Another word for wilderness?

The question of whether there is a better word for ‘wilderness’ provoked interesting responses. James noted: ‘there probably is one. I can’t think of it though’. Lesslie said he uses ‘large intact natural areas’. Plumwood used ‘nature’ or ‘large areas of nonhuman presence’. Rose wanted to describe them as ‘large flourishing areas’ or ‘quiet country’. Figgis said she doesn’t completely avoid using ‘wilderness’, but sometimes used ‘core conservation lands’. The use of ‘core areas’ instead of wilderness was also noted in Chapter 4 at the World Heritage Institute meeting. Hill said ACF ‘talk a lot about natural integrity and ongoing natural processes’. Recher wanted to use ‘wild country’. Both Aboriginal interviewees actually liked the word ‘wild country’ *less* than ‘wilderness’. This is of interest given Rose’s focus on ‘wild’ as meaning ‘lawless’, and given that Young reported that the TWS WildCountry program had not had ‘any adverse comment from any of the indigenous mobs we are working with’. It seems that ‘wild country’ might thus receive as negative a spin as ‘wilderness’ in some circles.

The only two alternatives that seem to be having any success are ‘core areas’ and ‘wild country’. These tend to get used when people don’t want to use wilderness, due to its tangled meanings. ‘Wild country’ can be applied to land in the same way that ‘wildland’ can. This seems to have a two-fold purpose. Firstly it seeks to encapsulate the idea of ‘*connectivity*’, secondly, it escapes the need to use the term wilderness for lanais, in the light of indigenous criticisms of the word.

However, both ‘core areas’ and ‘wild country’ fail to capture the idea of large size or naturalness. Lesslie’s alternative of ‘large natural intact area’ does capture these, but is hardly likely to come into common usage, due to its length. I have shortened it here to ‘lanai’, though I do not suggest it as yet another alternative to wilderness. Of the twenty criticisms of wilderness noted in the literature review, it would seem only a few are criticisms where a change of word *alone* might make a difference. For the

majority, the term 'wild country' is likely to fare just as poorly. It could be seen as a dualism, it could be seen as a human exclusion zone, it could be seen as being just a concept, as being just a human artefact, it probably would be seen as locking out multiple use, it could be seen as based on outdated equilibrium ecology. 'Wild country' might not be linked to terra nullius (at least so far), and it might not be argued yet that wild country is not essential for nature conservation. It might also be seen as closer to Biosphere Reserves as Callicott (2003) sees them. The last two are doubtful however, though 'core conservation lands' might fare better there than 'wild country'. The point is that the change of word *alone* does not substantially reduce the confusion. We need to specify the meaning. Accordingly, getting rid of the term 'wilderness' and replacing it by 'core lands' or 'wild country' would *not* seem to solve the knot.

There seems to be something of a parallel here with the term 'nature'. There has been criticism of both terms, therefore people cease using them and search around for an alternative, rather than addressing whether the criticisms are in fact valid. Surely the time has come to assess the criticisms, and move on to what we really mean, by using clarification and greater rigour. If we do wish to keep the nonhuman world into the future (and of course our own survival requires this), then surely we can continue to call this 'nature', a nature of which we are a distinctive part. Similarly, if we want to keep large areas of nature into the future, surely we can continue to call them wilderness, but make clear this is 'wilderness as lanai'.

Difficulties with academic debate

I wish to consider here the particular problem of academia and 'wilderness'. The question of the lack of rigour of some of the attacks on wilderness emerged both from the literature review and the interviews. Young was particularly concerned about the lack of academic rigour about 'wilderness', describing this as 'lazy'. She thought Rose hated the concept of wilderness: 'unfairly in that she hasn't thought to talk to anyone in TWS or do any recent research'. Young thought that within academia the main problem with the word came from the science community. Given the recognition in the literature review that many of the criticisms of wilderness were

statements rather than rationally argued positions, this lack of rigour is indicative of a long-term problem. There is an irony here in that Rose and Young in fact share an intense interest in connectivity and restoration between lanais. Yet to date they don't appear to be aware of this – effective dialogue has not taken place. It is my hope that future action may bring these scholars together, so they recognise they do have common ground.

The key problem remains a failure to distinguish *meaning*. For instance, criticising 'wilderness' when you really wish to criticise the idea of 'terra nullius', just creates confusion. The 'wilderness = terra nullius' argument is thus a convenient 'straw person' to be knocked down in any debate about wilderness, even if this is not what conservationists mean, or probably *ever* meant. It is in fact 'guilt by association'. There is little rigour evident, in terms of identifying *which* meaning of wilderness scholars discuss. The confusion around wilderness will remain until they are more rigorous. However, the exploitation strand of the wilderness knot does *not* accept the need to protect lanais, they wish to exploit them. Considering this, all those who wish to keep lanais into the future must improve the rigour of their discussion regarding 'wilderness as lanai'. Many scholars were also quite critical of other scholars, even though they appeared to hold similar beliefs. They had not found out what the other *really* meant. This was notable in Rose, Young, Archer, Recher and Figgis. They all share a strong belief in connectivity and the need to link lanais, yet were critical of others, who in fact held that same belief.

This raises the question of a certain academic '*naivety*' in regard to wilderness. Cronon (1996) and Callicott (2003) claim they are not trying to destroy lanais, just criticise 'the concept of wilderness'. Similarly, Rose, Plumwood, Archer and Flannery have criticised aspects of wilderness, yet clearly love lanais and wish them to survive. They criticise other meanings of wilderness, yet seem oblivious that such criticisms may be used by exploiters who seek to log, mine, graze or populate lanais. Rose and Archer are actually criticising the 'human exclusion' meaning of wilderness, Plumwood the 'human exclusion' and 'pure nature' meanings, while Flannery is criticising wilderness as 'terra incognita', 'terra nullius' and 'terra formidolosa'.

I discussed the wilderness knot with one ‘critic’ who had read my literature review, and his response was ‘you have quoted me as being negative ... but I think wilderness is great!’. My response was that I could only refer to what he had *published* in papers. Many of the criticisms of wilderness need to be taken in the context of the times when they were made. Some who expressed criticisms in the past seem to have since changed their minds, such as Cronon (2003), who takes a very different approach to wilderness than he did in 1996. There is also the problem that a scholar’s words may be misused by those who continue the modernist drive to exploit wilderness. The usual argument proffered by scholars is that ‘I am just raising ideas that need to be discussed’. However, this response would seem to be politically naïve. Many academics in fact know little about environmental politics, and the ongoing campaigns that are required not only to get lanais protected formally as ‘wilderness’, but just to keep existing wilderness areas under protection. At ‘Finding Common Ground’, George reported several attempts to destroy the NSW Wilderness Act had only recently been narrowly averted. A claim of ‘academic naivety’ about how academic criticisms of wilderness will be misused would thus seem valid. There is an urgent need for greater academic rigour in identifying *which* meaning of wilderness they mean, and making clear (if that is the case) that they are not against the long term protection of ‘wilderness as lanai’.

Dialogue

Why do people enter dialogue? In general I have tended to assume it is a ‘good’ in itself. However, more specifically, people enter dialogue to give others the benefit of their understanding, but also to understand others perspectives and what motivates their actions, what they ‘really mean’. Having the opportunity to discuss what scholars really *meant* made these interviews a wonderful aid to dialogue. There were also key observations about dialogue by the scholars themselves. Lesslie made a fascinating observation:

If you could ... somehow get past the labels and look at ... the actual ‘drivers’ ... If you could get down to those fundamentals ... and almost work backwards ... and then you say ‘by that I mean wilderness’, and then ‘oh, well if that is what you mean by wilderness then I will give it a tick, but its not what I mean by wilderness’ ... you

*almost got to **reverse-engineer** the thing. But you never do, people come in from the other way. And they will end up with big fights.*

Rose commented:

There is a lot of really interesting cross-cultural communication issues here ... somebody could say 'what you call wilderness I call home', and they could say that as a real confrontationist thing, and ask you not to call it wilderness any more. Or they could say 'here we have got two different words for the same thing – you call it wilderness, I call it home.

She thought the 'wilderness knot' forced people to really examine what they value. It was noteworthy that both Aboriginal men made statements saying contention (or challenge) was not a bad thing, that we need to discuss differing ideas. Lesslie's observation about the need to 'reverse engineer' the discussion to get at meaning, ties in strongly with Rose's thoughts on cross-cultural communication. Figgis's comment reinforces these two insights, where she asked what indigenous people and wilderness advocates 'actually agree about?'. These comments were in fact pinned up on the wall at 'Finding Common Ground'. The experience and wisdom from the interviews was thus significant in informing and guiding the workshop to gain better dialogue, with evident success.

The interviews showed that many potential allies are isolated by polarisation and divisiveness. 'Finding Common Ground' again demonstrated this truth. As Plumwood has noted, there are 'a lot of silly confusions behind this'. Of course, moving the mind-set in Figure 5 upwards through dialogical activism will remain a difficult task. We have seen that other meanings such as human exclusion, dualism, terra nullius, and wasteland are tenacious in people's minds, as are their own personal definitions. As Reason and Torbert (2001) noted in Chapter 3, the 'knowing' in PAR resides in the dialogue and actions undertaken. In this light the PAR was a success, for it taught the Network a huge amount about the knot. By way of conclusion, just being aware of these many spectra, and how they contribute to the wilderness knot, is a significant contribution to academic understanding. It must in itself help to decrease the confusion. It also importantly shows that society's mind-set *can* be shifted around this most poignant and imaginatively powerful of knotted words – 'wilderness'.

2. Hermeneutic phenomenology using wilderness journals

The hermeneutic phenomenological research provides added *depth* to the insights produced through PAR. When writing a wilderness journal, one can go far deeper than in any interview. Would Thoreau have expressed himself so eloquently in an interview? I doubt it. The aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is to ‘construct an animating, evocative description’ of human actions and experiences (Van Manen 1997, p. 19). True reflection on lived experience is a thoughtful, ‘reflective grasping’ of what gives each experience its special significance (ibid., p. 32). This was the aim of the journal-writers, when dealing phenomenologically with the wilderness experience and the wilderness knot. These journals covered the wilderness experience, as well as the experience of dealing with the wilderness knot itself. They are journals of both feeling *and* thinking. To a certain degree, the thinking about issues to do with wilderness became part of our lived experience of the wilderness knot.

I have approached the results of the hermeneutic phenomenology in an analytic and thematic way (Van Manen 1997, pp. 167-173), focusing on the ‘qualities’ of the experience itself. Some of these qualities have been touched on by several journal-writers, some by just one. The yardstick for inclusion was whether it had something significant to say about the lived experience of encountering wilderness or the wilderness knot. I shall discuss the wilderness experience, then the wilderness knot, followed by a section covering the contribution of the phenomenological accounts to understanding the wilderness knot. Some of the thinking in the journals, while not conveying the experience itself, nevertheless is relevant to the broad understanding of the knot.

2.1 The phenomenology of the wilderness experience

What was revealed of the qualities of the wilderness experience? Firstly, there is a quality of just ‘*being there*’, of not thinking while in wilderness. George noted while walking in Nattai: ‘I don’t think of anything much in wilderness, most of the time. I’m just there, really *there*’. At Gooches Crater I also noted: ‘I have to interrupt my

thinking to *feel* ... All my thoughts seem so petty in the face of the “eternal now”’. Later on the Colo, I expressed it poetically:

*So glad to surrender
Tumultuous thoughts
So good to be centred
To truly ‘be’. ...
Enough to feel ...
Put away the cerebral
And honour the land.*

The wilderness experience was so all encompassing that one could not just be in ‘cerebral’ analytical mode. One needed to use ‘*dadirri*’ (Ungunmerr 1995), to listen, to contemplate, to ‘be’. My thoughts seemed so petty in the face of the ‘eternal now’, which has links with what I mean later by ‘wilderness as Dreamtime’. Van Manen (1997, p. 10) observes that a person cannot reflect on experience while living through that experience, and that there is something we might call ‘epistemological silence’, when we confront and face the unspeakable (ibid., p. 113). The strength of this experience can be overwhelming, and often only in hindsight can one put it into words.

‘*Love of the land*’, a sense of wonder, runs through the wilderness journals, emerging in poetry as well as prose. Ron wrote: ‘a strong glow of orange sunlight is bursting from the western horizon’. Henry wrote of ‘a lovely gentle valley with alluvial flats, a small waterfall ... a superb expanse of rock ...’. I wrote:

*Luminous rock faces rising
In an orange and mauve and green
Patchwork wall of animate stone.*

I also wrote that the land is *made* of love: ‘it’s in the water, the cradling overhang, the trees and *Cissus* vines’. A taboo within our society about talking of ‘love’ may explain the lack of any writing about ‘love’ in other wilderness journals. This conspiracy of silence about love has been noted as being especially strong amongst scientists (Washington 2002), and three of the other writers share that background. However, love *is* of key importance in the wilderness experience. Closely related to this is the ‘sense of wonder’ that people experience in the bush. Ron wrote: ‘I am

going to show our little Elata the wonder of stars bursting forth'. It is imbued throughout the journals, and underlies the whole experience of the wild.

This wonder led me to describe the wilderness experience as 'stepping back into the Dreamtime – the morning of the world'. Interestingly, I strongly identified the wilderness experience with the 'Dreamtime', and have done so for more than thirty years. Of course, it can legitimately be asked if I (as a white Australian) really *understand* 'the Dreaming'. What do I mean by the Dreamtime? Well, one clue is that I also speak of it as the 'morning of the world'. There is a sense of ancientness to the experience (the eternal now), but also vitality and freshness. There is the spiritual dimension of *belonging*, being 'one' with the land, being part of its ongoing creation. The ongoing creative side of the Dreaming is something spoken of also by indigenous people (Rudder 1999). 'Being one with the land' is also something Thoreau (1854) wrote about: 'am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?'. Similarly, Muir (1916) wrote: 'you blend with the landscape, and become part and parcel of nature'.

Part of this wonder is experiencing the '*blessing*' and '*peace*' of wilderness. I wrote: 'that canyon recharged my batteries – blessed me', and 'the feeling of being blessed – of shared love is so great'. I do not mean to suggest there is anything religious about such terms. Spiritual perhaps, but not religious. In phenomenological terms, it can be the highlight of lived experience. Along with blessing may also come peace. At Angorawa Ck I wrote: 'I felt at peace. ... A weight had been lifted off my shoulders'. Being blessed, at peace and 'belonging' are powerful feelings, phenomenologically speaking. By understanding their place in the wilderness experience, one can gain insight into the importance of wilderness to those 'who get it', who love the wild.

From this sense of blessing and peace comes the '*healing*' quality of the wilderness experience. Ron wrote of Blue Gum Forest: 'it's therapeutic being here, soaking it up'. George wrote movingly of his own healing experience after resigning from work: 'the drama of the scenery and the river affected me. I was not impervious after all, and by lunchtime of the third day I was suddenly happy'. The significance of the

healing that wilderness offers has been discussed by Lopez (in Tredinnick 2003), Tempest Williams (2003) and Harper (1995). Virtually every member of the Network has spoken of the need to ‘get away’ to wilderness, largely because it is a place to rejuvenate, a refuge. This refuge can be both for people and for biodiversity. George noted: ‘I must be mad or sick of Sydney, and probably one caused the other?’. I wrote: ‘I felt I had to ... flee from the morass of words’. Henry however spoke of wilderness as a biodiversity refuge: ‘these refuges ... are critical to our wildlife’.

Another fascinating quality of the wilderness experience is its ‘*unpredictability and mystery*’. Henry wrote: ‘such is the way of wilderness – you can have all the expectations in the world, but so often entirely something else happens!’. I wrote of such unpredictability:

*We never step in the same river twice ...
For each and every one,
Is always just becoming.*

Sally’s daughter captured this feeling when she said that sometimes she just wanted to ‘keep on going’. When Sally asked what she meant, she said ‘she wants to see what’s “out there”’. As a pilot project for this thesis, I interviewed two artists, Kersten and ‘Janice’. They both mentioned the unpredictability and spontaneity of wilderness as being something that spoke deeply to their creativity. The creative power of the wilderness experience has been recognised by others (Rolston 2001, Nash 2001). I experienced this myself on a three day ‘solo on the Colo’, where I overcame a poetry block. Associated with this unpredictability is a sense that wilderness is a place of mystery which hides ‘secrets’. Sally wrote:

*The rock wallabies sit quietly in their
Hiding places and smile.
They know their secrets won’t be revealed.*

I wrote how a landowner commented: ‘that country is full of secrets!’. Another aspect of this mystery is what I will call ‘numinous events’, where things ‘happen’ when you are in the bush. On a walk, Henry found wildlife kept appearing to him: ‘it’s wonderful ... what shows itself when you’re alone ... It was one of those days’.

This quality goes right back to Thoreau (1864), who on Mt. Ktaadn wrote: ‘it was Matter, vast, terrific ... Talk of mysteries!’.

There is also the ‘*independence and freedom*’ of wilderness, that sense that this place is not something under our control – it is ‘self-willed’ (Nash 2001). I wrote after my solo on the Colo: ‘this place was so independent! ... a wild eternal being that lives on quite independently of me’. The independence of wilderness has also been seen as essential by other scholars. Willers (2001) sees respect for the independence of the nonhuman world as being essential, as this independence allows natural evolution. Nash (2001, p. 381) notes that wilderness began where the Garden of Eden ended, and we need to remember that ‘pastoralism is a form of control’. Rolston (2001) refers to wild nature as being ‘uncontrolled’ and ‘spontaneously autonomous’, but also of having autopoiesis, and ‘turbulence and ferment’. These add to an area’s uniqueness, so that ‘Yellowstone ... is like no place else on Earth’. The journal-writers feeling of independence related strongly to that of the scholars above, in the sense that wilderness is uncontrolled by humans, it is spontaneous and unpredictable, something that both scholars and writers agree the world and humanity *need*. However, while being uncontrolled, this does not mean that ‘benign neglect’ of wilderness is now feasible (Soule 1995), when what we need is an ‘active caring’. Such a caring would be minimum intervention management to keep wilderness (for example) free of exotic weeds.

The sense of ‘freedom’ people find in wilderness is connected to that independence. This freedom is largely an escape from Western society. George wrote: ‘cares drop off me one by one’. Elsewhere he wrote: ‘escape from the office is complete’. It is somewhat surprising, given the historical importance ‘freedom’ has had in wilderness advocacy (ACF 1975, Nash 1988), that more journal-writers did not write about freedom. Because of its freedom, wild country has been described as ‘the geography of hope’ (Stegner 1968 in Nash 2001, p. 262), a place where people can truly be themselves. Along with the freedom comes the *challenge* of wilderness. Sally noted: ‘it is not until we ... face the challenge of the “unknown” that we will really understand our place in the world’. George wrote of a wilderness experience as ‘the gift of risk and challenge’. Part of that challenge is in overcoming the fear of

the wild, part is in testing your body. Ron speaks of ‘an intangible pleasure in pushing yourself hard while in your prime’. Such a physical challenge brings both physical and psychological benefits, as noted by Duncan (1998).

Another strong quality of the wilderness experience is ‘*humility*’. I wrote: ‘it is in relating to the nonhuman or more-than-human that we become truly human. Wilderness shows us our limits’. Later after my Colo trip, I wrote:

*Perhaps I was being taught humility – a humbleness towards the immensity and power of life in the wild ... It is not indifference or irrelevance that I feel or even impotence in front of such a place. Perhaps it is **relative importance**?*

Ron also spoke in the PAR about the humility of almost dying of heat exhaustion on Kanangra Walls. Certainly there would be few bushwalkers that have not felt humility in the wild, as did Leopold (1949) and Tempest Williams (1999).

There is also a feeling of *the primacy of the land*, where the land is seen as paramount. George wrote of ‘these areas where nature is pre-eminent’. I wrote: ‘the primacy of the land. The land is paramount. Not us’. This does not mean that we ignore social justice or don’t care about humans (as has been claimed of ‘Earth First’). Rather, it means that in any unresolvable conflict, we take the nonhuman side. A part of feeling humility is the feeling that one also needs to show respect for the land. At Angorawa pool ‘I did not stop to welcome the pool ... I suddenly felt trepidation and my heart quailed ... I was here alone on the Rainbow Serpent pool – deep and dark – and worthy of respect’. Failure to show respect can also result in the experience of feeling the anger of place towards you. This has not happened to me often, but happened to Kersten at Baiame Cave, when inadvertently I led her across a men’s Bora ground. She ‘felt her throat was closing up’.

Underlying (and making possible) many of the other qualities of the wilderness experience is the diversity of ‘*communication*’, both to and from the wilderness. One part of this is *talking to place*. On the Colo I wrote how ‘I found myself telling the river that “I had fought for you!”’. Later at Angorawa Ck junction I wrote of a spiritual ‘talking’ that bore results: ‘a Red Bull-ant sizes me up, but when asked respectfully - leaves me alone!’. On the rock-shelves upstream on Angorawa Ck I

‘asked it to give me voice so that I can truly *sing* the wilderness’. So talking to place is part of the wilderness experience. Lopez (1986) speaks also of our ‘conversation’ with the land. Rose (1996) notes that Aboriginal people speak and sing to ‘country’. One does not necessarily have to believe in Gaia or Baïame or an ‘intelligence of place’ to do this. One merely has to feel respect for place.

Another part of communication is *hearing the voice* of wilderness. I wrote of how my first trip on the Colo ‘taught me to listen, it made me realise that the Lyrebird had no human voice’. Later I wrote: ‘I had heard its voice, I had realised it had no human voice to defend it’. Stewart in his interview referred to hearing the voice of the land. Harper (1995) noted that ‘if we are ... open enough to listen, wilderness itself will teach us’. Such ‘listening’ relates closely to many other terms. It could be said to be part of ‘dadirri’, an Aboriginal word from the Kimberleys that can be translated as ‘contemplation’ (Ungunmerr 1995). Tacey (2000) calls dadirri a ‘spirituality of deep seeing and deep listening’. Tredinnick (2003, p. II) speaks of ‘witness’ as the ‘way we apprehend (see, hear, feel, sense, experience) the living world’. The term ‘empathy’ is also one that gets used in relation to our ability to listen to the land.

These terms are indeed related and often conflated, but are not necessarily the same. I speak of ‘listening’, whereas ‘dadirri’ is the deep contemplation that *allows* this listening. Similarly, ‘empathy’ is the power to understand another entity (an empathetic contemplation). Empathy thus too allows listening. Is a ‘spirituality of deep seeing and deep listening’ the same as a deep ‘contemplation’? Perhaps. Certainly this description also gives the idea of putting yourself in a receptive (empathetic) state of mind, one where you can truly listen. ‘Listening’ would seem to be part of ‘witness’, but given that the listening that I refer to is spiritual as well as physical, and involves seeing (indeed the totality of one’s senses), perhaps ‘witness’ is actually a better term. Contemplation and empathy are mental approaches that allow one to lower one’s guard, and really listen to, or ‘witness’, the land. This doesn’t happen only in lanais, but is found wherever humans interact with wild nature. However, I believe that the voice one can hear is *stronger* in lanais, because of their sheer size. This lends poignancy to the wilderness experience. I find myself often telling people ‘if you listen you will learn’. Harper (1995) in his ‘wilderness

practice' also lets wilderness 'speak for itself', by sitting back and letting his party connect and listen in their own time.

Communicating with place can also mean that something *comes back to you* from the wild. At Baiame Cave, while walking to the flowing water-meadow, a thought kept returning to my mind: 'much has changed, but the love goes on'. Such phrases can, I feel, be a returning communication *from* place. Part of this two-way communication can be the experience of wilderness 'calling' you. I wrote of Angorawa Ck that 'these places call to me. I yearn'. This 'calling' manifested also in my poetry, where I saw the Colo as 'an endless voice calling'. It manifested itself in my dreams:

It leaves me disturbed – with a need to go there and check that everything is alright. I think it is the Colo calling – telling me it is too long since I have been there, been part of this place.

Rose (1996, p. 13) also spoke of how Aboriginal people 'long for country'. When we first found Baiame Cave, I wrote: 'there seemed something drawing me. ... There is no doubt in my mind that we were *led* here. ... I could feel this place *before* I reached it'. This 'calling' reflects a connectivity to place. This can be a yearning to return, to be a custodian, which can operate through dreams, as well as in a conscious feeling of a 'need' to do something, of actual *guidance* while walking. This is not something that I can 'prove' (though my partner felt it also), but then that is not the main aim of phenomenology. Bushwalkers at times obliquely refer to such intuitions, as have Aboriginal people and researchers (for example Elkin 1993). Rose (1996) noted that country is not passive, that it can call to you. As far as I know, this 'calling' has not been studied in any great detail phenomenologically, and merits further research. Another aspect of such 'calling' is the need to make a *pilgrimage*. After revisiting Dingo Dreaming I wrote: 'I completed my pilgrimage to this amazing place!'. On reflection, my answering the call from Angorawa was also a pilgrimage. Standing on those incredibly beautiful rock shelves in Angorawa, I felt both a need to 'share' but also almost a need to 'report' on the years in-between.

Another aspect of this two-way communication is the feeling one must speak for, or *sing*, the wilderness. By 'singing', I really mean a passionate lyrical 'speaking for'. Tredinnick (2003, p. II) has written of seeking to 'sing' the wild, which he also

describes as ‘bearing witness’ to it. Ron writes of a sunset, and his friend’s perplexity because ‘you just can’t describe this to people in the city. They just don’t get it’. This resonates with Noah’s poem in PAR Cycle 5: ‘some people just don’t get it’. It may be for this reason that some wilderness advocates express despair about society. I also wrote about the need to ‘sing’ wilderness. After Dingo Dreaming I wrote: ‘how to communicate this? ... All I know is that love and wonder work better than anger and despair!’. At Angorawa Ck I asked: ‘for the voice to sing this place ... to give expression to such beauty and wildness’. All this shows the deep frustration which wilderness advocates can feel when trying to express and communicate the deep spiritual importance of the wilderness experience.

What or who is it we communicate with? The quality of our wilderness experience will be influenced by our experience of what I call the ‘*synergistic intelligence of place*’. ‘Intelligence of place’ is a concept that I use here to describe the entity of place which one interacts with. More commonly ‘sense of place’ scholars would tend to use the term *genius loci*, or ‘spirit of place’ (Cameron 2003, p. 12, Rigby 2003, p. 108). Ron writes of the wild: ‘I think a key thing for me is something to do with wholeness’. After finding Baiame Cave I wrote:

*If I was led here, it was by the intelligence of place. This is made up of the patient rocks, the growing green, the animals in their movement and the memories of those ... who shared this place ... So the intelligence of place is a synergism, a collectivity, a wholeness. the emphasis is **not** on the human ... but that humans are a loving, valued part of this synergism.*

I am not the first to comment that the intelligence of place is made up of the human and the more-than-human. Others have indicated that several things, human and nonhuman, might be going on with a place simultaneously (Cameron 2003 pers. comm.). Lopez (1986) has noted that the land is ‘alive’, and Rose (1996, p. 13) similarly described ‘country’ as a ‘living entity ... with a consciousness and a will toward life’. This insight has been profound for me. It adds to my personal ‘witness’ of the wild. In the past, I was uncertain ‘what’ it was that guided me, but I now feel that I have a better understanding, that the synergistic intelligence of place was my guide.

Wilderness experience is influenced by our feelings around '*ownership and custodianship*'. Sally wrote: 'no one owns the land', and disagreed with the idea that 'you only care about what you own'. I wrote: 'the land belongs to itself ... We cannot possess it or own it', and 'custodianship flows to those who love and listen and respect the land – irrespective of race'. The issue of possessive ownership was previously identified by the Network (and Plumwood), as one of the problems around our view of the land. Clearly, the philosophical idea of any humans possessively 'owning' the land was repugnant to journal-writers. '*Kinship*' deepens the experience of custodianship. At Baiame Cave I wrote of a deep feeling 'of love and companionship and kinship'. It goes beyond feeling oneself to be a custodian, to a deep connection to all those who had loved that place before.

Custodianship also expresses itself as a sense of *obligation to the land*, a sense of *guardianship*, whether by black or white. I wrote: 'but I can't *not* act out of fear about this!'. This obligation (which Hill noted in Chapter 5) can lead to a sense of guardianship. I wrote: 'I guess if one calls oneself a "guardian" – one may be called on to guard?'. In Chapter 6, George spoke of his 'waking dream' in Kakadu, where an Aboriginal man gave him a shield and spear to guard the land. An aspect of being a custodian and guardian is that one may feel called upon to do 'ceremonies'. It was my feeling of custodial connection to Baiame Cave that communicated to me that it 'wanted' a ceremony, which I then returned to carry out. Noah has also organised ceremonies to celebrate place and wilderness.

Another fascinating quality to the wilderness experience is living through '*the return from wilderness*'. George writes of how after a hard walk he woke: 'and in the morning you wonder if you really were there ... your mind can't take it all in – there was too much and it's all too *big*, bigger than you could ever be'. I wrote after returning from the Colo of how 'the last few days I have been in two places at once'. I also spoke of how this can bring a 'gentle melancholy' while trying to reconcile consumerist society with the independence of the wild. Others such as Harper (1995) and Thomashow (1996) have written of how people can have trouble adjusting to returning from wilderness. The experience lives on in you afterwards. This is something *more* than just memory. I wrote of how my first trip down the Colo 'still

lives with me ... flashes of it still come to my mind'. This highlights the strength of that lived experience, for it lives on within, returning even decades later. I have noted the wistful conversation of people many years after I had taken them to the Colo. Clearly, as a phenomenon, it has a lasting effect.

Not all interaction with the land will be positive. There is the quality of living through '*fear of the wild*', something which has plagued humans throughout history. Sally noted her daughter was 'sometimes afraid of it' as there are thunderstorms. Henry wrote of travelling through the 'Devil's wilderness' which terrified Caley's expedition. He also mused how the West 'still fear the wolves at the edge of our vision'. I also reflected: 'I have been thinking about fear too. ... I realise I am not as fearless as I once was!'. Thoreau too knew fear on Mt Ktaadn (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 148), and probably everyone does at some stage. It is thus an integral part of the lived experience of the wild, and is sometimes the negative side of first experiencing the wild, without the backup of civilisation. However as Henry noted, some societies such as ours seem to *exacerbate* our fear of the wild.

The use of mobile phones in wilderness is in fact a tool for isolating one from experiencing the challenge and fear in such experiences. They lend a sense of security, for all communication is not withdrawn, and one can talk to familiar voices. They thus decrease the fear of the wild, but it needs to be recognised that they also limit participation or 'being there' in wilderness. For this reason their use should be strongly limited to a back-up in case of emergency. Fear and trepidation are not all bad, for they can teach us much about planning and self-sufficiency in the wild. It also does no harm to occasionally confront one's own fears.

2.2 The phenomenology of encountering the wilderness knot

What is it like to experience the wilderness knot? Firstly, there is the '*loneliness of the wilderness advocate*'. George wrote: 'where are the stalwarts, do they all hate me?'. I wrote: 'this understanding and passion for wilderness can be a lonely road ... Who speaks for wilderness?'. The wilderness advocate (since the days of Thoreau) thus often seems to feel 'out of sync' with society. Thoreau spoke of his own society: 'thank God they cannot cut down the clouds' (Emerson 1862). One can feel like a

stranger in a strange land, someone who ‘gets it’ about wilderness, but must strive hard to get others to value it. For someone who feels a deep love of wilderness as Ianai, dealing with the wilderness knot can bring a sense of unreality, cognitive dissonance, and real loneliness.

Connected with loneliness are the related qualities of ‘*frustration, anger and despair*’ about the knot. George thought that those who don’t believe in the reality of wilderness were ‘mad’. Ron wrote of his friend’s frustration with city people who ‘just don’t get it’. I wrote: ‘they don’t know it, they don’t appear to love it, yet they are happy to judge it and its value’. I reflected that I had to control my anger and frustration, that ‘my own sanity relied on it’. One source of frustration was the indifference to wilderness amongst academia. After the Sense of Place Colloquium, I wrote of an ‘underlying indifference’ to wilderness in many scholars. *Despair* can be close at hand as well. George noted: ‘I wish I could say “if I don’t do it, someone else will”. I *know* no one else will’. I also wrote: ‘I must admit to a form of despair at getting the message across’. In Tasmania, after watching the documentary ‘Wildness’, I was overwhelmed by an unexpected emotional storm:

*Why was I in despair? ... I was grieving for a world that was in danger, an independent wild world, a world shrinking and being torn apart, as much by **ideas** as machines. ... I so wanted to save these areas, and I didn’t know **how** to do it.*

Frustration and despair arose from a realisation that wilderness is caught up in human mind games, games made up of philosophical movements, political ideologies, concepts of justice and compassion (or lack of it) for the ‘other’. Dealing with the wilderness knot (along with the decline of wilderness) involves dealing with despair and depression. Macy (1996) has similarly written about coping with the despair of being an anti-nuclear activist, which she subsequently extended to environmental activism. The wilderness experience involves love, respect, and deep spiritual connection. Dealing with the wilderness knot (which threatens wilderness) can thus generate strong negative feelings. This in part explains why wilderness advocates are so keen to get back out into the wilderness, so as to shed that anger.

Another quality is the ‘*anguish around social and environmental justice*’. Clearly justice is a strong motivator. Sally wrote: ‘my life’s work has centred around the

desire to right the wrongs of past generations'. Later she asked: 'how can any of us afford to say that social justice must over-ride ... environmental justice?'. After revisiting Dingo Dreaming, I wrote worriedly that 'wilderness is losing out as those with a conscience are preoccupied with social justice'. I also experienced a rather disquieting phenomenon of flipping backwards and forwards from seeing the value in one form of justice one day, to seeing the other the next, and how I 'feel them battling in me'. I also worried that my feeling of obligation to the land might cause some people to label me 'racist'. My own conflict around differing sorts of 'justice' seemed to reflect society's own tangled nexus about these.

There was concern about *race and spiritual connection to the land*. Sally noted that all 'humans have a deep spiritual connection with "the land"'. I questioned the idea that spiritual connection to the land has anything to do with 'race' after returning from the Sense of Place Colloquium: 'to suggest that I as a white person who has listened to the land for all of my life cannot possibly feel sacredness is in fact a very bigoted view'. I acknowledge the sensitivity of this issue, and admit to considering removing it from discussion. However, phenomenology is about honesty in your real life experience, and this has been significant to me. I am not the first to note that Australians of European descent feel a strong bond to the land. Rose (2004, p. 211) speaks of the love of 'settler-descended people' for Gulaga mountain. After being 'led' to Baiame Cave, I wrote:

But I am not black. Does this make a difference? Not a bit – we were so very welcome here. Does this mean I have an Aboriginal soul? Do souls have colour or race? Are they not above such things? ... the joy and love I felt show me forever more that whatever else it may be about – it is not about race!

I have since asked myself if it was not convenient for me to think this? Upon long reflection, my reply is that the power of that 'knowledge' was so true that it achieved for me the force of revelation. I would have to say that I now 'know' this as deeply as I know anything. In Chapter 5, James explained the Aboriginal story of the 'Wungad' waters, the living waters, from where the spirit children come – for all races. This was used to point out that *all* people (black and white) in fact *come from the land*. Custodianship and kinship I now believe are about love and respect, whatever racial background one may come from.

There is also a positive quality in the experience of the wilderness knot, that of healing ‘dialogue’. Sally wrote:

‘Reading through the wilderness interview transcripts, I can’t help but be struck by how much common ground there is ... I hope the debates about wilderness will fade away if we concentrate on our common goals and values

When pondering the interviews with scholars, I wrote:

The thesis process over the last few months has been most positive for me ... personally it has really been a therapy.

My felt experience of the wilderness knot underwent an evolution from frustration through to dialogue, to the finding of common ground – which brought hope. There is real joy in untangling tangles, reducing confusion, and loosening the knot!

2.3 The contribution of phenomenological accounts to understanding the wilderness knot

Some journal-writing shed light on the wilderness knot, even if it was not about actual lived experience. One point was about ‘*nature scepticism and ignorance*’.

Henry observed:

*I don’t mean necessarily that they **don’t know**, more than they **won’t see**. ... When it comes to nature, I do believe ignorance explains a very large percentage of negative/ ‘right’ attitudes ... few have the foggiest how it all works, or how fast the wheels are falling off and why.*

This ignorance of our ecological grounding in the world was also referred to by several interviewees. Another point is about the ‘*size of wilderness*’. Ron, like Harper (1995), argued that for wilderness, size does matter: ‘the myriad relationships ... of interconnected ecosystems confer buffering capacity and redundancy, which results in long term stability’. Henry observed that small remnants ‘lack the overwhelming power and presence of natural ecosystems functioning on a wider scale’. I commented that:

the Colo was ridge upon ridge, catchment upon catchment, mountain upon valley, repeated again and again. The whole was a very large organic whole – and the impact it had because of this was more than a smaller area.

As noted in the literature review, there is little discussion or research on the impact of ‘size’ on the wilderness experience, certainly in a phenomenological sense. It would be a fruitful area for further research.

‘*Land management*’ is another point of interest. Sally acknowledged that natural areas need minimum intervention management to protect and restore them: ‘these areas could not simply be left alone or they would likely degrade over time’. Sally also thought we needed to use both ‘the ‘white toolbox’ and the ‘black toolbox’ for management. Ron was not so sure about bureaucratic ideas of ‘management’, where we have to manage everything: ‘why would nature be bound by the ultra ‘efficient’ linear managerialism that is currently in vogue?’. These views raise the question of what ‘management’ *means*. Is it the minimum intervention’ management that Plumwood spoke of in Chapter 5, or is it an anthropocentric ‘controlling’ of the land, which others express concern about (for example Nash 2001, p. 339)? The many meanings of ‘management’ were also noted by many speakers (white and black) at ‘Finding Common Ground’. Wilderness advocates tend to be suspicious of this ‘management mania’ (Lyon 1992), especially in the sense of ‘control’, or when it is suggested that any natural area managed by humans is somehow ‘humanised’ and no longer nature (Plumwood 2003). However, Kirkpatrick (2006) has pointed out the need for a certain minimum management in South-west Tasmanian wilderness, to remove exotic plants invading the coast (Balmer et al. 2004). The same is true for willows on the Colo River. Minimum intervention management need not be (and in fact to my mind clearly is not) ‘control’. Rather it is an ‘active caring’ for wilderness (Soule 1995).

The ‘*land needs humans*’ debate also figured centrally in journals, and related to management. Sally felt that people need a connection to land: ‘but does maintaining connection require permanent settlement or regular visitation? Not if that ultimately results in degradation of the environment and wilderness qualities’. At Baiame Cave I wrote:

People need the land, and the land enjoys the love of custodians – but it does not need us ... It is one thing to celebrate the value of the bond between human and the land – that wonderful loving symbiosis ... There is a world of difference between feeling an

obligation/ duty to respect and honour and love the land – and feeling responsible like an elder brother to a child.

I also wrote that the land enjoyed human love, and might even miss us, but did not need us (in the sense that we were a necessity). The *loving symbiosis* between human and land I believed was being misinterpreted. Anthropocentrism is influencing some people to use the wrong meaning of ‘need’. The distinction between the two approaches is in fact marked. The idea that the land ‘enjoys’ our loving symbiosis, that we become a part of the synergistic intelligence of place, involves humility and is an ecocentric concept. The idea that the land must have humans as a *necessity* is a profoundly anthropocentric position, one that ignores the agency of the land and all other life. This whole debate is certainly a fertile area for further research.

Another point of interest relates to ‘*theory and fanaticism*’. I wrote: ‘don’t such academics think strategically? ... Must reality be subverted in the cause of theory?’. Later I mused about a debate with two poststructuralists: ‘the intolerance and ignorance shown was quite breath-taking! How do you fight zealots? How do you even communicate with them?’. Later again I wrote about seeking dialogue with two postmodernists researchers at the World Wilderness Congress:

*I was concerned that ‘theory was taking over reality’, that the argument that wilderness is based on dualism is a postmodernist position, **not** a given truth ... It is misplaced fanaticism ... Can theory really brain-wash people so badly?*

I realise that terms such as ‘fanaticism’ and ‘brain-washing’ are controversial. However, this does reveal the frustration felt when theory seems to overtake reality, and threatens *real* places that one loves. Plumwood acknowledged in her interview that the theorization around wilderness is a major problem. At the very least, this journal entry demonstrated the problem when people won’t listen. I do not pretend that fanaticism is limited to one side, wilderness advocates can fall prey to it also. However, fanatics will not listen, as they ‘know’ they are right. They won’t enter into dialogue. When theory becomes a problem, (such as when it theorises the nonhuman world out of existence), then perhaps we should change our theory?

The question of the ‘*wilderness knot and postmodernism*’ raised strong responses. Henry wrote: ‘transferring a post-modern approach to the real world ... is delusional fantasy!’. I wrote:

in many ways I feel sympathy for the concerns of postmodernism – it’s just that they have become a dogma ... Postmodernism is the creation of the city ... It has little relevance to wilderness ... ignores its reality, ignores its independence.

There is also the aspect of failing to extend the ‘other’ to include wilderness, which I concluded was ‘a failure of compassion’. This resonates with comments by Soule (2002) that we need ‘a broader compassion, an ethic that makes room for the “others”’ of the nonhuman world. On dualism, Sally mused: ‘wilderness fitted at one end of a spectrum of natural areas’. Henry thought the idea of wilderness as a dualism was ‘bankrupt’, while I wrote: ‘rather than reinforcing dualism ... wilderness ... shows us we are one with life’. There is thus a strong feeling amongst journal-writers that wilderness is the wild end of a spectrum. The wilderness experience of feeling a part of nature mitigates strongly against seeing wilderness as a dualism splitting humans away from nature.

Regarding the postmodernist questioning of ‘reality’, Sally noted: ‘if we lose wilderness areas we lose all perspective of our *real* place in the world’. George argued: ‘there’s so much data ... and the totality can kill you - and yet people deny it exists’. He thought it a ‘madness’ to dispute this, that we should ignore those that do, and rather educate the next generation. This resonates with Soper (1996) who argued that those who deny nature’s reality are ‘incoherent’. At Cedar Creek I wrote: ‘how can any doubt the reality of where I am? – it’s the living land!’. Clearly, the sheer reality of wilderness is taken as a ‘given truth’ for journal-writers.

These entries resonate with the criticisms of the postmodernist attack on ‘reality’ by Barry (1995), Bryant (1994), Gare (1995), Reason and Torbert (2001) and Hay (2002). Barry (1995) points out that the ontological existence of nature is an indisputable fact, and our perception of it is then shaped by our senses and culture. Reason and Torbert (2001) emphasized that we must not confuse our symbolic constructs with our meeting with the ‘elemental properties of the living world’. Hay (2002) stated categorically that postmodernism denies a ‘real world’ tangible realm

of nature. These three thus largely point out the problem of denying reality. However, Bryant (1994) is concerned about the consequences of this, worrying that our ‘clever philosophical word games’ will lead us to lose sight of ‘real wolves being shot by real bullets’. Gare (1995) similarly worries that the questioning of reality leaves people without reference points, so they are ‘denatured’, and thus fail to act to protect nature. The problem with the postmodernist questioning of reality is that it results in a situation where it tends to work against activism to protect the wild. The journal-writers, like the scholars above, felt an essential need to acknowledge the reality of the natural world, even though our perception of this will indeed be shaped by our senses and culture (including our ability to ‘witness’).

Concerning ‘*anthropocentrism*’, Henry wrote: ‘in fact, humanity is virtually irrelevant to our concept of wilderness! Whether humans are part of a landscape or not, it still deserves protection’. I commented:

Anthropocentrism is a form of megalomania – a literal madness. ... It is the bane of wilderness, as it gives it no value ... Anthropocentrism is also insidious And it seems to be triumphing – in academia, in bureaucracy, in the media, in politics ... Even social justice is the triumph of anthropocentrism.

The universality of anthropocentrism has been attested to by Naess (1973), Godfrey-Smith (1979), and Smith (1998), reflecting its insidious nature, and the pervasiveness of the modernist world view. My quote suggests that social justice is the triumph of anthropocentrism, or at least anthropocentric humanism. Actually, I believe a sense of social justice in society is long overdue, and I am not lamenting this, merely that the concern for the ‘other’ has not been extended *beyond* our own species. The comments here reflect a belief of many older activists, that in the 1970s and 1980s the worldview of Australian society seemed to be becoming more ecocentric, with a focus on environmental justice. However, in recent decades we seem to have slid backwards, returning to anthropocentrism.

The ‘*political dimension of wilderness*’ is another point that emerged. George commented: ‘sometimes bureaucrats are turned into political zombies ... I have seen wilderness disappear and reappear in their eyes with the passage of political paradigms’. Later he added: ‘wilderness must fit in around the edges of this political apology to appease rednecks’. As a professional wilderness conservationist, his

political cynicism was understandable. An understanding of the *Realpolitik* of wilderness is something every wilderness advocate must learn. In our political system, wilderness as lanai will not be protected due solely to its intrinsic value, or even for the ecosystem services and other instrumental values it provides humanity. Wilderness does not vote, so conservationists need to run campaigns that lobby politicians to ‘do the right thing’. Conservationists also have to deal with the political strand of the wilderness knot, where neither main party comes from an ideological position that actually supports or accepts the intrinsic value of wilderness.

3. In Conclusion

3.1 The big picture

What then has come out of my research in terms of the ‘big picture’ of wilderness issues? ‘Wilderness’ is caught up in a web of meaning and miscommunication, of cultural perception, of intense passions around justice, of what is philosophically in vogue, of passionate debate about whether humans (or culture) are ‘part of nature’, of very different worldviews - and of intolerance and fanaticism about all of these. This is not surprising if one accepts that we cannot discuss the idea of ‘wilderness’ without fundamentally discussing the relationship between wild nature and humanity (Oelschlaeger 1991, p. 5). Rather than give up on the meaning of ‘wilderness’, however, we *can* specify what we mean. We can use greater rigour to explain the meaning we are using, and clarify what it is we are really saying. There are cases when this happens (and it often doesn’t happen, as people often fail to communicate), where part of the wilderness knot becomes illusory, a ‘smokescreen’. We can then find that there is common ground, so that many of the perceived differences vanish.

What was learned about dialogue on wilderness contributes to reducing confusion, especially between TOs and conservationists. The need for ‘profound attentiveness’ (true listening) and ‘mutual respect’ argued by Clark (2004) was confirmed here. It was also found that dialogue is not for everyone, as there are those who will *not* wish to take part. Dialogue is for the open-minded, who are willing to meet part-way. Intolerance seems common (to varying degrees), and fanaticism also occurs. Both of

these are the bane of meaningful dialogue, and much of the dialogue process consists of seeking to avoid these. Dialogue also requires time, energy and enthusiasm to succeed. This research also demonstrated the diversity of Aboriginal views about 'wilderness', something academics seem not to have acknowledged to date. There are TOs who (in contrast to Langton 1996) *support* the idea of joint custodianship of the land by both black and white. While there are differences between TOs and conservationists about wilderness (such as the 'land needs humans' debate), these are *not* such that the two groups could not work together to protect wilderness as lanai. The common ground outweighs the differences. Dialogue has been hampered by the lack of rigour in the wilderness debate within academia. Meanings have not been defined, and there has been a great deal of knocking down of 'straw people', dispatching arguments that others are not actually making. Associated with this is an unrecognised academic naivety about how their comments on 'wilderness' may be used - possibly to help exploit wilderness as lanai. Given that many academics *do* in fact value lanais (and want them protected), this is one aspect of the debate that could be easily corrected within academic circles.

Regarding conservation biology, this research has shown the extent of the conflict between the fragment ('representativeness') and landscape ('adequacy') approaches to wilderness as lanai. This debate is having a significant impact on the wilderness knot, and whether lanais are formally protected. The rise of landscape and systems ecology may see a revival of the recognition that lanais have major value to biodiversity, even if some scientists do not call them 'wilderness'. In the end what matters is not the name, but the protection and management of lanais into the future. The Network and other wilderness advocates will continue to call these lanais 'wilderness', while others may call them by other names. A loosening of the wilderness knot would allow more people to feel comfortable in calling lanais 'wilderness', or at least 'wilderness as lanai'.

Given the many criticisms of wilderness, it may indeed seem surprising that the use of the term has survived? The phenomenological discussion showed that the *power* of the wilderness experience is enormous to the lives of those it graces. As long as wilderness as lanai continues to exist, it will continue to form connections with those

who ‘listen’, it will continue to call, to challenge, to bless and heal, to live on within people’s minds and souls. The depth, richness and strength of the wilderness experience means that no matter how tangled the meanings, or how extreme the confusion, there will always be those who hear its voice and seek to ‘sing’ the wilderness. The phenomenological research helps explain why the ‘wilderness experience’ is so important and powerful to people. Oelschlaeger (1991, pp. 5-9) speaks of ‘posthistoric primitivism’ as trying to understand the world as Paleolithic humans saw it. Wilderness as lanai gives us the chance to try to do this, to ‘witness’ wild nature on a whole diversity of levels. It can be transformational precisely because it blows away the cobwebs of modernism and postmodernism, because people *do* communicate with wild nature as the ‘other’, because they show respect, because they feel part of it and ‘belong’. There is also the aspect of integrating ethics with science, most notably by acknowledging the ‘land ethic’ of Leopold (1949). This remains an urgent ongoing need (Oelschlaeger 1991). The wide acceptance of the land ethic (or related ethical positions), along with the power of the wilderness experience itself, may explain why (despite the modernism and resourcism inherent in government and business) 98% of the Australian public in 1996 still thought wilderness should be protected (Morgan 1996).

While in some cases (where effective dialogue *does* take place), the wilderness knot may be a smokescreen, it is by no means *entirely* a smokescreen. It is only a smokescreen when the two groups who are miscommunicating actually *do* share common ground, as at ‘Finding Common Ground’. As Figgis and others (Brown 1992) have observed, conservationists and TOs are already fairly closely aligned philosophically. In terms of the ‘big picture’, the wilderness knot is anything but illusory in regard to modern Australian society as a whole. It lies at the nexus of fundamental issues of how humans view the world. It could be argued that the world is divided into those who attribute *intrinsic value* to nature, and those who don’t, who just see it as something to use. Certainly, Taylor (1986) thought that seeing ‘inherent worth’ in the world was eminently defensible, but first you had to take that stance and make that choice. If you believe in intrinsic value, then you will probably see a need to extend the ‘other’ beyond the human species to include the nonhuman world, which you would believe has value in its own right. You would thus tend to

acknowledge the land ethic (Leopold 1949). By doing this, it would then become difficult to see the human as being 'central' any longer, so you would tend to take an *ecocentric* or 'ecological consciousness' approach (Skolimowski 1992). If you believe in intrinsic value, then you would also almost inevitably *respect* the land, and believe that it is special, or perhaps 'sacred'. Similarly, if you believe in intrinsic value and extend the 'other' to the nonhuman world, you will tend to believe that the nonhuman has a right to *environmental justice*, just as the human has a right to social justice. I would not argue that these things *have* to go together (for example, Recher supports intrinsic value but also supports resourceism), just that they are related and often *do* go together naturally. 'Wilderness' thus intersects with many critical aspects of how we view, value and judge the world - and our place within that world.

It could be argued that the standing of 'wilderness', certainly 'wilderness as lanai', within our society is a barometer of society's belief in intrinsic value, ecocentrism, respect for the land, and environmental justice. If these increase, then wilderness as lanai will be valued, and there will be strong moves to protect it. If these decline, then wilderness as lanai will correspondingly be given less importance, and less of it will be protected. Oelschlaeger (1991) has shown that the modernist does *not* believe in intrinsic value, respect for the land, or ecocentrism, and sees all the land as just a resource for human use. Modernists see no value to wilderness as lanai. A myriad of scholars have explained that this modernist approach is leading us towards ecological disaster (Suzuki 1989, Brown 1990, Oelschlaeger 1991, Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1991).

Many thinkers have similarly been looking for a new paradigm, a new *world view* (Fromm 1976, Taylor 1986, Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1991, Sessions 1996, Berry 1999) that might replace modernism and ensure ecological sustainability. The term 'postmodernism' became a beacon of hope for many. However, postmodernism in itself has shown a tendency to be largely focused on the human, to fail to attribute intrinsic value and extend the 'other' to the nonhuman, and to ignore the existence of environmental justice. There are elements of postmodernism that argue cultural relativism, that devalue the real, that argue against any grand narrative, that refute reason, and that focus on supposed 'dualisms'. These elements of postmodernism have caused problems not just for wilderness, but in terms of taking *any* action to

reverse environmental problems. As Gare (1995) and Reason and Torbert (2001) have both noted, postmodernism has tended to produce a feeling of 'rootlessness' and an inability to organise to protect nature, as any 'grand narrative' tends to be opposed. It is exactly such a grand narrative, which could be termed a narrative of 'Earth repair', that scholars such as Sessions (1996) and Berry (1999) argue we urgently need to find. To date, it seems that we are still waiting for a postmodernist champion, or at least an antimodernist or 'après-postmodernist' champion, of intrinsic value, ecological consciousness and environmental justice. Such a champion would necessarily be a champion for 'wilderness as lanai'. In the meantime, wilderness remains something of a philosophical orphan, seemingly only championed by romanticism.

Fundamentally, the wilderness debate is not one about what percentage of uncleared bush is reserved in protected areas. Rather, it is deeply involved in the central issue of our times – *how* we can change our society's worldview so that it can survive into the future in an ecologically sustainable manner. The transformative power of the wilderness experience is such that it can shake us free from our ideologies.

Wilderness provides a uniquely valuable experience that can enable us to reach an ecologically sustainable society, one founded on respect for nonhuman nature, intrinsic value and *both* environmental and social justice. It enables this by allowing us to see ourselves and our society in perspective, by realising we are not central but part of the web of life and land, by 'confronting your own uniqueness' (Nash 2001, p. 253). The standard of society's dialogues about itself are poor. Wilderness allows us to improve such dialogues by changing our perspective. If people can 'witness' the wild, then the humility, perspective, and sense of 'belonging' will motivate people towards 'respectful use' in all things, rather than seeking an anthropocentric 'mastery' over nature. Nash (2001, p. 388) notes that wilderness (which reflects ethical restrictions on our capacity to control nature) is the best environment to learn about sustainability. It is for this reason that I believe the protection of wilderness as lanai is *essential* to reaching a new worldview of ecological sustainability, rather than being seen in contrast to it (Callicott et al. 1999).

In terms of the big picture, there is a need to recognise how some attempts to change modernism have also done harm to wilderness as lanai. One of these seems to be the

response to the ‘humans are part of nature’ debate, where some poststructuralists are keen to break down the human/ nature split, a split going back at least to Descartes (Abram 1992). Given the predominance of anthropocentrism in academia, this ‘breaking down’ seems to have been attempted through the nature scepticism that Plumwood (2003) speaks of, by denying that ‘nature’ exists. Some argue that because humans influence nature, it thus somehow becomes human. Others argue the need to equate nature with culture, where again nature (the nonhuman) disappears *within* culture. Thus one is left with only ‘cultural landscapes’. Wilderness, as a place where nature comes *first*, has fallen foul of such approaches, being dismissed as a romantic legacy, or an attempt to maintain the nature/ culture dualism. The response by Gare (1995), Rolston (2001), and Plumwood (2001) to this seems most useful in this debate – that humans and their culture *are* a part of nature, but we are a ‘distinctive’ part. We need a conception of nature which allows humans to be essentially cultural beings, while still seeing them as part of and within nature (Gare 1995). By recognising the ‘other’ of wildness we bring culture and nature together (Rolston 2001). We can recognise ‘difference’ without seeking to create dualisms. We can thus continue to use words such as ‘culture’ and ‘nature’, just as we can recognise that any landscape will be a result of a spectrum of natural and cultural influences (Hay 2002).

The tension between social and (the often forgotten) environmental justice creates great problems for wilderness. This is especially true in Australia, where wilderness has become collateral damage in the campaign to discredit the doctrine of terra nullius. Social justice is clearly in the ascendancy in Australia, at least within the intellectual community (if not the conservative Federal Government). The lesson from this research is that if we wish to reach environmental justice, then we will need to do this together with social justice. At ‘Finding Common Ground’, TOs and conservationists found they *did* have common ground, that they both wanted social justice as well as environmental justice. Wilderness as lanai in the Blue Mountains may thus be protected into the future because of this recognition that both forms of justice are needed, and must go hand in hand. The acknowledgment by many scholars interviewed that social and environmental justice must go together is a promising sign. It is another demonstration that the wilderness knot is anything but

trivial, it is tied in with some of the most critical philosophical and ethical issues of our times.

3.2 The way forward

Unlike the ‘Gordian knot’, the wilderness knot will never be cut through with one blow. The interrelated aspects of the ‘big picture’ ensure the task of unravelling the knot will remain ongoing. It may never be fully undone, but it *can* be loosened. To fully untie it would require a philosophical and ethical evolution within society, one that has been the goal (or dream?) of scholars for decades, stretching back to Leopold’s (1949) ‘land ethic’. A critical path towards reaching this is rejuvenating people’s ‘sense of wonder’ (Washington 2002). It requires extensive education within society about the values (intrinsic and instrumental) of wilderness as *lanai*. In a world where modern humans are increasingly distant from wild nature, it must involve a concerted campaign to ensure people *do* encounter wild nature, and form connections to it, especially while young. This means trips to wilderness and wild country, starting in primary schools and ranging right through to university. Noah from the Network seeks to do this with primary school children in the Blue Mountains in his ‘Earth Journeys’ program.

Figure 6 shows the way forward will involve caring and love for the land, as opposed to intolerance and anger. It will involve meaningful dialogue, not a monologue with the converted. To gain this meaningful dialogue, people will have to extend mutual respect and really listen to others. It involves communication and connections, rather than polarisation. The way forward will be through an acceptance of joint stewardship and custodianship of the land by black and white. Rather than being based largely on confrontation, the way forward would be based more on conciliation. It involves grass-roots action to overcome the lack of recognition of the intrinsic value of the land by government.

I suggest that the way forward is towards the top of Figure 6. However, as for the other mind-maps, I am not suggesting that it must go all the way towards the end of all these spectra. There are some interesting middle grounds here. For example, Bill Lines in the PAR pointed out that environmental activism in today’s world *must*

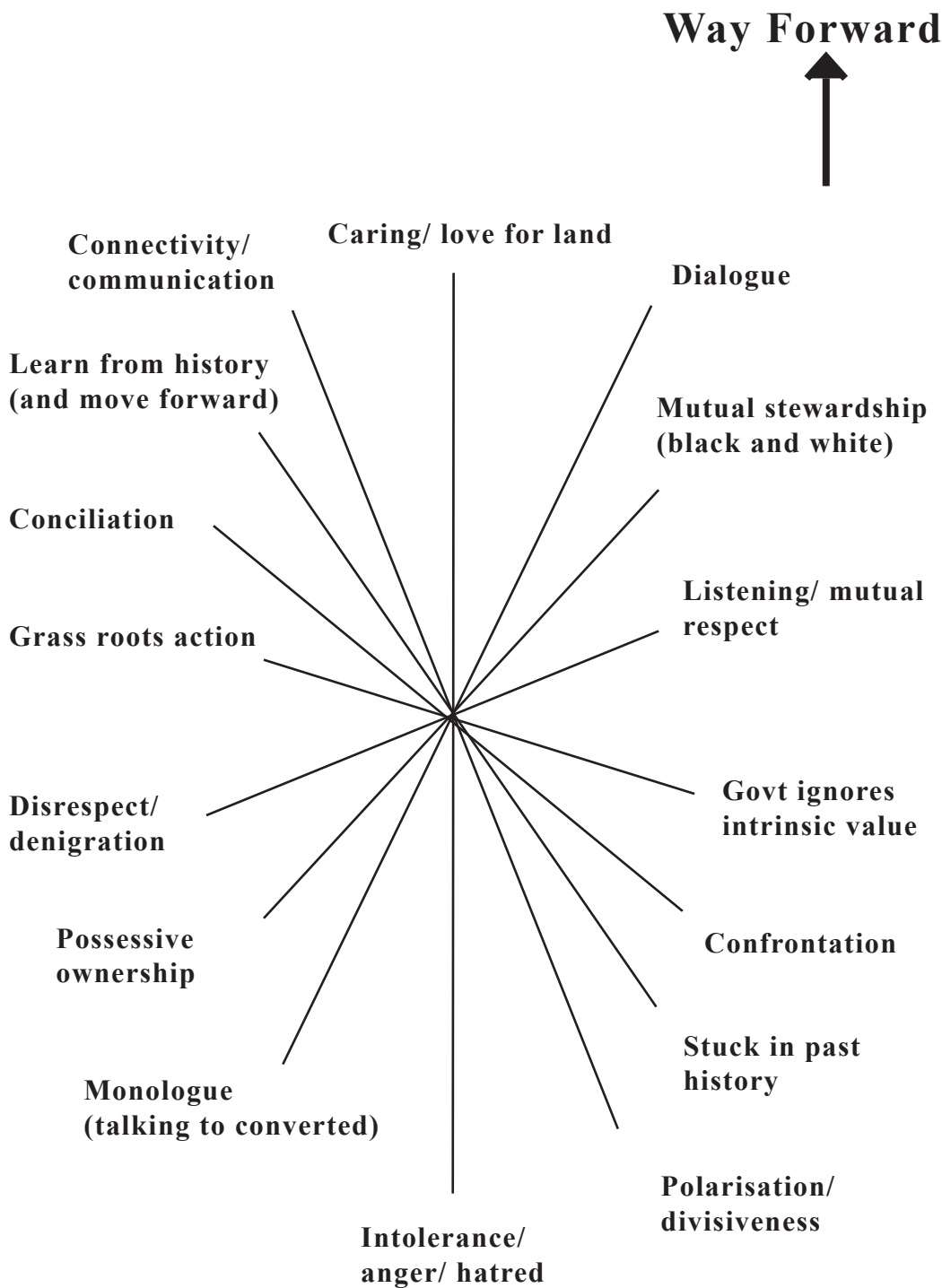


Figure 6. The way forward

involve some confrontation, as too often conciliation and dialogue can lead to a consensus which erodes conservation outcomes. In addition, the media and government seem to expect a confrontation framework. So, we need confrontation and conciliation together. Similarly, I am not suggesting we forget past history. We need to learn from, and thus move beyond, past history - rather than be stuck in it. This may be the history of the 'wasteland' meaning of wilderness, it may be its association with terra nullius, it may be the apparent focus of past wilderness literature on the 'absence of humans', or it may be the past history of the conservation movement in not making crystal clear that 'wilderness' *does* acknowledge the Aboriginal history of occupation of Australia. For example, the failure to consult TOs in the past about proposed wilderness declarations demonstrated an omission whose origin probably lay in a lack of dialogue between the two groups. This is something we can learn from, so that future dialogue may lead to both groups *jointly* nominating areas in the future?

One spectrum where I believe we need to move fully to one end is to leave polarisation behind, and rather seek connectivity and communication. However, as this research has shown, miscommunication will always occur, so it will always be an ongoing project to improve communication. This research lets us appreciate how commonly problems can be attributed to miscommunication, rather than to malice or deliberate obstructionism. Part of communication will include the essential aspect of *education* about wilderness issues, without which the wilderness knot will continue or even worsen. Another part of communication is a journalism sympathetic to the wild, one which celebrates 'self-willed' land, promotes intrinsic value and the other values of wilderness. All too often the easiest path for journalists has been to portray wilderness as dark, dangerous, menacing landscapes – rather than promote them as the fascinating original landscape of Australia. Without at least an even-handed media approach, the wilderness knot will remain, or even get worse.

Dialogue has been identified by both the PAR and the phenomenological research as being essential to the way forward. It ideally would mean an end to fanaticism, polemics, and the setting up of 'straw people' (fallacious arguments). Dialogue, however, will not remove *all* the tangled meanings and confusion, as there will

always be those who do not want dialogue. When representing a particular organisation, people seem to talk in polarised terms, using absolutes, and dialogue again suffers. If we really wish to reduce the confusion around ‘wilderness’, then dialogical activism needs to move society’s (including the conservation and academic) mind-set much further towards seeking meaningful dialogue. Part of reaching this is moving towards mutual respect and listening, and away from disrespect and denigration. Dialogical activism seeks to move the debate almost totally towards respect, both for people and for the land.

Effective dialogue seems to require a decrease in intolerance towards other groups and their views, as well as an end to certain forms of anger. There is indeed such a thing as ‘justified anger’, and a degree of anger may motivate activism. Similarly, a degree of frustration about the knot is perhaps unavoidable. However, communication ceases when people are too angry to listen or understand another view. In the same way, intolerance (and fanaticism) lead to a dismissal of another person’s credibility. I am always suspicious now when I hear some view described as a ‘nonsense’. These negative emotions can be shed, I believe, by focusing on caring and love for the land. It is time for our society to overturn the rather odd notion that it is ‘just not done’ to acknowledge and speak about our love of (and sense of wonder towards) the land. This is a bridge that can cross divides of culture, philosophy and even religion. ‘Care for the land’ was something TOs and conservationists agreed they had in common at ‘Finding Common Ground’. Recognition of commonality can (and did) lead people to tolerate other differences.

Dialogical activism endeavours to move the mind-set away from possessive ownership, towards joint stewardship (or custodianship). In terms of the middle ground, most of us do ‘legally’ own a piece of land, for our society is based on the idea of ownership. The shift is philosophical and ethical. The recognition of ‘Native Title’ in Australia was itself a recognition that there were rights *other* than just ‘ownership’ rights (such as rights of visitation, enacting ceremonies). Having ‘rights’ to land is *not* the same as unrestricted ownership, as all rights are constrained by the obligation to care for the land. So while we may be legal ‘owners’, we can all foster the idea of stewardship, both for our ‘own’ land and for public natural lands, such as

‘wilderness’. Seeing ourselves (black *and* white) as joint custodians of the land creates a non-racial focus for stewardship, where everyone needs to listen to, respect and protect the land. This would be a conciliation between humans and the land, as much as conciliation between black and white (Stewart 2004). We would be stewards not just for future humans, but of the land, its life, and its future evolutionary potential. Whoever legally ‘owns’ the land, it must be managed (not controlled) in an ecologically sustainable way.

The final spectrum is between political inaction about the wild, and grass-roots action to conserve it. All effective environmental activism relies on broad grass-roots support to galvanise governments. The very high level of public support for protecting ‘wilderness’ in 1996 is likely still the case today, due perhaps to the power of the wilderness experience at some stage in people’s lives. However, understanding the political strand of the knot suggests that governments will rarely *do* the right thing on their own about wilderness, for they see no ideological ‘good’ in its existence. They will always need to be pushed by grass-roots activism. Most politicians see politics as a ‘numbers game’, and wilderness in itself does not vote. Protecting (and retaining) wilderness will thus require ongoing campaigns to demonstrate that grass-roots support for wilderness *is* still there, and can sway votes. One day, society may indeed change its worldview, and political parties might also shift their ideologies, and seek to protect wilderness for its own sake. Until that time, grass-roots political action will remain essential.

We (the Network and I) started this thesis wondering *how* and *why* the meaning of wilderness had changed in Australia over the last 30 years. In fact the literature review showed that the ‘spin’ on wilderness had changed all around the world. We have gained a good understanding of the complexity of how this came about. The other meanings of ‘wilderness’ (or for that matter ‘wild’ and ‘natural’) will not go away. We can only focus on the ‘wilderness as lanai’ meaning, and seek those who value this, so we can work together in a world where the UN Millennium Report (Millennium 2005) showed humans are indeed ‘living beyond our means’. As a wilderness advocate since 1974, I have found that this thesis has been *healing* for me. It has shown that there is common ground to keep lanais into the future, that

there *is* still a deep caring for these areas. My three decades of involvement has also shown to me that each generation must weigh these issues, listen, form connections to the land, and feel an obligation to protect it. However, through the process of this thesis, I hope that we (I include my PAR group and journal-writers here) have contributed to the understanding of the ‘wilderness knot’, so that it will be easier for a new generation to move forward. Given how many strands are involved in the wilderness knot, I conclude that it will never be fully undone, at least in any likely future, until we *do* change our worldview, and perhaps bring to fruition the ‘Island Civilisation’ vision suggested by Nash (2001, p. 381). Until then, it will remain an ongoing process. However, the knot *can* be substantially unravelled – and needs to be. The art to keeping ‘wilderness as lanai’ is not just *eternal vigilance*, it is an eternal ongoing dialogue about its meaning and values.

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