

A Discourse Analysis of Post-World War Two  
Outdoor Education Practice in New Zealand.

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# Table of Contents

<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Attestation of Authorship.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Intellectual Property Rights.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Theoretical Overview .....	10
Methodology: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis.....	11
Research Design .....	12
Methods .....	12
Sampling .....	13
Data Collection .....	13
Data Analysis.....	14
Rigour .....	14
A Note about Terminology .....	16
<b>Chapter 2. A Brief History .....</b>	<b>18</b>
1950's.....	18
1960's.....	19
1970's.....	20
1980's.....	22
1990's.....	24
2000's.....	27
<b>Chapter 3. Event: 1953 Mt Egmont / Taranaki .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Preamble .....	29
The First Incident.....	31
Reaction from The NZ Herald to the First Incident.....	32
The Discourse of Experience and Judgement (1) .....	32
The Second Incident.....	33
Reaction from The NZ Herald to the Second Incident.....	34
The Discourse of Rules (1) .....	34
The Discourse of Education.....	36
The Discourse of Responsibilities of the Leader (1) .....	36
Other Media.....	39
The Discourse of Experience and Judgement (2) .....	41
The Discourse of Rules (2) .....	41
The Discourse of Responsibilities of the Leader (2) .....	41
Questions .....	42
Pre-conditions for Reaction.....	44
The lure of the outdoors – 1920's to 1950's .....	44
Tramping.....	44
The Discourse of the Outdoors as Antidote to Modern Life .....	46
The Discourse of Progress (1) .....	46
Mountaineering.....	47
The Discourse of Clubs.....	47
The Discourse of 'Give-it a Nudge' .....	47
The Discourse of Progress (2) .....	48
The Discourse of Nationalism .....	48

Social and Economic Climate .....	49
Media Role .....	50
Hillary .....	50
The Discourse of the Hero .....	51
<b>Interpretation .....</b>	<b>53</b>
Language and Society .....	53
The Influence of Hillary: Glory for those with Courage .....	53
Concurrent and Competing Discourses .....	55
The Discourse of Experience and Judgement (3) .....	56
The Paradox of 'Give it a Nudge' .....	57
The Paradox of a 'Margin of Safety' .....	58
Hillary's Path .....	58
The Comments of Bryant and Syme .....	60
<b>What the 1953 Event Represents .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Chapter 4. Event: 2008 Mangatepopo Stream Gorge .....</b>	<b>63</b>
Preamble .....	63
The Event .....	65
<b>Reaction: The NZ Herald, 2008 .....</b>	<b>67</b>
The Discourse of the Extraordinary Event .....	67
The Discourse of the Value of the Outdoors .....	69
The Discourse of Blame (1) .....	70
<b>The New Zealand Herald, 2009.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>The New Zealand Herald, 2010.....</b>	<b>73</b>
The Discourse of Systems.....	73
The Discourse of Culture.....	75
Discourses in Tension.....	76
<b>Other Media: Sunday Star-Times, The Dominion Post .....</b>	<b>79</b>
Historic Reports .....	79
Discourse of Blame (2).....	80
<b>The Coroner's Report.....</b>	<b>83</b>
The OutdoorsMark Safety Audit .....	83
The Language of Experience .....	85
Davidson's Stance.....	87
<b>Other Media: The Mountain Safety Council Media Release .....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Questions .....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Pre-conditions for Reaction.....</b>	<b>93</b>
What the Literature Tells Us: The Discourse of Risk.....	93
Changes in Education .....	95
Changes in Society.....	96
<b>Interpretation .....</b>	<b>98</b>
Blind Trust .....	99
The Recommendations of the Coroner .....	101
Five Other Outdoor Accidents: Mt Tasman, 2003 .....	103
Buller River, 2002.....	104
Shotover River, 1994 .....	105
Anakiwa, 1993 .....	106
Mt Ruapehu, 1990.....	107
Five Accidents, Four Themes .....	110
A Duty to Critically Examine Itself.....	111
<b>Chapter 5. What the Interviews Reveal.....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Themes Emerging from the Interviews.....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>The Practice of the Past .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>The Paperwork of the Past.....</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>The Practice and Paperwork of the Present .....</b>	<b>134</b>

<b>The Impact of Change .....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>The Point of Change – The Rupture From The Past.....</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>Chapter 6. The Invisible Hand in the New Zealand Outdoors: Neo-liberalism, Language and Foucault .....</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>Influence of Neo-liberalism in the NZ Outdoors.....</b>	<b>165</b>
Preconditions for 1984: a Brief History.....	165
Neo –Liberalism and the 1984 Government.....	167
<b>Implications for Education.....</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>Implications for Outdoor / Adventure Education.....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Language.....</b>	<b>176</b>
The Language of Experience and Judgement.....	176
The Language of Audit and Efficiency.....	178
<b>A Foucauldian Perspective.....</b>	<b>182</b>
Archaeology and Genealogy,.....	182
Savoir and Connaissance .....	183
Discontinuity.....	185
Power and Knowledge.....	187
A Brief Note About Risk Management .....	188
<b>Relations of Power / Knowledge in Current Practice .....</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>The First Power / Knowledge Relationship: ‘Governing Bodies’ and ‘Practitioners’.....</b>	<b>190</b>
The Paperwork / Compliance Clue.....	190
‘Governing Bodies’ and ‘Practitioners’ .....	191
Self-Regulation .....	193
<b>The Second Power / Knowledge Relationship: Competition between Organisations that Govern .....</b>	<b>194</b>
The Change in Stance of NZOIA .....	195
Produced and Repressive Effects: Systematic Increase in Suspicion.....	198
Difficulty of Disagreeing .....	198
Courses.....	199
Diminishing Abilities.....	200
<b>The Third Power / Knowledge Relationship: The Dominant Discourses of Outdoor Pursuits and Risk Management.....</b>	<b>201</b>
Produced and Repressive Effects: Fear .....	201
Paperwork Compliance.....	202
Marginalisation .....	203
Power / Knowledge Relationships in the Literature .....	204
<b>The Invisible Hand.....</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>Chapter 7. Summary .....</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>Implications .....</b>	<b>206</b>
The Comments of Ranger Smith .....	207
<b>Epilogue.....</b>	<b>211</b>
OPC Internal Inquiry Report.....	211
NZOIA Articles .....	213
<b>Future Research .....</b>	<b>215</b>
Diagram 1: Schematic of Discourse Analysis .....	216
<b>References.....</b>	<b>217</b>

## List of Figures

Diagram 1: Schematic of Discourse Analysis .....	216
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## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Ray Hollingsworth

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## **Intellectual Property Rights**

The author asserts any intellectual property rights emanating from the future publication of this material.

## Abstract

The focus of this study is to understand current outdoor education practice in New Zealand, using the methodology of Foucauldian discourse analysis. The French philosopher Michel Foucault reasoned that what appears ‘normal’ in society, is actually generated by ‘normalising practices’ (Zink and Burrows, 2006). He developed ways of looking at the world and at history, that help reveal these ‘normalising practices’. Several of these ways were useful in the analysis of this research, especially the concept of discontinuity, and the relationship between knowledge and power.

Data was collected by examining two historically separate tragedies (called Events in the research), in 1953 and 2008. The discourses emerging from the two Events confirmed there had been a change in ‘normal’ practice, from an ‘apprenticeship’ style of training, with little paperwork, to a ‘systems’ approach with a focus on audit trails. Interviews with six outdoor educators confirmed that the shifting discourse reflected related shifts in practice. These educators had very long lengths of service that enabled them to reflect on any historical changes. The interviews confirmed that the practice of the past emphasised experience, judgement and mentoring and the practice of the present is dominated by paperwork relating primarily to risk management. The interviews provided the clue as to when the practice changed – the era from the mid 1980’s to early 1990’s. An examination of the wider literature of that time revealed the discontinuity – the thing or event that pushed knowledge in a different direction. In this particular case, that discontinuity was the election of a government that pursued a neo-liberal economic ideology.

Current practice therefore has its roots in the ideology of neo-liberalism. This ideology has become hegemonic – invisibly dominant. Its tenets of market forces, managerialism, and Principal-Agency theory can be seen in the language, the paperwork, the use of contractors, the existence of pre-employment courses, the skill sets and experience levels of new practitioners, and the compartmentalisation of knowledge.

Foucauldian discourse analysis of the data also revealed three invisible, yet dominant, power / knowledge relationships in current practice. In the first power /knowledge



relationship, '*Governing Bodies and Practitioners*', *Governing Bodies* encompass *Edifices*, like the law, and *Organisations that Govern*, like NZOIA. They act upon *Practitioners*, like outdoor instructors, by using various tactics to coerce compliance and self-regulation.

The second power / knowledge relationship is '*Competition between Organisations that Govern*'. In this relationship, the competition results in a systematic increase in suspicion and a diminishing ability to make choices. The third power / knowledge relationship is '*The Dominant Discourses of Outdoor Pursuits and Risk Management*'. In this relationship, the dominance of outdoor pursuits and risk management leads to a suppression of other ways of using the outdoors as an educational medium.

Thus outdoor education in New Zealand, post-World War Two, has experienced two different models of practice – the old 'apprenticeship' model and the new 'systems' approach. This study suggests what is needed in the future is a blending of the old model and the new: less emphasis on systems and therefore less paperwork; more emphasis on the amount of experience and the quality of those experiences needed in order for practitioners (especially new practitioners) to make quality judgements in the field.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

The deaths of six school children and their teacher in the Mangatepopo Gorge in 2008, while undertaking an outdoor programme at The Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre of New Zealand (OPC), highlighted a paradox in the current thinking about outdoor education practice in New Zealand: that adventurous outdoor activities must be, and can be, safe. The literature of outdoor education, both the academic and the popular, hints at a change that has taken place in New Zealand, in the way outdoor activities are approached and in the perception of the value of those activities.

I have worked in the outdoor education profession since the mid 1980's, including stints at OPC, Tihoi Venture School and AUT University. Along the way I have gathered a number of qualifications, including New Zealand Outdoor Instructor Association (NZOIA) awards in kayaking, rock climbing and bushcraft. From these experiences, I am aware that risk management procedures in the New Zealand outdoors, have been championed by Grant Davidson, the Chief Executive Officer of OPC in 2008, and widely accepted and adopted as best practice (see for example, Williams, 2002; Davidson, 2004,). These procedures, for example the Risk Analysis Management System (RAMS), have been largely exercises on paper and their actual value has been the source of debate (for example Hogan, 2002). OPC has long been considered a standard bearer of best practice in the outdoor industry. Yet the tragedy still happened and the questions of how and why it happened are fertile ground for exploration and of benefit to the outdoor education profession. Such questions may also be of interest to those who ponder the evolving identity of New Zealand society.

The aims of the study were to identify the dominant themes in outdoor education in New Zealand since World War Two, and to identify how those themes have helped shaped the current practice. Data was collected by reviewing the discourse around two historically separate tragedies, and by conducting qualitative, semi-structured interviews, with six outdoor educators. These educators each had at least twenty years of experience in New Zealand outdoor education, in order to be able to reflect on the historical changes in practice. The data was analysed using a discourse analysis methodology.

The word ‘discourse’ encompasses language and text, symbolism, working attitudes, bodies of knowledge, and practice. Discourse analysis enables the examination of complex relationships within a discipline or practice. It facilitates the acknowledgement of power within those relationships and is seen to promote insight and understanding of human behaviour in a specific time and context.

## **Theoretical Overview**

Outdoor education sits within the philosophical approach of experiential education, whereby ‘a learner constructs knowledge, skill and value from direct experience’ (The Association for Experiential Education, 1991, cited in Ives & Obenchain, 2006).

Outdoor education has two often inter-related subsets: adventure education, which focuses on interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal growth, often through the medium of adventurous outdoor pursuits; and environmental education which focuses on issues of sustainability and connectedness (Priest & Gass, 1997).

In research literature, there are a small number of epistemologies or paradigms that can be shaped into numerous theoretical perspectives, which in turn influence the choice of methodology and the methods used for research. Crotty (1998) manages to simplify the number of epistemological positions into objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism. Lincoln and Guba (2000) posit five overarching research ‘paradigms’ rather than epistemologies: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory et al, constructivism, and participatory. Grant and Giddings (2002) suggest four paradigms in a framework that clusters different research methodologies: positivist, interpretivist, radical, and post-structural.

Furthermore, each of these paradigms contains philosophical assumptions about what we know to be ‘truth’, and about the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the thing being researched. Assumptions are “the set of beliefs shared by a group, that causes the group to think and act in certain ways” (Hammond, 1998, pp 13-15); they are statements or rules that are not (often) verbalised or visible, that also explain the context of the group’s choices. For this research study, it is the poststructuralist paradigm of Grant & Giddings (2002) that enables the invisible rules and the context of the formation of these rules, to be made visible.

Poststructuralism ‘rests on an assumption that no-one can stand outside the traditions and discourses of their time’ (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p.20). We are influenced historically, politically, culturally and often unconsciously. Poststructural investigations take into account complex, inter-relating power relationships. Discourse analysis, and especially the discourse analysis approach of Michel Foucault, is a methodology that sits comfortably within this paradigm.

## **Methodology: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

Foucauldian discourse analysis is underpinned by the inter-related threads of discourse, power and knowledge. Discourse in this paradigm, is the use of language, spoken and written - as well as other forms of communication like photographic images or film - that structure the reality of the individual. However discourse also encompasses ideas, ideologies, symbolism, working attitudes and courses of action (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). Discourse therefore, is closer to bodies of knowledge or disciplines (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

Power refers to “the network of relations that exist between people... rather than to a property someone has more, or less, or none of” (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p.21) and the relationship between power and the historical production of what is ‘truth’ (McHoul & Grace, 1993). It is ‘exercised by people acting on the actions of others’ (Foucault as cited in Grant & Giddings, 2002, p.21). Discourse analysis enables the examination of complex power relationships; what is the dominant discourse mainly serves the interests of the dominant social group (Grant & Giddings, 2002).

Discourse analysis facilitates an examination of taken-for-granted ‘truths’, or practice, or knowledge, in order to reveal the underlying formation of that ‘truth’ or practice or knowledge. A path will be able to be traced from relevant points in history (what Foucault calls genealogy) to illuminate how those ‘truths’ or practices or bodies of knowledge have become what they are. These relevant points may not always be connected yet they mutually reinforce the discourse. The effects of the discourse can then be examined to question how the ‘truths’ or practices or bodies of knowledge, might have been different (Galvin, 2002). Discourse analysis illuminates aspects of

practice and experiences that may not be made apparent with other research methods. It provides an opportunity for identifying oppressive practices and facilitating more enabling ones (Crowe, 2005).

The focus of this study is to attempt a better understanding of current outdoor education practice in New Zealand, using the methodology of Foucauldian discourse analysis.

## **Research Design**

In discourse analysis the participants are not subjects of research but rather subjects of discourses (Grant & Giddings, 2002). The aim of the research is to uncover the influences on the current practice, through an examination and interpretation of the discourse around both current practice and historical practice.

## **Methods**

A range of discourses, such as those of risk, adventure, and value to society, have influenced the practice of outdoor education. One way of exploring the effect of these on the practice of outdoor education is to explore the texts that are central to outdoor education, and the discourses that inform those texts.

For the purposes of this study, the time frame of interest is post-World War Two. Data was collected using the following procedures:

1. A review of the research literature relating to outdoor education in New Zealand, specifically looking for dominant themes influencing practice.
2. A review of the wider literature relating to adventure sports and adventure education, in New Zealand and internationally.
3. A review of media commentary and coverage of two high profile New Zealand outdoor tragedies (called Events in the research).
4. Semi-structured qualitative interviews with very experienced adults, who have been involved in outdoor instruction or outdoor education in New Zealand.

## **Sampling**

In qualitative research, purposive sampling allows for maximising the opportunity to learn from a small sample size. This is different from representativeness; while balance and variety in a sample size are important, it is the opportunity or ‘potential for learning’ that is more important (Stake, 2005, p.451).

The focus of this study is the practice of outdoor education in New Zealand, both current and historical. Thus a purposive sample will yield participants that are involved in outdoor education and who have had a long association with the profession. Six participants were recruited, and given the time frame and the emergent design of discourse analysis, it was felt that this was enough. Inclusion criteria was that the participants had at least twenty years of experience of outdoor education in New Zealand, in order to be able to reflect on the changes in the profession that have occurred, especially since the 1980’s.

## **Data Collection**

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with most participants, and via email questioning with another two. The interviews were semi-structured in order to allow the participant to talk freely about their experiences of outdoor education in New Zealand. This allowed them to reflect upon any perceived temporal change in practice. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

In addition, while data could be collected through a review of a range of texts, including newspapers, industry newsletters and journals, magazines, books, ‘pictures, poems, procedures, conversations, case notes, art work or articles’ (Cheek, 2000, p.40), it was primarily collected via analysis of newspapers, in order to identify the discourses within New Zealand outdoor education, and the public discourses that relate to the study area.

### **Data Analysis**

In discourse analysis, the stories and the literature surrounding a topic become part of the discourse about that topic. Therefore, firstly, a detailed reading of both literary and interview texts was necessary in order to make sense of the phenomenon under study. However, Allen & Hardin (2001) suggest that discourse analysis is not focused on the validity of these narratives or text in the usual sense; instead the second part of the analysis required interpreting these things in order to explore how individuals are influenced by the social, political, cultural and historical contexts that created them. What was being looked for was the unspoken assumptions within the texts, that shaped the form of the text in the first place (Cheek, 2000).

Thus the research seeks to identify and document the taken-for-granted aspects of current practice in New Zealand outdoor education. It seeks to identify, via the discourse around two tragedies in two different eras, the historic forces that shaped current practice. It seeks to reveal and analyse the power / knowledge relationships within the discourse of the practice, both current and historic. Lastly, it considers the intended and unintended consequences of the discourse of the current practice.

The data was collected and analysed from late 2009 through to mid 2010. During the writing phase of this research, several things occurred that necessitated an Epilogue being included.

### **Rigour**

Guba & Lincoln (2000) suggest there are two forms of rigour in qualitative research: There is rigour in the application of method, and there is rigour in interpretation. The first form hinges on concepts like trustworthiness, honesty, and integrity of the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee. In addition, the method must be congruent with the methodology and the research paradigm from which it springs.

The second form relates to the context and the audience: is there sufficient data and description to support the findings? Are the links between the discourse and the interpretations, plausible? Beyond this, does the community give its consent in ascribing importance to this interpretation and for the way it is framed and bound?

Arsenault & Anderson (1998) noted that the rigour of qualitative research in education comes from three things. Firstly, keeping meticulous records, an audit trail of communications, field notes, transcripts and reflective thinking. Secondly, the links and conclusions between the data and analysis as it unfolds, are recorded. Thirdly, the researcher declares any personal bias that may impact on their role, and they make known any theoretical or conceptual stance on which the study is based. Powers (2001) suggests that there are overlaps between discourse analysis and other methods of historical analysis, but that the difference is the focus on power, and “the lack of focus on theory, events, and the deeds of great people” (p.63).

Thus rigour encompasses a transparency of process, an authenticity of action in the process, an authenticity in the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee, and a willingness to subject the process and the findings to a wider community.

Rigour in this study was achieved by the following things: In the interview process by a willingness to share the context of my own interests, and a willingness to allow the participants to tell their story via semi-structured interviews, what Elliot (2005) calls ‘empowering the subjects of the research’ (p.135). In the data collection phase, there was an audit trail - sufficient data (texts) and description to enable the identification of discourse. In the analysis of the data, the links between the discourse and the interpretation were plausible. Lastly, the findings must be offered to the New Zealand outdoor education community in some manner, for comment.



### **A Note about Terminology**

A definition of outdoor education resides in the previously described ‘Theoretical Overview’. Outdoor pursuits are ‘a human-powered form of outdoor recreation’, being low-impact activities conducted in an outdoor setting (eg rock climbing, walking, sailing, caving etc) (Priest and Gass, 1997).

Hill (2010, p30) points out that outdoor education in New Zealand is a ‘contested notion’. For this study, wherever mindfully possible, the terms “outdoor education”, or “outdoor /adventure education” will be used interchangeably. “Outdoor /adventure education” encompasses: the teaching of outdoor pursuits within an educational setting (eg within schools or tertiary institutions); those programmes or practitioners that undertake ‘personal or interpersonal development through skill focused outdoor pursuit activities’ (Ibid, p31); and variants on this whereby there is a teaching /learning context in a (primarily) non-urban outdoor setting (eg flax weaving to promote connectedness, while in the bush on an outdoor leadership programme).

In addition, ‘practitioners’ in this study, encompasses outdoor instructors, guides, and teachers of outdoor / adventure education. Students on outdoor courses would technically be ‘trainees’ or ‘trainee practitioners’ but might also be referred to as ‘students’ or ‘clients’. People who guide outdoor pursuits for a recreational rather than educational focus, whether paid or unpaid, would also be termed ‘practitioners’ as they embody the ‘practice’ of the time. ‘Practitioners’, then, has an element of a teacher /student or authority / client relationship. In this study, people undertaking their own outdoor recreational experiences, are not ‘practitioners’, though they probably embody the ‘practice’ of the time. Technically they are just outdoor recreationists or outdoor enthusiasts.

The ‘practice’ is everything around and embodied in that activity, emanating from the practitioner. For example, the 1953 Event contained practitioners (Alpine Club members guiding a recreational mountaineering experience for clients) whose practice involved a programme, staffing ratios, experience and skill levels of staff, and the training they had received. In addition, the judgement calls the practitioner makes about weather and environmental conditions tells us something about the practice, as

does the utterances of any governing bodies that oversee the practice, e.g. the Alpine Club.

All other terminology is explained at an appropriate juncture within the study.

By way of contrast, and to further illuminate the history, a brief chronological description of key events in the New Zealand outdoors, post-World War Two, is also offered.

## Chapter 2. A Brief History

A brief history of the development of outdoor / adventure education practice in New Zealand may be useful in terms of a wider context. In NZ, nature study had been part of the syllabus in primary schools since 1904 and throughout the decades prior to WW2, teachers were encouraged by school inspectors to take pupils outdoors (Lynch, 1998). While school camps and school 'nature study' had become more common, the change that appears to have taken place by the end of the 1940's was in the approach to leadership within the primary sector.

### 1950's

Beeby (1992) suggests that the Department of Education struggled to provide much more than buildings and staff to a rapidly expanding school population. The hands-off approach allowed schools a freedom to explore ideas to meet the vision of an 'equality of opportunity' espoused by Prime Minister Fraser. The Department encouraged schools to provide good citizens; by the mid 1950s with school rolls nationwide growing, schools were called upon to prepare pupils in three layers for economic imperatives – for a university education, for a vocation, for more humble trades.

Interestingly, Beeby, who was the Director of Education, in his memoir of the time, makes no mention anywhere of outdoor activities in schools. But this freedom within disciplines and the desire to have a worthy curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils, probably provided the catalyst for outdoor education experiences to happen regularly in schools. Rather than teachers being 'encouraged' by external school inspectors and by reports, for the first time the emphasis was placed on equipping the teachers with the skills to run and develop their own programmes: Camping was introduced to the Diploma of Physical Education at Otago University in 1949, and 'Nature Study Specialist Training' began at Christchurch Teachers College in 1950 (Stothart, 1993). Port Waikato School Camp, established by the South Auckland Education Board in 1956, became the first permanent school campsite, and a 'showpiece' for others to emulate (Mahoney, 1971).

Throughout the 1950's and into the next decades, specialist teachers in physical education and nature study provided leadership in outdoor education (Stothart, 1993). Mostly, however, the training received by teachers was aimed at using outdoor subjects within the primary school curriculum. It was common practice for pupils to leave school in their early to mid teens and seek employment and this would not change until the economic instability of the early 1970's. It would be the mid 1970's before the first course for secondary school teacher trainees would be developed, that specialized in outdoor education (McConnell, B, 2006, personal communication).

In post-war Britain, an increase in the number of people undertaking outdoor adventures (attributed to the influence of Outward Bound), resulted in poorly-led groups having accidents and requiring rescues. This in turn caused the British government by the end of the 1950's, to step in and organise leadership training for the outdoors (Priest & Gass, 1997).

As such, it marked the beginning of a prescribed paper chase approach to outdoor leadership that would influence British outdoor leaders for generations to come, and the end of a more casual approach to leadership. This shift would be felt in NZ three decades later, initially by people resisting it, and finally by adopting aspects of it.

### **1960's**

New Zealand's landscape provided the setting and the sense of wonder, but it was the more social dimensions that attracted schools – both primary and secondary - and Education Boards into establishing school camps. The reasons cited for having students go to school camps included an improved relationship between pupils and between staff and pupils, better health and fitness, and a better appreciation of the environment. (McConnell, B. 2006, personal communication).

By the 1960's, field trips were well established in most schools and many extensive tours were regularly undertaken (Lynch, 1998a).

School camps had been accepted in educational circles and some schools set these up as permanent fixtures with resident teachers. Numbers attending school camps had grown from a few hundred at most throughout the 1950s, to thousands each year; in

1968 alone, some 7000 pupils are said to have attended camps. (Stothart, 1993). Lonsdale Park in Northland, Kaitawa in Hawkes Bay, Camp Benson on Kawau Island, Rotoiti Lodge in Nelson and others were all established through the 1960s and on into the next decade (Mahoney, 1971). Teachers who had loads of enthusiasm but little or no formal training, however, were running the majority of these school camps.

Two institutions that were to become venerable over time were launched: Outward Bound and the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council. Outward Bound was established in 1962 at Anakiwa, and offered leadership training in the outdoors, initially for young men only. The £100 000 set-up cost was funded by groups and individuals, and this support continues today.

The New Zealand Mountain Safety Council (MSC), was established in 1966 by representatives from government and recreational organisations, “in response to a growing concern over an increasing number of accidents in the bush and mountains” (Mountain Safety Council, 2006). Funded by the government, the MSC was important as it provided low-cost training in outdoor skills for the general public. Skilled volunteers conducted this training. MSC also had input into relevant legislation and conducted research about the outdoors.

Both of these organisations offered employment opportunities in the outdoors, albeit of a more limited nature, that differed from the pathway offered by the teaching profession.

### **1970's**

The decade was notable for the move to education camps based at centres. By 1972, the number of school pupils involved in outdoor education was large, though records are not clear to the exact figures - between 26000 (Stothart, 1993) and 73000 (Chapman-Taylor cited in Lynch, 2002). Graeme Dingle opened the Outdoor Pursuits Centre of NZ (OPC) in 1973 to introduce people to the great outdoors and to gain a love and respect for it, and schools were his target market. OPC provided a counterpoint to Outward Bound's 'sink or swim' personal development philosophy.

Lou Fisher, an Auckland businessman, donated the sailing vessel ‘Spirit of Adventure’ to the youth of NZ in 1974. Outward Bound opened its courses up to women for the first time in 1973, and Scouts followed suit in 1976.

The National Committee on Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) was established by the Education Department in 1975 (Moodie, 1998) and described by Joe Hughes, the South Auckland Regional Inspector of Physical Education as

...a turning point in the philosophy of outdoor education in NZ... it became a broad term which affected every subject area in the school (Ibid, p71).

EOTC was curriculum-based learning that reached beyond the walls of the classroom and sought to promote, amongst other things, a greater understanding of cultures, perspectives on the environment, and student well-being “through uplifting experiences in [a] natural environment” (Ministry of Education, 2006)

However, research by the Christchurch College of Education, found there were lots of outdoor education activities happening in schools but very little training of the teachers. In response to this, in 1976, through the same institution, Bert McConnell set up the first teacher training programme specifically aimed at outdoor education for secondary school teachers (McConnell, 2006, personal communication). Outdoor education was favored by the Johnson Report of 1977, which recommended that the Department of Education establish outdoor education as an area of high priority for curriculum development. It went on to recommend the “appointment of outdoor education advisors and the establishment of a fund to support camp values” (Stothart, 2002). Not everything in the report was actioned, but it demonstrated the regard in which outdoor education was held.

The Outdoor Training Advisory Board (OTAB ) was established in 1977, further evidence that the concept of outdoor education had been accepted with enthusiasm at the highest levels. OTAB was a government organisation which had been set up to develop a framework for coordinating leader training, advise existing school programmes, make recommendations on standards, and to secure the right people to run the courses (Priest & Gass, 1997).

Nationally, there was a movement by schools away from their own camps and towards using outdoor centres. Tony Hart and St Pauls Collegiate went against this trend by opening Tihoi Venture School in 1978, which impelled its 14 year old boys into a six month 'coming of age' residential wilderness experience (Hollingsworth, 1999). Lynch (1998a) suggests the national trend may have been precipitated by the rising cost of transportation. Another possibility is that outdoor centres were providing something more special than school camps – enthusiasm, freshness, and a slightly higher level of technical competence in outdoor pursuits.

Joe Hughes summed up the early courses at OPC when saying

...there was something about the instructors at that time – the way they related to other people, their whole philosophy, their enthusiasm. And when I saw the faces of kids who were down there, it was so special (Moodie, 1998).

Instructional standards may have been ill-defined but as long as the bush wasn't being damaged, as long as students were having fun in the outdoors and coming back safely, that was all right. In the next decade this spirit would change dramatically.

### **1980's**

Within the tumult of social change, brought about by ideologically driven economic reforms after 1984, outdoor leaders, through the establishment of NZOIA, defined a competency pathway in outdoor instruction, established a sense of professionalism, and strove to create a more sustainable future (see for example, Davidson, 2006).

OTAB funding was cut in 1983, but at the same time the government began issuing policy statements on Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC), and had funded a national conference on outdoor education in 1982. This sent a mixed message to those in the field. 1983 also saw Stu Allan depart for the USA on a Churchill Fellowship. Allan had taken over from Dingle at OPC, and his return provided new ideas on safety, environmental ethics and outdoor leadership training. OPC's Outdoor Educators Course, established in 1984 to 'train the trainers', together with its shorter 'Skills for

Outdoor Leaders' course, helped disseminate these ideas. These courses included many teachers among their graduates.

The NZ Outdoor Instructor's Association (NZOIA) was formed in 1987 by people working within the outdoor industry, partially in response to the death of a student on an outdoors course. NZOIA was initially driven by Grant Davidson in the desire to overcome the disconnected approach to operating in the outdoors where everyone was doing their own thing. It was driven also by the desire to set standards for instructors before the government tried to impose rules, as they had done with a whitewater rafting industry perceived as 'cowboys' (McLauchlan, 1995; Moodie, 1998; Davidson, 2006). Seasoned outdoor instructors like Mick Hopkinson, Ray Button, John Davidson and Jo Straker were influential in setting the benchmark standards of this association, and in promoting a continual quest for excellence in technical skills in outdoor leaders (Davidson, 2006).

Together with Alpine Guides at Mt Cook, OPC and NZOIA were to the forefront in developing a more professional approach in working in the outdoors in New Zealand, with qualification schemes, training courses and an approach that encouraged aspirants to stay in the budding profession and make a living from it. Not all outdoor practitioners embraced the drive for professionalism with its inherent focus on technical skills and assessment, but there was no doubting that the concept was here to stay.

In 1987, the Labour Government created two organisations that would further influence outdoor education in NZ, but in very different ways: The Hillary Commission, and The Department of Conservation (DOC). The Hillary Commission for Sport, Fitness and Leisure was set up to develop sport, physical activity, and more healthy lifestyles. While outdoor education had a very small voice within the organisation, its Chief Executive, Peter Dale, had once taught at Rotoiti Lodge and the Hillary Commission would provide funding and a voice for outdoor education at the highest levels, for the decades to come.

The independent government departments – the Wildlife Service, Lands and Surveys, NZ Forest Service et al - that controlled the national wild places became the



Department of Conservation (DOC) in 1987. With this step, NZ at last had an agency focused on conservation of natural heritage, though some mourned the “sad loss of the excellent relationship between the NZ Forest Service and Outdoor Educators and the loss of multi-use concept in parks” (Dale, 1992). The ‘Burn it, Bash it and Bury it’ ethos of dealing with rubbish in wild places, transmogrified thanks to the globe trotting of adventurers, and the Bushcraft publications of the Mountain Safety Council, into ‘leave no trace’. However, this concept still allowed for the unsightly rubbish pits often found behind huts (Abbott & Mullins, 1983).

Enough companies and outdoor centres had been established - including Whenua Iti, Arapaepae, and the Hamilton Skills Centre - to make outdoor instructing feasible as a career choice.

### **1990’s**

Upon reflection, it appears that the 1990’s, for outdoor leaders, were all about control. Controlling the amount of people recreating in the outdoors; controlling the quality of training the outdoor leaders were receiving; controlling the types of activities undertaken so as to minimize risk – to the individual and to the organisation. The desire for control was developed both within the outdoor industry by professional organisations like NZOIA and the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council (MSC), and in response to external pressure from government funded organizations, and legislation.

The Hillary Commission, for example, evolved into Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC) at the end of the decade, changing more than just its name by more clearly delineating where it allocated its funding. However, bigger changes had happened earlier in the decade:

Of possibly greater significance than [OTAB or NZOIA] was the introduction... of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 1990... [this] was crucial to the further development of accreditation, signaling the first government driven assessment and contributing yet another layer of audit to the industry (Chisholm and Shaw, 2004).

Legislation would prove to have a major influence in this decade: changes to existing law or the introduction of new law, effected the areas of Health and Safety in the Workplace, employment contracts, industry training, and Accident Compensation Insurance. For the first time it was possible to be sued for negligence: Outward Bound defended such a claim for the death of a student in 1993 (Brett, 1994), while a rafting company was prosecuted for recklessness in the death of a tourist in 1994 (McLauchlan, 1995). Having adventures safely became an oxymoronic approach to teaching in the outdoors.

The expectations of participants and practitioners alike moved towards having controlled adventures instead of barely controlled ones. Fear was the shadow lurking behind every programme. In NZ, mirroring what was happening internationally, there was a drive to verify the authenticity and safety of the outdoor instructors and outdoor programmes, especially after the death of six Army cadets during a mountaineering training exercise on Mt Ruapehu in 1990, and again when a viewing platform collapsed at Cave Creek in 1995, killing 14, all but one being students on a polytechnic outdoor recreation course.

In a way that has yet to be defined, Cave Creek will be the end of an era for DOC. Over the period 1987-1995 the department, like other Crown agencies, shaped itself to Treasury's model of lean and mean. But DOC finally became not just lean and mean, but fatally dangerous (Chapple, 1995, p24).

Possibly because outdoor programmes saw their own practice reflected back at them through these tragedies, safety standards, procedures and policies were instigated or overhauled, and training manuals expanded to fill every conceivable possibility; qualifications became as important as experience.

From a single course in 'how to be an outdoor instructor' (the OPC Outdoor Educator's Course) in 1984, by 1991 there were at least 45 providers offering outdoor courses (Stothart, 1993), and 26 tertiary level courses by 2000. Government had played a major part in this, with the establishment of the NQF and the Sport, Fitness and Recreation Industry Training Organisation (SFRITO) in 1992, which gave monetary

encouragement to businesses to sign up their employees to undertake unit-standard based qualifications.

A plethora of publications aided the flow of information and conformity. The MSC produced 'Managing Risks in Outdoor Activities (Haddock, 1993) and incorporated Davidson's Risk Analysis and Management System (RAMS), which became an industry standard for identifying and managing risk within any activity.

The Ministry of Education published 'EOTC Curriculum Guidelines for Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Early Childhood Centres' (1992), 'EOTC Guidelines for Good Practice' (1995) and 'The Health and Safety Code of Practice for State Primary, Composite and Secondary Schools (1998). Devlin, Corbett and Peebles reviewed the research and produced 'Outdoor Recreation in NZ' (1995). Books celebrating the educational aspects of OPC (Moodie, 1998) and Tihoi Venture School (Hollingsworth, 1999) were juxtaposed against those celebrating the adventurous outdoor climate of New Zealand.

Significantly, outdoor education was not compulsory in schools until the Health and Physical Education curriculum came into effect in 1999 (Lynch, 2002). There also exists some confusion over participation rates and the accuracy of the data collected in outdoor education programmes in schools (Lynch, 1998a and 2002). Several studies suggested a downward trend in participation. A Sport and Recreation NZ (SPARC) survey at the end of the decade suggested a "significant decline" in participation rates of 9 to 17 year olds, in sport and active leisure (SPARC, 2003).

Why such a trend existed was not determined. It may have reflected a growing loss of opportunity within the school system - the sense that outdoor education was in the 'too hard' basket for most schools. That the logistics, cost of transportation, the need for specialized training of teachers, the cost of hiring people with the right outdoor skills, together with justifying the practice to a parent population focused on employment and exam results – all of this made some schools either pull out or ease back on their commitment to running outdoor education programmes. Conversely, it may have reflected the range of leisure or recreation opportunities that were available in and outside of schools.

In the face of this, Graham Dingle and Jo-anne Wilkinson launched Project K in 1996, a programme aimed at using the outdoors as one means of building self-esteem and giving life direction to high school-aged young people. Outdoors New Zealand (ONZ) was established in 1997, to act as a lobbyist and an umbrella organisation for the disparate groups within the outdoors, and to foster collaboration and partnership. In addition, two of their key priorities are:

Encouraging high quality standards and best practices, and advocating strongly for increased funding and programme support (Outdoors New Zealand, 2010).

By the end of the next decade, ONZ would not only provide an annual national conference, but would strengthen its role in lobbying government on behalf of the New Zealand outdoor industry, and in turn become a vehicle for disseminating government dictates to the outdoor industry.

## **2000's**

The drowning of a student on a polytechnic white water kayak course in 2002 resulted in the Maritime Safety Authority (MSA) being critical of the trip's leadership, and the police investigating laying charges of criminal nuisance against the instructors. The investigation took two and a half years and was finally dropped after expert opinion was sought from overseas. This illustrated the difficulties of an activity (kayaking) falling under the jurisdiction of a government organisation (The Maritime Safety Authority):

A chronic problem with the MSA is that they have jurisdiction over white water kayaking, yet they have no knowledge of the subject, and often refuse to seek any. (Ward-Holmes, 2004, p8)

Furthermore it provided an illustration of the two paradoxes that exist in outdoor instruction: one of which is that to instruct in a risky environment you expose your students to risk; and secondly, if the students are going on to have their own adventures or to become outdoor instructors where they must make their own decisions, how much risk is it desirable to remove?

The Foundation for Youth Development, an umbrella organisation driven by Graeme Dingle and Jo-anne Wilkinson, to run programmes to maximize potential for adolescents and primary-aged school children, was established in 2004.

SFRITO morphed into Skills Active Aotearoa in 2008, and was part of a long-debated tripartite discussion, along with MSC and NZOIA, attempting to merge three nationally recognised qualifications pathways into one. In the wake of the Mangatepopo Event, Grant Davidson – one of the founders of the NZOIA qualifications pathway – left OPC and became Chief Executive of Skills Active.

## Chapter 3. Event: 1953 Mt Egmont / Taranaki

### Preamble

Mt. Egmont / Taranaki is a conical volcano on the western edge of the North Island of New Zealand. In 1953, within the space of a week, eight lives were lost on Mt. Egmont / Taranaki in two separate incidents. The first occurred on Sunday the 26<sup>th</sup> July, when a winter ascent of Mt Egmont / Taranaki was undertaken by the Nurses Tramping Club, assisted, organised and lead by the Taranaki Alpine Club (TAC). Six climbers died. The second occurred on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August, when two climbers fell from high on the mountain. For the purposes of this research, these two incidents make up the 1953 Event.

There are multiple discourses revealed in the reporting of the two accidents in the 1953 Event. The newspaper articles reflect a conservative tone that later historians like Barber (1989) and King (2003), suggest reflected a desire for order in a post-World War Two world. Concurrent with the reporting of the 1953 Event and the subsequent analysis, there was a lionization of the exploits of Hillary and the ascent of Mt Everest. This offers an insight into what value the New Zealand society of the time placed on adventure and risk, and what was considered normal practice in the outdoors.

The discourse reveals that the role of women in New Zealand, had been undergoing a steady transformation prior to World War Two, and outdoor activities like tramping and mountaineering had being increasingly seen as a means to redefine what women could do. The war itself had reshaped society and allowed women roles that traditionally had fallen to men, like engineering and farm work. Post-World War Two society, in general, appeared to reverse the gains of equality that women had made; tramping and mountaineering, however, retained their egalitarian appeal.

Most significantly, in light of the 2008 Event, the discourse of the 1953 Event reveals how the knowledge and skills of outdoor practice were passed on, and who could pass it on. An ‘apprenticeship model’, whereby those more-experienced practitioners induct the lesser-experienced trainees, is revealed as the dominant model of outdoor practice. This model was promulgated by the discourses of experience and judgement, the rules

of how to do things, and the responsibilities of the leader. Moreover, in the wake of the multiple fatalities in the 1953 Event, the response of the government and the outdoor representatives in calling for more education and resisting the imposition of more regulation, provides a contrast to what unfolded after the 2008 tragedy.

In this chapter, the reporting of the 1953 Event from the NZ Herald unfolds chronologically. Contemporary relevant public statements and analysis from other media are then examined. Italics are used to highlight statements of interest; these are referred to either in later discussions or as examples of an emerging discourse.

The reporting of 1953 Event raised questions about how the fatalities could have occurred but more importantly, how people were trained or achieved competency. Exploration of these questions reveals the underlying beliefs and attitudes that shaped the practice. What emerges from this exploration is that there were multiple discourses and that they were in tension: the discourse of ‘give it a nudge’ and feminism / empowerment, clashed with the discourses of experience and judgement, the responsibilities of the leader, and preparedness as defined by operating within the ‘rules’. In the 1953 Event, the ‘apprenticeship model’ that appeared to dominate practice was disregarded with fatal consequences.

## **The First Incident**

The party numbered 31, including nine members of the TAC. Of these, six were described (later, in the New Zealand Alpine Club report) as experienced, and 16 partly experienced, with nine inexperienced. The group was split up and roped into six sub-groups.

Apart from a number of faulty gloves, the party was adequately clothed and shod. Twenty had ice axes, and eleven used ski sticks. Two of the party wore crampons. (New Zealand Alpine Journal(NZAJ),1954, p560)

The party left the Tahurangi Hut at approximately 11.30am, in fine weather with light winds. Hard frozen snow was encountered all the way. Steps were cut into the snow /hard ice by the Alpine Club members and the summit reached at 3.45pm. The descent commenced at 4pm. There were several slips by individuals and some ski poles were lost or broken. A party of four slipped and slid nearly 200 metres before being held by the leader of another rope. After 5pm the wind freshened to between 30 and 50 knots.

The snow had become frozen really hard and extreme cold, fatigue, lack of food and inexperience contributed to the numerous slips. (NZAJ, 1954, p561).

Russell, the Chief Guide, had the biggest group but all six of the other people attached to his rope were inexperienced. Russell was the only one with an ice axe and the only one with crampons. This group had had at least three slips on the way down. A freelance male climber joined this group and helped clear steps at the front but did not tie into the rope. At about 6.28pm the freelance climber was holding the rope between the first and second person, when the rest of the group fell simultaneously, jerking the rope out of his hand. Russell tried to arrest the slide but to no avail: the party of seven slid about 30 metres down the slope then over the 12 metre Hongi's Bluff.

Due to the close proximity of the hut and more climbers, the alarm was raised very quickly (within seven minutes). Within an hour the conditions of the fallen were known (two unconscious, presumed dead; five others suffering from lacerations,



fractures and head injuries). By 9.30pm the first rescue party from town arrived at the closest (Nissen) hut,

Owing to the dangerous condition and lack of experienced runners between the two huts, news did not reach the Hostel of the seriousness of the accident until 1.15am, at which time a call went out to the Stratford and Mt. Egmont Alpine Clubs, Army, Fire Brigade, Police and all available manpower. The weather during the rescue operations was, until 10pm, bitterly cold with strong winds... by 10.30pm the wind freshened and it started to snow heavily. Although at 1.30am the wind dropped and conditions were much improved, the light was bad due to the total eclipse of the moon. (NZAJ, 1954, p562).

Most of the rescue work was carried out in a blizzard. It took two hours to carry the stretchers to the nearest hut, and about 100 rescuers were involved. The first stretcher bearing a fallen climber arrived at the hut about midnight. They were treated by a doctor then carried down the mountain to the North Egmont Hostel and a waiting ambulance. Only two of the fallen climbers were alive by the time the stretchers made it to the hostel. The last body was brought to the hostel at 10am.

## **Reaction from The NZ Herald to the First Incident**

The New Zealand Herald reported the event as ‘Six People Hurt on Mt Egmont – Snow Hinders Night Rescue Bid’ on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> July; as ‘Five Killed in Egmont Climbing Tragedy – Rescue Team’s Nightlong Efforts in Bitter Weather – Peak Has Claimed 24 Lives’ on Tuesday; and ‘Mt Egmont Death Roll Now Six – One Of The Two Injured Nurses Dies In Hospital – Story Of Tragic Climb’ on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup>.

### **The Discourse of Experience and Judgement (1)**

By Thursday the story appeared to have been swiftly worked to a conclusion with the headline ‘Expert’s Warning to Inexperienced Mountain Climbers’, a perspective offered by a ski instructor, Mr Haensli, based at Mt Ruapehu. This perspective offers the first example of a discourse that recurs regularly, that of experience and judgement:

It is not the peaks themselves that are so dangerous, he says, but poor weather often makes them so. With good equipment and a knowledge of how to use ropes, it is safe enough *provided the climber knows when to turn back*. (Italics added). (NZ Herald, 30.7.53).

There was no coverage in the Friday 31<sup>st</sup> July or Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> August papers. On Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August the second incident occurred on Mt Egmont / Taranaki.

## The Second Incident

Two young men hired one set of crampons, an ice axe and a pair of gloves from the Stratford Mountain House, with the intention of climbing the mountain. The NZ Alpine Journal (1954) described the mountain as being in ‘iced condition rendering it necessary that climbing be undertaken only by experienced parties’ and their intended route - the East Ridge - was ‘one of the most dangerous winter routes on the mountain’(p563). The second incident unfolded thus:

Throughout the morning and afternoon the pair could be seen as they ascended, by a party of 56 Junior National Party members from Te Awamutu and Feilding, led by the vice-captain of the Stratford Mountain Club, Mr W. Dorflinger. During the afternoon the pair were seen sitting for almost an hour above Manganui Hut.

Watched from both Manganui Hut and the Stratford Mountain House, they resumed their climb. Meanwhile, several of the party had gone round to Tahurangi Hut on the north face of the mountain with Mr Dorflinger, and there told Mr R. Syme, Hawera search coordinator for the Egmont National Park Board, about the men.

Mr Syme and Mr Dorflinger returned to the Manganui Hut at 5pm but the two men were still climbing toward the summit *at least two hours after they should have been down off the icy slopes*. Mr Syme informed the Police... throughout Taranaki, alpinists were warned by telephone calls and slides on cinema

screens. At 10.15pm, when the men had had ample time to come down, the rescue organisation was put into operation.

(Italics added). (NZ Herald, 3.8.53).

By 6am there were 55 alpine club members waiting at the Tahurangi and Nissen huts, assisted by four Red Cross men and three Army signallers. Twelve women members were stationed at the hostel and three women were at the huts to do the cooking. The two men were found the next morning, roped together, having fallen approximately 500 meters down icy slopes to their deaths.

## **Reaction from The NZ Herald to the Second Incident**

The NZ Herald ran descriptive stories in a similarly excited fashion on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> August with ‘Two Climbers Killed On Mt Egmont – Second Tragedy On Icy Slopes Within Week’ and ‘Fleets of Taxis Took Searchers To Scene’.

On Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> the discourse of experience and judgement re-emerges, with two articles entitled ‘Warnings Will Not Stop Mountaineering – Board Places Emphasis On Rules And Rescue Organisation’ and ‘Precautions For Mountain Safety’. The first article describes a meeting between the Egmont National Park Board and all mountain clubs of Taranaki, called to discuss the tragedies and the search and rescue operations. Mr W.A.Knapp, the acting chairman, commented:

The public had been deeply moved by the two accidents, and felt they might have been *prevented by the exercise of good judgement* and the use of proper equipment. (Italics added)(NZ Herald, 4.8.53).

### **The Discourse of Rules (1)**

In this article, a second discourse now emerges: the idea of established rules for practice. This discourse can be seen in the phrases ‘recognised mountaineering practice’ as well as ‘rules and warnings’.

Another participant of the meeting suggested that mountaineering was a great sport, as long as the rules were complied with, and went on to promote the displaying of rules in local hostels and children being told to obey the rules. The idea of banning winter climbing was discussed but dismissed by Rod Syme (an experienced mountaineer) as being counter-productive, because the ability to climb in winter conditions trained people to help in rescues. The discourse of rules can again be seen in the comments of Syme:

Many people in Taranaki could climb the mountain safely in winter without accident *because they were experienced and obeyed the recognised mountaineering practices*. If everyone did the same the position would be all right ... as far as he knew the young men had not been aware of these recognised practices. With the publicity in every paper in the country this week... you would have thought people would be loath to go on the mountain; *that they had gone seems completely inexplicable. What are rules and warnings worth?* (Italics added) (Ibid)

At the meeting it was announced that the Government would fund an intensive mountain safety campaign, including broadcasting talks on the radio and distributing booklets to schools.

The discourse of experience and judgement dominates the second article of the 4<sup>th</sup> August. Here the New Zealand Alpine Club's ideas on the fundamental precautions for mountain safety, are outlined. These precautions include:

- Novices shouldn't go unless conditions are safe for anyone with his lack of experience (sic).
- Mountains are not safe when covered in hard /frozen snow – for people who do not have the appropriate equipment or the skill to use it.
- Inexperienced parties should never venture onto hard / frozen snow or ice.
- The proper use of equipment required considerable skill and experience. It was much more dangerous for a party to be roped than unroped unless its members had the skill to use the rope properly.

### **The Discourse of Education**

A third discourse emerges in the NZ Herald of August 5<sup>th</sup>, that of using education to alleviate accidents. It signals a reluctance from the government, echoed by the climber fraternity, to impose restrictions upon practice. As such it contrasts markedly with the aftermath of the 2008 Event.

‘Education Planned To Reduce Climbing Accidents’, announced plans from the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr Bodkin, to promote mountain safety around the country:

We could do nothing better in memory of these fine young folk than to concentrate all efforts behind our campaign to *widen the knowledge of safety factors* which are so essential to the enjoyment of trips into our rugged back and high country. (Italics added). (NZ Herald, 5.8.53)

### **The Discourse of Responsibilities of the Leader (1)**

The responsibilities of outdoor leaders emerges as a new discourse and for the first time we see the idea of character development being linked to education. By Friday 7<sup>th</sup> a wider view linking schooling and mountaineering was being expressed in ‘Climbing Curbs Would Destroy Sport’. A member of the 1935 British Everest reconnaissance Expedition, and headmaster of Pukekohe high School, Mr L.V (Dan) Bryant suggested that restrictions would only increase the accident rate, and that the only disciplining mountaineers needed was that which they received in schools. Furthermore, schooling should be about more than obedience, it should be about developing character and ability, and fostering enthusiasm and responsibility:

If an educational system is only going to provide people who are going to do what they are told, I cannot see how we are going to have an intelligent, democratic and adult public. *Leadership is developed not only by taking responsibility but by seeking responsibility.* (Italics added)(NZ Herald, 7.8.53)

In the same article, the discourse of rules appears again with the phrase ‘margins of safety’. This phrase, while having much in common with the discourse of experience

and judgement, implies that safety margins can be set if one understands the ‘game’ – if you climb with the right equipment, if you have accrued the requisite amount of experience, if your judgement has been accurate in the past, if you can understand the conditions and the weather, if your skills are up to the challenge... in other words, if you have followed the rules or the ‘right way to do things’, then a ‘margin of safety’ will be present.

Bryant pointed out that he had guided more than 300 youngsters to the top of Mt Egmont and had never come close to having an accident because they ‘*had not exceeded the margin of safety*’. He went on to suggest that there were two approaches to mountaineering – one that forced a way through the difficulties to achieve fame and sometimes fortune; and the other that recognised that:

... There were peaks not worth climbing because the margin of safety would be exceeded. *This margin was not exceeded by the last expedition on Everest* (Italics added) (Ibid).

The paradox of the Everest expedition, when compared with Bryant’s ‘margins of safety’, is explored in greater depth later in this chapter.

The discourse of rules is also prominent in the articles of the 10<sup>th</sup> of September:

.... *This accident resulted largely from failure to adhere to rules of safe climbing which are applicable generally and which are taught by mountain clubs to their members personally and in their instruction books....* I recommend that mountain and alpine clubs should be careful not to support or give the appearance of supporting climbing expeditions unless they are properly planned and equipped and are *conducted in accordance with safe mountaineering requirements*. (Italics added)(NZ Herald, 10.9.53)

And again on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September, the discourse of rules appears in the Herald article “Mt Egmont Safety Code To Be Recommended”. This forewarned of a ‘special code for safety precautions for Mt Egmont’ prepared by the Safety in the Mountains Committee, which had been set up by the Government. A nationwide ‘safety in the mountains’ campaign was mooted.

The discourse of experience and judgement emerges again on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September. A further indictment of the Taranaki Alpine Club was issued in the Herald with “Alpine Club Gave Party Inadequate Help”. The article details a report from the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand (which essentially became the New Zealand Alpine Club accident sub-committee’ report of the following year).

... This accident serves to emphasize once again the fact that under icy conditions in winter Egmont is a peak which calls for a high standard of mountaineering, leadership, equipment and experience. Its difficulties should never be under-estimated (NZ Herald, 23.9.53).

## Other Media

The Weekly News, an Auckland based weekly magazine popular at the time, dedicated only three articles to this event, in the six months from the end of July to the end of December. In between the photographs of society people, the latest recipes and the advice for young women, the Wednesday, August 5<sup>th</sup> issue had the heading ‘Six lives lost in climbing accident on Mt Egmont’, with a brief description of the accident. The article mentions the party of ‘five girls and two men’, and included a photograph of the snow clad mountain, and Russell, but none of the others.

August 19<sup>th</sup> had two articles of note: ‘Hazards of the Shining Cone’ penned by the mysterious ‘A New Plymouth Correspondent’, had photographs of the snow clad mountain, Tahurangi Hut in winter, a climber in repose on a snow slope, and a large crowd of people – at least 45 – on the summit of the mountain, in snow, on a fine day. The description offered under the last photograph is instructive of the normality of large guided parties:

In summer months large parties of climbers are taken to the summit of Egmont in open climbs organised by the alpine clubs. This group has assembled on the summit in preparation for the descent (The Weekly News, 19.8.53a)

Here we see the discourse of experience and judgement: It appears to be acceptable for large groups to climb together, as long as the leaders are suitably experienced.

The article takes pains to reproduce the descriptions and causes of the 27 people who had died climbing on the mountain since 1891, and suggests the scale of the 1953 event:

Eight young lives lost in six days, two major rescue efforts under winter conditions, a depth of grief and sympathy that the whole province of Taranaki has felt – that sums up the most tragic week in New Zealand’s alpine history (The Weekly News, 19.8.53b).



The second Weekly News article of the 19<sup>th</sup> August, 'Beware of Egmont's Icy Slopes – sound advice for the tyro', had words of advice from a Taranaki Alpine Club member, Mr John Curran. The discourse of experience and judgement is prevalent here, and especially meaningful because Curran was a practitioner of the time, and as such his comments reflect the attitude and practice of that time.

Among the points about having the right equipment and how the weather can deteriorate quickly, Curran discusses experience. His comments reveal a mentoring or apprenticeship model was common practice.

*Inexperienced climbers should not at any time try the ascent... If, for instance, two inexperienced men wanted to climb they should get the help of two experienced men...* The experienced men should check over all the equipment before they set out for one of the upper huts... here they would again check equipment in case any of it had been dropped or put down on the way along and they would also make a note in the hut's log book, stating where they were going.

By this time too, *the experienced men would have found out the weaknesses in the men they were taking up* and would be able to adjust things accordingly... *Only experienced men would know if conditions needed rope ...* If there was at any time the slightest doubt about going on or turning back, the leader and he alone, should decide what to do (Italics added)(The Weekly News, 19.8.53c)

The following year, 1954, the New Zealand Alpine Club (NZAC) accident sub-committee presented its findings about the first incident, in the NZ Alpine Journal (NZAJ). The NZAC attributed the deaths to four faults: personnel, time, equipment, and errors in judgement; in attributing the faults to the Taranaki Alpine Club's organisation of the trip, the NZAC revealed again the discourses prevalent in the outdoor practice of the time:

### **The Discourse of Experience and Judgement (2)**

In terms of personnel, the NZAC said the ratio of competent climbers to novices was deemed to be ‘far below that required by safe alpine standards’. The Taranaki Alpine club should have refused to take such a large number of inexperienced climbers past the Tahurangi Hut. The Chief Guide made errors of judgement in setting out from the hut with such a party, and in not turning back at a stage that would have avoided the icy conditions and approaching darkness (NZAJ, 1954).

### **The Discourse of Rules (2)**

The NZAC said the party was too late in setting out on the climb. There was a shortage of axes, which should have been carried by all climbers. Insufficient rope was available to the climbers and this, combined with the absence of sufficient leaders, resulted in too many climbers on some ropes. Under the icy conditions which prevailed on Mt. Egmont that day, the only safe way to climb would have been in small parties of three or four, with no more than one inexperienced climber on each rope. Some of the climbers should have had more efficient protection for their hands, as shown by the fact that a number suffered from frostbite.

### **The Discourse of Responsibilities of the Leader (2)**

The following excerpt offers another insight into the prevalent practitioner attitudes of the day:

In regard to the actual leadership of the party, the Chief Guide of the Club, who lost his life in the fall, was among those who responded to the duty which the club undertook, but too much was left to him. *Yet his was the final responsibility for setting out...* (Italics added)(NZAJ, 1954, p562).

Firstly, the leader of the party *in the field*, has the overall responsibility to make the decisions for the members of the party. The position and power of the field leader is clear; the 2008 Event is at odds with this stance.

Secondly, while the tone is one of respect and disappointment, the phrase ‘responded to the duty’ implies a heroic stance on one hand but a stance where a wider benefit is

acknowledged, almost subconsciously. This phrase is a direct link to the views of the practitioners of the day – the outdoors was of value to wider society, and that recreating in the outdoors had meaning beyond the activity. The responsibility of the leader was (sometimes) more than just the responsibility of one person to manage a challenging activity in the outdoors, as there were other forces at work in the background. These forces will be examined in the following section.

Thus we see, via the NZ Herald and other media, the emergent discourses of experience and judgement, rules, education, and the responsibility of leaders. In conjunction with these discourses, the passing on of knowledge and accruing of experience – the training - was carried out via a mentoring or apprenticeship practice.

## Questions

It appears that, from the reporting of the 1953 Event, the practice and practitioners of the time embodied the discourses of experience and judgement, rules, and responsibilities of the leader. What is fascinating about this Event is that these seemingly commonly held beliefs and approaches to practice were ignored, with tragic results. There are questions about the Event that were not directly addressed by the media, yet when asked and worked through, shed light upon another set of discourses operating at the time. In the first incident:

- What impelled a group of Nurses to climb a mountain in winter?
- Why was the Nurses group so poorly equipped?
- Knowing they were poorly equipped, and knowing they were starting later than desired, why did Russell, the Chief Guide, push on with the plan?
- Why did the group not turn around earlier?

In the second incident:

- What impelled two inexperienced climbers to climb the mountain, in icy conditions, the week after a well-publicised tragedy?

- Why was it considered acceptable for a party of 56 inexperienced people, to be led by one experienced person (the Dorflinger group), yet later reports criticized the ratios of the group that had the first accident?
- Why did Dorflinger feel it necessary to traverse the mountain to tell Syme about the two climbers?
- Why did Syme raise the alarm before anything had happened?

Overall:

- Why was Hillary and Tenzing's ascent of Everest considered within safety margins, but the ascent of Mt. Egmont / Taranaki in winter was not?
- Why did the Government get involved with a nation-wide education campaign?

To answer these questions and to make visible the forces operating in and around the 1953 Event, it is necessary to explore the wider societal context of New Zealand and the relationship people had with the outdoors, in 1953.

## **Pre-conditions for Reaction**

### **The lure of the outdoors – 1920's to 1950's**

The attraction of adventuring in the outdoors, to young people in the 1950's, is worth considering. This attraction possibly stemmed from a desire to 'undo ... the psychic disruptions of the immediate past' (King, 2003,p413). Perhaps it was a result of their parents stiflingly conservative approach to life. Perhaps it was in response to a relatively stable economic world, which provided a degree of affluence - 'every adolescent was sure of a job of some kind' (Beeby, 1992), coincident with an increasing availability of motor cars - from 233,000 in 1950, the number would rise to 502,000 by 1960 (Ross, 2008) - and the security of a two-week paid holiday, made law in 1944 (Ross, 2008). Whatever the root cause, the numbers of people going into the outdoors for activities was perceived by all commentators (including Park Boards, tramping clubs, and the Tourism Department) to have increased.

The acceptance of tramping in New Zealand is worth exploring here, as it highlights the shifting conditions that enabled people by the 1950's, to recreate in the outdoors in mixed gender groups. Tramping can also able to be placed in the wider context of the developing relationship between pakeha New Zealanders and the meaning of the outdoors, often explored in the phrase 'bush'.

### **Tramping**

The first tramping club was established in Wellington in 1919, but tramping as a legitimate and distinct outdoor activity, endured a time of societal suspicion right through to the late 1930's:

Tramping was not mixed doubles: it did not comply with the socially acceptable codes of mixed recreation. Although seldom stated publicly, the idea of sexual impropriety on overnight tramps loomed large in the public imagination... A healthy self-image and carefully managed public relations campaigns were essential because of the misapprehension and disapproval directed at trampers (Ross, 2008, p65).

Reputations could be compromised. Clubs responded by giving members stern talks about responsibilities and honour. Sometimes chaperones were used. But economic hardships, along with the influence of business and government, would free tramping from many of its constraints. In the 1930's there developed:

A prevailing concern that citizens ought to spend their free time wisely for the sake of the moral and physical health of the nation. For the tens of thousands who were affected in some way by the Depression, the tramps were, potentially, a wholesome distraction that might boost morale (Ibid, p72).

The Physical Welfare and Recreation Act passed in 1937, and reflected an international trend of governments organising their citizens' leisure and recreation activities.

The shortened working week was fuelling fears that citizens were spending free time badly, in ways not conducive to body and mind. This had ramifications for the moral and physical health of the nation as a whole. The activities of the Physical Welfare and Recreation Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs set up under the act, were intended to encourage citizens into the right kind of recreation (Ibid, p86).

This branch of government promoted fitness and sought to 'democratize the hinterland', creating a series of tracks through the back country that all New Zealanders could enjoy, a kind of middle-ground of tramping, neither too rough (which was the travel reputation of tramping groups) or too expensive (which the Tourist Department walks appeared to be). The branch foundered due to World War Two but the idea proved robust and helped establish the network of huts and tracks that exist today.

Tramping was also increasingly seen as a new market for manufacturers. Trampers Esther James was paid to walk the length of New Zealand promoting local goods in 1932, the same year NZ Railways offered 'Mystery Train' weekend excursions for trampers. Beer, footwear, tea and clothing manufacturers used images of trampers, or appealed to trampers, in their advertising.

Preserving flora and fauna, establishing an ethic of soil conservation, promulgating National Parks, expanding tourism opportunities, and establishing control over recreational opportunities were all subjects that overlapped with tramping and which played out prior to and after World War Two. The war itself diverted people away from outdoor recreation, apart from using the outdoors as a food source and a training ground for troops.

Post war, the revitalising aspects of New Zealand's outdoors appealed to a 'war tired people' (Ross, 2008, p125). The 1948 rediscovery of Takahe in Fiordland also helped re-stimulate an interest in wild places. The 1952 National Parks bill reflected a desire from government and non-government groups (like the Federated Mountain Clubs, and Forest and Bird Society), for a clearer definition of a park and its uses. The new administrative structure would safeguard the parks for the future, encourage greater public use, coordinate local park boards and create new parks, ensure that the parks would be kept free from commercial activity and economic exploitation, preserve nature for scientific reasons, and allow citizens to enjoy these areas for leisure activities (Ross, 2008, pp136-137).

### **The Discourse of the Outdoors as Antidote to Modern Life**

Thus by the 1950's there were discourses emerging through the activity of tramping. Firstly, tramping was accepted as a way of moderating the effects of modern life, including pushing the boundaries of gender relations. Tramping was able to be done all year-round, and could be done in short bursts like the weekends. As such it appealed to young urban-based people who had limited time.

### **The Discourse of Progress (1)**

Tramping didn't require guides, though it did need leadership. Nor did it require much specialist equipment, and often clubs hired the requisite gear to members; therefore anyone interested in pushing boundaries, and escaping the cities, could tramp. Parallel with this, the 'bush' and in particular the National Parks, had become 'part of a vision of New Zealand as a prosperous and progressive country' (Ibid, p15), the place where recreational opportunities abounded. Thus tramping embodied the spirit of progress.

## **Mountaineering**

Tramping was often seen as good training for mountaineering (Ross, 2008, p54). Mountaineering, a European pursuit favoured by the middle classes (Ibid), was already well established in New Zealand by the time the New Zealand Alpine Club was set up in 1891. European alpinists visited regularly, attempting to climb as many peaks as possible, and to summit the highest, in an openly competitive way. By 1894 Mt Cook had been climbed – by the New Zealander's Fyfe, Graham and Clarke, anxious not to leave that plum to the Europeans. The first woman to ascend Mt Cook - the Australian Freda Du Faur - did so prior to World War One, in an age termed 'golden' because 'mountaineering was a sport for a small leisured class' (Logan, 1987, p20).

Throughout New Zealand in the 1920's, there was a growing interest in outdoor recreation in general, and tramping and mountaineering in particular. This interest continued to expand during the 1930's. Greater stimulus to climbing came from such clubs as the Tararua Tramping Club and the Canterbury Mountaineering Club.

## **The Discourse of Clubs**

The following passage from Logan presents three discursive threads within mountaineering up to the time of the 1953 Event. Firstly, the discourse of the value of clubs: clubs were the place you went to find like-minded people who were interested in adventure. Clubs provided the structure and the wherewithal to learn the skills, and clubs were for everyone, rather than just the leisured class of an earlier generation:

At a time when transport was limited and expensive, the club system provided the means for a large number of young, less well-off but strongly motivated climbers to get to the mountains... (Logan, 1987, pp21-22).

## **The Discourse of 'Give-it a Nudge'**

A second discourse involves the notion of giving-things-a-go rather than paying someone else to do it for you. The increase in amateur ascents represented more than just a change in who could afford to go mountaineering; they represented a shift in attitude. 'Give it a nudge' was later used by Hersey to describe this attitude, and



though Hersey was using it to describe Hillary, it could equally be applied to the bulk of the mountaineering fraternity of that time.

The ascent of the East Ridge of Mt Cook [in 1937 by Dan Bryant and Lud Mahan] demonstrated that amateur climbers were now a major force in New Zealand climbing... and amateur ascents, rather than guided ones, became the norm... (Ibid).

### **The Discourse of Progress (2)**

By the time of the 1953 Event, there was an additional factor in the increase in popularity of the sport: a small band of amateur New Zealand climbers, who had been part of major overseas climbing expeditions, helped raise the profile of mountaineering. This last passage from Logan highlights that climbing mountains was increasingly seen as less of a fringe activity and more as an activity that was within the reach of all who were fit enough and adventurous enough.

[In the early 1950's] climbers' numbers were beginning to swell; post war prosperity had taken hold, New Zealand successes in the Himalaya gained publicity, and climbing clubs became more active (Ibid).

### **The Discourse of Nationalism**

In Britain, the post-war increase in people recreating adventurously in the outdoors, was directly attributed to the influence of Outward Bound (Priest & Gass, 1997). In New Zealand the cause was more specific:

Just as Peter Snell generated new enthusiasm in athletics, Hillary generated new enthusiasm in mountaineering and overseas expeditions... (Temple, 1969, p15).

National pride in the mountaineering achievements on the world stage, of Hillary and Lowe, was another factor that resulted in new members being attracted to mountaineering clubs. The NZ Alpine Club membership grew from 548 in 1945, to

930 in 1955 (Wesley, 2005) - an increase of 70%. Along with an increase in participation, societal perception of the mountaineer changed too:

At home the mountaineer graduated from the status of a rough crackpot and his efforts and achievements appeared more worthwhile. There was more acceptance and practical encouragement. The mountaineer himself felt a great boost of confidence by the achievements of Hillary and Lowe. All this led to a burgeoning of activity at home and abroad (Temple, 1969, p91).

### **Social and Economic Climate**

Post-World War Two, New Zealand was still influenced by Britain but increasingly looking to align itself with the United States of America (USA). It supported the USA-led United Nations involvement in the Korean conflict, with troops and Navy craft. In return, the USA signed the ANZUS pact signifying a strategic military relationship between Australia, New Zealand and the USA, in 1951. Two years later Vice President Nixon would visit, the first time that such a high-ranking American official had done so. The country experienced an economic boom post-war as the Korean conflict saw the price rise for wool. As Britain sought to rebuild itself, it could not get enough of the butter, cheese, wool and meat produced by New Zealand farmers.

However, the 1950's were a time of conservatism in New Zealand. The historian Barber describes 1950's New Zealand society as being insular and conformist, rejecting the potential for egalitarianism offered to women during World War Two, and instead reinforcing the place of men as being in the workforce and women in the home.

A female-conveyed folk stereotype, created and applauded by the nation's males, passed on the secret that 'a woman's place is in the home, that a wife's duty is to 'stand by her man' and that 'the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world' (Barber, 1989, p169)

No renaissance accompanied the economic boom of the 1950's. Rather than broadening their cultural horizons, NZers red-neck philistinism became even

more entrenched, reinforced by a cold war hysteria that was even more xenophobic and puritanical. The fifties were a time of cultural austerity... rugby, racing and drinking remained the premiere national pastimes. (Barber, 1989, p163)

King (2003) suggests World War Two 'turned New Zealanders in upon themselves' and had them re-creating the pre-war social patterns of stable careers for men, and women in comfortable homes raising 'perfect children'. This can be seen post-war, according to King, in three things: The rapid development of cities and suburbs, driven by an expanded birth rate and a shift from rural to urban living, especially among Maori; the growth in philosophical and political conservatism, which brought the National party into power for 29 of the next 35 years; and a growth in materialism focused on improving the home, seen through the rise of consumer spending on items like refrigerators and televisions (King, 2003, p414).

### **Media Role**

Both Barber and King note the role that media played in reinforcing and promoting the conservative society:

The NZ Woman's Weekly and newspaper 'women's pages' reinforced this role placement.... The few women who entered traditionally male careers were patronised by both men and women. (Barber, 1989, p169)

The 1950's was the last decade in which magazines - NZ Womans Weekly, the orange-covered Freelance, the pink-covered Auckland Weekly News - played a major role in the country's national life, along with radio (King, 2003, p432)

### **Hillary**

Thus New Zealand society by 1953 was essentially rigid and conformist, but with a growing number of people who looked to the opportunities extant in the outdoors to forge a new sense of connection, with both nature and adventure. Into this mix

exploded Edmund Hillary and the ascent of Mt Everest. From the distance of nearly sixty years it is hard to credit the fervour with which New Zealand society lionized the achievement of Hillary and Tenzing, in climbing Mt Everest in 1953.

At a New Zealand state occasion celebrating the Queen's coronation, acting Prime Minister Holyoake had announced that Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing had on 29 May 1953 reached the summit of Mount Everest, in the first recorded ascent. Holyoake had publicly offered the ascent as a 'coronation gift' to the Queen. Hillary was soon knighted. (Barber, 1989, p170)

### **The Discourse of the Hero**

The discourse of nationalism engulfed New Zealand, but nationalism with an odd mix of deference to another country, as many New Zealanders in those post-war times still saw Britain as the 'mother country'. Another discourse emerges too, that of the discourse of the hero. The hero is someone who 'conquers', who 'challenges nature', who surpasses daunting odds to (hopefully) achieve success. Scott of the Antarctic exemplified the British image of 'glorious heroic failure' and this notion of hero and heroic was present in the (British influenced) New Zealand culture at the time of Hillary's ascent of Everest.

Excitement and pleasure that a New Zealand mountaineer had conquered what was known as 'the third pole' and taken New Zealand into the forefront of Britain's royal celebrations were enough to fill anyone's mind at the time. Over the following months the delayed reports of the expeditions progress, its dramas and successes, were eagerly read and the cup was filled to overflowing when it was announced on June 8 that no longer was the Everest climber simply E.P.Hillary but rather Sir Edmund Hillary (Temple, 1969, pp13-14).

A comparison of the number of articles in the NZ Herald is instructive: from when the Mt Egmont tragedy was first announced on the 27<sup>th</sup> July, to the end of September, there were 66 days. In that time, the worst period of deaths in New Zealand's mountains provoked 12 articles, ranging in topic from the accidents themselves to the coroners report and the repercussions for schools and mountaineering clubs. In the

same time frame, Hillary captured 68 articles, ranging in subject from mountaineering to wedding preparations to proposals for a monument to celebrate the ascent of Everest. The coverage, from a more recent perspective, seems obsessive; it is likely that it is symptomatic of the discourses of nationalism and progress.

Climbing mountains filtered into the wider public consciousness. Not only was there interest in the Herald about Hillary's next adventure – climbing Makalu – but speculation about who would be in his team, and comments from Nepalese Lamas about likely success. Articles appeared about proposed chairlifts on Mt Ruapehu and the progress of the American expedition on the unclimbed Mt Godwin-Austen /K2. First-aid kits being stolen from mountain huts suddenly warranted a headline and subsequent moralising comment.

In a country with fresh memories of war, where compulsory military service was still required of its youth, the qualities and achievements of Hillary endeared him to the New Zealand public. He was not loud like the American soldiers that had been stationed in New Zealand during the war; he was not formal like the British. Instead he came across as a kind of ordinary 'everyman':

Tall, gangling, raw-boned with protruding ears and an unruly mop of hair, usually (when not climbing) standing in a decidedly 'at ease' posture... he did not say a great deal, and what he did say was laconic and modest, and often eloquent in its stark simplicity (King, 2003, p511).

Combined with his climbing success, these qualities were sufficient to make him a hero in the eyes of the New Zealand public.

He had pitted himself against the natural world and won (Ibid).

The fervour with which Hillary and the other expedition climbers were greeted (10 000 people turned out to greet George Lowe in Hastings) was a few months later matched by the visit of the young Queen Elizabeth, but seldom seen again in New Zealand.

## **Interpretation**

### **Language and Society**

The juxtaposition of stifling social conformity and over-the-top celebrations for climbing a mountain, offers some answers to the questions posed earlier. In the language of the newspaper and magazine reporting of this event, the women are secondary figures, described as helping in the hostels, cooking in the huts, or simply ‘girls’. They are nurses enlisting the service of climbers, not climbers of their own right. Beside this, men are leaders, climbers, rescuers, doctors – the language of ‘he’ is quite clear about the roles that men and women were able to attain.

The twin discourses of progress and ‘give-it-a nudge’, explain the desire of the nurses to experience climbing a snow-clad mountain. Nursing was a profession where women had always had a degree of power. The existence of the Nurses Tramping Club indicates an acceptance of tramping as a legitimate outdoor experience for women. Tramping and mountaineering were already seen as activities where gender and class boundaries could be pushed. Thus the heightened media focus on mountaineering, and the positive attitudinal change from the wider society towards mountaineering, gave the Nurses Tramping Club the reason to climb Mount Egmont /Taranaki. They saw it as within their capabilities, they saw themselves as empowered to climb it if they chose to do so. They saw it as an exciting, possibly heroic thing to do. As such they might just drape a bit of the glory of Hillary around themselves if they too could conquer their mountain.

### **The Influence of Hillary: Glory for those with Courage**

The decision by Russell (aided surely by other alpine club members – one can’t imagine him making such a decision without at least talking it over with his fellow climbers) to undertake a winter ascent of Mt Egmont with a poorly equipped large party, with a moderately high ratio (for the times) for his group, in hard snow conditions, and with a late start, can also be understood by the newfound societal desire to climb mountains. Moreover, and consistent with the actions of the two

climbers the following week, it speaks of an attitude that favours giving things a go; that rewards with glory, the hard work of those with the courage of their convictions:

Undoubtedly Ed Hillary and his ‘give it a nudge, she’ll be right’ attitude influenced generations of potential kiwi alpinists (Hersey, 2008, p86).

This attitude, very British in its language but very American frontier / romantic in its tone, is seen in a NZ Herald article of the period on developing the resources of the Fiordland area:

Does anyone want to name a mountain or a lake? To tread where no other feet have been? To catch fine fish in fast-flowing rivers that have never seen a rod? To discover creatures once thought extinct? To be paid for shooting Wapiti and deer, which sportsmen overseas would pay thousands of dollars to stalk? These things are possible beyond New Zealand’s last frontier, in the wild magnificent maze of forested valleys and ranges that fill the south-western corner of New Zealand (NZ Herald 1.9.53).

And again in this article extolling the qualities of the man who set the world air speed record, the discourse of the hero is present:

There can be no climax to a life like that of Squadron Leader Duke. He and his fellow explorer-craftsmen have accepted this task of extending the range of human knowledge and human capability on a particularly dangerous frontier: the climax is continuous. We who live safer lives are in debt to such a man – and when one meets him, for all his great modesty, one is humbly aware of this (NZ Herald, 19.9.53).

This ‘give it a nudge, she’ll be right’ attitude, coupled with the perceived glory of the endeavour – the rewards would outweigh the hardship - explains the Nurses desire to climb; it explains the decisions of Russell to start and to carry on and to not turn back early; it explains the actions of the two young men the following week. In addition, it partially explains why Dorflinger was able to lead, unquestioned, a very large group onto Mt Egmont. What it doesn’t explain is why, in the second incident, the alarm was

raised **before** anything had happened, and the subsequent discussion around rules and safety margins.

### **Concurrent and Competing Discourses**

At this point concurrent and competing discourses can be acknowledged. The nurses (female) felt empowered to climb the mountain yet had to hire the alpine club (dominantly male) to do so. Mountaineering, once on the edge of society, was suddenly embraced as a glorious pursuit by the majority of society; though mountaineering in New Zealand was subsequently endowed with mythic/heroic qualities, it was seen as a pursuit that was accessible to all. In addition, the discourse of ‘give-it-a-nudge’ - as seen in the actions of Chief Guide Russell, the nurses, and the two young men in the second incident - was in tension with the discourse of rules, as seen through the comments post-Event of the NZAC and its members as reported in the media.

### **The Discourse of Rules (3)**

The language of many of the articles quoted earlier, often highlighted in italics, expresses an attitudinal tone of there being a ‘right way’ to do things. It implies that the ‘right way’ is knowable and able to be categorized, and that it follows a logical progression. Thus the discourse of rules emerges in the language of the media articles:

- ...*That is cutting it too fine.*
- ...It is safe enough *provided the climber knows when to turn back.*
- ...The two men were still climbing toward the summit *at least two hours after they should have been down off the icy slopes.*
- ...Many people in Taranaki could climb the mountain safely in winter without accident *because they were experienced and obeyed the recognised mountaineering practices.*
- ...*That they had gone seems completely inexplicable. What are rules and warnings worth?*
- ...*Widen the knowledge of safety factors* which are so essential to the enjoyment of trips into our rugged back and high country.
- ...*Unreasonableness is not fair on the rescuer.*



- ...*This accident resulted largely from failure to adhere to rules of safe climbing.*

### **The Discourse of Experience and Judgement (3)**

The language of the media articles also reveals that ‘experience’ is the crucial element in mountaineering:

- ...Mountains are not safe when covered in hard /frozen snow – for people who do not have the appropriate equipment or the skill to use it.
- ...Novices shouldn’t go unless conditions are safe for anyone with his lack of experience (sic).
- ...*The experienced men would have found out the weaknesses in the men they were taking up and would be able to adjust things accordingly... Only experienced men would know if conditions needed rope.*
- ...Inexperienced parties should never venture onto hard / frozen snow or ice.
- ...The proper use of equipment required considerable skill and experience.
- ...Might have been *prevented by the exercise of good judgement.*

But how do novices develop experience and skills and judgement? The answer to this can also be found in the discourse of the event:

- *Inexperienced climbers should not at any time try the ascent... If, for instance, two inexperienced men wanted to climb they should get the help of two experienced men.*
- ... *the rules of safe climbing... are applicable generally and ... are taught by mountain clubs to their members personally and in their instruction books.*

Thus novices learned from the more experienced. The alpine clubs provided a mechanism and a pathway too for novices to meet more experienced climbers, to be introduced to the necessary skills, to attain knowledge about environmental conditions, and to develop experience. The ‘rules’ and ‘*recognised mountaineering practices*’ and

*'the knowledge of safety factors'* were largely unwritten and were passed on through these clubs and within these clubs. Thus clubs were an embodiment of a power /knowledge relationship, in that they controlled (consciously or unconsciously) what was the 'right way' of mountaineering, and who could have access to learning that 'right way'. The term power /knowledge is further explained in a later chapter.

Within the 'rules', decision-making came from the leader: the leader made decisions based upon their experience level, their knowledge of conditions, and their ability to read both the intended route and the people they were climbing with (their judgement). The leader was at the top of the hierarchy of the rope, as they were the most experienced member of the rope; therefore the leader made the decisions. The opportunity to lead others came about through the practices of the club.

- *...Leadership is developed not only by taking responsibility but by seeking responsibility.*
- *...Yet his was the final responsibility for setting out...*

Novices learned from the more experienced. They should not "give it a nudge" on their own, yet it appears this is precisely what Hillary's ascent encouraged people to do.

### **The Paradox of 'Give it a Nudge'.**

The paradox then is that, for both incidents in the 1953 Event, the 'give it a nudge' attitude appears to have been present. The nurses were 'giving it a nudge' under the more experienced tutelage of the Taranaki Alpine Club; for the time, this was the correct approach. The following week, the two men were 'giving it a nudge' on their own; for the time, this was the incorrect approach. Yet the Taranaki Alpine Club and especially the Chief Guide, Russell, appeared also to be 'giving it a nudge' with the size of the winter climbing party, and the decisions that found poorly-equipped, tired and hungry groups, on tricky terrain, late in the day, high on the mountain. Yet the attitude nearly paid off – it took only seven minutes to get to the nearest hut to raise the alarm. Seven minutes. They could probably see the hut.

### **The Paradox of a ‘Margin of Safety’**

The comments about margins of safety also reveal a paradox. New Zealand mountaineer and school principal L.V (Dan) Bryant, criticised the idea that restrictions and more rules were needed in climbing. In doing so he pointed out that he had guided hundreds of people to the top of Mt Egmont without an accident because they ‘*had not exceeded the margin of safety*’ and later, that ‘*This margin was not exceeded by the last expedition on Everest*’ (NZ Herald, 7.8.53).

But who decides what constitutes a ‘margin of safety? And how can the first ascent of the highest mountain in the world, which had been attempted several times in the past without success because of the difficulties encountered, NOT exceed ‘the margin of safety’? Was the perception such that if Hillary was able to climb it, then it must have been within his ability, therefore he was operating within a margin of safety?

### **Hillary’s Path**

Some diversion into how Hillary learned to climb, and whether he thought he was within a ‘margin of safety’, may be helpful here. In the early 1990’s, Hillary was interviewed for a book that explored the reasons behind why people climbed. Following an initial experience skiing and scrambling around Mt Ruapehu at age 16, Hillary learned to climb. His comments reveal again the discourse of experience and judgement, and the practical apprenticeship common for the time:

I did quite a lot of tramping and trekking in the hills with people who were more experienced than myself. And then I started getting interested in purely modest sorts of climbing. As I became more experienced I attempted more difficult things and so became more useful at it. Later I became very friendly with Harry Ayres, who was the most outstanding guide in New Zealand. I based my abilities and techniques on his example.... (Sir Edmund Hillary in O’Connell, 1993, pp52-53).

Consistent with the discourse of experience and judgement, Hillary, like other novices, learned to climb with more experienced people. He built up his skill and experience level by doing lots of climbing and testing himself on gradually harder climbs:

In my early twenties I became fairly proficient at snow and ice climbing. I did the first ascent of the south ridge of Mt Cook and a number of first ascents of snow and ice routes in the Southern Alps of New Zealand. I was among the dozen or so who were at the forefront of New Zealand climbing... Doing a lot of mountain activity, particularly in New Zealand, I became a fairly competent all-round mountaineer [which prepared me for the Himalaya]. (Ibid).

However, in terms of the Everest climb, Hillary has some interesting points to offer that are in tension with the discourse of rules. He did not know if he could do it, was not confident that he could do it, was afraid of the mountain, and had to problem solve during the climb.

*Were you afraid of the mountain as you were climbing it?* Yes. Being afraid was part of the whole deal. I have frequently been afraid of mountains. Fear can be stimulating; it can allow you to solve problems you might not otherwise solve. And when you're afraid and have to overcome it, it adds to the satisfaction. And without the satisfaction of overcoming these fears, some climbs wouldn't be worth the effort. Life is fairly miserable at high altitude, and you need something to give you satisfaction.

*Were you confident from the start that you could climb it?* No. If at the start of a project you are confident of success, I can't see why you would go through with it. Maybe the objective is below your abilities. I planned to be fit, strong, and ready to give it a good shot, but never was I absolutely confident that I could climb it. If something is a big challenge and you don't know if you'll succeed, but you give it all you have and succeed then that's the ultimate satisfaction (Ibid).

Thus Hillary was NOT operating within a 'margin of safety' as the experience of technical climbing at high altitude was not common enough to have knowledge of what constituted safe practice, let alone rules. Hillary's comments align more closely with the discourse of the hero than with the discourse of rules.

Hillary was such an ordinary looking man, his social skills so recognizably awkward, that he seemed the epitome of ‘the guy next door’. What this conveyed was an impression that climbing mountains was something achievable to those willing to try: if he (who looks, acts and sounds so ordinary) could climb those mountains then we (who also look and feel ordinary) should be able to too. What the public did not see was that Hillary’s skills, experience and drive were far from ordinary.

### **The Comments of Bryant and Syme**

Bryant, who had climbed in the Himalaya, including climbing high on Mt Everest, in making the aforementioned comments appears to be trying to prevent officialdom imposing rules upon mountaineers. It is possible that his comments were tactical, in that they were saying ‘look, Hillary stayed within the rules and look where it got him. The system we have works, we don’t need to panic and change things’. The Minister of Internal Affairs supported his views:

I think most people will agree that *simple prohibitions and restrictions merely prevent or hinder the natural adventurous spirit of our young folk*. Therefore my approach ... has been one in which both the Government and the mountain and tramping clubs are seeking a happy and effective combination of regulation, organisation and education... I hope that some sensible provisions will result. (Italics added). (NZ Herald, 5.8.53)

Thus the mountaineers themselves, through the auspices of the club system, and with the blessing of the Government, would continue to decide the rules, and the margins of safety, in mountaineering. The Government had already legislated, through the 1952 National Parks Act, for both promoting the use of parks and for controlling how parks were to be used. It is no surprise that they sought an education campaign after the 1953 Event, because that was part of how they saw themselves – as educating people about ‘the right way’ to use their leisure time. That they did not impose ‘rules’ for climbing Mt Egmont / Taranaki after the 1953 Event, probably says something about how they were willing to defer to ‘the experts’, in this case, the alpine clubs.

Which leaves the question of why Syme raised the alarm before anything had happened. Today, if we observed two climbers ascending an icy slope towards a summit, late in the day, we would give it little thought. It is common for climbers to climb in darkness, and common for them to climb on steep, icy ground. This was not the case in 1953. The discourse of rules suggests that Syme raised the alarm preemptively because it was such an unusual event; climbers of the day generally made early starts, ascended during daylight and got back to safety before dark. As such, it was ‘outside the margins of safety’. That the Police and Search and Rescue teams responded so quickly hints at their heightened state of awareness (raised by the previous week’s tragedy) and at the respect accorded Syme.

Membership in the New Zealand Alpine Club continued its steady expansion after 1953, perhaps indicating that the public were still held in sway by the ‘give-it-a-nudge’ attitude and excitement of discovering the adventure possibilities in the outdoors. From 882 members in 1953, to 900 in 1954, to 930 in 1955 and so on. Membership increased every year until 1985, when the first-ever drop in numbers occurred. This decreasing trend continued until 1994, when an upward trend in numbers was re-established (Wesley, 2005). This is an interesting statistic when we consider what was happening at that time; however this will be covered in later chapters.

## **What the 1953 Event Represents**

The 1953 Event is therefore representative of several discourses about practice in the outdoors: the discourse of experience and judgement, with its emphasis on time in the field and mentoring; the discourse of rules with its emphasis on a ‘right way’ to do things; the discourse of education, whereby sharing knowledge is the way to prevent future incidents from occurring; and the discourse of the responsibilities of the leader, whereby the leader has a duty to not only care for the people in their group but also to uphold the wider cause implicit in the pursuit.

Outdoor clubs, at this time, were more than just the medium for like-minded people to come together and have leisure experiences in the outdoors. They represented a ‘pushing at the boundaries’ of gender and class interactions, a format where people could unshackle themselves from a pervasively conformist society. Most significantly,

however, clubs were *the* primary vehicle for the transfer of knowledge in the outdoors: for those starting out, experience was accrued via club trips; for those desiring leadership, clubs offered the structure. Clubs provided an apprenticeship model, whereby those with more experience mentored inexperienced practitioners. Clubs were the repositories of knowledge about practice. They were also the gatekeepers of that knowledge and, as such, held power over who had access to knowledge, and how that knowledge was passed on. Clubs then, were where the practitioners were trained. The situation was very different in the 2008 Event.

## Chapter 4. Event: 2008 Mangatepopo Stream Gorge

### Preamble

On April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008, six students from Elim Christian College in Auckland, and their teacher, were drowned trying to escape rapidly rising water in the Mangatepopo Stream Gorge. It was the second day of an outdoor programme conducted by The Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre (OPC), a specialist outdoor education facility in the central North Island of New Zealand.

The dramatic unfolding of details predictably excited the newspapers. Over time, the newspaper articles, together with the coroner's report and an examination of industry publications, came to reflect a range of discourses. The 'discourse of the extraordinary event' was evident in the shocked comments of the key people (the school principal, the director of OPC) and the initial commentary in the media. However, the sympathy with and trust in OPC, manifest in that discourse, was replaced by the 'discourse of blame': the organisation was at fault and someone should pay.

The 'discourse of experience and judgement', as defined in the 1953 Event, is evident in many of the comments of the public and in the coroner's report of the 2008 Event. The 'discourse of the value of the outdoors' emerges early on, especially in the comments of Ranger Smith, and reflects the use of the outdoors as an educational medium. The 'discourse of systems', refers to a compartmentalized, systematic approach to knowledge acquisition and management of outdoor practice. This approach incorporates pre-employment courses, in-house policies and standard operating procedures, as well as checklists of 'competencies' for new employees. In 2008 this had been championed for nearly two decades as the best way to train people, partly as a result of the waning of the role of clubs as training vehicles for outdoor practitioners. However, systems failure emerges in the reporting as the cause of the tragedy.



The ‘discourse of culture’ emerges with the coroner’s report, and subsequent newspaper articles. The dysfunctional culture of OPC appears to have had a part to play in the tragedy, but is largely ignored in the coroner’s recommendations. Moreover, the culture of OPC perpetuated the compartmentalization of training, and as such, OPC was representative of other organisations that also used this approach. The outdoor industry was strangely quiet in its professional reflections, possibly denoting an unwillingness to criticize itself or an unwillingness to criticize a powerful figure within the industry.

This chapter traces the chronological evolution of these discourses. The italicised sections are there to draw attention to what was being said or the tone in which it was being said. These are commented on either in later discussions or used as examples of an emerging discourse.

Like the reporting of the 1953 Event, the reporting of the 2008 Event raised questions about how the fatalities could have occurred and how people were trained or achieved competency. Exploration of these questions revealed the underlying beliefs and attitudes that shaped the practice. What emerges from this exploration is that there were multiple discourses and that they were in tension: the discourse of experience and judgement, clashed with the discourse of systems; the discourse of systems made possible the discourse of blame. In the 2008 Event, the ‘systems approach’ that dominated practice, appeared to directly contribute to the tragedy.

## The Event

A dry period of weather had finally ended and rain began falling in the Mangatepopo catchment on the 14<sup>th</sup> April and continued into the 15<sup>th</sup>. Around midday, after doing other activities based around the centre, and after a conversation with the field manager, Sullivan, an OPC instructor, led 10 students and their teacher on a trip up into the lower gorge of the Mangatepopo Stream. When the group started the trip the stream level was low and clear.

The group turned around at the ‘half-way ledge’, due to diminishing light levels in the gorge, and increased anxiety levels in the group – there were a lot of water crossings, some involving swimming and some students were not confident swimmers.

The... students noticed that on the way back down the water crossings were deeper and the current was stronger than on the way up. All but the last of the stream crossings were achieved by jumping in the water and being assisted by hand (Devonport, 2010, p10).

By the time the group neared the exit of the gorge the water was brown. At approximately 2.30pm, in gathering darkness, the group was on a ledge approximately 135 metres upstream from a dam /intake structure. Sullivan debated whether to stay or push to get out, but noting that the river had risen substantially, opted to stay put.

Initially, the ledge the group was on had been just above the water level. Over a period of time the water level became ankle deep, then knee deep, with the group having to hold tight to the rock to prevent being washed away by the current.

Ms Sullivan reviewed her options. She decided there was no way to exit the ledge upwards or sideways as the ledge was under an overhang. She tried the radio, but there was no reception. “I started to think that it would be better to go down the river and then throw-bag people individually. The entire group knew the white water position which they had all demonstrated earlier, and we had crossed the river already using a throw-bag so they knew how this would work”(Devonport, 2010, p11).

The group waited until about 3.30pm, with Sullivan assessing the river and the group's abilities. She decided they would leave the ledge and she set about pairing up – and physically attaching - the least confident swimmers with a supporting person. The noise of the river was so loud that Sullivan could only communicate directly with those people closest to her, and get her message passed along: as they would not be able to communicate directly because of a bend in the stream, they were to leave the ledge at 5 minute intervals and she would help them get out with her throw rope.

Just before 4pm, Sullivan, attached to a student, entered the torrent and was quickly swept around the bend towards the dam. Somehow they managed to fight their way to the shore, just above the dam. Sullivan then quickly organised herself to throw her rescue line to the next swimmer. At 4.05pm, in between rescue throws, Sullivan was able to radio OPC base for help. One by one or in pairs the rest of the group entered the water at intervals and were swept downstream. Sullivan was successful with one rescue. The rest of the group were washed over the dam; only two survived.

## Reaction: The NZ Herald, 2008

### The Discourse of the Extraordinary Event

Over time the language of the newspaper reports changed. The initial reactions probed questions about the quality of the equipment and the experience level of the instructor, and implied OPC was a trusted organisation and the tragedy must have been an ‘Act of God’. This is the discourse of the extraordinary event. Over the two years that the newspapers followed this story, that language changed to complete blame of the organisation and outrage that OPC had hidden, deliberately or otherwise, institutional knowledge from its staff, and cultural dysfunction from its clients.

The New Zealand Herald reported the event as “Students, teacher die in river tragedy” on Tuesday April 15<sup>th</sup> 2008. The principal of Elim Christian College, Mr Murray Burton, was quoted as saying:

From what I understand they were well equipped for the journey with wetsuits, life jackets and harnesses... *it is a fairly standard sort of activity. I guess it was OPC's call as to whether they should still go and I have no reason to doubt their judgement.*

This is important as it reflects the discourse of experience and judgement, but hints at the ‘extraordinary event’ – the school trusted that OPC were a safe and competent organisation, and had no reason to think otherwise.

On Wednesday April 16<sup>th</sup> 2008 there were five articles. ‘School River Tragedy: latest news’, contained this quote from OPC Chief Executive Grant Davidson, which reflects a discourse of systems:

The instructor involved in yesterday's river tragedy was a grief-stricken but highly qualified and competent instructor.

‘River victims fine young people’ contained language that spoke again of trust, but is also indicative of the discourse of the extraordinary event:

Mr Burton said... he had no difficulty with the decision to go on the river in the face of severe weather predictions. “We have been going to OPC for many, many years and I have no reason to doubt the call...I don’t think the teacher would have consented to taking the students if he had a doubt in his mind. Clearly it was something that happened very quickly” Mr Burton said...the students and teachers in the river group all wore wet suits, lifejackets, warm polypropylene clothing and hard helmets. “They were very well equipped”.

‘OPC missed warnings which could have prevented tragedy’ contained the first hint of criticism, concerning a disagreement between Metservice and OPC about a heavy rain warning for the area on that day. Metservice said warnings of heavy rain, lightning and flash flooding had been sent out at 8.29am. OPC said they hadn’t received it by the time of their staff meeting at 8am, and the metfax received at 6.15am had none of that information on. This disagreement would be latched upon and discussed with some ferocity, and the Coroner would eventually criticize both parties.

In a later quotation in the same article, Davidson uses the language of the ‘expert’ in describing the instructor involved as a:

*... competent, qualified outdoor pursuits instructor with a physical education degree and post-graduate certificate in outdoor education....*

But it appears that by the second day, the Chief Executive of OPC had already decided upon the cause of the tragedy, as the language here indicates a ‘scapegoat’. This is the discourse of blame:

*Mr Davidson said the centre’s field manager, who had 10 years local knowledge, was ultimately responsible for making decisions about whether or not to undertake certain activities.*

The debate about weather warnings continued on April 17<sup>th</sup>. On the 18<sup>th</sup>, the NZ Herald had the headlines ‘OPC staff in surprise visit to Elim school’, and ‘Sympathy pours in for pursuits centre staff’. The latter article contained this quote from a

volunteer, which summed up the outpouring of feelings from people around the country who had had contact with OPC over the years, who made contact at this time of crisis, and felt the need to defend the organisation. As such, it reflected the discourse of the extraordinary event:

It is a tragedy and it's awful but OPC has done wonderful things for 35 years and it's going to continue.

### **The Discourse of the Value of the Outdoors**

Three articles emerged on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008, including one about a local Department of Conservation (DOC) ranger who was familiar with the area and who participated in the rescue. His comments reflect several concurrently occurring discourses, firstly the discourse of experience and judgement:

Smith said even though he personally would not have gone in the stream for fear of flash flooding, *that was based on his local knowledge and instinct*. He said no fault could be placed on the centre or the instructor for doing so.

Secondly, Smith's comments reflect the discourse of systems:

*"It was one of those days where systems don't work," he says. "In looking for blame, we may be asking questions we aren't going to get answers for"....*

Lastly, Smith's comments reflected a new discourse, that of the value of the outdoors. He said he wanted the centre to continue taking students through the gorge and would advise any reviews of the tragedy that it should not be closed down.

"I know the value of what they are teaching kids in that gorge. It is a beautiful experience. *Risk is an inherent part of experiencing the outdoors.*"

Smith's comments about systems become even more relevant as the reporting of the Event unfolds, and are revisited in a later chapter. The editorial in the Herald on Sunday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 'In a small nation, we all share grief of those bereft by tragedy', spoke eloquently about the outpouring of grief around the country, and how parents burying their children upset the natural order of things.

### **The Discourse of Blame (1)**

For the remainder of 2008, there was only one further article in April ('Guide agonizes over her future', April 26<sup>th</sup>), one on May 26<sup>th</sup> ('OPC launches canyoning tragedy review'), and one on October 14<sup>th</sup> ('OPC prosecuted over canyoning deaths'), which outlined some of the charges being brought against OPC by the Department of Labour. Thus, six months after the tragedy, OPC now faced serious criticism; the discourse of blame had replaced the discourse of the extraordinary event:

The department considers that there were steps the outdoor pursuits centre should have taken to ensure the safety of the group on the day... Four charges were laid yesterday under the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992. One charge relates to the centre's obligation to ensure the safety of other people in the place of work. Another relates to its obligation to ensure that its employees' actions didn't expose others to avoidable risks. And two relate to obligations to protect the centre instructor who went into the gorge with the school party....

In addition to the criticism of OPC, the systems of the Elim school were also investigated. The paperwork in those systems must have demonstrated that the school had taken all practicable steps to ensure the safe experience of the students, thus they were exonerated from any wrongdoing. The discourse of systems here deflected the discourse of blame:

*Mr Burton [the school principal] said the department's investigation also found the school had met its obligations under the act and would not be charged.*

In the same article, the OPC Chairman Rupert Wilson 'welcomed any expert scrutiny and suggestions for improvement'. By appearing to be so open and willing to engage, his comments possibly reflect a desire to deflect blame away from OPC; later criticisms of OPC would show this 'openness' to be an attempt to mitigate damage to the organisation. Wilson's comments also reflect the thematic dualism that outdoor education providers find themselves in, that of providing a valuable experience in the

outdoors, an environment that has inherent hazards. They reflect the tension between the discourse of systems, which had, as its goal, controlling knowledge and managing practice to keep everything as safe as possible, and the discourse of the value of the outdoors, whereby adventure and risk were seen to be valuable educational tools:

The prosecution would be a test case in determining the parameters... for the outdoor education (sic), *in providing an exciting and meaningful experience, but still achieving the safest possible environment.*

## **The New Zealand Herald, 2009**

In 2009, the Herald published seven articles on the Mangatepopo tragedy. The headings reflect a change in tone from shock and sympathy, towards grief and anger.

- Fatal canyoning trip court hearing next week (January 13<sup>th</sup>)
- Timely call for a new era of responsibility (January 25<sup>th</sup>)
- Outdoor centre to pay nearly \$500k over canyoning deaths (March 20<sup>th</sup>)
- OPC fines won't bring closure, say grieving families (March 20<sup>th</sup>)
- Canyoning deaths could have been avoided (March 21<sup>st</sup>)
- Guide risked her life to save pupils (March 21<sup>st</sup>)
- Dismay at decision not to lay canyoning charges (August 4<sup>th</sup>)

The editorial of January 25<sup>th</sup> 2009, raised questions about why OPC admitted two charges when earlier it said it would defend them. The language here suggests a changing attitude towards OPC: that the organisation, rather than being the embodiment of courage where children could walk in the footsteps of the iconic Sir Edmund Hillary or Graeme Dingle (the discourse of the value of the outdoors), was actually a business motivated by business ideals. The discourse of blame is evident here:

The centre's decision was prompted, it said, by a desire to avoid a delay in coronial proceedings and to spare the bereaved... the ordeal of having to relive the horrific events... *A cynic might conclude that there is also tactical value in such an approach:* the police have yet to decide whether or not to lay criminal



charges and the possibility exists of later civil claim – though it would be legally complex; the decision to face the music at Labour Department level could be seen as a mitigating factor later on.

The discourse of blame is also evident in the following passage from the same article; in addition, the language used reflects the pervasive neo-liberal hegemony (neo-liberalism is discussed in a later chapter), with its emphasis on liability, blame, and the primacy of the individual over the group:

*... The fact is that taking responsibility for one's actions has become deeply unfashionable.... For all that, and notwithstanding the Outdoor Pursuits Centre's admissions, it remains worth wondering whether those who do not accept liability for their actions should have it sheeted home to them... as a society we should consider whether people whose negligence costs lives or inflicts horrific injury should not be personally answerable. The accident compensation legislation removed the right to sue for personal injury, but there is a danger that it can give us permission to be careless of each other's welfare.*

The article of March 21 2009, reported the blunt comments of Judge Anne Kiernan during the sentencing of OPC. These comments reflect the discourse of blame:

*This is a tragedy which should not have occurred and a tragedy which could have been avoided...* Judge Kiernan described the centre's actions as an “*obvious and dramatic breach of trust*”. She said its staff should have closed the upstream gorge walk and obtained weather information from the Metservice...

Further comments from the Judge reflect a different discourse, that of experience and judgement:

Judge Kiernan said the decision on whether the group should have gone into the gorge *should have been made by the experienced field manager, not Miss Sullivan who had just limited knowledge* and who had informed the manager of her intentions of taking the group partway into the gorge. “*She was a young*

*instructor with little experience in this area and it was the responsibility of the centre – her employer – to ensure her safety.”*

The article on August 4<sup>th</sup> 2009, conveyed that the police would not press criminal charges. It also conveyed comments from the school principal that use the word accountability. It is unclear whether Mr Burton is using the word as a proxy for blame or as an acknowledgement that he recognised that the systems approach so widely used in education and outdoor education, had failed to prevent this tragedy:

Mr Burton said today he did not want anyone to face criminal charges but was still *hoping accountability would come from within the outdoor sector to ensure the same mistakes were not repeated*.... He acknowledged that without criminal charges, the industry may not be pushed into action.

## **The New Zealand Herald, 2010**

In 2010, things that were in the background of the Event, shifted to the foreground with the inquest and the release of the coroner's report. After a lengthy media silence, the coroner's inquest into the seven deaths was finally started in February 2010 with predictably dramatic headlines. In 'Tearful instructor recounts canyoning trip disaster' (February 15<sup>th</sup>), Sullivan recounted her observations of the conditions:

She knew rivers could rise quickly, and she knew what danger signs to look out for. She told the court she checked the water levels and the colour of the river before going into the gorge... when we got to the dam at 1pm it was not raining hard. I could still see the rocks at the top of the dam. The water was clear and running at the same speed I'd seen it earlier. But we were under a canopy the whole time we were in the gorge and the light was fading.

## **The Discourse of Systems**

Key points emerge on February the 16<sup>th</sup>. The Field Manager said he had made contact with the instructor but did not stop her. The instructor said that she would not go far, and that no-one said to not go into the gorge. This could be a simple

miscommunication or an emergence of a the complexity of the Field Managers role – that he not only had field staff to keep an eye on, but he had to train them in the organisations processes, as well as allow them to develop their experience and ability to make judgement calls. As such, the Field Manager’s role can be seen as an embodiment of the discourse of systems – he was responsible for checking policies and procedures were being followed, and that staff had the requisite ‘ticks’ to run certain trips:

In the article on February 16<sup>th</sup>, ‘I wish I’d told her not to go into the gorge’, manager tells inquest’, the OPC field manager, Kerry Palmer said that he had earlier told the instructor Jodie Sullivan that the river might rise quickly as a lot of rain had fallen.

*I asked her why she was still going into the gorge. She said she wouldn’t go far. I told her to check the river levels when she got into the gorge. But I wish I’d told her not to go into the gorge.*

In a further article on the 16<sup>th</sup>, ‘Instructor in tears as she tells of rising water levels’, Sullivan said that

*No one had advised her not to proceed, despite predicted thunderstorms... the group was excited about the expedition and played games near the dam at the bottom before she led them in.*

The situation at OPC becomes more puzzling when the testimony of a contract instructor, Peter Zimmer, is heard on February 18<sup>th</sup> 2010, (‘Instructor tells canyoning inquest he regrets not acting earlier’). The coroner asked Zimmer why he did not go to the river until 4pm, despite becoming concerned for the group earlier:

*“I was concerned at 1.30pm because I knew instructor Jodie Sullivan had the intention to take her group to the gorge... it was raining heavily and I knew if it continued to rain heavily conditions would change quickly. My obligation was to my group, and I didn’t know exactly if she was actually in the gorge. I wasn’t 100 per cent sure she was in the gorge until 4pm when I got a radio call.”*

The discourse of systems is revealed in Zimmer's words: the compartmentalization of roles meant that Zimmer's first obligation was to his group and the trainee who was with him on that day. As a contract instructor he had to ensure that he did what he was told, otherwise his employment prospects might be put in jeopardy.

### **The Discourse of Culture**

Another article on February 18<sup>th</sup> revealed something about the workings of the centre and the culture that was present at the time of the tragedy. The words of the centre manager, John Maxted, initially reflect the discourse of systems with its compartmentalization of roles and knowledge:

*There were significant pressures upon centre staff to deliver quality programmes with very limited resources, which he believed contributed to the tragedy... the manner in which the instructional team was organised meant that instructors were required to operate more independently and with less active supervision than was ideal, and this undoubtedly contributed to the events of April 15. In my view the [OPC field manager] Kerry Palmer had too many direct reports ( a training officer, up to 14 instructors, and contracted instructors at times).*

Maxted's words also make visible the underlying belief system in operation – economic efficiency equates to do more with less. They also highlight the discourse of culture: information and experiences aren't easily shared because of the high staff turn over; there is high staff turn over because people are unhappy; perhaps people are unhappy because they are not heard or not valued.

*He believed staff turnover and the subsequent loss of institutional and local area knowledge was a significant root cause of the tragedy. He was very upset to find out the number of previous incidents OPC had experienced in the gorge and thought, in hindsight, instructors should have been made more aware of historical incidents.*

In contrast, the article on February 19<sup>th</sup> 2010(‘Centre boss says system failures led to tragedy’), had Davidson, the Chief Executive of OPC, saying that a ‘*series of slippages in the OPC’s systems* led to the tragedy’ for which he was ultimately responsible. In other words, Davidson is saying that the fault is with the people, as they were not following the system that he created.

In the same article, Peter Zimmer was asked what could be done differently to prevent a similar tragedy. His comments hint at the situation being more complex than what Davidson had suggested. Initially his comments reflect the discourse of culture, whereby OPC seemed to lack experienced staff. They also show how practitioners most often receive training via pre-employment courses:

*If there were staff with higher qualifications who have worked in the industry for a number of years that would help... That would be better than someone who’s just come out of polytech because judgement only comes over time...*

The discourse of culture (non-sharing) and the discourse of systems (compartmentalization) appear again, when Crown Solicitor Vanderkolk asked Zimmer if there was a contingency plan where staff at OPC shared information about weather warnings.

[Zimmer responded] *There weren’t many occasions where there was a sharing of concerns about such things as river flows or conditions on the mountain.*

### **Discourses in Tension**

The Herald article of February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010, quoted a mother of one of the deceased children. Evident here are multiple discourses in tension with each other. The discourse of the value of the outdoors struggles with the discourse of systems and the discourse of blame:

*I don’t want to see these kinds of trips stopped because they are great learning experiences for young people. But at the same time, it needs to be done in a safe environment with all the controls there so it can’t happen again... There*

are no words to describe what it's done to me... I'm just angry at the waste of lives... it did not have to happen. It was preventable.

This is an important quote as it highlights again the duality of outdoor education – that adventurous experiences are tremendous opportunities for learning and growth, but that people desire them to be safe. We see clearly the revelation to the parent that it was not an ‘Act of God’ that killed their child, rather that something was wrong with the organisation.

This article also has Davidson refuting Maxted's earlier accusations, stating that he believed

OPC did not cut corners on safety for financial reasons. *The tragedy was a result of a large number of things which came together on the day.*

This passage is also Davidson reiterating support for the risk management system that he has helped promulgate, a system that suggests an incident has many pre-cursors or ‘lemons’; decision points which influence the progression towards the incident.

On March 30<sup>th</sup> 2010, the coroners report was released. The Herald article of that day “‘Complacency’ a factor in canyoning deaths –report” chose to emphasize the severity of the rainfall, and included the following passage which points to a break down in the OPC systems approach to training:

The report also says the group's instructor was not trained to take groups out of an escape route at a halfway point in the gorge, other instructors heard claps of thunder in the area and had seen “a brown raging torrent” coming out of the gorge, and that “under-estimation of risks” and “complacency” contributed to the students deaths.

In “Licensing ‘no answer’ to gorge drownings” (NZ Herald, March 31<sup>st</sup>) the coroner's report is briefly discussed, including the recommendation for the Government to consider the licensing of outdoor education and adventure operations ‘to ensure minimum standards are met’. The article further illuminates the break down of the

OPC systems approach, as it mentions the need for better staff training (especially about the gorge's historical flood patterns), better systems for monitoring the weather, and a more conservative approach to the Gorge trips, including the use of a second instructor. Thus we see again in this article, discourses in tension – systems versus experience and judgement.

In the same article, the father of one of the deceased also noted these 'discourses in tension'. In offering a reflection on the efficacy of the systems approach at OPC, he makes visible the potential for failure of this systems approach across the wider industry:

*The coroner has articulated just how poorly OPC was running, even though it's had all these policies and was... held up as the benchmark of outdoor adventure centres. [Licensing] wouldn't make any difference. Who is going to monitor that? They passed an audit on the day the kids died. What did they have to do to fail?*

The Herald on Sunday (April 4<sup>th</sup>) ran an opinion piece entitled "No room for error". In it, the columnist strikes a sympathetic tone towards the benefits of outdoor education for kids – testing oneself, the thrill of self-discovery, the knowledge of how to work as a team (the discourse of the value of the outdoors). In addition, her comments reflect the discourse of experience and judgement, and make visible what was not evident to the OPC management on the day:

*I have enormous sympathy for the instructor, too. It was Jodie Sullivan's third month at the centre and just her sixth trip into the gorge. She lacked the knowledge and experience required to lead the teenagers through the gorge that day... Another instructor, more familiar with the gorge... decided not to go into the gorge, citing the weather conditions and an "eerie" feeling. That's what experience gives you: a gut instinct based on life-and-death decisions made over a number of years.*

## Other Media: Sunday Star-Times, The Dominion Post

In addition to the Herald, a number of relevant articles were published in other newspapers. Among these, the following three stood out.

The Sunday Star-Times ran a damning article on February 21<sup>st</sup> 2010, ‘Fatality, near misses preceded gorge deaths’. It described a ‘string of serious near misses’ in the gorge prior to 2008. It hinted that more incidents could be revealed after a suppression order was lifted. Further insights into the culture of OPC were reported:

In a statement read to the court, John Maxted, centre manager at the time of the tragedy, *painted a picture of a dysfunctional organisation with poor institutional memory. He said there was little interest in culture change, “unless there were clear financial advantages”.*

‘Clear financial advantages’ and ‘poor institutional memory’ would suggest that the dysfunction was a top-down problem; that the culture was heavily influenced by the people running the centre, and that the staff below them were unhappy. The discourse of culture, of ‘do more with less’, is evident again in the following comments from Maxted:

He said the staff had been under stress leading up to the incident, with three senior instructors heavily involved in the “Summits for Sir Ed” tour, organised following the January death of Mt Everest conqueror and OPC patron, Sir Edmund Hillary. Maxted said OPC had lost much standing over the last decade and there was “*significant pressure to deliver programmes with very little resources*”. He said staff operated under an ethos of “*don’t complain – just deal with it*”.

## Historic Reports

Further criticism of the OPC organisation was reported in the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2010 Sunday Star-Times, which had obtained two historic reports from 1996 and 2006. The first report was a confidential safety audit. It showed that problems with the OPC culture



had been known about for a long time, and furthermore, that the culture itself had been identified as affecting staff and client safety.

*Identified safety risks included high staff turnover, non-compliance with agreed organisational policy and an “autocratic, unfriendly and demotivating” management dynamic.*

The second report critiqued various systems in place, including the time allocated to inducting new employees, and the difficulty of assessing competencies:

It warned of the potential to place instructors in more demanding situations than the ones they had been signed off for.

In this second report, Davidson refuted the problems of culture and systems, instead indicated that staff turnover was more a factor of isolation and lack of work opportunities. The discourse of systems was again evident in his comments about qualifications:

He added the outdoor education industry had tried hard to “self-regulate”, but available qualifications were not always taken up because they were costly.

In this he appears to be saying that qualified people would make the difference but it is hard to get qualified people because of the cost. This approach places the emphasis of training practitioners on systems, rather than on acquisition of experience and development of judgement.

### **Discourse of Blame (2)**

The tone of the article was even sharper when it reported the anger of a mother of one of the deceased students. By now, the discourse of the extraordinary event had well and truly been replaced by the discourse of blame.

Catherine Linnen, mother of Tara Gregory, said yesterday it was important “the people of New Zealand know this wasn’t an accident”. She called for

government regulation of outdoor educators. “Somebody out there needs to be responsible for the people who work in places like this... if the laws of the country won’t charge them, at the very least people should lose their jobs.

The Dominion Post of April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010, had on the cover of their weekend magazine, a headline that read “Facing the challenge – two years on from canyoning tragedy, why do parents still send their kids on camp?” While it had elements of the discourse of blame in the article, the editorial raised again the discourse of the value of the outdoors:

How can sending a child to school camp ever be the same after the tragedy of the Mangatepopo Gorge, two years ago this week, when six students and their teacher were swept to their deaths by floodwaters? *The fact that parents do still sign those permission slips is testament to what they believe their child will gain from the experience – exposure to risk, yes, but also a resultant maturing of judgement, and at the end of it all a huge sense of achievement.*

In the article itself, an instructor at OPC, one of the six remaining instructors who were at the centre at the time of the tragedy, is asked if it shook his faith in what he does.

Totally. Is it worth the cost? If someone died every week, of course not. But I believe that what they can learn out here is valuable.

In a sidebar to the main article, the systems changes made at OPC since the tragedy were pointed out. It also referred to the problem of ‘complacency’ identified by the NZ Herald article of March 30<sup>th</sup>. But most importantly, the article voiced concerns about the effectiveness of the systems approach to practice and training. Thus we see the discourse of systems being critiqued and the discourse of experience and judgement being championed:

But as distressed parent Andy Bray points out, *revamped systems are not enough to guarantee safety. OPC already had good policies and a chief executive with a doctorate in risk management on the day Natasha died. “You*

*don't need policies, you need common sense.* It was obviously foolhardy (to go into the gorge). It comes down to the people on the ground, if they're wise enough to put their hand out and see how hard it's raining.... It's up to the outdoor industry to prove they have got their act together. They have let New Zealand down. How can I be reassured that complacency is not going to set in again?"

## The Coroner's Report

Much of the 2010 newspaper reporting reflected what emerged in the coronial inquiry and subsequent report. The report made for unsettling reading, as the picture emerged of OPC as an intense and not altogether harmonious place to work. There are a number of things raised in the report that never quite get addressed. All quotes in the following section are from Devonport's coronial report (2010) unless otherwise noted.

### The OutdoorsMark Safety Audit

OPC, on the day of the tragedy, was being field audited as part of a revalidation of an OutdoorsMark standard. The auditor, Jill Dalton, had observed Sullivan and her group on the high ropes course in the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> April. It had started to rain heavily and Dalton went to the centre office for an umbrella and 'a bit of protection'. She observed a lot of water pooling on the ground, and, while having a coffee with John Maxted and Kerry Palmer, noticed that it was very dark and there was thunder and lightning.

At the Resource Centre (an equipment storage space), Dalton observed Sullivan getting her group ready for the gorge trip with equipment and a briefing. After Sullivan and her group left, Dalton had lunch then observed another instructor, Matt Rowley, briefing his group for a gorge trip. At this point, the contract instructor Peter Zimmer arrived with another group and discussed the gorge with Rowley:

Matt said he was going to do the gorge trip and Pete said "I've just been down to have a look at the river and *I wouldn't do that trip if I was you. He said the river was brown and rising*" (p19).

In earlier testimony, Zimmer said this about his checking of the river:

[The stream] was darker than normal. It was raining. The water had a slight tint to it. *The whole place and atmosphere had an eerie (spooky) feel /atmosphere to it. It just did not feel right to be there today. That is what my gut feeling told*

*me*. At this stage I made my final decision not to go ahead with the upstream gorge trip planned for the afternoon (p13).

Dalton met with the field manager in the office around 2.15 but found him unable to concentrate:

He was a bit distracted because Jodie hadn't come back and it had been raining quite a lot and *I could see he was getting increasingly nervous...* I said to him *"look your mind's not on this and neither is mine"* so because *we both knew things weren't feeling right...* I said I'll write up my report and we'll just leave it there (p19).

These comments from and about people with many years of experience in the outdoors, suggest something about instinct, that they knew that being in the gorge on that day was a bad idea.

Dalton's subsequent report, following the field audit, revalidated OPC as an OutdoorsMark Standard holder. Davidson, who was also a safety auditor and was instrumental in setting up the audit process, had this to say about the audit:

*Quite frankly I was shocked and disappointed at the standard of the audit that was carried out. I have never personally carried out a field audit without going into the field and understanding the activity and going in a systematic way through the policies and procedures that the organisation has documented in checking off each one* (p20).

What does not make itself known here is the scope of the audit. Dalton stated that sampling was used to gather evidence, but this did not extend to her accompanying Sullivan to the gorge. Dalton had in fact listed nine areas for improvement in her report (p33). Often the focus in an audit is the paper trail of the organisation, followed by a snapshot of some of the fieldwork. Unless the auditors are being paid to do so, it is highly unlikely that they would endeavour to see all field operations. OPC had ample policies and procedures, and it had many staff in the field, of which Dalton was able to see only a few at work and at different times of the day.

### **The Language of Experience**

There are numerous times in the coroner's report where the language used suggests that the important factors in preventing accidents are the experience levels of the staff, their ability to be flexible in their decision making, their ability to make good judgement calls, and the retention of collective knowledge. The coroner's report therefore, repeatedly illustrates the discourse of experience and judgement as being a significant influence on practice and practitioners. This contrasts with the systems approach of organisations like OPC, and the proselytising of the systems approach by the organisations that provide skills training, qualifications and assessments, like NZOIA, MSC or Skills Active.

Some examples in the coroner's report, of the discourse of experience and judgement, included:

There were signs of water in streams *that normally were low* to non-existent (OPC instructor Griffiths, p7).

On the track down the water was sometimes up to my knees and thighs. *This isn't normal*. On the way down the track you normally follow is very easy to see but on this day I could hardly follow the track because there was so much water running off the track (OPC instructor Hughes, p7).

Pete, who is a senior instructor, explained that *he had noticed a rise* of the water level... and that *he wasn't going to do the gorge trip because of the weather*. *This was a bit of a relief to me* as Pete had made the decision for me (OPC instructor Rowley, p13).

The whole place and atmosphere had an eerie (spooky) feel /atmosphere to me. It just did not feel right to be there today. *That is what my gut feeling told me* (Contract instructor Zimmer, p13).

The majority of these comments related to being aware of the environment and the changing conditions. The coroner noted that Sullivan, the young, inexperienced instructor, lacked this awareness:

It is also vital to observe, during a gorge trip, whether the water level is rising ... *the rising of the water level does not appear to have been noticed* by Ms Sullivan... (p23).

Ms Sullivan...*did not appreciate the danger* when she returned from the halfway ledge, and did not appreciate the danger until on the return trip (p27).

Some examples in the coroner's report, of decision-making flexibility and the need to retain institutional knowledge, included:

At that point I radioed to OPC saying that there was a loud clap of thunder and that if the thunder and lightning continued I would radio back to say *we had changed our plans and we would not go* to the top of the mountain during the storm (OPC instructor Griffiths, p7).

*To make an appropriate assessment* as to the chance of the water level rising in the gorge *requires knowledge* of the catchment of the gorge (p21).

The decision whether there was the likelihood of the water level rising to an unsafe level appears to have been left to Ms Sullivan, *who did not have the same level of historical knowledge* of the ... stream... as was possessed by the Field Manager (p24).

The historic stream level data is an accumulation of knowledge that contributes to experience of place. The National Water and Atmospheric Research Limited (NIWA) organisation were of the opinion that the stream event of April 15<sup>th</sup> 2008 'was not unusual' (p15) and 'not unexpected' (p32). The coroner's report also noted that the ability to assess rising water levels '*was an essential and necessary skill*' (p22), but that there did not appear to be any training for it. In addition, OPC had amassed 'a

considerable body of knowledge' that related to historic gorge incidents, but *'the circumstances of the incidents were not being used as a learning tool for instructors'* (p25).

The language used in the coroner's report, as highlighted above, would imply not only that the Event was a predictable, knowable thing, but that the culture of OPC prevented that knowledge from being shared. Moreover, the more experienced staff used real-time observations to assess the conditions and make decisions, but the lesser-experienced staff were unable to do that. Thus the discourse of experience and judgement retained its value to practitioners, even while it was being subsumed by the discourse of systems.

### **Davidson's Stance.**

In contrast with the Language of Experience mentioned above, Davidson had a different stance when it came to what the important factors in preventing accidents were. Davidson, as CEO of OPC since the early 1990's, has had a major influence on shaping not only the way OPC was run, but also the way outdoor education was carried out in New Zealand. He earned both a Master's degree and a Doctorate in the area of risk management; in conjunction with the Mountain Safety Council, he helped promote and establish risk management courses nationwide in the early 1990's. He was instrumental in establishing OutdoorsMark, NZOIA, and the Outdoor Safety Institute. He has served as a board member on the government agency SFRITO (Sport, Fitness and Recreation Industry Training Organisation), as president of NZOIA, and as an industry expert in the investigation of outdoor tragedies.

After the 2008 Event, Davidson again championed the discourse of systems: his stance in the coronial inquiry was that the systems were not the problem, rather the problem was that people had failed to implement the systems correctly. In the report he mentions that 'OPC had slippage in its systems' (p18), that 'poor decisions were made by staff' (Ibid), and that he was 'shocked and disappointed by the standard of the audit' (p20). Davidson's consistent response was to apportion blame to those who had not followed the systems (ie the Field Manager, the instructor, the senior staff, the auditor)



and thus deflect blame away from either himself or the effectiveness of the systems that he had been instrumental in setting up.

The solutions, according to Davidson, were new high radio aerials that ‘would provide effective communication anywhere in the gorge’ (p20), and a new system that could ‘point out the potential of an activity to result in serious harm’ and allow ‘clear decision making for managing risks in those activities’ (p18-19).

In addition, Davidson listed his own assessment of the factors that contributed to the tragedy. There were 15 on his list:

- 2 were critical of Metservice
- 1 was critical that the people in the outdoors who knew about a Metservice email system hadn’t let the rest of the industry know.
- 4 were directly critical of the field manager.
- 3 were critical of experienced staff (for not grasping the ‘true potential risk’; not raising a concern about the planned gorge trips; and not organising a team to help the group once other instructors had decided that conditions were unsuitable)
- 2 were critical of Sullivan, the group’s instructor.
- 1 was critical of the safety auditor (for not questioning the trip).
- 1 was critical of the staff for not following established policies.
- 1 suggested more rigorous standards needed to be set as prerequisites for staff to run the gorge trip (implicating senior management again).

But was this a case of not seeing the forest for the trees? Why did the experienced staff not raise concerns about the planned gorge trips? Why were established policies not followed? Comments in the coroner’s report, especially by Maxted, would indicate there was a lack of trust between the management and the instructional staff that prevented clear communication occurring or information being shared or help being asked for. The fact that Davidson’s response was to allocate blame and then to seek a better tool for analysing risk in outdoor activities (the FLASH process -Factors Likely to Accentuate Serious Harm) suggests that he (and by inference OPC) was systems oriented, rather than people oriented; that a better system or people using those systems

correctly, might have prevented the tragedy. Moreover, the quote from parent Andy Bray suggests that this response may have missed the point:

*... revamped systems are not enough to guarantee safety. OPC already had good policies and a chief executive with a doctorate in risk management on the day Natasha died. You don't need policies, you need common sense...*

(Dominion Post, 17.4. 2010)

## Other Media: The Mountain Safety Council Media Release

On March 31<sup>st</sup>, the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council (MSC) released a statement from the Chief Executive, Darryl Carpenter, which endorsed the findings of the coroner. The discourse of systems is apparent in the blind faith that the systems approach is the right approach:

[The] New Zealand Mountain Safety Council supports the Coroner's recommendation *that Government consider ensuring minimum safety standards are met* in outdoor education and adventure operations.

It is apparent in the 'systems' language of the statement:

We support any moves to ensure *robust standards* exist across the outdoor recreation sector and that operators and participants receive *adequate training and education in how to best manage the risks inherent in outdoor activities*.

The systems approach is also apparent in the call to action for further systems to be introduced:

We would go further and *urge that Government consider requiring all activity providers undergo regular, external review of their operations to ensure minimum standards are met and that there is continual improvement in safety standards across the sector* (Mountain Safety Council, 2010. Italics added).

Carpenter went on to reaffirm the importance of outdoor adventure in helping develop the potential of young people, and the MSC stance that the 'risk management approach' towards outdoor activities 'avoids serious injury or death'. The following statement illustrates the tension between the discourse of experience and judgement ('dynamic environment... constant vigilance... experience') and the discourse of systems ('safe participation... careful preparation... best practice, robust processes... the right skills... processes... standards'):

The outdoors is a dynamic environment. Safe participation in outdoor activities requires constant vigilance, careful preparation, a *thorough understanding of best practice, robust processes and access to the right skills and experience.*

*We encourage schools, parents and students undertaking outdoor activity to seek appropriate reassurance from their activity provider that their skills, knowledge and processes and standards are both adequate and up-to-date (Ibid. Italics added).*

Chisholm and Shaw (2004) question who actually gains from audit and accreditation processes in New Zealand. The MSC statements, *prima facie*, appear reasonable and supportive. However, the statements play upon the fear generated by the tragedy and the fear inherent within the processes themselves, implying both subtly and overtly that adventurous activities should be left to the ‘experts’, and that anyone not within the system (and especially the MSC system) is not likely to be an expert. Chisholm and Shaw (2004) also suggest that the generation of fear is one of the consequences of an historic (and on-going) jockeying for position in the New Zealand outdoors, to be recognised as the provider of the best qualifications and training pathway. Their article is discussed further in a later section.

## Questions

It appears that, from the reporting of the 2008 Event, the practice of the time was dominated by the discourse of systems, with its compartmentalised approach to acquiring knowledge and skills, its use of pre-employment training to provide foundational knowledge, and its emphasis on policies and procedures to ensure outdoor activities were ‘safe’. More experienced practitioners, however, trusted their depth of experience and knowledge more than the systems: this is evident in the language used.

Again, there are questions about the Event that were not directly addressed by the media, yet when asked and worked through, shed further light upon the discourses operating at the time.

- Why did Sullivan enter the gorge in the first place?
- Why did senior OPC staff not intervene to veto the intentions of Sullivan?
- Why did the OutdoorsMark auditor not veto the intentions of Sullivan?
- Why did the coroner recommend changes to training practices and technical matters, yet ignore the evidence about the type of culture that existed at OPC?

And finally, some questions are raised about larger themes:

- What does the discourse say about the acceptance of risk in society at this time?
- What taken-for-granted knowledge is challenged by this accident?
- Who would gain from an analysis of the accident and a dissemination of that analysis, and who would lose?

In answering these questions, the forces operating in and around the 2008 Event are made visible. These forces include the wider societal context of New Zealand, and specifically the rise to prominence of the neo-liberal economic philosophy. These questions will be addressed in the following sections.

## **Pre-conditions for Reaction**

### **What the Literature Tells Us: The Discourse of Risk**

A common theme in the wider literature of outdoor education, since the mid to late 1980's, is that risk in the outdoors is valuable but that it can and should be managed:

The challenge for outdoor leaders and enthusiasts is to operate in a safe manner without compromising the excitement, the uncertainty, and the achievement of genuine adventure experiences. Risk should never be sought for its own sake but it is integral to the adventure experience (Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff & Breunig, 2006, p.251).

The difficulty of balancing safe practice while promoting adventure has been a subject for debate in the New Zealand literature also. Articles by Davidson (2004) and Haddock & Sword (2004) emphasize the primacy of safety and the perception of risk as the potentiality to lose something of value. These contrast with Zink & Leberman (2003), Allan (2005) and Sullivan (2006) and especially Hersey (2008 and 2009) who suggest that something important is lost when the practice of outdoor education is dominated by thoughts of safety, and that risk also contains an opportunity to gain something.

Straker (2007) further highlights this paradox in the practice of outdoor education in New Zealand, when she describes the tension that exists between providing outdoor activities that allow a space for exploration and a sense of personal freedom, and the need to manage those activities so no one gets hurt.

The identification and management of risk has become a central tenet of outdoor education practices, both in New Zealand and overseas (Haddock, 1993; Priest & Gass, 1997). The NZ Mountain Safety Council (MSC) has been responsible for a multitude of publications that promote this tenet (Haddock, 1993; Goldring and Mullins, 1995 & 2000; Allan, 2006). In the foreword to Haddock's book 'Managing Risk in Outdoor Activities', Alan Trist the Executive Director of MSC announces that:

The processes of risk management are a powerful tool in the development of excellence in leadership. They follow too the current thrust of responsible safety management required by new legislation, and in particular, the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992. (Trist in Haddock, 1993)

It is Trist's comments that hint at the temporal shift in the thinking behind the current practice, as the literature specifically promoting the identification and management of risk, did not appear to emerge until the 1990's. Until that point, risk management was a minor theme or a theme incorporated into a different topic like leadership or planning. For example, the 1983 Bushcraft manual published by the MSC (Abbot & Mullins, 1983) had no listing in its index for risk management, and no chapters dedicated to the topic, whereas the Haddock (1993) publication dedicated the entire 100 pages to the topic; the 1995 Bushcraft manual (Goldring & Mullins, 1995) had one entire chapter and four items in the index; and the 2006 Bushcraft manual (Allan, 2006) had four chapters that discuss or mention risk management, including one dedicated to the subject, and six items in the index.

Zink and Leberman (2003) also suggest that a shift had occurred in the 1990's and that it was entrenched in the thinking of practitioners by the early part of the next decade:

The uniformity with which the instructors' defined risk may also be indicative of how pervasive the current risk discourse is in adventure education (p69).

They went on to suggest that the dominance of the risk discourse prevented 'other ways in which risk can be understood' (p.69)

Thus the practice of outdoor education had been influenced by the emergence and dominance of risk management. Other influences on the current practice are yet to be uncovered, as the history of outdoor education in New Zealand is not widely known or in a coherent singular form.

### Changes in Education

Lynch (1998) states that outdoor education, in its European form, had been part of New Zealand education for 150 years. Furthermore, prior to the 1940's outdoor education was focused on recreational activities but after World War Two there was much more of an educational focus, and in the 1970's the focus shifted again to employability (Lynch, 2000, cited in Zink & Boyes, 2007). Given how long outdoor education programmes have been operating in New Zealand, there is very little known about the values and beliefs that underpin teachers' practice (Zink & Boyes, 2007).

Zink & Boyes (2007) noted some changes within the New Zealand education system that influenced how outdoor education was viewed in schools. These included 'Education Outside the Classroom' (EOTC), legislation, and written safety guidelines: Lack of agreement around definitions of outdoor education prompted the New Zealand Department of Education to create 'Education Outside the Classroom' (EOTC) in 1980; today EOTC is not only a philosophical approach to education, but a collection of educators who share information and methods through symposiums and a newsletter. The emphasis on safety in the 1990's coupled with a number of deaths during outdoor activities, prompted the Ministry of Education (the successor to the Department of Education) to issue safety guidelines to EOTC practice and to run a series of workshops promoting this approach – to which schools were *required* to send staff.

The prominence of risk and safety discussions were partly fuelled by the 1992 Health and Safety in the Workplace legislation which shifted the onus of employee safety more firmly onto the employer. In the outdoors, there was a lot of fear and misinformation generated by this legislation, especially around the use of sites that had naturally occurring hazards like cliffs, or trees in rivers. This fear spurred attempts to control practice through a systems approach.

Zink & Boyes (2007) also noted that the first official sanctioning of outdoor education occurred only in the 1999 education review, when it became one of the seven key learning areas in the Health and Physical Education curricula. Prior to this it had been part of the education culture but not part of the official national curricula. The 1999 review had been instigated 15 years earlier and was part of the major reshaping of New



Zealand society by successive neo-liberal governments. The impact of neo-liberalism is addressed in a latter chapter, but one of the impacts in education was that governance of schools had been devolved to individual schools rather than overseen by a government department. This had repercussions for which schools could afford outdoor education for their students, and how it was valued.

### **Changes in Society**

Even Davidson, while championing safety procedures in the outdoors, notes a change in social attitudes towards acceptable risk and the value of adventure, driven in part by legislative change. While discussing the analogy of unsupervised activities being likened to a student pilot logging 'solo' time, Davidson states that his belief is 'that the training programme is a legacy of a more risk accepting age' (Davidson, 2004, p22); and if the reason that unsupervised time is included in a programme is tradition and cost, then 'We cannot allow either of these reasons to be an excuse in outdoor education because society is less tolerant of a loss in our programmes' (p23).

In addition, it appears that the benefit - to the individual, group or society - of people having adventures in the outdoors may no longer be apparent:

I despair when I hear of school leaders cancelling outdoor excursions because of the concern over litigation, should something go wrong... Undeniably there is an ongoing tension between those people who would eliminate risk and those, like me, who know that if we achieve that goal then the human species is certainly finished (Graeme Dingle writing in the Foreword to Charles, Jones, Waters & Moodie, 2004).

Dingle's comments were echoed by another grizzled outdoor user and commentator, the journalist Colin Moore. Moore's comment illustrates the perception that recreating in the outdoors is more dangerous than recreating in other environments:

Parents happily encourage their youngsters to play soccer or other sports, or take swimming lessons, but are reticent about similar involvement in the great outdoors (Moore, 2006, p10)

Yet getting outdoors used to be part of the New Zealand culture. Graham Charles, while sea kayaking the Antarctic Peninsular with two companions, describes spending a lot of time discussing what could be done to keep the ‘spirit of adventure alive and kicking in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’:

All three of us grew up in family environments that encouraged exploration, outdoor activity and accountability for our own actions. Thankfully we were not wrapped in cotton wool in the false belief this sort of protection would make us better people. We were allowed to make mistakes and learn lessons of reality, success, grief, adventure and accomplishment that go hand in hand with outdoor activities (Charles, Jones & Waters, 2007, p14).

Thus the literature of outdoor education, both the academic and the popular, portrays a societal change of attitude that has taken place in New Zealand, in the way outdoor activities are approached and in the perception of the value of those activities.

## Interpretation

Crowe (2005, p55) suggests discourse analysis illuminates three things: Firstly, how ‘social relations, identities, knowledge and power are constructed in spoken and written texts’; Second, it can illuminate aspects of practice that may not be apparent with other research methods; and third, it can ‘provide an opportunity for identifying oppressive... practices and facilitating more enabling ones’. What then is illuminated by the reporting of the Mangatepopo tragedy?

Certainly the complexity of operating in these times was shown by the number of investigations into the Event, the number of charges laid, the political manoeuvrings to reduce the impact upon the centre, the size of the fine and the debate over whether it was enough / appropriate, the range of responses by the parents to the charges, the prosecutions and later the evidence at the coroners court.

Furthermore, the systems failures at OPC, implied or visible, were complex in themselves: some appeared obvious lapses yet hid deeper causes that did not always fully reveal themselves in the court proceedings.

In this particular tragedy, it initially appeared that all reasonable steps for identifying and managing the risk within that activity, were undertaken by the staff of OPC: OPC had the relevant policies and procedure in place to theoretically manage the risks of the activity; on the day of the Event there had been a weather forecast obtained and communicated to the staff at the morning briefing; the field manager had approved the activities for the day; the field manager had liaised with the instructor prior to her taking her group into the gorge, and had cautioned her to be aware of rising water levels; the group had entered the gorge with appropriate clothing and equipment, and had practised throw-bag rescues prior to entering.

Let us now turn to the questions raised by the discourse around the 2008 Event. A key question was ‘why did Sullivan enter the gorge in the first place?’ The answer is that Sullivan entered the gorge with her group because she felt it was an appropriate activity for her group and because no one had told her not to go. The NZ Herald articles on February 16<sup>th</sup> 2010, clearly relate this:

[Palmer] *I asked her why she was still going into the gorge. She said she wouldn't go far.* I told her to check the river levels when she got into the gorge. But I wish I'd told her not to go into the gorge...

[Sullivan said that] *No one had advised her not to proceed*, despite predicted thunderstorms... the group was excited about the expedition and played games near the dam at the bottom before she led them in.

Sullivan's inexperience became manifest in her lack of knowledge about the gorge and her inability to respond to the change in conditions. Why senior staff or the OutdoorsMark auditor did not intervene, is a harder question to answer. Certainly the latter was bound by a scope of inquiry that prevented her from seeing all staff running all activities – she could not be everywhere at once. The focus of the audit is to see if the paperwork matches the field practice. It was not her job to stop staff doing their job, but to see if what they did in the job matched what the paperwork said they were going to do.

### **Blind Trust**

A paper by Chisholm and Shaw (2004) may offer some insight into why the senior staff, including the field manager, may not have intervened earlier. In this paper, they explore the discourse around audit and accreditation processes in the New Zealand outdoor industry. They ask whose interests are best served by the promotion of audit and accreditation systems, and who benefits from a greater focus on safety: what emerges is that consumers are encouraged to rely on regulatory bodies to ensure that practice is being conducted safely. These regulatory bodies influence what is 'safe' and what is not, as they are in a position of power to lobby to further these concerns. In New Zealand, what has become normalized is the need for organisations to demonstrate that their practice is safe, by having policies, procedures in place and by having appropriately qualified staff.

Undoubtedly, each of these organisations [NZOIA, OutdoorsNZ, Water Safety New Zealand, Maritime Safety Authority] has a responsibility to promote a responsible development of the NZ outdoors industry. Yet each focuses

primarily on safety, choosing to marginalize other discourses, for example fun, enjoyment, social interaction, exercise or health. This focus on safety... does little to allay any fears of potential customers. Indeed a suspicion may develop that if it were not for the national regulatory organisations then operators / teachers / instructors would be constantly pushing the boundaries of safety. (Chisholm and Shaw, 2004, p319)

The audit and accreditation processes are essentially reductionist, in that they privilege one form of knowledge over others, and may ignore the experience levels and abilities of operators. The ability of operators to make choices further diminishes, Chisholm and Shaw argue, if they trust too much in the criteria for safety.

Not only are there bodies such as ONZ who can implement sanctions based on compliance but, over time, operators themselves can become experts in self-surveillance, expecting sanctions and thus conforming to the requirements of audit and accreditation. Consequently the influence of the governing bodies extends, increasing their stature within the industry. The ability of operators to make individual choices, based on experience or context, diminishes (Ibid, p322).

The result of this focus on safety, the jockeying for authority of regulatory bodies, and the diminishing influence of individuals, is the belief that this approach will ultimately create a safe working environment. This is the perception promoted to and accepted by, consumers. Ultimately, according to Chisholm and Shaw, this perception is flawed:

Based on the knowledge that is represented by such 'yardsticks', those who choose to do outdoor activities may expect that a company or individual with glowing 'results' will have no accidents... therefore, accreditation and audit may create a culture of blind trust (Ibid, p324).

It is possible that OPC's processes – its many policies and procedures, its training methods – instilled a 'blind trust' within the management and within the instructor taking her group into the gorge, that everything would be alright.

... *the rising of the water level does not appear to have been noticed* by Ms Sullivan... (Devonport, 2010, p23).

And that while they didn't intervene because of that 'blind trust' (distinctly different from complacency), some senior staff valued their 'instinct' and reacted to it:

The whole place and atmosphere had an eerie (spooky) feel /atmosphere to me. It just did not feel right to be there today. *That is what my gut feeling told me* (Contract instructor Zimmer, in Devonport, 2010, p13).

The auditor had also been around long enough to value her instincts, which is why there was such discomfort expressed:

He [Palmer] was a bit distracted because Jodie hadn't come back and it had been raining quite a lot and *I could see he was getting increasingly nervous...* I said to him "*look your mind's not on this and neither is mine*" so because *we both knew things weren't feeling right...* I said I'll write up my report and we'll just leave it there (OutdoorsMark auditor Dalton, in Devonport, 2010, p19).

The discourse of systems, therefore, has 'blind trust' as an unforeseen influence (what Foucault would call a 'produced effect') upon practice and practitioners.

### **The Recommendations of the Coroner**

The coroner made 29 recommendations. In terms of the discourse offered by the coroner, the recommendations sat firmly in the discourse of systems, with two major groupings, that of training and roles, and that of policy and procedures.

Within the training and roles group, there were six recommendations about aspects of training (river rescue technique, rescue exercises, competencies, radio use and gorge geography, assessing water levels and catchment data); five recommendations related to field practice (signals, radios carried and kept on, ratios, approach to gorge); four related to the duties of the field manager (field plan, decision analysis, radio communications, environmental conditions); three related to acquiring knowledge of

the stream (catchment identified, gorge map, monitoring); and three related to equipment (radios).

In the policy and procedures group, two recommendations related to OPC policy (when to exit gorge, communicating with the field manager); and one was for an OPC procedure (emergency plan). In addition, the coroner recommended changes for three other organisations: three recommendations were for Metservice (severe weather warnings, written forecasts, procedures); one was for ONZ (audits); and one was a recommendation for the government (licencing).

Even the recommendations that dealt with experience levels were couched in terms of systems: assessing water levels was about training, not about time spent in the field developing observational skills and flexible judgement; decision analysis was not a reflection of experience but rather it required a 'tool' to guide the decision making.

The short answer to why the coroner recommended changes to training practices and technical matters, yet ignored the evidence about the type of culture that existed at OPC, is probably that the training and technical matters are easier to deal with than the issues around culture. The cultural issues that emerged in the discourse of this Event, had been around in that organisation, it appeared, for at least ten years, as was disclosed in the Sunday Star-Times article of the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2010: two reports, one from 1996 and one from 2006, were both critical of the unsupportive culture generated by management, and the subsequent high staff stress levels that resulted.

The first, a confidential safety audit [from 1996], showed staff stress levels were high enough that half of all employees had a 50% risk of being involved in a serious accident or illness...

The 2006 report... critiqued the three-week induction period for newly graduated instructors... It warned of the potential to place instructors in more demanding situations than the ones they had been signed off for.

It appears from the historic reports and the critique of OPC by some of its staff in the aftermath of the 2008 Event, that culture is a difficult thing to change. The common

elements between 1996, 2006 and 2008 were the systems approach of the organisation, and the leadership of that organisation. Perhaps it takes insightful criticism from within an industry, in order for real change to be seen. The aftermath of other accidents in the New Zealand outdoors may be instructive here, in that they reflect, generally, a willingness of those deeply involved in a profession, to critically analyse their profession.

### **Five Other Outdoor Accidents: Mt Tasman, 2003**

Mountain guide Bill Atkinson, the MSC avalanche programme head Steve Shreiber, and Don Bogie, former head of search and rescue at Mt Cook, investigated an incident on Mt Tasman in 2003 that involved guides and clients and multiple fatalities. In addition, an independent safety auditor was engaged by OSH to review the guides report. The outcome of all of this analysis was that there was no evidence that the company had breached health and safety regulations, that poor light conditions had contributed to the guides not recognising wind slab potential, and that spreading the party out across the slope may have avoided the rope entanglement (Cropp, 2004).

Yet sometime later, in relation to this incident, the call for objective but informed analysis was evident in the remarks offered by renowned New Zealand mountaineer Pat Deavoll,

If people – especially professional operators – make mistakes, these need to be recognised, not swept under the carpet or dulled down so as to not harm the industry. You’re not going to learn that way. The guiding profession needs to be more accountable. Accidents need to be investigated by highly competent mountaineers who are outside the guiding community (Deavoll in Hersey, 2009, p139).

The coroner in this case, Bradley, received praise for his informed analysis too:

Bradley accepted that although the risk of mountaineering could be mitigated by training, experience and caution, “nature at a particular time and place can deceive even the most cautious... The attraction of mountaineering is not only the spectacular scenery, remoteness and the tranquillity of the mountains, but



the physical challenges and risks the activities present. Clearly with this goes an acceptance of the dangers and at times that an injury or fatality might occur” (Coroner Edgar Bradley in Hersey, 2009, p138)

Hersey, a climber himself, recognised that in the immediate aftermath of an incident, changing how things are done is difficult; and while the coroner in the 2003 incident showed an understanding of the relationship between risk and adventure in mountaineering...

But coroners base their investigations and subsequent findings on the expert advice that is presented to them, so their investigations have limited scope. *The alpine guiding industry itself needs to critically reassess its practices after each accident, and the guiding community should be prepared to change its practices accordingly and to improve all relevant technical information available to the wider climbing community* (Ibid, p140. Italics added)

Thus both Hersey and Deavoll appear to suggest that there is reluctance from within that industry, to critique and change practice, or that the lens through which the critique occurs needs to be widened.

### **Buller River, 2002**

In contrast, the remarks by the government organisation investigating the fatal kayaking accident on the Buller River in 2002, the Maritime Safety Authority (MSA) were vehemently refuted by industry experts, both from within New Zealand and overseas:

A chronic problem with the MSA is that they have jurisdiction over white water kayaking, yet they have no knowledge of the subject, and often refuse to seek any...

The MSA report assumes an instructor has absolute responsibility for a student, and that if an accident happens, it must therefore be the instructors fault. On this point one of the overseas experts, Marcus Bailey, made the following

comments: “Tim was well into the strange transitional phase between being a student and being a leader which exists with leader training. One cannot expect to stop being a guided and instructed student one day and become an aware self reliant leader the next” (Ward-Holmes, 2004, pp8-9)

Thus we can see two points emerging from the past that are relevant to the Mangatepopo incident– one is that a coroner can have a limited understanding of an outdoor practice, and a limited scope within which to examine an incident. The second is that ‘the strange transitional phase’ between learning and competence, requires an ability by those with more experience or power to know when, and how often, to ‘lengthen the leash’ in order to allow learners to make some decisions and live with the consequences.

### **Shotover River, 1994**

The death of a man while on a commercial rafting trip in 1994, resulted in the Maritime Safety Authority (MSA) prosecuting Kawerau Rafts for recklessness. The standard of safety and training within the rafting industry was criticized as being ‘appalling’, as the industry had had three fatalities and a permanently brain damaged client in the previous couple of years. Industry self-critique appeared to not be working in the rafting industry, as the companies were predominantly resistant to change, regardless of the external criticisms being levelled at them.

The training within this industry, at that time, appeared to focus heavily on accruing experience in order to achieve competency. This is reminiscent of the ‘apprenticeship model’ approach illustrated by the discourse of the 1953 Event. However, in the 1994 accident, the industry training was done in isolation within each company, and that there was no accepted standard of competency.

Most [raft guides] are male, tough and fit, in their 20’s - and retain the invincibility of youth. They start in the industry by learning first aid and survival swimming skills, then assisting experienced guides until a rafting company reckons they’re competent to skipper a boat of their own. There are no exams, no certification, no annual surveillance by outside authorities, just

the grace and favour of a company owner. Most guides are on-call and paid only if they raft (McLauchlan, 1995, p75)

Even though the emphasis is on an apprenticeship model – accruing experience in the company of others who are more experienced - this model was flawed because of its inward looking nature. As such it differs from the tragedy of 2008, in that OPC incorporated national standards into its training pathways, and its organisational paperwork was heavily influenced by accepted best practice and managing risks.

### **Anakiwa, 1993**

The issues raised by the 2008 tragedy are similar in nature, however, to concerns that emerged from an investigation into the death of a student at Outward Bound, Anakiwa in 1993. Blame for that fatality was definitely laid upon the organisation, and industry ‘experts’ commented on the incident. The discourse of risk is apparent in the initial comments of Button:

[Experienced outdoor instructor Ray] Button says the deaths at OB are a sure signal of a massive organisational problem: *“Each death is predicated by hundreds of near misses or lesser accidents. The deaths are just the tip of an iceberg”*.

Button then goes on to analyse the organisation. His comments reflect that he values experience and judgement, and is critical of the organisations systems:

Button believes the lack of long-term, experienced instructors at OB is part of the problem, but the other and perhaps most important part, is the *hierarchy of control within the organisation which prevents the instructors from really owning and running the programme according to their own best judgements...* The programme is very demanding on staff, and the system set up by OB deals with this by expecting rapid burn-out and staff turn over.

The article then outlines Button’s potential solution, which is to change the staff /student ratios:

A safer solution would be to increase the staff numbers so students and instructor ratios in areas like kayaking and bush expeditions were lower and instructors were able to pace themselves better...

(Brett, 1994, pp52-53. *Italics added*).

Thus Button's critique reflects the tension between discourses that held sway at the time of the Anakiwa accident, and that can be seen in the 2008 Event: older experienced instructors value experience and experience-based judgement (the discourse of experience and judgement), more than the policies and procedures of organisations (the discourse of systems). Outward Bound drastically overhauled the way it ran its courses after this accident, partly in response to the criticism from industry 'experts' like Button, and partly in response to an independent audit. One of the auditors was the Director of OPC at that time, Grant Davidson.

### **Mt Ruapehu, 1990**

Davidson was at the forefront of examining the multiple fatalities on Mt Ruapehu in 1990, and disseminating the learning for the outdoor industry. In the February /March 1991 issue of Adventure magazine, Davidson's comments also reflected the discourse of experience and judgement. The first comment is a call to learn from the accident:

*The media hype is now over... But the outdoor world should not sit back. Now the dust has settled we should rationally reflect on what can be learned from this incident...*

The discourse of experience and judgement appears when he notes that it was possible to survive the storm:

One thing we know for sure is that in those conditions there was no reason for six men to die. This is evidenced by the two army personnel walking out safely to raise the alarm... and... George Iwama sitting out the same storm only a couple of hundred metres away...

An approach to risk management, whereby accidents are the end point of a decision-making pathway, appears in his analysis. This approach to risk management appears to have appealed to Davidson, as it became the basis for his subsequent studies and promulgation of his strategies, for example the RAMS form:

*Every accident is the culmination of a series of smaller decisions leading on a critical path towards the final incident. The final result can be avoided by making a correct decision at any of those decision points on the path, and similarly each one of those decisions is not as important as the path in its entirety...* (Davidson, 1991, p48. Italics added).

However, within Davidson's analysis of the Mt Ruapehu accident, a tension between discourses can also be seen. On one hand he is espousing a systematic approach to analysing and managing risks; on the other, he is using words like judgement, experience and common sense:

*What I am trying to point out is that once in the field the only weapon we have to avoid progressing along the critical path towards an incident is careful assessment of all factors, and good judgement. Good judgement is based on a certain degree of common sense and a depth of experience.*

What comes next is important – it appears to be the underlying philosophy of practitioners of the time (of which Davidson was one). The philosophy indicates that the workplace is not the place to gain experience. At this time, the role of clubs in training people in the outdoors was diminishing but there was not yet a government organisation set up to provide training (SFRITO would evolve in 1992), while NZOIA and MSC were in disagreement about what, how and who to train.

That experience should be gained on personal trips where your only responsibility is your own life. It comes from a variety of situations and will generally involve a history of some poor decisions, you progress on the learning curve towards more educated decision-making and this leads to good judgement. Instructing should not be the means of gaining experience.

As a point of interest, this stance is markedly different from Davidson's later stance. By the mid-1990's, he was promoting a systems approach to all aspects of outdoor organisation practice and especially the management of risk. In particular, Davidson adopted the compartmentalisation of knowledge advocated by SFRITO (unit standards) to further the training of staff at OPC. It was a reversal of the beliefs that he espoused in 1990.

Interestingly in light of the coroner's recommendations for the 2008 Event, in this article Davidson makes a comment about radios, saying that 'they are no substitute for experience and judgement', that they are useful tools but that it would be irresponsible to rely on them for your safety. Furthermore, the language Davidson most used in this article – experience, judgement - is more similar in tone to the 'traditional' discourse of the 1953 Event, than the language he used in the aftermath of the 2008 Event. For example:

I believe this is not the complete solution but merely an easy focus for administrators to opt out of their true responsibilities ... *This responsibility [is] to find out if the instructor has the required ability of sound judgement based on past experience, and that the skills they possess are equal to the task given* (Davidson, 1991, pp49-50. Italics added).

The article is eloquently and persuasively written and at one point compares the Ruapehu incident with two overseas tragedies that had consequences for their respective outdoor professions, the Cairngorm incident in the UK in 1971, in which six died, and the Mt Hood incident (1986) in North America, in which ten died. The three points that Davidson illuminated from the comparison of accidents, can equally be applied to the 2008 Event:

These comparisons bring out some interesting points: 1) The use of a regular venue for training can lead to a lowered perception of the dangers they possess... 2) The people who died would not have been there at all if they had not been on a course... 3) The aftermath of all three incidents included a call for increased qualification of instructors (Davidson, 1991, pp49-50).

In the same magazine, a further article by Chris Knol reflected a similar discourse, namely that experience is the key ingredient in making good judgement calls in the outdoors. Knol had a long association with the Mountain Safety Council and mountaineering, and at the time was working for the Hillary Commission. He had been the civilian on the Military Board of Enquiry into this incident. His comments note that training people to make good decisions in the field, requires a complex balance between skills, knowledge, training and attitude. This balance, he suggests, has ‘long been debated’. Understanding accidents and how to prevent them, is a complex task:

*Accidents are never the result of a single event, although often it may look that way. Usually they are the culmination of events that may have had their roots in decisions made weeks or even months before the disaster occurs. Very often the decisions needing to be made immediately prior to the incident need to be made so close together that there is little margin for error, and every opportunity to lose control of the situation.*

The discourse of experience and judgement can be seen in Knol’s comments about leadership and decision making:

*There can be no doubt however that good leaders are those who make the right decisions and this ability is all of the above coupled with a large amount of experience... Inevitably, in the career of an outdoor leader will come a time when they are required to make hard decisions. How well they respond and the eventual outcome will in large depend on how much experience they have to meet the demands placed on them (Knol, 1991, p46. Italics added).*

### **Five Accidents, Four Themes**

The five accidents discussed above involved different outdoor pursuits – mountaineering, tramping, white water rafting, white water kayaking. The 2008 Event adds a fifth pursuit – canyoning. Yet the differences in the pursuits are incidental because the collective discourse around these historic tragedies points us towards four themes: the key factor in avoiding accidents, the critique most valued, organisational

change is possible, and a shift in the willingness of outdoor professionals to critique each other.

While not the only factor, experience was the **key** factor in avoiding accidents. The accident on Mt Tasman stood apart from the other four accidents described because the most experienced people were caught in the accident too. The critique most valued by the profession, appears to come from within the profession itself. Even the rafting industry, resistant as it was to change and unable to agree on standards, thought more highly of itself than external commentators.

The third theme was that organisational change is difficult but it can be achieved – both the Army Adventurous Training Centre (AATC) and Outward Bound overhauled their systems after the dust had settled, and in doing so changed their culture.

Lastly, there has been a shift in the speed of the critical analysis of an incident, by the outdoors profession. The 1990 Mt Ruapehu incident was analysed in Adventure magazine in 1991; the 1993 OB incident was reported in North and South magazine in 1994; the 1994 death in the rafting industry was reported in North and South in 1995; the 2002 kayaking death was commented on in both the NZ Recreational Canoeing Association (NZRCA) publication New Zealand Canoeing, and the NZOIA Quarterly in 2004. The 2003 mountain deaths were reported in North and South in 2004. As of July 2010 there had been no publication examining in depth, the 2008 Event.

### **A Duty to Critically Examine Itself**

These industry voices believe that the outdoor industry has a duty to critically examine the 2008 Event and to pass on its thoughts / findings to its members:

*But the outdoor world should not sit back. Now the dust has settled we should rationally reflect on what can be learned from this incident...*

(OPC Director Grant Davidson, 1991, p48. Italics added).

If people – especially professional operators – make mistakes, these need to be recognised, not swept under the carpet or dulled down so as to not harm the



industry. You're not going to learn that way. (Alpine Guide Pat Deavoll in Hersey, 2009, p139).

[Outdoor instructor Ray] Button says the deaths at OB are a sure signal of a massive organisational problem (Brett, 1994, pp52).

In the eight NZOIA Quarterly newsletters published after Mangatepopo, in a time span of two years from June 2008 to June 2010, there had not been a single in-depth analysis of the incident from the organisation representing professional outdoor instructors in New Zealand. The only communication about the tragedy was from the Chief Executive in his regular column, and the tone of communication was one of sympathy and a desire to keep people informed.

The 2008 tragedy reflected systemic failures. But was it the organisations systems or the system widespread in the outdoor industry? The 2008 incident, on one level, was no more complex than the incidents at OB or Mt Ruapehu. But as of July 2010 there had been no analysis offered in any publication. Is the lack of published analysis by the outdoor industry reflective of fear? Perhaps that depends on who would gain from an analysis of the incident and a dissemination of that analysis, and who would lose. In addition, who has the authority to challenge the authority of the norm?

There has certainly been a shift, in at least the last twenty years, towards a more systematised approach to outdoor instruction. Correspondingly in the language and in the practice, greater emphasis has been placed on identifying and managing risks in the outdoors environment, and on having suitably high levels of technical skill. An example of this can be seen in the 2010 New Zealand Mountain Safety Council (MSC) media release examined earlier.

This emphasis – on safety, on standards, on the ‘right’ training - has privileged one type of knowledge and one approach to practice, over others. The language of the MSC media release is representative of an industry that currently has a highly systemized, highly compartmentalized approach to outdoor practice. The language used in the earliest incident analysed above was much more focused on experience, judgement, and decision-making.

Thus there has been a shift in the outdoor industry in how training occurs and *what is emphasised* in that training. The systemisation of training is not necessarily a bad thing, and a case could be made that it is the most efficient way to train large numbers of people. What appears from the examining the past is how far the industry has seemingly moved from the emphasis on accruing experience. The answer to who would gain from a close analysis of the 2008 tragedy, is potentially the entire outdoors industry. The answer to who would lose, is potentially the privileged position of risk management and those guardians of the systems approach to training, in that an analysis may reveal a better approach to practice. 'Real change' therefore, would be whatever a robust and self-critical industry acknowledged about the architecture of its practice.

## Chapter 5. What the Interviews Reveal

Six qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with outdoor professionals; four of these were face-to-face and two via email and phone. The scope required these people to have been involved in the outdoors in some practitioner capacity (guide, instructor, teacher, logistics, assistant leader, volunteer etc) for at least twenty years, and to presently be involved.

There were four men and two women, with a combined number of years operating in the outdoors currently standing at 226. The average length of service for this group was 37.6 years; the longest serving being 47 years, and the shortest being 30 years. Five of the six currently resided in the North Island (three lived in Auckland), one in the South Island. The careers of three of them had a more national (as opposed to regional) geography, and two had worked internationally in the outdoors.

Collectively, the interview group currently encompassed the following employment types: university lecturer, facility director, freelance contractor, industry assessor, guide, business owner, secondary-school teacher, youth worker. Several interviewees had more than one employment type. In addition, over the course of their careers, these people had engaged in other roles: conference organiser, editor of industry magazine, president of industry organisation, physical education teacher, primary school teacher, writer for an industry training organisation, government employee in the Department of Education, field officer for industry organisation, and outdoor instructor.

What this indicates is that the interview group spans a timeframe and experience level, whereby it may be possible to see where and why the change in practice occurred, from the apprenticeship-type model used in 1953 to the more complex situation at the time of the Mangatepopo tragedy in 2008. Their voices have a collective authority of experience, and their reflections offer insight and wisdom accrued from that experience.

For the purposes of this research, the interviewees remain anonymous, yet their voices are distinctly different. A coding system will enable consistency of voice, and thus the

interviewees will be identified by the names Mr Black, Mr White, Mr Grey, Mr Yellow, Ms Red, Ms Blue.

## **Themes Emerging from the Interviews**

Several themes emerge from the interviews. The first is that the practice of working in the outdoors (in whatever capacity) was different in the past. There was less paperwork, less inhibitions and more of a sense of adventure. Safety was ‘common sense’ and not something that had to be overly focused on. Volunteering was a valuable way of accruing experience. People learned from being mentored by those with more experience. Experience in a particular pursuit gave you the authority to run the pursuit.

Secondly, the type of paperwork was different in the past. This is apparent most clearly in what schools required in order for their pupils to go on camp. There was less of it, and what there was related to organisational logistics.

Thirdly, the paperwork required at present is voluminous and specific, and often regarded as a burden and hindrance to practice. One interviewee found the paperwork so onerous as a business owner that he chose to quit and work for other people. Another interviewee noted the economic cost of the paperwork, especially the cost of compliance, and the cost of concessions to work on the conservation estate. Furthermore, there is an expectation around paperwork – that organisations will have some, including policies and guidelines for practice. More than one interviewee suggested that the Risk Analysis Management System (RAMS) tool has been useful to sharpen the thinking around identifying and managing risks in the outdoors, but has been misused.

Fourthly, the practice is different now than the past. The interviewees suggest that it is not the actual outdoor pursuits that have changed – people still go tramping, camping, climbing etc – but rather the shape of the practice. One interviewee lamented the loss of time available for outdoor skills training, for the aspirant teachers in the tertiary organisation she worked for. More than one interviewee noted that the tertiary training

pathways are a valuable source of new outdoor practitioners; that they provide foundational learning that used to be provided on the job. Few businesses can afford the time to slowly induct new practitioners. Graduates from these training pathways are often lumbered with debt and needing to earn money; not unreasonably they have an expectation that, having done the training, they are now worthy of being paid. Current practice appears to be dominated by the constraints of managing risk, and the teaching of technical outdoor pursuits.

Fifth, the interviews collectively identify a point in time where the practice changed from one type to another (from the apprenticeship-type model of the 1953 to the complexity of 2008). This point in time – this rupture from the past – is more an awareness of change from one ‘era’ to another. The late-1980’s to early 1990’s appears to have been the era of most significant change. Seemingly disconnected events within this era - the striving for professionalism at an influential centre, the establishment of NZOIA, the publication of a book on outdoor safety, the popularity of risk management courses, legislation about safety in the workplace – contributed to the changed expectations of society and influenced the shape of current practice.

Sixth, the impact of the change can be seen in the complexity of the current practice. When compared with historic practice, it is clear that current practice has a lot more variables operating behind the scenes, including expectations of parents, Boards of Trustees, landowners and government. More than one interviewee hints at a covert jostling for primacy of authority between outdoor organisations, to be seen as the best provider of training pathways for outdoor practitioners. One of the unforeseen repercussions of this jostling, may have been an increase in fear and a decrease in willingness to engage in adventurous activities. This trend was noted by several interviewees, although it could also have reasons beyond what is happening in the outdoors.

What follows are extracts from the interviews, grouped around the aforementioned themes. There may be some overlapping of themes within an extract. Some of the extracts have been edited for ease of reading but none have had the content misrepresented. Relevant interview questions have been included and italicised.

## The Practice of the Past

The reflections of the interviewees construct a past that suggests practice in the outdoors was a lot easier to arrange with authorities, more informally organised, and had a taken-for-granted value. In addition, practitioners were engaged because of their depth of experience in a particular pursuit. Managing risks in the outdoors, was – in the words of Mr Yellow – ‘common sense’. These reflections span a considerable amount of time – Mr White, for example, could recall childhood experiences of the 1940’s and 1950’s and began teaching in the 1960’s.

Mr Black had a depth of experience recreating in the outdoors, beginning in the 1960’s, before he became employed professionally to do so. His approach has always been experiential:

Mr Black      Some trips with the Ashburton students [in the 1970’s] we’d let them sort their own food and cookers out as part of learning from experience, but check clothing and sleeping bags... Some of the CMC [Christchurch Mountaineering Club] courses [in the 1980’s] were very much make it up as you went along but had lots of energy. We did things like Rolleston, west ridge of Mt Cook, Malte Brun by the W ridge... Can’t see that happening now with equivalent groups.

Mr White had no recollection of attending school camps as a student in the 1940’s and 1950’s. He could recall school trips to interesting places near the schools he attended, and day walks or ‘nature study’ with teachers. He became a teacher in the mid 1960’s.

Mr White      I can remember taking kids to Brown’s Bay beach [late 1960’s] and I taught them swimming and I had 40-odd kids in the class and it was just me, to give you an idea of the ratios, but of course we worked very safely... you know, it was a 1 to about 8 in the water at the same time. [The other kids] were on the sand. It was all very well controlled. [No one else was helping and ] it was normal for the time. I’d mentioned to the DP at Brown’s Bay school, I’d say “We are going to head off down to the beach at morning tea, we’ll be back by lunch”. There was no pool, so you learned by swimming in the sea and I actually taught swimming in the sea.

*Did you have to do any paperwork for example, to enable you to go to the beach?*

Not at all. No.

By the 1970's, Mr White's school trips went further afield and involved overnights:

Mr White      You'd go either to the Bay of Islands or right up to Cape Reinga, but I also took kids to Wellington by train and to Ruapehu... On the trip to the Bay of Islands I had five parents, all women. On the trip the following year to Ruapehu I had, I think, five parents again. There were 45 in the class. This would be certainly different today. These trips were a week long. They were much more involved in that bookings had to be made, not only of accommodation but also of buses and transport... I had parent meetings and talked to them about the trip and why it was being taken – so we could work on history and geography and you know – go to the actual places we'd talked about. Hoping to provide more meaning.

*Did you have to state how you were going to overtly manage any inherent risks and safety factors in those trips?*

Mr White      I can't recall anything like that. I feel I've always been cautious... and aware of people in my charge... and always trying to allow the adventure part but also watching the risk...

*Were there any guidelines for operating back then?*

Mr White      Not that I can recall, because taking kids out of the classroom was not... it was done but it wasn't done on a formalised basis. It was more an informal thing... Many classes didn't go unless it was for sports or Phys Ed. I felt very confident about taking people because you know I'd talked with them, we'd create things on the blackboard in those days.

[For] school camps, they picked on places like Snell's Village out on the end of Whangaparaoa. Now this was probably a pretty low decile school so the people were not wealthy and we had to do some fundraising for the accommodation and the bus and that sort of thing which fell a lot on my shoulders. You ended up doing strange things [like] running stalls on a Saturday, you know that sort of thing. We did

a lot of work on the beach and it ranged from artwork to swimming – where you’ve got the water you’ve got to use it... There was a patch of bush there as well so there was science. These are very primitive by comparison to today’s efforts.

By the late 1970’s, early 1980’s, ratios were openly talked about, though not always followed. Mr White recalled that he had to do no paperwork to take school groups climbing at The Quarry, a cliff in central Auckland, in the early 1980’s as part of an outdoor centre. His personal recreational background gave him the confidence to run such activities. But by 1985, and having been employed within a large school, there was more ‘planning’ involved in taking groups away.

Mr White      ...The teacher did all that, the planning of the trips [and] now I was the teacher.

*Was that arduous?*

Mr White      I didn’t find it so. I found it pretty easy because I felt confident about all the things I’d done at the outdoor centre... [It was] part of the school culture. The school has [always] supported the camp. I think they see a great deal of benefit out of it.

Mr Grey progressed from being a participant on outdoor events run by his church, to being a leader of the events. Along the way he developed a variety of skills, especially an awareness of history and of outdoor practice changing over time.

Mr Grey      As a child I’d been brought up in a church setting and I’d come through [the] ‘Crusader Camps’, the modern version of Scripture Union. I had some quite interesting experiences, I have to say, in those places, personal experiences. I remember one particular trip... this was back in the late 1960’s, early 1970’s... where you’d have to say it was ‘the blind leading the short sighted’. I think that’s the only way you could really describe it.

I trained as a youth worker, way back in the late 1970’s, and worked at that stage for an organisation called ‘Youth for Christ’. I was involved



in running camps. Mostly big camps where you'd take 100 kids, 200 kids, out to an established residential camping place... One of the things I remember quite distinctly back in that particular era, was just how little [the] parents would even question you as to where you were going or what you were doing or whatever. There was this incredible trust in the fact that you were going to look after their kids and take them out somewhere and have a good time basically. And by and large we did.

Mr Grey [By the early 1980's] I came to a realisation that there were all these camps around New Zealand and the majority of camps were residential... and Christian. Two things were happening: one [was] that they had this really crappy equipment that nobody used, or alternatively they had equipment there but they never had any expertise that could actually utilise it properly.

.... I came to the impression that, for the rest of the secular world, Christian involvement in adventure camping was looked upon as being somewhat shoddy. I remember people basically saying, "Well there's these camps but they've got no commitment. They don't have trained staff"... Well one of my goals if you like, was to see that I had an obligation to try to change some of that perception of Christian involvement in the outdoors.

In 1982 I ended up doing a Skills for Outdoor Leaders course at OPC. In fact it might have been either the first or second programme that was run... I had a real sense that... they were an adventurous organisation, they took that sort of thing seriously. I got the impression they were on the cutting edge of developing new ideas in relation to working with people in the outdoors.

I learned to roll a kayak there. Prior to that I'd never, despite the fact that I'd taken people sea kayaking on other trips, [I'd] never actually learned how to roll a kayak... I guess I came out of that realising that I

needed to put some real effort into skills. There was a level of excellence being demonstrated.

I think the first kind of experience we did was down in the Mangatepopo Gorge. We abseiled into this thing. It was exciting. It was a great experience and the people there that took you were confident and they showed to me what seemed like a high level of skill.

By the early 1980's Mr Grey had launched his own outdoor business. His comments about attitude and people are interesting in light of the change that appeared over the next decade.

Mr Grey      Starting [a business] in 1984, I didn't have the sense that there was any reason that you couldn't do this with anybody. That somebody with skill couldn't take kids out into the outdoors.

To start a centre, I realised back then, you still needed 3-500,000 dollars probably. I would put that money, if we could, into gaining some quality equipment and also into training people, because I saw people as the major resource in an organisation. At the end of the day you could have all the fancy equipment, a great centre, but if the people are not up to the mark, then you can't have a great organisation.

... Coming back to risk management, I saw [it] as being largely around the quality of the people that you had involved... if you've got the right people, with the right qualifications and experience and getting out there and mixing it up and doing stuff in the outdoors, then you've got some assurance of safety because of their skill, training and experience.

*How do you perceive that institutional knowledge was passed on, either in your own organisation or somewhere like OPC?*

Mr Grey      Up until 1987 I don't think there were many conduits for that occurring, apart from... the sort of knowledge being passed through [courses like] the Outdoor Educators Programme [at OPC].

*So it was like an apprenticeship scheme. You learned stuff just by being there?*

Mr Grey        You learned it by being there and being with someone else and those sorts of things. As I look back on it, we were very fortunate at times that we got away with stuff... We were learning on the hoof. There was a lot of that but also there was a lot of teaching each other.

Mr Yellow enjoyed recreating in the outdoors as a youngster in the late 1960's. He joined a tramping club while still at high school. His reflections suggest a level of self-sufficiency that would be alien today and probably attract censure.

Mr Yellow        I can remember only one prang in that whole time. A girl doing her ankle, really, really badly. We had a big, very mixed group. [We were] three days up behind the Waipawa Saddle and had to carry her out for three days. No nothing. We carried her through to a hut on a makeshift stretcher... three to four ran out, got a decent stretcher, came back in and took her out.

*So you were learning from the older tramping club members?*

Mr Yellow        Yeah, a great old guy called Pete Lewis. Just prepared to give you a little bit of rope and tell you a bit of stuff when you needed it. We learned by doing. We had another close one when none of us knew a whole lot about alpine. Ten of us walked the Sawtooth Ridge in the Ruahines in winter. It was too icy, too slow and we only got three-quarters of the way along before it got dark. No tents, no shelter. [We had] sleeping bags and we sat on this ridge for the night. Luckily for us it was the most beautiful night... I often think about that as embarking on something where you don't totally know everything, and you learn from a little bit of luck and a little bit of skill... You can see that sometimes, eventually, it can get a little too big, a little bit too fast.

Mr Yellow initially taught in a primary school teacher in the mid-1970's, before moving to Rosehill College as a Physical Education teacher, in about 1978.

Mr Yellow        There was an outdoor programme but it was pretty lightweight... I already had a lot of experience in the outdoors in tramping and hunting, so took over the HOD of outdoor education and really pushed that

programme for all the year ten's, twelve's and thirteen's. It was an amazing programme. Rosehill joined with another three South Auckland schools and invested in a property at Waharau, on the coast of Thames. Set that camp up, established its running and we took all the year ten's there over eight different camps. They'd go for a week. They did a bit of sailing on the quarry's lagoon, they'd tramp, do some environmental work... it's really only three days by the time you travel there, settle in and so on, then leave on the last day of clean up.

*Was there much paperwork?*

Mr Yellow     There was nothing in terms of risk management in a formal, written sense. There was certainly no identification of hazards in the written sense either, but the people who took the activities were experienced in those.

Mr Yellow     The people who took the sailing or the people who took the tramping had a lot of on-the-job training. People who had some tramping experience but weren't used to leading a group, would come with one of the other people and learn the route and learn the problems.

... Those sorts of things were always measured and thought about but not necessarily written down. It sort of got passed from one to the next that you needed to watch that hole or watch that such and such.

... The year twelves went to the Kaueranga Valley – three days in the valley floor, and three days tramping up to the Pinnacles, along to Table Top, then back down. In the valley they did bushcraft skills, a little bit of abseiling, and orienteering. We didn't have river skills. If you didn't have experience or anyone on the staff who was experienced in those kinds of things, you didn't do them.

... We'd have 60 arriving in three waves, with three-day gaps. As one group moved off to do the tramping, the next group moved into camp. It worked really well.

We usually tried to set [the senior kids] a journey. [Like] walking from coast to coast across Coromandel. Little challenges like that that they had to achieve and lead.

*How many kids would you take out at any one time on a pursuit?*

Mr Yellow They were usually in manageable groups [of] 12 – 15 but they'd always have a couple of staff on, usually an experienced person and a helper.

[The senior trip] was a smaller group 20-25. Three staff and good people, who enjoyed tramping. People who did those sorts of things as their recreation.

*Was the school supportive?*

Mr Yellow Yes, very. I think it's gone a bit now... I think it was like "I think this is what we should do" from myself and the other staff, and then support [came].

Mr Yellow reflected at one point about witnessing an abseiling activity being run by another school:

Mr Yellow I saw another school group on the little abseil cliff at the campground. It was in the very early days of having abseiling and rock climbing as a pursuit for school kids. Even though I didn't know anything about it at the time, I was horrified. They had tape harnesses, which were fine, but they were using virtual clothesline to abseil off. There was no hawserlaid or kernmantle ropes, it was glorified clothesline... I couldn't believe it... I was horrified... Common sense. It's the be-all and end-all of safety.

From the late 1980's, as the residential outdoor education teacher in a facility, Mr Yellow dealt with a constant stream of schools and kids and staff with not many outdoor skills.

Mr Yellow      We had camps with anywhere from 120 [kids]. Pukekohe High School was the highest with 210 or 220 [kids]. And you were it on the instructing staff. Just you. There was nobody who came with a piece of paper and said, “Yeah I can take climbing” or... it’s mind boggling now looking back on it. But we were there three and a half years and we had one accident and that was in a weekend when I wasn’t there...

Mr Yellow      So I look back on it now, knowing what I know about all the risks and management policy writing and everything like that, and I still don’t believe we were just lucky. I still believe it was just, I’ll say the word again, ‘common sense’. Common sense of the parents and staff who were there. Common sense of the kids. You know, there’s this aversion to being hurt, nobody wants to throw themselves on the ground.

Mr Yellow      ... I can never remember having a problem and thinking, “good grief, I wish I’d had somebody more experienced on that.” Then again, I think that’s what you do isn’t it? You know the limitations of the people you’ve got, so you’re setting the programme to suit that. You’re not saying, “this is our programme and it’s going to go ahead no matter what. Even if I haven’t got a decent staff person to take it, we’ll just wing it, they’ll be alright”... There were definitely times when I said, “I’m going to take the wall today and sailing is off.”

While training as a secondary school teacher in the late 1970’s, Ms Red decided to do outdoor education as an option paper, as it was ‘something different’.

*How did they teach outdoor education in 1979?*

Ms Red          Oh well you went on camp and did cool stuff. Had Hillary Chidlow teach us archery. Went rock climbing, kayaking. And we did a whole lot of Project Adventure – it was new, cool and exciting... it might have been called something else... [For the archery] Hillary came along, set up some targets and just talked us through. We did a whole session of introduction to archery. Shot arrows. I just remember going and shooting at pictures of people. Probably Muldoon was on a target.

After graduating, while working as a teacher at Papakura High School, Ms Red was invited on the school camps.

Ms Red        I didn't have a clue what I was doing and I had a great time... We stayed in this forestry hut with these kids and did little tramps, did wood chopping. Kids were allowed to chop wood. With sharp axes. It was only ten kids because that is what would fit in the hut. Two teachers and me and about ten kids.

*Did those teachers have any particular skills or were they just enthusiastic?*

Ms Red        They had been taking this camp for years, so in that sense they were experienced and they had a big background in hunting and were familiar with the area.

*So the culture of the school was generally supportive towards the camps?*

Ms Red        Absolutely. I think it was part of the whole culture of the school. At the end of the year they ran all these different camps, so they weren't only tramping, there was all kinds – culture, beach, city adventure.

*What did the school value about those camps?*

Ms Red        I think they thought it was the end of the year and it was a good idea to do something different. Learn some new skills. I don't think they had very high expectations of goals, of the kids. The teachers got right into it, I think it was part of the school culture. Just something you did. And about that time, in the 1980's, there were four schools that had ownership of the Waharau Outdoor Education Centre and our school put 25% allocation to use – there was always a bit of impetus to make sure we used all the 25% because we had this investment.

*Did it have a place in the curriculum?*

Ms Red        Not really. [It was] seen as a good thing... We developed quite a programme at Waharau because we had a lot of resources out there: team building games, tramping, orienteering, sailing...

*What sort of ratios were you working with?*

Ms Red        Pretty small. Pretty good.

Then this little bird said to me, 'you don't know much about this stuff do you?', so I thought I'd better go and find out more. I decided then

that if I was going to A) get involved in this I needed to get more personal experience – so I did heaps of tramping – and B) try and find out if there were any courses, and at that time OPC was just starting their ‘Skills For Outdoor Leaders’ course, and I went to the second year, about 1981 or ’82...

[About that time] I went to a conference in Wellington by myself. I was terrified [but] it was absolutely inspiring – they had Bert McConnell and Peter Dale... and all these great people up there inspiring everybody and I thought ‘wow, what a great world out there’.

*What changed for you as a result of going on that course and to that conference?*

Ms Red        It made me realise how little I knew and how inexperienced I was compared to some of these people. But it also introduced me to some of the philosophies behind why you might do some of these things – about adventure and growth, personal development, communication, as well as learning some useful skills. It also caused me to do a whole lot more personal things...

About 1990 Ms Red was involved in running the Risk Management and Outdoor First Aid programmes nationwide, and developing education programmes, for the Mountain Safety Council.

Ms Red        But of all of it, the risk management courses were the biggest success, I think. Cathye Haddock trained me.

[In addition] The Mountain Safety Council supported the camps [run by the Otago University School of Physical Education] by providing the instructors... When I went in the early days it was part of my job... We had a camp handbook. We had a training day. They went through that and then they left us to get on with it... we did have to talk about where we were going and write that down but that was subject to change because of the weather – for any reason that might change.



Ms Blue had a family background of recreating in the outdoors, skiing, sailing, riding and hunting. She first worked on school camps in 1971, as a physical education teacher in Tauranga. Teachers were encouraged to organise camping experiences for their form classes.

Ms Blue      Young teachers were mentored by more experienced teachers. [This] included checking on our planning, talking with the class, and accompanying the trip as a support person. The class organised their own food, and during the three days we explored the Kaimai's, tramping and the history of the area.

The school had an elective scheme for Wednesday afternoon. Many outdoor activities were offered. I ran the sailing as I had an extensive background in small boat sailing. Parents provided a rescue craft that was very rarely needed. The group of 15-20 students sailed all afternoon. We had [an] expedition around the harbour, races, and a lot of fun.

Ms Blue      Prior visits were always essential and usually involved all the staff going on the expedition or camp. We tended to plan and implement what was needed, or what we thought we needed. The parents, students and other staff members came to enjoy the experience and assist. No Police checks. There was paperwork but not the detail and the focus on risk management.

Most of my training came [through] mentoring by others around me...  
Much of my training was informal and on the job.

## The Paperwork of the Past

Mr White noted that there was minimal paperwork in the past, and what did exist was not particularly arduous and focused on logistics. These are sentiments echoed by Mr Black, Mr Grey, Mr Yellow, Ms Red and Ms Blue.

*What paperwork (if any) did you have to do back then in order to be able to do that work?*

Mr Black        Very little, usually getting permission from parents / guardians and registering the trip with the school. Checking with land managers about being on their property when relevant. Nothing when at university. Not much at first as a guide, just a simple concession document and proof of qualification.

Mr Grey had similar things to say about the paperwork involved in the camps that he worked on in the 1970's and also how much paperwork was involved in running his own business from the early 1980's:

Mr Grey        [For the camps] I'd say virtually nil. We might have produced a little brochure, an advertising thing where you signed up for it. I don't even remember having Parental Permission Slips. I think that was just taken for read if they turned up, and paid the money, that mum and dad had said yes.

[For his own business] We established our operations manual on the first of June, 1994. So up until that point, I never had an operations manual. There was not a single shred of operational management paperwork between 1984 and 1994. No policies, no procedures, guidelines, anything.

*So in the field all your risk management was done by what was in your head?*

Mr Grey        What was in you head and the whole interaction between instructors and sharing our knowledge and a commitment to gaining skills as well.

On a course at OPC in 1982, Mr Grey could not recall much paperwork at all:

Mr Grey I suspect that a lot of it didn't exist. And I suspect that I just wasn't aware of it. I don't have any recollection of signing stuff and basically I paid my money and came on the programme.

In charge of running high school camps from the late 1970's and through the 1980's, Mr Yellow oversaw an expansion in the numbers of students participating in the outdoors. All through that time, the amount of paperwork was minimal.

Mr Yellow I can't even remember writing. Like you'd write your timetables and everyone knew what was happening and who was going when and all those sorts of things, but... we never wrote anything about the safety aspects.

You'd have the job of appointing staff to each camp, in a mix of ones who had the tramping experience and ones that were learning and ones that were there to just be support. Mixed gender. That took us up to the late 1980's – about 1988.

*So by the time you left there, were the paperwork requirements still the same?*

Mr Yellow No. I remember having to write one thing [in 1988] – we wrote the Year Plan for the camps... objectives and goals. Maybe there was that starting to come in. That kind of administration pressure, what you were trying to achieve, what your goals were. It was nice to be able to put down that it was sequential skills – that by the time they'd left the year ten programme, they had the following skills and then you pick those up and carry on in year twelve and thirteen. You were hoping that you could just let the leadership go to them.

From 1989 to 1992, Mr Yellow was residential teacher at one outdoor education centre, before moving to be in-charge of another centre for the remainder of the 1990's.

Mr Yellow I wrote a five-year plan to improve the [first] centre but none of my thinking at that stage was around writing. I wrote some procedures but we never wrote policy. We never wrote who should be taking this

activity, this sort of qualification, or this is the sort of person you want taking this activity.

I guess we all assumed that the next person coming in would be like the person before us, and be able to assess people's skills at taking something and be able to delegate the right things to the right people. As opposed to the structure or the written guidelines of everything that the person who is going to control the climbing wall, needs to have.

Mr Yellow [At the next centre] We got there and [I had been left with] three sheets of paper, handwritten! ... A year later, maybe longer, I found the incident book. I mean when you talk about institutional knowledge, that's the be-all and end-all of it. You can't hope to find out everything that the people before [you] knew... all the stuff they knew, it just goes with them. But the things that should be written down are the incidents and the problems that highlight those places.

I tell you, around about then Grant Davidson released his RAMS form... I thought about this and I thought "That's pretty good, you know, look at the risk, how dangerous is it? How do you manage it? What do you do if it goes wrong?" So I thought about this thing and I manufactured a few and tried to write one up for tramping. Then one day, very close to when I took over [the centre], I sat down with [two senior staff] and said "I want you to write these... identify the hazards and how you are going to manage them". You know I was embarrassed. I just felt why am I doing this with these two guys who would just get on the water, automatically put themselves in the best position, have their way of running the kids through. I was met with steely silence. They looked at me. And it was only the fact of their respect... that they deigned to answer me really. I could just see the look on their faces of "What the hell?... Why do we need this?" I just remember the occasion being really uncomfortable.

Mr Yellow ...I think [RAMS] was a very useful tool that suddenly gave a structure to things that weren't. My introduction to it was in early 1993 or late 1992... I thought they had to be revisited. There was always the possibility of stuff you hadn't identified, so they had to be a dynamic document. I've always thought that they've been really good and from that you make your policy.

*When did you start writing policy?*

Mr Yellow The same time. I guess it was the fact that there was nothing there. There was nothing left [behind from the previous Director] to build on. It was a way of saying "Well, this is what we do". It was a benchmark, a standard.

Training as a teacher in 1979, Ms Red could not recall any paperwork in the outdoor education paper she did on the course.

Ms Red No I honestly don't remember it. It was more of an action doing thing. It wasn't the paperwork that we know today. At all.

Employed as a teacher in the 1980's, the amount of paperwork Ms Red had to do related to the logistics of the camp more than anything else.

Ms Red We started ending up with preparation – with trying to run lots of groups through Waharau, we started getting more check lists...you've only got to leave meat behind in the freezer once to know that you have to starve... it was mostly check lists.

Ms Blue had been involved with outdoor education since beginning work as a physical education teacher in Tauranga in 1971. She noted that there was paperwork, but not the detail and focus on risk management that exists today.

Ms Blue In many of my trips tubing, skiing, tramping and camping, the paperwork was different [but] always covered the essential aspects of permission, detailed plan, timing, transport and supporters' details...

Risk management was embedded in the planning... Parent evenings informed the parents of the trip goals and expectations.

## The Practice and Paperwork of the Present

The contrasting answers between Mr Black and Mr White actually reveal the impact of the present regime of paperwork: Mr Black found it all too much and ‘gave up’, preferring to work for someone else rather than be bothered with current requirements. Paradoxically, given that he makes a living partly as a contract instructor, Mr Black reflects upon the value of schools contracting out outdoor subjects. Mr White’s observations about RAMS forms (Risk Analysis Management System) hint at a weariness of paperwork among current school practitioners. Mr Grey suggests RAMS have had both positive and negative effects, and notes the wider impact of the Health and Safety in the Workplace legislation from 1992. The economic and psychological costs of compliance, and the reduced capacity of workplaces to train new practitioners, are noted by Mr Grey, Mr Yellow, Ms Red and Ms Blue.

*How much paperwork do you have to do now, in order to do that job? What sort of paperwork?*

Mr Black        None, as only working as a wage slave. I gave up when getting concessions and insurance became complicated and expensive. About 2004. Just noticed that with NZOIA that we are going to have to do more detailed reporting on our assessments and be more open about revealing risks. Even noting that we have done so.

I still tend to work by instinct relying on my experience and knowledge to make trips up to suit both the client / student and the weather /conditions. I like to base what I do and how I run it on my own skills and observations. Never gone for Risk Management forms.

The interaction [between staff and students in the outdoors] had great value. Now we seem to be delegating this to professionals and I sometimes wonder if it is as effective. Leaving [outdoor classes] to professional contractors...can be ok, but can just become another job delivered without any passion and with no long-term commitment to the students.

Mr White      It's pretty extensive. We have to do the RAMS forms which protect everyone. You've got to organise all the buses, notify various people around the school. We have to plan for this a year in advance so that it's timetabled in. Any trips have to be pre-approved by the Principal, because ...the normal classroom activity of learning maths or what have you, that is held sacrosanct for us versus a trip which might be something that kids will remember for the rest of their lives – for the enjoyment and what they got out of it.

... RAMS forms in their various guises have been around for 15, 18 years... I think [they] might have helped a lot of people who were unsure about what might happen in the outdoors if they didn't have some sort of background experience.

*So did the RAMS form give people confidence to take a group into the outdoors?*

Mr White      I think I've always cautioned against that because the bit of paper is between you and the rainstorm or the flooded valley or the overturned kayak or the frayed rope or something like that.

I've always talked [with others] around anything that could happen that would be the worst thing on this particular trip. Anything ranging from blisters to death.

I must admit a lot of staff members think it's a vast waste of time writing them. You know, "why do we have to do this?" Of course that's wrong because why you have to do this is to sharpen up for each thing and almost mentally engage in what you want to do or what you want to get out of this particular activity.

*Why do they think it was a waste of time?*

Mr White      I think they resent repetitive things. They may resent paperwork. They may resent camp or the activity also. I'm not sure. Or is it because you have to do it? I mean you can get very blasé about them.

Mr Grey was asked how much he had to do before he got into the field compared to the past.



Mr Grey        I think there is a lot more. It varies from place to place a bit, but for example the bulk of work which is still through the schools, there's a paper trail that has to get sorted through before you even get the chance to take a group outdoors. Commonly schools will want a RAMS or some form of risk management documentation. We will put together a package of stuff that might be relevant to them – risk management policies, general safety policies, frequently asked questions about the Trust, medical forms. If it's white water rafting involved there will be another layer of compliance. So that process is quite elongated...

Mr Grey described dealing with a teacher from a school who had been a little slow in requesting paperwork. His organisation got the required paperwork to the teacher, but because they were within a six-week timeframe of the trip they were hoping to run, the school Board of Trustees wouldn't let the trip go ahead.

Mr Grey        The problem was she had left it too late. It was about 4 ½ weeks [until the trip].

*So what does the six weeks have to do with anything?*

Mr Grey        Exactly. But this is the changing scene here... they had all the information there, right through to the fact that we're Maritime Safety New Zealand compliant white water rafting operators. So we're fully audited. I guess that's just an example of the way things have changed. It's much more difficult for organisations who are engaging organisations like us... it's less likely that we have a situation where someone rings up and a week and a half later you're doing a programme for them. There's that lead-in stuff, then they're wanting pre-course information.

Now increasingly I have to say, we are also involved in situations where we're invited to come to a school to talk to parent meetings... [to] calm their anxieties.

*So people are anxious about sending their kids away into the outdoors?*

Mr Grey        Mmm. [affirmative]

*Where do you think that comes from?*

Mr Grey        It comes out of accidents and the media basically I think. It's a change in perception... and I've had to stand up at these meetings and [face] parents, [post- Mangatepopo] who say "How do we know our children aren't going to be involved in that sort of thing?" Well, firstly we are not comparing apples with apples, if we are going away on a sea kayak trip to Whangapaoa Harbour, I don't need to tell you it's a totally different thing. You don't get flash floods. You're not in a canyon. You're all sitting there in a lifejacket, which is totally buoyant in the sea and we are in a harbour, and yes we do go outside the harbour but we have the ability to get regular forecasts. And at the end of it, I've had to stand up and say to people "Look, we're going into the outdoors and I have to be completely honest with you and say that absolute safety cannot be guaranteed. That's it, can't tell you anything else apart from we can't absolutely guarantee the safety of your child."

Mr Grey        So all I can say is that we have these processes in place and we have this level of training for staff, and we have these things here... there are some places that are higher risk and we have to identify those places sometimes for people to be able to see them.

I think [there are] other areas that have promoted that change, I mean that in a sense the whole RAMS or risk management approach, its been helpful but I also think it's been two-edged because we have created something [or] we've helped promote it, and there's that heightened awareness for the need for risk management, particularly among schools.

Mr Grey        If you look at the whole rise of the Occupation and Safety Health [legislation], that has had a big impact on the way society views safety management. A very big impact I believe... If you look at the American thing of liability and where blame lies, I think we are becoming more of a blame culture. We have to find somebody to blame. I think there is a sense of [in] years gone by that people did hurt themselves and that was OK. The media stuff around the Christchurch Creche case for example,

all those things have heightened fear or they created a hype about fear, around the safety of our children.

RAMS in a sense, was a great tool for the industry but I'm not sure it was a great tool for society. If I can put it this way, I think RAMS was helpful for us to identify what we needed to [do]. The other thing that happened, of course, was that from somewhere in the mid 1980's, we started to see the growth of the course – OPC, the polytech courses etc. So as a consequence we had people being taught these things. Ready for the work. Without being disparaging of the courses, we now look to courses to do that [but] sometimes you think to yourself 'why do we bother getting these people from courses when we have to teach this thing again?'

Sometimes it feels like that because there's a whole different way now that things are being learned... in a sense we don't have the freedom for people to go and make a mistake now.

When I say that RAMS has been good for us but not necessarily that good for the public, [it] is that two things happen with RAMS. One is that I doubt most schools understand RAMS. That's my personal feeling about that. I think as long as they see the paperwork, there is the sense of 'I have ticked my box'. To go back to the Elim guy, [it was like he was saying] "We ticked our boxes, so we avoided – it couldn't come back to us".

Mr Grey [The other] thing I say to our staff here, [is] "you've got to remember here that when [they] employ us, what people are doing is transferring all that risk onto us." This is actually what our game is about. This is the whole thing. If you don't understand that, get it. That's the service that we are actually offering.

Mr Grey showed me a book as thick as the width of my hand, which contained the compliance paperwork for just one of the activities that his organisation runs – The

maritime rules (rule 80) for white water rafting. In addition to Maritime New Zealand compliance, an OutdoorsMark audit and a Child, Youth and Family audit, his organisation has had to bow to pressure from the Department of Conservation, and apply for concessions to use the conservation estate – something he has been able to do unimpeded for nearly 24 years. The pressure has only been applied in the last couple of years.

Mr Grey        Because of the nature of our work and because we work with schools in different parts of the country and [have] programmes going in different places, we have interaction in nine conservancies and that is costing me \$6200... but it might be more. This is just to look at the paperwork, without any guarantee that we may actually be given a concession... and on top of that, the Tongariro Crossing is different again and they have to throw my stuff in front of the iwi and other bits and pieces at a further processing cost of about six or seven hundred dollars. And when I've finished that process I still haven't any idea as to what they are going to charge me on a per head basis... To go through this process is just huge.

The reflections of Mr Yellow suggest similar things about the quantity and value of the paperwork involved in current practice.

Mr Yellow        Now, I think, it has gone from the sublime to the ridiculous in the paperwork. In fact at the moment, in our place now, we are consciously going through reducing our paperwork. To make it more simple.

I still don't think institutional knowledge gets captured that well because it is so specific to how you might run a particular rapid or those sort of things. They aren't captured by RAMS. They aren't captured by policy.

*How do you capture them?*

Mr Yellow        Team teaching, two instructors always working together or a group... most of our training is on the job training, but you want that level of understanding first... I see young instructors now over instructing and telling students stuff that they don't need to tell them... I see staff

telling kids exactly how they should be sitting in the boat, leaning forward at the waist. Jesus, let the kid on the water. You've got plenty of time to correct that over the first two or three hours...

That's a big part of practice now, experiential education. Give them enough that they can get on. Give them enough to keep them safe and then let them go.

...[With new staff] it definitely depends on their experience and how comfortable the instructor is in their pursuit. And [that they] know enough about their group and enough about the terrain, that you can let the kids have a certain amount of freedom and they're not going to hurt themselves.

*How do you teach them to teach less?*

Mr Yellow     We try to do a lot of reflective practice and a lot of feedback sessions to staff.

*Do you have senior staff going with junior staff?*

Mr Yellow     Always. And then they have a variety of roles... The most powerful part of learning, I think, is going with somebody who shows you the ropes.

*You've got some international staff [at the current centre]. What was their training pathway?*

Mr Yellow     One of them was a biologist with a strong interest in hiking. Masters in Biology. Then there's a young chap who's taught for six summers in an American summer camp, and had good skills in canoeing and tramping. And a young German girl, very passionate and interested. But it brings another dimension. It brings in no knowledge of NZ fauna and flora. It's bad because you can't always capture those teachable moments. You don't know if they've got the same idea about NZ weather, [or] the large catchment areas for small streams. There are different things you have to manage and another one is English as a second language.

When we advertised these positions we had 20 applicants and I didn't have a good kiwi in there.

*Why do you think that was?*

Mr Yellow I don't know. Didn't see the ad? I've found that more and more I've had to go to institutions and ask for recommendations from them...

*What do you look for in a new employee? Do you put much weight on qualifications?*

Mr Yellow Oh it gets you through the door. Then enthusiasm. I see their log books. I want someone who is passionate.

*Does word of mouth make a difference to who you employ?*

Mr Yellow Yeah... I've found people pretty honest in recommending people.

Through her contracting work, Ms Red regularly comes into contact with school teachers. She was asked for her impressions about the preparations required of teachers running camps now, versus back in the 1980's.

Ms Red I think now the requirements are far greater. At one stage we went around the country [in the mid-2000's], running a series of workshops on how to use the EOTC Guidelines for Teachers resource. If you had opened that book and looked at all the forms in it, you probably wouldn't go on camp. You'd close the book and say "I think we'll stay in the classroom". It was unwieldy. It was frightening. You had to have a form for everything. It's not the latest book, it's the one before the latest one. I haven't really looked at the latest one. I've seen it but I haven't really looked at it but the number of forms was frightening.

... [In the 1990's] When I was with Otago [physed camps] we didn't have to do all that... their theory was they'd hired us because we had the skills and experience to be taking students into the field for a week and they didn't require us to go and fill in a whole pile of stuff.

*When you are running trips in the outdoors, is it fair to say that you need a certain amount of leeway or buffer, with your plan?*

Ms Red Absolutely.

*Does the forms approach allow for that buffer to be in the preparation?*

Ms Red            I think it might hamper that approach because when you are out there, there might be a plan B, C, D that might also have been attractive, and you might not have seen them till you got there. The forms approach is not necessarily going to cover those.

Ms Blue noted the change in emphasis within the paperwork – that risk management had become an entity by itself rather than being part of an overall picture. She also felt that there was less time available for on the job skills development.

Ms Blue            Risk management has changed the planning process and set the safety planning to the side rather than having it integrated in the whole process. I think it is much more detailed now, particularly the detailed emergency plans and discussions that involve all the teachers and volunteers.

Ms Blue            The opportunity to demonstrate and ‘walk the talk’ has been reduced. We now rely on student teachers personal experiences, and schools to do more of the mentoring.

## The Impact of Change

Mr Black , Mr White and Mr Grey and Ms Red all note the change in society over time, away from risk and adventure. Collectively they suggest that the ability to have an adventurous practice was easier in the past, especially with the increased availability of suitable equipment, and the lack of restrictions. In the present time, the type and volume of paperwork impacts upon current practice: Ms Red, for example, wondered if the paperwork put people off, or ‘dumbed down’ their practice. Ms Blue in particular, has several insightful comments about the nature and values of present society.

Mr Grey, Mr Yellow and Ms Blue all offer insights into the value of current training pathways. Mr Grey, suggests that there is a relationship between businesses and training organisations like polytechs, that is necessary, beneficial, but flawed. Necessary and beneficial because businesses depend on the training organisations to lay the foundations of knowledge in the new practitioners, while training organisations get to spread their influence or place their graduates into the outdoor industry more easily; but flawed because businesses are confined to an economic model that limits how much training they can offer new practitioners. Mr Yellow has mixed feelings about the product of polytech courses, while Ms Blue laments the reduction of practical time that teacher trainees receive.

Mr Black        [A] trend I see that I think has been going on for some time is to be risk averse. Getting to be hard work for the keen and only partly qualified amateurs, like teachers who hold NZOIA level 1 quals and have a full teaching load. The paperwork they have to do to go out, plus leaving behind lessons for their other classes seems to be very onerous

Mr White was asked if he saw anywhere that the practice of education in the outdoors had changed:

Mr White        Yes very definitely. The 1 to 40-odd kids I had at Brown’s Bay Primary, taking them to the beach. You just wouldn’t do that now. Because laws change and expectations I guess have been placed on society that demand that you have a ratio of whatever it may be to do an activity, so that people are supposedly safe.



I presume that somebody within society, no, probably within education, has realised that before things get too much out of hand and people are just going rafting rivers where they've never been before and don't know about waterfalls and that sort of thing. I presume that they've realised that they've got to stop something happening before it does.

I think that awareness probably goes back even to Barry Crump... he told one of the kids that had just got a licence to drive the Landrover somewhere and the kid drove it over a bank and it went into a lake and five kids were drowned... that must have been 1970's at a guess. It was a holiday camp in the Ureweras, but from that people probably sat up and took notice. So it could have had its beginnings from there.

Mr White recalled other incidents that may have been catalysts for change – a teacher drowned crossing a flooded river; two schoolgirls and a wrapped kayak. In addition, he mentioned that the availability of outdoor equipment, like packs and plastic kayaks, and outdoor suitable clothing like polypropylene, made outdoor trips more possible:

Mr White      Undoubtedly. Absolutely. Just having the gear available... You know, all of these things, people could see there was a great mushrooming, I think, of the development of use of the outdoors as an educational tool. So take the kids out. People actively encouraged it.

I'm sure there's something within the last decade that has happened, that has turned the tables on taking people outside of the classroom. They are reluctant to do it because of the legal ramifications if things happen.

Mr Grey's discourse revealed that the attitude of people recreating in the outdoors has changed over time. On a tramping trip in the South Island in the early to mid-1980's, Mr Grey and his partner hired an ice axe and crampons and went up to Mueller Hut in the Mount Cook National Park.

Mr Grey        This is the whole interesting thing in itself, I mean I don't think I've ever seen [this] much in recent times, but we arrived at Mueller Hut and there were two couples there and they said, "We're off to climb Mt Sealy tomorrow, do you want to come?" We thought "Absolutely". You know, fantastic, I mean I can't even remember owning up to the fact it was the first time we'd ever put on crampons, but anyway we got up.... I remember half way down, I think the guy said "Have you done much stuff?" I said 'No'. He said "I better teach you to self arrest"... How many times would you walk into a hut now and have somebody say "Just join our party"? So I think I got into the outdoors almost at the end of that era that kind of said 'Hey you've got here!'. I mean we didn't even have a rope... It was a great experience.

In addition, the comments from Mr Grey highlighted a difference in **how** people accumulated the necessary skills and experience and judgement necessary to work in the outdoors.

Mr Grey        So for me, up until 1987 and the formation of NZOIA, I think most of it was if you were lucky enough to be around the right people.

Mr Grey        Now there's this huge awareness that organisations should have or must have, processes. So when there's processes and those processes fall down as we see with OPC... you go back and you can identify that things completely fell down. [However]The coroner's recommendation that perhaps adventure centres be licensed... where was he able to extrapolate that out of that report?... I cannot find anywhere in that report... that would lead me to the end conclusion that said 'adventure centres need to be licensed'. It's just like this massive leap.

Interestingly enough you have the situation with Pete Zimmer, who didn't go in there because of a gut feeling. It's very easy to dismiss that in a sense, [and] say 'well, how does that get trained into people?' Well, that doesn't get trained into people, that gets **experienced** into people.

Mr Grey        And it's very hard to put your finger on it, and yes it's an inexact science, but for all of us that have been around for a while, we get to certain places and we just go 'it's over for us today'. It doesn't feel right, what ever it may be.

We're saying the same things here. We're going: look, we've got a two year [instructor] going away with a one year [instructor]. Is this good? Is this right? Are we in a situation where we can change that? How do we make all these things happen, so that we can protect both ourselves and our clients, in this particular place? I can tell you, you chuck economics into this picture; it's really, really hard work, really complicated and very difficult. We had a staff member here,[Ms. X]. When [Ms. X] went off to work for Outward Bound... she had something like a three month induction. I was looking at three months and thinking 'How do you afford that?' It's the luxury of the organisation that has found its place in the funding world and you think to yourself that would be wonderful to take on staff and have three or four months out and have them. We're trying to think through some of the apprenticeship ideas here.

Mr Grey        I'll tell you another thing that's changed as well, which makes it difficult for organisations: I came through an era where people volunteered to do things. I volunteered, I would say, on some weeks 20 plus hours per week... I loved it. I was young and enthusiastic. I didn't have a student loan. That's the other thing that's changed in our society, the student loan scheme. Everybody that arrives here arrives with a student loan and an expectation that they're worth something. So even that has an effect on risk management because how do you pay somebody and not have them earn something – you've got to earn your keep. In that respect we're no different from OPC, we're under the same kind of pressures that [they've] got: we can't have you here being paid lots of money, not being able to do stuff. Ideally it would be great for you to be here for five to six months, just being around and going away with this and that instructor.

Mr Grey        That's the change in society, coming back to compliance and risk management: it does have an effect because in a sense you are literally forced from an economic point of view, to put people into the field in an earning capacity perhaps before they are truly ready... Everybody wants great risk management but nobody wants to pay for it.

Mr Yellow had supported NZOIA and its qualifications schemes, and saw them as valuable for an employer. His observations provide insight into the tension between qualifications and experience, as the thing of value for the employer and the aspirant outdoor instructor.

Mr Yellow        But as I went through some [NZOIA] assessments myself, I began to get very, very concerned that there was a movement where young people who wanted to become outdoor instructors, trained for the qualification. As opposed to somebody who was already a very good rock climber, tramper, kayaker, who loved their pursuit and practiced their pursuit and recreated in their pursuit [and ] went through to say "I'd like to be recognised in the qualification for this."

*What was the difference?*

Mr Yellow        [The first group] had no background in it. They hadn't climbed the climbs or made the mistakes or taken the falls. They had nothing and when presented with an unusual scenario that was outside [their training], they couldn't relate to it.

I saw students on an assessment ... who had a system almost pre-made for [the site]... and when they were presented with a slightly different method of setting up, they would criticise that because it didn't fit their little thing that they'd been told. I thought "If that's the ilk of our new level of young instructors, we're in trouble!" I was worried that the passion wasn't there. That these people were gathering certificates to say 'I'm an outdoor instructor', but not really living it. People who were going for the qualification [but] just didn't have the depth of experience.

*What do you think of the value of these polytech courses now?*

Mr Yellow I find them frustrating. They're pretty diverse and that example I gave you about the rock climbing, they were just performing monkeys really... I found that very frustrating that their course had revolved around doing the particular task to get their assessment, and there was no other depth.

I [also] think I'm pretty positive about them. Certainly where a lot of our interested young people come from, and if they don't have that pathway, what other pathway have they got?

I'd like [it if] these polytech students should have another string to their bow, especially if the majority of employment in the outdoors seems to be through schools. If they had some papers in social studies or geography or maths or science, then they could be more employable. They may find that they have a more predictable career path.

*Do you think there's a shift somewhere with people's attitudes about working in the outdoors?*

Mr Yellow Huge shift! It's become a job.... So many see it as a nine to fiver. [Yet] you think about the valuable time you've spent with kids outside those hours. At the end of the day when you sit around a campfire having a cup of tea. You're chatting and they are so keen to learn stuff and listen to stories. That's gone. So many organisations [say] "Oh no, I knock off at five. I've got other staff that look after you now." You've taught your stuff, you pat yourself on the back at 4.30 and walk away. It doesn't work.

Mr Yellow [In the past] I think they loved that job and loved that time getting on with kids and helping kids out and maybe we've become far more capitalistic: that's what I get paid for, that's what I do. Could be the next generation – 'it's more about me'. I don't know. Somewhere in there there's been a shift that outdoor education is now a job and I think the kids are the ones that miss out. It's always been my career but I've

never stopped at five o'clock. It wouldn't matter what organisation I worked in...

We [currently] do a lot of reflection too, sitting in the bush thinking about what you've done, where you are going. I think, if we go back to finishing your work at five o'clock, you don't always have time for that

Mr Yellow I notice a bigger change in the kids. I think they are gradually getting softer. They are gradually less robust. Gradually less coordinated, able to make decisions, just a whole sort of softness... I got the feeling that... even from the city kids they were less robust, less adventurous. I wonder if we are still wrapping our kids up in too much cotton wool. Parents won't let their kids get as dirty and not letting them walk to school. Probably a whole range of things. We've looked recently at play – what is play, how do you play and what you need to play. I'd say that 20 years ago if you left a lot of kids together with a few logs and said "look after yourselves, we'll be back in an hour", they'd play hide and seek, and chasing and balancing and just play. I don't see that now. I don't see kids being content with their own company or each other's company.

Mr Yellow I don't know that kids think that there's adventure out there anymore, without really bizarre stuff... doing a double back-flip on a motorbike over a jump... I don't think the kids today think they can have an adventure closer to home... just you and a mate going in a tent, heading off into the hills for a couple of nights, trapping possums, catching eels or something... it has to be a grand scale thing. Extreme!

*Do you have a sense that opportunities, for a kid to do outdoor education things at school, are diminishing?*

Mr Yellow Yeah. I thought that at one stage there was a resurgence but now I'm not so sure... I think there's a lot more teachers who are very fearful of taking their kids out of the normal situation. I think NZOIA hasn't helped that because they did set some pretty high benchmarks early on,

as to the level of competence that you should have to take your kids out the door. I think that probably had a detrimental effect... that has made a lot more teachers, who had enough skill to take their kids overnight camping, to think 'I'm not going to do that anymore'. Because of what could go wrong. Thank God for ACC.

*Do you think society has become more risk averse?*

Mr Yellow Risk averse, risk intolerant. "You take my kid to camp but don't do anything risky there." I think that's the kind of thinking that's there.

Although Ms Red had a part to play in the development and dissemination of the ideas around managing risks in the outdoors, the overall impression from her discourse is that the changes in practitioner requirements have not been beneficial for the practice of the practitioners. Initially Ms Red was asked if there were any repercussions from the increase in paperwork and the rise of the risk management courses.

Ms Red Well, I wonder if the number of outdoor programmes diminished. I wonder if it put people off, if they said, "I can't be bothered with all this." ...

*Did the risk management forms help?*

Ms Red No, because if you could copy someone else's form instead of doing it yourself, you probably did that. I don't think it helped at all. I think it's a handy thing to have to do because it heightens your awareness. But it would be quite good if you could just focus on what you were actually doing out there. The poor things. They were filling in so many forms. They'd have a form for everything.

... I think for a big period of time I was very concerned that RAMS were seen as a way of managing risk. As long as you filled out your form you were OK and that was prevalent. It was frightening. I think that was in the 1990's. You had to have a RAMS form and there were people talking about "Show me the RAMS form" who honestly didn't know what they were looking at. It was scary – and once they saw it ,

“Oh you’re OK now, you’ll be right.” [It was] not understood at all. And that RAMS form might have been mine! In fact, I saw something I’d written somewhere, regurgitated. Oh my goodness me.

*It became the end point not the starting point?*

Ms Red Yes, exactly right. It was the end point. It was if you’ve done the paperwork now you’re alright. But you know a lot of the inspiration I got was from seeing other people at work in the field. It wasn’t about the bits of paper I’d filled in. It was how you were going to give people a quality experience. And that probably got lost.

*Do you think people became more constrained in what they could do?*

Ms Red I think it was dumbed down a lot. They kind of went overboard telling the students all this stuff that they never remember anyway, about what they had to do and how they had to behave. Instead of just getting on with it and having fun. It was “Oh now we have to tell you about all these things on the form because that’s what it says.”

I’ve seen it on assessment courses. They have this massive list of stuff they have to cover before they can even leave the car park and often the car park is one of the most dangerous places... instead of just taking them up the track and drip-feeding a bit of stuff here and there and having a good time... There’s a group of us who will defer people [editors note: defer means not pass] on their client day for being plain boring and over managing... even on a glorious fine day, you’ve got these people insisting the students empty out their bags so they can see what sort of spare gear they’ve got [yet] the forecast is for fine weather!

So all of a sudden they were constrained by massive amounts of paper and policy, and maybe the teachers weren’t that competent in their ability to just go and get on with it... but that comes with experience doesn’t it?



As well, if you only go on camp a couple of times a year and that's all you do, you're limited, you don't know what you don't know.

*Do you think that EOTC has been successful in promoting safety standards in schools?*

Ms Red        I think so. But you know one of the things the Ministry did – they used to have EOTC advisors in regions around New Zealand. Was that in the 1990's? They used to go and work with schools on their programmes and advise them. And they cut all those people.

*Why?*

Ms Red        Funding. We don't want to pay for that anymore. I think that was a really backward move.

*Because?*

Ms Red        Well because as part of the Ministry of Education role, you can get an advisor to come in, just like you can get a math's advisor to come in, and work with you on making your school outdoor programme better. Why would you change that? I thought that was very sad when they did that... One of the things the advisors did was to raise the awareness of school camps, that you actually know why you are doing this... it made a lot of schools think about it. I think that was in the 1990's.

*What's your feelings around the mergers that have been trying to happen over the last ten years, between MSC, NZOIA and what is now Skills Active?*

Ms Red        Frustration. Back in 1997, I remember the year clearly, I was at MSC and we were at a meeting and Bev Smith was there and Bev had an MSC syllabus in something and she said, "Why have we got two assessments. These documents are the same." So we put together a group of people who attempted to merge and we did a great job I reckon. One scheme, one assessment. We got it all the way through, all the syllabus written and how it was going to be administered. And at that point it got up to the Executives of both organisations, and the whole thing fell over. The practitioners had it sorted, the administrators couldn't get their act together.

Thirteen years later [It's about to go ahead]. That's been a long time in the making and I still don't know how it will work or if it will work. I'm not sure about unit standard based outdoor subjects...

*Because?*

Ms Red I don't think you can compartmentalise rock climbing, for example, down to little boxes... How do you assess the mortar [between the unit standard bricks] – the things that glue the bricks together, the people skills, the communication skills, how you inspire clients, the little gems of learning that make a great instructor.

*So given that skills Active, NZOIA and MSC are now trying to come up with this national qualification, which is predominantly a box system, what is your feeling around that?*

Ms Red Fully nervous. The reason hasn't changed. I'm also a bit nervous about how you maintain consistency of the assessment process.

For the past twenty years Ms Blue has run a teacher education programme at a New Zealand university, and considers herself privileged to have done so. Her reflections offer insight into the change that has occurred in the training of teachers in outdoor subjects. It appears much has been lost in terms of the ability to 'walk the talk'.

Ms Blue The former College of Education had a very extensive outdoor programme... the students doing the three-year B.Ed or Diploma of Teaching would immerse themselves in outdoor education for a whole course, which would often last four weeks. The course would introduce EOTC in school grounds, then extend into local environments, build skills in outdoor activities designed for an expedition, and also work with schools on their EOTC programmes.

Since the university took over the programme has reduced to one or two lectures, and some practical tutorials, which are generally based outside the lecture room.

- Ms Blue [Currently] Performance Based Research Funding (PBRF) and the research culture has reduced the face-to-face component of courses. There is less time dedicated to outdoor courses and in some cases, no time. This is true of many of the curriculum courses, especially at Primary level. The training is non-existent or minimal in regards to too many of the subjects. Physical education has ten hours of lecture time and only four hours of actual practical tutorial time. Secondary teacher trainees... time has been reduced from 80 hours to 40 hours, so we have needed to change some of the sessions and keep closer to home. We have no mini bus now, so our mobility has been reduced and we are reliant on personal cars.
- Ms Blue The promotion of EOTC and risk management is delivered as a lecture to 250 people, with little opportunity to walk the talk. The opportunities to adventure have been seriously reduced. Not too many risks in a lecture theatre!
- Ms Blue Pressure from technology has reduced our opportunities to be active. [In] my childhood we were active most of the day. No TV, computers, playstations. The changes have seen little walking or biking to school, less exploring, running, jumping, sliding etc... The longer term outcomes will be that children are less independent and have less experience in the outdoor environments, as they have had fewer opportunities to explore and be self sufficient.
- Ms Blue In today's society, parents and caregivers are expected to supervise children and this may restrict the number of experiences – having someone watching over you is likely to limit the adventure.
- Ms Blue I also think the diversity of our population has watered down old beliefs. Swimming is a good example. Where it was once a 'must' for every child to be able to swim and every school had a pool or access to a pool. Now many pools are closed and schools limit swimming to a few sessions.

Ms Blue        Every school had a camp. These are less visible now, and they tend to be at fixed camps rather than tent based... The amount of time and experiences the average teacher trainee gets in outdoor education today is minimal. We will be reliant on the enthusiast that has personal experience or need to employ an outdoor instructor, at a cost, which can be a limiting factor.

Ms Blue        I believe there is an over emphasis on technical skills, as opposed to learning through the environment. Outdoor education has become dominated by pursuits- rock climbing, abseiling, kayaking. Don't get me wrong, I love outdoor pursuits and have always been a very keen rock climber, kayaker, mountain biker and sailor... In high risk situations, good training and qualifications are essential.

I fear for the impact that the registration board will have on access to the outdoors. Will we get to the stage that every leader in the outdoors must be qualified and pay each year?

Ms Blue        The tertiary outdoor providers are doing a good job and there are a group of more holistic educators coming through the systems. These were never an option when I learned the trade. I would say the training is more formal now and there is a commercial interest in providing [a] course and training people.

## **The Point of Change – The Rupture From The Past**

If the practice of the past trended towards an apprenticeship model, where experience was gained under supervision and determined the level at which you could operate; and the practice of the present is dominated by the discourse of managing risk, accruing qualifications, and paperwork, then establishing when that change occurred may help us understand why the change occurred.

A single point of change appears difficult to determine from the interviews, but two ‘eras’ appear to be consistently mentioned. The early 1980’s saw the first Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) guidelines for operating in the outdoors published for teachers (1980); and The Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuit Centre of New Zealand (OPC) started the first ‘Skills for Outdoor Leaders’ course (1982), the first training course of its type available in New Zealand. These disparate events gave practitioners a structure to guide their practice.

This first era reflects the growth in popularity of using the outdoors within the school system, and the subsequent awareness of what could go wrong. More than one interviewee mentioned the deaths of kids while on a camp run by Barry Crump in the late 1970’s. This may well have been the spur for the government publication of EOTC guidelines. OPC were tapping into a market –teachers – and providing an alternative pathway to gaining skills and experience, which was previously the realm of clubs or personal contacts.

The second era encompasses the late 1980’s to the early 1990’s. The interviewees suggest that an overt drive towards professionalism was manifest in the establishment of the New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association (NZOIA) in 1987, which set specific standards for practicing various outdoor pursuits, and competed directly with the longer established Mountain Safety Council (MSC) for primacy of authority. Courses were established that specialised in risk management, and their subsequent (though short-lived) popularity, together with the publication of a manual that included the Risk Analysis And Management System (RAMS) - a tool for managing risks in outdoor activities – these three things together succeeded in placing both skill acquisition, and risk as the dominant discourses in the years to follow. A spur for these

developments may well have been a death on Mt Ruapehu, of a school student while on an OPC trip.

Mr Black was unable to offer a point of change, other than noting the influence on his own attitude, of climbing with Nick Banks (the second New Zealander to climb Mt Everest) in the early to mid 1980's, a man described by Mr Black as having "An irreverent and no bullshit approach". He did note, however, that the New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association (NZOIA) was influential in New Zealand, because they helped establish some standards in outdoor practice. NZOIA was established in 1987.

Mr White was not able to identify one moment when things changed. He noticed a political jostling for position, but aside from government sponsored guidelines, specific changes were slow to filter through to his practice.

Mr White      I think that to me, it seemed from quite a long way outside the circle, that there was a lot of political jockeying. I know that someone had to take some form of responsibility, but it seemed that there were people such as the Mountain Safety Council who felt that they had to get their act together as a result – I think they saw a move coming from within the industry of outdoor instructors to, I'm not sure about the tiers of framework here but I just had the feeling that the Mountain Safety people felt that they had to put themselves into a leadership role.

Then there was also the situation about actually this is a subject and we've got to teach it, and we're going to be responsible for some sort of training, so there had to be some sort of, not only facility, but programme to work through with younger people who didn't have the experience... It was sort of more formalised rather than my efforts of going off and tramping through the Kaimanawas.

*When did it effect you?*

Mr White      There was a big symposium about 30 years ago that produced a booklet of guidelines for the outdoors. It had just happened at about 1978. Yes I think that [EOTC guidelines] started to emerge from there.

*Was there a formalisation of training as well?*

Mr White      OPC was running courses fairly early on, but exactly how early I'm not sure.

*When did policies start being written?*

Mr White      From memory here [at his current school] about 1999 or '97. I think the school was just about to embark on a conscious effort to increase the roll and we needed to look at a whole lot of policies, so I guess that come out of that.

Mr Grey had an awareness of just how long outdoor education had been operating in New Zealand, and noted that it was predominantly led, in the past, by Christian organisations. In addition, he places OPC squarely at the forefront of a more professional approach to outdoor practice. For Mr Grey, by the late 1980's there was a change in how practitioners worked in the outdoors, with the creation of NZOIA, the influence of Project Adventure, and the establishment of training courses to learn the requisite skills.

Mr Grey      If you look at the history of outdoor adventure camping in New Zealand, the bulk of that was done by Christian organisations. There were Boy's Rally troupes, which were like Scouts, or Boy's Brigade, up and down New Zealand. [Boy's Rally] were associated with one denominational church, Boy's Brigade was another. Boy's Rally was very similar to the scouting thing and started out of a movement called Every Mans Hut. That actually happened between the World Wars. We wore uniforms, I remember building a kayak and all those sort of things... Scripture Union [recently] had its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We tend to see modern outdoor education as almost a 70's and 80's thing, but if

you go back, they were doing adventurous stuff in the 60's, 50's and 40's, in those sorts of places.

Mr Grey        Then of course you had the Barry Crump thing. That was in the 1970's. That was interesting and short lived due to that accident, in many respects, and probably the total lack of risk management.

*Going to that risk management thing, when did that kick in and why?*

I can't answer why it particularly kicked in. I know that about 1988 or 1989, I got invited to be involved in one of the very first risk management courses, run by the Mountain Safety Council. It was a five-day programme. A number of those big, long risk management programmes were starting to be developed, and about the same time Grant Davidson was doing the whole RAMS thing.

By the time we got to the 1980's we saw a number of different things. One of those was that a lot of [Christian] organisations were starting to be in the very early part of the decline of uniforms... and boys getting involved... And in contrast to what I was suddenly seeing at OPC, here we had people that really had no skill. And in fact what was once the bastion of adventure in New Zealand... no longer cut the mustard really. There was grotty looking equipment and all those sort of things.

What I did notice in 1982 was that there was a level of professionalism coming into that era... I suspect a lot of it was the Stu Allan era, growing that sort of thing. I put OPC in the centre of that whole universe really at the time. I can't think of anywhere else in New Zealand that really had that same impact. Certainly not Outward Bound – they were still in that era of Wardens and those sort of things. So for me, up until 1987 and the formation of NZOIA, I think most of it was if you were lucky enough to be around the right people.



...I think I was just there, rolling along with what was sort of an expansion of what was happening generally in the outdoors from the mid 1980's onwards really.

*What was it about that time that compelled those individuals to form NZOIA? Was there a threat from the government that they were going to step in?*

Mr Grey        To be honest, I don't recall any particular threat... I think a lot of it was driven by Grant Davidson... he'd been to Britain hadn't he and had worked at Plas Y Brenin or somewhere... so that scene was changing there, I would suspect but I can't think of any specific threat in New Zealand... I think there was a general sense that the world was changing though... I can't put my finger on it specifically but there was certainly that feeling that self-determination was better than someone else determining something for you. So I think when somebody said that, it rang a general bell with people who were still coming out of an era of 'Do it yourself' outdoor involvement and those sorts of things.

...I think the fact that Grant and others were involved with OPC and OPC was seen as being THE place and rightfully so. It gained the reputation as the driver for outdoor pursuit growth and excellence. I think there was a general sense that there was a need to see us come together and work some things through to see some standardization.

... In a sense I see we were in that early era, that early 1987 through to sort of early 1990's, where the huge influence [of] Project Adventure was coming in... it had some influence on risk management because of the whole structure of it and [the] 'Challenge by Choice' [philosophy].

Mr Grey        [At an outdoor conference in the early 1990's] We brought out as a keynote speaker [the mountaineer] Nick Banks, who excited quite a lot of people and upset quite a lot of people, saying "I got into the outdoors because it was a way of rebellion basically, and a lot of this stuff that is starting to creep into us now needs to be thrown out the door". There

were a lot of people who went “What was he doing at a conference like this? We are supposed to be gaining more professionalism, not less”.

Mr Yellow was working as a resident teacher in an outdoor centre between 1989 and 1992. At some point in that time frame, due to the change in government and a move to a neo-liberal economic philosophy, the Department of Education changed to the Ministry of Education; chaos ruled until Mr Yellow was able to re-establish the residential position by liaising directly with the schools.

Mr Yellow     Being there at that particular time, suddenly there was no one to pay my salary. So I rang the Ministry and they said “Oh no. There’s been no provision for your salary. We don’t have any money.” I asked what is going to happen to my job? They said, “We don’t know. Who do you work for?” I said “The Department of Education. Which no longer exists.” It became a bizarre situation... I was in No-Mans-Land.

For the remainder of the 1990’s, Mr Yellow was in charge of another outdoor centre.

Mr Yellow     At [this centre] we had a dedicated focus on writing stuff up, how to do stuff, where to do it... Because there was nothing [written down] and I thought this is really hard work.

*What difference do you think NZOLA made when they started in the late 1980’s?*

Mr Yellow     I was very, very pleased that it existed. I thought it was going to be a wonderful organisation. At last we’d got some professional standards onto what we were doing. [I was] relieved as an employer because you knew that somebody that came to you with Rock1, [you] knew that there’d been a standard set and they were at that... you could then be confident that those people knew how to run a safe, rock climbing practice.

*Yet earlier you said that you were quite happy to train people as they came to you, if they had common sense?*

Mr Yellow     Yeah but we went to a new level at [the second centre]... [The first centre] was really entry level.

Mr Yellow had earlier said that his first experience of using a RAMS form was in about late 1992 or early 1993, at about the same time as first seeing Cathye Haddock's book on managing risks in the outdoors.

*Do you have any inkling as to why the risk management book and the RAMS form and the risk management courses, really exploded in popularity?*

Mr Yellow     It was ripe. I don't know whether there was a catalyst about that time or not. As far as I was aware, Grant had done some research into what the manufacturing industry did, and started to apply that to our industry, so I think it was time. It was needed, and I think it's been well used. I don't know if there was another catalyst. It might have been that the time was right.

Ms Red's varied career has allowed her to work within schools, within government as part of SFRITO, as well as with non-government organisations like NZOIA, and MSC. As such, she was part of the development and promotion of the risk management approach to outdoor practice.

*What was the impetus behind the risk management courses?*

Ms Red        It's a bit foggy but I believe that there had been a death. It might have been the Declan O'Keefe incident on Mt Ruapehu. With OPC. He fell off...a big wall... Joe Hughes stood up and said "We need to do more to manage our students out there." And he really pioneered the whole risk management, he was the driver. It was around the late 1980's, I think. Then they started running – I think it was through the Department of Education – these big risk management courses. Five-day courses. Chris Knol and Bert McConnell and people like that were all at the forefront of that. And then MSC started running weekend courses. Cathye developed that model and then we trained people to run that course. Then MSC commissioned Cathye to write the manual [about managing] risk in the outdoors.

*Did the courses grow in the time you were there?*

Ms Red        Oh yeah. We grew it. It was seen to be desirable... by teachers, probably Principals, Boards of Trustees.

Ms Red was asked when all the forms started coming into the preparation and planning for teachers. Her answer places the period of increased paperwork, into the late 1980's; her answer also makes visible the tension between the perceived value of the courses and the unforeseen impact of the increase in paperwork. 'Butt covering' suggests there was an undercurrent of fear providing motivation for the paperwork.

*Do you think it was concurrent with the explosion of risk management courses?*

Ms Red        Yeah I do. I think it was self-generating. More paper. More butt covering.

*Have there been any other incidents that have changed the way practitioners' practice or the way the public perceives the outdoor industry in NZ?*

Ms Red        One other significant one has been the Kaueranga Valley, in the early 2000's, where two kids drowned. I think that it changed practice because Water Safety poured a lot of money into how to supervise kids in the water.

*What do you remember about the setting up of NZOIA?*

Ms Red        Grant Davidson said, "Oh look, we've got a big outdoor industry here in NZ and we've got no professional organisation that represents it." And he went around the whole country and did a whole lot of workshops and gained a whole lot of enthusiasm and impetus and NZOIA was born. I think that was 1988. Could have been 1987. My impression was everyone thought it was a great idea at the time... because there was no professional organisation. You see, outdoor instruction wasn't seen as a profession. It was kind of something that people did. I don't know if they ever saw them in the same footing as other professionals, but in fact they were professionals... Well, they all thought [NZOIA] was a great thing and they sorted out the key disciplines like bush, alpine, rock, kayak, and then got to work developing syllabi and they had all

the top instructors at the time on board. Everybody thought it was a great idea.

Ms Blue was asked if there were any organisations that had been influential in the development of a New Zealand outdoor education practice. She responded with the teachers support services, who ran practical courses for teachers; Education Outdoors NZ (EONZ) which developed the KiwiOutdoors manuals and a magazine for sharing information; the Mountain Safety Council, which offered volunteer systems and instructor networks, first aid and training; and NZOIA, of which she had this to say:

Ms Blue        Positives [were NZOIA] set standards and set up an award scheme. They have a good system for assessing technical skills. Negatives [are that] there is a lack of collaboration with others in the outdoor sector. They have also failed to embrace the average teacher who is engaged with tramping, camping etc. The Leader awards could be a good move but there needs to be real consideration re costs and access for teachers. This is often only a small part of the year but [it] is a vital part and the design of the Leader awards needs to be carefully managed. They need a much more holistic approach to outdoor education.

## **Chapter 6. The Invisible Hand in the New Zealand Outdoors: Neo-liberalism, Language and Foucault**

In this chapter, the factors guiding current practice are uncovered and examined. They are ‘uncovered’ because the economic philosophy of neo-liberalism has become hegemony in today’s society; that is, its tenets have become so well ingrained that their ‘truth’ is unquestioned and invisible. Neo-liberalism is examined because it is at the heart of the change in practice identified by the interviewees ‘point-in-time’. The language used in each of the aforementioned Events, is examined. It too informs us of change, especially in the beliefs that underlie practice. Lastly, the theories of Michel Foucault offer a fresh perspective with which to view current practice, and deepen our understanding of how that practice arose.

### **Influence of Neo-liberalism in the NZ Outdoors**

The societal conditions that existed in the identified ‘point-in-time’ – the late 1980’s to early 1990’s - that allowed or impelled the change from one type of practice to another in the New Zealand outdoors, warrant a closer examination. Moreover, these societal conditions go some way to explaining the course of events, the power relationships in the outdoors, and the underlying ideologies behind the change. Dramatic societal changes occurred from 1984 with a change in government but the preconditions are equally important to acknowledge.

#### **Preconditions for 1984: a Brief History**

The generations that had emerged out of the desperation of the depression era 1930’s and the conflict of World War Two, created a liberal social democratic state in New Zealand and elsewhere, that followed the economic theories of John Maynard Keynes. Keynesian economics advocated social welfare, employment protection and limited nationalisation of industry (Kelsey, 1997). It proposed that governments regulate capital flows, thereby controlling the boom-bust business cycles and so protect jobs

and optimize economic growth. A liberal social democratic government promised representative democracy, personal wealth accumulation, a fair distribution of wealth, and planned use of resources to benefit the whole country. “It was an instrument to ensure the general welfare of all in society” (James, 1992, p20).

‘Social security’ or ‘social welfare’ was a central tenet of successive New Zealand governments, regardless of their political colour. Social security was a contract “whereby the state provides a level of support for everyone in recognition of their contribution to society or by bringing up families... [it expressed] the egalitarian roots of New Zealand... that people share common experiences, fates and values” (Coney, 1997, p20).

The 1950’s to 1970’s were a time of economic prosperity in New Zealand, and a time of a ‘prosperity consensus’ (James, 1992), whereby common people and the politicians (in general) agreed with the direction New Zealand was heading. It was a time of ‘insular conservatism and conformity’ (Barber, 1989), a highly regulated society that looked especially to Britain and increasingly to the United States of America for security, markets and foreign policy leads.

Television and cheap jet travel in the 1960’s “would open New Zealand to the world and the world to New Zealand” (King, 2003, p416). This ‘opening to the world’ would illuminate to a younger generation just how restricted New Zealand had become. Those born in this era of social security and ‘prosperity concensus’ were born into an era of stability and a society that, at its heart, valued security over all else (James, 1992). However, this overarching desire for security was stifling and by the 1980’s, this generation had attained positions of power in society and was agitating for change.

Moreover, in New Zealand the authoritarian politics and regulated economy, especially through the 1970’s and early 1980’s under Muldoon, had shown itself to be ill-equipped for the geo-political forces sweeping the world – oil shocks, the repositioning or severing of economic ties, decolonisation, the increasing cost of welfare, and the globalisation of business. Ill-equipped also for the changing times within the country, Muldoon

... provoked confrontations over Maori land occupations, sanctioned police raids on immigrants, short-circuited environmental legislation, refused to intervene over French nuclear testing, and split the country down the middle by insisting that the 1981 Springbok rugby tour went ahead. Muldoon's authoritarian response bolstered demands from diverse groups for political, economic and cultural change (Kelsey, 1997, p22).

By the 1980's the New Zealand economy was faltering, stagnating and vulnerable. "It was clear only major economic change could restore prosperity" (James, 1992, p47). That change was promised by the ideology of neo-liberalism.

### **Neo –Liberalism and the 1984 Government**

Neo-liberalism is an ideology that has its roots in the writings of the 1960's Chicago School economist Milton Friedman, and the Public Choice Theory of James Buchanan. It has other names – market-liberalism, libertarianism, 'New Right', economic rationalism. This ideology is focused on "the primacy of the individual, and the social and economic efficiency of unrestricted interaction between individuals... and nations" (James, 1992, p86).

Public Choice Theory encourages minimalist government and open-market policies. One of its assumptions is that the open market will provide competition and result in efficiency and choice for consumers (Dumble, 2003).

The Labour party won the general election in 1984. The key positions of power in the party and in the Treasury, were in the hands of people sympathetic to neo-liberalist ideas, who were ready for change, and who had had their formative political years in or shortly after the 1960's, a time of

... impatient self-expression, reform and radicalism... in office in the 1980's these people put that radical temperament rapidly and energetically to work... no significant policy area remained unquestioned (James, 1992, p100).

They also had sympathetic allies in the business sector, who would undoubtedly benefit from change. This aggressive and unsympathetic government wielded policies



designed to deconstruct the economic and social systems, and placed the emphasis on success (or failure) upon the individual in society and not the community within which the individual resided. Critics contend that this deconstruction was not only unnecessarily brutal, but that there were alternative pathways to change that were ignored. The rhetoric and propaganda emerging from politicians spoke of success but the rise in unemployment, debt and people at or below the poverty line all pointed to the failure of a government to care for its people (James, 1992; Coney, 1997; Kelsey, 1997; Jesson in Sharp, 2005).

Political commentator Bruce Jesson provided insight into this turmoil via his Metro magazine column, and his writings bear witness to the unfolding dimensions of change. By July 1986, the scale of the change in New Zealand society was becoming clear:

There is little that is humanitarian in the performance of this government. Instead it has devastated the rural economy, causing anguish and trauma for thousands of families. And now it has other targets in its sights: railway workers, public servants, the manufacturing sector... (Jesson in Sharp, 2005, p185);

The fundamentalist nature of the political leaders driving the changes also revealed itself:

It isn't the anguish and suffering that appear inexplicable – such is life – so much as the reasons for it. The purpose of it all is to construct a society based on cold-blooded economic criteria, efficiency, profitability, market relationships. Non-commercial goals are being systematically eradicated from the functioning of society. If this goes on, the human element will survive only as an afterthought, in the form of means-tested welfare schemes, targeted to assist the casualties of the economic system (Ibid, p185).

By December, 1986, as the economic policies were implemented, we see the disintegration of the old social order, and a corresponding disintegration of the trust

that society had generally held for politicians in the past. The ‘shambles’ and ‘confusion’ that Jesson noted had another side effect: that of fear of what was coming next.

All is confusion... the economy is a shambles... Now that the economy is in trouble, attention is shifting to the social impact of Labour’s economic revolution. And it turns out that all is confusion in this area too... Labour’s social goals have been used to excuse its economic heartlessness. And we now discover what should have been obvious all along: that this government has no coherent social vision (Ibid, p191).

The 1984 Labour government managed to convince the electorate that the pain was only short term and the economic policies would bear fruit if given time. They were re-elected in 1987. By February, 1988, Jesson noted that the welfare of the people – something that had been a cornerstone of numerous New Zealand governments since the 1930’s – had been sacrificed for an ‘economic orthodoxy’:

From a longer-term point of view, the financial speculation of 1985-86 amounted to the plundering of the assets of New Zealand industry. It has created a chain of debt throughout the economy. And it has added financial instability to all the other faults of the economy... the blame for this lies not with the business community. They have acted as businessmen always do, short-sightedly, in their own interests, and with no sense of long-term consequences. No, the fault lies with a government that has abrogated its responsibilities in the name of laissez-faire and economic orthodoxy. It is the role of government to protect the interests of the wider community and they haven’t done it (Ibid, p205).

By 1990 the shell-shocked, disenchanted electorate, voted Labour out of office. They had not seen improvement in the standard of living for the overall population, but had seen the gap between the rich and poor grow to unthinkable levels (there were a few who were doing very nicely out of the changes, especially importers and bankers and property speculators). They had seen a large chunk of the country’s state-owned assets sold to foreign interests or privatised. They had been on the receiving end of numerous

broken political promises. By now neo-liberalism had firmly taken root in the political landscape, however, and the newly elected National party carried on where Labour had left off, arguing that there was no alternative. Between 1984 and 1996, New Zealand society was irrevocably transformed.

## **Implications for Education**

The situation in the education sector can be seen as a microcosm of the overall upheaval. In 1984 there was no mandate for change:

In 1982 the OECD review of New Zealand education policy found to an extent greater than in some other OECD countries, that parents, citizens, employees and workers of New Zealand appear to be reasonably well pleased with what is done for them in schools, colleges and universities (Kelsey, 1997, p219).

Having no mandate was no barrier to change however, and Treasury produced a blueprint for education restructuring that was swiftly enacted by the politicians:

Its ‘devolutionary’ goals were to rationalise the costly and inefficient educational bureaucracy, eliminate the ‘provider capture’ of the teacher unions over education policy and practice, and increase parental choice and voice. This meant opening education to the competitive market-place (Ibid).

With the Education Act of 1989, under the regime called ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’, new agencies were created: The Ministry of Education (for policy development and funding); the Education Review Office (to audit schools, and oversee curriculum implementation); the Teacher Registration Board (to register the professional standards of teachers); the Parent Advocacy Council (to convey community views to the Minister– it was abolished in 1991); and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), to monitor post-compulsory education qualifications. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was also established, to provide a structure and pathway for unit-standards based qualifications.

The implications of these changes were profound. The school funds and school curricula were now placed in the hands of Boards of Trustees, but they had to operate within non-negotiable directives and the government made no guarantee about funds. The school leaving age was raised to 16 years but budgets did not expand to compensate. Zoning was abolished and compulsory teacher registration was removed - to cut administration costs and to allow hard-up schools to employ cheaper, untrained staff. Schools were expected to compete for students but the changes disadvantaged those schools from poorer areas. Schools in rich areas could draw on the resources of the surrounding community:

... while poorer schools would face larger classes, less qualified teachers and decisions on which educational essentials to go without (Kelsey, 1997, p222)

Kelsey asserts that the state 'divested itself of responsibility and accountability' in the realm of education, leaving it instead to local communities to run the schools:

Failure to meet parent, student and community expectations became the problem of the school boards. Some had the skills and private funding to take full advantage of the competitive liberated environment. Others found it impossible to cope (Kelsey, 1997, p222)

Thus, if those Boards did not value or could not afford outdoor programmes, then it was easy to dilute them in the curriculum or close those programmes down.

## **Implications for Outdoor / Adventure Education**

Historically, volunteer organisations like clubs, youth groups and schools were the primary providers of outdoor /adventure education training in New Zealand (Stothart, 1993; Zink, 2003; Ross, 2008). Clubs and groups generally followed an apprenticeship model, whereby more experienced people would lead and induct lesser-experienced people. Outdoor / adventure education was (mostly) a non-assessed part of a schools curriculum, and the activities were lead by experienced but non-qualified people. In general, there was little thought given to qualifications of the staff or assessments of the students.

By the late 1980's, outdoor programmes had to justify their existence within schools. They did this by aligning with the unit standards approach dictated by 'Tomorrow's Schools' policy, constructing assessment end-points, and re-focusing the outdoor programmes towards components that could be easily measured, like pursuit skills. An expectation arose that staff would have 'qualifications' in the outdoors, or employ people that did.

Mirroring what was happening in schools, there was a more managerialist approach to the conservation estate, with environmental impacts, access permission, safety systems and accountability processes being required of commercial outdoor user groups. This coincided with a rise in adventure tourism numbers (Grant, Thompson and Boyes, 1996) and pushed outdoor operators towards a more systematic, professional approach. What this meant for outdoor operators / educators in NZ was that the government was perceived as being increasingly oriented towards justifying everything in terms of its dollar value, and being willing to isolate, blame and punish those organisations or individuals that resisted compliance. The relative stability of the past was replaced with confusion, disquiet, and uncertainty about the shape of the future.

The discourse of empowerment, accountability and transparency conveyed the antithesis of what really took place... stagnation, recession and instability dominated economic life. Poverty and inequality deepened as unemployment and the gap between rich and poor grew... alienation, social dis-ease and a deep sense of betrayal took hold (Kelsey, 1997, p349-350)

The New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association (NZOIA) was established in 1987, in the midst of, and perhaps in response to, this turmoil.

Dumble (2003) contends that neo-liberalism, in the shape of the corporatisation of education (the imposition of a business model upon education), and the commodification of knowledge (neat packages to be consumed) has shaped outdoor education and outdoor leaders. This is especially so in those courses that adhere to the underpinning philosophies of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and offer NQF qualifications, because the NQF is a product of neo-liberal ideology.

Furthermore, managerialism, a key tenet of neo-liberalism, demanded a quality product that could be audited through report writing, recording, efficiencies, cost accounting and policy statements (Dumble, 2003).

To enable the measuring and recording of 'quality' education, the notion of education and what counts as knowledge had to not only change but also had to be reduced to smaller parts. The attempt to objectify and quantify all knowledge came in the guise of unit or achievement standards (Dumble, 2003, p8)

The government funded Sport Fitness and Recreation Industry Training Organisation (SFRITO) created unit standards and national qualifications in outdoor recreation leadership, and encouraged their use through marketing and monetary incentives. These 'industry training organisations' were established to help meet the governments stated objective of a 'highly skilled and technologically literate population' (Kelsey, 1997, p220). Ironically, they also appear to have been established in the wake of the collapse of the traditional apprenticeship schemes; the collapse was provoked in part by the repeal of the Apprenticeship Act in 1991 (which meant employers were no longer obligated to take apprentices), and by the decimation of the industrial manufacturing base of the country (there were fewer employers).

In addition, the third underpinning of neo-liberalism, Principal-Agency Theory, contends 'any relationship between the agent and the principal is contractual' (Dumble, 2003, p9). This theory suggests shifting the (economic)'risk' to a third party minimises the 'risk' to the primary party: in New Zealand this has seen a reduction in tenured outdoor professionals in favour of 'entrepreneurial agents' working within the scope of a contract. Dumble asserts that this results in power inequalities and a dysfunctional work force with corroded trust, loyalty and commitment. It is a short step to see that one of the repercussions of this 'contracting out' is a potential loss of continuity of historic knowledge of place.

The influence of managerialism in education with its need for audit and accountability, together with the pressure to legitimise the place of outdoor /adventure education in the school curriculum, an increase in the numbers of people recreating in the outdoors,

and an increase in surveillance of the use of the conservation estate, spurred a 'professionalism' of outdoor training. This resulted in the growth of training and assessment pathways, most noticeably in technical pursuit awards offered, for example, by the New Zealand Outdoor Instructor Association (NZOIA) or the Sea Kayak Operators of New Zealand (SKOANZ). The ability to perform technical pursuits is more easily measured than other forms of knowledge (eg. cultural, connectedness) and thus easier to implement and assess (Zink, 2003).

While outdoor organisations like NZOIA and SKOANZ tended to construct their own training and assessing pathways, Polytechnics and Private Training Establishments (PTE's) like OPC created outdoor courses that used the SFRITO endorsed unit standards and qualifications.

Qualifying outdoor 'professionals' thus became a new industry, with a systemised approach that allowed for auditing and assessment of quality, a focus on technical pursuits as the measure of quality, and a resultant increase in the volume of paperwork within organisations. From a single course in 'how to be an outdoor instructor' (the OPC Outdoor Educator's Course) in 1984, by 1991 there were at least 45 providers offering outdoor courses (Stothart, 1993). By 2002 there were at least 17 competing organisations offering 45 outdoor courses at a tertiary level in New Zealand (Dumble, 2003, p8).

It was hard for the prospective consumer to differentiate between the quality of the courses running unit standards and those that did not. The underpinning neo-liberal ideology of these courses sought to safeguard itself and explains why SFRITO marketing portrayed unit-standards based courses as being more appropriate than 'traditional' qualifications and courses.

Thus the 'point-in-time', where the practice of outdoor leaders changed from an apprenticeship model to a model dominated by a systems approach, was shaped by an economic ideology that favoured managerial processes controlling a compartmentalisation of knowledge, for the benefit of the individual.

What this ideology did was to force change through fear and policy. Fear of being held negligent, fear of losing one's job. The policies included the Education Act of 1989, the changes to the ACC legislation in 1992, and the Health and Safety in Employment Act of 1992. These all changed how education was practiced and how the workplace was managed.

Two of the results of the fear and policy, were that outdoor programmes within schools had to justify their existence in terms of costs and benefits, and the paperwork increased. The paperwork was essentially a trail that demonstrated adherence to policy. It shaped the competences needed of staff, the training of staff, and the boundaries of acceptable practice.

Dumble (2003) also contends that one of the repercussions of this ideologically forced change, has been the reshaping in education of what counts as knowledge:

There has been a shifting from a broad knowledge base to a skill based one; Knowledge is increasingly reduced to smaller packages; the teacher / student relationship has changed to a provider / customer relationship; economic value is given to unit standards because they are used as indicators of quality in programmes; and delivering and assessing these 'knowledge commodities' is dominated by efficiency drives.

Managerialism tends to resolve any audit upsets (eg accidents) with increasing layers of audit or assessment (eg OutdoorsMark), even though there is little evidence supporting the notion of more assessment guaranteeing 'safety' or 'quality' (Dumble, 2003, p9)

Dumble's comments prove disconcerting in light of more recent events: in the wake of the Mangatepopo Tragedy, and a death in the adventure tourism industry, the Prime Minister ordered a Risk Management and Safety Review (Cant, 2010a and 2010b). The outdoor /adventure education industry was represented by Outdoors New Zealand (ONZ). I attended an ONZ symposium in September 2010, where it was revealed that ONZ would recommend to the review committee and thus to cabinet, that outdoor operators be registered and their operations receive regular audits.



## Language

The language displayed between the two Events is indicative of change. The discourse of the 1953 Event could be titled 'traditional' in that it used words, phrases and descriptions of practice, that were common before the rise of neo-liberalism. These things were also evident in some of the discourse of the 2008 Event, and possibly indicate the incomplete capture of the outdoor / adventure education vision. The 2008 event was dominated by 'managerialism' words, which became common in New Zealand with the rapid introduction of neo-liberalism in the post-1984 era.

### The Language of Experience and Judgement

The 'traditional' language contained words like judgement, experience, inexperience, young, senior, trust. These words suggest four components of the practice of that era: firstly, an emphasis on 'time in the field':

... [the accidents] might have been *prevented by the exercise of good judgement* ... Many people in Taranaki could climb the mountain safely in winter without accident *because they were experienced and obeyed the recognised mountaineering practices* (NZ Herald, 4.8.53);

Secondly, an emphasis on a partnership, whereby more experienced people teach lesser-experienced people:

... *Inexperienced climbers should not at any time try the ascent... If, for instance, two inexperienced men wanted to climb they should get the help of two experienced men...* (The Weekly News, 19.8.53c)

Third, there would be a gradual succession of leadership, based on those two components:

... *Leadership is developed not only by taking responsibility but by seeking responsibility* (NZ Herald, 7.8.53)  
 .... *This accident resulted largely from failure to adhere to rules of safe climbing which are applicable generally and which are taught by mountain*

*clubs to their members personally and in their instruction books* (NZ Herald, 10.9.53).

And lastly, the responsibility for practice clearly belongs to the person in charge of the group:

*... Yet his was the final responsibility for setting out...* (NZAJ, 1954, p562).

This 'traditional' language is also seen in the interviews, when the interviewees were describing what the practice was like in the past:

- Mr White      I felt very confident about taking people because you know I'd talked with them...
- ... taking kids out of the classroom was not... it was done but it wasn't done on a formalised basis. It was more an informal thing...
- Mr Grey        There was this incredible trust in the fact that you were going to look after their kids and take them out somewhere and have a good time basically. And by in large we did...
- ... You learned it by being there and being with someone else and those sorts of things. As I look back on it, we were very fortunate at times that we got away with stuff... We were learning on the hoof. There was a lot of that but also there was a lot of teaching each other...
- Mr Yellow      We learned by doing...
- ... I already had a lot of experience in the outdoors in tramping and hunting, so took over the HOD of outdoor education...
- ... The people who took the sailing or the people who took the tramping had a lot of on-the-job training. People who had some tramping experience but weren't used to leading a group, would come with one of the other people and learn the route and learn the problems...
- ... Those sorts of things were always measured and thought about but not necessarily written down. It sort of got passed from one to the next that you needed to watch that hole or watch that such and such...
- ... If you didn't have experience or anyone on the staff who was experienced in those kinds of things, you didn't do them...
- ... Common sense. It's the be-all and end-all of safety.

- Ms Red            They had been taking this camp for years, so in that sense they were experienced and they had a big background in hunting and were familiar with the area...
- ... I think it was part of the school culture. Just something you did...
- ... When I went in the early days it was part of my job... We had a camp handbook. We had a training day. They went through that and then they left us to get on with it...
- Ms Blue            Young teachers were mentored by more experienced teachers. [This] included checking on our planning, talking with the class, and accompanying the trip as a support person. The class organised their own food...
- ... Most of my training came [through] mentoring by others around me... Much of my training was informal and on the job.

The 2008 discourse only occasionally contained similar sentiments:

*... obvious and dramatic breach of trust ... She was a young instructor with little experience* (comments of Judge Anne Kiernan, NZ Herald, March 21 2009).

*... judgement only comes over time* (NZ Herald, February 19, 2010)

*... She lacked the knowledge and experience required to lead* (Herald on Sunday, April 4, 2010).

But more often the 2008 Event contained examples of neo-liberal language.

### **The Language of Audit and Efficiency**

Neo-liberal language emphasizes individualism - the primacy of the individual over the group - and managerialism. Managerialism is defined by Dumble as:

*...an obsession with audited quality,... efficiency... and policy*  
(Dumble, 2003, p8).

Managerialism requires rigid lines of accountability of actions, through things like reports, cost accounting, and a clear delineation of roles. It results in an emphasis on avoiding liability, rather than ensuring responsible decision-making through experienced-based judgement. In managerialism, the economic costs and benefits of decisions are more important than any social gain. There may be risks in having an autocratic or dictatorial management system but it is more efficient than having a collaborative approach, as collaboration takes more time and therefore incurs a higher cost.

Thus emanating from both the participants in the 2008 Event, and those critiquing it, we have the neo-liberal language of managerialism in the discourse, with terms and phrases that signify blame:

... Those who do not accept liability for their actions should have it sheeted home to them.... we should consider whether people whose negligence costs lives... should not be personally answerable (NZ Herald, January 25, 2009).

... still hoping accountability would come (NZ Herald, August 4, 2009).

Or that signify a clear delineation of roles or emphasis on the individual:

... *My obligation was to my group* (NZ Herald, February 18, 2010).

Or that signify a compartmentalization of knowledge:

... *There weren't many occasions where there was a sharing of concerns about such things as river flows or conditions on the mountain* (NZ Herald, February 19, 2010).

Or that signify a hierarchical management structure with its inherent demarcations of power:

*... included high staff turnover, non-compliance with agreed organisational policy and an “autocratic, unfriendly and demotivating” management dynamic* (Sunday Star-Times, 28 March, 2010).

Dumble’s description of managerialism –

...an obsession with audited quality,... efficiency... and policy (Dumble, 2003, p8)

is also seen in what the interviewees had to say about the practice of the present. There are many references, throughout the interviews, to paperwork, risk management, policy, systems, and standards:

Ms Blue      Positives [were NZOIA] set standards and set up an award scheme. They have a good system for assessing technical skills.

Ms Red      ... I think it was self-generating. More paper. More butt covering.

Mr Grey      I think there was a general sense that there was a need to see us come together and work some things through to see some standardization.

Mr Black      [Now I am] only working as a wage slave. I gave up when getting concessions and insurance became complicated and expensive... Leaving [outdoor classes] to professional contractors...can be ok, but can just become another job delivered without any passion and with no long-term commitment to the students.

Mr White      [Paperwork is] pretty extensive...

Mr Grey      I think there is a lot more [paperwork]. It varies from place to place a bit, but for example the bulk of work which is still through the schools, there’s a paper trail that has to get sorted through before you even get the chance to take a group outdoors... Commonly schools will want a RAMS or some form of risk management documentation...  
 ... the whole rise of the Occupation and Safety Health [legislation], that has had a big impact on the way society views safety management...  
 ... somewhere in the mid 1980’s, we started to see the growth of the course – OPC, the polytech courses etc...

... To go back to the Elim guy, [it was like he was saying] “We ticked our boxes, so we avoided – it couldn’t come back to us”...

... Because of the nature of our work ... we have interaction in nine conservancies and that is costing me \$6200... but it might be more. This is just to look at the paperwork, without any guarantee that we may actually be given a concession...

Mr Yellow Now, I think, it has gone from the sublime to the ridiculous in the paperwork... institutional knowledge [isn’t] captured by RAMS [or] by policy.

Ms Red ... It was unwieldy. It was frightening. You had to have a form for everything...

Ms Blue Risk management has changed the planning process and set the safety planning to the side rather than having it integrated in the whole process.

The language used in the discourse surrounding the two Events, is mirrored in the language used by the interviewees regarding their practice of the past and of the present. The language is indicative, therefore, of a change in how outdoor / adventure education was practiced and how it currently is practiced: from a ‘traditional’ mentoring / apprenticeship model, with an emphasis on experience, to a ‘systems’ model with an emphasis on managerialism (eg. audit, accountability, qualifications, policy, risk management).

## **A Foucauldian Perspective**

The French philosopher Michel Foucault (1924-1984) reasoned that what appears 'normal' in society, is actually generated by 'normalising practices' (Zink and Burrows, 2006, p40). He developed ways of looking at the world and at history, that help reveal these 'normalising practices', and several of these ways are useful in the analysis of this research: the concepts of archaeology and genealogy; the relationship between the forms of knowledge Foucault termed *savoir* and *connaissance*; discontinuity; and the relationship between knowledge and power.

Current outdoor / adventure education practice in New Zealand encompasses the following: a privileging of outdoor pursuit performance and risk management, over other forms of knowledge; and a compartmentalisation of knowledge. Practice also consists of organisations infused with managerialism in order to justify funding, legitimate their practice, and assess and accredit students; organisations competing for funding; and organisations engaged in self-promotion or lobbying, in order to be seen as the authority in a discipline or in a field of knowledge, which in turn attracts clients / students or funding or both. Practice also encompasses pre-employment training being carried out by organisations external to the eventual employer.

The origin(s) of the current practice can be traced using the aforementioned Foucauldian concepts and terms.

### **Archaeology and Genealogy,**

In Foucauldian terms, archaeology is the 'domain of research' or analysis of the discourse, undertaken in order to uncover the knowledge implicit in that society. This knowledge is both formal and informal. Emerging from that implicit knowledge, is a more formal body of knowledge or discipline. Genealogy identifies the tactics based on that analysis, which would be used to bring the analysis to fruition or 'into play', for example, relations of power, or technology (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005). One of the methods employed by Foucault, was to compare two different periods in the history of the formal knowledge (which sometimes, but not always, equated to different historical periods), in order to understand how the earlier period differed from the latter

period in its implicit knowledge, and then to illuminate the ‘discontinuity’ that drove the emergence of the formal body of knowledge.

An example is offered to illustrate how Foucault worked. Foucault noted the ‘diseases of the head’ and ‘nervous diseases’ of the 1700’s (in France), was a very different way of looking at mental illness from the discipline of psychiatry that emerged in the 1800’s. What made the emergence of the psychiatric discipline possible, was a raft of changes in seemingly disparate things – the rules around hospitalisation and internment, the conversations around morality and what is ‘normal’ behaviour, changes in laws, changes in concepts, practices, and procedures, changes in the language used in literature, law, philosophy. Political decisions and the opinions expressed in everyday life all contributed to, and reflected, the emergence of psychiatry (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005, p846).

### **Savoir and Connaissance**

This ‘raft of changes in disparate things’ in the example above, is what Foucault would term ‘savoir’. He used the term ‘savoir’ to describe the knowledge implicit in society, that is, ‘everyday opinions and commercial practices’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p647) but also including institutions, police activities, customs and conventions (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005, p846). Savoir creates the conditions for the possible emergence of a formal body of knowledge. Formal bodies of knowledge were termed ‘connaissance’, for example, specific disciplines such as psychiatry or evolutionary biology. Savoir is broad; connaissance ‘covers conventional territory’ (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005, p857).

In the New Zealand outdoors, the current shape of formal bodies of knowledge (the connaissance) – for example the formalised training and assessment packages of the NZOIA awards in the pursuits of rock climbing and white water kayaking, or the practice of risk management - arose out of the conditions of possibility that existed in the wider context of the mid-1980’s (the savoir). These conditions included a climate of social unhappiness with a very conservative and controlling government; a rise in the numbers of people seeking recreational experiences in the outdoors; and



recognition, by those working in the outdoors, that outdoor practices were haphazard, coupled with a desire for standardization of practice.

Davidson (2006) in writing a brief history of the New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association (NZOIA) for its member's handbook, captures some of the complexity of the *savoir*. Firstly, he alludes to the rift between what the Mountain Safety Council (MSC) offered to outdoor practitioners, and what those working professionally in the outdoors wanted. At the time, the MSC was the only organisation offering nation-wide outdoor skills awards for outdoor practitioners, and aside from several administrators, it was a volunteer system.

[In the mid 1980's] there were very few qualifications in the outdoors at that time, and those that did exist were held by volunteers in the main and were held in poor esteem by those working full time in the profession.

Secondly, Davidson notes the volume of robust debate around the subject of qualifications and the desire to be different from what the MSC offered:

There was considerable debate... about the need for qualifications at all; many in the outdoors were there because of their desire to separate themselves from the bureaucracy and trappings of the normal workplace... [and] would resist any structure being placed on their new life. There were others... who were committed to the concept of outdoor education as a profession...

Third, Davidson alludes to the societal turmoil of the mid-1980's, and the fear that existed of government intervention in the outdoor work practices:

... that to be a profession, and to be professionals, we had to have a set of ethics that we abided by and we needed to be self-governing rather than have all of these things imposed.

Lastly, the *savoir* is further illuminated by Davidson's recollection that it was a difficult task to not only create a new organisation, but to get buy-in from people:

Other issues raised their heads from concerned groups throughout the country... How will this affect volunteers? What about soft skills? How will they be assessed? Who will be the assessors anyway? What about Maori outdoor instructors? I've been doing this for years and now you tell me I need to have someone else tell me I can still do it? And on and on. The clubs were... very threatened...(Davidson, 2006, p9).

### **Discontinuity**

Foucault asserts that formal bodies of knowledge (*connaissance*) emerge from a wide range of 'complex, irrational sources or conditions' (*savoir*) and that this knowledge 'does not necessarily... do this in a logical, continuous, progressive manner'. He uses the term 'discontinuity' to describe a rupture in the flow of history, a thing or event that pushes knowledge in a different direction. (Foucault cited in Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005, p847).

In the field of outdoor /adventure education in New Zealand, the practice of the past – the 'apprenticeship model' – did not logically, progressively flow into the 'systems approach' of the present. The *savoir* was present in the societal desire for change. The 'discontinuity' that took the historic body of knowledge in a different direction, was provided by the instigation of an ideology, neo-liberalism, by a new government in the mid-1980's, which would restructure virtually all facets of social life in New Zealand, creating turmoil as it did so. This ideology would continue to exert its influence well beyond the life of the government that introduced it.

In Education, the new ideology eventually resulted in an imposition of a new model ('Tomorrow's Schools' in 1989) that compartmentalised knowledge and demanded audit and accreditation processes (amongst other things). This in turn drove subsequent changes in practice and in training.

The desire for self-regulation by those working in outdoor /adventure education, appeared in the discourse surrounding the formation of NZOIA in 1986 /87:

Suddenly it seemed that there was a threat of government imposed standards rather than an industry or profession that was self-governing (Davidson, 2006, p9).

The creation of standards and qualifications reflected not only a drive for legitimisation and self-regulation from within the outdoor industry, but also a way ahead through the dissonance of the time. A variety of training courses, that embraced the new ideological approach to knowledge, evolved to meet the needs of those people needing to upskill. The comments from Davidson about NZOIA history (Davidson, 2006, pp9-10) reflect a mix of self-regulation:

[NZOIA members]set and monitor[ed] their own standards;

neo-liberal language,

The standards would not only be technical standards but incorporate how the instructors related and passed on those skills to their clients... ;

And traditional language,

... the standards would be supported by previous logged experience in the outdoors...;

Davidson's comments also reflect a tussle for power and legitimisation that was to dominate the governance of the outdoor industry for the years ahead:

... slowly, but pervasively, NZOIA awards became the standard for competence in outdoor instruction... By the mid-1990's NZOIA was a healthy organisation with sought-after awards.

## **Power and Knowledge**

Foucault joined the two terms, power and knowledge, together in the term power / knowledge as he felt they were inseparable, and that each influenced the other.

Furthermore, *savoir* and *connaissance* are intimately bound to power / knowledge:

*Savoir* is the regime of knowledge... the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relation to power (Foucault, 1994, p331).

Behind all knowledge (*savoir*), behind all attainment of knowledge (*connaissance*), what is involved is a struggle for power. Political power is not absent from knowledge, it is woven together with it (Foucault, 1994, p32).

Holstein and Gubrium (2005) give an example of the intertwining of power and knowledge. They suggest that it would, generally, be ‘preposterous’ to see Western medicine and the practice of voodoo as equal and viable options for understanding sickness and enacting healing:

The power of medical discourse partially lies in its ability to ‘be seen but unnoticed’, in its ability to appear as the only possibility while other possibilities are outside the plausible realm (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005, p491)

Foucault also demonstrated that power / knowledge has both a repressive effect and a ‘positive’ effect. A ‘positive’ effect is more correctly a produced effect, as it is created, and is different, from something that is approved of. In his examination of the French penal system, he noted that at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the old penal style of punishment (physical violence against the criminal), died out, and was replaced by a more modern style of incarceration. This had a repressive effect on the ‘soul’ of the prisoner, as it was no longer just their body being penalised; it also had a produced effect as it ‘normalized the larger population in terms of correct behaviour’ (Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005, p854). In addition, a produced effect was that the new system spawned a whole industry – not only prisons and mental institutions, but laws; not only warders but doctors, psychiatrists, educationalists, police. The focus thus shifted from what the person did (their behaviour), to what they are, what they may be, what they

will be (Ibid, pp855-856). Penal reform illustrated both the practice of power / knowledge (behaviour defined as criminal) but also the technologies of power (laws, prisons, experts, surveillance techniques).

### **A Brief Note About Risk Management**

The history of risk and the influence of risk management in modern thinking has been well documented (see for example, Bernstein, 1996, or Deuchars, 2004). Covello and Mumpower (1985) contend that modern ideas of risk management have four basic mechanisms of control: insurance, common law, government intervention, and private sector self-regulation. These ideas and mechanisms have very historic roots.

Insurance can trace its roots to trade in ancient Babylon, where The Code of Hammurabi (circa 1950 B.C.) established, through the concept of ‘bottomry’, the elements of loan, interest rate, and a risk premium for the chance of a loss (Ibid, p109). Modern insurance however needed the invention of probability theory by Pascal in 1657, and its redefining into a quantitative risk assessment tool by LaPlace in 1792. It also required the coincidental search for truth and order that arose in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which resulted in advances in scientific instruments and the evolution of a rigorous scientific method for observing and collecting data, and testing hypotheses (Ibid, pp105-108), another Foucauldian example of the savoir generating the connaissance.

Common law, in the English and American systems, has roots in Babylon and the Old Testament, both of which discussed the idea of liability. Common law (which New Zealand law has its legal roots in) provides two risk management functions – compensation and deterrence.

Governments have traditionally intervened to reduce, mitigate or control risks, from proclamations against burning coal to enacting laws about food and safety, from establishing fire brigades to developing sewage systems. Interventions also included sacrifice (thankfully no longer practiced), flood control, disaster relief, vaccination programmes, compensation laws, and traffic flow regulation.

The 1348-49 epidemic of Black Death (bubonic plague)... killed over a quarter of the population of Europe – approximately 25 million people... government authorities adopted one of the oldest and most direct strategies of disease control – quarantine and isolation (Covello and Mumpower, 1985, p111).

Private sector self-regulation is less visible than the other strategies and its roots generally stem from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century attempts to control hazards associated with increased industrialization. Covello and Mumpower suggest there are two forms that are most visible. One form is licensure and certification, which controls who can be involved in the industry. The other form is ‘perhaps the most important mechanism for industrial self-regulation’: the standard-setting organisations, professional and technical societies, which set consensus-based standards (Ibid, p115).

## **Relations of Power / Knowledge in Current Practice**

Emerging from this study, are three power / knowledge relationships that appear to underpin and influence current outdoor / adventure education practice. *Governing Bodies* exert influence over and through *Practitioners*; *Organisations-that-Govern* compete for primacy of authority; and the discourses of risk management and outdoor pursuits, dominate the practice.

### **The First Power / Knowledge Relationship: ‘Governing Bodies’ and ‘Practitioners’**

This power / knowledge relationship has three components: the paperwork /compliance clue; what ‘Governing Bodies and ‘Practitioners’ are and how they relate; and lastly, how self-regulation works.

#### **The Paperwork / Compliance Clue**

Power / knowledge relationships in current outdoor practice, have been illuminated by the discourse of the interviewees, and in the discourse of the literature. In the previous section ‘What the Interviews Reveal’, at least five themes emerged from the discourse of the interviewees. The theme ‘paperwork of the present’, suggests that the paperwork is voluminous and specific, often about risk management, and often regarded as a burden and hindrance to practice. This theme also suggests paperwork has a cost in terms of time and money; that organisations are expected to have policies and guidelines for practice; and the Risk Analysis Management System (RAMS) tool was useful but has been misused.

Different from the paperwork required in the past, the ‘paperwork of the present’ is expressed in the ‘formal body of knowledge’ (the *connaissance*) that is outdoor / adventure education; most clearly in the policies and procedures that manage how practice is conducted. However, the driver for these audit and accreditation processes – the paperwork - clearly emanates from the *savoir*: that driver is managerialism, a tenet of neo-liberalism.

Paperwork arises out of compliance (eg, with organisational policy, with law) and out of a desire to manage the risk to the organisation and to the individuals; in other words, to make sure nothing should go wrong (all the boxes are ticked), but to avoid liability if something does go wrong. The desire to manage risk is the *sine qua non* of contemporary paperwork, the thing that influences all other things and the thing that has become indispensable. The first power / knowledge relationship inherent in the paperwork becomes apparent when we understand what or who is driving the need for paperwork.

Three of the four aforementioned ‘mechanisms of control’ of risk management – law, government intervention, and self-regulation – relate to the first power / knowledge relationship. This relationship is between the ‘Governing Bodies’ on one side, and ‘Practitioners’ on the other.

### **‘Governing Bodies’ and ‘Practitioners’**

‘Practitioners’ includes teachers, instructors, guides, trainees and volunteers, who work in some capacity in the outdoors (see ‘A Note about Terminology’ in the Introduction). ‘Governing Bodies’ includes Edifices (eg the law, the government Ministries, the courts) and Organisations-that-Govern, who create and steer bodies of knowledge in the New Zealand outdoors (eg NZOIA, MSC, SFRITO /Skills Active). Schools or outdoor centres like Outward Bound or OPC are not Organisations-that-Govern, but rather just organisations. They are conduits through which the power / knowledge relationship flows. Governing Bodies sanction both compliance and managing risks (consciously or unconsciously). The law guides through legislation; the Ministries create policy and provide (or withhold) funding; the courts represent a threat to freedoms, an endpoint if things go wrong.

The following comments from Grant, Thompson and Boyes (1996), suggest the power / knowledge relationship is essentially a one-way flow, from the Edifices to the Practitioners:

Amendments to the ACC Act, the introduction of the Occupational Health and Safety Employment Act of 1992 and the influence of the New Right politics



have all resulted in the costs of misadventure in the outdoors being increasingly transferred from the state to the public as ‘users’ ... (Grant, Thompson and Boyes, 1996, pp5-6).

Additionally, their comments suggest that the motives behind this one-way flow are driven by the neo-liberal tenets of minimalist government, managerialism, and individualism:

Furthermore, in the event of misadventure in the outdoors, the path is being cleared for blame to be apportioned, for the state to be free of responsibility, and for costs to be demanded from sources other than the State (Ibid, pp5-6).

Dumble was a high-school teacher during the 1980’s and later helped established a polytech outdoor leadership course. His comments also suggested the power / knowledge relationship was a one-way flow, bullying in nature:

People from Wellington came on the scene and said, “This is the New Way, this is what it will be like, and we are here to help make it happen. If you go into denial over this, you will be Left Behind because the New Way is being pushed by the Big Boys. Join us or fall by the wayside”. The political / financial agenda behind this is so insidious, and because they espouse it as educationally sound, it is hypocritical (Dumble, 1996, p15)

He also suggested that the power / knowledge relationship was successful in changing the way people thought about education:

There is an increasing acceptance of the unit standards with school leavers because so many schools have been pushed into providing them... increasingly, students look at tertiary courses and expect to see units (Dumble, 1996, pp16-17).

Ten years after Dumble’s comments, research by Zink and Boyes (2007) into outdoor education in New Zealand schools, suggested that the power / knowledge flow had

become invisibly successful. In this extract, for example, it is apparent that ‘outdoor education’ in schools has been effectively reduced to ‘outdoor pursuits’, possibly because pursuits are easier to write units for, and thus easier to teach and assess:

Respondents [to the questionnaire] utilised a wide range of NZQA units to support their teaching at senior secondary level. The majority of units that respondents listed were outdoor pursuits related and ranged across tramping, climbing, skiing and snowboarding, adventure based learning, risk management and first aid (Zink and Boyes, 2007, p67).

### **Self-Regulation**

However, there is another element to the Governing Bodies and Practitioners power / knowledge relationship. This element is much more visible and active in the practice: it is the self-regulation conveyed in the statements, newsletters, literature, training and assessment practices, and industry alliances of the Organisations-that-Govern. For example, in the chapter on the 2008 Event, the section “Other Media” contains this quote from the Mountain Safety Council. The quote initially contains a passage that has language that hints at a ‘traditional’ response to an accident:

If we are to reduce the risk of such tragedies recurring, the focus has to be on prevention and education.

But then changes its tone to advocate a more managerialist response, using words like standards, audits, and managing risk:

We support any moves to ensure *robust standards* exist across the outdoor recreation sector and that operators and participants receive adequate training and education in how to best *manage the risks inherent in outdoor activities*... We would go further and urge that *Government consider requiring all activity providers undergo regular, external review of their operations to ensure minimum standards are met and that there is continual improvement in safety standards across the sector* (Mountain Safety Council, 2010. Italics added).

This position can be seen as an attempt to self-regulate. It holds implications about where the position of authority is (clearly not with the operators or participants), the suggestion that practitioners aren't safe, and the threat of more regulation in the future. However, this quote has an invisible element too, as these Organisations-that-Govern have their own power / knowledge relationship: they compete to be the accepted voice of authority.

Creating knowledge regarding audit and accreditation is therefore key to dominance and success in the industry... in the outdoors, those who become experts in the development of accreditation are those who become crucial to the governance of the outdoors industry (Chisholm and Shaw, 2004, pp320-321)

Chisholm and Shaw demonstrate that Organisations that Govern, compete via the development of their own training and assessment pathways, and the promotion of those pathways as being the best way. The key to attaining the position of authority (which Chisholm and Shaw called 'dominance and success') is 'creating knowledge'; this in turn depends on acceptance of that knowledge by the practitioners, and having enough practitioners to create authority. Thus competition between Organisations that Govern, to be the voice of authority, is the second power / knowledge relationship in current practice.

## **The Second Power / Knowledge Relationship: Competition between Organisations-that-Govern**

While there are in-house training pathways for specific pursuits, eg kayak awards through the Canoe and Kayak business, or mountaineering through the NZ Mountain Guides Association, the dominant Organisations-that-Govern in outdoor / adventure education have a much wider multi-skill, multi-pursuit scope. These are NZOIA, MSC and SFRITO / Skills Active. All three have created their own training and assessment pathways and were established via different mandates: NZOIA via professional outdoor instructors, MSC via volunteer outdoor instructors, and SFRITO / Skills Active via the government. For many years all three have competed to be the voice of

authority in the outdoors. Dumble noted the employers perspective about the value of NZOIA awards versus the value of SFRITO / Skills Active unit standards:

When I asked those who employ people in the outdoor industry the question “All other things being equal, who would you employ – someone with NZOIA qualifications or someone with a collection of [SFRITO] units?” They all responded in a similar fashion – THOSE WITH NZOIA. (Dumble, 1996, p16, capitals in original)

While Davidson noted the historic antipathy between NZOIA and MSC:

... For many years there has been an unfortunate tension between NZOIA and MSC, where the two organisations share a common purpose and should be walking together in the outdoor safety landscape. The worst manifestation of this could possibly be viewed by competing qualification schemes for the same environments that led to mistrust and even animosity between the two groups. (Davidson, 2009, pp19-20, NZOIA President at the time).

The complexity of the power / knowledge relationships, that exist between the Organisations-that-Govern, is illustrated by another passage from Davidson. It appears that those who were once distrustful and competing, have more recently become bedfellows:

I have been enormously cheered by the approach of...the MSC Exec in working with us to finally remove these barriers and work towards a single qualification pathway for all (Ibid).

### **The Change in Stance of NZOIA**

The following sequence of excerpts further illustrates this second power / knowledge relationship. It outlines the change in stance of NZOIA over the years, and the jockeying for acceptance as the voice of authority, between NZOIA and SFRITO /

Skills Active. The historic NZOIA stance, is stated by Davidson (2006), whose comments convey the success NZOIA had in getting established:

...slowly, but pervasively, NZOIA awards became the standard for competence in outdoor instruction... By the mid-1990's NZOIA was a healthy organisation with sought after awards (Davidson, 2006, p10).

Dumble (1996), citing a number of key industry people of the time, portrays the distrustful and competitive stance from NZOIA towards SFRITO /Skills Active and the non-acceptance of unit standards by the outdoor / adventure education industry:

David Bailey says that "unit standards don't represent the strengths of NZOIA qualifications. The units are confusing and huge gaps exist". Ray Button agrees, stating "NZOIA has a quality assessment system that can measure more than just skills" He does "not have a lot of confidence in unit standards"... Peter Garlick of Abel Tasman Kayaks sees the potential [in unit standards] to mix some generic type units with what is already in place, [but] "What we are providing (eg SKOANZ Guide qualification) seems to be working, so why reinvent the wheel?" ... Geoff Gabites from the Adventure Tourism Council... states that "NZOIA qualifications are increasingly getting recognition in the industry, whereas NZQA units are not"(Dumble, 1996, p16).

Dumble also speculated as to why the government was pushing industry-based training, and in doing so illuminates the ideological driver:

They see it as being a cheaper option [and] the quality of the end result plays second fiddle. Of course industry is going to say 'thanks for the cheap labour'... the potential for students to be short-changed [is] enormous.  
(Dumble, 1996, p16)

But evidence of this sort contrasts with the recent official NZOIA position however, which is to dispense with 'unnecessary duplication of awards' (Cant, 2006, p3) and to seek strategic alliances and forge a unified training pathway (Cant, 2007, p6). The

change - towards cooperation - in the NZOIA position from that of a decade earlier, was explained by Cant, the NZOIA Chief Executive:

NZOIA has a strong preference for retaining control of our Awards by not 'Unit Standardising them' and by keeping them off the National Qualifications Framework. Therefore the challenge has been to try and find a way to continue to offer a summative assessment pathway while at the same time offering an alternative pathway that recognises the training that is offered via the SFRITO model (Cant, 2007, p6).

Cant (2007) went on to outline the benefits of such an alliance: to simplify the qualifications 'map' and to 'provide clear pathways to professional instruction' thereby reducing confusion. SFRITO staff will be promoting NZOIA qualifications and in return NZOIA will 'encourage trainee instructors to become workplace trainees with SFRITO'.

Thus the NZOIA stance has shifted dramatically between the mid 1990's and the mid-2000's. A possible reason for this shift in stance is that of economics – that perhaps one organisation was struggling financially and needed to grow and the other was struggling for credibility in the industry that it was set up to serve. The following excerpt suggests such a driver:

It is envisaged that SFRITO will gain trainees, NZOIA will gain members, and the Registration process [part of NZOIA and established in July 2007] will become widely accepted as evidence of current competence (Cant, 2007, p6).

Another passage from Cant reveals the people driving this alliance between these Organisations-that-Govern:

...Should you need clarification please direct your enquiries to Matt Cant and Executive members Grant Davidson and Simon Graney who have been the main people involved in these developments (Cant, 2007, p6).

What these excerpts illuminate is the unique position of Davidson. In 2007, he was not only one of NZOIA's founding members but its current NZOIA President; at that time he sat on the boards of ONZ and SFRITO, and was Chief Executive of the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuit Centre. As such, his role in the first and second power / knowledge relationships, is profound, in that he has been a conduit for power / knowledge and a creator of power / knowledge.

### **Produced and Repressive Effects: Systematic Increase in Suspicion**

One of the produced effects of this power / knowledge relationship, was that these Organisations-that-Govern (unconsciously) generated what Chisholm and Shaw (2004) describe as a 'systematic increasing of suspicion' (p320), whereby statements to the public about safety, 'encourage consumers to be suspicious of those who do not have accreditation' (p319) and in doing so, cause the consumer to rely more heavily on the expertise of the Organisations-that-Govern, to guide them on what is safe. Given the circular nature of this, 'it is unsurprising that accreditation...and audit, is considered to be a need within the industry' (Ibid, p320).

### **Difficulty of Disagreeing**

The Practitioner has a degree of power in this relationship in that they can feed back to the Organisations-that-Govern or they can work within them to modify them, or they can exit from them; but in general the internal 'architecture' of these Organisations-that-Govern – their purpose, their systems, the individuals who have power within the organisation- is difficult to amend once they have attained the voice of authority, and as such, the 'architecture' had a repressive effect on those who disagreed with the 'architecture'. For example, the passage below would indicate that the current direction of NZOIA is unquestionably the right one:

Our strategic partnership has continued to develop and strengthen. We are striving to develop a single training and assessment pathway for outdoor instructors that leads to Registration (recognition of currency)... we are also exploring opportunities for greater collaboration...by drawing together the strengths of NZOIA's current systems with Skills Active's coverage through regional offices...(Davidson, 2009, pp19-20, NZOIA President at the time).

But the current direction appears to take no account of the different ideological bases of the two organisations. This difference was summed up by Interviewee Ms Red, who stated that a recently proposed three-way merger between SFRITO / Skills Active, NZOIA and MSC (to come up with a national qualification), made her ‘nervous’:

The reason hasn’t changed... I’m not sure about unit standard based outdoor subjects... I don’t think you can compartmentalise rock climbing, for example, down to little boxes... How do you assess the mortar [between the unit standard bricks] – the things that glue the bricks together, the people skills, the communication skills, how you inspire clients, the little gems of learning that make a great instructor... I’m also a bit nervous about how you maintain consistency of the assessment process (Interviewee Ms Red).

## **Courses**

Another of the produced effects of the second power / knowledge relationship, and linked to the jockeying for primacy of authority, was the creation and proselytizing of courses. The two main players initially, were OPC and the MSC. OPC established itself, by the late -1980’s, as the place to go to learn pursuit skills through short courses. By the early 1990’s, the MSC risk management courses were in high demand, especially with changes in Health and Safety in the Workplace legislation in 1992. Tertiary-level courses run by polytechs and Private Training Establishment (PTE’s) emerged at about the same time, and most of these followed the SFRITO / Skills Active pathway. NZOIA ran training and assessment courses for its members that followed its own pathway.

Those practitioners wanting to gain the skills on offer, or gain qualifications so as to be seen as credible or current, attended courses. These courses reflected a desire for qualifications or credibility (often forced by issues of funding), a drive for professionalism by practitioners, and an opportunity in the land of the ‘free-market’.



I would say the training is more formal now and there is a commercial interest in providing [a] course and training people (Interviewee Ms Blue)

In turn, these courses instilled risk management as an imperative in the minds of the practitioners.

... We have created something [or] we've helped promote it, and [now] there's that heightened awareness for the need for risk management, particularly among schools... (Interviewee Mr Grey).

### **Diminishing Abilities**

The repressive effect of this power / knowledge relationship is less known by practitioners. It is hinted at in the interviewee comments:

Well, I wonder if the number of [school] outdoor programmes diminished. I wonder if it put people off, if they said, "I can't be bothered with all this (Interviewee Ms Red);

but more clearly seen in the literature (see especially Dumble, 1996; Williams, 2002; Zink and Burrows, 2008). Chisholm and Shaw (2004) state:

The influence of governing bodies extends via compliance and self-surveillance, and the ability to make individual choices, based on experience or context, diminishes (Chisholm and Shaw, 2004, p322)

Dumble presaged the 'diminishing ability' eight years earlier:

A contract instructor at a poly who was delivering and assessing units made the comment that the staff treated the exercise in a state of exhaustion – 'another unit delivered, let's move on to the next'. He also commented on doubts he had as to what the students had learned and retained. They ... saw it as part of their collection. There was no feeling of higher learning being involved (Dumble, 1996, p17).

In light of the 2008 Event, the Dumble comments about retention of knowledge, and particularly the Chisholm and Shaw point about the diminishing ability to make individual choices, become poignant (perhaps even prescient).

### **The Third Power / Knowledge Relationship: The Dominant Discourses of Outdoor Pursuits and Risk Management**

In the section ‘What the Interviews Reveal’, one of the themes that emerged was ‘the practice is different now than the past’. This theme included: less time available for outdoor skills training; the value of tertiary training pathways; inducting new practitioners; the expectations of graduates from these training pathways; and that current practice appears to be dominated by managing risk and technical outdoor pursuits.

From this theme we can see there are issues that relate to funding (cuts in training programmes, student debt, economic imperative of outdoor businesses) which probably sit within the second power / knowledge relationship. However, the position of outdoor pursuits and risk management as the dominant discourses of current practice, provides us with the third power / knowledge relationship. This is stated clearly by Interviewee Ms Blue:

I believe there is an over emphasis on technical skills, as opposed to learning through the environment. Outdoor education has become dominated by pursuits

### **Produced and Repressive Effects: Fear**

The dominance of the discourses of risk management and outdoor pursuits had a produced effect of fear. Interviewee Mr Yellow clearly portrays the way this took shape for some practitioners– the promotion of these discourses had the effect of making teachers think that it was too hard to gain qualifications or that the risks of taking students outdoors were too great:

I think there's a lot more teachers who are very fearful of taking their kids out of the normal situation. I think NZOIA hasn't helped that because they did set some pretty high benchmarks early on, as to the level of competence that you should have to take your kids out the door.

While the comments of both Interviewee Mr Yellow and Interviewee Mr White suggest that fear is present in the decisions by schools or teachers to not participate:

I think that probably had a detrimental effect... that has made a lot more teachers, who had enough skill to take their kids overnight camping, to think 'I'm not going to do that anymore'. Because of what could go wrong. Thank God for ACC (Interviewee Mr Yellow).

I'm sure there's something within the last decade that has happened, that has turned the tables on taking people outside of the classroom. They are reluctant to do it because of the legal ramifications if things happen (Interviewee Mr White).

### **Paperwork Compliance**

Another of the produced effects of the risk management discourse, was paperwork compliance, which also feeds back into the second power / knowledge relationship. Interviewees Mr Grey and Mr White both note the volume of paperwork needed prior to any outdoor activity:

Commonly schools will want a RAMS or some form of risk management documentation. We will put together a package of stuff that might be relevant to them – risk management policies, general safety policies, frequently asked questions about the Trust, medical forms. If it's white water rafting involved there will be another layer of compliance. So that process is quite elongated... (Interviewee Mr Grey)

[Paperwork is] pretty extensive. We have to do the RAMS forms which protect everyone (Interviewee Mr White).

Interviewees Ms Blue and Mr Black both note the effect of paperwork upon the planning process, and how that paperwork is impacting upon the attitude of the practitioner:

Risk management has changed the planning process and set the safety planning to the side rather than having it integrated in the whole process (Interviewee Ms Blue).

[A] trend I see that I think has been going on for some time is to be risk averse. Getting to be hard work for the keen and only partly qualified amateurs, like teachers who hold NZOIA level 1 qualifications and have a full teaching load (Interviewee Mr Black).

### **Marginalisation**

The dominance of the discourses of risk management and outdoor pursuits also had repressive effects. Chisholm and Shaw note the marginalisation of other ways of educating people in the outdoors:

Each of these organisations has a responsibility to promote a responsible development of the NZ outdoors industry (sic). Yet each focuses primarily on safety, choosing to marginalize other discourses, for example fun, ...social interaction, exercise or health (Chisholm and Shaw, 2004, p319).

Interviewee Mr Yellow noted marginalisation via the narrowing of the scope of knowledge being taught in some pre-employment courses:

I find [polytech courses] frustrating. They're pretty diverse and that example I gave you about the rock climbing, they were just performing monkeys really... I found that very frustrating that their course had revolved around doing the particular task to get their assessment, and there was no other depth.

### **Power / Knowledge Relationships in the Literature**

The third power / knowledge relationship – the dominance of the discourses of outdoor pursuits and risk management - has been noted in the literature, for example Hill (2010), Zink and Boyes (2007), and Zink (2003):

This complexity [of reasons for people to engage in the outdoors] is strongly influenced by dominant conceptions of outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand, which privilege personal and interpersonal development through skill focussed outdoor pursuit activities (Hill, 2010, p31).

Zink and Boyes (2007) noted that narratives of risk and safety dominated the discussion of current practice, caused in part by the Health and Safety in the Workplace legislation of 1992, and in part by a number of deaths in the New Zealand outdoors. Zink (2003) noted the circular power / knowledge dynamic between risk identification and outdoor pursuits:

In a somewhat perverse move, the focus on risk and safety has increased the profile of pursuits within outdoor education... RAMS [Risk Analysis and Management System] is a tool commonly used to document their [teachers] safety management practices... RAMS has contributed to the way we talk about and think about outdoor education, and it is a tool that suits pursuits more comfortably than other forms of outdoor education (Zink, 2003, p60)

Other power / knowledge relationships can also be identified in the literature - Hogan (2002) notes the spread of the risk management dominant discourse to Australia and argues for a refocusing of RAMS; Callander and Page (2003) note the culture of minimum safety standards in adventure tourism, created by the existing compensation regime; Zink and Leberman (2003) note how 'pervasive the current risk discourse is in adventure education' and explores ideas around risk, including a critique of RAMS; Zink and Burrows (2006) question the privilegeding of adventure and the assumptions around gender in outdoor education; and Zink and Burrows (2008), identify and challenge the assumptions inherent in current outdoor /adventure education practice.

## **The Invisible Hand**

Thus we have, guiding and shaping New Zealand outdoor practice and practitioners, the invisible hand of neo-liberalism. This can be seen through the examination of the language used by the Interviewees, and in the different discourses emerging from the two Events of 1953 and 2008. These discourses lead us to an examination of New Zealand history, and the abrupt change or ‘discontinuity’ that occurred in the era from the mid-1980’s to early 1990’s.

Foucauldian methods illuminate the architecture and invisible hegemony of the system; the methods also provide the means to understand the evolution of the current practice. The three power / knowledge relationships identified in this study– ‘Governing Bodies’ and ‘Practitioners’, Competition between Organisations that Govern, and the Dominant Discourses of Outdoor Pursuits and Risk Management – illustrate the complex ‘savoir’, the knowledge implicit in society, within which the discipline (or *connaissance*) of outdoor / adventure education is practiced.

## Chapter 7. Summary

The discourse around the two Events suggests something about how outdoor / adventure education was practiced in 1953 and in 2008, in New Zealand. The interviews, while not quite reaching that far back in time, reiterate the same overarching themes – that practice in the past was an ‘apprenticeship’ model, and that practice in 2008 (and today) was dominated by ‘systems’. The interviews were able to allocate a ‘point-in-time’ where the model of the past was taken over by the model of the present (see Diagram 1, p226, for a schematic representation of this).

### Implications

The 2008 Event was an unsettling experience for the field of outdoor / adventure education. Beyond the obvious tragedy of multiple deaths, the 2008 Event illuminated a practice where knowledge and roles were compartmentalised, and that was systems dependant. More than that though, it signalled a practice where the systematic approach was ‘normal’ and a matter of faith that it was the best way to work in the outdoors. The 2008 Event raised doubts about this approach, especially in its ability to produce practitioners who can make good judgement calls in the heat of the moment.

From the Foucauldian analysis, which compared the 2008 Event with the 1953 Event, and examined current practice via interviews with experienced practitioners of current practice, what emerges from the contemporary discourse, is that practice used to be different in the past, with little paperwork and an ‘apprenticeship’ style of training. Current practice resides within complex and competing forces (the *savoir*) of risk, responsibility, economics, conservation, and the nature of education. Current practice has its roots in an ideological discontinuity. This ideology has become hegemonic – invisibly dominant; its tenets of market forces, managerialism, and Principal-Agency theory can be seen in the language, the paperwork, the use of contractors, the components and make up of courses, the skill sets and experience levels of new practitioners, and the compartmentalisation of knowledge. The hegemony can also be seen in the power / knowledge relationships in current practice, especially that of the jockeying for authority between governing bodies, and the disciplines of risk management and outdoor pursuits that dominate the practice.

Lastly, the despair of older practitioners, who were ‘trained’ in a pre-discontinuity era, but who are engaged in the complexity of the practice of the current era, both illuminates the changes and offers a way ahead:

That’s the change in society, coming back to compliance and risk management: it does have an effect because in a sense you are literally forced from an economic point of view, to put people into the field in an earning capacity perhaps before they are truly ready... Everybody wants great risk management but nobody wants to pay for it (Interviewee Mr Grey).

The thing that makes people ‘truly ready’ for work in the ‘field’, is experience. But experience alone isn’t enough, as the discourse from the 1953 Event tells us; there needs to be suitable training and systems. The 2008 Event highlighted a highly systematised organisational approach to practice, but this too was not enough to prevent a tragedy, as one of the parents who lost a child in the Mangatepopo, informs us:

*... revamped systems are not enough to guarantee safety. OPC already had good policies and a chief executive with a doctorate in risk management on the day Natasha died. You don’t need policies, you need common sense...*  
(Dominion Post, 17.4. 2010)

### **The Comments of Ranger Smith**

In the light of the discourse analysis of the 2008 Event, the comments from a local Department of Conservation (DOC) Ranger Smith seem to capture something about the wider context and complexity of outdoor practice, something that is easily obscured by the dominant discourses of outdoor pursuits and risk management. Smith’s comments capture the irony of, and the warning to, the current approach to practice:

Smith said even though he personally would not have gone in the stream for fear of flash flooding, *that was based on his local knowledge and instinct*. He



said no fault could be placed on the centre or the instructor for doing so. “*It was one of those days where systems don’t work,*” he says. “*In looking for blame, we may be asking questions we aren’t going to get answers for*”.... Smith said he wanted the centre to continue taking students through the gorge and would advise any reviews of the tragedy that it should not be closed down. “I know the value of what they are teaching kids in that gorge. It is a beautiful experience. *Risk is an inherent part of experiencing the outdoors.*” (NZ Herald, 19.4.2008)(Italics added).

There are four elements worth recognising in the comments of Ranger Smith. Firstly, he states that he would not have gone in to the stream because of his local knowledge. He mentions the word instinct but instinct (in this context) is knowledge based upon experience (It was the same for contract instructor Zimmer, the same for OutdoorsMark auditor Dalton: their knowledge told them that the stream and gorge should be avoided). Sullivan, the OPC instructor entering the gorge with her group, does not have Smith’s local knowledge, nor his ‘instinct’; nor is she accompanied by anyone who does. In addition, the people who do have the knowledge and ‘instinct’ appear to be constrained by the system within which they are working.

Secondly, Smith’s statement that “*It was one of those days where systems don’t work*” is an interesting one, implying that it was either an extraordinary event beyond the scope of a system, or that he believed the systems in place were not the complete answer for working in the outdoors – that they could help so much but not enough when it came to making hard decisions in the field. The NIWA data (Devonport, 2010) tells us that the flood was not an extraordinary occurrence and would thus refute the first interpretation. The second interpretation is supported by the discourse: the discourse unveiled that flood knowledge had been recorded at OPC but not passed on in way that was easily absorbed by new staff; that staff were required to operate more independently and with less active supervision than was ideal (NZ Herald, 18.2.2010); and that a ‘series of slippages in OPC’s systems led to the tragedy’ (Ibid, 19.2.2010). ‘Slippages’ is itself an interesting word, implying that the systems were robust but they weren’t being followed, which is what Davidson later expanded upon in the Coroner’s court (Devonport, 2010).

Thirdly, “*In looking for blame, we may be asking questions we aren’t going to get answers for*”.... Suggests that ‘looking for blame’ has become a natural response, perhaps an indicator of the wider social context, where organisations and people are more liability-focused and risk-averse, more willing (and able) to allocate blame and sue for negligence. The last part of that statement hints at the complexity of the situation: if the instructor was following accepted practice, if the systems in place around that practice were robust, then how could an accident happen? Eventually the discourse revealed information about the practice and the systems that gave some answers but created more complex questions about organisational culture and the potential for ‘blind trust’ in systems.

Lastly, Smith’s statement “I know the value of what they are teaching kids in that gorge. It is a beautiful experience. *Risk is an inherent part of experiencing the outdoors*” reveals the paradox of modern outdoor / adventure education and the difficulty for the practitioner: that risk is a double-edged sword. It is risk that gives an activity the attraction, it is overcoming risk that is the reward within the experience. But modern society has become risk-averse and an expectation has evolved that adventure can be and will be, safe.

Outdoor activities contain risk; that is part of their attraction. Learning from other people’s mistakes is a key ingredient to furthering one’s own experience. However, comments from Hersey (2009) eloquently point out that there are no guarantees in any of this:

... That is the problem with hindsight. While we want to use it to learn from mistakes, we can also lose sight of the difficulty of decision making at times of stress. Looking back it is easy to see what went wrong, but at the time this is not always apparent... (Hersey, 2009, p21)

... over-vigilance doesn’t necessarily translate into lesser risk (Ibid, p157)

...The ability to gain knowledge from experience, and to keep building on understanding, is probably the most important skill a mountaineer can have. But often the only difference between a near miss and an accident is luck... (Ibid, p159).

Perhaps what is needed in the future, is less emphasis on systems and therefore less paperwork, in conjunction with a re-visiting of the amount of experience and the quality of those experiences needed in order for practitioners (especially new practitioners) to make quality judgements in the field. In addition, 'quality of experience' would encompass some type of mentoring, whereby activities deemed to be particularly hazardous, would only be run by new practitioners in conjunction with more experienced practitioners. In essence then, a blending of the old system and the new, a swinging of the pendulum away from the extremes and towards the middle.

## Epilogue

In early 2010, Dr Grant Davidson resigned his position as President of NZOIA, and his Chief Executive position at OPC, to take up the Chief Executive position at Skills Active.

### OPC Internal Inquiry Report

With the data collection completed and the analysis phase of this research progressing well, towards the end of 2010 OPC released its internal inquiry report of the Mangatepopo accident. The public could access the report by requesting it through the OPC website. I did not sight a copy until 2011 and thus digested it with the Foucauldian analysis of the rest of the data in the front of my mind.

The report, undertaken by an independent review team, grouped the causal factors of the accident into four types: direct causes (of which there were 2), contributory factors and circumstances (32), underlying causes (17), and root causes (7). In light of the Foucauldian analysis offered above, the report has several points that are synchronous.

Firstly, the report confirms that, in current practice, sometimes the decisions people make are unknowingly guided by the ‘invisible hand’. The comments in the report are consistent with comments made by Interviewee Mr Grey, who had commented on staff being impelled into running trips because of an economic imperative

... you are literally forced from an economic point of view, to put people into the field in an earning capacity perhaps before they are truly ready.

Thus we see in the Contributory Factors section of the report:

MB informed the Review Team that he felt pressure to get JS working as an instructor... deploying JS on the assumption that her induction would proceed successfully and quickly. The Review Team formed the view... that it was not unusual to deploy instructors who only just met OPC’s ‘competencies’.  
(Brookes, Smith & Corkill, 2009, p70).

and again in both the Underlying Causes section and Root Causes section,

It is understood that financial constraints provide the limitation on induction length (Ibid, p95).

The ‘invisible hand’ may also have been present in Sullivan’s decision to go further into the Gorge, in that she was assessing the group against a unit standard. The Review Team cited this as a Contributory Factor:

...she did recall she wanted to get at least some of the unit standards out of the way so that she didn’t have to worry about them on the overnight campout (Ibid, p42)

The second point of synchronicity, is that Chisholm and Shaw’s comments about ‘blind trust’ are reflected in the report, where it suggests that a Contributory Factor was that

Parents could have consented to their child attending the programme based on a faulty impression of the significance of OPC’s achievement of the ‘OutdoorsMark’. (Ibid, p70).

Further to this point, the Review Team noted that The Outdoors Mark auditor, the Training Officer, the Centre Manager and Operations manager, were all aware of instructor Sullivan’s intention to do a gorge trip of some kind -

... but none felt obliged to intervene (Ibid, p76).

Both comments thus demonstrating the confidence – their ‘blind trust’ – in OPC’s systems, held by the staff and the parents of the children sent there.

A third point of synchronicity is seen in Dumble’s assertions that audit and accreditation are no guarantee of ‘safety’ or ‘quality’. These assertions are echoed numerous times in the report, with policies and procedures not being followed or

known about, competency sign-off being missed, and institutional knowledge not being passed on. OPC had a mentoring scheme but it was not being used.

‘Overconfidence in OPC’s systems’ was identified as a Root Cause of the incident, and the comments from the OPC report echo both Dumble, and Chisholm and Shaw:

OPC’s leadership in safety management seemed to have become less something borne entirely based on a safety record – indeed the record of close calls and incidents that could have had a fatal outcome suggests the contrary – but more an article of faith that for some reason was not open to question (Ibid, p110).

The fourth point of synchronicity is that the first power /knowledge relationship, between Governing Bodies and Practitioners, is played out at OPC. It is likely that OPC’s safety management systems was ‘not open to question’ because of the unique power /knowledge relationship that existed at OPC: Davidson lead a practitioner organisation but also lead one of the Organisations-that-Govern (NZOIA), thus his authority was irrefutable; all of the senior staff were NZOIA qualified instructors, including one – the Operations Manager Bev Smith - who had served as NZOIA President for a term of two years. They were thus inducted into the systems that Davidson had initiated and embedded within both NZOIA and OPC. If Dumble’s comments hold true about this power /knowledge relationship being a one-way flow, then it is highly unlikely the staff who were not senior staff, would question the systems. The report says as much:

In the case of OPC, available New Zealand standards might not be independent of OPC, because individual staff and OPC operations have contributed to the development of those standards (Ibid, pp9-10)

### **NZOIA Articles**

In December 2010, NZOIA published seven articles analysing the Mangatepopo Tragedy by six NZOIA members, including three by myself. My articles were, in essence, questions raised by the tragedy and attempts to answer them. As such they contained excerpts from this research. Davidson offered a new system called FLASH

(Factors Likely to Accentuate Serious Harm), and dubbed it a ‘risk communication tool’. MacLean offered insights gleaned from working at Outward Bound (Anakiwa) and the National Outdoor Leadership School (USA), including match the risk to the context, encourage judgement, encourage debate and honour the stories of the past. Hopkinson offered a unique perspective by criticising the structure of the dam on the river.

Lastly, two current OPC staff members (Manning and Graney) offered changes the organisation had implemented post-tragedy. These included management restructuring, weather analysis, and no longer using RAMS forms but replacing them with a new Safety Management System (that involves a three tiered analysis of hazards; using the FLASH tool; a severity ranking of hazards; and the competency levels required of instructors at specific sites). A booklet of historical accidents addresses the need to ‘learn from the past’. Tellingly, in light of the summary offered earlier, are the following excerpts from that article:

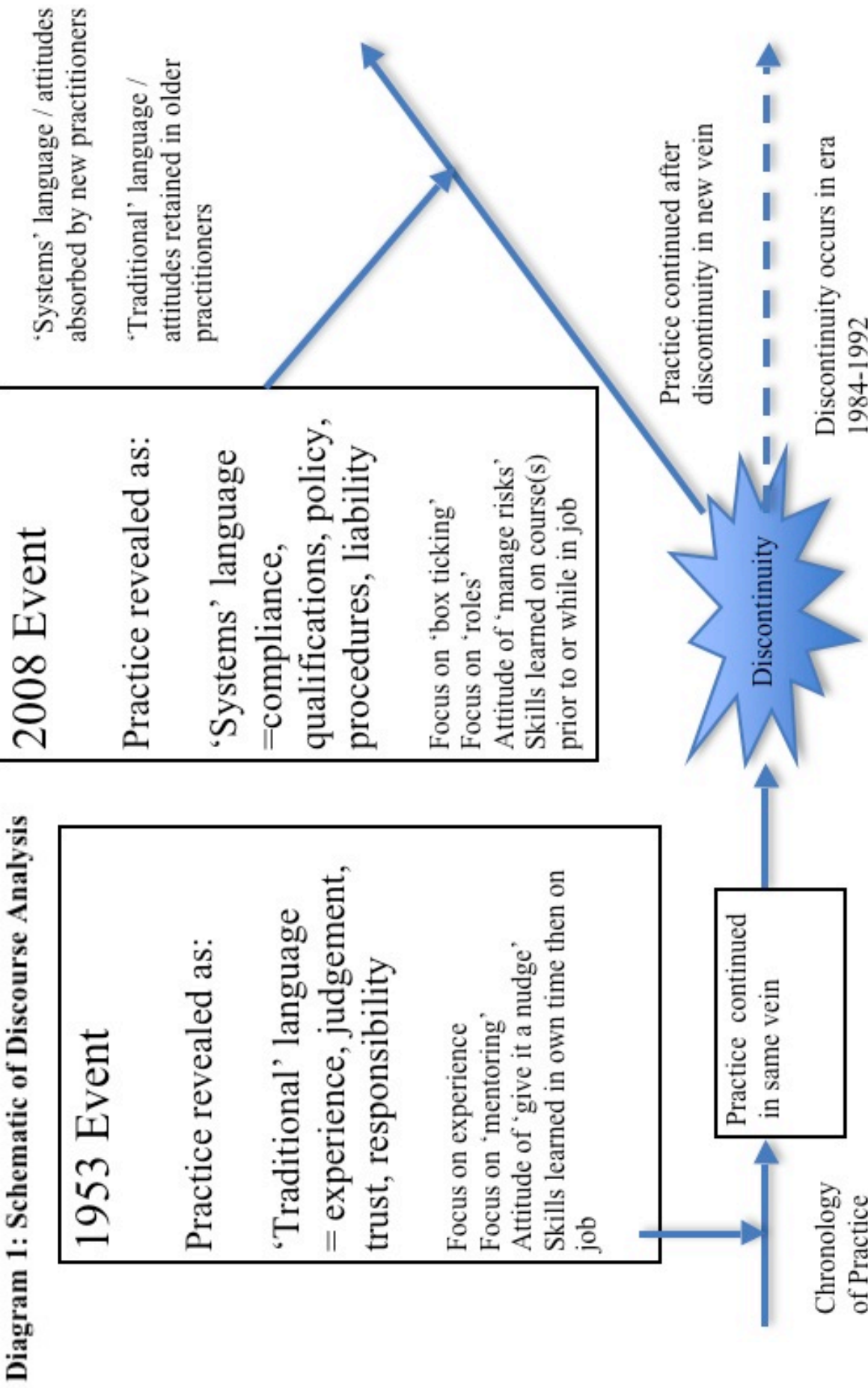
Staff induction periods are now longer and levels of supervisions beyond the formal induction period have been increased... more conservative decisions are made around the choice of activities and the concept of closing an activity site is well accepted and regularly used (Manning and Graney, 2010, pp7-8).

Perhaps the pendulum has started its swing back towards the middle.

## **Future Research**

At least three further questions arise from this study: ‘How many other outdoor organisations are blind to a critique of their foundations?’; ‘What alternative system is there?’; and “What is the most effective way of training new practitioners?’ Given the scope of this study, the answers will have to wait for further research opportunities.





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