

Experience and Place-Making in Contested Forests

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Abstract: This piece examines narratives of place from diverse actors who engage with forests in the Yukon Territory, Canada. In examining personal stories of forest experience, I show how a single locality can be multiple places. In addition, this work focuses on the ways in which stories of experience are also expressions of legitimacy and belonging. What is shown are the varied mechanisms of engagement, the diverse places created, and the voices which are at once individual and influenced by a broader social context. As educators I argue we need to examine overlapping narratives of place. Through focusing on experience the intersecting nature of different localities becomes clear. As does the necessity to situate such narratives within their broader context, one within which experience is a key aspect of determining the legitimacy of land-use voices.

Keywords: Place, Yukon, Forests, Discourse, Dwelling

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Places are not inert containers. They are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions. (Rodman, 2003)

I love visiting areas with trails, not just the Yukon but other places, I am fascinated by what other people are doing. Every trail has a personality, the more time I spend on trails, the more I am fascinated by how a physical construct in the middle of the woods can create all kinds of emotional feelings, I think every trail has a story to tell. (Yukon resident)

Forest users often articulate their views, and judge the legitimacy of other voices from a position of personal experience. Their experience is both an act of individual agency and the re-enactment of historically situated patterns in which attention is drawn to particular aspects of the landscape and where patterns of interaction and meaning making are constituted and affirmed. In their outdoor activities people carry with them a set of privileges: memberships within communities of practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992), and access to associated networks of knowledge and power. As individuals they move within a landscape and exercise agency, but also reproduce patterns in which each has been habituated, in part through their accumulated learning as members of these groups. In this, the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) and dwelling (Ingold, 2000) can be useful; the role of individual agency and belonging within society as well as the non-human environment, is at once separate from and built upon prior patterns. Rather than a question of constructing the environment, through individual agency the environment experience is informed by prior knowledge rather than directed by it.

What follows is an account of individual experiences within forests of the Yukon Territory, Canada's most north-western territory. As part of a broader project exploring forest perception among different outdoor communities of practice, between 2009 and 2011 I interviewed Yukon residents concerning their regular forest activities (Asselin, 2013). What emerged was a rich mosaic in forest values, perception, and meaning. What I realized was that these ideas were often articulated through narratives of forest experience and were connected to a broader understanding of the Yukon landscape and the territories' socio-political climate more generally. The extracts below are not meant to be fully representative, but offer a sketch of places from which people might speak, and from which I explore the connection between experience and place.

One of my goals as a post-secondary educator interested in the human environment is to embrace the complexity of multivocal and multilocal place (Rodman, 2003). Stepping away from facile depictions of single user groups and postcard localities, towards portraying the layered meanings of place that emerge from dissimilar embodied activities. Local land use debates are far more than 'use' issues. In a single area people can speak of different *places*, and in doing so invoke particular histories (Asselin, 2013), and judge the legitimacy of other actors. Likewise stories of place may be in response to external pressure, which in turn can influence how those stories are

told. One need not agree with the viewpoints below to understand that these divergent experiences play a role in land use language and community relations.

To that end, this paper first reviews the intersection of practice and place, followed by an exploration of the connection between practice, knowledge, and legitimacy. The third section touches on two related issues, the role of outdoor education, and a look at land-use claims as purposefully simplified narratives of self-expression in particular contexts.

Practice and Place

I approach place here as bound to bodily senses (Casey, 1996) and that knowledge of place is derived from human feeling, thought, and activity (Tilley, 1994). More specifically I employ Walter's definition of place as "The whole synthesis of *located* experience- including what we imagine as well as the sights stories, feelings and concepts..." (Walter, 1988). Experience, or practice, then refers to the physical movements and interactions of people in their daily lives. The stories below both draw from and represent different ways of seeing, understanding, and encountering the physical environment. Participants were diverse: near even female and male representation, long term Yukoners as well as those who were more recent, of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and connected to forests in a variety of ways including logging, tourism, conservation, hunting, trapping, hiking, and policy-making. Transcripts are close to verbatim, with small changes for readability.

To start I turn to NA, a late middle aged woman who works and lives in the forest on a cyclical basis. NA came to the Yukon as a young woman from a southern Canadian city. In her first years in the Territory she was introduced by a friend to trapping. Over time NA acquired the permits and education necessary to have her own trap line. There are many in the Yukon who have spent most of their lives in the bush trapping and whose families have trapped for generations, particularly among Aboriginal peoples. Others such as NA are situated as relatively new Yukon residents, white, and with alternative employment to support their trapping work. While NA draws a very modest income from trapping she has an alternate job in-town to support herself. Trapping in this case is a privilege supported by her status within the local community, economic means, and flexible work schedule. At the time of this research, NA and her husband had two trap lines which were joined by a central cabin. Over the last 15 years she remained at her isolated trap line between three and six months per year, though on some years was unable to trap at all.

NA: And so I headed out with the dog, and then it would take me a good, to go around the lake on those days, it would only take me like three hours max to do everything. Because you have things at certain areas, you have to look, like and you always had your traps marked with flagging or something, sometimes you had to dig them out if it had snowed. Around the lake sometimes it got wind-blown in certain areas, but you had to check every trap, you had to re-bait it, you had to make sure it was in working order and then you carried on. But, the eight mile track was pretty tough too, because sometimes I didn't know where the trail was because of the wind when I crossed the lake, so the dog would show me the way, he was a really good

dog, that dog. Yeah, so, that one took me at least five to six hours of walking and checking, and it was a really good work out. And that is why I only did that one like every three days.

Jodie: and in between those days you would do the shorter one?

NA: yeah, and then there was a day of skinning and see that is what X would do. He would go out and do a day, the next he would skin and those skinning days I would head out and do the short loop and the next day I would be doing my long day and he would do his long day, the next day we would be doing skinning. So it was a day travel and check and collect furs and then skinning was the next day. And Saturday was you know, wash day, baking day, because you had to have both fires going. Your cook stove and your other stove, so, and, you would have your bath, do you laundry, utilize all the heat in the house, cause we had a ... cabin at the main camp. And you hauled your water, you had certain days you did certain things and that is how you did it. And then later in the night of the skinning day you had to turn your furs. After, cause they would dry for so long and then you would have to turn your furs.

In terms of her status among trappers NA is still a newcomer and outsider. Yet she nevertheless encountered forests in this way, through the process of walking within them, setting traps, harvesting animals, skinning, collecting water, and through leaving the bush when the season was over. She described this work as useful, immediate, independent, and liberating.

People trap for a variety of reasons, some have learned from their families and continue as a way of life, many non-Aboriginal trappers have moved to the Territory from other countries or regions and are searching to purposely enact a lifestyle reflecting their environmental values. Trapping in the Yukon is a skilled endeavour with a complex history and tensions along political, economic, and cultural lines. My purposes here however are to simply highlight both NA's understanding of place, as well as the resources that allow for this endeavour.

A second example of forest experience comes from B, a male middle aged logger who worked in the Yukon for many years. Logging in the Territory is small scale, and many of the loggers I spoke with had been involved in various aspects of the industry at different times. Felling, surveying, hauling, and processing are all aspects of logging, and when the operation consists of a backyard portable mill, it can involve as few as one or two people. I asked B to tell me about his work:

B: ...two most enjoyable jobs I have done in the whole process is number one, falling, I used to do all of it myself with a chainsaw, ultimately I became quite efficient with the chainsaw, I didn't kill myself learning how to use it. It is a job that is challenging both physically and mentally, a lot of satisfaction. The other job was sawing at the sawmill, very similar, challenging physically as well as mentally to do it right and do it productively. I would go home at night and have a little gob of spruce pitch stuck in my hair and right ear, some sawdust stuck in my belly, it smelt

good, I miss it. I don't have the time to do those jobs anymore. I don't have the physical stamina, to do them all day, so it does not happen.

When asked more about tree felling and what that implied, B described the process necessary to 'eye up the tree' and see the way it wanted to fall. He had to ask himself where the tree would fall and then how it would be skidded out of the bush once it was on the ground. B logged selectively, stating that while he didn't have a problem with clear cutting he felt it was a method that had its own place and time.

B: You would have to fall the tree into a position where you could get it out of the woods, load it onto the truck without damaging all the other trees around it, without breaking your (back) so it becomes important that your trees are all fell a certain way, that they are not crossed up, and it comes to be a challenging process because these trees don't stand up perfectly straight, or stand up the way you want, all over. The hinge that you leave on the stump, the little techniques that you learn over the years. One of the hardest ones to learn is to recognise that some trees you just can't make go where you want to go.

Some of the loggers I spoke to came from logging families, but many decided to move into logging when an opportunity arose for work. Many in the industry had moved north during the mid-nineties with the promise of plentiful work and good wages, and choose to stay despite the reality of limited employment. Heavy equipment, noise, the smell of sawdust, oil and gasoline are part of B's experience, as is moving to different parts of the forest to work.

Many loggers and trappers I spoke to describe their work as good in a sense beyond the economic, as a healthy way to live and as part of a lifestyle which is closer to the land and often compared against a stark urban office-bound alternative. These types of narratives have been explored by anthropologists such as Dunk (1994) and Satterfield (2002) who discuss the link between the work of logging, local identity, and the politics of identity narratives.

A third example comes from E and F, a couple in their late twenties whose surveying work takes them into forests but who primarily enjoy forests in a "recreational way". E and F organize their work schedules to ensure a maximum amount of time is spent outdoors together. When asked to tell me about a day that came to mind, they told me of a day-long hiking/biking trip in Kluane National Park in the south east Yukon. Their day began with a visit to the warden's office to log their intended trip after which they located their trail along an old highway.

E: ... the sun opened up, warm enough to be in shorts and a tank top, then we get into the mountain. All the mosquitoes hatched that day, because there must have been, I had a photo of my leg, there must have been about 80 mosquitoes down my leg, and I am not normally one to use chemical anything but I was spraying, I was so mad by that point I didn't care. And ah, biking up we passed a really large fresh grizzly footprint, scat here and there, followed his trail. You probably biked the whole thing (looking at F), I got off now and then. And walked a little ways

F: you start out on that hike to that observation mountain and you can see that typical Klugane view with the glacier but um, about a third of the way down that trail there are two trails that are old mining roads that kind of branch off and go up the side of the valley and we took the very first one and, old silver claims, there are, somebody had about 100 years ago had carved some silver or gold out of the mountain so these roads are visible, not maintained

E: but you could see them

F: we followed one of these, it took us up the side of the valley and you are able to see down the main valley, for a beautiful view

E: at the top it was low bush, cranberries and moss, bare rock, just above the tree line. The mosquitoes went away up there, or maybe we just didn't care anymore. Warm and sunny and we just passed out and laid up on the rocks. The clouds I think started to come in again, we did consider to keep going but, we thought there was a storm coming in. So we got on our bikes and just tore down it, you know in a quarter of the time. You are ringing your bells the entire time cause it is definitely thick bear country and the whole way you sing or shout.

Evident in their story are themes of discovery, personal challenge, solitude, and sharing of experience. Though they enjoy returning to favourite spots the location of their experience often changes. Specific skills are necessary to encounter the environment in the way they choose and they both enjoy challenging themselves on the performance of those skills.

Though the stories above do not overlap geographically, they could quite easily. In fact many such stories told to me did take place within areas of multiple forest use. Guide-outfitting concessions, where resident business owners take non-locals to hunt, cover most of the Territory. Traditional Territories of Aboriginal peoples cover the entire territory. Within these, local practices are varied but include hunting, fishing, logging, berry picking, and other forms of outdoor life by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents. Mining is also common throughout the region as are other forms of resource extraction.

Each of the people in these stories emphasized their connection to the non-human landscape as more than a simple 'use'. They were involved in acts of place making, of becoming familiar with the land, gathering new memories and stories, associating smells and ideas with the surroundings their bodies encountered. None of these experiences created the same place, and it is from these diverse backgrounds and experiences that Yukoners speak and form opinions as to what constitutes appropriate land use.

Practice, Knowledge and Legitimacy

In the years leading to this fieldwork the Yukon Territory was the site of a series of highly public land use planning processes on the territorial, regional, and municipal scale. This included negotiations and public hearings for the Territories' first Forest Act, forests previously having been under the purview of the federal government. It also included public consultation for the

Peel Watershed Region Land use Plan, a process in some ways defined by the clashing views of tourism, mineral interest groups, Aboriginal peoples, conservation groups, and southern Canadians. During this time there was also a much smaller review of the Whitehorse Official Community Plan within which the capital city's green spaces were being reviewed and revised. Some or all of these processes were commonly spoken of by participants and as a consequence the terminology of stakeholder, resource rights, planning, and environmental protection was common. Because of this, even when these processes were not being discussed, stories of forest use tended to be dual position statements; of individual experience, and of the validity and importance of those experiences in the context of a wider political scenario concerning the correct way of engaging with forests, legitimate voice, and of managing landscapes.

From the perspective of people who work and move within them, it can take specific skills and knowledge to interact with forests in a proper way. That is, without getting lost, injured or causing harm. B's work depended upon the skills necessary to move about the forest and to interact with trees, men and equipment. Likewise the trapper and hikers above spoke with a hint of pride at the skills involved in their endeavours. Yet these narratives were also positional statements, from which speakers could judge the legitimacy of other voices and through which they reflected a general state of anxiety concerning whose voice would be included in the land planning processes closest to their interests.

Often cited examples were the actions of 'outsiders' whose lack of knowledge, and some would argue common sense, caused trouble. Though many Yukon residents I spoke with were relatively new themselves and may only reside in the Territory for a number of years or decades, a general sense of unease stemming from intermittent southern interest in northern affairs was common among most residents. For example, M is a long time female Yukon resident and avid recreationalist:

M: I think one thing that drives Yukoners crazy is that, with some of those societies (conservation groups) that people will just move here from Vancouver or somewhere and then they will join those societies and before they have an idea about what the Yukon is all about will start shooting off their mouths and people get upset about it.

And then you have people like, some Greenpeace people, and they don't have an idea what they are talking about. That guy, X, he came up here during the wolf kill, and I don't agree with wolf kills at all, but he came up here, didn't have an idea, he wanted to go out there and stop them from killing the wolves so he goes out somewhere and walks into the bush, gets lost, nowhere near any wolves at all, he comes back and says he's leaving!

The person in the story lacked the common sense that would keep him from getting lost, as well as an understanding of his social position as an outsider. This story also reflects a commonly encountered view that "those societies" are primarily composed of individuals who are out of touch with the less than pleasant realities of nature.

At the time of this research there were two well-known Yukon conservation groups who were engaged at some level in most major land use planning processes. Both supporters and naysayers

of the work undertaken by these groups were boisterous in their views. Indeed, I was informed by an employee of one of these groups that much of her time was spent establishing herself as a legitimate actor with relevant outdoor experience.

Ingold (2000) has argued that knowledge is the capacity to apply the correct information within the correct context. In this sense, and as expressed by study participants, knowledge both built from and supported particular forest use. Later in my discussion with NA I asked her why she chose to trap:

NA: it is just that you are on your own, you are independent, you get to know that land really well. You have markers, you notice things, you see things around you. There is the odd animal out so you are always looking for tracks, seeing what birds are out, and it is just a real, different way of being. You kind of get grounded, I don't know if that makes sense to you, but you kind of, you're grounded, you are who you are, where you are, and you are just enjoying yourself. And you still have a purpose ... it is just a way of living more than anything.

NA is expressing a connection between experience, skill and being-in-the-world in a way that makes sense for her. She talks about noticing things around her which she can do based on years of experience on her trap line and this ability is an important part of her own identity.

Proper or good forest use, a concern of many forest users, is an idea which represents engagement according to limited principles and priorities as determined by the social norms, experiences, and formal and informal education of individuals. Many I spoke to in the logging industry felt that those expressing fears of the impact of logging in the Territory lacked sufficient knowledge to understand what was involved in the process. Comments such as these were common:

HA: How much logging do these people do? I want to ask them a few questions, how many payments have you made on hire, how many hours you put in the seat? How much do you really know about any of this? If I took you out to see, would you know the difference between a feller-buncher and a skidder and a fricken V8, you know? Would you know the front end from the back end of a sawmill?

B: ...the reality is that most of them peddle their bicycles along the waterfront in Whitehorse and have lots of opinions about the forest and how the forest should be looked after, but they really don't know bugger all about it. They don't spend any time there. I don't have a lot of time for them.... they have opinions, they don't have knowledge, in a lot of cases they have education but they don't have intelligence.

With the above loggers, 'others' are judged through their experiences and knowledge: are they familiar with the equipment, the skill, do they have the capacity to appreciate what is "in front of them"? Such conversations were often in response to discussions concerning consultation for the new Forest Act, which was inclusive to the general public as well as a particular conservation group. Implications of this standpoint are varied: such narratives imply homogeneity of experience and views within their community of practice, and that without having this

experienced or knowledge, a person cannot understand the value of certain places or the lives of those who depend upon them.

The argument that personal experience limits the possibility of perception is not new. Dunk (1998) argues that those in the forest industry are often labeled as a class unable to appreciate the value of nature. Likewise, McCandless (1985) has argued southerners in the mid-20th century who advocated the enforcement of stricter wildlife regulations in the Yukon felt they were better able to appreciate wildlife than those whose livelihoods depended upon animals. The loggers I spoke to lamented the lack of contact most residents had with logging sites and processes, and argued that if that experience were present there would be fewer concerns over the negative impact of logging on the Territories forests.

Enskillment, in which learning is not separated from the act of doing (Ingold, 2000), can be a useful concept here. Using such a frame, the knowledge necessary to act in an appropriate manner within forests is not a thing which exists outside of context, but is instead a type of understanding gained through practice and in which attention is drawn towards particular aspects of the environment. Acquiring skill through practice implies a process of becoming familiar with areas and the actions that occur within them, and of using tools and applying them in the right context. The process of learning was often expressed as a valued aspect of experience among forest users. Indeed, this was a challenge for a local conservationist who despite having a forestry degree was dismissed by loggers for lacking work experience in the industry.

NA told me stories of learning to trap and live on the land. Mishaps, such as falling through the ice and walking home cold and wet, a small injury while working, losing trails and trying to find them again, were stories of the lessons she learned through experience. In one instance NA was away from her cabin and in hearing wolves howl, was concerned they would harm a dog that had been left behind:

NA: well, they were calling up in the hills and I heard them and I said to X “ I am going to walk back and make sure our other dog is OK” cause she would not back down on anything. And so I did, I walked back, and X said when he came back one had tracked me just to, within half a mile of the cabin. It, I kind of was aware of them, they kept howling to each other up in the hills. And that is why I went back, so I was walking fast, I didn’t have a pack or anything, but I was walking fast. I kind of had a feeling that ‘I better just get home’, and that was the fastest couple miles I ever walked or ran, I was really worried about the dog, he was a good dog. He was OK, but, shit! I, then when he told me that I said “God, I kind of had this feeling”, you know, you kind of know...

These experiences are part of place-making, building skill, and learning to trust ones instincts. Such narratives also position the speaker as a legitimate actor on the land.

For another example I turn to JB, a guide outfitter who learned outdoor skills from his father and worked alongside an outfitter for many years before purchasing his own concession. Guide-outfitting in the Yukon originated in the early 20th century to provide wealthy clients with long guided hunts in Yukon’s wilderness. At the time of its formation, the limits on guide outfitting

were such as to almost ensure the exclusion of Aboriginal ownership and to this day most guide outfitters in the Yukon are non-Aboriginal. JB is a relatively new outfitter and spoke about gaining the skills necessary in the context of both his staff and his children who he hopes will one day want to become guides themselves. He feels that children who grow up in the outdoors become good citizens, are well rounded, and know how to work. He also takes on employees who know little about the land but are willing to learn. The skills involved in being a good guide are wide ranging: a guide needs to be knowledgeable about land, animals and outdoor survival, while also being personable and able to manage clients who are sometimes unfamiliar with the outdoors.

JB: ... we train them, we start them out as wranglers, or packers, I have another guy who is learning, he might guide this year... That is my idea, I want my wrangler to be guides. I have a star right now, he is 21 now and I can put him out with a millionaire. He handles that guy like a professional, some guy told me last year it was the best guide they had and they didn't even get anything.

Intergenerational continuity was valued by many forest users who enjoyed sharing their knowledge with their children. This continuity was expressed to me as not only building skills, but also sharing a way of life that is good and healthy. When placed in the context of a sometimes negative public profile that portrays guide outfitters as wealthy big game hunters who care little for animal welfare, such statements were also claims to local belonging and legitimacy.

I was told similar stories from biking enthusiasts who valued teaching their children the skills necessary to navigate forest terrain on a bike. For instance, E detailed the route that he and his children often biked during the summer months around the city of Whitehorse:

E: People have built things on those trails, teeter totters and ramps and jumps and stuff like that, the kids love it. I often take my son and few of his friends up there. They spend a lot of time going back and forth on those. Then we bike down, if we have loads of energy we bike back up to X and it turns into a 40 km ride, but if people are lagging a bit and it's a Saturday we (take) the bus, put the bikes on.

They get to experience an outing that is self-propelled and at the end of the day they have had a fantastic time. Then over the summer, you do that ride in early June late May, kids can barely do that ride, they are done, by the end of August and September they have loads of energy, right back up to X, the health value is there, it is a family type of things, you are there with your kids and their friends, it is community oriented and you are out there using the forest and trails and wild spaces, it is not lecturing, kids are learning the importance of these areas and these spaces without you saying anything, they are just out there having fun right.

Those trails then become something beyond a mere feature of the landscape, but a place of memory and experience. In this case, E's story was also a use-claim of the city's green spaces in the context of city planning, between the lines we hear that those who do not go out and use these trails cannot understand their value.

In each of the above cases how people understand their environment and come to know place is intimately connected to experience. I have argued that as educators, we need to approach place as overlapping localities of meaning, but in embracing this multitude of voices, we need also pay attention to the socio-political context to which they speak. Sometimes multivocality can emerge from a single actor who articulates the meaning and importance of place for very specific reasons. The individuals above are each in a position to participate in public land-use planning processes, and indeed some of them had. In a planning environment it is vital to understand that not all people are speaking of the same place, and many are drawing on very different ideas of legitimacy and knowledge. Recognising this diversity may go a long way to reducing the inherent tensions and defensiveness that can be a by-product of multiple-use issues.

Narrating Practice and Gaining Experience

The final section will briefly touch on two issues embedded within the above stories. The first examines the sometimes simplistic portrayal of identity, place, and use that can be put forward by local actors while the second touches on access to outdoor experience and future areas of inquiry on outdoor education programs.

As is apparent above, in narrating stories of place and experience participants often drew a cohesive image of their communities of practice and tended to detail incomplete and sometimes simplistic portrayals of the Yukon environment. In some ways, the intensive land use planning that was ongoing during my research and indeed, my own position as a researcher, facilitated this depiction. I argue that the stories, for instance of a concerned environmentally-friendly logger working in an area that has been harvested many times before, or of a law-abiding family-man hunter who acts only as a positive force on the land, strategically serve as points of leverage to ensure voice in future planning and to create a space of belonging and legitimacy. If the places and stories given do not ring true, perhaps a deeper look rather than a dismissal is called for.

While these narratives may leave out the complexity of human environment relations as well as the voices of other forest actors, they are not inauthentic. Instead, I suggest we must approach them as deliberate tools of self-expression to the outside. How people talk about forests and locate their experience within them are revealing narratives. These narratives, as Murray Li (1996) suggests, provide a vocabulary for legitimation and a space of potentiality which is created by idealized visions of forest use. Murray Li, in working with case studies in Indonesia and the Philippines, looked at how the image of community was used as a tool to assert property rights. She suggests that the notion of an idealized community, while not ethnographically accurate, did create potential discursive space for actors to make their claims to land (Murray Li, 1996). She states that:

Their analysis may fail to convince or impress anthropologists, but it is presumably not their goal: simplified representations can be more effective than subtle ones, when deployed in a macro-policy context. (1996: 504)

Images of community are central to questions of resource access at the local level, not because of any self-evident qualities of moral economy, but as culturally available points of leverage in an ongoing process of negotiations. (1996: 509)

These experiences are both the locus of individual agency, where experience builds place and belonging, and the arena within which broader social patterns are materialised and repeated. Such narratives fill the same discursive role; at once telling a personal story and continuing contested patterns of access and power. I do not suggest that all stories of experience are conscious political statements, but as much as they detail the story of place making they detail belonging, and are therefore statements of exclusion, however implicitly.

Guide outfitters, for instance, hold a privileged position within the Yukon community and have drawn critique for their perceived privileged influence in environmental planning issues (Nadasdy, 2006). The experiences shared with me are individual expressions; they are the stories of place and identity. Yet the *narratives* also reproduce power relations in situating certain persons as legitimate actors while devaluing the views of others. We must recognise and respect the places people speak from and speak about, and part of this is placing them within a wider context which may influence how stories are told, and how they should be received.

Finally, I turn briefly to an ongoing area of inquiry which deserves more attention than I can give here. It takes knowledge and skill to encounter forests, to know them, a person's place in them, and to use the tools that are part of that encounter. Over time an individual builds experience and knowledge and from this, legitimacy, authenticity and respect is gained or refused by others. Yet participants seldom directly addressed the questionable capacity of all people to gain access to such endeavours, though they lamented at times the metaphorical and geographic space between Yukon residents and typical forest activities.

This concern has two sides; the first is that not all residents have easy access to the experiences that over time build skill. The second is that any group seeks its own cultural reproduction which involves bringing in new members. In this sense there is a balance that many groups tread: boundary upkeep in terms of membership, and secondly the need to have people who engage in experience and provide belonging and legitimacy between them.

I had the opportunity to interview GA, an avid outdoorsman and member of the Yukon Fish and Game Society. GA spoke to me about what he perceived as declining participation in outdoor activities. He had concerns over what he perceived of as a loss of typical outdoor skills among youth. From this loss he felt that future generations would not share the same sense of place and meaning that he and others like him felt.

GA: I think people are using the land less, probably what use they're making out of it is more intrusive than what was in the past. When I say more intrusive, the introduction of ATVs and snow machines, more of them. There is no question, it is change to access, change, especially ATVs, they have really made things a lot easier to access, made it so hunters, a week hunt is now a two day hunt.

That is the biggest change I have seen. In terms of fishing, fewer younger people being involved, a lot of the smoking, the racking, the curing, are work, and kids don't want to do it. The same thing in wildlife, in terms of skinning the hide, looking after it, lot of work, and

even as simple as going catching some fish, that is fine it is fun. But then you clean them and look after them it is a lot of work. And there is less, I would say less of take in terms of, effort. That is a trend that I perceive, my perception

Jodie: With fewer people getting out on the land to hunt and fish, does it have implications for community and society?

GA: Yeah. If it keeps on, if it keeps on going down this path there would be less regard, less understanding or appreciation for the wilderness we have. You have to be exposed to that to appreciate it, if as parents we are not exposing our kids, it would change.

The reality that knowledge and skill are necessary to encounter forests is emphasised by the difficulties of those who have the desire but lack the experience to engage with the outdoors. In the stories above, skill was often learned as a child or later in life alongside a close relative or friend who was able to provide guidance.

While in the Yukon, I had the opportunity to participate in a number of education workshops for individuals who did not have this option. These included birding and orienteering classes, whose goal was explicitly to recruit new members to certain activities. I also attended a number of sessions hosted by the Yukon Fish and Game Society, including family fishing weekends and on one occasion an annual weekend event called Yukon Outdoor Women (YOW) aimed specifically at teaching women outdoor skills. In both cases the intent was to introduce people to a particular experience of the outdoors, and from this implicitly grow a shared sense of outdoor values and use among the general population.

In her research concerning gender inclusion in recreation, Henderson (2000) argues that the most significant determinant in participation in recreational activities is whether or not a person was exposed to that activity as a child. However, she also reports that skill-based courses aimed at under-represented groups are of growing interest. Such programs have already been explored with youth in the Yukon, and participants have been found to build stronger connections to the landscape, express concern for local environmental issues and a desire to minimize negative impacts on wilderness (Perrin, 1999). Similarly, YOW was modeled off of the Becoming Outdoor Women (BOW) program which was developed in 1991 to overcome skill-based barriers that limit women from pursuing outdoor activities (Hargrove, 2011).

Yet, as much as these programs meet demand for education, they are also active producers of a shared outdoor value, and are in many ways inherently political. For instance, National Park Canada has recently undertaken programs to introduce new Canadian immigrants to the skills of camping and fishing through educational outings. In a documentary following these programs the argument is clearly made that learning these skills would hopefully directly contribute to shared Canadian value of the outdoors (Yanchyk, 2012). Similar arguments were made to me in support of Fish and Game Association programs, as well as other outdoor programming available in the Yukon.

As introductions, these courses do not make skilled individuals, at best they provide an introduction which sparks a building interest and lasts the test of time. At the least however,

many such organizers aim for spark of shared understanding and experience regarding a common landscape, and through this to gain public recognition, political consideration, and perhaps solidify a claim to local legitimacy. The role of such programs in creating a shared sense of place through these experiences, or in building shared understanding between forest users is yet to be explored, but it is an aspect of outdoor education that deserves further attention.

Conclusion

There is a richness of human experience within Yukon forests. In presenting an argument concerning the multilocal and multivocal aspects of place, Rodman (2003) challenges anthropologists to address the contested nature of place directly, rather than provide one unchallenged location within which ethnographic fieldwork takes place. She writes that in doing so we can look:

...through these places, explore their links with others, consider why they are constructed as they are, see how places represent people, and begin to understand how people embody places (2003: 218).

Yukon forests are multiple places at once for different forest users. Activities within forests are varied, but more than that, people *experience* forests in different ways. Such experiences shape part of how these individuals encounter and understand forests, as places of work, of solitude, as places separate from humans or as integral to human life and engagement. To speak of forest use should be to invoke and address the complexity of human experience within them. de la Barre writes:

Issues arise around the promotion of one place identity over others. Local level 'place identity clashes' point to the need to consider the way some place discourses are more powerful than others. (2005, p. 55)

She is addressing here the impact of the promotion of place identity for tourism purposes, but in doing so highlights the fact that place discourse is a powerful medium. Experience, place, and knowledge are bound up in the activities of forest users and become markers of identity on the boundaries where activities and viewpoints meet. Cohen emphasises that there is a sense of difference among people that must be attended to because it matters to those individuals, informs their actions and is central to how people express their attachment to locality (Cohen, 1982). Similarly, forest users encounter and understand forests in different ways, relate to them and to the Yukon community in different ways, assert that difference, and because of this it matters.

Stories of place should invoke the voices of the people who create them. Descriptions of their activities and where possible in their own voices, can serve better than most academic or government writing in expressing the importance of place. However, as de la Barre emphasises, we must also situate these narratives as both individual acts, and statements of legitimacy and belonging in a wider political context. Considering one of these aspects does not take away from the legitimacy of the other; it recognises that identity and legitimacy are acts of continual creation and that place is central to both.

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