



The University of Adelaide

Women's Perceptions of a Wilderness Experience  
in a Women Only Setting

Deborah Lea Nanschild

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of  
the Degree of Master of Arts (Women's Studies).

December 1996

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

DECLARATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Study Focus  
Study Context  
Summary of Thesis Structure

Chapter 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Concept of Leisure for Women

- Work Patterns
- Gender Roles
- Patriarchal Values

Wilderness and Women  
Psychological Benefits  
'Women Only' Settings  
Conclusions  
Research Questions

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Purpose of Enquiry  
Origins of Enquiry  
Source of Data  
Methodology  
Methods  
The Interview  
Collection and Analysis of Data  
Limitations of Study

Chapter 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 5: CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES

## ABSTRACT

This research examines women's perceptions of a wilderness experience in a women only setting. It has been undertaken using a qualitative interpretive methodology and is a feminist ethnography. Women were studied in isolation to men, enabling them to experience and appreciate themselves as women. The research is based on a series of interviews with nine participants of WomenTrek. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed, and the central themes which emerged substantiate the conclusions.

The research provides evidence of women's personal growth and development when in a wilderness environment. This growth is in the physical, emotional, psychological, relational and spiritual realms. The results of this research include findings of how women's perception of gender relations differ when they are in a women only setting; how women understand and experience the wilderness domain; the discovery of a connection between a women's inner wilderness and the external wilderness; how women appreciate a wilderness experience as a leisure experience; and women's changed perceptions of self and others.

The findings from this study show that women's feelings about the environment are merged with feelings about themselves. Women instinctively know that the wilderness is a place for self renewal and rejuvenation; it has a cathartic, therapeutic and transformative effect upon them. There is evidence that personal growth is transferable from the wilderness setting to the domestic, work and world sphere, demonstrating that a wilderness experience in a women only setting can enable lasting change to take place in women's lives.

A distinct women's experience of wilderness emerges from this research. Male knowledge assumptions about the experience of leisure and wilderness are challenged by women's perceptions of their experience and reality. Mentorships, in the form of role modelling, are found to operate in the women only setting and relationships with others are central to each

woman's experience of wilderness. Bonding between women is noted as a phenomena of the women only wilderness experience.

Included in this study are a number of recommendations pertaining to practices, policies, programmes, education, training and the integration of Aboriginal Culture as well as implications for future research.

## DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any other university or tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

I consent to this copy of my thesis being available for loan and photocopying, with due credit given whenever applicable.

Signed:

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all of the women who participated in WomenTrek. It was indeed a tremendous experience for all concerned and no less so for me as the organiser of the event and the researcher of this study. The women interviewed generously shared their experience of the wilderness and of the women only setting, and they shared their lives. I came to know each one of them in a connected and spiritual way and I especially thank them for their insight, their trust and their confidence in the interview process and in me. The journey for each of us continues on.

I sincerely thank Deborah May, my friend and colleague, who supported me with such faith and conviction. She provided encouragement and assistance with regular editing and proof reading of the final manuscript. Her academic expertise and personal support was greatly appreciated. I also wish to thank Dr. Helen Connole for her advice and guidance in the review process from the original thesis.

A big thankyou to my family, Deb and Sam, whose patience and physical and emotional nourishment provided wonderful and necessary sustenance to the long hours of research and writing required to complete this thesis. Also, sincere thanks to my friends who maintained interest in my work and continued to follow my progress. This thesis materialised because of their support and my capacity to follow a dream, like WomenTrek.

I also acknowledge Myra Betschild and Dr. Margaret Allen from the University of Adelaide Women's Studies Department as supervisors.



## Study Focus

This study is located within Leisure and Recreation Studies, Women's Studies, and Sociology. In addition, studies within Psychology and Ecofeminism informed the research as well as feminist theory.

Findings available from research conducted specifically on women's experiences of leisure, recreation and wilderness is scant, particularly in Australia. The dominating male influence in Leisure and Recreation Studies base the disciplines' knowledge on male culture, which defines leisure experience by male-centred values, standards and lifestyle. Studies in this field are typically gendered. Outdoor experiences have been promoted as the exclusive domain of men and wilderness experiences as opportunities for proving one's masculinity.

The male-defined concept of leisure is inappropriate for women. Women's lifestyle differs from that of men but this is rarely acknowledged in the Leisure Studies field. What women experience, value and perceive needs documentation so that the leisure and recreation industry, as well as the general community, can be informed. The intention of this study is to challenge male construction of knowledge, experience and identity, by describing, analysing and documenting women's perceptions of a wilderness experience and hence a leisure experience.

As Henderson et al (1989) stated, women are learning to value themselves as individuals and seek opportunities to find meaning in their lives. Social roles for women are changing - more opportunities for recreation and leisure for women are emerging (ibid). This study intends to develop meaningful concepts of leisure for women as it recognises leisure experiences as quality life experiences.

This study also contributes to the documentation of women's lives, thus is an important addition to Women's Studies and to studies in Sociology. A radical feminist standpoint is the critical analysis applied to this research. It draws on theories of gender, locates women at the centre of the research and respects women's culture. It is women's experience, and women's perceptions of a wilderness experience, that provides the focus and epistemology for this research.

Reinharz (1992) observed that feminist research frequently involves the researcher as a person and that projects stem from part of women's own lives. This is true for this study. As researcher, my background and interest in the outdoors and wilderness environment has prompted this study. My personal experience in a wilderness setting has challenged and changed me; it is where I seek and find sense of self, solace, personal growth and autonomy. It is where I make important decisions and where I claim my power as a woman. It causes me to examine the philosophical foundation of my life, which connects my inner consciousness to the cycle of life. Wilderness experiences have influenced my perceptions of the world and the perceptions and lives of other women who have journeyed with me. I have witnessed women's lives being changed as a result of a wilderness experience.

Going in to the wilderness is like going home. It reflects parts of myself back to me that get lost in the artificial world, but which have existed since my childhood. The study of women and women's experience in the wilderness commits me to my personal and professional world, which deals with women's everyday experience of living. There exists a metaphoric quality in the wilderness for me, represented somewhat by the following poem:

I sometimes wonder  
why I  
was chosen  
to hear the heartbeat  
of a tree.



I wonder  
if anyone else  
hears the music  
of the Sheoak  
or....  
is it just me?

I wonder  
why my heart beats  
in time  
with the water's ebb  
and flow.

The Trees Heartbeat  
The Wind's Song  
The Water's Ebb and Flow  
The Fires of change,  
all remind me  
of who I really am.....

and then I remember  
that I am a Leader  
that I am everchanging  
as is Mother Nature.  
I AM making a difference...

then I know why  
I was chosen  
to hear the Heartbeat  
of the Tree.

(ennaJi 1994, unpublished)

## Study Context

This study explores, at an individual and group level, the effects of a shared wilderness experience on a self-selected group of women. It examines the relationships between a wilderness experience in a women only setting and women's personal growth. The findings of this study provide evidence of a rising level of awareness for women as a result of their wilderness experience.

For the purpose of this study, a wilderness experience is considered a leisure experience in a wilderness setting and a form of recreation. A wilderness setting implies a geographic location that corresponds to physical boundaries of place and space, and from a Western perspective, it refers to a '...natural environment of difficult access and perceived as such

by individuals entering into it' (Scherl 1988, p.225). This study extends the concept of wilderness to include cultural determinants, such as gender and experience, and perception of self in relation to the environment. What is perceived as wilderness varies from individual to individual and is relative to experience and situation.

This study investigates the therapeutic claims that have been made about wilderness experiences and whether these hold true for women. The wilderness setting can be a place of retreat from the stress of daily living; it can be a spiritual place for self renewal and energy. The wilderness can be a place of personal challenge, adventure, exploration, tranquility and healing; it can also be a place of learning. In addition, this study examines how women perceive other dimensions of the wilderness experience and how this differs from the way wilderness experience is described in the literature by men.

This study was undertaken in a women only setting. In order to understand women's experience, informed by women's culture, women need to be studied in isolation from men. This provides information that is accurate and congruent with women's reality. Women, however, are not a homogeneous group. There are different issues for women when it comes to leisure availability, leisure experience and as a consequence, their perceptions of leisure, because of the differences amongst women and their lifestyles.

Research was conducted during an event called "WomenTrek", where 728 women and girls walked and rode 1500kms across the state of South Australia, in celebration of the Women's Suffrage Centenary in 1994. WomenTrek provided a valuable opportunity to collate significant data on the participation of women and girls in outdoor recreation in Australia, and for the purpose of this study, overall results were utilised as a secondary source of information. Due to the diversity of women who participated in the event and the fact that it was conducted consistently over three months, opportunities to explore the phenomena of female bonding emerged.

## Summary of Thesis Structure

In chapter two, the literature reviewed includes several studies from the 1980s that influenced early feminist scholarship in the Leisure Studies field, such as Deem (1986): *All Work and No Play? The Sociology of Women and Leisure*; Wimbush and Talbot (1988): *Relative Freedoms*; Henderson et al (1989): *A Leisure of One's Own*; and Green et al (1990): *Women's Leisure, What Leisure?*.

Wearing and Wearing (1988): *All in a Day's Leisure* promote the concept of 'leisure experience' when analysing what leisure means for women. It is 'characterized by freedom of choice and anticipated intrinsic values such as self-expression, self-enhancement and enjoyment' (p.117). It is this understanding of leisure that the study pursues. Since a wilderness experience can be defined as a leisure experience, an analysis of the concept of leisure for women is a necessary prerequisite for understanding women's perceptions of a wilderness experience.

A radical feminist standpoint examines and challenges the gendered concept of leisure, which reinforces gender power relations. Because women's lifestyle and leisure experience differs from that of men, women's work patterns and imposed gender roles are discussed as well as the effects of patriarchal attitudes and expectations on the experience of leisure. The wilderness setting itself appears to hold different meanings for women and men because of differences in their cultural experience of wilderness. The traditional premise that wilderness is a place for men and not women is deconstructed and challenged.

The meaning of wilderness for women is analysed through discussion on 'inner wilderness' and perceptions of the external environment. Ecofeminist philosophies are examined and a radical/cultural standpoint is offered, which argues that a spiritual connection between women and wilderness exists and that women can reestablish their identification with

Mother Nature through a wilderness experience.

Writings on the psychological benefits of a wilderness experience indicate that a wilderness setting can allow a relatively unobscured glimpse into the personal, cognitive and emotional aspects of the self and that what one learns about the self whilst there can be carried back into everyday experience. Psychological wellbeing and concern for the preservation of the wilderness seems to occur for people who undergo a wilderness experience. Gender differences in wilderness experiences and the wilderness setting as a context for therapy are also discussed.

Women's personal, emotional and psychological development in the women only setting are also examined. It would appear that relationships, a sense of safety and feeling supported are important motivational factors for women to be involved in a wilderness experience, which the women only setting promises.

Other major references reviewed in chapter two include Walsh (1989): *Women's Experience of Wilderness*; Mitton (1986): *Meeting the Unknown: Group Dynamics in the Wilderness*; Nanschild (1994): *Wild Women Never Get the Blues*; various essays in Plant (1989): *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*; Nanschild (ed.) (1994): *WomenTrek Journal*; and Norwood (1988): *Light, Power, Space, and Sun: Women in Landscapes of Adventure*.

The research questions that form the basis of this study emerged from the reviewed literature. What does 'wilderness experience' mean for women? What motivates women to experience the wilderness and what expectations do they hold? How do wilderness experiences affect the way women think and feel about themselves? What connections do women make between themselves and the wilderness environment? What is the effect for women being in a women only setting?

Chapter three details the theoretical basis of the study and outlines the qualitative and interpretive methodology chosen to answer the questions raised about women's experience of wilderness in a women only setting. Interviews with nine women were conducted and their responses to open ended, semi-structured questions were recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed. An interpretive methodology was chosen because it allows for recognition, examination and acknowledgement of the multiplicity of meanings and potential contradictions that the concept of leisure and wilderness experience manifests for women.

Chapter four presents the grounded theory that emerged from analysis of the research conducted on women's perceptions of a wilderness experience in a women only setting. The theoretical constructs that contributed to formulating the theory are discussed, together with the central themes that emanated. The findings represent these women's constructed reality and perceptions of a women only wilderness experience.

Chapter five considers the findings of this study and forms conclusions about the relationships between women's experiences of wilderness in a women only setting and their physical, emotional, psychological, relational and spiritual awareness and development. The study extends current literature presented in chapter two, which is either confirmed or challenged, and presents women's perceptions of a wilderness (and hence a leisure) experience.

In Chapter six, recommendations regarding practices, policies, programs, education and training are made with respect to experiences of leisure, recreation and wilderness as a result of this study. Opportunities for cultural learning and exchange are also encouraged. Preservation of the wilderness environment and implications for further research are likewise presented.

## Chapter 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW

A woman is not a potted plant  
Her roots bound to the confines  
Of her house

A woman is not a potted plant  
Her leaves trimmed to the contours  
Of her sex

A woman is not a potted plant  
Her branches espaliered  
Against the fences of her race  
Her country  
Her mother  
Her man

Her trained blossom  
Turning this way and that  
To follow the sun  
Of whoever feeds  
And waters her

A woman is wilderness unbounded...  
Holding the future  
Between each breath  
Walking the earth  
Only because  
She is free  
And not creepervine  
Or tree

Nor even honeysuckle  
Or bee

(Alice Walker: *A woman is not a potted plant*, 1991)

### The Concept of Leisure for Women

Leisure is a subjective experience which enhances quality of life. A perceived freedom exists and a positive dimension is implied (Wearing and Wearing 1988; Henderson et al 1989). The elements of freedom and choice are inherent within an understanding of leisure. An androcentric concept of leisure (ibid; Deem 1986) considers leisure as time free from (paid) work and other commitments. However, this definition largely ignores the different context that leisure and recreation has in women's lives (Anderson 1975; Henderson et al 1989; Betschild 1995). The study of leisure for women needs to be

conducted within a broader social context, seen as part of women's lifestyles rather than as a separate dimension in itself (Wimbush and Talbot 1988; Green, Hebron and Woodward 1990). Leisure is a culmination of interests, commitments, and obligations in women's lives (Stanley 1988) and not simply time free from work. It is a phenomenon not easily separated from the everyday routine of most women (Deem 1986). As Mobily (1991) states 'when we recall a leisure experience, we remember it along with its context, not as a pure form' (p.6).

For the purpose of this study, leisure for women is defined as *a leisure experience*. This moves '...the conceptualizations of leisure as 'leisure time' and 'leisure activity"' (Wearing and Wearing 1988, p.117). An experience of leisure has unique meanings for women because it presents opportunities for personal expansion, fulfillment and the possibility of interaction with others. Women's leisure appears to be socially or relationally motivated rather than undertaken purely for self pleasure or enjoyment (Henderson et al 1989) and spending time with family and friends is congruent with women's social roles (Kiewa et al 1993). Friendships and opportunities for social gatherings provide a large focus for women's experience of leisure.

The role of leisure in the lives of women and women's experience of leisure is different from that of men (Henderson et al 1989; Wearing and Wearing 1988). To fully understand and appreciate this difference requires an analysis of women's lifestyles that include work patterns, gender roles and patriarchal attitudes and expectations.

### Work Patterns

Women do paid and unpaid work for many different reasons, such as self interest, income, and as unpaid helpers in a family business (Kempnich 1993). Whatever their reason, women generally need to be flexible to accommodate their family responsibilities (ibid) and community interests. Their patterns of employment oscillate according to factors like age,

dependent children, ethnicity and mobility. These factors can shape their domestic circumstances, income levels and employment status (Wimbush and Talbot 1988).

Changes in the nature of women's employment over the last ten years (Kempnich 1993) has meant that, for example, in South Australia, 59% of women work in full-time employment and 41% work part-time (of women in paid work). In the period between 1966 and 1990, there was an increase of 250.1% in part-time jobs across Australia and only 41.6% in full-time employment (Women's Advisors Unit 1991; see figures 1 and 2 in Appendix A).

The role of part-time work in women's lives is significant. Nearly one tenth of employed women work mainly from home and over two thirds work part-time (Kempnich 1993). Part-time workers have the least amount of free time available to them because they give time to their job whilst still performing their household duties full-time (Henderson et al 1989; Wimbush and Talbot 1988). Given that women in part-time work mainly operate from home to complement their other role responsibilities (Women's Advisors Unit 1991), the potential to integrate leisure time and work time is obvious. Women have mainly experienced leisure in the home, even though it is difficult for women to find their own space in the home for leisure (Henderson et al 1989; Anderson 1975; Green, Hebron and Woodward 1988). Few studies have researched the impact this has on women's leisure time but it appears that part-time work is a constraint to women's leisure because women's work at home is not reduced (ibid).

There will be considerably more women working, particularly part-time, in the future. Kempnich (1992) states that '[o]ver the next twenty years nearly two thirds of the growth in the workforce will be attributed to women taking up paid employment' (p.1). An additional consideration is that part-time work increases with age for women but decreases with age for men (Women's Advisors Unit 1991). Setting aside free time and generating personal space for leisure could be seen as one of the major challenges for women who are increasingly working part-time and from home.



The issue of unemployment has serious implications for women. Nearly half of all unemployed women in South Australia are in the 18-24 years age bracket (Kempnich 1993; see figure 3 in Appendix B) and whilst their time may be less consumed by other roles, responsibilities and work considerations, their self esteem and disposable income to use for leisure and recreation is less. In addition, a perceived sense of 'free time' in which to enjoy leisure can potentially be distorted.

A large percentage of the women in paid employment are often balancing two jobs, the domestic work connected with home management and child care as well as their paid employment. This means they spend considerably less time on leisure than do their male peers. Women in full-time work, who experience the 'double shift' perhaps more so than their part-time counterparts, were found to have over 10 hours less leisure time per week than similarly employed men (Scraton 1994; Bittman 1991). Whilst women live in a changing world which has influenced their working patterns and consequently their non-working lives, it appears that there has been little significant change in the division of labour in the home in the past decade (ibid). 'The elimination of gender-imposed roles will do much to enhance the leisure lives of women' (Henderson et al 1989, p.xii).

### Gender Roles

The perceptions and experience of leisure continues to be divided along lines of gender (Green, Hebron and Woodward 1990; Wearing and Wearing 1988; Scraton 1994). Women still schedule their priorities in terms of domestic concerns rather than in terms of their own need for leisure (Chambers 1986). When women decide to pursue a leisure experience, it is a deliberate choice weighed against family responsibilities, limited income and social conditioning (Cosgriff and Bell 1989). In addition, women who work in the home find their perceived free time not translated into leisure experiences (Henderson et al 1989).

The perception of entitlement to leisure has always been more readily accepted by men than by women (Cunningham 1993; Green, Hebron and Woodward 1990) and now the trend for working women in the paid labour force is increasing towards the belief that they too deserve leisure after working so hard (Henderson et al 1989). Full-time employed women are more likely to see their entitlement to leisure and to be able to compartmentalise their work and leisure time (Deem 1986). In addition, these women often become involved in leisure pursuits because of their work affiliations and have more disposable income available to them to pursue leisure and recreation interests (Henderson et al 1989).

### Patriarchal Values

Values held within a patriarchal society promote the assumption that leisure means doing something, that activity is necessarily taking place, and that more often than not leisure activities become sporting activities (Cunningham 1993). This internalisation of patriarchal values about leisure also reflects the gendered concept of leisure. What women value as leisure differs; it can incorporate activity and non-activity, be active and/or passive, or it can be simply taking 'time out' from the domestic scene in any number of ways (ibid). Deem's (1986) analysis of the meaning of leisure for women is based on her premise that leisure is often expressed as an experience for women but as an activity or period of time for men. The research paradigm for this study supports her opinion, that leisure for women means:

...solidarity with their own sex but in a spirit of friendship and companionship rather than competition or status struggles, an emphasis on caring and on co-operation, a lack of aggression and selfishness, enjoyment of everyday things and happenings, an emphasis on the creative and aesthetic aspects of life, a willingness to include rather than exclude others, greater detachment from consumerist values. There is certainly no future in advocating that women's leisure should become more like men's, if this means women become involved in activities which are selfish, hierarchically organized, over-commercialized, aggressive, competitive and focused on rivalry rather than companionship... (p.149).

Our understanding of leisure has been based on what the masculine culture knows and values. Mainstream leisure activities and theoretical approaches in the leisure studies field reflect and affirm the interests of the dominant white male middle class (Wimbush and Talbot 1988). Henderson et al (1989) reflect that '[w]omen function in a world that is governed and controlled by men' (p.3) and Spender (1980) states that '...as long as male knowledge of reality remains unchallenged, women's experiences remain invalid' (p.52).

Research on leisure experience has been constrained not only by the fact that it is typically gendered but that it is predominantly empirical in method (Scherl 1988). This dominant positivist paradigm uses objective data to validate leisure behaviour and leisure experience in measurable, 'number crunching' ways, and has been the major influence upon which assumptions about leisure and recreation have been made. The overuse of quantitative research has limited our understanding of women's leisure experience because it nullifies qualitative aspects of this experience. Burden and Kiewa (1992) agree:

In the study of leisure, the use of quantitative techniques has contributed to the androcentric nature of our understanding since it pushes the researcher to focus on the time or activity dimensions of leisure rather than the quality of the experience and this focus tends to make women's experience invisible. (p.3)

The concept of leisure time itself is a point in hand. Leisure time is understood as *free time* for the purpose of this study, although 'free time' in itself does not imply that leisure takes place. Women's time differs from men's with women's personal time often seen as family time (Wimbush and Talbot 1988). The issue of time management and the politics of spending time impinges upon the lifestyles of women (Cunningham 1993). Women often have less time available for leisure, especially on weekends, regardless of whether they are employed or work full-time in the home (Henderson et al 1989). As Cunningham (1993) states '...there is little (if any) time which is understood [for women] as leisure time' (p.14).

Leisure and recreation activities themselves are often male defined and male controlled (Deem 1986) and serve to reduce women's leisure options because they are gender specific (Wimbush and Talbot 1988; Wearing and Wearing 1988). Cunningham (1993) defines sporting activities as the most popular leisure activities cited by men. Interests pursued by women in their leisure time, however, include home-based and cultural activities as well as outdoor activities (Henderson et al 1989). Research has been biased in favour of men with men's experience constructed as 'the norm' (Spender 1980). This presents only a partial view of the world because women are made invisible and gender-based power relations are maintained (ibid; Wimbush and Talbot 1988). This is reflected and magnified through the inequitable provision of recreation and leisure facilities for females and males in schools (Nanschild 1994) and the general community.

Contemporary feminist research that has examined the gendered concept of leisure has considered gender difference the focus of attention (Cunningham 1993; Henderson et al 1989; Green, Hebron and Woodward 1990). Both feminism and leisure aim to encourage choice rather than set limits, yet there exists a paucity of leisure experience research that has been approached from a feminist perspective (Henderson et al 1989; Betschild 1995). Feminism presents us with a way to live our lives (Stanley and Wise 1983).

A new paradigm about leisure is required, one that not only incorporates the lives and experiences of women but also makes them visible. Women are not an homogeneous group. Questions about leisure for women have been more successfully solved by researchers taking a different ontological and epistemological view (Henderson 1991) because of the recognition that differences exist in the way we view the world (Galland 1980). As a feminist scholar, I have utilised an interpretive qualitative paradigm, one that incorporates feminism with other imperatives such as the ecology movement, to recognise, examine and acknowledge the multiplicity of meanings and potential contradictions that the concept of leisure and wilderness experience manifests for women.

## Wilderness and Women

The domestic landscape has traditionally been portrayed as the domain of women and the outdoors landscape, particularly the wilderness, as the exclusive domain of men. American writers tell of men's experience of the wilderness and legends are told of their pioneering exploits (Slotkin 1975; Showalter 1981). The Australian 'bush', represented as wilderness, has been the context for men to symbolically measure their identity (Schaffer 1989). According to the myth of the typical Australian, the men 'fought' the land whilst the women were 'enslaved' to the kitchen and the backyard; the domestic sphere (Allen 1992).

The wilderness has been a metaphor for male validation, determination and domination (Walsh 1989). Historically, women did not have an opportunity to participate in the wilderness as men did (ibid). There existed strict divisions of labour along gender lines that confined women to the domestic sphere and childrearing whilst men were free to roam and hunt (Grimshaw 1986). Women were not allowed to vote, to hold public office, to be educated nor own property. They were excluded from the public sphere. What often goes unacknowledged is the fact that without women's support, men could not survive in this wilderness (Walsh 1989). Not recorded nor validated is the female labour contribution in the pioneering settlements due to the shortage of male labour (Grimshaw 1986).

The pioneer myth also could not exist out of context, that is, without the wilderness. This male dominated frontier setting influenced twentieth century Australia specifically in terms of gender relations (Grimshaw 1986). The male fantasy excluded women. If women appeared at all in literature and legends, they were shown as merely the servers and companions of "adventurous" men.

Women's experience of wilderness has usually been bracketed by men's experience. In a landscape traditionally perceived as the domain of men, there are issues for women that stem from patriarchal perceptions that wilderness is a masculine domain and is experienced

according to the behaviour codes of men (Norwood 1988). As Walsh (1989) states, '[w]omen had to come to terms with the wilderness landscape as well but the prevailing metaphors and meanings which they had to come to terms with were male' (p.16). Nash (1982) supports this hypothesis. 'Wilderness...acquired importance as a source of virility, toughness, and savagery - qualities that defined fitness in Darwinian terms' (cited in Walsh 1989, p.19).

The male codes of bravery, courage, heroism, and conquest have provided the cultural context for such experiences and can intimidate women from venturing into it. There is a prior expectation before the experience itself that, in order to enjoy and perhaps even to survive, women must act in a masculine way. This presents a double bind for women because they are entering male defined landscapes which potentially question their validity as women (Norwood 1988). The feminine becomes displaced (Walsh 1989).

Through analysis of written 'first hand' accounts by four women adventurers in the past and present centuries, Norwood (1988) confirmed that women's perceptions of a wilderness experience do differ from that of men. Nicolette Miles Walker sailed single handed across the Atlantic; Robyn Davidson trekked with camels across the desert of the Australian Outback; Arlene Blum was the expedition leader of the first women's group to climb Annapurna; and Anne LaBastille made her home in the wilderness of the Adirondack Mountains.

Norwood found two distinct qualities from the women's perspective that largely differ from that of men. Women enter the wilderness with care for its environment and proceed with the view that personal safety is more important than the set task or goal. 'In my personal experience mountaineering is far more than a sport: it has a deeper meaning, trying to achieve a harmony with nature' (Tullis 1986, p.220).

The four women adventurers wrote about their relationship to the environment they found themselves in and their respect for it. They were not interested in changing the landscape or conquering it, as male pioneers did. Rather, these women were interested in learning to coexist within the environment, submerging themselves to become part of it. Norwood proposes this submersion and identification with the environment as perceptions that women hold for themselves in a wilderness experience, as opposed to operating with an exploitative 'frontier mentality' that incorporates the male norms of victory and dominance over the environment.

It is not surprising then that concern for the environment and the rise of the conservation movement has paralleled the rise in the women's movement. Walsh (1989) has also noticed this relationship. 'The history of environmental preservation which evolved in response to the actions of domination and development, parallels that of the struggle for female liberation' (p.25).

The women's liberation movement saw women speaking out against their oppression and against the destruction of the planet. The emergence of ecofeminism since 1972 came at a time when rivers were noticeably congested with pollution, the ozone layer was thinning, our human and non-human wastes from technological production were piling, and feminists demanded to know what was going to be done about it (Ruether 1975). The merging of the women's movement with the ecological movement illuminated concerns for the survival of all species on our planet.

Ecofeminists argue for a transformation of our beliefs and lifestyle to end the devastation of the earth and the exploitation of women. As Estes (1992) puts it, '[w]ildlife and the Wild Woman are both endangered species...Old forests and old women are viewed as not very important resources' (p.3).

Writers of ecofeminist theory share a similar vision of what they want in an ecologically healthy world but differ in their analysis and political strategies for achieving this (Nanschild 1993). Nature is a central category of ecofeminist theory. Radical/cultural ecofeminists argue that the oppression of women and nature is one based on gender relations because male domination and control is the basis of patriarchy. It is sometimes called 'deep ecofeminism' as it: '...examines the deepest assumptions, values and fears that inform the structures and expectations of patriarchal culture' (Spretnak 1990, p.10).

Deep ecofeminism differs from 'deep ecology'. The latter was born from a radical strand of the environmental movement but is not informed by a patriarchal consciousness.

Nevertheless, essential beliefs held within 'deep ecology' that are useful to this study include a deep understanding of self being necessary for personal growth and development and that our understanding of self needs to incorporate the biosphere we depend upon for our survival (Devall and Sessions 1985). Walsh (1989) is encouraged by the possibilities that ecofeminism and ecology offer towards understanding the environment from a feminist perspective and hence developing greater respect for it.

The emergence of the science of ecology, of deep ecology and of eco-feminism, offers the possibility for a shift in the treatment and language of the land from a traditionally masculine, objectified, utilitarian approach to a more connected, internalized, intuitive and feminine interaction. (p.30)

It is important to note the contribution that post-structuralism offers to the ecofeminist debate, primarily because this theory advocates that assumptions about the 'woman and nature' connection are culturally determined (Walsh 1989). Whilst women's oppression is indeed linked with the domination and destruction of nature by 'man', the idea of one group being closer to nature is a construct of culture (Plumwood 1992), albeit a masculine culture purported by a patriarchal society, rather than a natural attribute. Post-structuralists argue for the development of an alternative culture that will recognise human characteristics as continuous with nature (Plumwood 1992; King 1990), with the perspective of 'all living things' being part of a continuum. This has been termed



'transformative ecofeminism' (Plumwood 1990; Warren 1987). Unfortunately, this theory falls short in its analysis of the actual difficulties associated with a change in the power base of patriarchal society that would be required. It necessitates a perspective that nature and humans are holistic, respectful and egalitarian in their relationship, something which the twentieth century has yet to experience.

The WomenTrek study is situated within the cultural context of women's lived experience in the twentieth century, with all that entails. The radical/cultural ecofeminist standpoint, somewhat supported by the study, assumes that a caring, bonding relationship exists between woman and her environment and that 'woman and nature' are interconnected and deserve celebration through the practice of feminist spirituality. The life cycle of birth, growth, death, and regeneration is honoured and Mother Earth held sacred (Starhawk 1989). Feminist spiritual relationships to nature facilitate personal transformation and are emancipatory in ethics. Women can find spiritual renewal in remote wilderness (Walsh 1989), for instance, and know the value of preserving the wilderness that is left (Starhawk 1990). Women often speak of their wilderness experience as causing them to feel connected with the environment in a spiritual way.

I start feeling at one with what is around me. It feels like a dance to me...The body is me flowing over the landscape, I'm of it, I'm within it, I'm moving in harmony with it, so that all of my movements feel like a dance flowing over the landscape. For me, that is the epitome of a beautiful experience in the outdoors; that is spiritual renewal. (Dann and Lynch 1989, p.155)

Because the life cycle is held sacred and seen as interconnected, women can recognise the intrinsic value of earth itself. This potentially shifts women's definition of power (Starhawk 1990). Through being affirmed as female, reestablishing bonds with nature and finding a reality and a spirituality that honours the feminine, women are being empowered. Connecting earth-based spirituality with ecofeminism ensures a transformation of the self and the world around us, as Spretnak (1989) goes on to say:

Nature has given me gifts, teachings, and revelations, but none more intense than those times in the wilderness I approached in silence, simply observing and being aware of the sensations I was experiencing, until eventually I was enfolded by the deep, deep silence and the oneness...the distinction between inner and outer mind dissolve[d]... (pp.7-8)

In an analysis of how women writers explore nature and the cycles of nature as a powerful metaphor for women's lives, Jones (1984) concludes that women can discover themselves and have their experiences validated through identification with the natural world. Adams (1991) suggests that there is a paradigmatic feminine attitude towards nature and this is supported by the radical/cultural strand of ecofeminism. King (1980) calls upon women to remember our connections to one another, to our mothers, daughters, and sisters, as well as our origins in nature.

From a psychological view, what is perceived as wilderness varies from individual to individual and is relative to experience and situation. These factors frame our understanding and recognition of a wilderness setting and what important qualities must exist within it. 'Our definitions of its boundaries and meanings are within us and therefore available for study' (Walsh 1989, p.42). Women can become alienated from their deepest needs, thoughts and feelings in their everyday lives but being in a wilderness environment enables them to access this part of themselves, their 'inner' wilderness (ibid). Going into the wilderness can invoke the wilderness within us all (Galland 1980). '[T]he natural world allows women to continue their journeys of self discovery and self definition in a way that the built world does not' (Cosgriff and Bell 1989, p.60).

Women often seek metaphors of 'self' reflected in the environment (Henderson and Bialeschki 1987). Through interaction with the natural environment, women express a sense of coming home into 'self' and of being in touch with their inner 'self' (Scherl 1988). A wilderness setting acts as a source of emotional and spiritual renewal because the wilderness has the potential to bring us closer to ourselves (Walsh 1989).

The wilderness experience carries inherent metaphors. Climbing mountains, finding or losing one's way, overcoming obstacles, carrying your life on your back, persevering for the big view, and dealing with fears as they arise...are some of the more obvious examples of metaphoric possibilities. (Walsh 1989, p.74)

The association between woman, nature and 'wildness' is the primary connection that has popularised Estes (1992) work in *Women Who Run With The Wolves*. Estes purports that women get in touch with their inner selves and connect with their inner wilderness when they feel connected with the external wilderness. She explores the concept of the 'Wild Woman' archetype through her gift as a storyteller. She parallels women's experience through myths, legends and tales to lead women deeper into their own 'knowing' and states '[n]o matter by which culture a woman is influenced, she understands the words *wild* and *woman* intuitively' (p.6).

Estes advocates for the 'wild woman' who represents the health of all women. 'Wild' means to live a natural life but 'wild woman' stirs a deep memory, an inner feminine force, that is both powerful and spiritual. The wilderness forces us to pay attention to that which is important, to be in tune with our surroundings, and to see the environment from the eyes of the experience (Walsh 1989).

Images of journeying create a feminist mythology of the 'wild zone', a woman-centered place that brings into being a female consciousness (Showalter 1981) where 'symbols of passage' are used to represent the image of the journey. Galland (1980) likens the journey as one of spirit, where each life is a 'heroic quest', during which we discover our purpose. Women can and do get in touch with themselves and their inner strength through using metaphors of 'self' in relation to the environment, particularly in peak wilderness experiences (ibid).

Mountaineering...the challenge is to myself, not the mountain...no goals are scored or points won. You have to learn to push yourself through a desire to want to know more...And this is what draws me back to the mountains time after time...there has to be a reason to live beyond purely surviving, an extension of that force of nature of which my body and spirit are a part, just as a river has to flow and broaden or it will stagnate. (Tullis 1986, p.222)

## Psychological Benefits

Concern for the state of the environment and the subsequent awareness raised by the conservation and ecofeminist movements has prompted an interest in and a quest for preserving the wilderness. It appears there have been many theorists since 1980 who have explored the effects of a wilderness experience upon the individual, usually with recommendations that the outdoors environment be maintained in its wilderness state.

The wilderness has been seen as a source of healing (Nanschild 1994). Walsh (1989) described the wilderness as therapeutic for women because women can get an unobscured glimpse of who they are in that setting. What one learns about the self in the wilderness can be transferred into everyday experience. We need our wilderness areas to facilitate that understanding.

Many researchers (examples follow) in the Psychology and Leisure/Recreation fields of enquiry agree, despite using different methodologies, that meaningful changes in the form of psychological wellbeing can take place within individuals when they are in a wilderness setting and/or involved in a wilderness experience. These changes include overcoming fear, increasing locus of control, increasing self esteem (Mason 1987) and feelings of restoration and rejuvenation and a sense of peace and tranquility (Walsh 1989).

Scherl (1988) examined the dimensions of psychological wellbeing that are widely claimed about the effects of wilderness experiences using the Repertory Grid Technique. Individuals involved in the study constructed their perceptions of a wilderness experience from a personal standpoint. A strong relationship was found between individual's perceptions of themselves and their psychological sensations and bodily awareness. How they were coping with the situation, as well as the effort required to be in that setting, were added correlational factors. She found that:

...three aspects of the wilderness experience [were] more predominant than others; emotional responses and level of arousal, a distinction between self and group...and a recognition that effort (either physical or mental) was part of the experience. (p.234)

Scherl also found that significant changes in self concept and self esteem can occur as a consequence of having gone through a wilderness experience. In addition, she discovered that closer contact with one's emotional state and a sense of inner self through a wilderness experience was likely to enhance a respect for the wilderness environment itself.

Outdoor experiences contribute to psychological growth, particularly in the area of self concept and relationships. Outdoor adventure ideally happens in a wilderness setting (Burden and Kiewa 1992) and combines physical activity with opportunities to interact with the natural environment (Williams 1992).

Most of the research on the psychological and therapeutic aspects of wilderness have predominantly used male subjects and high risk male dominated activities, such as climbing, exaggerate patriarchal relations (Egan 1994). Mixed groups are sometimes used but the issue of gender is not addressed. Women have generally not been the target of investigation even though there is a distinctly feminine relationship with the wilderness (Walsh 1989). The keywords 'woman/women' had to be deleted from my literature search because so few studies came to light. This confirmed my suspicion that research conducted specifically on women's experience of leisure, including recreation and wilderness, is scant.

In terms of findings that support gender differences in wilderness experiences, Mason (1987) discovered that women initially had less trust in themselves but their overall wellness, including physical health, was higher than men's. In addition, women's perception of their partner's trust in them was less than that of men's and, not surprisingly, males trusted the equipment more than women did. Men have had more exposure to equipment used outdoors through their socialisation.

Walsh (1989) used the phenomenological research method to learn about women's experience of wilderness. She found that women discovered strength and pleasure in their physical abilities and had their previously unacknowledged competencies and strengths in a traditionally masculine domain confirmed. She also identified that women experienced spirituality and connectedness with the wilderness environment. They appreciated moments of solitude as well as opportunities for social contact.

People go to the wilderness for a variety of reasons and in a number of ways. The majority of academic studies cited were conducted whilst participants were attending wilderness courses. Relatively few have been conducted out of a wilderness context although participants had spent considerable extended time in wilderness environments. The subjects of research on the psychological benefits of wilderness experiences included victims of rape, those in therapy, couples in relationship, people who suffered from stress and/or felt 'burnt out', and those who were activity oriented or experience oriented.

There were several references in the research to the wilderness courses themselves. Outward Bound is mentioned frequently and the National Outdoor Leadership School (N.O.L.S.) less so. Some studies have specifically designed the wilderness experience whilst others have tapped into courses already in existence.

Outward Bound has been utilised as a research source and there is a real concern by feminists that it is a programme grounded in masculine culture. It promotes self discovery through a series of physically demanding activities with exacting standards. It seems to operate similar to a 'military style' of command, has a solo element to it, and lacks focus on group cohesion. The choice of activities and the way they are presented reflects men's preferred interest and learning style (Holzwarth 1989).

N.O.L.S., on the other hand, promotes a different philosophy about how the self can be experienced in a wilderness setting. There is an emphasis on the process of learning and

group dynamics which this organisation considers are essential features of a wilderness experience. The self is located as part of, not external to, the process. It would appear that N.O.L.S. supports women's preferred learning style because its philosophy and programmes enable experiences to be shared with others (Nanschild 1994).

### Women Only Settings

Whilst women are concerned with the domestic sphere of their lives, they need not be confined to it nor constrained by it. Since the mid 1980s, several studies have appeared which highlight the need for outdoor programmes for women and why they have become so popular. Holzwarth (1989) parallels the growth of women's outdoor programmes with the women's movement. She claims that women are regaining a sense of self through the emergence of a feminine process in experiential learning. This process allows women to explore the feminine experience separately from the masculine model within women only settings.

The number of women actively choosing to be in the outdoors has increased because women only settings are now being offered (Cosgriff and Bell 1989). These settings enable women to have control and choice in directing their experiences. Women are free of gender role expectations and therefore find outdoor experiences far more enjoyable (Flint 1991; Holzwarth 1989; Nanschild 1994). They are free to experience and appreciate themselves as women and not as women in relation to men (Henderson et al 1989; Walsh 1989). Women also find that the pressure of competition which sometimes occurs within a mixed groups tends not to exist in women only settings. This allows fun to be a priority of the experience (Pascual 1989).

Outdoor programmes designed for women are in fact enabling women to experience their own wilderness adventures with confidence (Curry 1991). A supportive and non-competitive learning environment, more easily established through women only settings,

allows women to set their own goals and to operate at their own pace. Appropriate risk taking is therefore seen as a positive experience (Holzwarth 1989; Nanschild 1994). Women are able to discover the joy and confidence that learning a new outdoor skill can create (Miranda and Yerkes 1982). Developing the skills and abilities to meet the physical and mental challenge of a wilderness adventure serves as a catalyst for personal development for women (Kiewa et al 1993). Women tend to defer to men for these skills in a mixed, outdoor setting (Nanschild 1994) and men have a tendency to take over the experience (Henderson et al 1989). In a women only setting, women learn more with other women and they learn to do it for themselves. 'Knowing that "I can do it!" is often a transformative experience, generating confidence in other areas of women's lives' (Cosgriff and Bell 1989, p.62).

Women only settings enhance personal development and provide opportunities for spiritual connectedness (Galland 1980). An emphasis on wellness and health awareness and a sense of being in harmony with the environment are important elements of an outdoor experience for women (Holzwarth 1992). The opportunity to practice environmental aesthetics, to take the time to appreciate nature in informal ways, was identified as being particularly valuable (Henderson and Bialeschki 1987). A woman centered space allows women to meet their need for a safe place in which to get in touch with who they are deep inside, their inner wilderness, their sense of belonging (Cosgriff and Bell 1989). '[H]aving time in an all-women's space is nurturing and essential for many in maintaining a solid sense of self' (Mitton 1986, p.3).

The primary reasons for women being in women only settings are the connections with nature and with other women. The potential to make new friends is a strong factor for women in choosing women only settings (Miranda and Yerkes 1982). A wilderness experience can facilitate open communication, trust and respect that is inherent in developing friendships (Mitton 1986). An important step in the development of relationships is mutual self disclosure and sharing one's innermost feelings. Women's



friendship groups share feelings of affection, trust and equality and focus on personal and interpersonal affairs (Raymond 1986).

Women are often able to recognise and renegotiate their relationships with others as a result of a wilderness experience (Walsh 1989). Relationships are the most important aspect for women in considering what they do, where they do it, and with whom (Nanschild 1994). It has been noted that this concern for relationships is experienced through an ethic of care (Gilligan 1982; 1988).

Bonding with other women is noted as a phenomena of a wilderness experience, one where the diversity of women is welcomed (Mitton 1986; Holzwarth 1989; Galland 1980). Wilderness experiences can bring women together immediately in a common need for cooperation and survival. The more cohesive the group, the greater the impact upon individual's self esteem, participation and goal attainment.

When women bond while accepting and meeting challenges on an adventure the connections are often strong and reinforce the developing bonds or trust among the group members. (Mitton 1986, p.30)

Female bonds of mentorship, where the relationship can be described as one of mentor and mentee, have been found to impact upon the formation of women's identity as well as contributing to the growth of intimacy and integrity (Klopf and Harrison 1981).

Mentorships are unique relationships of communication for women and they successfully support women in their quest for identity and autonomy. Women on a wilderness experience together often operate mentorships through the enactment of role modelling.

The cross generational opportunities that women only experiences offer are highly valued (Nanschild 1994). Women and girls of all ages and from all walks of life meet as one community of women. It is in this setting that women's culture can be fully understood, acknowledged and realised.

For a girl coming of age in a world of mothers who will take action on her behalf, the fear of being female in a violent world of men loosens in its traumatic impact. (Debold 1994, p.195).

The diversity of women who come together in a women only setting present a wide range of possible role models. Role modelling has a strong influence on women's concept of what is possible for them to do. Older women have been found to provide the best role models for other women (Pascual 1989; Nanschild 1994; Holzwarth 1989). Women outdoor leaders also act as role models for women (Mitton 1986; Holzwarth 1989). Learning through the example of leaders, who focus on teaching rather than testing, helps set the scene for emotionally 'safe' experiential learning to take place.

Appropriate leadership is about facilitating someone else's experience rather than your own (Mills 1988). When the participant is placed at the centre of the experience their full potential is more able to be realised. The intention is to provide equal opportunity to access knowledge and every opportunity to practice and experience it (Bowen, cited in Holzwarth 1989). This style of leadership operates from a feminist perspective (Nanschild 1991). Increased participant responsibility can then be realised. This is the key to a successful experience as well as active participation (Rapp 1989), which can further develop self reliance and a sense of personal power within the group (Cosgriff and Bell 1989). This, in turn, develops personal leadership as women increasingly take more responsibility for themselves in an outdoors setting. This calibre of personal leadership can be woven into women's everyday lives (Kline 1988).

There are issues for women regarding leadership. Many women are uncomfortable in a leadership role because they become the central focus (Kline 1988) and feel subject to criticism. However, in a women only setting, a woman must become the leader! The models of leadership we have in our society are hierarchically based and there is a perception that it can be 'lonely at the top'. Women would prefer to be relating with others more equitably and within a structure that is not hierarchical. It appears that women want participatory

management (Henderson and Bialeschki 1986). We do not want women who lead as men have been conditioned to lead (Kline 1988). Leadership by 'conquest' needs to be replaced with leadership by 'thinking well' of others. Women outdoor guides believe motherhood and nursing to be better requisites for outdoor leadership than 'swashbuckling'! (Mills 1988). The qualities that women can bring to a leadership position are potentially great as they are likely to bring an interpersonal focus.

## Conclusions

A woman is not a potted plant...she is wilderness unbounded...

(Walker 1991, pp.454-455)

There is a distinct women's experience of wilderness (Holzwarth 1989; Galland 1980). Women are constructing a more holistic view of themselves through a total immersion experience in the wilderness (Miranda and Yerkes 1982). The physical, psychological, emotional, relational and spiritual realms become tangible for women (Walsh 1989) in this setting.

The journey into the wilderness is a journey towards wholeness as one begins to integrate the beauty, the strength, and the power of the experience and of being with others who share from a common perspective. (Henderson and Bialeschki 1986, p.39)

It is worthwhile to remind ourselves from time to time that wilderness is not only a place, but is also a state of being. It is a state characterized by freedom, self-organisation, extravagant variety, complex order, grandness of scale, continual change, orientation in time, and beauty. Those are among the powers that wilderness has over us, but they are also among our powers. We can find and create them in many ways, whatever place we happen to be in. Our best task then, is not only to preserve wilderness settings, but also to try to resemble them more within ourselves, and in what we do. (J.W. Meeker: *Where is Wilderness*, cited in Walsh 1989, p.1)

The wilderness as an outdoor leisure experience offers a depth of personal enrichment to women's lives. Women's leisure needs to be understood in the context of women's physical, economic, social and cultural worlds (Scraton 1994). A more holistic view to

understanding women and leisure that will embrace the diversity of women's experiences and make them visible is required (Wimbush and Talbot 1988). A variety of research methods are needed that will enable women to find their own voice of experience (Stanley 1988).

There is a need to research around difference in order to understand difference. We need to explore the leisure worlds of women with disabilities, minority ethnic women from a range of cultural backgrounds, single parent women, lesbians, women in lesbian couples, professional women, etc. It is only by starting from everyday experiences that we will be able to recognise the importance of difference and the significance of shared experiences. (Scruton 1993, p.258)

### Research Questions

Several questions emerge from the literature about women's experience of wilderness and form the basis of this study. The research paradigm employed is that there does exist a relationship between wilderness experiences in a women only setting and women's personal growth. In establishing this connection, the following questions are investigated:

- What does 'wilderness experience' mean for women?
- What motivates women to experience the wilderness and what expectations do they hold?
- How do wilderness experiences affect the way women think and feel about themselves, at the time of their experience and in the long term?
- What connections do women make between themselves and the wilderness environment?
- What is the effect on women being in a women only group?

The next chapter outlines the methodology chosen for this study and the research methods that were employed.

## Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

### Purpose of Enquiry

The purpose of this study is to examine the wilderness domain from the perspective of women and to broaden understanding about the wilderness experience itself as a leisure experience for women. This study explores the relationship between wilderness experiences in a women only setting and women's personal growth. The research intention is emancipatory in that women's experience of wilderness is encouraged and seen to contribute to an overall sense of wellbeing and quality of life, and that the psychological and therapeutic effects of a wilderness experience for women have the potential to positively enhance and change women's lives.

This study examines why women undergo a wilderness experience and what happens to them during such experiences. As such it contributes to the Leisure and Recreation disciplines and challenges patriarchal knowledge assumptions about the experience of leisure. The study is also located within Women's Studies and Sociology and informs research about women's changing life needs in the 1990s and beyond (Scraton 1994).

### Origins of Enquiry

Feminist theory, at its most fundamental level, examines the relationship between gender and subjectivity. Gunew (1990) defines gender as the 'social construction of sexual difference'. Eisenstein (1984) agrees that gender differences are the result of socially constructed influences and are therefore transformable. Burton (1985) sees the different experiences of women and men are a result of sex role allocation and the exclusion of women from the cultural sphere. She expands on her position by explaining how ideologies develop to keep women's subordinate status alive and that it is difficult for women to see their position as a socially constructed one.

There are different standpoints of feminist theory. Socialist feminists not only see gender as socially produced but historically changable as well. This theory is based on the concept that patriarchy as a social system is influenced by class and racial oppressions as well, and that a full transformation of the social system is required in order for social change to take place. This theory does not address the issues of power relations that keep women and women's interests subordinate to men. It does, however, support the abolition of the privileges of heterosexuality and recognises the family and the broader context of work, leisure and public life to be key sites for the operations of patriarchy (Weedon 1987).

Liberal feminists advocate for equality in all spheres of life without changing the patriarchal structures. The family unit is promoted rather than understood as the primary institution of patriarchy. Whilst gender per se is not a highlight, the main thrust for liberal feminist theory is the transformation of gender roles based on sexual divisions of labour. There is no platform for discussion of power relations.

A radical feminist standpoint is the feminist discourse chosen for this study. In the evolution of feminist theory, the term 'radical' has shifted in meaning, according to shifts in the primary and fundamental focus of the feminist movement and what is understood as the root of women's oppression. During the 1960s 'radical' meant a commitment to a form of social change, which influenced the equal opportunity legislation that marked the women's liberation movement during the 1970s (Eisenstein 1984). The debate focused upon social and economic issues. However, this style of liberal feminism accommodated for '...women's equal participation with men in structures that remained the same and [which] continued to oppress women, particularly [in] the nuclear family' (Ibid, p.138). Despite access won by women to male-dominated professions and elite Universities, for example, the structures of male power did not change.

As focus on political change gathered momentum, radical feminism shifted its debate to gender and gender difference as central components to key issues associated with power

relations. Gender is crucial to theories of radical feminism. Radical feminists argued that the nuclear family required women to be dependent on men for their survival and that '...the power of males [wa]s the basis for all forms of exploitation and oppression...Inequalities were perpetuated by males, to the benefit of males' (Burton 1985, p.35).

Radical feminists offered a perspective on how systematically institutions and ideas affected women (men and children). It linked the powerlessness of women to their socialisation into the female role. 'Men are in control of the construction of social reality and devise the ways of maintaining it' (Ibid, p.36). Power relations remain an important focus for this woman-centered perspective.

Eisenstein (1984) proposes the backlash upon feminism in the latter part of the 1980s may have been directly attributable to the attack by radical feminists upon the family and heterosexuality. However, she claims radical feminism made it easier to get reforms and improvements than otherwise possible because of the extent of the issues raised.

[W]omen were raising such a wide range of issues, across such a broad spectrum of sexual, social, economic, and political demands, [that] certain of the less threatening of these were able to find their way into legislative and judicial decisions benefitting women. (pp.137-138)

Humanist feminists promote the theory that different realities exist for different individuals and that all are valid (Weedon 1987). This theory also views women's realities as different to men and it is important to understand why. This is a premise for the existence of this thesis. It supports the standpoint that 'woman' as subject of her own experience provides an authentic source for interpretation of her reality.

The term 'woman' is not a unitary one but a universal category. 'Radical feminists have always understood that race, class, sexuality, age are intertwined, but they hold fast to the identity of woman' (Bell and Klein 1996, p.xviii). When a woman speaks in her own voice, of her own realities, she is speaking for her 'self' as she is situated. Sometimes she might

identify with her emotional self, at other times with her physical, intellectual or spiritual self (Stanley and Wise 1993). There is a relationship with the self implied. Concepts of self are socially constructed and dynamic and changing according to experience.

Women's collective experience has been recognised as a basis of feminist knowledge since the second wave of feminism (Gunew 1990). However, there is considerable disagreement amongst feminists about which approach to take. A tension exists between the commonality and the diversity of women's experience that questions the philosophical foundations of feminist theory. Eisenstein (1984) warns feminists of developing a 'false universalism', where the experience of being female, of being socially designated as a woman, is generalised as the experience of all women of the world. Certainly the WomenTrek experience, which this study examines, cannot speak for all women. Rather, it provides sensitivity to the diversity of the women involved and their experiences as the event progressed.

A radical feminist standpoint supports this study because it argues that under patriarchy male knowledge and male experience is assumed as the norm. Radical feminism insists that women define and interpret their own experience (Stanley and Wise 1983) and claim their own reality, rather than patriarchy defining and naming women's experience as experience in relation to men. A radical feminist analysis promotes women as having the authority to speak from their own experiences.

It is important to recognise the power dynamic we are fighting. Power operates as a network and is reproduced at every point where 'someone who "knows" is instructing someone who doesn't know'(Gunew 1990, p.22). Power relations are sustained at every level, public and private. Women seen in relation to men are defined in terms of 'other than' masculinity. It leaves women no conceptual space for developing autonomous interests and point of view other than or different from those of men. The general use in contemporary western society of the term 'guys' to address almost everyone serves as a classic example where women are reduced to the common denominator of men.



Gunew (1990) reminds us that feminist theory is:

[O]ften caught in the contradiction of being both critique and construct. It offers a critique of traditional knowledge which is controlled by patriarchal structures while at the same time existing within and being compromised by these same structures. (p.9)

We can either continue to work within chosen (male) discourses and continue an egalitarian approach or scrutinize these discourses from a feminist perspective, as this study does.

This involves separation from masculine forms of discourse and construction of positive feminist alternatives.

Feminism is a politics...directed at changing existing power relations between men and women in society. These power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. (Weedon 1987, p.1)

Radical feminism theory engages with and challenges traditional male-based knowledge assumptions. It purports that no one reality or truth exists. Rather, radical feminism proposes a plurality of perspectives that acknowledges other points of view and embraces a variety of positions that are constantly changing and being redefined (Rowland and Klein, 1987; Grosz 1990).

There are various streams within radical feminism but the analysis of the oppression of women is of fundamental importance.

It is a woman-centred interdependent theory and practice which is created from women's lived experience, making the personal political. It maintains that men oppress women through patriarchy, a system of structures, institutions, and ideology created by men in order to sustain and recreate male power and female subordination. (Rowland and Klein 1987, p.8)

Biological facts have been used as constructs in the oppression of women, especially in the discipline of Sociobiology, which argues for the biological determination of the sexes (Gunew 1990; Kaplan and Rogers 1990). Whilst any platform that oppresses women is not

accepted by radical feminists, 'biological essentialism', the celebration of women's feminine virtues, has been a criticism of radical feminism in the past. However, radical feminist theory focuses on issues of power rather than biological difference (Rowland and Klein 1987). It's about the fact that under patriarchy, the culture of men have power and the culture of women do not.

Radical feminism 'strives to generate a woman's culture...[to] recreate both their selves and their way of being in the world outside of patriarchal definition' (Ibid, p.295). Patriarchy limits the development of feminine characteristics which can only be cultivated in isolation from men (Kaplan and Rogers 1990). This separatist theory is the most criticised aspect of radical feminism '...because it suggests that women can successfully live in the world independent of men' (Rowland and Klein 1987, p.294). Weedon (1987) supports this view by stating that the only way in which women can assert their autonomy from men is in separation from them and patriarchal structures. Whilst difficult to establish, this is an empowering concept for women.

The fact that the research was conducted in a women only setting supports a radical feminist approach. Such experiences generate a gynocentric model of knowledge, with women and women's experiences at the centre of the research. How do we know what women's experiences and perceptions are if not studied in isolation to men? The results reveal many things but most important of all is the fact that in this study women define their own perceptions and experiences themselves. What they do with those experiences thereafter is also enlightening and do not necessarily mean that only a separatist existence prevails. Aboriginal communities, for example, recognise the special place in their culture for separate women's and men's business, as well as the need for community business. This doesn't negate their existence as women and men.

Rather than identifying with the patriarchal power base, we can construct our own identity. Gunew (1990) says 'we are what we know'. We use systems, such as language, music and

mathematics, to understand our world. Language, as a male construct, can make women's language and therefore women's experience invisible. It is a central tenet of radical feminist theory as it demonstrates the power dynamics at hand. How something is spoken reveals a great deal about the operation of gender power relations (Stanley 1988; Spender 1985). 'It is in language that differences acquire meaning for the individual...[it] teaches us what is socially accepted as normal' (Weedon 1987, p.76). Meaning depends on the context in which it is articulated and the discourses available to the individual to interpret her world.

Post-structuralism also makes claims on the use of language. Deconstruction of language is the common factor in post-structuralist theory. It assumes that subjectivity, our sense of ourselves, is constructed and socially produced and that language itself constitutes our social reality (Weedon 1987). In post-structuralist theory, there are no essential qualities of femininity or masculinity and the meaning of 'woman' varies according to its context. Language as discourse is used to give meaning to our world. Meaning is not fixed but specific to any discourse within which it is produced.

Weedon (1987) postulates the emergence of post-structuralism as a consequence of '...gender relations which have structured women's absence from the active production of most theory within a whole range of discourses over the last 300 years' (p.13). She asks what constitutes knowledge and proposes 'feminist post-structuralism' theories that are useful for feminist practice. She states '...a theory is useful if it is able to address the questions of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed' (p.20). She is concerned with producing a form of post-structuralism that can meet feminist needs and offers an understanding of the relationship between post-structuralist theory and feminist practice.

For instance, in order to understand the implications of reproducing and contesting power relations, we can look at what assumptions a particular discourse makes about the language used in the construction of subjectivity. The individual is both the 'site and subject of

discursive struggle for their identity' and constantly subjected to discourse, particularly on the nature of femininity and masculinity. There are, however, sites of contradiction, such as women's roles. It is almost impossible to debate against woman as childbearer, to deconstruct the existence of a fetus in her womb. However, I feel sure this would not prevent some post-structuralist theorists from trying. Weedon proclaims that resistance to the dominant discourse of the individual subject is the first stage of producing alternative forms of knowledge.

The different feminist theories ensure that there will be different discourses in action. The way that gender is conceptualised, for instance, sets boundaries for the type of questions asked in this study. Where there is conflict in discourse, Weedon says, it is conflict in subjectivity and competing subject positions. Post-structuralism, primarily concerned with the production of meaning, deconstructs women as subjects within social and historical discourses. As a theory, it constantly defers meaning and this works against the purpose of this study.

The research questions are not compatible with a post-structuralist perspective. The study requires other discursive frameworks, in particular radical and humanist feminist perspectives. We are inquiring about women's perceptions and experiences and wish to know the meaning of leisure and wilderness experiences for women. In post-structuralist theory, '...authorship cannot be the source of authority of meaning' (Weedon 1987, p.162) but this study's woman-centered position actually privileges female authorship and guarantees its gender perspectives.

A further criticism of radical feminism is the notion of womanhood linked with the 'woman and nature' debate. The revival by contemporary feminists of the ancient practice of goddess spirituality that is grounded in nature is a way of operating outside patriarchal forms and language (Tulip 1990). It was during the late 1970s in Australia that 'women's spiritual consciousness' found form. The symbol of the goddess promotes the feminine as an

independent and joyful source of power.

For many women this direct experience of and union with or grounding in the power of being occurs in nature. In Australia it is the bush, the land, the desert which provides not only the transient empowering mystical experiences but also a more long-term sense of our authentic selves grounded in our own power and the power of the universe. (Tulip 1990, p.256)

Images of the female body and women's bonds with each other are being affirmed through this spiritual practice. Adrienne Rich (1978) refers to the power of many kinds of relationships between women, including mother/daughter, sisters, friends, lesbian love and work colleagues. She observed women meeting and 'measuring each other's spirit'. Janice Raymond (1986) also notes the passion of female friendships which '...gives depth and spirit to a political vision of feminism' (p.29). As Tulip (1990) declares, female friendship provides women with a culture that has a power of its own.

Whilst spiritual experiences are personal and not the experience for all women, the fact that it is experienced by some women makes it valid. Women's spirituality is concerned with who women are and the relationships they have in all spheres of their lives. It is about personal power and hence discussion on the 'woman and nature' connection does fit within a radical feminist perspective. As a theory, radical feminism is working to revalue the feminine which patriarchy has devalued.

#### Source of Data

WomenTrek was the 'vehicle' for this research. WomenTrek was a walking and riding relay of the 1500km Heysen Trail in South Australia, conducted over a three month period in 1994 to celebrate the centenary of Women's Suffrage in that state. Over 725 women and girls participated in the event. Much of the appeal of the event was the fact that it was a women only experience and women were supported by back-up vehicles and trailer to carry their gear. In addition, there were group leaders who planned each section and coordinated relevant logistics that would enable the journey to be a safe and rewarding one. The event

was entirely organised and conducted by women.

WomenTrek began in the Flinders Ranges, north of Adelaide, on the fringes of the South Australian outback. The Flinders Ranges are the second oldest mountain ranges in the world and is a unique wilderness environment. It is the most isolated area of this study due to its remoteness and terrain. For many travellers to the area, the beauty and richness of the Flinders Ranges is breathtaking. People go there for various reasons - to camp, to relax, to backpack, to enjoy - it is a special recreational experience. The Flinders has a charm of its own.

The trek wound its way through sections of the Flinders Ranges, through rural areas, large pastoral stations, mountains and hills, as well as open pastureland. The trail itself took many forms, from single file in bushland to fire access dirt tracks. Many country towns were passed as the trek neared the city. A southern section started from the sea two months into the event, resulting in two main groups converging into Adelaide for the trek's completion, together with two other groups, one covering a women's historical journey from Hahndorf, and the other group a mixture of WomenTrek friends who reunited to walk the last section together. (Refer to Appendix C for a report on the event and the extent to which women participated.)

WomenTrek was advertised nationwide and individuals received an information package, as well as information about my research, upon registration. WomenTrekks were invited to participate in the research via the widely distributed information sheet on the event.

Consent forms (see Appendix D) were sent together with an explicit outline of the research methods to be undertaken (see Appendix E), to intending participants of the study. All other ethical considerations follow the process outlined by the University of Adelaide Women's Studies Department, including an assurance of confidentiality and honouring any commitments made with the research participants.

From those who responded, nine women agreed to be interviewed (refer Appendix F for individual profiles of women in this study). All of them participated in at least one of the most rugged and remote sections of the Flinders Ranges and five of them experienced the first 5 days of WomenTrek. Without back-up support, many of these sections of the Flinders Ranges and the often unmarked Heysen Trail in this area are only accessible for backpackers. A wilderness setting implies a geographic location that corresponds to physical boundaries of place and space, which these sections of the Flinders Ranges presented. As Scherl (1988) said, it '...refers to a...natural environment of difficult access and perceived as such by individuals entering into it' (p.225).

In the minds and hearts of the women walking through, it was a leisure experience in a wilderness setting. A leisure experience because it was subjective and there existed freedom and choice as well as the potential to enhance the quality of life of the participants. The experience also presented opportunities for interacting with others, cited in chapter 2 as an important factor for women in choosing to be involved in a leisure experience.

This study extends the concept of wilderness to include cultural determinants, such as gender and experience, and perception of self in relation to the environment. It is not simply a study on 'outdoor recreation' or 'wilderness recreation' because of the potential and implications that a wilderness experience has for women, as outlined in the previous chapter. In particular, the work promoted by Estes (1992) is used as a standpoint for this thesis; that women have found they connect with their inner wilderness when they feel connected with the external wilderness. This study does not assume, however, that this is a natural attribute for women nor a quality of 'wilderness' in and of itself that causes changes in women (and possibly men). It is a relationship constituted in culture, which does not make it any less 'true'.

As the researcher and the leader at the time, I was part of each woman's experience in the Flinders Ranges. My experience as the researcher was intertwined with the material being

researched because the content and process were inseparable.

## Methodology

This study utilises a qualitative interpretive methodology to learn about women's perceptions of a wilderness experience in a women only setting. This methodology responds to requests for different methods of research to be employed that will answer questions about the leisure behaviour and experiences of women and examine meaning from the perspective of those engaged in the experience.

An interpretive methodology interprets data by identifying categories, domains and subsequently themes, that will lead to grounded theory (Henderson 1991). The data discovery and interpretation of meaning is a continuous process. Theoretical propositions are based on initial descriptions of the experience, the guiding research questions, and the categories of meaning that emerge in the form of central themes (ibid). The categories and subsequently the themes are checked against the data for accuracy of interpretation and for inclusivity of all possible explanations. If it appears that there are more categories to develop then the process is repeated until all possible explanations for the data are exhausted.

The emerging themes, ideas and meanings generate the grounded theory of the research and the theoretical constructs give it shape (ibid). The grounded theory should correspond to observations made in the study (ibid). Reference to the literature pertaining to the content area is made to help illuminate the data being discovered and to confirm the formal theory. An interpretive framework allows individual construction of a wilderness experience to surface and to generate theory based on women's own words and reality.

An interpretive methodology was chosen because it enables a feminist concept of leisure and wilderness experience to emerge. This research paradigm allows for multiple realities to



exist and differences between women to be more easily recognised (Locke 1988). In addition, this methodology accommodates the use of group interviews as a source of data as there is an emphasis on social interaction as a basis for knowledge (ibid). Meaning can be interpreted through understanding at the level of ordinary language and action, and can be mutually understood by both the researcher and those researched (ibid). Construction of an individual and of a collective reality is possible and able to be clarified through the interview process and interpretation of data.

## Methods

Individual and group interviews with nine women who responded to the invitation to take part in this study were the primary sources of data used in this research.

Secondary sources consulted were the WomenTrek Report (Nanschild 1994: see Appendix C), the WomenTrek Journal (Nanschild 1994), a recorded interview on Adelaide Radio 5UV *No Frills* programme with long term WomenTrekkers (October 11th, 1994) and a recorded interview with Anne Thomas, Aboriginal Spiritual Leader from Gulaga, Mother Earth (November 5th, 1995).

## The Interview

The interview was designed to concentrate on themes and universal structures and to elicit individual responses to the wilderness experience. The focus of the interview was each woman's perceptions, her feelings, thoughts, and awareness, of the wilderness experience during WomenTrek. Question headings were formulated prior to the interviews to maintain focus but these were not in any order or particular format (see Appendix G). Participants were informed of the confidentiality of the interviews and that they did not need to answer questions if they did not wish to do so.

In each interview, questions covered the same topics and issues, only the order of them differed, according to commonsense and the flow of conversation. This is consistent with the informal nature of the interviews and allowed for individual perceptions and experiences to be expressed. Sound judgement in deciding to include questions that would extend a topic under discussion was consistently made in order to validate the content elicited from the interviewees.

Out of the nine interviews undertaken, four were conducted in the natural setting and a group of two followed one week after the experience; the other three interviews were conducted on an individual basis between one and three weeks after their experience.

### Collection and Analysis of Data

Each interview was recorded on to cassette tape and transcribed on to paper and computer disk. Pseudonymns replaced the true identities of the interviewees in order to preserve confidentiality. The grouped data was organised and visually displayed according to the initial research questions. Data under each general heading was sorted separately, in two ways.

Firstly, preliminary sorting was made by extracting each individual's comments according to key words and phrases (I have used the interview with Heather in Appendix H as an example of this). This procedure assisted with profiling the interviewees in an unbiased way. Secondly, the key words and phrases were listed under preliminary categories and every expression was given equal weight (refer Appendix J). The textual transcripts were then grammatically corrected so it would make sense during the analysis phase but the actual dialogue of the discussion has not been altered. I continued to use the pseudonymns to remain unbiased during the analysis of data, even coding idiosyncratic expressions that may have identified the individual.

Using a data discovery and data interpretation continuous feedback loop, and typological and inductive analysis (Henderson 1991), typologies in the form of categories of meaning emerged. I returned to the data source for verification that ideas were linked accurately under particular categories. Categories that had a relationship to each other were clustered together and random samples of the data were checked against them. Frameworks for the categories, in the form of themes, were identified. It became necessary to keep an audit trail of their evolution. The developed categories and themes that emerged under the guiding research questions are listed in Appendix K.

A constant comparison technique (ibid) was then implemented to integrate themes that were closely connected. Interpretation of data that could fit within existing formal theory were linked. The themes were reduced to saturate the grounded theory being generated from this research.

The themes represent moments of the experience. I returned to the data to ensure that all possible meanings and moments of the experience were extracted and were represented in the central themes. I also checked for any rival hypotheses and potential biases. In addition, a 'member check' was performed whereby a professional colleague independently reviewed the data, categories and themes for verification of interpretation.

### Limitations of Study

My preference was to interview in a natural setting because a naturalistic method of enquiry would bring the experiential accounts of wilderness for women to the forefront of their consciousness. This proved difficult to orchestrate. Despite the interviews not happening formally in the wilderness setting, there was much discussion along the themes of the research that occurred informally whilst we were there. The interviews occurred on or within three weeks of the interviewee's experience and this enabled extensive data to be collected on the effects of the women only wilderness experience on women's domestic and

working lives thereafter. The data therefore reflects and substantiates women's perceptions of a wilderness experience in a women only setting.

The influence of tertiary education on women's perceptions of themselves and their world was a piece of data not collected. In hindsight, this data would have been interesting background material on each interviewee and the degree to which their responses may or may not have been influenced. However, the influence of tertiary education is not vital to the outcomes of this research.

The source of data for this research was determined by participants on WomenTrek, who were predominantly anglo women. Data was not collected on the ethnic mix of the 728 participants nor from the research subjects. Whilst the outcomes cannot purport to represent indigenous women, coloured women or black women (for instance), this research is nevertheless important in its contribution towards understanding women's opinions and experiences of outdoor recreation in Australia. This research can lead the way for others to follow.

The theoretical constructs and the grounded theory generated from the research, which represents women's perceptions of a wilderness experience, are now presented.

## Chapter 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The grounded theory that emerged from the research conducted on women's perceptions of a wilderness experience in a women only setting, using an interpretive methodology, are presented as underlined central themes. The theoretical constructs that contributed to formulating the theory are also discussed.

### Women experience (emotional and spiritual) connectedness with the wilderness setting.

Women experienced connectedness with the wilderness setting in physical, emotional, relational and spiritual realms. Women spoke of wilderness not only in terms of its physical features and location, but in terms of their emotional involvement with the setting. Women's feelings about the environment merge with feelings about themselves. Debbie was able to lose her fear of being with strangers in a new environment and consequently felt a greater respect and appreciation for herself.

*I lost a lot of fear about being out bush...I'm in touch with it now...it's not scary anymore, it's nice...[I have] a greater respect and understanding...of myself [and] of our environment. (Debbie)*

Women's perceptions of the setting influenced their experience whilst in that setting and these perceptions reflected their concept of self. Most women experienced strong, positive feelings whilst in the wilderness setting and valued aspects of the experience that resonated within themselves. The impact of a wilderness experience on many women was profound because women experienced a merging of self with the wilderness setting as a dynamic relationship.

The effect of a wilderness experience on women's changing perceptions of themselves was significant. *'[My] experience was profound' (Donna)*. The scale of impact of the experience upon the individual would not have been possible in the built up, artificial world of our

everyday lives. Women realised that they had been carrying an invisible suit of armour around themselves in order to survive in the city and that it was irrelevant in the wilderness setting.

*All this dead wood that you carry around with you [that's] been imposed on you and [which] you impose on yourself...th[e] freedom [here]...opens up the doors of all possibilities. (Jenny)*

Women discovered an awakening awareness of their feminine selves as they experienced a spiritual connection with the wilderness setting. The cycles of nature became powerful metaphors for women's understanding and discovery of themselves. Women perceived themselves as part of the whole ecosystem and life cycle and located their place as belonging naturally in the wilderness landscape. '*[I] made contact with the earth and with the spirit of the earth, and the spirit of being a woman on the earth' (Donna)*. Women thought about times when spirituality was part of everyday existence in times past, when things female were more highly valued, and they were reminded of the celebration of the feminine spirit. It was a time to revere in things female and be affirmed as female. The reverence given to carrying the female icon on the journey indicated a strong honouring of the feminine spirit.

The handover ceremonies and collection of artifacts were examples cited where a sense of ceremony was felt that honoured the feminine and honoured the journey of women. The rituals brought women together. It was acknowledged that women were travelling on Aboriginal land and the women themselves felt welcomed in the group regardless of the amount of time they were involved. Margaret encapsulated the spiritual essence of the journey in her discussion on how integral it was to the whole wilderness experience.

*The handover ceremony was very important because that acknowledged those coming and...those who were leaving...Women weren't allowed to just come and go without acknowledgement, without being valued and recognised and significance [was] attached to their arrival and departure...Women were encouraged to share their personal feelings...to communicate meaningful things...[what] we value[d]...We saw inside other women as they spoke...we contemplate[d] our endeavour during these...ceremonies, how far we ha[d] come personally and how far...as a group. We also thought about how far we ha[d] to go. We'd measure and claim our personal achievements at this time, how far we'd walked...perhaps we measured the cold that we slept through or thought*

*about the clever solution to a problem that we came with. We might have thought about our good sense of direction or our good thinking that prevailed over the lack of markers...Handover ceremonies require[d] focusing on the present. Sometimes we remembered the political significance of women's suffrage, sometimes we thought about the goddesses...when they were the primary and dominant deity and when femaleness was the dominant gender. (Margaret)*

Being open to the spirituality of the wilderness and honouring their personal journey enriched women's experience and enhanced their perception of themselves. For the women in the first two weeks of the trek in the northern Flinders Ranges, the most isolated area of WomenTrek, their spiritual experience as individuals and as a group was profound. Women could sense the spiritual presence of the indigenous people there because they felt the spiritual connection to the environment themselves. *'We had as our icon the eagle, and we saw eagles...we had the rainbow serpents and we were seeing rainbows'* (Natalie). Women considered the spiritual element an important aspect of their journey.

*My experience was affirmation of my intense love of just being in a wilderness environment...I love the peacefulness and the solitude, the solitude was magnificent...I felt very close to God's creation. (Heather)*

Women recalled a spiritual connection with their surroundings, with themselves, with the land, whilst others referred to God or the Goddess, and some referred to 'spirit' as themselves. *'Spirituality for me...is bound up with the inner self'* (Margaret). The spiritual experience in the wilderness setting had a profound effect on women.

Counter to most women's perception of the Flinders Ranges location, was Jenny's perception.

She was distressed about the devastation in areas that had once been wilderness but which have since been damaged through farming and grazing. She raised valid questions about the land being mistreated and the need for a balance between the natural environment and the human impact upon it. Since patriarchy privileges 'white' men to hold the power of land ownership in these pastoral areas, it is they who are responsible for its devastation.

Schaffer (1989) alludes to this through her question, 'who owns the farms, who has ever owned them?'. Women regarded the wilderness domain with reverence and desired to co-

exist with it, unlike the predominant male construct of conquer and domination over the landscape.

Jenny was not connected to the northern Flinders Ranges wilderness landscape in the way other women were in the study. Her questions about the male impact upon the environment may have severed possible feminine connections or awareness raising within herself. She did not fully join the campfire gatherings nor handover ceremonies in this area. It was at a time when she was feeling most distressed about losing her adult son only months before in the Flinders Ranges and she likened her WomenTrek experience at this time to a personal pilgrimage. Jenny's distress with the environment reflected her internal distress. In later sections of the Flinders, Jenny found beauty in the wilderness setting as she experienced healing energy within herself. This differing experience of the wilderness provides further evidence that women's perception of the wilderness reflects their inner world; how they feel about themselves.

Women experienced an openness to self and were more in touch with their instincts in the wilderness setting. They experienced a readiness to change. Women were challenged and expressed changes in their psychological, physical, spiritual and emotional aspects of self in the wilderness. Many experienced this change as peeling away layers of themselves, to uncover who they really were, and to experience being themselves openly.

*It's been a steady stripping away with some resistance in all sorts of areas about how I feel. It's been terrific...layer after layer being peeled off [physical, emotional and psychological]...to get a little bit nearer to me...it's been wonderful. (Jenny)*

Wilderness experiences enable women to access their inner wilderness, to get in touch with their inner selves, and to experience a renewed sense of self.

The wilderness setting held innate appeal for women at a physical, emotional and psychological level. Women had an instinctual awareness that the wilderness was a place



where the self could regenerate. *'The lure for me was the wilderness setting' (Denise).*

Women desired personal growth and their involvement in a wilderness experience promised a change to their environment and routine. *'I really wanted to be out in the bush' (Anne).*

Women instinctively knew that the wilderness was a place for self renewal and rejuvenation.

Rejuvenation of self, an inner process, occurred simultaneously with the wilderness (wildness) experience. Identifying with the waves on the ocean and feeling cleansed as a result, or walking through the natural bush and letting the mind roam free, were examples cited. Immersing oneself in a beautiful, wilderness setting was found to be energising and revitalising and women were ultimately able to transfer their renewed sense of self back into their daily lives. *'This experience provided some sort of transformative energy, to push me through to being with myself in a different way' (Donna).*

Women expressed their ability to get in touch with parts of themselves that had been dormant and untouched. *'Through the experience of being out for five days, I made contact with myself' (Donna).* They were able to access an 'inner wilderness' within themselves through being in a wilderness setting. Women described feelings of inner peace and became self absorbed as they merged with their setting. They experienced a natural rhythm and flow within themselves with the energy and life cycle of the wilderness environment. *'Just to be there in all that wildness...and be part of it, is really good' (Anne).*

In the wilderness setting, women felt at one with the environment. *'It's much easier for me to meditate in a wilderness setting...[it's] very powerful' (Margaret).* Women were able to connect with their inner wilderness because they bonded with the external wilderness. The longer the immersion in the wilderness setting, the more profound was their experience.

The wilderness environment had a cathartic and therapeutic effect upon women. Whilst there, they experienced healing, rejuvenation, and transformation of the self. Jenny shared

her personal experience of the healing power of the wilderness. She returned to the wilderness for solace on each occasion that she had, sadly, lost a child. She worked through her personal crisis during her wilderness experience and felt rejuvenated and transformed as a result.

As women's awareness, appreciation and reverence of the wilderness environment grew, so did their awareness, appreciation and reverence of themselves. *'I want to stay in touch with this part of me more'* (Alison). Through discovering their inner wilderness, women came to firstly access and then value themselves as being open, caring and conscious individuals. They spoke of "coming home to the self" and of knowing their inner wisdom to be their truth. *'Things became brighter, clearer, that place within myself'* (Donna).

Women identified and used metaphors from the wilderness environment to describe their inner experience. These metaphors reflected who they were, how they felt about their experience, how their body felt and what they learned about themselves.

*I get my feet...tramping...or me lying on the ground...or leaning against a tree in the wilderness (Margaret)...How natural it feels to be in the environment and to be part of it (Debbie)...[I'd] flow with the water and float over it and just be there in all that wildness... to be there and be part of it is really good. (Anne)*

The artifacts women presented during the handover ceremonies were metaphors of themselves; they were symbolic representations of their inner connection with the wilderness environment, of their personal journey with the trekking experience over the landscape. Some were representative of the group journey.

Women's reconnection with the self was seen as a priority of the wilderness experience. It gave women the opportunity to look within themselves and to consider their overall lives in context. In the wilderness setting, they experienced a different way of living and a different way of being with themselves. *'I've moved to being more in touch with my deeper self, with my intuition, [with] my knowing, which comes from a deeper place within myself than in*

my head' (Donna).

*Being out in the bush...gave me time for reflection...the insights I gained from... learning more about myself have increased my personal growth...the middle years [are] an opportunity to rebalance your life...I found [that] opportunity on WomenTrek. (Margaret)*

A wilderness experience demands that women be in the present moment. There are issues of safety and survival to attend to, both personally and for the group. Being aware of the surrounding environment and knowing the direction to go are crucial elements of a safe experience. Women found value in being in the present and paid attention to what they were doing and how they felt at that time. The physical activity enabled women to be more integrated in their experience of the moment. There were occasions when instantaneous decisions had to be made without needing to know the specifics of the journey in the long term. Who they were in that moment, as well as where they were, was brought into perspective.

*It's needing to be in touch with myself as I am right at the moment, doing what I need to do right at the moment and give up knowing what the future holds...the biggest change has been coming from a different place within myself...a very profound change. (Donna)*

Even in the environment amidst beauty, there were shadows and imperfections, which paralleled what women saw within themselves. Some women initially felt fear with the new experience of bushwalking and camping, or with being in the company of women (only) for the first time, or with being in a wilderness environment. Women expressed sadness at their loss of self in their everyday routine. This paralleled their sadness at the devastation of the land.

Women change their image of self and their perceived ability as a result of a women only wilderness experience.

Women desired time for self and time away from responsibilities and commitments. They needed space to wander physically at their own pace and mentally in their own thoughts. *'I was there to enjoy the experience in my own time...at my own pace'* (Heather). The organisational support enabled women to focus on their own issues and enjoyment of the wilderness experience. Several women took the opportunity to reflect upon important issues in their lives. *'I was at a real crisis and there were lots of things affecting me'* (Anne). The fact that WomenTrek celebrated a centenary of Women's Suffrage meant that it was perceived as a once in a lifetime experience and many women wanted to be involved because it was a special event. *'I really just wanted to do a bit. Then I wanted to do some more!'* (Alison).

The activity of walking had innate appeal for women. It was an activity that they felt they could do successfully to regain their physical fitness.

*Women felt it was something they could do...it's meaningful for me to actually do it (Alison)...This was an opportunity...to kickstart me into old age! (Jenny)...We all had the same reason for being there. To trek'. (Debbie)*

WomenTrek was also an opportunity to combine personal interests, such as orienteering, field botany and history, with walking. The wilderness experience promised to cater for a combination of interests and skills which motivated women to become involved.

*It would combine my love of bushwalking and orienteering, with the community (Donna)...It was like taking the best part of our jobs, the things we love...and putting them together. (Anne)*

The emphasis on a women's journey and the women only setting was important.

*A drawcard [was] that it was women only. I've had enough tastes of...women only in a wilderness setting to know that [it's] really fantastic for me (Margaret)...Part of my experience was about being out there with women. (Alison)*

Women met their personal goals and enjoyed new experiences in the women only setting.

They discovered various ways to perform tasks which often involved a cooperative effort.

Women showed other women how to do things and they preferred to do things together. *'It's a really natural process'* (Natalie). Women found ways to do things that worked for them and empowered them. *'We were free to say "okay, women do it like this"'* (Anne). In the women only setting, women worked together in ways that focused on building relationships, rather than only on the job itself. There was a feeling that women were on the same level with each other and that they enjoyed sharing their knowledge and understanding.

Women realised their social conditioning under patriarchy had led them to believe that the way men operate in the world is the correct way for all. When men appeared in the public accommodation areas, they automatically tried to take over the jobs the women had been doing, uninvited, and attempted to push the women away. Women observed that men had to do things in a 'masculine' way, in the fastest possible time, and on their own. *'I remember one woman in particular [who] said "this man's just taken my job"...It was a really big moment for her to realise that this man had just [done that]'* (Natalie).

Women discovered that men got in the way of their enjoyment of the experience and that their presence changed things, it changed the whole feeling. This was resented by women, who felt that men were better kept at a distance so that women could continue their journey on their terms. *'The women only group made it really obvious how male presence adversely affects women's experience'* (Natalie). Women expressed awareness of how different it would have been if men were involved.

Women gained clarity about experiences they wanted to create for themselves that extended them as powerful women. They realised they had deferred to men in the past but now felt confident to organise experiences themselves, particularly as a group of women working together.

*[W]ith other women I know that we can do it, even if we don't all have the knowledge and the skills at the beginning. If we're in a group we will solve our own problems...we can do it and I can do it with others. (Margaret)*

This paradigm shift in women's understanding of gender relations was a catalyst for many women discovering their personal power within. The power source for men was seen as needing to take over and to not share their knowledge; the power source for women was felt in doing things together on an equal basis and in sharing their knowledge with other women.

*I find men need to compete with one another which influences women [in mixed groups] to do the same, feel you have to prove you're as good as...fast as...strong as...the men out front. This didn't happen at all [in the women only setting]. (Jenny)*

Women were able to overcome previously self defined limits and physical barriers. They realised that boundaries were self imposed as a result of female socialisation and that, in reality, women can be and do anything they want. By pushing through perceived limits and expanding their comfort zones, women changed their image of self.

*I've stopped putting limits on myself. I've stopped telling myself that I can't do things...because I'm female...I've [now] given myself permission as a female to do whatever I like. I'm a human being that can do and does a lot of wonderful things. (Debbie)*

The wilderness experience in the women only setting positively affected women's concept of self. In discovering ways to do things that worked for them, women no longer felt inhibited to try new experiences. Their confidence in their ability to do physical tasks grew as they realised their capabilities were greater than they had previously thought. In the women only setting, women were able to more fully realise their potential.

*Taking these challenging drives without a map...was amazing!...The women only environment helped me feel much more confident in activities...it was an empowering thing. (Anne)*

Women enjoyed feeling good about themselves and their capabilities and expressed an overall sense of wellbeing and fitness because of their wilderness experience. They appreciated the opportunity to be physical for a sustained period of time and felt a great sense of achievement in the distance walked, the extended camping conditions experienced in all seasons of weather (including snow), and in meeting other challenges along the way.

*[I felt a] great pleasure and reward out of doing something that I could do...I had blisters and sore legs but I could do it (Donna)...It's given me a chance to get fitter which I really appreciate. I enjoy the feeling of my body being this way. (Alison)*

*For ten years now I've been a mother and put a lot of my physical [energy] into that realm. I used to be very physical as a teenager...it's nice to throw that off and to become extremely physical again and really love it. (Debbie)*

The physical activity component of the wilderness experience brought women together and brought them across the land. Women gained a great deal of personal satisfaction from doing it themselves and their perceived physical ability and confidence was transformed. Many women have set physically challenging goals in their future as a result of their wilderness experience.

*I just trekked two hundred kilometres, which is a statement I never thought I would make...I stood on top of St. Mary's Peak and look[ed] down the Aroona Valley stretching away in the distance...knowing that I had walked down there, that I had walked that amazing distance that just seemed to stretch to the horizon from such a high point...was an amazing experience because I could actually see what I had achieved and I just never thought I would do distances like that...it just had a profound effect on me to actually see what I had achieved...I just know that I'm capable of far more than I believed of myself before. I'm much stronger when it comes to trekking and backpacking than I knew and that's the old problem - you don't know until you've tried and if you don't try, you think you can't do it. (Margaret)*

Women were appreciative of the opportunity to experience themselves in a women only wilderness setting. This setting enforced a minimal existence. Concerns about appearance, daily showers and domestic chores, for instance, were irrelevant, unlike the encumbrances

and complexity of everyday life.

*Being in a wilderness environment means you have to leave a lot of your normal baggage behind...emotional and physical way of life behind...that leaves you a lot freer to be the person you are. (Margaret)*

Women discovered an increased ability to withstand emotional stress as a result of increased physical fitness. In addition, women felt the psychological benefits of the experience themselves and expressed immense satisfaction with knowing that these benefits could be transferred back into their own lives. *'[This] affected my personal growth by...giving me the opportunity to do more of it, to have the opportunity to gain more insight into myself...I intend to do more' (Margaret).*

Understanding one's limitations as well as personal strengths was also part of the wilderness experience. Denise was emotionally challenged by the frequent farewells and greetings throughout the event. She found the comings and goings were a disruptive influence towards making connections with others, yet this enabled her to stay within herself and to keep her emotional energy in balance.

*I felt with my personal journey [that] I had to find a space [and] focus on where I wanted to go...sometimes it required me...to...walk [on my own]... It was very much a learning experience for me. (Denise)*

Women were physically, emotionally and psychologically challenged by the wilderness experience. Personal growth and an overall sense of well being were benefits of the wilderness experience for women. Perceptions of self changed to include increased self esteem, increased personal confidence and a greater belief in one's capabilities. *'It's a sense of honouring myself in a way I haven't honoured myself before' (Donna).* Women's changed image of self was transferred out into the world. Women felt empowered to make choices and changes in their lives. *'I can now do anything' (Debbie).*



Women are open to other people and ways of working and being in the world as a result of being open to self in the wilderness setting.

Women's judgement of others and their judgement of self were examined whilst in the open space of the setting, which was free of walled structures to hide behind or to be contained within. Women experienced this open setting as providing them with the freedom to be themselves. They felt liberated and their minds opened to welcome new possibilities and becoming more receptive to change. A parallel could be drawn between an open mind and the open spaces of the setting. *'It was good for me in that it broadened my mind further'* (Heather).

The wilderness experience freed and opened minds, enabling women to be receptive to new possibilities, including a greater ability to be open to other people. Women's perceptions of themselves and of others changed once women discovered their true self, without encumbered labels.

*All these labels that we carry around inside our heads, that we often associate certain behaviours with, starts to dissipate [as well as] the inhibitions and fears inside you...getting rid of the labels is pretty freeing. (Jenny)*

Developing long lasting friendships with women who were different was often cited as a change in personal values. Even women who thought they were broadminded discovered, with surprise, that there was room for greater openness and change. Other women's experiences presented a range of different possibilities in the way women could choose to live their lives and operate in the world. Natalie was convinced that she was going to give up the work she was doing before her wilderness experience because it was not congruent with her self.

*The work I was doing pre-WomenTrek was on scientific research. It was everything to me. I had to find the most time efficient way of really learning a process [and] work really fast. No peripheral thinking, no lateral thinking, no holistic way of looking at it. Just getting the task done. I found that it took me more than a couple of weeks [of being] out on the trail to get me out of being totally practical, totally responsible, and*

*trying to get things done efficiently. Really ghastly! (Natalie)*

Natalie realised how she had been in that pattern for a long time and that by opening herself to the wilderness experience and to other people, she saw things differently. The discipline of science is based on male knowledge assumptions and research in this field requires conforming to the way men operate in the world. This was the basis of her dilemma and she resolved to continue her scientific research but on her terms, in a way that would affirm her as a woman. *'Women encouraged me to continue, helped me to see things differently...this changed my perceptions' (Natalie).*

Being open to self and to others gave many women clarity and perspective, both on a personal level and in various ways of working and being in the world, which the diversity of women on WomenTrek modelled. Through being open, other senses and feelings were heightened and women were subsequently open to change in many dimensions of the self. *'I'm really clear and feel invigorated by it all' (Jenny).*

Alison discovered that her wilderness experience had a wonderful effect on her as a teacher. She was positive about her work and happy in herself, and felt that her classes went extremely well. Consequently, her students were happier and more lively in their educational interest. She marvelled at the good feedback she received from students, parents, and other staff.

*The students were bouncing off my energy and I was much more open to them and accepting of individuals...I was prepared to meet students where they were at and found myself more interested in their knowledge of learning. That was interesting! (Alison)*

Being open to the self in a wilderness setting gave women greater ability to be open to other people and other ways of working and being in the world.

There is a translation of experience, lessons and personal growth from the wilderness setting to the domestic/work/world sphere. This enables lasting change to take place within women's lives.

Major changes in women's lives were made as a result of their wilderness experience. Some women decided to give up work and take more time out for themselves, to do the things they really wanted to do. Others mentioned putting aside domestic routines because of a preference to spend time on things that were more important to them, such as their relationships with others, more time for physical exercise and more time for themselves. Margaret wanted to connect with Aboriginal women and felt this was now possible. *'I've got more of the skills and confidence to just get up and organise it, whereas before it was too hard'* (Margaret). Her experience from the wilderness setting has translated into her world sphere.

A significant experience for most women returning from the wilderness setting was the culture shock.

*After the first five days out, I was resentful about getting home and back into decision making as a mother and a wife and a friend. The day I got home, I had to toss it all in and go off walking and jogging for a couple of hours, just anything to get away from it.*  
(Heather)

Women realised their preferred way of being and living together was in direct contrast to their everyday experience in a patriarchal society, which still imposed social conditions upon them. The noise, the pollution, the pub culture, cars and television intruded upon their senses, and many women found difficulty in reconciling this after their wilderness experience. (I found myself debriefing with many of them on their return.) It was this realisation that prompted many women to effect significant changes in their lives.

*Going to the pub was also a culture shock...I couldn't stay there. I'd been to country pubs while we were away with women. It was the realisation that it doesn't have to be like this...I don't have to put up with th[e] sort of people who [put women down]...I've decided I don't want to put up with this environment anymore and that I'm not going to.*  
(Anne)

Whilst women wondered how they were going to return to a different reality, they recognised themselves as role models for others in their lives. They spoke of the impact of their experience upon their partners, their children, their friends, their family, their students, and their work colleagues. New perceptions of themselves as inspiration for others was an empowering discovery for women and helped them to realise that many layers existed in the fabric of their lives. Women determined that their experiences, lessons and personal growth in the wilderness setting could be translated back into their personal lives.

*I've inspired lots of old friends...this puts a whole new slant on it...not only on yourself but on other people...There's more to life than what we do everyday...It's having huge repercussions [that] I didn't expect. I didn't think this would affect my relationship with my son, my partner, or myself, or people that I'd meet. I didn't even think that was possible. They're wonderful bonuses. (Debbie)*

As a result of their wilderness experience, women were able to more easily identify potential barriers to making desired changes in their lives. Some sought professional assistance to deal with them, others sought guidance from within themselves. Several women resolved to continue to honour themselves and their own journey and were prepared to make significant and lasting changes in their domestic, work, and world spheres, even to start a whole new life. *'I could start anything!' (Jenny).*

Women's feelings about their work life were affirmed by other women. They wanted to remain open to their inner self, to their natural instincts, newly discovered during their wilderness experience. They wanted to continue to operate from an intuitive place within themselves when in the working world, without compromising personal values. Women found renewed energy, clarity, and purpose about their work, and women were open to change. *'[I realised] that being away from work made me really happy...it was time to do something!' (Anne).*

*I'd like to have a meld of science with a focus on people in my work...I now have a different perspective as a result of my experience and from my contact with lots of other women. (Natalie)*

Anne was prepared to find more satisfying work when she returned from WomenTrek. As a Field Naturalist, opportunities for expanding her work would likely mean periods of extended separation from her partner but she was now prepared to change her domestic situation to enable this to happen. She saw the merits of this for both her work and domestic spheres, which included spending quality time with her partner on designated fewer occasions rather than passing each other in the corridor at home on many occasions.

Women perceived their wilderness experience as valuable to their personal development, empowering them to operate differently in their world. Women believed there were going to be long term benefits and future changes as a consequence of their wilderness experience. Contact with their inner selves meant that women were more aware of who they were and what they wanted. Extensive connections with others also meant that women had a wider network from which to find love, support and friendship. Developing friendships as a result of their wilderness experience was one of the strongest outcomes that women expressed.

Many women are committed to continuing to walk regularly and at least three different groups of women from WomenTrek are known to be regularly walking. Some have set a personal goal of walking the entire trail in their lifetime. *'I really know I'm going to continue to do this' (Denise)*. The wilderness experience provided personal growth and women were adamant that their progress would continue. *'What I have gained from the experience...will stay with me...my intention [is] to keep working on it' (Margaret)*.

Women wanted the journey to continue indefinitely, and suggested other areas to trek through. However, some were able to recognise the political agenda associated with funding similar women only experiences under a patriarchal system because the power base lies in the hands of men, yet these experiences enable women to access their inner selves, their inner wisdom, their inner power.

*WomenTrek broke new ground in that it enabled and affirmed, in a public way, women being physically active in outdoor recreation. It gave women 'permission' and 'status'*

*to be involved through linking with the Suffrage celebrations and this 'allowed' us to gain so much more. (WomenTrek Report, Appendix C, p.11)*

Women wanted to celebrate the Suffrage Centenary, they wanted to celebrate women and their achievements. The centenary in many ways legitimised their desire to participate in a women only experience and many women participated who might otherwise not have ventured out.

Women feel physically and emotionally safe being with other women. There is a trust of other women and of women only settings. Relationships between women were strengthened in the women only setting.

Women discovered that they were able to journey at their own pace, take their time to admire the scenery and immerse themselves in the beauty of the environment. It wasn't a competitive walk nor was there a hierarchy to tell them what to do. The experience was a cooperative and comfortable one. Being with other women was not an intimidating experience. *'To be walking in that atmosphere was much more pleasurable and enjoyable than I had expected' (Heather).*

A women only setting was perceived as a caring environment where women openly demonstrated physical affection. *'It's really natural and easy to be doing what we're doing, like we're meant to be doing this. It's a natural part of women's culture' (Debbie).* Women found they could be independent, strong individuals yet reach out to others in times of need. *'I felt like I was there as my own person' (Alison).*

Relationships were a predominant factor in women's motivation to participate in the wilderness experience. Women perceived the trek experience as an opportunity to do something special with others, to catch up with friends and family and to spend quality time together. The relationships that women already had were an important criteria for women to be involved.

*77% of [728] women trekked with friends, relatives or work colleagues, indicating that women significantly prefer to engage in recreation with others...Relatives included sisters, partners, daughters, mothers, grandmothers, granddaughters, nieces, aunts, sisters-in-law and infants. (WomenTrek Report, Appendix C, p.12)*

Opportunities to be with others contributed to a sense of emotional safety for women, especially those new to the bushwalking and camping experience and to the wilderness environment. Women wanted a non threatening experience. The rewards from placing oneself in a new experience included forging long lasting friendships and developing a greater respect for the self.

*Lots of relationships wouldn't have happened if I had just carried around my little box and didn't step outside of the norm and the roles...the relationship I have with myself has been [positively] affected. (Debbie)*

Relationships between women were strengthened through the women only setting. Women liked being together and enjoyed sharing their experiences. *'Women communicate really well with each other'* (Alison). Women cared for each other.

*You receive love and affection, which I have responded to (Jenny)...The common experience of the physical hardship at times, and the wonderful times...living together...created special bonds between women. (Alison)*

This was particularly noticeable amongst the first group who started out on the trek together. As a result of being together, women developed friendships at a deeper level because they were able to share their concerns as women in a more meaningful, direct and honest way.

*It's about sharing stories...The conversation [is] more meaningful and honest and about more personal things...the interaction between women is generally more meaningful but in a mainstream situation...you only get to talk about the surface things or you pick really boring things. Conversation and exchange that goes on between people is truly meaningless [then] and just a waste of time...[on WomenTrek] there was sharing of more personal stories, people learning from each other [and] therefore having access to experiences women very different from yourself [have]...In a normal social situation you don't talk about those things, especially with men around. (Margaret)*

The connections between women was noted as a phenomena of the women only experience. The companionship and sharing of women's stories strengthened relationships between women. The physical activity of walking freed the mind to interact in a more meaningful way and walking through the wilderness setting created opportunities for women to stop and admire some aspect of the scenery together. Sharing observations, sharing stories, meant the whole experience was shared, and therefore validated, by all women who participated. This differs under patriarchy because women's reality and women's experience is often made invisible by social conditioning. *'The ethos changes. The ambience changes. I think I must change inside when men are around...It's a block...in your mind the censoring starts'* (Margaret).

The women only setting had a bonding effect between women and they likened it to a family or 'tribal' situation. Hugs and positive feedback were freely given. Several women were initially challenged by the demonstration of physical affection, believing it to be a part of lesbian culture only. Heather, in particular, discovered that she could be openly affectionate towards women without sexual inference. She had rarely practiced this in her home life: *'...especially with people I didn't know and who weren't part of my family'* (Heather). She came to accept this form of expression as a wonderful new aspect of herself.

Lesbianism was demystified in the women only setting. What it meant to be a lesbian was given a physical reality. There was a merging of all kinds and types of women and the experience showed a way women could comfortably live and be together in a community.

*Women could work together and there weren't issues about sexuality...people didn't have to label themselves...it didn't matter. It was more about the things we share[d] than the things that divide us. (Natalie)*

Lesbians and non-lesbians felt safe. Lesbians discussed the issue of responding to the comfort level of others in their demonstration of affection, that they wanted to be open in their relationships yet didn't want to challenge nor confront people. They sensed a change in other's reactions to them, especially in being unafraid to give them hugs, and that getting to



know them for the people they were was an important catalyst for this change. Lesbian parenting was also demystified because many women took the opportunity to talk about it.

*I had built a rapport with the women who spoke seriously with me about being a lesbian parent and I...ask[ed] them about their lives, what choices they were making and what...that mean[t] for them...it was really good. (Alison)*

There developed a greater trust of women who were different from oneself and also of the women only setting. Inhibitions were brushed away as women openly hugged one another and kept in perspective the meaning of that hug. As a result, women experienced a significant change in their values, which included getting rid of 'labels' and becoming more aware of the effects of social conditioning. There developed an awareness and understanding of what it meant to be a woman and that women could be strong irrespective of their sexuality. It was safe for women to claim their personal power. The presence of strong women affected how other women saw themselves.

*I've had an exposure to, as a group, lesbian feminists which I haven't had an exposure to before to that degree and that's been really quite empowering. I learnt to value myself, actually, through it all - seeing different women work and do things...my relationship with myself has been very much strengthened.(Donna)*

*It was different for me to meet people of a different sexuality because you don't meet them very much in mainstream society or if you do, it's not something that can be admitted to or shown or claimed by lesbians because of [the prejudice they experience]...It was interesting to talk about that with my mother. (Margaret)*

The variety and diversity of women who participated on WomenTrek greatly influenced women's perceptions of other women and of themselves. The experience brought women together from all walks of life: *'I never knew existed...It's allowed us to share each other's experiences, it's tremendous...(Jenny)...There's been a real acceptance of women being as they are' (Donna)*. Women were genuine in their appreciation of this diversity and found the social interaction to be a highly rewarding outcome of their experience.

Women's image and perceptions of themselves strengthened as a result of meeting other women who demonstrated what was possibly an alternative approach to being a woman. They spoke of the impact certain role models had and how this encouraged them to follow through on making desired changes in their own lives. Women's sense of self grew as a consequence of identifying with these women role models.

*You learn from other women...they're examples of where women have been achieving over these past years...[the] divers[ity of] women who prove, through their own lives, that women can do anything - and they do! I've now met them! (Jenny)*

Women personally gained from being exposed to all sorts of women, all sorts of role models, for themselves and for their female relations. *'I think the experience for my daughter has given her a whole lot of different role models...[to] help offset the effects of peer group pressure...[it's] very empowering' (Donna).*

The wilderness experience in a women only setting impacted on relationships women had in their domestic life. Women mentioned that they felt more open and loving towards others. *'I used to push people away...[now] I give spontaneous hugs, regardless of the environment I'm in...this has been a change in me' (Jenny).* Women recognised that social conditioning had previously influenced them not to show affection towards others and they were able to realign themselves in relation to this social norm after their women only wilderness experience. Many spoke of the freedom they felt and were certain that many of the women they met on WomenTrek would be lifetime friends.

A sense of community that we've lost in our culture is identified through the women only experience and is enthusiastically embraced by women. This strengthens women's sense of belonging.

Women felt a strong sense of community through the experience of living and working together. The women only setting provided a unique situation for women to fully experience

their culture and a large percentage of women returned to WomenTrek for that reason. *'Once it was born...[it] gathered its own momentum, gathered more energy by gathering more women, and many returned'* (Debbie). Women expressed how the experience came to be an essential part of their being, that it was like coming home to how they would normally live without the imposed sanctions of patriarchy. *'It's a bit like coming home. That was wonderful, that's why I went back for more...It is like being a junkie, one shot and I want more. I need[ed] more than one'* (Margaret).

At least fifteen percent of the 728 participants returned to the experience after they had completed their initial time on the trek (WomenTrek Report, Appendix C, p.12) and the women interviewed in this study all returned on at least one occasion. Even when the experience was declared finished, women still wanted to return to it!

Women received love, support and encouragement for being the people they were. *'To be encouraged to be truly the person you are...not misunderstood, put down or ignored...it's [a] very affirming experience'* (Margaret). Women felt their reality was validated. The community of women gave individual women affirmation and strength to be themselves and created an awareness that there was an alternative way of living and being amongst women. Additionally, there was a genuine appreciation and interest in the way other women lived their lives. Women discovered their culture and fully embraced it through the women only setting.

*It's being encouraged by other women, a feeling [that] what you say is understood, how you live...it's not squashed...there's an atmosphere of friendly encouragement, instead of squashing you or putting you down...that's the big difference for me...as opposed to how I live my life normally...in mainstream society.* (Margaret)

*The group together were so warm, caring and sharing and this came as a shock to me because there are so few opportunities in [my country] community to be different, to be something you couldn't or wouldn't be...* (Heather)

There were many women who discovered that being in a women only setting was something natural and preferable, and an extension of the way they wanted to live. They recalled other women who had also mentioned, at the end of their experience, that they could live like this, in a women's household. *'This is the way I want to live' (Denise).*

There were exciting times when the younger generations were involved with the older ones, when the love, support and friendship was cross generational. Natalie recalled this sense of community as a special part of her experience.

*The young women [were] singing our chant, they got in to the ceremony stuff... the Goddess stuff really appealed...they got to the point where they were really comfortable with it and that was special for me, seeing that and feeling they were there...because they wanted to be there and were having a great time amongst themselves and feeling part of the community stuff. (Natalie)*

The sense of community made the experience, for many, a special one. Women mentioned how wonderful it was for them and their children to be involved and how accepted and welcomed they felt. *'I didn't have to be an apologist as a parent. My daughter was a WomenTrekker too (Alison)...To hear other women really affirm my daughter has been a wonderful experience for me' (Donna).*

There was a strong sense that the experience of community in the women only setting paralleled with the bonding experienced within an 'indigenous' village. Margaret, for example, returned with her female relations because of this unique element.

*I wanted them to come and experience WomenTrek with me because it played quite a [large] part in my life...I wanted them to come and have a taste of what I was so enthusiastic about...I wanted to bring them out into a wilderness setting because I knew that it would further deepen the connection and bond between us and I don't have very many opportunities to do that...also, this is a new awareness, that our sharing would be better and even deeper...different from the sharing that we do at home...it was an opportunity for us to be in the same space without necessarily being mothers and daughters...My daughters were able to see a different side to me that I just don't show at home...being more true to [my]self and [for them to] also see me having fun with other women and having fun in a different way...that's not evident to them at home. (Margaret)*

Women were able to be in the same space as their female relations and not always in their roles of mother and daughter (for example) which they experience under patriarchy. Women felt they were part of a bigger community of women and the children were regarded as the children of the 'tribe', which paralleled with an 'indigenous' village community. In Margaret's case, there were eight different age groups who interacted easily and confidently, on their terms, with other women and girls in the community. *'[Mum] did her own talking...more often than not she was...with other people' (Margaret).*

The wilderness experience brought down barriers between women and enabled them to really get to know each other. *'I always say to people, if you want to get to know someone, go camping with them' (Anne).* Women and girls walked and talked together and enjoyed the fun of the experience. The personal connections strengthened women as women. They felt an important part of a larger group of people, a wider support network, and their awareness of being part of a bigger community grew. *'The experience became a big part of my reality...[and] walking with women has become an important part of my life' (Alison).*

## Chapter 5: CONCLUSIONS

The findings presented in this research explores and develops the concepts and relationships reviewed in the literature between women's experiences of wilderness in a women only setting and their psychological development. Further, this study extends current literature to include women's physical, spiritual and relational responses whilst in that setting. For the purposes of this research, it is a premise that women regard a wilderness experience as a leisure experience.

This study was conducted in a women only setting as it was important for women to explore the feminine experience separately from the masculine, as Holzwarth (1989) stated, so that women had control and choice in directing their experience. A radical feminist analysis of what was being said through women's voices of experience was possible because of the women only setting. Women were free to experience and appreciate themselves as women and not as women in relation to men, which Henderson et al (1989) and Walsh (1989) advocated. The women in this study found the women only setting safe and enjoyed the supportive and non-competitive environment alluded to by Flint (1991), Holzwarth (1989), Nanschild (1994) and Cosgriff and Bell (1989).

Further, findings of this research provided evidence of a paradigm shift for women with regard to gender power relations. The women in this study realised the oppression they experienced in society came from male domination and control, the basis of patriarchy. They valued being in the same space as their female relations without their gendered social roles. They realised that self defined limits and physical barriers were a product of female socialisation and that social conditioning had limited the development of their full potential. They became more aware of their own power and personal authority and experienced a greater equality in the women only wilderness setting than out of it. This setting provided the safety for women to be themselves, to be open and receptive to others and feel connected to their world.

The women in this study discovered ways of working and being in the world which affirmed their reality as female. This challenged 'male' knowledge assumptions about the experience of leisure and wilderness, which includes the wilderness as a masculine domain (Norwood 1988; Walsh 1989); that time or activity are the measured dimensions of leisure rather than the quality of the experience (Burden and Kiewa 1992); that a hierarchy exists, beginning with the leader, and a focus on competitiveness and rivalry is apparent rather than companionship (Deem 1986). The very different experience and perception of the women in this study was evidence of an alternative approach and appreciation of wilderness which was more congruent with and affirming of women's values.

It can be concluded that the women only experience in the wilderness setting was emancipatory as women gained insight into themselves and expanded their world of possibilities and opportunities. The women in this study broadened definitions of what women could do. They changed their image of self. As they gained confidence in the outdoors, they experienced strength and confidence in other areas of their lives and this supported Henderson and Bialeschki's (1987) study. There was a translation of experience, lessons and personal growth from the wilderness setting to the domestic, work and world sphere and this enabled lasting change to take place within women's lives.

In a women only setting, women's experiences of the wilderness impacted not only the physical and psychological realms covered in current literature, but extended beyond that to women's concept of 'self', spirituality and relationships.

Whilst in the wilderness, the women in this study experienced a physical awakening. The wilderness experience challenged and changed the perception for many women that they could not be actively involved, over a long period of time, in an outdoor leisure experience. The benefits of physical exertion for women described by Cosgiff and Bell (1989) was validated by this study. The wilderness setting itself demanded a certain amount of physical stamina and ability, which awakened the senses and enhanced women's experience of their

physical selves. They exceeded preconceived physical limits which encouraged them to want to do more.

The findings of this study confirmed the psychological benefits identified by Scherl (1988), Walsh (1989) and Nanschild (1994) amongst others. The women studied knew that the wilderness was a place for self renewal and rejuvenation and the wilderness environment had a cathartic, therapeutic and transformative effect upon them. The wilderness experience enabled them to access an 'inner' wilderness, to get in touch with their inner selves, and to experience a renewed sense of self. Reconnection with the self was a priority of the wilderness experience for the women in this study and the metaphor of journeying was a common reference to symbolise personal growth, learning and discovery. This was also noted by Showalter (1981), Galland (1980) and Estes (1992).

Previous literature has contained women's experiences to both the physical and psychological realms. This research has developed this further with evidence of changes to other aspects of women's psyche at a spiritual and relational level.

The spiritual essence of the journey was integral to the whole wilderness experience. Those who were open to the spiritual experience found their perceptions and experience of themselves enriched. As women's awareness, appreciation and reverence of the wilderness environment grew, so did their awareness, appreciation and reverence of themselves. This supports several earlier findings, in particular Norwood (1988) who found that submersion of self and identity with the wilderness environment was reflective of women's perceptions of a wilderness experience, and Estes (1992) who determined that women connect with their inner wilderness when they feel connected with the external wilderness. Women cared for the environment because it mirrored their inner self and, as Walsh (1989) found, there was a symbolic turning towards a greater appreciation of a feminine way of 'being' in the wilderness.



The findings on spirituality and connectedness between the inner wilderness and the external environment parallel indigenous views of woman and wilderness as expressed by Anne Thomas, Aboriginal Spiritual Leader from Gulaga, Mother Earth. She states that the natural environment, the bush, the wilderness, were made by the Great Spirit and placed naturally there 'for the teaching of the Aboriginal women and the Aboriginal people'. The sacred sites of Mother Earth and the Aboriginal women's teaching connects with all women; 'the women are...the accepted teachers of that environment because they bear children... When Aboriginal women look at the bush their every instinct...is geared towards comparing these two things' because the bush/wilderness reflects their identity as women. Anne explains further:

When you see...male trees and...female trees, they're quite different because the female trees bear more fruits, they go right down and they come up over the surface of the soil. So they contribute everything that is born and the water is there to feed the roots so it expands and grows and it becomes a healthy tree...that's the way with women. They bear the children in a sacred way, the child is then...nurtured and taught and then...expected to grow and produce the same as everybody else...It's the spirit giving birth. Regenerating, regenerating, regenerating all the time.

The Aboriginal people let the land teach; they see everything as connected and sacred; everything in the life cycle is part and parcel of their songs and ceremonies. 'Everything represents what we're told to teach.' There are herbal plants and food in the bush as well as many lessons on lifestyle to be found there. Anne's totem is the Great White Pointer Shark and when she sees her totem in the wilderness (not necessarily an ocean wilderness), she wants 'to stand there because that's my totem and that's an identity with me, that's how I feel and these things are there, what [is] our spirit.' She sees everything in its place and felt upset whenever places had been disturbed or when something is there that doesn't belong in that place. This correlates with the women in this study who used metaphors as their 'totems' and felt sadness and loss when they witnessed the destruction of the land. The Aboriginal Spiritual teachings support the findings of this study and prove that we have much to learn from the Aboriginal culture, which ecofeminists like Plant (1989) likewise recommend.

Women's relational development whilst in a wilderness setting was manifested in two ways; firstly, their experience in relation to their self and secondly, themselves in relationship with others.

The women in this study experienced connectedness with the wilderness setting and by extension to their inner self. Their feelings about the environment were merged with feelings about themselves and was experienced as a dynamic and changing relationship. This connectedness impacted on how receptive and open women were to listening to themselves and to their intuition. Those women who were open and receptive were those most likely to manifest change in themselves and in the things they do. Scherl's (1988) findings were supported by this study which showed that emotional awareness developed as women became emotionally involved with the wilderness environment and that emotional appraisals (such as feelings of self) were significant barometers that women used to interpret their wilderness experience. The women studied experienced an openness to self and instincts in the wilderness setting. They experienced a readiness to change.

A clear outcome from the research is that the wilderness experience strengthened a sense of community. Women and girls from all walks of life met as one community of women. The women only setting enabled women to fully understand, acknowledge, identify with and embrace their culture. Women felt valued members of a wider support network. There was a merging of all kinds and types of women and this variety and diversity lent awareness and understanding of what it meant to be a woman without socially imposed norms and labels. It greatly influenced women's perceptions of other women and of themselves. Artificial and self imposed barriers between women were eroded and personal connections were strengthened.

The women only setting enabled women to find ways of doing things that worked for them and empowered them. They discovered that working together in cooperation and with collaboration was a preferable way to operate in the world. Those with particular skills shared their knowledge and provided encouragement to others. The women in this study

operated mentorships through the enactment of role modelling. Women role modelled to other women and demonstrated alternative approaches to living and being. Stories and experiences of other women were part of the process for women learning about themselves. Older women were mostly cited as role models, which Pascual (1989) and others found.

Relationships were a predominant factor in women's motivation to participate in the wilderness experience and intimate friendships was one of the strongest outcomes that the women in this study expressed. This is aligned with Miranda and Yerkes' (1982) findings. Relationships with others were central to each woman's experience of wilderness. A phenomena of the women only wilderness experience was the bonding between women. This evidence substantiates several researchers, such as Mitton (1986) and Holzwarth (1989). These women felt safe being with other women and preferred the women only environment. They shared their concerns as women in a more meaningful way and felt their reality validated.

Finally, this research demonstrated that whilst in a women only wilderness setting, the women studied examined their relationships, identified and questioned imposed social roles and limitations, and were empowered as capable and competent women. They gained insight into the effects of men's presence and found men had a tendency to take over their experience. The setting became a context for women to work out their personal, domestic and work related issues.

Women's perceptions of a wilderness experience do differ from that of men as Norwood (1988) pointed out. The women studied speak of the environment as a connected, internalised, intuitive and feminine interaction, which supports Gilligan's (1988) research, instead of a masculine experience of domination and conquest, bravery and heroism (as noted by Walsh 1989, Norwood 1988, and Grimshaw 1986). Rather than displacement of the feminine (Walsh 1989), women discovered and determined their place in the wilderness landscape. They did not seek separateness, as the behaviour codes of men

entering the wilderness discussed in chapter two indicated; rather, the women in this study valued their connectedness to others and to their environment and sought independence within relationships they formed. Women in the company of women could find both solitude and connectedness. The wilderness setting was a place where women could meet their need for personal space and time away from their everyday routine, unlike the pioneer women mentioned in chapter two.

The western frontier was anything but a place of privacy and solitude for pioneer women...the choice of whether or not to go West was not theirs. They followed family or they moved because of economic necessity. (Walsh 1989, p.163)

This research supported radical/cultural ecofeminist perspectives regarding the relationship between woman and nature and the perceived intrinsic value of Earth itself. The women in this study felt a sense of oneness with the land. They spoke of 'being' in the wilderness and desired to co-exist within it as Norwood (1988) found. They demonstrated care and concern for survival of the wilderness and for survival of the feminine, as noted by Starhawk (1990), Spretnak (1989) and Jones (1984). They honoured a feminist spiritual relationship to the natural environment through ceremony and ritual, which Starhawk (1989) advocated. This facilitated personal transformation which further substantiated radical/ cultural ecofeminist theory. The thinking of 'deep ecologists' was also supported in that these women experienced personal growth in the wilderness setting through developing a deeper understanding of the self, which included seeing themselves as part of the whole ecosystem and life cycle.

The research proved that women's perceptions of themselves were altered and enhanced as a result of a women only wilderness experience. The women in this study expressed changes in their physical, emotional, psychological, relational and spiritual aspects of self. Personal growth and an overall sense of wellbeing were benefits of the wilderness experience. Women were challenged and changed by feminism, lesbianism, disability, age, by their own physical capabilities. They developed a consciousness about themselves and

others; the diversity of women that came together highlighted the multiple realities of women's experience. The women studied found freedom from social constraints, tried new activities, made long lasting friendships, connected with nature, lived out their dreams and sought adventure in a world defined by women, which Henderson and Bialeschki (1986) advocated. The women in this study found the wilderness experience in a women only setting to have significantly enriched their lives in many interconnected yet separate ways.

## Chapter 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

### Practices, Policies, Programmes and Education

This study indicates that women want leisure opportunities that will enhance their quality of life and meet their needs and interests. Personal health and wellbeing are key ingredients and essential outcomes for women in their pursuit of leisure experiences. The wilderness experience as a leisure experience awakened women's understanding of their potential and capacity to lead full and healthy lives and most women wanted this experience extended. In light of the evidence from this research, the following recommendations are made.

1. The value of recreation in women's lives needs to be understood and acknowledged by government, community, education and media organisations. Recreational activities are more popular than sporting activities for many women. Sport is often seen as exaggerating patriarchal relations through the inequitable media and societal focus on sporting achievements, particularly those of men.
2. Recreational programmes need to accommodate women's lifestyles. Women want experiences that are relationship based and enable participation with family and friends as well as options for self involvement. More opportunities for women to be recreationally active are required.
3. Greater choice of leisure in the public sphere needs to be accompanied by changes in the private sphere, otherwise women will continue to be disadvantaged and be unable to access leisure opportunities. The inequalities experienced through the division of labour, as outlined in chapter two, need to be addressed so that women have 'free time' to enable them to participate in leisure experiences.

4. 728 women and girls participated in WomenTrek (refer Appendix C). The statistics presented in Appendix M on the breakdown of ages of women who participated in the event confirms that walking is a popular recreational activity for women of all ages: 41 years was the mean age, the oldest participant was eighty and the youngest six months. The value of walking as a leisure pursuit is highly regarded by women and girls. Therefore, more opportunities need to be made for women only walking experiences.

5. Ten percent of the participants were sixty years and over; sixteen percent were between 50 and 59 years and thirty seven percent were between 40 and 49 years of age (ibid). The research proves mid-life and older women want to be physically active in their pursuit of leisure rather than be confined to the domestic sphere. In recognition of this, it is recommended that community and recreational organisations specifically address the recreational needs of these groups by targetting these women in their promotions and by ensuring appropriate modifications are made to events and walking trails (for instance).

6. Organisations, especially those in receipt of government funding, should be encouraged to implement affirmative action strategies to increase the level of involvement of women.

7. An alarming Australian trend is the high percentage of teenage girls who drop out of physical activity (Nanschild, 1994). The statistics in Appendix M indicate approximately fifteen percent of the overall participants on WomenTrek were between 10 and 19 years of age. This is evidence that girls are interested in walking, riding and camping as leisure options and not necessarily the traditional sporting activities that society and media promote. The findings of this study supports the recommendation cited in the WomenTrek Report in Appendix C (p.16) that schools implement positive measures to encourage girls to participate in recreational activities, particularly through offering 'girls only' experiences in curriculum areas such as Outdoor Education and Physical Education.

8. The provision of leisure and recreational facilities by government and local community organisations needs to be gender equitable - and accommodate the range of age groups.

9. There continues to be a need for leisure and recreation equipment and clothing to be designed specifically for women. This would encourage and validate women's participation in outdoor activities and enhance potential for more satisfying leisure experiences.

Mandatory bicycle seats that accommodate women's hips, for example, would be a useful modification!

### The Wilderness Environment and Policy Development

Concern for the state of the environment and the subsequent awareness raised by the conservation and ecofeminist movements has prompted an interest in and a quest for preserving the wilderness. As this study showed, the effects of a wilderness experience upon the individual are potentially profound. A wilderness experience brings about greater awareness of the self. It breaks down artificial and socially imposed barriers and shows us that we can be more than we are. We need wilderness to facilitate that understanding. Those who venture into the wilderness develop a concern for its survival. Instead of finding wilderness forests destroyed through profit motivated economic capitalist greed, more people should undergo a wilderness experience to understand and appreciate its value and worth.

10. This study recommends that the outdoors environment be maintained in its most natural and wilderness state. The wilderness must be preserved.

11. Further, its value and role in the psychological and emotional development of people should be harnessed. This study recommends that the outdoors and the wilderness be used in the field of counselling, therapy and personal retreat.



12. Women bring a sense of caring, responsibility and consciousness to the wilderness environment which can be integrated into an overall policy of wilderness protection and stewardship, such as nurturing the land and using minimum impact techniques whilst there.

#### Integration of Aboriginal Spiritual Teachings and Culture into Society

The findings of this research on spirituality and connectedness between the inner wilderness and the external environment parallel indigenous views of women and wilderness. The Aboriginal culture teaches respect and value for the land and the environment affirms their identity. 'What I'm thinking about all the time is that we're learning together' (Anne Thomas, Aboriginal Spiritual Leader from Gulaga), Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, we can all benefit. Anne acknowledges that 'women are the ones who are keeping the culture in tact'; all women, all cultures.

13. Australian society has much to learn from Aboriginal culture, especially as caretakers of the land and as the spiritual teachers. This study recommends opportunities for cultural learning and exchange be explored and implemented, in ways that affirm the Aboriginal culture and spiritual teachings.

(Mandawuy and Yalmay Yunupingu, of the Gumatj Aboriginal clan, have put together a curriculum known as "both ways", which incorporates traditional Aboriginal learning methods and topics with conventional education. They intend to establish a cross cultural institute in east Arnhem Land, N.T. (*The Daily Advertiser*, Wagga Wagga, [N.S.W.] October 28th. 1995, p.23). This provides one example for implementing the above recommendation and deserves further investigation and support.)

## Training

The leaders on WomenTrek facilitated women's wilderness experience through a feminist style of leadership. This places the participant at the centre of the experience.

Responsibility and self reliance increase and this empowers women and develops personal leadership skills, which can be woven into everyday lives. The models of leadership in patriarchal society are hegemonic and hierarchically based. The qualities that women bring to a leadership position have the potential to radically reform social conditioning, training and experience. Women prefer to relate with others more equitably and using a model of participatory management they are more likely to bring an interpersonal focus to positions of leadership, which is likely to enhance the quality of experience.

14. This study recommends models of feminist leadership be employed in outdoor recreation courses and training in outdoor leadership.

## Future Research

Theoretical approaches in the leisure studies field continue to reflect and affirm the interests of the dominant 'white' male middle class. Major assumptions about leisure and recreation have been made using quantitative studies, which has limited our understanding of women's leisure experience. The qualitative interpretive research methodology utilised in this study enabled understanding and meaning of leisure experience and wilderness experience from the perspective of women. Women were able to put their wilderness experience into the context of their whole life. Such exploration is possible with an interpretive methodology; it is doubtful that this is possible with a quantitative approach. In addition, this feminist leisure research explored options and choices rather than limited experience, and defined an alternative research paradigm about leisure.

15. Further qualitative and feminist research in the leisure and recreation fields would contribute to the awareness raised through this study and broaden understanding of the meaning of leisure from a non-androcentric perspective.

16. Increased numbers of women only wilderness programmes in various parts of the western world, for instance Women Outdoors, Women of the Wilderness and Woodswomen, offer a rich source for both qualitative and quantitative leisure research as alternatives to those grounded in masculine culture described in chapter two, such as Outward Bound. Women only courses and programmes provide a feminine cultural experience. An emphasis on the process of learning, on group dynamics, and the 'journey' as a personal and shared experience, are essential features.

17. The importance of women only experiences in establishing women's reality and visibility has been verified by this study. The potential impact of the women only setting on developing women's practical skills as well as emotional health and self confidence, needs further research.

18. Leisure experience for mid-life and older women warrants further investigation as there has been a paucity of research in this area and consequently little is known about women's leisure interests and involvement in this stage of their lives.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### BOOKS

Anderson, Robin (1975). *Leisure - An Inappropriate Concept for Women?* Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Bell, Diane and Klein, Renate (eds.) (1996). *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed.* Spinifex Press, North Melbourne.

Burton, Clare (1985). *Subordination: Feminism and Social Theory.* Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

Dann, Christine and Lynch, Pip (1989). *Wilderness Women: Stories of New Zealand Women at Home in the Wilderness.* Penguin, Auckland.

Deem, Rosemary (1986). *All Work and No Play? The Sociology of Women and Leisure.* Open University Press, Milton Keynes, England.

Debold, Elizabeth (1994). *Mother Daughter Revolution: Good Girls to Great Women.* Doubleday, Sydney.

Devall, B. and Sessions, G. (1985). *Deep Ecology.* Gibbs M. Smith Inc., Salt Lake City, Utah.

Diamond, Irene and Orenstein, Gloria (eds.) (1990). *Reweaving the World: the Emergence of Ecofeminism.* Sierra Club Books, San Francisco.

Eisenstein, Hester (1984). *Contemporary Feminist Thought.* Unwin Paperbacks, London.

- Estes, Clarissa Pinkola (1992). *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman*. Rider, London.
- Galland, China (1980). *Women in the Wilderness*. Harper & Row, New York.
- Gilligan, Carol (1982). *In a Different Voice*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Green E., Hebron, S. and Woodward, D. (1990). *Women's Leisure, What Leisure*. Macmillan Education, London.
- Gunew, Sneja (ed.) (1990). *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*. Routledge, London.
- Henderson, K. (1991). *Dimensions of Choice: A Qualitative Approach to Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Research*. Venture Publishing Inc., State College, PA.
- Henderson, K. et al. (1989). *A Leisure of One's Own: A Feminist Perspective on Women's Leisure*. Venture Publishing Inc., State College, PA.
- Merchant, Carolyn (1989). *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.
- Nanschild, Deborah (ed.) (1994). *WomenTrek Journal*. YWCA of Adelaide, Australia.
- Plant, Judith (ed.) (1989). *Healing The Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*. Green Print, London.
- Raymond, Janice (1986). *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*. Women's Press, London.

- Reinharz, Shulamit (1992). *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Rich, Adrienne (1978). *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977*. W.W. Norton, New York.
- Rogers, Susan Fox (ed.) (1994). *Another Wilderness: New Outdoor Writing by Women*. Seal Press, Seattle, Washington.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford (1975). *New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. Seabury Press, New York.
- Slotkin, R. (1973). *Regeneration through Violence: the Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Wesleyan University, Middleton, Connecticut.
- Spender, Dale (1985). *Man-Made Language*, second edition. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Stanley, Liz and Wise, Sue (1993). *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology*, new edition. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Swan, Malcolm et al. (1978). *Research in Outdoor Education: Summaries of Doctoral Studies*, American Association of Health Physical Education and Recreation, Washington D.C.
- Tullis, Julie (1986). *Clouds from Both Sides*. Grafton Books, London.
- Tuttle, Lisa (1986). *Encyclopedia of Feminism*. Arrow Books, London.
- Weedon, Chris (1987). *Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory*. Blackwell, Oxford.

Wimbush, Erica and Talbot, Margaret (eds.) (1988). *Relative Freedoms: Women and Leisure*. Open University Press, Milton Keynes, England.

## REPORTS

Bittman, Michael (1991). *Juggling Time: How Australian Families Use Time*. CPN Publication, A.C.T., Australia.

Burden, J. and Kiewa, K. (1992). *Power Relations on the Ropes: a Study of Women, Adventure and Empowerment*. School of Leisure Studies, Griffith University, Queensland.

Cosgriff, M. and Bell, M. (1989). *Women Outdoors New Zealand: Networking to Serve Women's Needs in the Outdoors*. Wellington College of Education, New Zealand.

Kempnich, Barb (1992). *Loud & Clear: Women's Voices at Work*. Department of Labour, Adelaide, South Australia.

Kempnich, Barb (1993). *Working It Out: Employment Patterns of Women*. Department of Labour, Adelaide, South Australia.

Kiewa, J. et al. (1993). *Women and Adventure Survey - Preliminary Results*. Centre for Leisure Research, School of Leisure Studies, Griffith University, Queensland.

Williams, Lisa (1992). *In Through the Outdoors: A Research Project on Women and Outdoor Adventure*, Executive Summary. University of Canberra.

Women's Advisers Unit (1991). *Same Time Next Week: The Extent and Nature of Part-Time Work in South Australia: An Issues Paper*. Department of Labour, Adelaide, South Australia.

## CHAPTERS OR ESSAYS PUBLISHED IN BOOKS

Angel, Jean (1994). The Wilderness Solo: An Empowering Growth Experience for Women, in *Wilderness Therapy for Women: The Power of Adventure*. eds. Ellen Cole, Eve Erdman, and Esther D. Rothblum, Haworth Press, New York.

Betschild, Myra (1995). Towards a Theory of Leisure and Pleasure: New Perspectives on Women's Lived Experience in Midlife, in *Proceedings Australia and New Zealand Leisure Studies Association Conference*. eds. Clare Simpson and Bob Gidlow, Lincoln University, N.Z., 97-102.

Gilligan, Carol (1988). Remapping the Moral Domain: New Images of Self in Relationship, in *Mapping the Moral Domain*. ed. Carol Gilligan et al. Harvard University Press, Boston, 3-20.

Grimshaw, Patricia (1986). Man's Own Country: Women in Colonial Australian History, in *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*. eds. Norma Grieve and Alison Burns, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 182-209.

Grosz, Elizabeth (1990). Philosophy and Conclusion, in *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*. ed. Sneja Gunew, Routledge, London and New York, 147-174, 332-244.

Henderson, K. and Bialeschki, M.D. (1986). Outdoor Experiential Education (for Women Only), in *Association of Experiential Education Proceedings Journal*, 14th Annual Conference. eds. M. Gass and L. Buell, Moodus, Ct., 35-41.

Kaplan, Gisela and Rogers, Lesley (1990). The Definition of Male and Female; Biological Reductionism and the Sanctions of Normality, in *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*. ed. Sneja Gunew, Routledge, London and New York, 205-228.



Kheel, Marti (1990). Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference, in *Reweaving the World: the Emergence of Ecofeminism*. eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 128-137.

Kiewa, Jackie (1994). Self-Control: The Key to Adventure? Towards a Model of the Adventure Experience, in *Wilderness Therapy for Women: The Power of Adventure*. eds. Ellen Cole, Eve Erdman and Esther D. Rothblum, Haworth press, New York, 29-41.

King, Ynestra (1990). Healing The Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature/Culture Dualism, in *Reweaving the World: the Emergence of Ecofeminism*. eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 106-121.

King, Ynestra (1991). The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology, in *Healing The Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*. ed. Judith Plant, Green Print, London, 18-29.

Le Guin, Ursula K. (1989). Woman/Wilderness, in *Dancing at the Edge of the World*. ed. Ursula Le Guin, Grove Press, New York.

Little, Sandra L. et al. (1991). Utilizing a General Leisure Behaviour Instrument for Measuring a Specific Recreation Activity, in *Recreation: Current Selected Research V.2*. eds. F. and J. Humphrey, AMS Press, New York.

Merchant, Carolyn (1990). Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory, in *Reweaving the World: the Emergence of Ecofeminism*. eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 100-105.

Mobily, Kenneth E. (1991). Thoughts on a Reconstruction of Leisure Research, in *Recreation: Current Selected Research V.1*. eds. F. and J. Humphrey, AMS Press, New York.

Rowland, Robyn and Klein, Renata (1987). Radical Feminism: Critique and Construct, in *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*. ed. Sneja Gunew (1990), Routledge, London and New York, 271-303.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford (1989). Toward an Ecological-Feminist Theology of Nature, in *Healing The Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*. ed. Judith Plant, Green Print, London, 145-150.

Spretnak, Charlene (1990). Ecofeminism: Our Roots and Flowering, in *Reweaving the World: the Emergence of Ecofeminism*. eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 3-14.

Spretnak, Charlene (1989). Toward an Ecofeminist Spirituality, in *Healing The Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*. ed. Judith Plant, Green Print, London, 127-132.

Stanley, L. (1988). Historical Sources for Studying Work and Leisure in Women's Lives, in *Relative Freedoms: Women and Leisure*. eds. Erica Wimbush and Margaret Talbot, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, England.

Stanley, Liz and Wise, Sue (1983). Back into the Personal or our Attempt to Construct 'Feminist Research', in *Theories of Women's Studies*. eds. Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelle Klein, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 192-209.

Starhawk (1989). Feminist, Earth-based Spirituality and Ecofeminism, in *Healing The Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*. ed. Judith Plant, Green Print, London, 174-185.

Starhawk (1990). Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth-based Spirituality, in *Reweaving the World: the Emergence of Ecofeminism*. eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 73-86.

Tulip, Marie (1990). Religion, in *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*. ed. Sneja Gunew, Routledge, London and New York, 229-268.

Walker, Alice (1991). A Woman is Not a Potted Plant, in *Her Blue Body Everything We Know*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, San Diego, 454-455.

Zimmerman, Michael E. (1990). Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism: The Emerging Dialogue, in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. eds. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 138-154.

#### JOURNAL ARTICLES

Adams, Elizabeth (1991). Scientific Vocabulary Divergence among Female Primatologists Working in East Africa, *Social Studies of Science*, August, Vol. 21, No.3, 547-560.

Chambers, Deborah (1986). The Constraints of Work and Domestic Schedules on Women's Leisure, *Leisure Studies*, 5, 309-325.

Freysinger, Valeria J. (1992). Women's Leisure: Affiliation, Self-Determination, Empowerment and Resistance?, *Society and Leisure*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 303-322.

Green, Eileen and Woodward, Diana (1990). In Celebration of Women's Friendships: Collusion, Catharsis or Challenge, *Conference Proceedings*, Leisure Studies Association, Brighton, U.K.

Griscom, Joan L. (1980). On Healing the Nature/History Split in Feminist Thought, *Heresies*, 13, 4-9.

- Henderson, K.A. and Bialeschki, M.D. (1991). A Sense of Entitlement to Leisure as Constraint and Empowerment for Women, *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 51-63.
- Henderson, K.A. and Bialeschki, M.D. (1987). A Qualitative Evaluation of a Women's Week Experience, *Journal of Experiential Education*, 10(6), 25-29.
- Jones, Dorothy (1984). A Kingdom and a Place of Exile: Women Writers and the World of Nature, *World Literature Written in English*, V.24, No.2, 257-273.
- King, Ynestra (1980). Feminism and the Revolt of Nature, *Heresies 13: Feminism and Ecology*, 12-16.
- Klopf, Gordon J. and Harrison, Joan (1981). Moving Up the Career Ladder: The Case for Mentors, *Principal*, September, 41-43.
- Kohn, Sandy (1991). Specific Programmatic Strategies to Increase Empowerment, *Journal of Experiential Education*, V.14, No. 1, May.
- Lahar, Stephanie (1991). Ecofeminist Theory and Grassroot Politics, *Hypatia*, 6(1), 28-45.
- Mason, Marilyn J. (1987). Wilderness Family Therapy: Experiential Dimensions, *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 9 (1-2), Spring-Summer, 90-105.
- Mills, Patricia Jagentowicz (1991). Feminism and Ecology: on the Domination of Nature, *Hypatia*, 6(1), 162-178.
- Miranda, W. and Yerkes, R. (1982). The Need for Research in Outdoor Education Programs for Women, *Journal of American Association of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*,

April, 82-85.



Moorcroft, Heather (1990). Ecofeminism: a Patchwork Paper, *Top End and Down Under Proceedings*, First Northern Territory Women's Health Conference Report, Batchelor, N.T., 19-22.

Norwood, Vera (1988). Light, Power, Space, and Sun: Women in Landscapes of Adventure, *Women Studies Forum*, 11, no.2, 155-165.

Pascual, B. (1989). The Road to Success: Getting There in a Women's Outdoor Adventure Business, *Women Outdoors*, Spring, Vol.9, No.3, 18-20.

Plumwood, Val (1986). Ecofeminism: an Overview and Discussion of Positions and Arguments, *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, supplement V.64, 120-138.

Plumwood, Val (1990). Feminism as Ecofeminism, *National Women's Conference: Proceedings*, University of Canberra, 24-33.

Plumwood, Val (1992). Feminism and Ecofeminism: beyond the dualistic assumptions of women, men and nature, *The Ecologist*, V.22, No.1, 8-13.

Plumwood, Val (1991). Gaia, Good for Women?, *Refractory Girl*, No.41, 11-16.

Plumwood, Val (1991). Nature, Self and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism, *Hypatia*, 6(1), 3-27.

Plumwood, Val (1991). Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics, *Refractory Girl*, No.41, 44-46.

Rapp, L. (1989). Leading Roles, *Women Outdoors*, Spring, Vol.9, No.3, 21.

Rhudy, Edward (1979). An Alternative to Outward Bound Programs, *Journal of Physical Education and Recreation*, January, Vol. 50, No.1, 26-27.

Schaffer, Kay (1989). Women and the Bush: Australian National Identity and Representations of the Feminine, *Antipodes: A North American Journal of Australian Literature*, Spring V.3 (1), 7-13.

Scherl, Lea M. (1988). Constructions of a Wilderness Experience: Using the Repertory Grid Technique in the Natural Setting, *Australian Psychologist*, V.23, No.2, 225-242.

Scraton, Sheila (1994). The Changing World of Women and Leisure: Feminism, 'Postfeminism' and Leisure, *Leisure Studies*, V.12-13, 249-261.

Showalter, Elaine (1981). Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness, *Critical Inquiry*, Winter, 179-205.

Sowinska, Suzanne (1993). Peak Performances, *The Women's Review of Books*, February, Vol. X, No. 5, 1 and 3.

Stringer, L. Allison and McAvoy, Leo H. (1992). The Need for Something Different: Spirituality and Wilderness Adventure, *The Journal of Experiential Education*, May, Vol.15, No.1, 13-20.

Tapply, Richard M. (1977). High Adventure: Confronting the Essentials, *Parks and Recreation*, June, Vol. 12, No.6, 26-29, 80.

Warren, K. J. (1987). Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections, *Environmental Ethics*, No.9, Spring, 3-20.

Warren, Karen J. and Cheney, Jim (1991). Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology, *Hypatia*, 6(1), 179-197.

Wearing, Betsy and Wearing, Stephen (1988). All in a Day's Leisure: Gender and the Concept of Leisure, *Leisure Studies*, Vol.7, 111-123.

Welton, George E. (1976). Natural Freedom and Wilderness Survival, *Journal of Physical Education and Recreation*, April, Vol. 49, No. 4, 29-30.

#### OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Allen, Margaret (1992). *Course Notes for Women in History*, Department of Women's Studies, University of Adelaide.

Egan, Wendy (1994). *Testosterone-Free Climbing*. Unpublished paper, Women's Health and Leisure Course, Department of Women's Studies, University of Adelaide.

EnnaJi (1994). Untitled, unpublished poem, Adelaide.

Flint, N. (1991). Outdoor Recreation, *Women's Studies Resource Centre Newsletter*, Vol.17, No.1, Adelaide, 6.

Hooper, Liz (1991). *Herstory of Women's Outdoor Recreation Activities in South Australia*. Unpublished paper, Women's Health and Leisure Course, Department of Women's Studies, University of Adelaide.

Holzwarth, R. (1989). *In Search of A Feminine Model in Outdoor Education*. Unpublished paper, Alaska Women of the Wilderness, Anchorage.

Holzwarth, R. (1992). 10 reasons for 'Why women only?', *Anchorage Daily News*, Dec. 6th., Anchorage, Alaska, E2.

Kline, N. (1988). *The Necessity of Women's Leadership and About How to Achieve It*. Unpublished paper presented to the Women's Political Association of Ireland Annual Conference, Dublin. The Leadership Institute, Maryland, U.S.A.

Leslie, R.G. et al. (1987). *National Wilderness Inventory: A Computer Based Methodology for the Survey of Wilderness in Australia*. Prepared for the Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra.

Locke, Ralph (1988). *Study Guide: Nursing Knowledge and Research*, Part 1. External Studies Unit, South Australian College of Advanced Education, Adelaide.

Mills, J. (1988). Women Adventure Guides, *Women's Sports and Fitness*, April, 47-51.

Mitton, Denise (1986). *Meeting the Unknown: Group Dynamics in the Wilderness*. Unpublished paper, Woodswomen, U.S.A.

Nanschild, Deborah (1994). *Wild Women Never Get the Blues*. Video, Women of the Wilderness, Australia.

Nanschild, Deborah (1994). *WomenTrek Report*. YWCA of Adelaide, Australia.

Nanschild, Deborah (1993). *Ecofeminism*. Unpublished paper, M.A. Research Strategies Course, Department of Women's Studies, University of Adelaide.

Nanschild, Deborah (1991). *Notes from Women's Outdoor Leadership Course*. Women Of the Wilderness, Australia.



Women's Sport & Fitness (1986). What a Wonderful Walk It Could Be!, *Women's Sports & Fitness*, Sept. 57-59.

## THESES

Cunningham, Joan (1993). *Home and Away*. M.A. (Women's Studies) Thesis, University of Adelaide.

Nanschild, Deb (1994). *Girls and Physical Activity: Strategies for Change*. Individual Project for M.A. (Women's Studies), University of Adelaide.

Walsh, Linda Michele (1989). *Women's Experience of Wilderness: A Phenomenological Study (Wilderness Experience)*. PhD, Ann Arbor, UMI.

## APPENDICES

A: The extent of part-time employment in Australia and South Australia.

B: Women's participation in the labour force according to age.

C: WomenTrek Report, 1994.

D: Consent form to participate in this study.

E: Information letter to intending research subjects.

F: Individual Profiles of women in the study.

G: Question headings that guided the interviews.

H: Sample interview with Heather that analysed an individual response to the guided research question: 'What is the effect on women of being in a women only group?'

J: Sample of collective analysis of women's response to this question.

K: A summary of the categories and central themes that emerged, which were analysed under each guided research question.

M: Breakdown of ages of women who participated overall in WomenTrek.

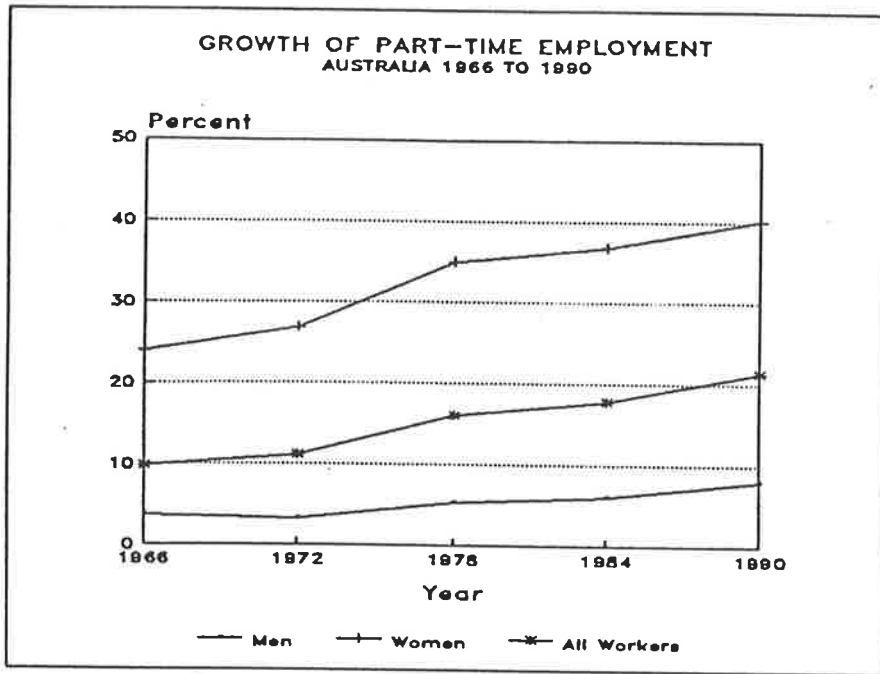


FIGURE 1: The growth in part-time employment since 1966 has been far greater than the growth in full-time work, and part-time workers comprise a substantial segment of the workforce.

(Source: ABS Cat No 6204.0 & 6203.0)

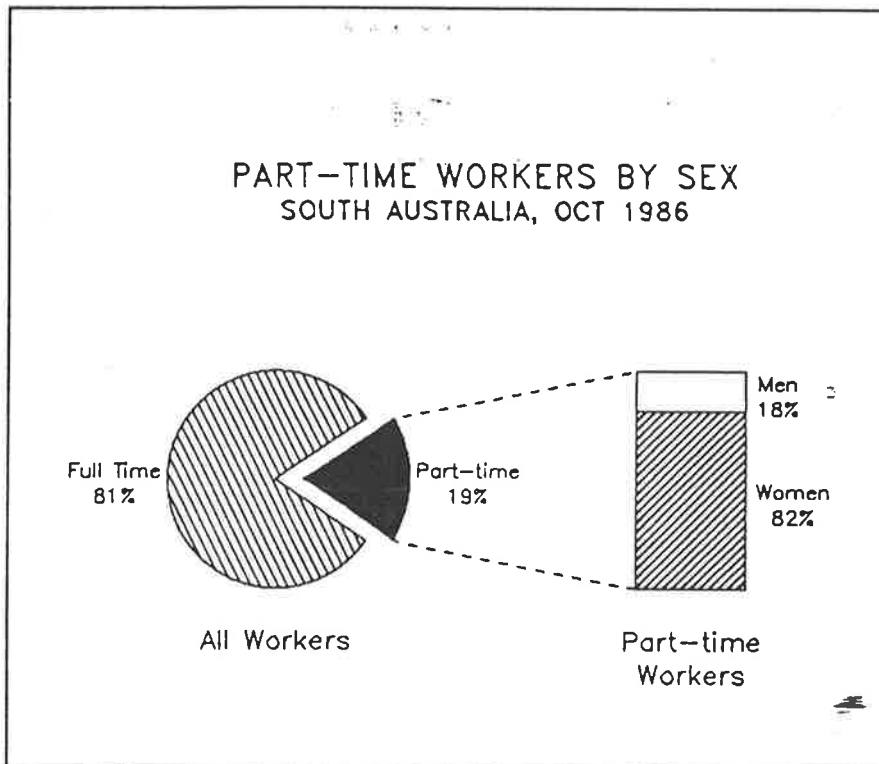


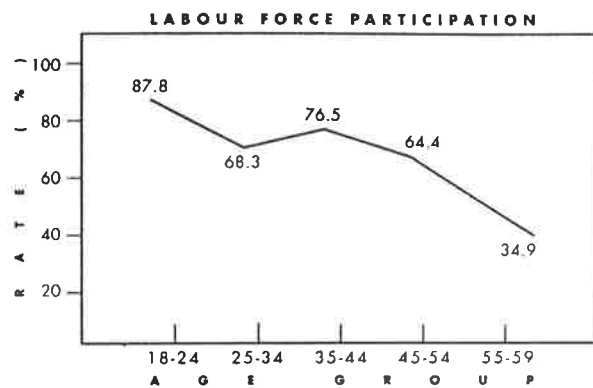
FIGURE 2: In October 1986, 19% of the South Australian workforce were employed on a part-time basis and 82% of these workers were women. (Source: ABS Cat No 6203.9)

SOURCE: Women's Advisors Unit (1991): *Same Time Next Week: the Extent and Nature of Part-time Work in South Australia*, Adelaide, Department of Labour, p.3 and 4.

Appendix B: Women's participation in the labour force according to age.

Other factors include age of dependent children and whether women come from an English or Non-English speaking background.

Figure 3

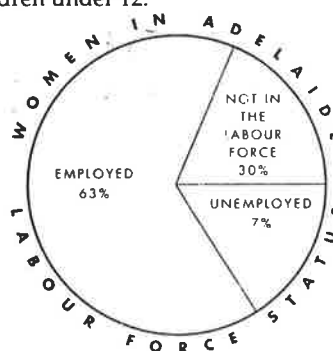


Women's participation in the labour force drops off dramatically after age 54.

Nearly half of all unemployed women are aged from 18 to 24.

Women with children under 5 are less likely to be in the labour force than women whose children are aged from 5 to 12 or those with no children under 12.

Women born in non-English speaking countries have a lower participation rate than others, and an unemployment rate which is nearly double that of women born in an English speaking country.



SOURCE: Kempnich, Barb (1993): *Working it Out: Employment Patterns of Women*,

Adelaide, Department of Labour, p. 19.

# WOMENTREK

## REPORT

SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

PLANNING

WOMEN'S CULTURE

THE BATON

DISABILITY COMMITMENT

SPONSORSHIP

RESOURCES

PROMOTION and MEDIA LIAISON

THE EVENT

ACHIEVEMENTS

PRECEDENCE

RESULTS

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Deb Nanschild

November 1994

## SUMMARY

WomenTrek was a mammoth event. It has never been done before. A 3 month continuous physical trek covering 1500kms of the state, with back up support and over 100 volunteers, all being women, has been an incredible achievement. There were 728 different participants and many of them returned to do more; there were over 3,000 WomenTrek days (ie. no. of women by the no. of days they trekked) which reflected the level of interest and support given to the event overall; the youngest participant was 6 months and the oldest 80 years; and they trekked on foot, by camel, on horseback, with clydesdales & wagon, by bike, and in wheelchairs. WomenTrek was a safe, affordable, non competitive and empowering experience. Not only did WomenTrek prove to be a cross-generational event, it brought together women from diverse backgrounds, women who would not have had the opportunity to get to know and understand each other in any other context. It brought together rural, country and urban individuals and communities, and women from all walks of life who trekked a Trail together and whose lives have been enriched through this experience.

WomenTrek challenged and changed the perception for many women that they could be actively involved over a long period of time in the pursuit of outdoor physical recreation; the long term sustained effort awakened women's understanding of their capacity and potential and they want to do more. We offered WomenTrek as a one day experience through to the whole 3 month experience and women could choose the length of time they wanted to 'have a go', more often than not, extending it. This added to the feeling of being 'safe' in this new experience, and to know there was back up vehicle support in the remote wilderness areas 'just in case'. WomenTrek also introduced the majority of participants to bushwalking and camping for the first time and an opportunity to mix with experienced trekkers who shared their knowledge and provided encouragement. Everywhere, women were role modelling to other women that such experiences and personal achievements were really possible... for every woman, regardless of age, ability, fitness, disability, culture or previous experience.

We ensured that WomenTrek was inclusive of women with disabilities. A disability consultant was employed, herself a quadraplegic, to assist us with planning and advertising within the disability community. A combined effort of abled and disabled being physically active together in the outdoors was certainly a new concept. We set a precedence with contracting for a hiking rickshaw to be made and this will be donated to a new S.A. club for people with disabilities.

WomenTrek was a physically challenging outdoor recreational event that proved women of all ages and abilities can achieve personal goals. It was an event that achieved mass participation yet had a low impact on the environment due to the measures taken in preparing the leaders and their groups. Its recreational focus was a key to the high level of participation and enthusiasm that women continually expressed throughout the event. It proves that women do want to be physically active but not only in the traditional sporting ways that our society and media have promoted. This is particularly so for the older women, who made up nearly 10% of participants overall, as well as the teenage girls who tend to drop out of physical activity [ie. sport] around puberty. This is an alarming Australian trend.

Recreation is a vital and necessary part of women's lives and needs to be seen as part of a broader understanding of 'sport', a very important aspect that tests people's endurance, capacity to cooperate, to be in a team, to work collaboratively rather than competitively towards a common goal, where personal health and well-being are essential outcomes as well as key ingredients to why women choose to be physically active. WomenTrek proved that women want to actively recreate in the outdoors.

WomenTrek was a 'special measure' to increase the involvement of women & girls in outdoor recreation. Under the banner of celebrating a century of Women's Suffrage in South Australia, this initiative was able to obtain funding and other goodwill sponsorship from the community which it might otherwise not have received owing to its uniqueness and women-only orientation.

WomenTrek was truly a South Australian Women's event of which we can all be proud. As expressed on the back of the thankyou cards, WomenTrek was a:

- \*brilliant Women's Suffrage celebration
- \*tremendous gathering of diverse women
- \*fantastic physical achievement
- \*life enriching experience
- \*fulfillment of many women's dreams
- \*beginning for many women in outdoor recreation.

## BACKGROUND

WomenTrek was created to involve women and girls walking or riding (by wheelchair, cycle, horseback, on camels, wagons, and buggies) relay style along the state's long distance trail, the Heysen Trail, over 3 months. The concept of WomenTrek was created by Deb Nanschild, Programme Director of "Women of the Wilderness Australia" [W.O.W.]. For the past 15 years, Deb has been involved with women of all ages in their pursuit to learn outdoor activities in a safe and supportive environment. Two clear dreams had emerged from women participating in bushwalking trips and adventures in South Australia, particularly in the past 5 years: women wanted the opportunity to walk the Heysen Trail, and others wanted the opportunity to walk its entire length. Many women had already earmarked sections to complete during their lifetime.

WomenTrek provided the opportunity for these and other women to realise their dreams. In our Suffrage year of celebrations, it seemed appropriate to celebrate our achievements as women with a Trek that encompassed women's different ages, abilities, backgrounds, culture, and interests. Since this was a 'once-in-a-lifetime' event, we wanted every woman who wished to participate to be able to do so. WomenTrek therefore allowed for women with disabilities to participate for the very first time in an organised recreational event as equal participants; it allowed for women who cannot carry a backpack to be supported with vehicle back-up; it allowed for indigenous, rural, country and urban women to come together on the Trail to celebrate their lives as women in Australian society; and it allowed for women to gain strength and confidence in themselves and in their culture through participating in the continuous walk/ride link.

## PLANNING

Deb Nanschild approached the YWCA of Adelaide who agreed to run WomenTrek collectively and funding submissions were made to the Women's Suffrage Centenary Committee, Foundation S.A. and Recreation S.A. After an extraordinarily long wait, 3 months beyond their timeline, funding was finally approved at the end of March. This meant that if WomenTrek was to eventuate, we only had 3 months to organise it. Given that this was possibly the only time we could run such an event and the enormous impact it could have on women's lives, we decided to go for it!

Two Coordinators from W.O.W. were employed, Deb Nanschild on 0.8 and Chris Hales on 0.5 time, as well as a Data Processor, Roz Daniell, for 0.2. We knew from our experience with W.O.W. that there needed to be a variety of activities that would appeal to women to generate

enthusiasm and interest in the WomenTrek event overall. We created the options of *Horseriding*, with or without their own horse, *Camel Trekking* and *Cycling*, with Recreation S.A. able to supply the cycling gear at a nominal rate. We arranged for women to register either as a supporter of the event, especially to receive the 'information kit', or as a participant. Supporters could later register as participants if they wished and women could register either individually or as part of a group, be they relatives, friends, or work colleagues.

The kit comprised of newsletters, a WomenTrek sticker, itinerary and information details, complimentary membership for 6 months to the national Paddy Pallin Club, which included a discount card, and be in the draw for a hip/daypack, donated by Paddy Pallin and valued at \$125. Supporters could become participants once they had the Trek details, especially with dates and locations of the Trek. It was important to give women the time to peruse their options and make adjustments in their busy lives accordingly, particularly if alternative care for children and/or others was involved.

The Trek was originally designed to include the unmarked section from Mt Babbage and through the Gammon Ranges, to finish at Cape Jervis. Due to less time available for planning and especially less sponsorship than requested, we decided to shorten the journey by starting from where the Trail is marked at Parachilna Gorge and re-routing the southern section to start at Cape Jervis. In this way we reduced the Trek by 6 weeks [3 weeks at each end] and aimed to have the Journey's End linked with the International "Women, Power and Politics" Conference scheduled for October 9th. We also decided to include the Hahndorf Women's Heritage Trail (usually a 1 day walk) by spanning it over 2 days and linking it with the Journey's End.

Anne Fisher, from Recreation S.A. and Coordinator of 'Trek 94' for Secondary Schools, provided valuable guidance in the initial logistical planning and moral support throughout the duration of the event. For the purpose of organising WomenTrek, the Heysen Trail was divided into 4 sections [A, B, C, D] with a final registration date set 4-6 weeks before each section commenced. This assisted with the initial planning of those sections and gave some leeway for the time it takes to organise people and equipment. Legs of 1-3 days were planned within these sections to allow for women to participate on a short term basis as this tends to be the only time available to them. This created the scenerio of women coming and going quite frequently, though in areas more remote, the legs were extended and the group size kept proportionally low. Sometimes leaders changed and trekkers didn't, sometimes trekkers changed and leaders didn't, but usually there was a mixture of both. Whilst such planning is difficult and very different to the usual in outdoor events, it addressed the needs of women's lifestyles, gave them choices in time and allowed for more women to be able to be involved. Once registered, it was the responsibility for intending trekkers to contact their Group Leaders for details.

There were two meetings with leaders of each section, one for planning logistics with the Coordinators and the other for the continuity and celebratory aspects of WomenTrek with both the Coordinators and Margaret Hypatia, voluntary WomenTrek Consultant. Andrew Moylan, Heysen Trail Coordinator from Recreation S.A., met with each leader and support driver team and discussed route details, camping sites, vehicle access, landowners, and other needs. His assistance was invaluable and highly appreciated. He responded instantly to the occasional crisis that arose and made himself available at any time of the day - and we made use of that! The leaders were expected to make contact with the respective landowners, plan their legs specifically and prepare their groups. Generally, each group had 2 meetings, one at the YWCA for logistics and the other at Paddy Pallin to discuss clothing and equipment needs. Groups were responsible for their own car pool, food arrangements and costs.

The women who chose to do the bulk of WomenTrek or the whole journey were prepared by Deb separately to the group meetings. They divided their sections into stages and prepared



food parcels accordingly, suitably packaged and stored at the YWCA. Respective Group Leaders took the food parcels with them out onto the Trail. Money to cover group expenses, anticipated accommodation and emergencies was deposited and administered through the YWCA account.

Of special consideration was the safety of women, both emotionally and physically. Leaders were briefed by Deb about group management and interpersonal skills; about handling a diverse collection of people; about self esteem and confidence and what happens for women under physically demanding conditions; and the likely scenarios and how to deal with them. Our support vehicles which followed the entire Trek were fitted with radios and leaders carried handheld radios. The support drivers were recruited on a weekly commitment by Chris Hales and briefed by State Emergency Services [S.E.S.]. Radio contact was maintained with S.E.S. at all times.

Anticipation, participation and recollection are equally important aspects of recreational experiences and WomenTrek was no exception. The WomenTrek newsletter, *Adventures from the Trail*, was designed to keep women informed of the Trek's progress, with any newsworthy items of interest included but in particular to maintain a feel of being part of the entire journey. We planned to have 3 editions between July and October and this strategy was enthusiastically received by Trekkers, who often quoted from the newsletter on their journey or wanted to include something themselves.

## WOMEN'S CULTURE

The event was predominantly organised by phone. We found that women prefer personal conversation to written material and all of their inquiries, bookings, cancellations, changes and transfers required outstanding patience and phone conversation skills. We consequently spent an enormous amount of time on the phone and this needs to be understood in the context of women's culture. We spent 10 minutes on average with each call, as women shared their dreams, goals and visions of what WomenTrek and the opportunities it presented meant to them. Participant's need for information and reassurance was also paramount to their overall feeling of safety and confidence in the activity.

Our experience had prepared us for the fact that women often can't commit to something until nearer the time as they tend to be the carers of others and manage the home and family. We expected late registrations and levied them 10%, but we didn't expect so many of them. Up until the last 3 weeks of the event when we had to close registrations, the flow of interest never waned. Consequently, we were working at full speed for the entire 6 months of preparation and delivery of WomenTrek.

## THE BATON

The WomenTrek baton carried by our Trail walkers and riders comprised of the WomenTrek banner; a journal of our adventures and trekking experiences, in which each participant's name, place of residence, age and their experiences were recorded; a copy of the WomenTrek song on tape; our 1994 Charter of Women's Demands, the front page being the only copy of the 1894 petition which demanded the vote for women; a petition demanding the 'new' rights for women in 1994; an ancient symbol of women's spirituality; a redgum staff collected in the Flinders Ranges; and an old shell collected from the sea at Cape Jervis.

As a group of women met to take over the Trek from the previous group, the baton was passed on via "handover ceremonies" organised by leaders and in which we acknowledged the Aboriginal custodians of the land. Local women were invited to join us, to share their stories from living in the area, and any 'tokens' gathered by women to represent their Trek experiences were shared. These became known as the WomenTrek artefacts. The ceremonies were specially planned to provide continuity. We welcomed 'new' women and farewelled 'old' women, and asked them what they were bringing with them or taking away.

## DISABILITY COMMITMENT

Being our Suffrage Centenary, we felt it appropriate to accommodate women who were disabled or unable to walk far, which would include the very young and the very old. The *Horse 'n Buggy*, *Clydesdales & Wagon*, and *Riding for the Disabled* were Trek experiences that didn't involve walking. Through a grant from 'Sports Arts and Recreation Council for People with a Disability Inc.' (S.P.A.R.C.) we were able to employ a Disability Consultant, Cathy Nirta, to work with us to successfully offer positive outdoor recreation experiences for women with disabilities. *Wheelchair* sections were planned and a *hiking rickshaw* was made, to give some of these women more access into bushy areas. Off-road wheelchairs were ordered on a hire basis but had to be returned to Victoria as the seating area did not accommodate for women's hips. This was disappointing, as it effectively reduced the number of disabled participants we could accommodate as well as the range of possible areas available for them to recreate.

A Disability Checklist was designed by Cathy so that we could best meet each participant's special needs. The checklist was obtained from Cathy and forwarded with the participant's registration and that of her care worker. This ensured that each participant had personally been in contact with Cathy. We only required the supporter's fee from care workers to encourage them to be involved.

## SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship made this suffrage event affordable to women and girls. Our major sponsors, Recreation S.A., Foundation S.A., [each granted \$10,000] and Women's Suffrage Centenary Committee [\$5,000] enabled coordinators to be employed initially to run the event. S.P.A.R.C. contributed \$5,000 and Paddy Pallin supplied the camping equipment, which enabled women who did not have this gear to participate. These sponsors believed in this project from the start and their support enabled this event to get underway. CMI Toyota and Mitsubishi Motors Australia, who gave us 4WD vehicle support for two of the three months, enabled women to trek for days without having to carry heavy gear. The YWCA of Adelaide contributed approximately \$5,000 in addition to other support.

Deb Nanschild originally submitted an extensive grant proposal to the Suffrage Committee for the first round of funding submissions in April, 1993. The submission was carried over for the second round in June but notification of the possibility for some funding was not given until late in September. Even though submissions to Recreation S.A. and Foundation S.A. were placed on time and a second submission made to Recreation S.A., the approvals were delayed, possibly due to a change of Government. Notification for these were received at the end of March, 1994. The grant money from Recreation S.A. and the Suffrage Committee was received in March and from Foundation S.A. in September, 1994.

WomenTrek truly was a community event. The support for WomenTrek from the general public was phenomenal. Many other organisations in the community, both public and private, have contributed to WomenTrek through sponsorship and/or provision of services and goods because they believe this event to be so worthwhile. We also experienced incredible support from the country areas once the event started. Due to the tremendous popularity of WomenTrek, we had no difficulty in obtaining extra raffle prizes for the Journey's End.

## RESOURCES

WomenTrek existed due to the support of all of these sponsors and particularly due to the many women who assisted us in a voluntary capacity. WomenTrek relied on the experience,

enthusiasm and availability of over 120 volunteers, including 58 leaders and 26 support drivers. Their expertise and knowledge directed all participants over the entire length of the Heysen Trail without mishap. Volunteers in the office and in the field gave us the extra assistance that was necessary to competently run this event.

The administrative staff at the YWCA of Adelaide were also involved in assisting with phone calls, printing and posting in particular, with the YWCA itself providing office space and facilities, general administrative support and use of their vehicle for WomenTrek business. Women of the Wilderness hired computer equipment and provided 4WD vehicle and trailer, business expertise and camping gear. Public liability for the event was covered by the YWCA of Adelaide. In addition, W.O.W. supplied 30 volunteer leaders and had valuable connections with other recreational groups that ensured we had a healthy start in the short time available towards planning and logistics. We could not have organised WomenTrek in only 3 months without the experience and network that W.O.W. already had in place.

Maps were kindly donated by Recreation S.A. in addition to the sponsorship. Foundation S.A. also assisted towards the cost of our promotional poster. The State Emergency Service was an invaluable resource, in that it supplied all the radio equipment and training in its use. Its regional and city staff kept in contact with the trekkers for the entire event as well as conveying information to the WomenTrek organisers.

## PROMOTION and MEDIA LIAISON

We formed a WomenTrek Taskforce, comprising a selection of talented and enthusiastic women, to handle the publicity. Promotional material was prepared and distributed to many women's venues: ie Universities, Colleges, Schools, Women's Organisations (State and National), Women's Health Centres, Girl Guides, Scouts, Venturers, Libraries, YWCAs, CWAs, and all Local Councils along the Trail. A media release was sent to all television and radio stations (metropolitan and country), with particular programmes being targeted as well. We gave talks and presentations to interested groups as required. We had a stall at the April Walker's Federation Extravaganza and a promotional display was erected in the window of Tourism S.A. for the month of July.

We promoted WomenTrek as a unique, non-competitive, relay-style event along S.A.'s 1500km of Heysen Trail and we invited all women and girls to take part. "We do the work of planning and coordinating the event and you do the walk/ride!" We encouraged women to join us as individuals or to organise their own group, by walking or riding some or all of the Trail for a day, a weekend or longer; that no matter what their age, ability, disability or fitness, that they could be part of this *once in a lifetime* event. The fact that we offered this experience in short stretches made it appear possible for women to participate and that we actively promoted sharing this experience with others also contributed to the large numbers involved.

Registration forms were available from 65 venues in the metropolitan area. A brochure/registration form was devised to be at the forefront of our promotion and sixteen thousand were distributed. A thousand posters were used in metropolitan and country venues and 4,500 stickers were distributed. We had 2 banners which were used extensively to create a WomenTrek awareness.

The event drew wide media coverage. Radio interviews with organisers and newspaper reports were frequent in the country areas and they often included articles about the local women, either in preparation for or after, their section of WomenTrek. The Advertiser, the Messenger Press, Radio 5AN, Radio 5RPH (disability services), Radio 5UV and the television stations carried the news of WomenTrek statewide, and nationally it was covered on the ABC Regional/National Network.

## THE EVENT

### \*The Launch

The official launch of WomenTrek was held on July 23rd, 1994. Women and supporters collected at the Pioneer Women's Memorial Gardens in King William Street and celebrated our beginning with bootscooting and spiral dancing. The President of the YWCA of Adelaide, Cathy McMahon, welcomed everyone and Margaret Hypatia orchestrated the proceedings. We marched, suffrage style, with banners proclaiming "Votes For Women", "Women To Vote For" and "Let's Use The Vote For Women", dressed in either period dress or trekking gear, to the steps of Parliament House. Sitting women members of State and Federal Parliament led the march carrying the WomenTrek banner.

Approximately 300 people attended the launch. Judith Robertson, Women's Advisor, Department of Recreation & Sport, spoke to the crowd on behalf of the Minister for the Status of Women, Diana Laidlaw, and Carolyn Pickles, MLC, spoke on behalf of the Women's Suffrage Centenary Committee. The baton was handed from Deb Nanschild, the creator of WomenTrek, to our Patron, Deirdre Cowell who was starting her Trek in the Flinders Ranges. Senator Rosemary Crowley launched the first group of WomenTrekkingers travelling on the bus to Parachilna Gorge. The WomenTrek band played the WomenTrek song and the trekkers were on their way.

### \*The Trek

The camel trekkers started on July 18th at Blinman and then walked to Parachilna Gorge to meet the group officially launched from Adelaide on July 23rd. The Cape Jervis section began on September 17th, which meant that we had both sections C & D operating at the same time. The Hahndorf Women's Heritage Trail was conducted on the last weekend and proved to be an overwhelmingly popular Trek.

Our Patron for the event was Deirdre Cowell, the daughter of Sir Hans Heysen after whom the trail was named. Deirdre celebrated her 80th birthday just prior to the event's commencement and in fact became not only our Patron but the oldest trekker from 728 different participants. Her participation on the Aroona Valley leg in the Flinders Ranges included her stories from childhood of her father travelling there and the inspiration he gained from the landscape for his paintings. It was indeed a pleasure to be part of her journey, as it gave us the opportunity to celebrate the centenary of women gaining the right to vote by acknowledging the Heysen female lineage and learning about the women's lives. Deirdre also became our dear friend and a wonderful role model to us all - she was never 'at the back'!

The average number of trekkers per day was 20 and the average kilometres covered varied between 10-15 per day. Some days were only 9kms, others 23kms, with variation during some days of 5kms to accommodate for wheelchairs and less mobile women. We carried our own firewood and carried out our own rubbish and sanitary supplies to ensure that we didn't impact on the environment; we also took other specific measures such as dispersing our tent sites when we had large numbers and only wearing soft soled shoes around camp. We requested smokers to smoke only when the group was not walking and to carry their butts out with them. We experienced genuine concern from trekkers for the care of the environment and they soon overcame the initial shock of leaving absolutely nothing behind (especially used toilet paper!); WomenTrek provided an educational service to the community in this regard.

Each group was divided into small cooking groups which organised the menu and food for their respective journey. In this way, each person was responsible for their own food and cooking needs, but organised on a collective basis to enable each woman to feel part of a group and to break down the potential fear barrier of what to bring, etc. as luggage room,

including food, was restricted to one duffle bag. Most women met in their small groups in addition to the large group meetings specifically to plan this part of their Trek which contributed to a sense of belonging before their journey began. This is an important strategy in planning recreational activities for women - it needs to be relationship based, where the process is an important phase of the planning; this recognises women's emotional needs. Women were encouraged to take responsibility for themselves.

WomenTrek truly was a statewide event. This is reflected in the significant number of country participants and in the interest and support of the rural and countryfolk who held suffrage celebrations in their towns and local communities in conjunction with the WomenTrekkers passing through. Their tremendous country hospitality was very much appreciated. It ranged from supplying camping spots, afternoon teas and special functions, to digging pit toilets, assistance with vehicles and towing us out of boggy situations! The Burra weekend was advertised as a feature because the local community rallied in support and organised a combined evening meal, a speaker from the Penguin Club and tree planting along the Heysen Trail and in the Burra Showgrounds. Many participants have expressed an interest in visiting 'their' trees regularly to see how they're growing!

WomenTrek was so popular that we had to appoint more leaders in some sections and more 'legs' to accommodate for the vast increase in numbers. Countless women had to be turned away as their decision to join was late and the Trail 'leg' they wished to do was already more than full. Unfortunately, the horse 'n buggy option was cancelled due to low numbers which we also experienced on the designated toddler days. Women decided to bring their toddlers with them on other Trail 'legs' and prams on 'wheelchair friendly' sections instead.

The co-ordination of women coming and going was a major task that required outstanding communication skills and knowledge of the area and access routes. It required extraordinary management skills and clarity of purpose, keeping in mind the safety factors and equipment pool available. The excellent communication network developed between leaders, support drivers, visitors, trekkers, co-ordinators and S.E.S. was both critical and essential.

In general, women car pooled to the Trail but where numbers were high, we needed to hire buses which was kinder on the environment. The Department of Road Transport were generous in their support with petrol subsidies and flat hire rates for the use of their minibuses. The support drivers and participants coordinated the movement of vehicles out on the Trail. Whilst organising outdoor recreational experiences that require back up vehicle support is an essential part of women walking, this coordination is more difficult than only backpacking the Trail. However, backpacking was indeed a less popular option with women.

A new phrase emerged that served to express the odd and unsuspecting things that happened on WomenTrek, for example if the distances were wrong, the degree of difficulty expected was different or the campspot was not the designated one. "The WomenTrek factor" became a folklore along the Trail, as did the WomenTrek 'Junkies' who continued to return! Since the end of the event, many participants have expressed their loss as "the Post- WomenTrek Blues"!

#### \*The Journey's End

All trekking trails converged onto the Mt Lofty Botanic Garden on the last day of WomenTrek, October 9th, to celebrate our marvelous achievement. Over 400 women representing trekkers from Parachilna Gorge, Cape Jervis and Hahndorf (as well as a group from Waterfall Gully walking for the day) all arrived at the same time from different directions, with banners and tassels flying. They were accompanied by percussionists who made this a mighty and noisy homecoming. Women attending the "Women, Power and Politics" International Conference also walked the last 5 kms with us from Mt Lofty Summit.

Our speakers brought the Trek to a close: Cathy McMahon officially thanked everyone for their support and involvement; Senator Rosemary Crowley, now being a participant, was able to share the excitement of being involved; Rosemary Wanganeen spoke about reconciliation between the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal communities - WomenTrek acknowledged that we were on aboriginal land throughout the event. The Baton was handed back by the Patron, Deirdre Cowell, to the Organiser, Deb Nanschilid, who spoke of weaving the essences of WomenTrek back into our own lives. Consultant Margaret Hypatia completed the celebrations by leading one of the largest spiral dance ever held in the Southern Hemisphere, whilst in the centre of the spiral, the WomenTrek artefacts were woven together. The final celebration was a powerful experience.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

WomenTrek offered women and girls the opportunity to take part in a major event that encouraged their active participation in physical recreation in a unique and celebratory style. The event allowed participants to set and meet personal challenges and to feel empowered through being active and self sufficient. Rejuvenation of self was a positive outcome of this experience.

WomenTrek captured the spirit of imagination, adventure and celebration in us all. Participants have consistently expressed the extent to which WomenTrek has been a catalyst for their personal growth, empowerment and the development of a more healthy and active lifestyle for themselves. It provided women with a range of opportunities to access the outdoor environment and to be able to actively recreate in a safe and affirming way. In addition, WomenTrek enhanced the potential of every woman to realise her personal skills and gain confidence in handling herself in an outdoor environment.

WomenTrek was a phenomenal success. It surpassed all of our expectations, for organisers as well as participants and it brought our diverse community together to share in the celebrations of Women's Suffrage in South Australia. The event also promoted a statewide awareness of Women's Suffrage as the Trek passed through many country townships and traversed private and public land.

The support vehicles ensured that WomenTrek was an experience possible for every woman, regardless of age and ability. They carried the bulk of the gear and acted as a reassurance for women whose initial worries about distances, fitness level and carrying gear may have prevented their participation. It also enabled the group to be self contained and considerate in minimizing our environmental impact because we could carry water, firewood and rubbish as well as camp in low impact areas. Support Drivers learnt 4W driving and trailer backing skills as well as developing competency in all manner of support duties. WomenTrek presented the outdoor community with an opportunity to fulfill leadership qualifications through experience. In mixed company, women tend not to be given the responsibilities for leading. Leaders not only gained confidence in themselves and their leadership capacity, they enjoyed sharing their knowledge and expertise on WomenTrek.

The number of women for whom walking and/or camping was a new experience was surprisingly high. The vehicle back-up, the fact that we were an all-female group and that it was our Suffrage Centenary, contributed to this. The diversity of women that came together and shared so much of themselves and their lives has been a significant highlight. Women appreciated the challenges of being with others from different cultural backgrounds, of various ages, of different sexualities and with disabilities.

The feature walks conducted by Ann Prescott and Margaret Allen provided an additional aspect to WomenTrek and were well received. Ann's immense knowledge of fauna in the Adelaide Hills and Margaret's knowledge of the history of women walking, were important sources of information and inspiration.

WomenTrek gave an opportunity for the YWCA of Adelaide to raise their profile, not only in the women's community but in the community at large. Women now know that the YWCA is interested in recreation programmes for women and that it can be used as a resource and meeting venue.

Many women returned, signifying that WomenTrek was indeed a positive experience that suitably met the needs and interests of women for outdoor recreation.

WomenTrek has been recognised as a significant event in the Women's Suffrage Centenary year as it has already received a 'Certificate of Merit' from the Lord Mayor of Adelaide.

## PRECEDENCE

WomenTrek was organised by women, supported by women and led by women; there has not been an event like this before. Women like to recreate with friends and family in a non threatening environment and WomenTrek provided this. It offered: recreation between a half a day or nearly three months; trekking for women of all ages, fitness and abilities; an all women's adventure; assistance with carrying gear; a safe journey; a chance to connect with the bush; and an opportunity to create a network of women who want to recreate outdoors together. WomenTrek broke new ground in that it enabled and affirmed, in a public way, women being physically active in outdoor recreation. It gave women 'permission' and 'status' to be involved through linking with the Suffrage celebrations and this 'allowed' us to gain so much more.

Women with disabilities were actively encouraged to take part in a significant outdoor recreational event, alongside able-bodied women. Not only was WomenTrek available to women with disabilities, a big step, but there were choices about how, when and where they could be involved as well. To enable women with disabilities to have access to mobility in bushy areas, sometimes where wheelchairs are not appropriate, a hiking rickshaw was commissioned to be built. A team of women worked together to take women with disabilities into those areas. The rickshaw will be made available after WomenTrek to the general community through a new club for people with a disability being formed through the Walking Federation of S.A. Careworkers and participants worked as a team. WomenTrek actively profiled women with disabilities as being able to join in our Suffrage celebrations.

WomenTrek was filmed by several women under the coordination of a filmmaker, Jenny Sobey. This will be presented in 1995. There are very few films that positively present women being active in physical recreation and this film has potential to be used in this capacity. It also acts as an important archival record of this Centenary event.

## RESULTS

3032 WomenTrek days; that is, the number of women on a per day basis involved, indicates the huge success of this event and its mass appeal. It also indicates the high level at which staff were working to physically support participants and keep the event in momentum.

728 women & girls registered for WomenTrek and at least 15% returned after they had completed their time on the Trail initially and before we stopped taking more registrations. This included 8 interstate registrations and 2 overseas registrations.

21% of the registrations were from country areas of S.A. and this indicates the extent to which WomenTrek was truly a statewide event. Registrations were received from the Flerieu Peninsula, the Mid North, Eyre Peninsula, Far South East and Yorke Peninsula.

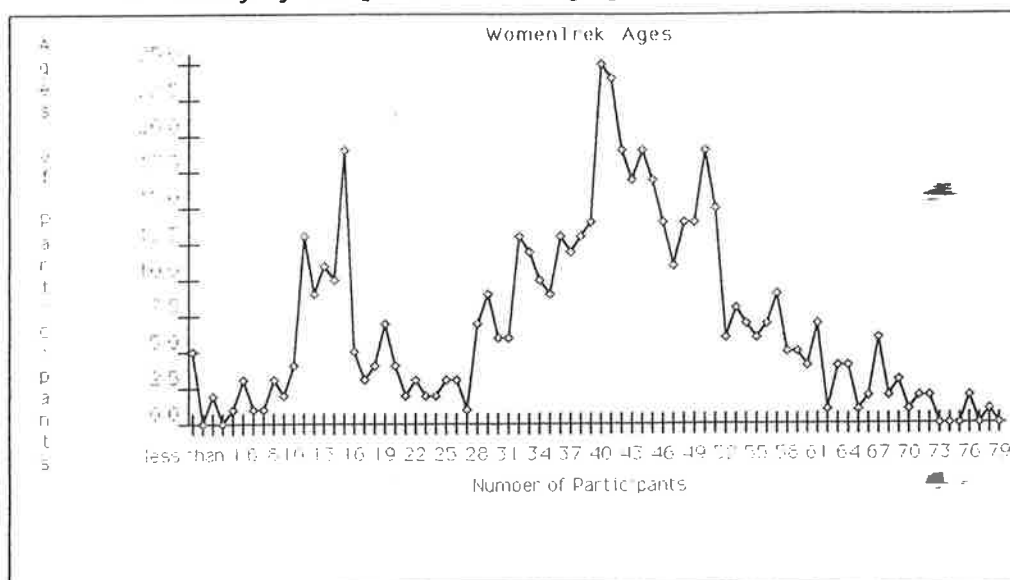
Over 1% of registrations were received from women who indicated they had a disability. Information about WomenTrek was sought from over twice as many women as those registered with a disability and given that the event set a precedence in this arena, we would expect a higher proportion to participate in future recreational events, particularly if the issues that prevented more involvement were able to be addressed.

11% of women participated in 2 or more sections and 2% in 3 or more sections. 4 women participated in all 4 sections, and 2 women did all of A, B and C sections, minus a couple of days; that is, the entire WomenTrek!

3.5 days is the average number of days trekked though 1.7 days is the mean number of days trekked [variance considered]. Therefore, over 50% of Trekkers did 1 to 2 days.

77% of women trekked with friends, relatives or work colleagues, indicating that women significantly prefer to engage in recreation with others. This figure is based on information known to registration staff and is likely to be higher. Relatives included sisters, partners, daughters, mothers, grandmothers, granddaughters, nieces, aunts, sisters-in-law and infants.

41 years was the mean age of participants, from 76% of known ages. The oldest participant was 80 years and the youngest 6 months. There were 18 participants under 10 years and 27 participants were 60 years and over. A significant deficit in age group representation was 20 to 29 years of age, where only 6% were involved. We were pleasantly surprised by the 10 to 19 year age group with 15% of registrations, as this is the typical age when girls drop out of physical activity. It would indicate that walking is seen as a desirable activity by this [in fact most] age groups.





24.1% of registrations were from women living in the southern suburbs, which includes the outer southern areas. The proportion of other Metropolitan areas represented were Western with 14.3%; Northern with 10.2%; Eastern with 7.8% and the Hills with 10.6%. Of particular note is the poor representation of women from the Outer North suburbs who represented only 2% of WomenTrek participants. WomenTrek attracted a predominantly middle class and well educated clientele, as noted by the long term trekkers and leaders and this could possibly explain these statistics. The YWCA operates an Outreach Service in the Elizabeth area and they organised and sponsored up to \$500 for a group to participate. The statistics would be markedly less for the Outer Northern area if they hadn't done so.

Walking was the most popular activity. The Camel Trek was so well received that we ran a second one during WomenTrek and the cycling group did one leg of 3 days from Wirrabara Forest to Spaulding, in time for the Spaulding C.W.A. afternoon tea!

1500kms of the marked Heysen Trail was covered on WomenTrek.

Over 400 women trekked to celebrate our Journey's End on the last day.

## CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

### Funding

The funding for WomenTrek was so late in being released that it created an extremely stressful working life for the organisers. Whilst the intention was to be working on a part-time basis, in truth we mostly worked more on a full-time basis. Requests for funding had been submitted at least six months before and according to timelines requested by such bodies. The short timeframe given was unjust. Nevertheless, we are glad to have had the opportunity for WomenTrek to happen but would *recommend funding bodies be considerate of the timing of future events with respect to acknowledging whether or not funding is granted.*

A large proportion of the participants have requested another WomenTrek and countless women have expressed their disappointment at not being able to be involved this year and would like the opportunity to do so in the future. Even ABC National television suggested the possibility of holding WomenTrek on a biennial basis! W.O.W., YWCA of Adelaide and Paddy Pallin are keen to support more WomenTreks, possibly S.P.A.R.C. as well, but funding for salaries in particular would need to be guaranteed from other sources. On behalf of the women of South Australia, *we highly recommend that WomenTrek be held again, in three years time (1997), with funding sought from respective Government bodies.*

We have concern with regard to funding for women's recreation in a number of areas. Whilst 'Womensport and Recreation' are funded regularly, there still appears to be a lack of opportunities for women who want to excel in the recreational sphere. Scholarships are awarded in the sporting field and given a high profile, yet the recreational field is not given due attention. *We recommend that the percentage of money allocated towards women's recreation be reviewed and made equitable with that of sporting organisations. We further recommend that recreational scholarships be made available on a similar basis to sports scholarships.*

There are a number of funded recreational bodies [those that reside in State Association House for example] which need to increase the level of involvement of women through the implementation of affirmative action strategies. *We recommend these organisations target women's participation and submit plans to do so with their annual*

*funding submissions, together with their report on the outcomes of previous year's success in this arena.*

### Sport versus Recreation

Sport is not a popular aspect of recreation for older women. We must recognise that women want recreational opportunities that will enhance their quality of life and meet their needs and interests. Our statistics confirm that older women do want to be physically active and that most women wish to do so with others. *We recommend that recreation for older women be a specific measure implemented by Recreation S.A. and other recreationally funded organisations.*

There is a genuine concern about awards received at annual sports and recreation functions which tend to be primarily of a sports focus and this does not honour the value that recreation has in many women's lives. For instance, the annual Womensport and Recreation Awards has regularly awarded achievements in sport and poorly represented recreation, yet it is funded by Recreation S.A. The problem lies in understanding and acknowledging what recreation is and the importance it has for women (and men); the judging criteria and the judges themselves need to be considered in this context and not merely representatives of the sponsors, who probably attach more importance on sporting performance as it has a higher status in the community and will therefore give their respective business more kudos. *We recommend that annual awards specifically in recreation be made.*

### Women with Disabilities

Toilet facilities, access to electricity and accommodation for women with disabilities were problems experienced along the Trail. This effectively reduced the number of women with disabilities who could join us. Cathy Nirta, our Consultant, was unable to locate accommodation for herself despite every effort to do so and therefore she could only participate on a daily basis and missed the overnight experience. Other women needed access to power and appropriate toilet facilities during the day and the lack of such facilities prevented their active involvement. *We recommend that accommodation possibilities be made available for people with disabilities along the Heysen Trail*, supported through appropriate government initiatives and funding resources. *We also recommend that bushy areas of the Trail be targeted* for this, not only where current wheelchair trails exist [such as Arbury Park which has good accommodation].

Just as affirmative action strategies have been implemented in several areas to actively increase the level of participation of women and girls in physical recreation, we need to convince women with disabilities that they can be actively involved as well. *We recommend similar strategies be implemented for women with disabilities so that they are not only encouraged to be involved but know they can do it.* Active role models and regular 'good' publicity about women with disabilities are some examples of useful and positive strategies.

*We further recommend that offroad wheelchairs be made with women in mind as the users.* The only chairs available in this context were inappropriate for women to use as the seating was not wide enough nor the actual technicalities easily managed. We suggest that they be converted to electric or with a hand rotor mechanism rather than having to lean forward or use 'hands on wheels' which is the current system.

## Leadership

It is interesting to note that only 4 out of the 58 leaders and 26 support drivers emerged from the Government funded Bushwalking Leadership S.A. body. We are concerned that the only S.A. organisation funded to train people in bushwalking leadership was unable to support WomenTrek in meeting the need for appropriate leaders. *We recommend that Bushwalking Leadership S.A. be accountable to the community it serves, via the Minister.* The statistics show that there are very few women graduates from this programme and in addition, the number of women who drop out of the course before graduating is alarming.

WomenTrek occurred without the influence of Bushwalking Leadership S.A. The course was not necessary to the existence and safe experience that WomenTrek was, nor does it meet the needs and interests of women for leadership in the outdoors. The skills displayed by the leaders from Bushwalking S.A. were inadequate in some areas, particularly in their capacity to handle the interpersonal relationships and group dynamics, so essential to successful, safe and enjoyable experiences for both women and men. This observation has been made on other occasions as well. Since relationships are the predominant factor in influencing women to participate in recreation and to feel safe in that experience, it is important to develop interpersonal and group dynamics skills in leaders and to lead with the participant at the centre of the experience, rather than the leader. This is currently not the case. *We recommend that a funded Outdoor Leadership Course be developed and implemented, separate from activity-based training programmes, but which acts as a prerequisite for them. We also recommend that the respective activity-based training courses be suitably structured to reflect women's lifestyles, interests and incomes and that a Recreation Council similar to the Tasmanian style be developed in S.A.* Activity-based courses include bushwalking, canoeing, horseriding, etc.

Leadership is about people management and training courses need to reflect this philosophy. Special attention to personal development and group management needs to be made as well as the consolidation of appropriate leadership styles and an awareness of where the participants are coming from. Too often a potential adventurous experience is squashed by an overemphasis on safety, or that the difference between an experience being a positive risk or a stressful one for each participant is not understood. These are essential leadership skills which were required on WomenTrek.

30 leaders were trained by Women Of the Wilderness and the rest were either known by the organisers or emerged from other organisations such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and the Guides Association. *We recommend that organisations such as these should be supported with access to funding for their training programmes.*

## Community

The Heysen Trail WomenTrek proved that such experiences are popular with the community and *we recommend future Treks be offered in a 'mixed' and 'women only' format*, the latter necessary to accommodate for the differing needs of women who prefer this option. Perhaps the 'mixed' experience could be conducted by agencies like 'Friends of the Heysen Trail' or the 'Walking Federation', with the expertise of the WomenTrek consultants, if desired.

Transport is a major consideration for events like WomenTrek and our concern for minimizing the impact on the environment leads us to recommend that a community bus be made available specifically for events and hired at a discount rate. We need to reduce the number of cars required, the subsequent 'parking' space they take, the pollution they cause and the safety factor for people travelling long distances.

*We recommend a bus transport sponsorship or subsidy be available* as it is necessary to also keep personal costs down and this assists with unique recreational activities being affordable to all echelons of the community.

Women are generally the lowest income earners and the group with the least disposable income. *We recommend that sponsorship be made on an ongoing basis to assist with conducting recreational programmes for women in the community that they can afford. If the costs associated with salaries can be significantly reduced through regular subsidies, then the cost to participants can be significantly reduced. We recommend that community organisations such as the YWCA have access to sponsorship to conduct recreational activities for women and girls.*

Owing to the fact that women are a disadvantaged group in recreational activities in particular and that they require 'special measures' to be encouraged to be involved, *we recommend that an exception to the Equal Opportunities Legislation be made to allow for women only recreational events.*

### Participants

WomenTrek awakened women's understanding of their potential and capacity to lead full and healthy lives and they want to do more. An increasing number of women are not only walking together everywhere, they are bolder and stronger and have the confidence that they can be physically active and enjoy it. Women want to do more WomenTreks and in response, Paddy Pallin have now planned trips in Nepal and Ladakh for 1995. More opportunities to be recreationally active need to be offered. *We recommend that a WomenTrek be held in every state to celebrate their respective Suffrage Centenaries.*

The northern metropolitan area needs 'special measures' implemented to not only increase the numbers of women engaging in recreation but to redress the imbalance caused by their respective socio-economic status and situation. Our statistics show that these women do not have equitable resources available to them. *We recommend that recreational programmes for women in the Northern area be targeted* so that these women have access to quality life enriching experiences and know that activities like WomenTrek are suitable for them.

### Education

There exists a need for affirmative strategies to continue in schools. Using the results from the secondary school's Trek '94 as an example, there was a predominant number of boys who participated and only few numbers of girls. In mixed schools, the ratio was an average of 7:3 and only one girls school participated whereas several boys' schools were involved. *We recommend that schools implement positive measures to encourage girls to participate in recreational activities, particularly through offering all-girls groupings in curriculum areas such as Outdoor Education and Physical Education.*

In general, women don't have access to quality gear that will hold up in a storm nor have an understanding about how to use it correctly. Sleeping bags are a good example. Some organisations like Paddy Pallin have a good hire pool of gear at a reasonable price but there still exists a lack of knowledge and consequently a lack of confidence to access it.

WomenTrek certainly played an educational role in this. *We recommend that a community educational programme be offered, where an awareness about the outdoors and required equipment and clothing can be taught, perhaps through the Federation of Walking Clubs or the Workers Education Association.*

### Heysen Trail

The Heysen Trail itself received a high profile as an accessible walking Trail for the public to use and we would expect use of the Trail to increase in demand as a result of WomenTrek. The Trail is generally in good condition though certain sections are poorly marked due to vandalism and works in progress. We congratulate Recreation S.A. for this innovative and essential public walkway and we appreciate the efforts required to maintain it and keep landowners on side. *We recommend that the Heysen Trail and other Trails continue to be developed and maintained for our future generations to enjoy. In addition, we recommend that funding for recreational programmes for the community be increased.*

Accommodation along the Trail was researched by leaders and found to be generally good. Youth Hostels were well placed and when the weather was poor, we were usually able to find a dry campspot on private property or head into a caravan park. The Wilmington Tourist Park is to be avoided, however. We experienced a dreadful time from the owner there which resulted in an assault charge laid against him. It appears that this situation is common because the local women belatedly warned us about staying there.

### Maps

Some of the maps are out of date in that the Trail has been re-routed or dirt tracks are now bitumen roads, with increased housing development. Usually this was not a problem except that the sections marked for wheelchairs were on the old maps, which Deb knew, but it is not the current situation. Consequently, wheelchairs were lifted with women in them over stiles and fences, rather than leisurely wheeling along flat dirt and bitumen roads as planned. *We recommend that maps be dated when printed and regularly updated.*

### First Aid Kits

We have found commercial first-aid kits over the years to be lacking in essential items and this was the case on WomenTrek. Of particular note are products used by women - tampons and sanitary pads - and blister repair kits. For severe cuts, even basic grazes and foreign bodies, our large first-aid kit lacked medical supplies to attend to the problem. Our home-made varieties proved much more adequate and complete. *We recommend that commercial first-aid kits be reviewed.*



THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

Department of Women's Studies
The Undercroft, Ground Floor Napier Building

STUDY OF THE DIVERSITY OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF WILDERNESS

Research undertaken by Deb Nanschild as part of her study for the degree of Master of Arts in Women's Studies at the University of Adelaide.

I (print your name)....., have been provided with a description of the aims and purposes of this research. I agree to participate in the following way/s(tick which apply)

- An individual interview.
A group interview.
By providing my individual journal for the study.

I understand that the interviews will be tape recorded and that all information that I provide will remain completely confidential. My name, and any identifying information, will not be connected with the tape and will not be included in the report of the study.

I am aware that my participation is completely voluntary and that:
I am free to withdraw from the research at any time and that I do not have to give reasons or justification for doing so.
I can withdraw any of the information that I provide anytime during the information gathering process of the study.
I am under no obligation to divulge information or to discuss issues if I do not wish to do so.

I understand that Deb Nanschild will provide me with information about the results of the research if I so desire.

Please indicate below whether would like information regarding the findings of the study.

- Yes - I do wish to receive information about the results of the study
No - I do not wish to receive information about the results of the study

(If you answered YES please provide a postal address)

.....Street.
.....Suburb/Town.....Postcode
.....Phone Number

Signed (Participant).....

Signed (Interviewer).....Date.....



**THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE**

Department of Women's Studies  
The Undercroft, Ground Floor Napier Building

15 September 1994

Dear

I am currently researching the perceptions and experiences of women in a wilderness setting as part of my Master's Degree in Women's Studies. This research examines what women want in recreational experiences and Women Trek provides an opportunity to discuss this in an all women environment, and to reflect on the possibilities for recreation that we see for ourselves.

This study intends to explore, on an individual and group basis, the effects of a shared wilderness experience for a self-selected group of women. I therefore intend to document women's perceptions and experiences of Women Trek, and how it has impacted upon their lives.

Research conducted specifically on women's experiences of leisure, recreation and wilderness is scant, particularly in Australia. Women's lifestyles differ from those of men but this is rarely acknowledged in the leisure studies field. This study will also provide, therefore, a critical analysis of male-centred approach to leisure.

I would like to record your experiences as participants in the Women Trek event. If you would like to participate in the research you can do so in a number of ways. I would like to interview some women individually and also hold a group discussion. I would also like to include reflections from the group journals and people's individual journals if they are happy for me to do so. If you agree to be interviewed either individually or in the group these discussions will be tape recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed. Personal journals will be examined where people are happy to share them with me.

I have enclosed a consent form for you to sign if you wish to be part of the project. If you do elect to participate you need to know that there is no financial remuneration and that you are involved willingly and with no coercion. I assure complete confidentiality in all aspects of the project.

You can contact me by phone on 340 2422 at any time if you wish to discuss the project further and your involvement in it. Thanks for your interest and response. I look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely

Deb Nanschild  
B.Ed.Dip.T.(Sec), Grad.Dip.Women's Studies

NATALIE

Natalie was 32 years of age and studying for her PHD in Science. She originally booked for the first ten days of WomenTrek and expected to walk solo at times along the peaks of the Flinders Ranges. She prepared her food and herself separately from the group. Her experience and knowledge of the wilderness was extensive and she was confident in this environment. The women only setting was not new to Natalie but she preferred mixed company on her many walking adventures.

Natalie was so affected by the women only wilderness experience, she postponed her PHD to be more fully involved as both a participant and a leader. Her expertise in walking, camping and the wilderness environment was greatly admired by other women. Instead of a solo experience, Natalie shared food and carried infants, enjoyed the company of women, and never wanted to walk separately from the group. Her leadership and interpersonal skills evolved. She also developed an intimate relationship. She commuted between the trek and the city frequently during the three month event, trying to balance her work commitments with her passion for the women only wilderness experience.

ANNE

Anne was 27 years of age and a support driver in the Flinders Ranges area. Her work as a field naturalist in a community based organisation was becoming less satisfying and she needed time away to contemplate her future. She chose her holidays to coincide with WomenTrek, which promised to combine her interests of being in the wilderness with being in the company of a close friend. She had knowledge of her surroundings and was confident of the outdoors experience, although the women only setting was new to her.



Anne decided to participate in the research after her wilderness experience because of the profound effect this experience had on her. She witnessed her friend's growth in confidence and feelings of empowerment through operating in the women only setting and she expressed amazement with acknowledging she could do anything. She would have liked to rejoin the trek had circumstances allowed.

Anne was recently married and had moved to a country town where her partner worked. This required Anne to regularly commute to work. As a result of the wilderness experience, Anne decided to apply for a new job and live where her work would be. Her relocation was important to her personal and professional development. She decided to seek professional guidance to resolve the implications this would have on her marriage. She was confident she and her partner would work it out.

#### JENNY

Jenny was one of the long term walkers in WomenTrek. At 57 years of age, she decided to take her long service leave and participate in the entire event. She had several reasons for doing this. Apart from feeling she needed a 'kickstart into old age' because she had neglected herself physically, she needed an opportunity to grieve the loss of her eldest son who had been recently killed in a car accident in the Flinders Ranges. WomenTrek provided Jenny with the personal pilgrimage she craved, particularly in the wilderness region of the Flinders. She told her partner of her intentions only two weeks before leaving; she felt he too needed the space in which to grieve.

Jenny radically changed through her wilderness experience and thereafter. In the beginning, she found the women only setting, the trekking experience and camping all new and difficult to adjust to. She had walked with her children before but had not trekked extensively; she had a previous experience of mixed groups and her expectations were therefore distorted. She felt lost and a little bewildered, awoke with puffed eyes, and often

missed the campfire gatherings.

It wasn't until after the first section of the Flinders Ranges was completed (two weeks) that Jenny began to join in the group more, to notice her location on the map, to enjoy her routine, and to begin to heal. As the journey progressed, she showed other women new to the experience how to erect tents and use lightweight stoves. She occasionally returned to the city for short bursts of time.

Jenny was interviewed whilst on the trek; she wore her head torch (a new acquisition on the journey) the entire time and was comfortable speaking of her personal pain openly with others. By the journey's end, she had walked over a thousand kilometres, lost over two stone in weight, and had become a vibrant member of the group. Her attitude towards others and towards herself, had changed. She relished the diversity of women she met and has since walked on many occasions with women only.

#### DONNA

Donna was 39 years of age at the time she participated on WomenTrek. She joined the group for a week in a southern section of the Flinders Ranges and returned during the final week of the event. In the meantime, she had encouraged her 11 year old daughter to participate on a three day section unaccompanied by herself. Donna was confident of the outdoors and experienced in cooking over a fire and in bush navigation. She particularly wanted a wilderness experience that would combine her love of the outdoors with her sense of community. The women only setting was entirely new to Donna as she has mostly walked and camped with men in previous outdoor experiences.

It was the women only experience that had a major impact on Donna. She found that the presence of other women affirmed her and she gained further insight into herself as a woman. She discovered her inner wilderness by allowing herself to be open to the

wilderness experience in a deeply personal way. Donna valued the opportunity to feel connected to the environment and to experience being in the moment. The wilderness experience enabled her to make difficult decisions about her personal and professional life, which she hadn't expected. Donna was nonchalantly cooking dinner over an open fire in the outdoors at the time of the interview.

## DEBBIE

At the time WomenTrek was advertised, Debbie was unemployed and initially assisted organisers in preparing for the event. She was 29 years of age and decided to leave her 10 year old son with relatives to participate on two months of the journey. Before departing to join the southern Flinders Ranges section, she succeeded in obtaining a new job but decided to take unpaid leave to fulfill her ambition. The wilderness environment and the women only setting were new experiences for Debbie.

Initially, Debbie pondered her reasons for participating. She didn't know anyone, apart from the organisers, and felt fearful of strangers. She was suddenly faced with completely new experiences and had no control over any of it! In addition, she suffered badly from blisters in the beginning, which contributed to her overall discomfort. It took Debbie at least two weeks to begin to find her place; that is, her place inside herself and her place in the group. It took another two weeks for Debbie to trust others, and in so doing, she discovered and made many deep and longlasting friendships. The women only setting allowed her to be herself, in whatever way she needed to be, and it allowed her to see others more clearly.

Debbie became known as one of the long term trekkers, occasionally taking a weekend out to join her family nearby, who had travelled to her location. Their support enabled her to continue her journey and contributed towards her capacity to transfer her experiences from the women only wilderness setting into her domestic world.

## ALISON

Alison turned 41 years of age during her WomenTrek experience. Like Donna, she originally booked for a weekend in the southern Flinders Ranges because she was a full-time worker with a six year old daughter. This was the furthest section she could go on a weekend with her family; her partner also worked full-time. She didn't see any advertising of the event but had heard about it from other women and knew she wanted to be involved. Her family had just returned from three months trekking in the Himalayas.

The weekend experience proved to be the beginning for Alison. She decided to return for a smaller group experience and then became intoxicated with it and wanted more. The combination of walking with women and the wilderness setting were comfortable experiences for Alison, which were extended on WomenTrek. She returned as often as she could, with and without her daughter and her partner, on many occasions. Despite being fully employed, Alison managed to walk over 200 kms of the trek. Walking over much of the state of South Australia as a community of women were wonderful highlights of the experience for Alison.

## HEATHER

Heather was 42 years of age and lived in a small country town. She first read about WomenTrek in the newspaper and immediately decided to join the most remote section of the event in the northern Flinders Ranges. She was comfortable with the wilderness environment of the Flinders as it was one of her most favourite areas. She was joined by her sister-in-law on this section and the women only setting was a completely new experience for both of them.

A spiritual connection with the wilderness environment was most important for Heather. She appreciated the opportunity for solitude and personal space that the wilderness

provided. In addition, she enjoyed the caring and compassion of the women only setting, which initially surprised her. She learnt about the effects of social conditioning and about her own self imposed beliefs, and valued this insight. She marvelled at, and thoroughly enjoyed, the interaction of such diverse and loving women and the chance to walk the Heysen Trail.

Heather returned for the last week of WomenTrek with her 16 year old daughter and daughter's friend, also 16 years of age. Her life and that of her female relations, as a letter from her later exclaimed, have been enriched through the women only wilderness experience.

#### MARGARET

Margaret turned 46 years of age on her first section of WomenTrek in the northern Flinders Ranges. She originally booked for a southern Flinders section with her two daughters and mother, on which she was the leader. Since Margaret had assisted with organising the event, she knew that a vacancy had occurred in the popular first section only days before it began. She jumped at the chance to go. As a mother of three children, all of whom had to be instantly coordinated for her week away, she recognised this opportunity for a wilderness experience in a women only setting as special and unique. She was not disappointed.

As it turned out, Margaret returned on numerous occasions to the women only wilderness experience. Her experience and contribution was valued by other women, which was reciprocated. Margaret found spiritual renewal in the wilderness environment and a greater sense of herself as a woman of action and power. She felt herself and her reality validated and affirmed, and more clearly understood the effects of social conditioning through the women only experience. She gained meaningful insight into herself.

Margaret participated as an individual woman, a leader, a mother, a daughter, a friend and a colleague. She relished being part of the diverse community of women, with no gender expectations, and gained respect and understanding for lesbian women in particular. She noted the companionship and friendship of women as a phenomena of her experience.

### DENISE

Denise was 27 years of age and one of the international participants. She was travelling around Australia when she first heard of WomenTrek and consequently had only one week to prepare for her three month involvement. She was familiar with a wilderness environment, although not an Australian setting, and was experienced in walking and camping. She also preferred the women only context and perceived the event as a wonderful opportunity to see a part of Australia and to meet people.

Denise became a long term trekker and had only a couple of short breaks from the event. She had walked nearly a thousand kilometres. Denise discovered her emotional limitations with the huge numbers of women involved and the frequency of women coming and leaving. Her friendships with other women were dependent on the length of time of their involvement and several deep and lasting connections were made. Denise developed an intimate relationship whilst on WomenTrek, which contributed towards demystification of lesbianism that other women experienced.

APPENDIX G: Question headings that guided the interviews.

I initially set the scene with an introduction about the research, how the interview would proceed, an assurance of confidentiality with the right to 'pass' any questions, and the interview being open and flexible to include anything they might like to discuss.

- What were your initial perceptions/ expectations of WomenTrek?
- How did this differ from your actual experience?
- Did you have any personal goals, dreams or ambitions about this experience?
- What do you regard as your achievements?
- Any comments on the environment you've trekked through?
- What is your perception of 'wilderness'?
- How did you find the women only setting?
- It appears that relationships were part of the experience. Would you comment on that?
- Was there a spiritual aspect of the experience for you?
- How did you find the communication models of leaders?
- Were there any barriers to your participation/experience?
- Were there any aspects of the experience that challenged you in particular?
- What were the psychological benefits for you of the wilderness experience?
- What about the physical activity component?
- What was the phenomena of WomenTrek/the wilderness experience for you  
(if there was one)?
- Any other comments?

Appendix H: Sample interview with Heather that analysed an individual response to the guided research question: 'What is the effect on women of being in a women only group?'

women's culture

no hierarchy

it never occurred to me what the other women would be like, what their backgrounds were, what sort of women would be there, what we'd eat...

good with women only because it allowed me to hang back a little, admire some part of the scenery, work out what it was, point it out to someone else

there was no feeling of being pressured: 'where were you, what were you doing' - everyone had stopped along the way

role models

two women in particular who were role models for me, gave me the inspiration to continue, to be doing what they're doing at their age, to have the dedication

found we had capable women leaders

physical and emotional safety

no bitchiness

the group together were so warm, caring and sharing and this came as a shock to me because there are so few opportunities in my countrytown community to be different, to be something you couldn't or wouldn't be

to be walking in that atmosphere was much more pleasureable and enjoyable than I had expected

the interaction was good - made me be different

her discovery of being able to show affection openly towards women and that there was nothing wrong with it. Came to accept in herself this form of expression and the permission to do so was there on WomenTrek - rarely practised this in her home life, especially with people she didn't know and who weren't part of her family

personal power

you didn't have to be or do anything, you were still left to do your own thing

I was there for the scenery and the walking

good because I was able to meet my personal needs, not to trek flat out but to enjoy the experience in my own time and at my own pace

if I felt like a brisk walk in solitude, I did so; if I felt like a quiet walk with the group, I did so; that was excellent

lesbianism demystified

I thought there'd be some lesbians there but I really didn't know

there often aren't many experiences where women hugged each other openly and where you met and mingled with lesbians

significant change to my values: feel less inhibited about hugging somebody and this struck me. Obviously if I was exposed to it enough I would become much more uninhibited.

This is a sad factor about our conditioning - displays of emotion are frowned upon could see that female/female was a caring relationship

it was a good experience for me to find I wasn't with a bunch of radical feminists or necessarily with women who all lived with each other as if it was a male/female relationship

some of our inhibitions were just brushed away - took 5 days - they're not even inhibitions that we want; inbred into society. I'm very affectionate with my family but not with people I don't know and this has been my learning.



APPENDIX J: Sample of collective analysis of women's response to the guided research question: "What is the effect on women of being in a women only setting?".

CATEGORIES [T = Themes]

Women's perceptions of women [T: diversity]

WomenTrek brought down barriers between women N  
I gained a much broader perspective on who women are A I  
there's been a real acceptance of women being as they are Do  
it never occurred to me what the other women would be like, what their backgrounds were,  
what sort of women would be there, what we'd eat... H  
I hadn't thought about the fact there was going to be all these interesting women there, what  
it would mean N  
I literally had no picture of where everybody else, the vast majority of others, were coming  
from A I  
I didn't know how they got there A I  
I didn't predict there would be such a variety of women A I  
lesbian & heterosexual & young & old & city & country - an enormous variety. I loved it. It  
was wonderful. A I  
it's been absolutely amazing! A I  
the response and diversity of women has been absolutely tremendous J , N  
there was so much diversity out there An  
bringing together women with such diverse backgrounds, from walks of life I never knew  
existed, whom I wouldn't have ever had occasion to meet. It's allowed us to share each  
others experiences, it's tremendous in fact J  
there was certainly a real mixture in the time we were up there An  
we had people who just came up for the day and we had local women walking with us An  
being out there and spending time with such a vast group of people An  
real diversity An  
a drawback was that it was women only M  
I never dreamed there'd be so many women! J  
I had imagined it would be much smaller A I  
there was a lot of strong women Den  
it wouldn't have been the same if I had gone out there on my own, wouldn't have been as  
much fun - all of us in swags around the campfire. I remember that part, it was good.  
An  
you get good feedback from the women J  
it was a group of women that I wouldn't normally be attracted Den  
especially in that first 10 days where we had a remarkably diverse group Den  
it's been an experience of mixing with groups of women I wouldn't normally like Do  
really diverse group of women and many who I've had different responses to Do  
somewhere in the back of my mind was the thought "these are all women", probably radical  
feminists H

Role models [T: identity]

two women in particular who were role models for me, gave me the inspiration to continue,  
to be doing what they're doing at their age, to have the dedication H  
one of the long termers left before the trek finished - she had no real sense of how special  
she'd been to WomenTrek N  
found we had capable women leaders H  
I think the experience for my daughter has given her a whole lot of different role models;  
help offset the effects of peer group pressure Do

a whole host of different sort of women to have as examples of what women can be may prove  
in time to be very empowering Do  
you learn from other women J  
the diversity of the women - they're examples of where women have been achieving over  
these past years [empowering for other women to witness] J  
women have done all these careers in the world J  
great variety of role models, especially in terms of their different careers J  
even us older women who already have careers - doesn't mean you can't go on and do  
something else J  
regret there weren't more girls and younger women on the trek who could experience this  
diversity and role modelling of what women can do J  
some women's image of themselves, their perceptions of themselves, is strengthened  
through meeting other women who can do anything J  
I didn't think we as women had achieved all that much, even though it's the Suffrage  
centenary, but that concept was totally flattened through meeting such diverse women  
who prove through their own lives that women can do anything - and they do! I've now  
met them! J  
it's exposed to me to all sorts of wonderful women, all sorts of role models De  
good for younger women De  
I'm just gaining so much from these role models, to connect with women full of life & love &  
warmth De  
sharing of personal stories M  
women learning from each other and having access to experiences that women very different  
from yourself have M  
normally you can't get access to these women's experiences in mainstream society M  
seeing all the different people and hearing bits of their lives and different things they were  
doing and stuff An  
watching people that I knew come out with different agendas and people who had just come  
out having lost their job and others who had given up their work, put their job on the  
line to be there or to be spending more time there An  
it made me realise there were more important things than slogging along and putting up  
with things the way they were An  
it made me act on that for myself and to do something An  
these role models gave me the courage to follow through An  
it reinforced me to make changes in my life An  
I listened to other people and their experiences An  
how women had changed their lives or lived their lives An  
I really admire those women walking the whole thing for three months An

Relationships are strengthened [T: trust]

you're encouraged to be truly the person you are M  
you're not misunderstood, put down or ignored M  
it's validating and affirming M  
meaningful interaction between women M  
phenomena that we strongly connect from walking together M  
women like being together N  
love of sharing N  
I think a lot of women on that first section were really there to connect with women Den  
that made it special Den  
women communicate really well with each other A I  
the most amazing thing was talking to the women on the radio An  
women care a lot about other people, particularly other women A I  
relationship based rather than outcome based N  
to be in groups, to be together, to nurture each other De  
the common experience of the physical hardship at times, and of the wonderful times,  
created special bonds between women; living together A I

Appendix K: Summary of categories and central themes identified.

What does wilderness experience mean for women?

CATEGORIES

- Definition of wilderness [T: construct]
- Flinders Ranges as a wilderness setting [T:merging of self with setting]  
(Flinders Ranges landscape as devastation - rival hypothesis)
- Defining wilderness experience [T: merging of self with setting]
- Spiritual connections (with wilderness setting) [T:spiritual]
- Handover ceremonies [T:spiritual]
- Artifacts [T:spiritual]

THEMES

- The Flinders Ranges is perceived as a wilderness setting by women entering it.
- A merging of the wilderness setting with personal feelings and experiences occurs for women whilst in the wilderness.
- Women experience a spiritual connectedness with the wilderness setting. This connectedness impacts on how receptive and open women are to listening to themselves and to their intuition. Those women who are open and receptive are those most likely to manifest change in themselves and in the things they do.

What motivates women to experience the wilderness and what expectations do they hold?

## CATEGORIES

- Time for self [T: desire for personal growth]
- Space [T: desire for personal growth]
- Safe and supportive [T: personal growth]
- Physical and emotional appeal [T: innate appeal]
- Walking as the activity [T: innate appeal]
- Opportunity to combine interests [T: appeal]
- Be in the bush/wilderness setting [T: environment]
- Change of environment - from personal, work, domestic [T: environment]
- With others [T: relationship based]
- Special event/experience [T: appeal]

## THEMES

- Women desire personal growth and want space and time for self.
- All the support enabled women to focus on their own issue/enjoyment/experience of the bush/wilderness. Therefore, women had space and time for personal growth.
- Wilderness had innate appeal to women at a physical, emotional and psychological level.
- Some instinctual awareness that the bush/wilderness was a place where self could regenerate.
- The physical environment/ setting will influence women's decisions to be involved.
- Women look for a change of environment and routine.
- Women are more likely to choose to experience an activity if it is relationship based.

How do wilderness experiences affect the way women think and feel about themselves?

## CLUSTERS

## CATEGORIES

- Physical responses

- overcoming self defined limits and physical barriers
- pushing limits and changing image of self and ability
- increased self esteem, confidence and belief in self
- value a sense of well being

- Emotional responses

- personal growth and feeling good about self
- realisation of own limitations with investment in emotional energy
- value of staying connected with self and the experience
- value of connections with others

- Psychological responses

- provided space to reconnect with self and instincts
- realisation of value of being in the present
- parallel between open mind and listening to self, with open space
- heightened other senses and feelings
- more receptive and open; space to open mind for change
- open to self, therefore open to others, and therefore open to change perceptions
- self analysis - reconnection with self still possible
- realisation of self as woman under patriarchal influence

- Translating experiences to the world sphere

- #In relation to domestic life:

- opening up to change
  - taking experiences from wilderness to home and world

### #In relation to work life:

- want to remain open to self (from wilderness experience) and retain personal values
- continue to be intuitive when in the work world
- openness to self in wilderness ∞ greater ability to open to other people and ways of working/being in the world

### #Long-term effects / future experiences:

- realisation of value of experience to self and way of being/seeing the world

## THEMES

- Personal growth and an overall sense of well being are benefits of a wilderness experience for women.
- Wilderness experiences affect women's concept of self. Women analyse and identify self determining factors through such experience.
- Women change their image of self and their perceived ability as a result of a wilderness experience.
- Women realise that boundaries are self imposed as a result of our socialisation and that, in reality, women can do and be anything they want. The mind becomes open to possibilities for themselves.
- Women experience a reconnection with the self in the wilderness setting and value being in the present moment.
- Women experience an openness to self and self instincts when in the wilderness. They experience an openness to change.
- Women develop a greater ability to be open to other people and ways of working and being in the world as a result of being open to self in the wilderness setting.

- There is a translation of experiences, lessons and personal growth from the wilderness setting to the domestic/work/world sphere. This enables lasting change to take place within women's lives.

What connections do women make between themselves and the wilderness environment?

#### CATEGORIES

- Response to environment [T: awareness and appreciation of wilderness and self]
- Connect with sense of inner self [T: inner wilderness]
- Cathartic experience [T: therapeutic]
- Rejuvenation of self [T: therapeutic]
- Appreciation of the environment (bush/wilderness)  
[T: awareness, appreciation and reverence for environment parallels with self]
- Influence of work connections [T: seeing self as part of the whole ecosystem]
- Historical connections [T: seeing self as part of the whole life cycle]

#### THEMES

- Wilderness experiences enable women to access their inner wilderness, to get in touch with their inner selves.
- Increased awareness, appreciation and reverence of the wilderness environment is translated to an increased awareness, appreciation and reverence of the self.
- Being in a wilderness environment has a cathartic and therapeutic effect upon women. Whilst there, they experience healing, rejuvenation, and transformation of the self.
- Women see themselves as part of the whole ecosystem and life cycle. The environment and concept of self are interconnected.

What is the effect on women of being in a women only group?

## CATEGORIES

- Women's perceptions of women [T: diversity]
- Role models [T: identity]
- Physical and emotional safety [T: safety]
- Relationships are strengthened [T: trust]
- Lesbianism demystified [T: trust and safety]
- Meeting own needs [T: confidence]
- Changing awareness and perception of male influence [T: trust]
- Parallel 'indigenous' village bonding [T: community]

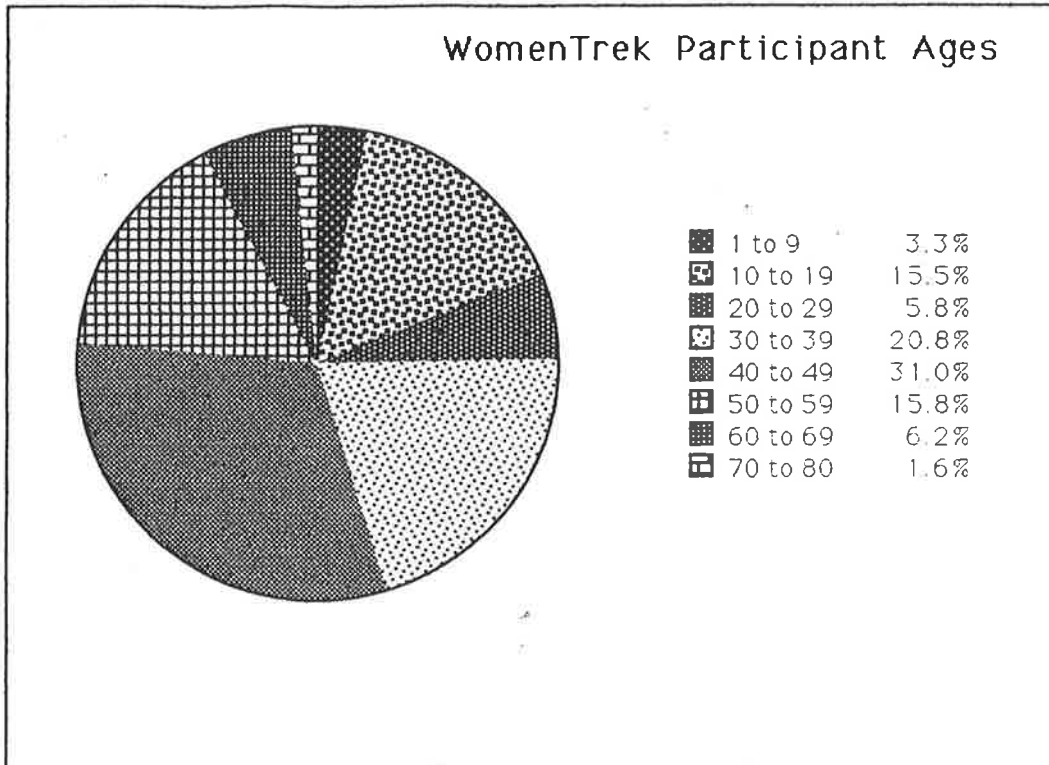
## THEMES

- The variety and diversity of women greatly influenced women's perceptions of other women and of themselves.
- Women's sense of self grows when identify with other women role models.
- Women feel physically and emotionally safe in being with other women.
- There is a trust of other women and the women only setting.
- Relationships between women were strengthened.
- Women's confidence is raised in a women only setting. This confidence is transfered out into the world.
- Women are empowered through experiencing a paradigm shift in gender power relations.
- A sense of community that we've lost in our culture is identified and enthusiastically embraced. This strengthens women's sense of belonging to a wider support network.



Appendix M:

Breakdown of ages of women who participated overall in WomenTrek.



SOURCE: WomenTrek Report, Appendix C, p.12.