

Constructions of Nature and Tensions in the Outdoors

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Abstract

This dissertation explores aspects of hunting and tramping experiences in the southernmost region of New Zealand, Stewart Island/Rakiura. The focus is on the complexities of hunting, and how tramping, particularly as performed by international tourists, impinges on these complexities. My primary goal is to provide a more nuanced understanding of hunting in modern society, using the particular case of hunting on Stewart Island/Rakiura to provoke new thoughts on the diverse possibilities that this practice provides for hunters who sensually engage with other elements of Nature. This more nuanced understanding involves the discussion of constructions of Nature in modern Western societies, and how the philosophical underpinnings of these constructions help shape experiences and performances in the outdoors, particularly those of hunting.

Secondly, through the understanding of hunting as performances situated in space and place, I discuss how other contemporary practices, equally taking place in natural environments, may influence the embodied narratives of hunters, creating tensions that may, occasionally, turn into conflict situations. I use tourism experiences of tramping in New Zealand, particularly on Stewart Island, to illustrate my arguments.

To achieve my aims I examine the historical processes that relate to hunting in New Zealand and the social norms and values associated with this activity over time. Tramping in this country is examined as a tourism product that is sold to, and performed by, international visitors. Also, I explore how the commodification of the tramping experience impacts on the local routine of hunting as recreation. In doing so, I relate New Zealand hunting and tramping, the latter as performed by tourists, to broader social issues and discuss the meanings attached to their practices in relation to philosophies of environment present in contemporary society. These philosophies are central to the combined understanding of both practices, their connections and disparities, and the relationships with the natural environment and with nonhuman animals that they provoke.

In order to be able to develop the literature on 'uses' of Nature and wildlife, integrating debates from philosophy and the animal studies field to conversations in the tourism and leisure studies field, the present study moves towards a more emergent approach to research, embracing a qualitative methodology where both humans and nonhuman animals are understood as being part

of a intertwined web of complex relations performed in an 'out of doors' context. A critical reflexive narrative approach was selected as better suited to facilitate metaphorical conversations between the different social actors. Hunters, trampers, and the researcher all bring to this project contributions promising a better understanding of human/nature relations, as well as a more emotionally engaged and embodied relationship with the research act. These exchanges challenge common assumptions associated with recreation conflict and the so-called consumptive uses of wildlife in recreation and tourism studies, thus opening a new window for sociocultural studies of human/nature relationships.