JOURNEYS INTO THE WINTER WILDERNESS:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE TRADITIONAL WINTER CAMPING EXPERIENCE

by

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A thesis submitted to the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
(August 2015)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on a phenomenological study designed to examine the traditional winter camping experience from the perspective of the participant. The specific research questions that guided this study were: (a) What are the personal meanings that traditional winter campers attach to their experiences? (b) What factors led to their decision to take up the activity of traditional winter camping? (c) How has participation in traditional winter camping affected changes in their own attitudes towards nature, wilderness travel, personal identity and feelings of self-reliance? and (d) What are the unique learning outcomes that could be achieved by including traditional winter camping activities as part of outdoor education experiences? The participants in this study were eight people who regularly participate in traditional winter camping activities. I conducted semi-structured interviews with them in order to discover the attachments, significant aspects and personal meanings that they see in relation to their traditional winter camping experiences. Analysis of the data revealed three core themes that were central to the experiences of traditional winter campers. These are: connection to the land, sense of community, and personal empowerment. The findings suggest that participation in traditional winter camping activities may have an impact on physical, mental and social well-being, and may help to foster pro-environmental attitudes. The thesis research also illuminated unique aspects of this activity and participants’ experiences. Suggestions for continued research are described, which may provide further insight into this phenomenon.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people contributed to this research study and I would like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank them for their support and contributions. They include:

- Dr. Mary Louise Adams—my thesis supervisor, who supported my interest in outdoor education and adventure activity and offered ongoing assistance during the development of this research study.

- Dr. Samantha King and Dr. Elaine Power—supporting members of my thesis committee.

- The participants, Bill, Katja, Kourtney, Shawn, Roger, Danny, Beth, Carl, and who gave their time and memories to this study. This learning experience and research would have not been possible without their significant contributions.

- The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario and the Aloha Foundation of Vermont for assisting in my recruitment of participants for this study.

- My fellow graduate students in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies who introduced me to many new ideas, perspectives, and approaches to research.

- Mike Elrick—friend and fellow outdoor educator, who introduced me to traditional winter camping practices and inspired me to share the experience with my students.

- Lauren and Jasper—my partner and son, whom I dearly love.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

During the summer after my second year of university I came across a unique book in my local library. It was entitled *Snow Walker’s Companion: Winter Camping Skills for the North*, by Garrett and Alexandra Conover (1995). As an avid camper, lover of nearly all outdoor winter activities, and student studying Outdoor Adventure Leadership, I was of course immediately drawn to the title. However, I remember thinking to myself as I first picked up the book that the cover image seemed a little odd (a colour photograph of a person who appeared to be dressed as *coureur des bois* reenactor crossing a frozen lake and dragging a large wooden toboggan behind them) and I was initially unsure of what to make of it. After a quick inspection I discovered that the authors of the book were in favour of an alternative approach to winter camping, and that they recommended the use of traditional skills and technologies rather than the more typically used modern camping gear, materials and practices—hence the strange outfits and archaic equipment that were depicted on the book’s cover.

Through reading this book, I first learned about the practice of warm winter camping, or traditional winter camping as it is more commonly called. The skills practiced, equipment used, and style of winter camping described in the book were quite different from my own winter camping experiences. Through my participation in various clubs and courses during high school and university, I had, until that time, only experienced the “cold-style” of winter camping. Cold winter camping involves sleeping in an unheated modern tent, tarp-covered snow shelter or quinzhee—a shelter made by hollowing out a pile of settled snow. Warm or traditional winter camping utilizes large canvas walled tents in combination with portable metal woodstoves.
Reading *Snow Walker’s Companion*, descriptions about the increased comfort and potential utility of a heated tent had little impact on me as, in my mind, the act of winter camping was strongly paired with constructing and sleeping in quinzhees—a unique and adventurous activity that I thoroughly enjoyed and saw as central to the winter camping experience.

Flash-forward several years. I was working as a secondary school teacher at a school in central Ontario. Initially hired as a Special Education Resource Teacher, I was asked to develop a multi-credit semester long outdoor education program tailored for male students who were deemed by the school board to be “at-risk”. I also took on the leadership of the school’s outing club. Given all my previous positive experiences with winter camping, I decided to include winter camping trips in both the outdoor education program and the schedule of annual club excursions. During my first two years at the school, I organized a number of winter camping trips that all ran smoothly and were great learning experiences for the students involved.

At the beginning of my third year of teaching, I had the opportunity to attend an outdoor education conference. While at this conference I signed-up to participate in a winter camping workshop that focused on skills related to traditional winter camping. Remembering the book I had read several years earlier, I was very interested to see the presentation and learn more. The session was led by two experienced teachers who had successfully taken their students winter camping using some of the techniques described in the book. As this workshop began, the presenters enthusiastically described some of their trip experiences with their students and then they demonstrated how to erect the large canvas tent and to set-up its collapsible metal woodstove. They explained the safety protocols they use with their students and then outlined several advantages they felt this style of winter camping had in comparison to cold winter camping (e.g., many risk management benefits, the ability to extend the length of the trip past
one or two nights). While driving home from this conference I began to think about how I might incorporate the use of a heated canvas tent into the winter trips I was doing with my own students. Clearly, having access to a warm space while on trip would allow us to easily accomplish some simple but important tasks like: drying clothing, boots and mitts; warming hands and feet; and boiling water. The heated tents could extend the number of nights on our trips by allowing a rotation of where students slept (i.e., girls in the tent the first night, boys in quinzhees, then switch the following night and repeat).

Upon returning to my school I set about planning how I might purchase one of these tents. I informed my Principal of my plans, tallied the monies available in my program budget and club fundraising account, and then went searching through my personal library for that book on traditional winter camping. After receiving permission from my school administration and securing the funds that would allow me to purchase a canvas tent and stove, I placed a phone call to one of the teachers who had led the workshop at the outdoor education conference. I left a voicemail explaining that I was interested in purchasing a tent for my school and asked if he could share contact information for the local manufacturer or distributor he used. I received a voicemail at work the very next day with a reply. As the message began to playback, I immediately sensed some hesitation in the voice of the teacher on the other end. He provided the name and phone number for an individual who sold tents and stoves, but quickly added a caveat, explaining that the contact person could be hard to get ahold of and, sometimes, could be difficult to deal with. He also went on to suggest that I be sure to mention his name to the person selling the equipment and that he would also try to contact the seller to let him know I would be calling. He also suggested that if I didn’t have any luck that I call him back. He mentioned that he might be able to purchase the tent for me or, if he were to purchase a new one
for his school, he could possibly sell me one of their old ones. After listening to this voicemail I wasn’t sure what to think. I had thought that the purchasing of the equipment would be the easy part—apparently I was about to become involved in some sort of exclusive or guarded process.

Nervously, that evening, I placed a call to the seller, introduced myself, made sure to mention my connection to the other teacher, explained that I would like to purchase a tent, fly and woodstove and described how I intended to use it. The seller responded by asking me all about my past wilderness leadership experience (and specifically winter camping experience). I explained that I had a great deal of experience leading others in the outdoors, including during the winter time, but that traditional winter camping was something I hadn’t participated in before, but was keen to start and eventually share with my students. Unfortunately my response was not well received, as the seller quickly informed me that this type of camping required a great deal of specialized skill and knowledge; it wasn’t something one just jumped into, and it would be highly unlikely that he would sell me a tent and stove. Dumbfounded, I sheepishly thanked him for his time and hung up. For some time afterward I wondered why the person had refused to sell me the equipment—was it really my level of experience? Perhaps it was something I said or didn’t say? Maybe it was my age, the way in which I had planned to use the equipment or some other reason? After this experience I searched the Internet for others sellers, but with no luck and feeling quite disheartened, I quickly gave up on the idea. A few weeks later, I received another voicemail from the teacher who had led the conference workshop. When we eventually spoke on the phone, I explained what had transpired and told him that I thought the seller refused my business based on my level of experience or how I had planned to use the equipment. He then suggested that I might like to arrange to join his class on a trip to Algonquin Provincial Park that winter and get some experience that way—I believe the teacher
thought a short apprenticeship might increase my odds of being sold a tent the following year. Excited by this generous offering of support and opportunity to learn more, I approached my Principal with the idea, but unfortunately I was not given the release time to participate in this type of professional learning experience. And so it was several more years before I was able to acquire a canvas tent and stove for my school. During that period I continued to take my students cold winter camping with much success, and I always thought about the potential use of a heated canvas tent whenever my toes got cold.

Personal Experience with the Phenomenon

Eventually I was able to purchase a canvas winter camping tent and stove for my school and my ideas about this form of wilderness camping began to change. One October day at work, I convinced a co-worker and my co-teacher in the school’s outdoor education program to spend his lunch and prep period with me setting up the canvas tent. The week previous to this, I had headed out to a friend’s forested property and harvested and trimmed the wooden poles needed to erect the tent. I transported these to the school on the roof rack of my car and stored them along a fence near the school’s football field. My plan that day was to practice setting up and taking down the tent and stove in order to get an understanding of how long the process would take and how difficult it might be. I had fully expected that my colleague and I would be able to accomplish this task fairly quickly and unassisted, however, by the end of the lunch hour we had to enlist the support of three students. With the help of these students we were finally able to fully stake, lash, and raise the poles and tent. Granted, it was a very large and heavy tent, but the experience was humbling and made me come to the realization that we would need more practice doing this before involving our students and/or teaching the skill to them. Over the next
month, we assembled a “tent team” that successfully set-up the tent four more times, but not without some struggles and mishaps along the way, which included having a pole snap while a fire was burning in the stove! Luckily the tent did not catch fire, but this incident made us realize how quickly things could go wrong. During the process of setting up and taking down the tent that autumn, I also became aware of how heavy and bulky it was and how much we were relying on many hands (and fingers) in order to lift the structure, tie knots, position poles, etc. I began to think that these and other required tasks, like the collection and cutting of firewood, coupled with frigid winter temperatures, might make for too arduous an experience for a small class of students to take on—these initial worries were soon extinguished.

That winter our outdoor education class headed out on a three-night excursion. We snowshoed into a local county forest and set-up camp. Now, several years later, when I think back on that first experience, what I recall most vividly is the continual activity and high level of engagement of the students on that first day. Perhaps driven by the knowledge (fear) that we would require plenty of wood to keep the woodstove’s fire burning and the tent warm, the students worked feverishly, first to ensure the tent was set-up up correctly and that each pole and line was secure, then locating dried, dead standing trees, pushing these down, cutting them up, and finally, chopping and splitting them into pieces. It was not to my surprise that they appeared to relish the opportunity to use bush tools like an axe, bow saw and knife, nor that they always worked with them and alongside each other in a thoughtful and careful manner. I believe that this responsibility given to them, along with the authenticity of the task (i.e., the urgent importance of collecting wood so that the tent would stay warm) made for a rich and meaningful learning experience. Many remarked later in reflective conversation and through written accounts in their journals, that the experience was like being part of a team, but unlike
any team or cooperative group experience they had ever been part of before. They mentioned having been told what team or cooperation was many times before, but that this single experience finally defined it for them and that it now really meant something. As the sun went down on the last night, everyone gathered in the tent together—an opportunity not usually afforded in other school-based wilderness camping experiences, where most students are sleeping in 2, 3, or 4 person tents that they do not typically share with their teachers. The glow of a few candles placed around the tent, the popping and crackling sounds emanating from the stove, the sipping of warm drinks, the talking, playing cards, drawing, writing, and relaxing, all made the power of the walled tent clear. The tent helped to nurture a sense of community and to connect people to natural spaces and was like nothing I had been a part of before.

In the spring of 2010 I moved to eastern Ontario. Late in the summer of that same year, a local friend informed me of an annual event, which took place in the northeast United States; it was a conference or rather gathering dedicated to traditional winter camping. Living within a comfortable driving distance of the event and enjoying the relatively unscheduled freedom of a graduate student, I decided to register and attend. In early November I found myself in Vermont with more than 80 other people for the Snow Walkers’ Rendezvous, an event attended yearly by traditional winter camping enthusiasts from both the United States and Canada. The weekend consisted of workshops, presentations, and storytelling, as well as some great food and entertainment. Shortly after arriving and settling in, I came to the quick realization that I had entered a tightknit community. It was apparent that many of the people were already good friends, or at least knew each other, and although everyone was very friendly, I couldn’t help but feel (and look) like an outsider. As the weekend progressed, I began to notice some interesting commonalities amongst those in attendance; some were subtle, some more obvious.
Most apparent was that the group shared a common aesthetic in the clothing they wore, which was unlike that of the typical wilderness camper. Many were wearing “rustic” clothes made from natural fibers such as cotton and wool (e.g., bulky canvas pants and cotton anorak-styled pullovers, heavy woolen sweaters), however, they often did so in combination with a modern Gore-Tex coated nylon jacket or polyester fleece zip-up. This look was quite different from that adopted by many active North American outdoorspeople who often choose to clothe themselves in the latest all-synthetic wicking, warming, wind-proof, and water-repellent apparel.

As I listened in on many conversations throughout the weekend, I could not help but recognize the themes of self-reliance, authenticity/simplicity, craft and handwork, and connections to the land, which kept emerging in the various discussions. At the end of the weekend it was becoming clear that the group valued highly, qualities such as functionality and craftsmanship in the material items they used—be it clothing, tents, stoves or snowshoes. Also, the skills and knowledge possessed by group members were highly valued. People with the ability to make their own clothing or camping equipment, for instance, were revered, and anyone who could share ancient, new or repurposed knowledge was also placed in high regard.

Through this event and the other interactions I have had with those who participate in traditional winter camping, I have heard many impassioned stories and unique perspectives. It is these shared accounts of meaningful personal experiences, along with other factors (i.e., my own experience of exclusion from the activity, perceived contradictions imbedded within and related to the activity itself), which have made me increasingly fascinated by this form of wilderness camping and something I felt worthy of further investigation.
Definition of Key Terms

*Wilderness* is often considered a problematic or confusing term, as different people use it in different ways to mean different things (Roggenbuck & Driver, 2000). I have chosen to adopt Driver’s (1987) definition of wilderness for use in this study, as I feel it most clearly describes the place visited, experienced and thought of by the participants in this study:

…wilderness has more to do with the contour lines in our heads than with those on maps; it exists, in other words, in the eye of the beholder. And there are a lot of beholders, which makes for a lot of definitions…relatively large land areas that are neither easily accessible nor frequently used by motorized vehicles, where opportunities exist for basic types of recreation, and past and current human activities are not readily noticeable. The concepts of spaciousness and wildness are central (p. 295).

*Wilderness camping* is an outdoor recreational activity in which people (campers) travel from their homes to spend one or more nights living and travelling in the wilderness (e.g., usually within designated park or conservation lands). Campers will generally hike or paddle from campsite to campsite while carrying everything that they require with them, including food, water, a compact stove, modern tent and sleeping bag, and change of clothing. Those who participate in wilderness camping often follow a widely promoted low impact or no-trace camping protocol that limits their potential negative effects on the natural environment in which they are travelling. When wilderness camping in the winter time, campers usually utilize modern skis or snowshoes and rely on sophisticated camping equipment to keep warm and dry, for instance four-season tents and highly insulated sleeping bags. In this style of camping, the tents used may block the wind to a certain degree, but are not heated and provide very little insulative value. It is a camper’s own body heat being trapped within his or her sleeping bag.
that keeps him or her warm throughout the night. This mode of camping relies heavily on modern materials and technology and the self-regulatory behaviours of campers to ensure that they remain warm and dry throughout the wilderness camping experience.

In comparison, traditional winter camping techniques and equipment are an unusual assemblage of North American indigenous, 19th century European, and modern technologies. Individuals travel exclusively by First Nations-style wooden snowshoe and pull long, narrow toboggans made of high-density polyethylene loaded with everything they will need for their excursion. Traditional winter campers erect large prospector style canvas walled tents on timber posts. They heat the tents with small lightweight collapsible metal woodstoves. Axes and saws are used to harvest and prepare wood for fires, which heat the tent and keep the campers warm and dry during their trip. When out camping, these traditional winter campers choose to dress in thick wool clothing covered by a cotton outer layer, and so they often appear as though they have stepped out of another period in time. These items are shown in Figure 1.

The daily routine of a traditional winter camping trip is dependent on several factors. These include the experience level and number of campers on a trip, precipitation and snow conditions, and whether or not the group plans to travel each day or selects a single campsite for the entirety of the trip. Campers who choose to utilize one campsite for their trip are afforded the freedom to explore its surroundings from a basecamp, unburdened with the daily takedown and set-up of the canvas winter tent. In comparison, traditional winter campers can plan excursions that require daily travel and the selection of a new campsite each night. When this is the case, all of the groups camping equipment must be loaded onto their toboggans and pulled to the new campsite—the tent and stove is then set-up again and the living space reheated. In
each case, the camper’s daily activities must include the necessary foraging and preparation of firewood, as well as the procurement of drinking water.

Figure 1. Traditional Winter Camping Equipment. (A) Winter Moccasins; (B) Maine Snoeshow; (C) Toboggan; (D) Collapsible Metal Woodstove; and (E) Prospector-style Canvas Winter Tent.
Context for the Research

Traditional winter camping, as a specific form of wilderness camping and travel, has emerged as a distinct recreational activity in North America within the last thirty years. It is a unique outdoor pursuit with practices and philosophies that differ in significant ways from those of accepted contemporary wilderness camping models. Traditional winter campers reject many modern materials and ideas while choosing to embrace others, utilizing techniques and equipment that are an eclectic mash-up of North American indigenous, 19th century European, and modern day technologies. Members of this community believe that participation in this activity develops self-reliance, physical confidence and individual resilience, while providing a more natural, authentic and practical means of reconnecting with the land during the wintertime. They see their camping experience as one that is not constrained by modern material contrivances or ideological boundaries. Traditional winter campers are opposed or resistant to many of the methods and meanings endorsed by the dominant camping culture. To practice traditional winter camping means to accept and embody a very specific set of values, beliefs, and behaviours; dress, technical skill and knowledge, language, experience, equipment and performance are critical elements used to identify and form the identity of the camper.

The overarching goal of my Master’s thesis project was to understand the traditional winter camping experience from the perspective of the participant (or insider). I have conducted a phenomenological study of this leisure group in order to develop a rich and complex description of the characteristics of this activity as well as the experiences, behaviours, interactions and identity formation of its members. People who choose to traditional winter camp do so for specific reasons and derive particular things from the experience. As I began this project, I asked: what are the personal meanings individuals attach to this specialized
recreational activity and can these be examined to determine how and why they have chosen to experience the outdoors in this way? Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to describe how people experience traditional winter camping and to examine these “personal meanings” in light of the context of this specialized activity. In order to do this, it is first necessary to describe how the terms *experience* and *meaning* have been utilized in this study. To locate definitions that would work within this specific context, I drew upon Garst’s (2010) work on family camping participation and the meanings associated with these experiences. Garst defines camping experiences as emergent qualities of camping participation that are dynamic, constructed, emotional, multisensory, important in people’s lives, and related to a natural setting. Camping meanings are defined as symbolic, emotional, and emergent interpretations of camping experiences that are culturally and socially shared. By uncovering the meanings and unique practices of this leisure community, I provide a detailed description of the traditional winter camping experience, including the perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of its participants.

Although a number of texts have been written about traditional winter camping and some descriptive research has been conducted on the activity (Conover & Conover, 1995; Henderson, 2005, Marrone & Marrone, 2013; Provencher, 1953; Rutstrum, 1958, 1968), little work has been published that reflects a variety of voices and experiences from those who practice it. And so, this study seeks not only to address this gap in the literature, but to also determine why traditional winter campers believe their methods and experiences differ in important ways from those of the typical wilderness camping community (i.e., how is this specific mode of camping a means of expressing a certain set of values, which differ from that of the dominant wilderness camping culture?). By revealing why these people see this activity
as distinct, and learning how their recreational identities are constructed, expressed and maintained, this thesis aims to provide the most detailed understanding of this leisure subculture group to date.

This thesis describes the phenomenon of traditional winter camping experiences as recalled by participants after longtime involvement in the activity. The research has been guided by a phenomenological perspective—that is, it was designed to describe lived experiences, and to explore how human beings, individually and collectively make sense of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). The study focused on how individuals experience and understand the recreational activity of traditional winter camping. A qualitative approach was utilized, wherein interviews were conducted to collect detailed information. The interview questions were designed to elicit information about the significance and meanings individuals gave to this activity and to reveal the influences or aspects of the traditional winter camping experience that they felt contributed to the development of these meanings. In addition, the data was also used to examine the processes through which traditional winter campers construct their identities and resist the dominant wilderness camping culture.

As an emerging researcher interested in outdoor pursuits that connect individuals with the natural world, I feel the results presented in this thesis have potential value in assisting outdoor educators and recreation specialists in their planning, programming and instruction. The collective work of these outdoor practitioners aims in part to remedy the condition which Aldo Leopold (1966) described as “landlessness” and what Richard Louv (2005) has more recently promoted as “nature-deficit disorder”. Traditional winter camping presents a unique approach to spending time in nature, and one that may offer valuable insight into activities which work to mend the apparent disconnect that exists between many urbanized humans and
the more than human world. Through a close examination of traditional winter camping, some of its unique aspects or conditions that work to nurture “deep nature connection” have been highlighted as they may possess the potential to be transferred to a variety of other outdoor recreational and/or learning activities. In addition, this thesis adds to the body of knowledge pertaining to the evolution of wilderness-based recreational activity and to the psycho-social health benefits of reconnecting to the land. To a certain degree, the thesis also describes the ways in which a particular group of non-indigenous people negotiate their appropriation and use of indigenous knowledge and skills. In addition, by learning why traditional winter campers choose to reject many aspects of typical wilderness camping practice (i.e., modern outdoor apparel/equipment, leave-no-trace/low impact camping techniques, rules and regulations associated with the use of provincial or federal lands), this thesis has revealed those systemic flaws, disconnections or incompatibilities that these campers feel exist. By highlighting the politics associated with wilderness travel and individual expression, with land access or usage, and with North American ideologies around how people should appropriately experience or be in nature, this thesis works to complicate and stretch present understandings and practice of wilderness camping.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to learn how people understand their experiences of traditional winter camping. And so, this thesis aims to discover the attachments, significant aspects and personal meanings that emerged as participants recounted their traditional winter camping experiences. In part, I was interested to know what led participants to the decision to take up this unique outdoor pursuit, and if and how their experiences of traditional winter
camping have affected their attitudes towards natural spaces and being out in nature. As an outdoor educator, I was also motivated to substantiate, through research, the positive learning outcomes I observed when involving students in this specific form of wilderness camping and travel. Additionally, I was interested to learn about participants’ personal understandings of self-reliance, authenticity and community, and the extent to which they see their current personal views as having been influenced or shaped by their camping experiences. This thesis also attempts to examine the degree to which traditional winter campers see their participation as a form of resistance against typical wilderness camping methods or more accepted ways of recreating outdoors. Specifically, by inviting traditional winter campers to describe salient memories associated with their camping experiences, this thesis reveals the central factors that led to their involvement in this activity and whether their participation promoted changes in their personal attitudes, understanding of self, and connections to nature.

My research questions were as follows:

1. What are the personal meanings that traditional winter campers attach to their experiences?
2. What factors led to their decision to take up the activity of traditional winter camping?
3. How has participation in traditional winter camping affected changes in their own attitudes towards nature, wilderness travel, physical or mental health, personal identity and feelings of self-reliance?
4. What are the unique learning outcomes that could be achieved by including traditional winter camping activities as part of outdoor education experiences?
Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters. This first chapter provides an introduction to the study and an opportunity for me to share my own personal experiences with the phenomenon. Chapter 2 contains a review of the findings of prior research and literature related to participation in traditional winter camping. In this chapter, I review the available sources describing the traditional winter camping experience. I examine personal meaning as it relates to participation in outdoor recreational activities and then, I review the area of scholarly research that concerns camping and its potential impact on physical, mental and social well-being, as well as on pro-environmental attitudes.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology that supports the research and the types of methods used to gather and analyze data. I outline the qualitative method of empirical phenomenology and discuss the procedures employed in order to strengthen the overall trustworthiness of the study.

The results are presented in Chapter 4, in which each of the eight interview participants are introduced. I provide descriptions of each participant’s experience with the phenomenon of traditional winter camping. This chapter ends with the presentation of a general situated description, a synthesis of the meanings this activity has for the participants.

Chapter 5 details the three themes identified as connected to the traditional winter camping experience accompanied by illustrative quotes, which show the significance the activity has for participants.

In Chapter 6, the final chapter, I discuss the results and the limitations of the study. I summarize the results and then describe the potential positive outcomes that may result from people participating in this form of wilderness camping or other related recreational pursuits.
In this chapter, I review the findings of prior research and literature related to participation in traditional winter camping. Due to the near absence of academic research pertaining directly to traditional winter camping, and more specifically the impact of participation and meanings individuals attach to this activity, three areas of related literature are examined. I will first review the limited literature that describes traditional winter camping experiences and that attempts to identify the personal meanings or significant themes contained within these. Second, I examine research that looks at the personal meanings people take from recreation more generally and then I look more specifically at literature about camping participation to clearly describe the concept of personal meaning and show reason for its application in this study. The chapter ends with an examination of research that looks at the potential impact of wilderness camping and time spent in nature on physical, mental and social well-being, as well as on the development of pro-environmental attitudes.

Traditional Winter Camping Experiences

American author Calvin Rutstrum is credited with first popularizing traditional winter camping techniques. He wrote many books about wilderness camping, however, it was two of his titles in particular, The New Way of the Wilderness (1958) and Paradise Below Zero (1968), that inspired many readers to partake in extended camping trips during the winter months in northern woodlands. Published in 1958, The New Way of the Wilderness lays out clear instructions and best practices for winter dress, travel techniques, and set-up of the winter tent
and stove. In the body of this book, Rutstrum makes very little mention of his own personal experiences or affinity for wilderness camping, but instead focuses on describing various camping skills and techniques. However, in the introductory chapter entitled *The Wilderness Challenge*, Rutstrum relays the story of Lillian Alling, a homesick Estonian immigrant who, in 1927, travelled back home by foot from New York through Chicago, Minneapolis, Winnipeg, British Columbia, and Alaska, and then by boat across the Bering Strait to Asia. Rutstrum uses this story to illustrate his belief that everyone is capable of undertaking a great wilderness journey with success; they only require basic camp skills, sound judgment, a plan of action and the determination to go ahead with it. In this introduction Rutstrum also talks about self-reliance and independence, and the need for individuals to learn and practice wilderness living skills. He encourages those who may be reluctant or inexperienced to find determination and make up their minds to try. In *Paradise Below Zero* (1968), Rutstrum presents not only a how-to book on winter camping, but he also shares many stories and experiences that provide insight into many of his personal beliefs and understandings. Through these accounts, his ideas of reconnecting with nature, utilizing indigenous skills and knowledge and harkening back to simpler times again surface.

Although not as widely distributed and read as Rutstrum’s work, the French Canadian bushman Paul Provencher achieved moderate notoriety for his retelling of his personal experiences living in the woodlands of the St. Lawrence River’s north shore. His most popular book, *I Live in the Woods* (1953), can also be credited for introducing outdoor recreationalists to techniques and skills used to travel in the bush during wintertime. Provencher’s writing is celebrated for its apparent high level of authenticity, practical content and detailed illustrations. Prior to both Rutstrum and Provencher’s work being published, author Elliott Merrick wrote
True North: A Journey into Unexplored Wilderness (1933). In True North, Merrick recounts an adventurous 300-mile journey down the Churchill River in Labrador that he and his wife took in 1930 with trapper John Michelin. Traveling through a vast unmapped wilderness and facing numerous environmental challenges, Merrick wrote of this experience: “We have traveled to the earth’s core and found meaning” (Millman, 1998, p. 74). Throughout the book, Merrick describes the beauty and utility of items crafted by the indigenous peoples: “The toboggan sled is a bit of a pure art very much like a canoe, useful, strong, graceful. Indians invented both, and white man has never discovered anything to equal either for traveling overland in this country” (p. 95). Merrick believed that “some modern improvements truly are, but not many” (Conover & Conover, 1995, p. 2), and in his later years presented harsh criticism of the reworking of traditional pieces of winter gear, such as the modern vinyl decked, aluminum snowshoe.

Greatly influenced by the work of Rutstrum and Merrick, is Garrett and Alexandra Conover’s book, The Winter Wilderness Companion: Traditional and Native Skills for the Undiscovered Season (1995), which was later reprinted under the title, Snow Walker’s Companion: Winter Camping Skills for the North (2006). Those in the traditional winter camping community consider this to be the definitive source for information on traditional winter camping (including Elliott Merrick, who provided the forward for both editions). Although the main focus of the book is to relay specialized skills and techniques to the would-be traditional winter camper, the authors reflect often on some of their past tripping experiences and reveal much about what the activity really means to them. The Conovers’ message to the reader is quite similar to that of Rutstrum and Merrick—repeating ideas of self-reliance, necessity for skill acquisition, reverence for First Nations knowledge, simplicity, common sense and individual empowerment. The Conovers make no direct reference to the work of
Provencher, though they do acknowledge several Canadian winter guides and traditional winter campers who contributed to the content of their book. These people (e.g., Craig MacDonald of Huntsville, Ontario) were themselves influenced and informed by the traditional bush knowledge relayed within the pages of Provencher’s book, *I Live in the Woods*.

Although others have written about their experiences with traditional winter camping, nothing has appeared which presents the depth and breadth of information communicated by these four authors. This being stated, the following section includes a summary of shorter excerpts, articles and essays related to traditional winter camping and individual experience. By included these, I hope to provide the most comprehensive understanding of this winter activity and its devotees.

In his book entitled, *Every Trail has a Story* (2005), author Bob Henderson devotes a small chapter to traditional winter travel and camping. He expresses delight for the comfort of a “winter home”, his description of the heated canvas tent: “once settled, you can stay a night or stay a month…I know of few feelings as satisfying in the bush” (p.134). His description of the traditional winter camping experience also includes a juxtaposition between the warmth and comfort of the tent with the effort and resolve required to haul a large toboggan along the winter trail—a task that must be endured each day, but is “well worth it” he notes, when you have the warmth of the tent to retire to each evening.

Peter Morgan (1980) reflected on his first experience traditional winter camping in the Temagami region of Ontario, relating one important lesson he thought he had learned. He compared his experience to other more common outdoor pursuits that tended to fixate on setting “records” (i.e., establishing personal bragging rights) for speed, altitude or distance travelled. He wrote that traditional winter camping was a “pattern of careful slow travel in harmony with
nature, taking advantage of her bounties when necessary, but leaving no scars either on the traveller or on the land” (p. 959). Concluding, Morgan makes an analogy between these two approaches to wilderness travel and the ways one might choose to move through life. The story of an all-women expedition, as described by Dudley, Glackmeyer and Ferren (1999), suggests, in a similar fashion to Morgan, that the pattern and slow pace of this activity provides multiple opportunities to test one’s abilities and to connect with the land. These authors explain how their winter camping experience helped them discover and internalize their own developing feelings of self-confidence and self-determination. Leckie (1996) also describes the traditional winter camping experience as an opportunity to reconnect with the natural world, discover oneself, push physical limits and grow as a person—“these trips help us to make sense of the world and our role in that world” (p. 8).

McCormack (2011) writes of a month-long winter journey purposefully taken to explore how the use of traditional technologies would affect his camping experience and/or change his perception of the winter landscape. Ultimately, this experience allowed him to carefully reflect on his everyday life, specifically his use and reliance on modern technologies and the distraction they cause. McCormack describes the traditional winter camping experience as an opportunity to switch off, slow down and learn from the land. More recently, Marone and Marone (2013) reflected on how influential the Conover’s book was on their own practice of traditional winter camping. Not surprisingly, the ideas expressed by Marone and Marone—simplicity, common sense, and skill acquisition—echo those conveyed by the Conovers. The personal meanings that the various authors associate with traditional winter camping are evident in many of these books and articles, as are the factors that motivated the authors to take up the activity, and the aspects of it that they see as unique. However, what is missing from these texts,
and what this research study offers, is a current survey of the traditional winter camping experience—an opportunity to describe the activity today and hear from those who currently participate in it.

In this opening section I reviewed the small amount of existing literature that describes traditional winter camping experiences. I also highlighted some of the common meanings and significant aspects of this form of camping as described by the authors. Several recurrent meanings emerged, including: necessity for skill acquisition, authenticity of experience, reconnecting with nature, reverence for First Nations knowledge, self-confidence, self-reliance, and individual empowerment. These meanings and their relationship to peoples’ camping experiences is the focus of the next section of this literature review and the basis of this research study.

Meanings of Recreation

The meanings that people take from their experiences is the main analytical focus of this thesis. The construction of personal meaning, or meaning-making, is an ongoing process through which individuals read their experiences and make sense of their surroundings. Richins (1994) describes personal meaning as the sum of the subjective meanings that a person holds for an object, place, person or experience. A person’s social and cultural context has an impact on how personal meanings are organized and defined (Geertz, 1973). Individuals who share common experiences do not necessarily attach similar meanings to them, as everyone constructs meanings in different ways (Oxley & Hort, 1996). However, members of specific social groups, are more likely to agree on some meanings, which may result in a shared common meaning for a particular person, setting or event (Richins, 1994). These common meanings emerge through
social interaction and participation in shared activities. Within the areas of physical education and recreation, the notion of personal meaning has been conceptualized in different ways, studied from various perspectives, and reflected by multiple terms, including: commitment, motive, value, affective attachment, centrality, importance, personal relevance and enduring involvement.

In some early studies of recreation, meaning was gleaned through an understanding of a person’s level of commitment or involvement in a specific activity or sport. This research attempted to locate the personal meanings that people attach to their participation in recreational activities and to understand why contrasting meanings existed between members of the same community (e.g., differences in knowledge and practice of activity-related etiquette between beginners and experts.) Byran (1977) looked at the issue of commitment in a research study on specialized participation in outdoor pursuits. He described a continuum of behaviour from the general to the particular that was categorized by equipment and skills used in the sport and in recreation setting preferences. Individuals at the entry level of involvement simply participated in the activity, whereas those towards the more specialized end were concerned with the physical and social setting, the quality of their equipment and their experiences, and they were more likely to base decisions on friendships, trips and career choice around access to a particular activity. Building upon Byran’s study, Buchanan (1985) worked to further describe the relationship between level of commitment and degree of specialization, seeing commitment as “the pledging or binding of an individual to behavioural acts which result in some degree of affective attachment to the behaviour” (p. 403). Buchanan proposed a continuum that described recognizable stages of commitment—from continuance to cohesion to control, the later being a state of complete commitment where identity, self-concept, and life decisions are connected to
participation in the activity. For example, this high level commitment is often observed in lifestyle sports such as surfing, where a person’s identity, vocation and other life choices centre on their participation in a preferred recreational activity. Similarly, Kim, Scott, and Crompton (1997) defined commitment as “those personal and behavioural mechanisms that bind individuals to consistent patterns of leisure behaviour” (p. 334). They suggested that their definition, like Buchanan’s, alluded to an understanding of commitment in terms of dedication, inner conviction, centrality, costs, and social considerations. Given the specific nature of traditional winter camping, it is easily classified as a specialized recreational activity. Do all traditional winter campers share the same high level of commitment and common personal meanings?

Research conducted more recently into recreation and meaning has transitioned away from models and conceptualizations that attempt to correlate and predict the significance sport and recreation play in people’s lives, to studies that more thoroughly investigate and describe how specific pursuits are experienced by particular groups of individuals. Mixed methods approaches like those employed by Skille and Osteras (2011) show the complex nature of the meanings attached to sport. In describing fun as an aspect of their sporting experience, teens interviewed by Skille and Osteras expressed intrinsic meanings like being with friends, elements related to winning, being fit and having extra energy to do other things. However, these various meanings associated with fun changed depending on the individual’s social position and various other factors. For instance, teens with an academic focus saw sport as mostly a competitive exercise, while those being trained to enter the workforce (e.g., carpentry apprentices) valued the physical contribution sport made to their bodies (i.e., increasing their physical strength for work). Krane (2009) has suggested that the meanings that individuals
attach to sport might change over time as they grow, as they face various challenges, and as they create and recreate themselves on multiple occasions. Groups involved in shared pursuits may attach different meanings to a recreational experience depending on the specific nature of that activity. This idea is described in O’Connor and Brown’s (2007) study of how non-conventional cyclists experience weekend group rides. The cyclists experience a sense of belonging and self-identity through the semi-competitive and social atmosphere of their group ride, which would in some ways be different from the experience of participating in organized practices and races or simply cycling alone. O’Connor and Brown suggest that given these multiple ways of experiencing cycling, the process of specialization will probably result in a greater number of varied recreational meanings for participants.

Participation in a specialized recreational activity, such as traditional winter camping, means different things to different people. In an attempt to grapple with this type of diversity and complexity, Seippel (2006) developed a classification system for the “meanings of sport.” To better understand how different groups of people experience their sport activities (and also to see what kind of social good sport represents to various social groups), Seippel drew upon philosophy, history and sociology to develop a list of seven ways people might attach meaning to sport activities. They include: fun/joy, expressivity, to keep fit, mental recreation, body and appearance, competition and achievements, and social integration. The results of this research suggest that the study of personal meanings helps us to form a picture of how a recreational activity is experienced. These meanings are related to the social class, gender and age of the participant, to the type of activity, whether it is competitive or non-competitive in nature, or a team or individual pursuit.
Meanings-based approaches or frameworks have been used in research on camping in order to understand how individuals understand these experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993; Patterson, Williams, & Scherl, 1994; Garst, Williams, & Roggenbuck, 2010; Garst, 2005) suggests that the meanings people take from camping are “related to the cognitive, affective and behavioural characteristics of individual campers.” We can see links between self-identity and camping when a person selects a type of activity for what they feel it symbolizes, or for the equipment and clothing used, or for how it fits with how they might like to be perceived (Haggard & Williams, 1991; Lavarie & Arnett, 2000). For example, in the late 1960s, Bultana and Klessig (1969) compared two groups of campers—those who camped with a minimal amount of gear and relied on their skills and knowledge versus those who chose to bring modern conveniences with them to the woods (e.g., camping trailers). Each group represented their self-identity through their choice in camping equipment.

Several researchers have also shown the importance of social interaction to campers (Etzkorn, 1964, Hendee & Campbell, 1969; Irwin, Gartner, & Phelps, 1990; Patterson, Williams, & Scherl, 1994; Shaw, Havitz, & Delamore, 2002). Many campers see their participation as a way of connecting with others, spending time with family and friends, and meeting new people. Some studies have shown that some campers see social interaction as a more important part of their camping experience than access or exposure to natural resources. These social interactions may influence how campers view and come to know the world, as Ross & Nisbett (1991) suggest, meanings may evolve cooperatively through the social interaction that takes place during camping, as people describe to each other their interpretations of the experience, thus developing shared meanings.
In an early study, Burch (1965), suggested that the actual activities associated with camping contribute far less to the meanings campers take from it than do the social aspects. Burch found that the activities common to a typical State Forest or Park camping experience (e.g., chopping wood, building fires, etc.) allowed for males to act out a “primitive” or “pioneering” role, and that in a gendered society, this play had a significant impact on the meaning of camping for some men. Riese and Vorkinn (2002) found that camping experiences afforded some participants an opportunity to become reskilled in specific tasks (i.e., chopping wood, building fires, etc.) not often performed in modern urban settings. Riese and Vorkinn argue that these activities had great meaning to some people, allowing them to separate from their daily lives or pursue an important activity they felt they had been previously deprived of.

The idea or concept of *place* has been shown to hold important personal meaning for campers and is a much-researched topic within the field of outdoor recreation (McCool, Stankey, Clark, & Williams, 2002; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992). Human-environment interactions can foster attachments to place or what has been termed *place attachment*. This term describes the emotional bond that is formed between an individual and a place of significance to them. Williams and colleagues (1992) have shown that individuals seek out camping experiences because of specific values or motivations related to natural spaces. As campers, they repeatedly visit such areas they may come to view them as places with significant personal meaning. Stokols and Shumaker (1981, p. 451) suggest campsites or settings may take on “shared meanings as a symbol endowed with social or cultural significance.” Places with important personal meaning to individual campers my take on larger meaning for a specific community or group (Greider & Garkovich, 1994).
The concept of place within outdoor recreation literature has also been linked to the restorative power of nature and special traditions. Knopf (1987) described natural environments as restorative places for people and highlighted some of the important meanings they had for individuals—these included their ability to provide people with an escape or break from everyday life, a space for social interaction, a means to developing a sense of control or increased personal competence, and an aesthetic vacation from the over stimulating urban landscape. People can also develop a historical connection to place and the idea of tradition can provide special meaning in multiple ways. Jacobi and Stokols (1983) have shown this by linking place to historical activities, traditions or rituals, to identifiable groups, cultures or organizations, or specific values, ideas and beliefs.

In this section I explored some of the ways in which physical education and recreation researchers have examined meaning as related to peoples’ experiences camping. I began with a review of some earlier studies that investigated the correlation between a person’s involvement, or commitment to an outdoor pursuit and the degree to which they feel an emotional attachment binding them to an activity. I also explored how a variety of external factors can contribute to the way recreational activity is experienced and the resulting impact on meaning for the participant. Within the latter part of this section, some camping meanings identified by prior research were presented and discussed. These included self-identity and personal expression, social interaction, activity, and place. The restorative power of camping experiences was also mentioned here, as participants in previous studies had indicated several positive outcomes as a result of their involvement in camping (e.g., escape, stress relief, increased sense of personal control). This line of inquiry is the subject of the next section, where I explore the impact of
camping and time spent in nature on peoples’ physical, mental and social well-being, as well as on the development of pro-environmental attitudes.

Benefits of Participation in Wilderness Camping

Because of my interest in the benefits or positive outcomes associated with participation in traditional winter camping, I now present an examination of the research pertaining to wilderness camping and its potential impact on physical, mental and social well-being, as well as on changes in environmental attitudes. I have chosen to focus specifically on literature that discusses the personal benefits realized by adults who participate in wilderness camping trips, as this research has clear links to my own research on the traditional winter camping community.

Some major studies have previously described the personal benefits attributed to the non-facilitated use of wilderness spaces (Driver, 1987; Roggenbuck & Driver, 2000). These studies have attempted to categorize the potential positive outcomes, offering similar lists that include benefits to social, mental and physical development, emotional, physical and mental health, feelings of self-sufficiency and personal independence, social identity, individual learning and spiritual growth. For the purposes of my thesis, I will examine the benefits described in these studies and other research that I feel most directly relates to the traditional winter camping experience.

Developmental benefits are positive changes in wilderness campers’ self-concept or identity, as well as the development of personal skills related to the camping experience (e.g., bushcraft, navigation). Williams (1988) describes how experiences in the wilderness contribute to self-esteem and self-identity by offering challenging opportunities that affirm identity and
enhance feelings of self-worth. In a related study, Kellert (1998) found that participants in a wilderness leadership course reported an increased sense of self-reliance, confidence and self-esteem. Similarly, in a study of participants involved in a nine-day wilderness backpacking trip, Talbot and Kaplan (1986) demonstrated that campers’ changing perceptions of themselves had a strong effect on their view of their own abilities. Talbot and Kaplan also explored, as did Arnould and Price (1993), the effect of skill development and its benefit to participants. Both studies found that participants experienced personal growth, as they expressed feelings of increased comfort and confidence after learning some new camping related skills and applying them in a wilderness setting. Overall, these studies highlight the potential developmental benefits of participation in wilderness camping, however, most of them are based on facilitated experiences in the outdoors—for instance, an outdoor leadership courses that is led by instructors. Because of this, it is difficult to make a direct link to the potential benefits of participating in non-facilitated experiences like traditional winter camping. That is to say, how much does an instructor, guide or teacher contribute to facilitating the types of developmental benefits described in these studies?

The use of wilderness and natural spaces for therapeutic and mental health applications has been well studied. As Roggenbuck and Driver (2000) note, “escape from the stresses of everyday life and the search for privacy and solitude remain among the most important motivators of wilderness trips” (p. 40). Kaplan (1986) found that as a result of their involvement in a planned wilderness expedition, participants felt refreshed, relaxed, renewed, and alive. Hine and colleagues (2009) examined the restorative benefits of participation in wilderness programs by reviewing 70 related studies. They determined that there is a wide range of benefits that can be attributed to time spent in the wilderness, including: reduced
anxiety and stress, as well as positive changes in mood and behaviour. In another study by Kaplan (1995), he posited that restorative environments should have four key components: being away, fascination, extent and compatibility. Given these criteria, the typical wilderness camping experience could be considered restorative. Wilderness, as defined earlier in this thesis, is certainly “away” and has “extent” (i.e., large space or area), and natural places are often fascinating and compatible due to their biodiversity, beauty and the innate connection people often feel they have with them. Offering a caveat in their review of the benefits of wilderness camping experiences, Roggenbuck and Driver (2000) remind readers that not all encounters with nature are restorative or stress-reducing and that some may be stress-causing. Inexperienced people may feel a high degree of stress or anxiety if not prepared for a challenging wilderness environment or a taxing set of physical tasks.

Very little research has been done that documents the benefits of self-sufficiency or the ability to be self-reliant in the wilderness. Driver and his colleagues (1987) suggest that solo hikers and climbers, travelling in the wilderness, are there in part to test their self-reliance. However, the authors deemed that with the availability of high-tech clothing and camping equipment, fewer and fewer people are afforded this type of camping experience. In an attempt to evaluate self-sufficiency, other researchers have included “solo” components or pioneering activities in their studies and have recorded mixed results (Talbot & Kaplan, 1986; Borrie, 1995). Borrie found that participants were slow to identify or recognize the benefits of the “simple living skills” they were presented with, but that their ability to do so increased over time, while Talbot and Kaplan’s participants responded very positively, saying that while their solo experiences were among the most difficult parts of their trip, they were the most meaningful.
Spending time with others is often identified as the most important part of peoples’ wilderness camping experiences, and several studies have documented that close relationships often form during wilderness camping trips (Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Fredrickson 1998; Pohl, Borrie & Patterson, 2000). Some of the social benefits of wilderness camping include: family bonding, general cohesion amongst group members, social recognition, improved communication, trust, and understanding (Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Roggenbuck & Driver, 2000). Kellert (1998) has also shown that wilderness camping experiences can nurture important interpersonal traits like compassion, tolerance, patience, and cooperation. In a study of women who had taken on extreme challenges in the outdoors, Lichtenstein (1985) found the spirit they developed was one of intense bonding, cooperation, and support. In addition to this, it has been found that when people wilderness camp they become more dependent on each other, establish trust and build confidences (Driver et al., 1987).

The research that has looked into the benefits of wilderness camping has also described spiritual outcomes as a result of participation (Fredrickson, 1998; Heintzman, 2002; Kaplan & Talbot 1983; Schroeder, 1992). For some campers, the wilderness is a place that elicits spiritual, mystical or religious encounters; it is a place where one can experience wonder, awe, harmony, balance, and inspiration (Nelson, 1998). Encounters with the more than-human world are generally believed to contribute to these powerful feelings. Borrie and Rogenbuck (1995) have suggested that the vastness, size, and scale of the natural environment lead to feelings of humility and insignificance in people. Frederickson and Anderson have reported on participants who were unable to fully describe in words the spiritual impact of their wilderness camping experiences “due to its ineffable and intangible nature” (1999, p. 27).
Research into the benefits of wilderness camping has also demonstrated that time spent in nature leads to changes in peoples’ environmental attitudes and understanding (Borrie, 1995; Chawla, 1992, 2009; Foster & Linney, 2007; Marcinkowski, 1989). These educational benefits specific to the environment include developing an environmental ethic and undertaking responsible environmental stewardship. Marcinkowski (1989) links environmental sensitivity (which is described as respect for and knowledge about the natural environment, as well as feelings of responsibility for it) with environmental behaviour, and suggests that this sensitivity is nurtured as a result of spending time outdoors with mentors who care for and are knowledgeable about the environment. Others (Chawla, 1992, 2009; Borrie, 1995; Nelson, 1998; Talbot & Kaplan, 1986) have reported similar results, making connections between extended time spent in nature and enhanced feelings of empathy, caring, reverence, as well as collective and individual responsibility for the environment.

Physical activity related to wilderness camping and travel can also present benefits. The recreational use of wilderness spaces usually involves physical exercise that is extended and aerobic (Roggenbuck & Driver, 2000). Although much has been written in recent years describing the importance of outdoor activity for physical fitness, especially as it applies to school-aged children (Kimbro et al., 2011; Gubbels et al., 2011; Wood, 2011), few if any studies have measured the physiological benefits of wilderness-based exercise. This being stated, exercise and physical challenge have been cited as among the top motives people have for undertaking a wilderness trip (Driver et al., 1987).

In this final section I have reviewed the benefits associated with participation in wilderness camping activities. I started with an exploration of the developmental benefits, described as positive changes in wilderness campers’ self-concept or identity, as well as the
development of personal skills related to the camping experience. I also reviewed the beneficial use of wilderness and natural spaces for therapeutic and mental health applications. This was followed by a review of how participants benefit from wilderness experiences that promote self-sufficiency, social interaction, spiritual understanding, and environmental ethic. And finally, the limited research pertaining to the physical benefits of wilderness camping experiences was also considered.

Summary

In this chapter, I examined the literature pertaining specifically to traditional winter camping and explored the various meanings and benefits that people associate with their participation in more general camping activities. In particular I established some approximate linkages between the meanings and benefits expressed in the traditional winter camping literature to those presented in a variety of studies looking at typical wilderness camping. The literature reviewed in this chapter is important to this study in several ways. It demonstrates a gap between what has been previously reported about typical wilderness camping experiences and the lesser-examined pursuit of traditional winter camping. The question of what personal meanings do traditional winter campers attach to their experiences remains largely unanswered. Do they see this style of camping as significantly different to other forms? What factors led to their decision to take up this specific activity? How has participation in traditional winter camping affected or changed them personally? In addressing these questions, this study will provide the most detailed understanding of this form of camping to date and reflect a variety of voices and experiences from those who practice it.
CHAPTER 3

THEORY AND METHODS

This chapter describes the methodology that supports the research and the types of methods I used to gather and analyze data. First, I describe the qualitative method that I employed and why I determined that a phenomenological approach would be the most appropriate for this research study. Next I outline the method of analysis based on the empirical phenomenological procedures described by Giorgi (1979), Moustakas (1994), and von Eckartsberg (1986). I then detail the components of the method: (a) participant selection, (b) data collection, and (c) analysis. The chapter ends with a description of the procedures I employed in order to strengthen the overall trustworthiness of the study.

A Phenomenological Approach

Qualitative research attempts to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin 1994). Based on this understanding, this study must take a qualitative approach, as my aim is to examine the phenomenon of traditional winter camping from the viewpoint of those who have experienced it. This also required a method of inquiry that is sensitive to context and which calls attention to particulars, and therefore, again, a qualitative method is most appropriate (Schram, 2003).

I have employed a phenomenological approach in my research. Phenomenology is the study of how people make meaning of and describe direct experience. It is focused on understanding experience from the perspective of the individual (Creswell, 2007). A phenomenological perspective emphasizes the essence of individual experiences and identifies
phenomena as they are perceived by the actors in a situation (Patton, 2002). The term essence is used in phenomenological research to describe a collection of possible human experiences. Collectively, experiences from multiple individuals can form a shared essence and contribute to common meanings of lived experiences (Patton, 2002). Thus, using a phenomenological approach to understand the experiences of a number of people may provide a clearer or more complete understanding of the traditional winter camping experience. The aim of this approach is not to generalize, determine or define the experience, but rather to try to reveal the central underlying meaning of the experience that might be shared by a number of different participants. According to Moustakas (1994), “Phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved” (p. 58). The material that emerges from this type of study can be compared with other related, but separate phenomena, and may suggest patterns of meaning or themes belonging to a particular grouping of related experiences. For instance, how do the meanings people attach to traditional winter camping experiences compare to those of wilderness canoeists or survivalists?

**Origin of Phenomenology**

Phenomenology, as a qualitative research approach, emerged from the philosophical work of German mathematician Edmund Husserl and his student Martin Heidegger. As described by Reiners (2012), phenomenology was a protest or response to the positivist paradigm that dominated 19th century thinking. Positivism asserted that reality was ordered, rational, and logical and could be studied by researchers strictly using quantitative means. This included the assumption that knowledge could be measured objectively and independent of human interaction. Phenomenology aligned with the naturalistic countermovement, which
viewed reality as something that was not fixed, but based on individual and subjective experiences.

Phenomenologists assumed that knowledge is achieved through interactions between researchers and participants. Therefore, phenomenological research is considered subjective, inductive, and dynamic. Consequently, participant and researcher engagement has offered researchers an understanding about phenomenon not typically studied. (Reiners, 2012, p. 1)

**Empirical Phenomenology**

Phenomenological research studies are quite varied in the methods, forms and traditions they employ. Empirical phenomenology is one of several commonly applied approaches outlined by Moustakas (1994) and Patton (2002). As described by Moustakas (1994), empirical phenomenology involves a “return to the experience” in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience. In this way, the approach is both descriptive and interpretive, as opposed to one or the other—this specific approach combines the two in order to uncover thematic aspects of the experience. This type of phenomenological method is described as *empirical*, because it relies on the actual words that participants use to communicate their experiences (Klein & Wescott, 1994; Hein & Austin, 2001). The product of this method is a general description of the investigated experience, which is then used to identify and interpret the possible meanings of the phenomenon.

The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the
individual description general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13)

Giorgi (1985) has described two descriptive levels to the empirical phenomenology approach: A first level, in which the original data is comprised of descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue, and a second level, where the researcher describes the structures of the experience based on reflective analysis and interpretation of a respondent’s account or story. The following section outlines the design and analysis procedures of this study and details how they relate to empirical phenomenology.

Research Design

*Participant Selection*

In order to conduct this phenomenological study, it was necessary to collect data from people who had direct experience with the phenomenon in question. And as the aim of this project is to reveal how people understand their experiences of traditional winter camping, it was critical to identify persons who possessed sufficient and significant experiences with this particular phenomenon. I employed purposeful or purposive sampling in order to select participants with an in-depth understanding of traditional winter camping, and who have experience participating in the activity.

I recruited participants for this study through communities of active traditional winter campers via informal member/contact lists produced by the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario and the Aloha Foundation. The participants in this study were people who have spent a minimum of 12 nights out participating in traditional winter camping. I contacted these organizations and asked if they could distribute a recruitment notice through their websites,
Facebook groups and/or member newsletters. The recruitment notice directed traditional winter campers interested in participating in the study to contact me by email or phone. Each traditional winter camper who contacted me was thanked in writing for his or her interest in participating in the study, provided with a Letter of information, and Invited to participate in an interview.

I also utilized snowball sampling in the recruitment of participants (Patton, 2002). This is a technique in which initial participants provided the names and contact information of people whom they knew, and whom they believed might be valuable participants in the study.

I selected a total of eight people to participate in an interview. The participants represented a diversity of individuals within the community, both neophytes and confirmed members who were of different gender, age, types of experiences, and geographic location. The participant group was not, however, diverse in terms race or class background (white, middle class professionals). In this way, the participants in this study reflect the racial class homogeneity of the traditional winter camping community as a whole.

**Ethics Clearance**

Prior to contacting potential participants, I applied for and received ethical clearance from the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at Queen’s University in June 2014. A Letter of Information and two copies of a Consent Form were distributed to the interview participants and returned to me in person or by mail (see Appendices B and C).

**Data Collection**

I collected data using two methods: (a) semi-structured interviews with participants, and (b) field notes taken during the interviews.
Interviews

According to Patton (2002), the purpose of qualitative interviewing is to allow the researcher to enter the other person’s perspective and to find out from the participant those things that the researcher cannot directly observe themselves. Patton also states that the process of qualitative interviewing is particularly valuable in learning about other people’s thoughts and feelings, as well as the meanings they attach to lived experiences and how they make sense of the world. The qualitative interviews I conducted for this study were used to elicit an individual’s insight about and personal understanding of their experiences with the recreational activity of traditional winter camping. I also hoped to learn the reasons behind their choice to partake in this specialized outdoor pursuit.

As described previously, I selected the participants purposively to represent a diversity of individuals within the traditional winter camping community in Ontario. They represented both relative newcomers to the activity and as well as long-time participants, both women and men, of different ages, types of experiences, and geographic location within the province of Ontario. All of the interviews were conducted over the telephone and were digitally audio-recorded with the permission of each participant. These semi-structured phone interviews occurred in July 2014. The interview questions focused on the reasons why people have chosen to take up traditional winter camping, as opposed to another form of camping or outdoor activity. I also asked how people actually experience traditional winter camping activities (including probing for both physical and emotional understandings) in order to reveal the meanings it has for them.

I developed an interview protocol so that there would be consistency in my interviews (See Appendix D). In the interview I introduced myself, explained my research objective,
verified that the participant had read and understood the Letter of Information and Consent Form provided to them, and then outlined how the interview would proceed. I asked the open-ended questions in a logical sequence with sufficient time for response. When necessary I reiterated the question. I occasionally probed participants with follow-up questions in order to investigate more deeply certain areas of inquiry.

*Field Notes*

I made focused notes as a secondary means of data collection. I took notes during the interviews and formulated any follow-up questions I had for participants as they emerged during the course of our discussions. I also documented any general impressions or spontaneous insights I experienced during each interview. In order to assist with my analysis, I made notes detailing any participant comments that I felt important or of particular significance and used these later to reflect on the findings. In addition, I noted many of the personal meanings and experiences of participants that I myself also shared or understood to be true. I did this in order document the overlap between my thoughts and interpretations, and those of the participants—and also to make myself aware of each time this occurred.

*Analysis*

*Qualitative Data Analysis*

In his description of phenomenological research methods, Moustakas (1994) recommends the structured method of analysis developed by Giorgi (1979) for projects using an empirical phenomenological approach. The following description of this approach details the steps involved and how they were applied in this particular study. Giorgi’s method of analysis
includes the following steps: 1) immersion, 2) slow reading, 3) individual thematic analysis, 4) situated descriptions, and 5) synthetic description of phenomenon.

Immersion

The first step involves immersion in the data, which normally requires the researcher to read the entire description of the experience straight through to get a sense of the whole. By reading the transcript through several times, the researcher begins to develop an overall sense of the participant’s experience with the phenomenon. I completed this step by first listening to the digital audio recording of each interview several times. I then transcribed each interview recording into a Microsoft Word document and then I read the text of each interview in its entirety. Through this process I was able to become very familiar or fully immersed in the data and developed a sense of the whole.

Slow reading

In this next step of the analysis the researcher reads the same description more slowly and identifies each time that “a transition in meaning is perceived with respect to the intention of discovering the meaning” (Giorgi, 1979, p. 83). From this procedure, the researcher obtains a series of statements, meaning units or constituents that are relevant to the phenomenon. I accomplished this task by first identifying statements of meaning from within each interview and then compiling them into a comprehensive list.

Individual thematic analysis

According to Giorgi (1979), the next step in the process involves “eliminating redundancies and then clarifying or elaborating on the meaning of the units that have been constituted by relating them to each other and to the sense of the whole”. And so, in this step, each of the non-repetitive statements was categorized under a theme description so as to capture
their meaning. Through the close reading and rereading of the data, I identified some themes as they emerged, while other themes were already pre-established due to their importance within the literature related to traditional winter camping.

*Situated descriptions*

In this step, the researcher reflects on the given “meaning or theme units”, still expressed in the concrete language used by the interview participant. These themes and the verbatim excerpts are then used to piece together a description of the participant’s experience of the phenomenon. The description written by the researcher includes verbatim excerpts from the transcribed interviews, in which individuals have described their experiences with the phenomenon. I present these situated descriptions in the next chapter.

*Description of phenomenon*

And finally, the researcher compares all of the thematic analyses and situated descriptions that come out of individual interviews to identify shared themes. In the process, the researcher attempts to develop a general description of the phenomenon that relay the shared or general aspects of the phenomenon as experienced by all of the study participants. This general description reveals the commonality that maybe present in the many possible experiences of the phenomenon. The phenomenological study concludes with the development of these general descriptions, which are presented in the final chapter of this thesis.

Validity and Trustworthiness of the Study

I made use of several strategies in order to increase the overall comprehensiveness of my study. I attempted to achieve methodological triangulation by using multiple forms of data collection. I conducted semi-structured interviews, wrote field notes, read online and popular
media accounts of the activity, and reflected on my own experiences of traditional winter camping and attempts to integrate into the community.

The interviews, which were digitally audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim, provide a definitive record of the data that I collected, and furnish a written account that presents the personal meanings as relayed by participants. I also employed member checking during the interviews to see if I had correctly elicited and understood the views of my interviewees. This was accomplished by simply restating to the participant what it was I understood them to be explaining and in the process confirming this with them. Through this procedure, my hope was to insure that I had provided a substantive opportunity for participants to relay their personal experiences as well as to ascertain whether or not I had thoroughly and accurately captured their responses to my questions and prompts for reiteration.

Overall, the aim of my analysis has been to examine how the participants in this study talk about their experiences. I have attempted to do this while also remaining cognizant of how my own experiences might impact the interpretation and analysis of the data.

Summary

In this chapter I have described the methodology that supports the research and the methods used to gather and analyze data. I outlined the empirical phenomenological approach and I discussed the approaches I used to enhance the validity and trustworthiness of this project. In the following chapter, I present the results of the analysis of the eight semi-structured interviews. The interviewees present eight unique voices that describe a common lived experience.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS – THE PARTICIPANTS

Within this chapter, I introduce each of the eight interview participants and provide descriptions of each participant’s experience with the phenomenon of traditional winter camping. The interview data, including direct quotations from the interview transcripts, is organized in the following manner: (a) the participant’s demographic, educational and recreational background, (b) the participant’s experiences of traditional winter camping and the context of these experiences, (c) the meanings that the participant attached to these experiences, and (d) the participant’s views on whether participation in this activity has affected and/or changed them in any way. Pseudonyms have been used to replace the names of participants in order to protect their privacy.

Bill

Demographic, educational and recreational background.

Bill is a married male in his late fifties who grew up in Montreal. He is an educator by profession and has extensive experience (40+ years) guiding people on canoe trips throughout Canada. He recalls engaging in absolutely no outdoor activities with his family as a child, but remarked that his family knew enough to send him to camp every summer. He remembers that a family friend once told his father “if you are not going to do anything with those kids outdoors, then you have got to send them to a children’s camp”. Starting camp at age seven, Bill later joined his high school’s outdoors club and became involved in other outdoor activity related groups and clubs as the years went on. Today, he continues to be an active canoeist, participating in several long trips each summer, and he also enjoys both Nordic and alpine
skiing in the wintertime. Bill was first introduced to cold winter camping through his high school outdoors program and noted that “I loved all things outdoors, and I would have kept cold camping, I would have kept doing it, but I didn’t enjoy it perhaps the way I should. I never really was excited about the survival-type man toughened up in the woods kind of thing”. Bill was first introduced to warm winter camping through a Canadian outdoor studies program called “Headwaters” in the 1970s and he has continued to participate in the activity with his friends and students ever since.

Lived experiences traditional winter camping.

Bill made it a practice during his university teaching career to take his students out on a camping trip each winter. He shared one of these experiences:

[It was] maybe a 30 below night on Grape Lake in Algonquin Park. There were about 3 or 4 students and myself and everyone had gone into tents or Quinzhees to go to bed and we were by the fire and it was a perfectly clear night, just gorgeous conditions. We were all dressed warm, we were all really happy and we went out for a walk on the lake. We put on our snowshoes and it was...we realized after we walked for about half of an hour that we were just so content, and it was just too beautiful to go to sleep. And I think I have had that before, but that really jumped out at me, that I am with these students who are on their second night out in their life in the winter, that they have already come to this place where it was just too stunning to go to bed, and it was like that phenomena that we hear about people who live in the arctic. That with the midnight sun, that it’s just so much energy that you just can’t go to sleep. And I experienced that one night with a group of students winter camping. And that is very powerful, when one of the students
pointed out and I realized, “Oh my God, she’s completely right, we just can’t go to sleep.” It’s just too great.

Bill also shared a story of camping with friends:

We were out for a week, and in Algonquin [Provincial Park], and it was a gorgeous day out on Burnt Island [Lake] and went for a walk and we were actually taking a break at lunch and I was happy to not be hauling a load for a little bit. And I went for a walk and I walked with a friend up a hill and we found an otter track and I’ve never done this before, because I have seen otters on the lake, because I am on the lakes more—we followed the tracks up a hill and there was a moment where we both realized, at least in our own minds, we were convinced that the otter was choosing a more playful route to get down. So there was a place where they could have hit a flat bed, but it looked to us like they were sliding down this hill on their belly and he/she opted for a rise and made a conscious bend to take the rise which of course was a log running vertically downhill and you would only do that if you were seeking more fun – like a toboggan ride. And we thought that was the most profound thing and we just sat there and we became compelled and went for a long walk following this otter track. My friend took a few pictures and I know one of them is still in an important place in his house. You have these moments, where you have—an epiphany might be strong, but something that will really stay with you for your life.

*Personal meanings.*

When describing the traditional winter camping experience and the meaning it has for him, Bill chose to start with one word, “primal”. He noted many aspects of the activity that are important to him:
The activity of working with wood which is very profound…activities of living seem so necessary and welcoming and belonging because you are engaged in really primal things, staying warm and eating and exploring and seeing things. So I think it has a richer quality than the summer camping [experiences]…with warm camping, it seemed to have qualities that I was innately drawn to and that was being comfortable and feeling native. Not native in the First Nations people way, but native as somebody who could properly dwell and could be in a landscape that I could call home and you know, that I could develop a sense of space for…I think one of the really special qualities about winter, not 100 years ago, but now is because we don’t live actively outdoors in winter, the way we once did, I think of winter as a place. You know, the consciousness of Canadian winter, is a place. The Canadian Shield is a place, it’s weird but I am convinced of that.

*Impact of participation.*

For Bill, traditional winter camping has allowed him to feel a greater connection to the land and history:

I am a big believer in this “Belonging Hypothesis”. There is a wonderful article called the “Belonging Hypothesis” and when I winter camp with the wall tent and a woodstove, that is my most profound sense of belonging to the great Canadian traditions of winter travel…I just feel it most profoundly when I’m hauling my own gear for winter camp. So, that just seems to be a stronger feeling in the winter than it does in the summer. So that connection to something much larger than yourself to be part of something that has a tradition and is rich in story and you feel part of that story…the feeling of being in pristine settings is enhanced in the winter you know, in Algonquin
[Provincial] Park, when you are camping on let’s say at Grape Lake, which is only 4 or 5 km from the highway, in the winter, that feels remote and pristine. In the summer, it feels like you are just off the highway…you know I don’t like the word, but wilderness is closer at hand it seems in winter than it does in summer.

Katja

*Demographic, educational and recreational background.*

Katja is a woman in her late thirties and is married with three young children. The daughter of immigrants, she grew up in Toronto, Ontario and noted that her “parents didn’t really come from a culture where camping was something that you did very often”. Despite this fact, she did access many outdoor recreational and learning opportunities as a child. She participated in a learn to canoe program located at the Toronto Harbourfront, spent time at northern cottages and also attended many school and summer programs at an outdoor education centre operated by the Toronto District School Board. She listed a number of outdoor activities that she and her family enjoy participating in today, including: cross country skiing, biking, hiking, canoe tripping, and making maple syrup each spring. Having no previous experience cold winter camping, she first learned of the existence of traditional winter camping while completing her Bachelor of Education degree. She recalls that her initial thoughts were “Oh my gosh, like why or how would you ever want to do that?” But after being told about this way of being outside and travelling in winter, she became very interested and was intrigued to experience it herself.

*Lived experiences traditional winter camping.*

Katja had her first experience traditional winter camping in Algonquin Provincial Park in less than ideal conditions. She noted that “it was very intense” and that “I had a number of
moments where I was thinking, oh my God, what the heck am I doing out here?” Although the conditions were poor, she described the experience as “empowering”:

This first winter camping experience that I went on, it actually rained and it was actually a pre-trip and everybody else had left and I was out with my friend Dave and 2 other people. And we were hauling in the rain, and any winter camper will tell you, there’s no worse conditions to be in, because it’s one thing when it’s cold and dry, but when it’s cold and wet and miserable and I was absolutely miserable and we put up this tent, with 7, 18 foot long balsam poles with these 4 people and I still don’t know to this day how we did it. And I just remember being absolutely exhausted and thinking, this is crazy. But also being awestruck at being out in the winter and to just see the patterns that the snow made on the trees and to the way that Dave managed to navigate this totally different route from summer route just by looking for the blazes on the trees, and I thought oh my gosh, I’m never going to be able to do this or what have I gotten myself into.

*Personal meanings.*

Katja described feeling a special connection with people and the land when traditional winter camping, something she values about this experience and feels you don’t achieve through other forms of camping. This, along with the comfort the wall tent and stove, provide is meaningful to her, as she notes:

We have 3 wall tents and we have these little tents that we erect, these 7 pole pitch wall tents and it’s just this wonderful, little village that appears in the wilderness in Algonquin, so it’s really cozy in that sense…And then, inside there’s a woodstove and one of the beauties about warm winter camping is that you have that ability to dry out
your gear to get warm and to have a meal in a warm place. And there is a surreal coziness to that atmosphere after you have been hauling all day when it is cold out for everyone to be piled into that warm enclosed space, it’s just a really cozy feeling and really differentiates from cold camping experience where you are trying to warm yourself up and you don’t have that same group environment in terms of a sleeping area, and an eating area. So we really like that.

For Katja, there are many varied aspects of traditional winter camping that seem meaningful:

I think as a woman, I really, I also really value being able to swing an axe and just role modeling that for younger women, is really important to me…And being able to be comfortable out in the woods, honing my senses to observe what’s out there and knowing some of the birds and some of the animals and tracking and all those things that we’ve lost that it’s so important to get back and in touch with because it’s so much a part of who we are that we’ve totally never had a chance to do and I just love that when I’m out winter camping that, yeah, that so many things are stripped away. You don’t have the technology and the stuff, you’re really in nature and with each other and in a way that you’re not when you’re in any other situation. And summer camping does that too I think, but certainly as I said that magic of the tent, being squished in there together and eating in there together and laughing in there together and telling stories and playing music and telling jokes and that there’s just a magic to that coziness that isn’t there in the summer.

**Impact of participation.**

In discussing what she has taken away from her experiences warm winter tenting, Katja noted that:
When you are in the winter camping situation and are forced to use the resources of the land, there’s a new understanding and respect for what those give you, and also for how much you need, so you are always really amazed at how much firewood you need to be able to feed yourself and keep warm for 5 nights and how much work that is and how much work it is to cut, to haul, to split, to stoke, all those things they did, you can see it in a way that they don’t you know when they are lighting a white gas camp stove or when they are turning on the stove at home or turning on the heater at home and there’s, I think that there’s, well there’s an ecological impact to that act of harvesting firewood or cutting poles. There’s also tremendous learning that comes from respecting that material and learning the work it takes to harvest that and to use it.

Kourtney

Demographic, educational and recreational background.

Kourtney is a woman in her late twenties who has just recently married. She is university educated and self-employed. She grew up in a small town in southern Ontario, but now lives “up north” as she described it. She wasn’t involved in organized camping as a child, but did spend a lot of time outside and made frequent family visits to her grandparents’ cottage near Georgian Bay. She notes that these visits involved “lots of swimming, hiking, picking raspberries and playing in the mud”. She recalls not doing a lot of wilderness-style camping until she attended university and had never been winter camping until she was introduced to it as part of a activity course in the specialized Physical and Health Education program she was enrolled in. Currently, she spends a lot of time outdoors and enjoys rock climbing, as well as sea kayaking and she also does quite a bit of gardening.

Lived experiences traditional winter camping.
Kourtney spoke passionately about many of her experiences traditional winter camping, many of which, centred around her connecting to other living things and the landscape, as she notes here:

We did a trip on Lake Superior and it [was the first time it] fully froze in over 20 years. And just the fact that nobody [had apparently done it before], an avid historian of winter camping suggested that we were the only people that he knew of that were able to do that route that we did. And I believe it was the only reason we were able to do it, was because we were doing it in a traditional way. And the ice formations that we were able to see, were [a] once in a lifetime opportunity. It was breathtaking, every moment of it, and to be able to see that and really experience something that you really wouldn’t be able to experience and using that traditional way of travelling really made me connected to who I am and where people came from on this land. And you know seeing those ice formations was really breathtaking.

For Kourtney, having special access to the secret lives of animals in the wintertime is also an important part of this camping experience:

Other moments that stand out in my mind are seeing animal tracks. In the summertime, you are very, very lucky if you see wildlife, especially if you are travelling in a group because you create a lot of noise that you don’t even realize. It’s a rare opportunity, you could see something like a moose or a bear or a deer, and the amount of wildlife signs that we see is unbelievable. You are able to put yourself in their shoes and follow their tracks and you can see [in winter] where they slept and you know, there’s moose hair left in the bed you know, a wolf chasing a moose or you see deer killed and one of my favourite wildlife signs to see is an otter slide, you can see an otter slide all the way...
down a hill into its little hole that it keeps open and then jump and it’s just like, it runs for a few steps and slides on its belly and it just makes me so happy, you wouldn’t be able to see that in the summertime.

**Personal meanings.**

When describing what meaning the traditional winter camping experience has for her, Kourtney chose to speak of the bonds that form between groups of people on the winter trail:

One of the things that stands out for me, is that you are completely reliant on your travel companion[s]. And this is something that really hit home for my partner and I. When my partner and I are out on a trip, just the two of us, and one of us goes down, the other just immediately picks up their slack and is able to compensate. But when you are in a group of people who have never done it before, you can really see the transformation happen. The first couple of days, people are just getting comfortable with themselves and their clothing systems, their layering, their toboggan packing and even things just like using the washroom and they are just getting comfortable with themselves and then come day 3 or 4 or 5, they start to get comfortable with the group and take care of each other. They can lean on each other more and then you know, after day 5 they are able to just take care of themselves and the group. They are able to look up and around and really take in where they are and that’s one of the reasons why we believe that any camping trip should be at least 5 days because it really takes 2 to 3 days just to get into it and then you need that time to really appreciate where you are...Another thing that stands out for me is the communal living. In the summer time, often you are sleeping with one maybe two people in a separate tent amongst a group of 10 people but in winter camping, you are sleeping all in one tent, you are eating in one tent, you are setting up one tent, and
that initiates the bond that is so much deeper than you can achieve when you are summer
camping I believe.

Impact of participation.

For Koutrney, an understanding of her own consumptive patterns have changed along
with her usage of natural resources in her life:

Definitely, there are a few different aspects. One is the making of our own gear. My
mentality for consumerism has completely changed. I’m walking to the store and I see
this thing I like, my first thought is not, “Oh I should get that”, it’s, “How can I make
that?” I have a whole new appreciation for material and functional products and that
allows me to be more creative and appreciate the things that I do have and the things that
I can actually make instead of just dropping the dollar. The other thing that I have come
to appreciate, is the use of resources. When I was younger, you know, I thought that
when people would cut down trees or use just using resources, I thought it was the worst
thing in the world and that they were killing the environment. But the thing that you
don’t realize is that when you are living in the city, you are using those resources. You
don’t even realize a) where it’s coming from and b) how much you are actually using.
Whereas when you need to cut your wood to keep you warm, or to cook your food, you
know exactly how much sweat goes into it, you know exactly how much handfuls of
wood you have used and you can see your impact and that to me is one of the most
important things about winter camping. You can see exactly your impact on the
environment, whereas when you are summer camping, you know, you’ve got a bottle of
fuel, you can see how much fuel you are using and you don’t really know what exactly
went into making that fuel or you know it’s just like “Well I buy it at the store” and you
know, using wood and natural resources really gives you that perspective…You just don’t make that connection of your environmental impact and I think that to me is one of the more important aspects to winter travel.

Shawn

Demographic, educational and recreational background.

Shawn is a man in his mid-thirties who grew up within a large urban centre in Nova Scotia. He described his occupation as a combination of “outdoor guide and educator, youth worker and mentor”. During the past decade, his work has taken him around the world, but over the last few years he has maintained regular seasonal positions in Antarctica, the south shore of Nova Scotia and west coast of British Columbia. Shawn noted that his work in Antarctica has resulted in him being absent from Canada during the winter months, something he described as “probably one of the only downfalls of not being here [Canada]…I miss being in the woods in the winter”. He currently participates in a wide variety of outdoor recreational activities, but specifically enjoys spending time sea kayaking and ocean canoeing with his partner. As a child, he spent a lot of time outdoors and went on many canoe camping and hiking trips with his family. He also had the opportunity to attend summer camp in Ontario as a child, where he participated in many organized canoe excursions. As a young teenager, Shawn had the opportunity to try cold winter camping with his father on several occasions, but was not introduced to the warm style of winter camping until years later, during his formal training as a teacher in Ontario.

Lived experiences traditional winter camping.

Shawn had his first experience with traditional winter camping as a teacher candidate within a specialized outdoor education program in Ontario. He recalled that:
It was kind of slow, you know, slow moving. I had done lots of winter camping with backcountry skis, even snowshoeing and things, but on the whole, it was just like, you kind of stop a lot. You kind of have to go with the flow and put all of your other pre-conceived kind of ideas of how things should work, you put that aside and just go along with this other way, this other system and I remember it was really fun.

Shawn continued to describe this first experience, as opening a door onto a new way of approaching wilderness travel:

We had a big group, a great group of people and it wasn’t about doing a lot of miles, it was just about being in the place in winter, and engaging in the environment and the places where we were in a new way that I hadn’t really experienced before. So yeah, it was just a lot of fun and got me hooked on it and I soon got to collecting all my own bits and pieces from mukluks to a wall tent and toboggan and from there got into sort of making some of that stuff.

Shawn’s first extended expedition took place in Labrador. He and a friend journeyed unsupported for a month and, although he had many memories associated with this trip, it was some of the sensory experiences that he felt were most significant:

The whole thing was just magical, the silence of it. How the snow just absorbs sound and the vastness of the landscape and just how…just the beauty of it. And you know, we weren’t alone because we could tell, you could see all the little tracks of rabbits and all the different critters that were out there but your ears become so attuned to every little sound. And I hadn’t really heard silence like that before… that’s one thing that jumps out at me is just the silence, or you hear so many things after you are out there for a month and you are out there and you just start to hear so many subtle little things in the
way of the snow blowing or you think you hear something really far away, but you aren’t sure. And you become focused in on these things and you can hear something, a tree crack, you feel from maybe a mile away you start to really like, I feel like my hearing got better.

Personal meanings.

Shawn appreciates that the clothing, equipment and travel systems used when traditional winter camping match the environmental conditions, landscape and human needs. He noted that it is:

Really civilized, because humans haven’t really lived for long periods of time in these climates without an external heat source like fire…the idea is that this whole system sort of works in the woodlands…in the tundra there is a completely different set of systems you know, coming from Inuit people, and this is sort of more of a northern forest kind of way spending time in the bush in winter…a lot of the outdoor equipment [today] is very commercialized and it’s very, you know, nothing against Mountain Equipment Co-Op, but that’s a different system…I was interested in more traditional technologies that had been developed over time in connection with the landscape. It just really made sense in that way, you know you use the moose hide mukluks because they breathe and they work. And you use all of this in a toboggan because they work, if you carry that gear on your back, you have way too much weight on the snow and you sink too deep and if you have Gore-Tex, well that just doesn’t breathe well enough and canvas is really what you need.

For Shawn, the opportunity to be outside and active in winter is important and he sees his participation in traditional winter camping as another way of facilitating this:
I guess just the whole idea of going out in the winter is, you know we count on a lot, we wait for the good weather to come in the summer and we try to fit it all in a lot of us. And then, but we all live in this northern climate that has a beautiful winter and then it’s just great to get out there and enjoy it, it’s a part of the whole thing—to get out in winter more. That’s a meaningful part of it for me.

*Impact of participation.*

In discussing what he has taken away from his experiences traditional winter camping, Shawn first reflected on the crafting aspect of the activity:

Well the craft part of it is pretty cool, because a lot of us are in “modern civilization” and are kind of taught, or not taught, but sort of would just go out and buy the things that we need in order to do the jobs that we want to do and we kind of rely on a lot of diversification of labour and specialization and different things…if we go camping, we go to Mountain Equipment Co-Op and buy all the gear we need to do it and we buy everything…but this sort of breaks this kind of [typical] camping down and because we can’t find it all in one place it challenges one or me to look for those things in other places or even make some of the things themselves and that’s just kind of the creative and fun process…we have moved farther away from harvesting the materials and actually making things ourselves as we become more specialized in our trades and in our disciplines. And so then, we actually have less and less part in the things that we make and do. And so traditional winter camping, is a way to kind of step outside of that and look at kind of crafting a few things that we can actually use so that we can even harvest the materials and then make something and then apply it to the activities that we are dealing with firsthand and I think that is a really empowering experience.
Shawn also feels the realization people get from knowing where their fuel [fire wood] is coming from and how much is required is an important lesson learned through traditional winter camping practices:

You have a big picture as well in terms of where are you getting your fuel from and how far is that travelling and how much refinement of that fuel has had been undertaken to get it to you and into the back country and then compare that with cutting down some dead wood in a bog or whatever…I’m not trying to say that I’m sitting on a high horse, saying that traditional winter camping is necessarily better in that respect, I mean everything has downfalls, but I don’t think it’s any worse environmentally, sustainably. In fact, it could even be better because you are engaging with the landscape in the way you appreciate where the warmth is coming from, not just thinking about turning the switch on and having heat [within a building] or priming your MSR stove or whatever it is.

Roger

Demographic, educational and recreational background.

Roger is a male in his early fifties who grew up in a small rural Ontario town. In his free time, he enjoys cycling, mountain biking, sea kayaking and canoeing, as well as skiing and snowshoeing in the wintertime. As a child, Roger played outdoors and participated in many organized sports. His family did very little camping, but he would camp out with friends during trout season. Roger’s first experience with winter camping came while he was a university student studying Physical and Health Education in the mid-1980s. He participated in several winter field camps and slept out in a quinzhee several times. During these outings he actually pitched a wall tent, noting “We did have one, the hot tent was there as kind of re-warming tent,
but I never actually got to sleep in one at that point.” After graduating from university, Roger worked in the Canadian Arctic and during these early years of his professional career he had the opportunity to sleep out for many nights in igloos. It wasn’t until his early forties, after returning to southern Ontario that he acquired a canvas wall tent and stove for himself.

*Lived experiences traditional winter camping.*

Roger’s first experience with a group of people in a wall tent was a sleepless experience as he was concerned for everyone’s safety, but at the same time marveled at the warmth and resilience of these canvas structures. Roger told the story of this night:

> We got into some really high winds that first night, we got into some really bad weather and we were a little exposed. The tents were exposed. They did really hold up well, but you know, that first night with high wind and the chimney moving and all this stuff, it was pretty sleepless night knowing that you got the responsibility of 10 others in your tent, you got a fire in the tent and all you are thinking about is their safety...but we were fine and everybody was warm and content … somewhat exposed still [the next day] and we had a blizzard and the roads were closed. And that was the amazing thing, that these tents, you know, they took high winds and you could see the clothesline in the tent just jumping. As I am sure you have been in those situations before where you are drying your clothes on top of the tent and they are just like, with the winds and buffeting like that, it was just something to see but that pretty much sold me on the stability of the tents.

*Personal meanings.*

For Roger, the sense of community and caring that develops amongst people out on winter trips seems most meaningful and significant. His thoughts on this:
I think it’s probably taking care of yourself and others, I think that’s kind of where you know, you want to have a positive experience, you’re taking a group out and they need to take care of each other, but they also need to take care of themselves, so they need proper equipment.

He also expressed his understanding of the equipment used in traditional winter camping and how it afforded people a fuller and richer experience:

It needs to be functional… moccasin making and things like that because of the breathability of the moccasins and the comfort of the moccasins and being able to dry them off so, I think I come at equipment from the practical view point of comfort and reliability I guess. If you are comfortable, you can actually thrive, you are not focused on surviving, you are focused on being in that space, in that place. And you are feeling more confident and able to think outside of your own little, “I’m cold, I want to go home” mentality.

*Impact of participation.*

With respect to how this form of camping has transferred into other areas of his life, Roger was quick to respond that it’s allowed him to spend more time outdoors in all months of the year:

I can tell you that it has opened up my canoe season huge with the tent. So you know, you can [typically] start canoeing in say May and then finish in October and with the traditional winter camping [gear], we start in you know, when the ice breaks say April and then we go to December…we can take it you know, canoeing if there aren’t too many portages and things like that. So that gives you that sense that you can go out in more extreme weather, even canoeing!
Danny

Demographic, educational and recreational background.

Danny is a male in his early thirties who spent his childhood in western Canada before moving with his family to Ontario at the age of 14. He is a university educated self-employed entrepreneur who operates a business with his wife. Danny is an avid rock climber, but also enjoys canoeing, hiking and some cross-country skiing. During his youth he spent a lot of time outside and playing in nearby urban parks, but didn’t do any wilderness camping until later on. He was an avid cold winter camper throughout his high school years and during university. Inspired by mountaineering practices and making use of modern cold winter camping equipment, Danny organized many successful and enjoyable winter camping trips with friends and classmates. He was then introduced to warm winter camping as part of a university Physical and Health Education activity course. He recalled that he “went in with really a lot of pre-conceived notions about traditional winter camping. And most of them were negative”. Still skeptical after this first experience, he noted that “a few years after that I read a book, The Snow Walker’s Companion, and that’s when I sort of was re-inspired to try it again. Then I started to appreciate just how good it was and the applications for using it for back country travel.”

Lived experiences traditional winter camping.

Danny was an enthusiastic cold winter camper before transitioning to walled tenting. He recalls his first traditional-style trip:

The first trip I undertook, sort of on our own after reading this book [The Snow Walker’s Companion], was planned as an 8 day trip to Ishpatina Ridge in Ontario, and with my now wife, then girlfriend and our dog. And it was very, very informative for me because I had tried that exact same trip a few years previously with some other friends, but we
had tried it with the more, lightweight sort of mountaineering inspired set up. And on that first attempt, the modern attempt, we all found it very difficult and didn’t make it to the summit, we made it pretty close but we were eventually turned back and that was an 8-day trip. So my wife and I went out, and there was a few little hurdles, but for the most part it was—we were amazed that just not only how comfortable we were, but that despite having a heavier set up, we were actually travelling faster than we were when we were more lightweight. And so we made it up to the summit. Took a rest day on I guess it would have been day 5, and then on the 6th day we were just feeling so fresh because we were getting such good rest that night, but we travelled all the way and I think that was about a 30 km day. And so that was a real eye-opener, because you are more comfortable and you’re getting more well-nourished and easier to have warm water and to get a good night’s sleep, that that extra weight is really offset, you really can still travel as fast, or faster than a more modern set up.

His first multi-week expedition came two years later and it was on this trip that he got his first real sense of remoteness, commenting that “I was holding stress and anticipation going into that trip”. He shared his memory of this experience:

The first 2 days or so, we were [travelling] on snowmobile tracks, so it was really easy going around the falls at Hell’s Gates Canyon. And I remember vividly getting to the Hell’s Gate portage, and that area was well travelled—I think people [snowmobilers] like to go up and visit those natural attractions and as soon as we hit the end of that portage, I was up on a hill and I was looking down and you just saw the tracks come to an abrupt stop and we walked down that hill and I just looked out on the huge expanse of this wide river, and not a single track on it and you know it just struck me that we
were really, it felt like we were heading out to the great beyond at that point. I think it was just, it was pretty meaningful because of all the sort of already built up emotions on that trip.

*Personal meanings.*

Danny, who admitted initially preferring the modern, mountaineering style of winter camping equipment, notes the value and importance that the handcrafting of his own equipment has added to his wilderness camping experiences and his life:

Well, for me, I think that one of the things that I really, really value is the opportunity to make much of the gear myself. And so that is something that still 2 years later, I still get a lot of joy out of looking down and seeing moccasins on my feet that I made and wiggling my toes and just thinking about how warm and comfortable they are. And yeah, I think that for me is—I realize some of the more far reaching impacts that’s had on my life because I didn’t have a lot of, I would say, confidence in my abilities to craft or to do a lot of sort of handiwork type stuff myself. And you know, being able to make clothing myself, keeps me warm and comfortable in such a harsh environment. That has given me a lot of confidence that I can make so many other things myself from you know, other sorts of craft or clothing type of items right up to you know a house or cabin myself—that I have the confidence now that…I’ve made the little structure that can keep me warm on a winter’s day and I have the confidence now that I can make a larger structure or home that would also keep me warm on a winter day.

*Impact of participation.*

For Danny, his experiences and the skills and self-confidence he has developed through traditional winter camping have been significant and have transferred into other areas of his life:
I’ve already mentioned that one of the first crafts that I did was making moccasins and went out on that trip on the Missinaibi with another guy who was much more equipped with modern equipment and you know, I saw my equipment was performing better than his, day in and day out, until that was a huge eye-opener and I came home and back the following spring, you know, I never swung a hammer before and I built my own shed in the backyard and totally re-did my roof of my house, changed the pitch of my roof and put steel on it. I think I would never would have tackled this stuff if the fact that, yeah, the confidence and the empowerment that I learned that winter. And now, more recently it’s given my wife and I the confidence to move to an off grid, off road property and I don’t think we would have had that confidence to take on an endeavor like this if we hadn’t spent so much time out in the winter and you know, just come to appreciate that we could be comfortable with a little bit less and just this spring as we have been out there, I’ve started to realize that these last few years have really, I have been gaining a lot of skills that I hadn’t really realized I was gaining.

Beth

*Demographic, educational and recreational background.*

Beth is a female in her early fifties who was raised in a suburb of Toronto. She is a teacher and enjoys participating in a variety of outdoor recreational pursuits. She is an experienced wilderness canoeist who enjoys camping and many winter activities including cross country skiing, snowshoeing, skating and kick sledding. She attended summer camp from the age of nine, but remarked that she “didn’t grow up in a very outdoorsy family. My dad liked the outdoors.” She was introduced to some downhill and cross country skiing at a young age, but didn’t get skis of her own until she was older. Beth first experienced cold winter camping as
a university student and recalled not enjoying it, “You’re frigging cold or you can be on really cold nights.” She was first introduced to warm winter camping on a dog sledding trip in northern Manitoba and remarked that this experience was like “night and day” compared to her cold winter camping experiences.

*Lived experiences traditional winter camping.*

Beth described her first experience traditional winter camping as “very comfortable”, noting the social aspect as a highlight:

The whole trip [was comfortable]…I washed my hair. I would never consider doing that on a winter camping trip. And you could stand up. You know, you are comfortable, you are probably sitting on something you know just insulated and it’s just a much more inviting social environment. Just to be able to sit around and talk. Whereas, I don’t have any memories of doing that in a quinzhee. You know, as soon as you are in a quinzhee, you are trying to go to sleep, you are not sitting up socializing whereas in a walled tent, it is so much more inviting to do that.

She has taken many groups of students out warm winter camping and again, in recalling these experiences, she noted the social atmosphere and camaraderie created by the walled tent:

Well conversations, again, in the tent, because it is a much more social environment…I kind of like, when you are with a group, when you hear somebody else get up and start the woodstove and you know, feed it. That is kind of a nice feeling, because it is like people taking care of people in the group. It is just a good environment…having hot chocolate, laughing, telling great stories, singing great songs, so it is very group bonding that way. And because you are also cooking on that woodstove, it has all of the community building aspects of meals, it is all centered around that hearth.
Personal meanings.

In sharing what her involvement in this activity means to her, Beth noted a connection to place and the past:

It’s a nice ambience. To be able to sit up instead of hunch over like in a quinzhee, to be out of the wind, to put up the tent with some of the local materials like poles, to have to collect firewood. It makes you feel a bit more part of the land I would say. When doing what people did a while ago, if you feel the people in the past had a connection [to the land], I think for me that extends to…I feel like I have a connection because I am doing the same things.

Later in the interview, she also mentioned more of the community building aspect and how this is a meaningful component of the experience is for her:

Well when you are putting up a group size one [tent], it’s a group bonding kind of experience. I was on a trip once where somebody was talking about leading corporate games and a friend talked about how he had been sent off to one of these corporate training sessions and when he came back he told his boss “Don’t you ever send me off again. I will do anything else”. You know? And then he kind of said why can’t putting up a wall tent be considered a group activity? And that’s just always stuck with me. So when you see people who are standing on the end just holding a pole, but you know that they are important because you can’t put it up, especially the big tent without some security of knowing the pole is not going to crash on somebody else—you see that group dynamic. And, you don’t get that so much with putting up a regular tent or even building a quinzhee.

Impact of participation.
For Beth, traditional winter camping has offered her an opportunity to commune with nature:

Even though there is less wildlife around, because a lot of them might be hibernating or down south. There is probably more that you kind of tune into. So what does occur, like a raven call, would be noticed. Whereas, in the summer it might not be, it might be mixed in with other things. You’re noticing the tracks on the lake, so you probably are cluing into a lot more than you would in the summer. You know people aren’t tracking across grass and bush if they see a moose [track], but in the wintertime, you could follow a moose’s tracks for a lot longer and have a different sense of that animal, even though you don’t even see it. Just through tracks, following tracks I think is very drawing into the sense of a “winter trail”. You start to feel like you are an animal too. You know, or maybe it’s like an inner animal, an inner wolf that has to be released when you do that.

Carl

Demographic, educational and recreational background.

Carl is a male in his late sixties who is employed by the provincial government. He is an amateur historian with a particular interest in the traditional travel methods and routes of the Canadian woodlands pre- and post- European contact. This interest originated in part by his own family history in Canada, which he has traced back to the late 1700s. Some of his ancestors had worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company, while others were part of exploratory expeditions to western Canada and the U.S. Midwest. His strong connection to the past and great interest in the ways in which people lived and travelled were evident as he spoke about participation in traditional winter camping: “Both my parents had this, and my ancestors had a strong
connection to the woods, to living outdoors, and so in my particular case, my parents were well familiar with wall tents and all those types of living so…really [that is how] I got into it”. As a teenager, Carl worked as a camp leader at a popular Ontario summer camp. It was at this time, during a camp-organized event on Christmas holidays, that he first attempted sleeping out under a make shift canvas tent in the wintertime. He has spent a “lifetime outdoors” and along with many extended winter camping trips he has participated in a number of extended canoe trips in Canada’s north.

Lived experiences traditional winter camping.

Carl’s first winter camping experience came as a result of the encouragement of a mentor and teacher:

My boss and professor at the time was quite interested in pursuing the recreational possibilities of winter camping…We did this event during Christmas holidays I guess it was, and he had this vision that sometime taking university students out as part of their Phys. Ed training or whatever…[So it] was an experiment and what we did, we took an old rotten wall tent…the panels were rotted out on the one side so we cut the whole tent in half, right down the ridge and then there was a cliff in the woods, not too far away [from camp] . And we put up a bunch of poles, we put the poles up against the cliff and then we hung this half a wall tent up all over the poles and that was faced into the cliff to create a sort of leaned shelter. And then we proceeded to collect a lot of firewood and I remember, because I was young and I remember it getting very cold, it went down to thirty below zero…We were able to keep fairly warm and of course we had a fire, strong fire, in the evening so that the rock had heated itself up and was ready to heat itself. I
wouldn’t say it was totally comfortable, but at least we were able to deal with the conditions and that really impressed him.

Personal meanings.

Carl reported earlier on in the interview process that he felt he would be unable to share the more “poetic or touchy-feeling” aspects of his involvement in winter camping, stated that he “just doesn’t think that way”. However, because of his wealth of shared experiences with warm winter camping, he did manage to convey, in several ways, what this activity means to him:

What people are out there doing winter camping, a lot of them, they are re-tracing the winter travel routes, the nastawgan in winter. So that’s really what the activity is all about. So it’s about sledding, it’s about ice travel, it’s about camping with heat and it’s about connecting themselves with the land in an intimate fashion. And that is the appeal, it’s exciting because it’s less known, the routes are very much less known. In terms of difficulty, in terms of skill level, [if] you start with canoeing and winter camping done traditionally is not insurmountable for anybody, it takes a little more time, it’s one, in my opinion, it’s one notch higher because the routes aren’t well known you have to have the skill in finding them. The routes are not as well maintained so you have to have skill in trail maintenance aspects, you have to certainly know how to use a bow saw and etc., etc., etc.

Carl sees the craft aspect or making of equipment and clothing as an additional level of involvement in the activity that is not necessary, but as he notes, he feels it adds something unique and of value to each person’s experience:

I think the people that do this, they make the effort to do it. They have a whole additional level of understanding that people that don’t, they have a whole better
appreciation and understand the function better…And, but I mean that’s okay. Not everybody’s handy…I think you gain more out of it if you do your own moccasins, or sure, I make moccasins, you can come buy them from me. But the big, if you are at all capable of doing this stuff, you should get involved…And in terms of winter, that’s, I have a level of understanding. I know how to take a tree and go at it with an axe or build a toboggan, I know how to do it. Split the wood out and the whole business, and I think that gives me an understanding that other people don’t have. So yea, I think there is something to getting interested in the craft itself.

Impact of participation.

For Carl, his experiences traditional winter camping and time spent in the bush have been significant and as he describes, have connected him to the land in an intimate way:

Well, first I would like to say that every time I go out camping, just like everybody else, it’s a learning experience. There’s some small thing, even if it’s just geography that I learn. Every time I go out, like everybody else, I continuously am expanding my knowledge, even though I have done this for now damn well 50 years, I always am learning something. So what’s in my head, is now that I’m almost turning 68, I’ve got a lot of dirt time there and a lot of stuff about this in my head. So it’s going to rub off on my outlook. I’ve spent so much time in the bush that I have an understanding of the nastawgan [traditional travel routes] probably that nobody else does. And I just really connect to that type of stuff now, and it’s to the level now that I can intuitively tell you answers of the things. You know, I’ve watched the night and the sky so much over the years, at my age and I can look at it and I can tell you, I have a rough idea of what’s going to happen with the weather in the next 24 hours, that sort of thing. Just from the
sheer fact of going through thousands of days of looking up and I can now, I walk into a forest and tell you how easy it’s going to be to camp. Look at forest condition and say, “Oh maybe we should camp over here, maybe we should keep walking a bit more, the snow should be a bit more, this isn’t too good here, this is not going to cut it, we can do better than this.”

Composite Description

The following section includes a synthesis of the eight participants’ descriptions. The presentation format of the data remains the same.

Demographic, educational and recreational background.

Six of the participants grew up in Ontario with the exception of Danny and Shawn. Danny spent the early part of his childhood in western Canada before relocating with his family to Ontario, and Shawn, who was raised in Nova Scotia, moved to Ontario as an adult. All eight participants were university educated and four described their profession as that of teacher or educator, while three indicated they were self-employed and the other, Carl, stated that he is a government employee. Five of the eight participants attended residential summer camps as children. In terms of outdoor recreational involvement, all eight participants indicated that they were active canoeists and wilderness campers. Four described their participation in sea kayaking and two mentioned that rock climbing was an outdoor pursuit of great interest. Six of the eight participants were first introduced to cold winter camping and quinzhees before learning of traditional or warm winter camping.

Lived experiences traditional winter camping.

All of the participants reported that their first time winter camping was a highly positive experience. Each participant then noted that they sought out further opportunities to engage in
this activity. All eight eventually purchased, collected or made the equipment necessary to go out camping on their own or with companions. Five of the participants became aware of the activity and had their initial experience as part of a prescribed university course (two through a Physical and Health Education program, two through a course offered in a Faculty of Education, and one through a Kinesiology program). Of the eight participants, all indicated that they spent no fewer than six nights out camping during the previous winter.

*Personal meanings.*

In reflecting on the meaning they made of their traditional winter camping experiences, six spoke specifically of the opportunity to connect with the winter landscape and other living things. Shawn noted specifically that his initial experience has forever changed the way he thinks about camping and being out in nature, while Katja spoke of the empowerment and sense of self-reliance that she has developed through traditional winter camping. Five of the participants commented on ideas of community and the personal relationships that are fostered through this type of camping experience. All but two indicated that the crafting aspect or opportunity to make their own clothing or camping equipment was an aspect of the activity that they felt was very valuable.

*Impact of participation.*

The impact of the participant’s involvement in traditional winter camping can be seen in four ways: (a) through an increased amount of active time individuals can spend outside per year, (b) through an increased awareness of humans’ consumptive patterns and use of natural resources, (c) through an improved sense of awareness or feeling of connection to the land, and (d) through an increased level of self-confidence and self-reliance.
The participants shared many similar reflections of how they felt their involvement in traditional winter camping had transferred over into their everyday lives. Roger, Beth, Carl, Danny and Shawn all commented on how the equipment and systems associated with wall tenting extended the numbers of days they could spend camping in winter, thus allowing them to spend more time outside and active throughout the year. All participants, in some way, noted how their personal views on resource usage had changed and how they also felt more connected to natural or wilderness spaces. For Danny and Katja, the traditional winter camping experience has increased their personal feelings of self-reliance and these have carried over into other projects, tasks or activities they’ve since undertaken in their everyday lives.

Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the eight interview participants, presenting the descriptions of their involvement in traditional winter camping. This chapter also included a composite description, which incorporated the information conveyed by the participants. In the next chapter, I present core themes and qualities that are connected with the traditional winter camping experience.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS – THEMES OF THE PHENOMENON

In this chapter, I develop the themes related to the phenomenon of traditional winter camping as experienced by the people I interviewed. These themes are based on an analysis of the fundamental components of the traditional winter camping experience as described by the participants. Excerpts from the data have been interwoven throughout each theme description in order to give the reader a clear understanding of the defining characteristics and how they were derived from the data. I will examine the three core themes that were revealed through the analysis: (a) connection to the land, (b) sense of community, and (c) personal empowerment. The following table presents the three core themes along with three fundamental components of each theme.

Summary of Findings: Themes and Components

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**Theme 1: Connection to the Land**

The first theme, connection to the land, refers to the emotions, sensations and personal attachments that were relayed by the participants as they described their experiences traditional winter camping. For all, there was a shared association with place—land, landscape or the “winter trail” were referenced by all participants when detailing what the traditional winter camping experience meant to them.
Component 1: The winter landscape.

For the majority of the participants, the winter landscape had significant meaning and was clearly identifiable as a fundamental element of the traditional winter camping experience. The participants connection to place was described repeatedly through a variety of sensory observations, as described by Shawn, “The whole thing was just magical, the silence of it. How the snow just absorbs sound and the vastness of the landscape and just how… your ears become so attuned to every little sound. And I hadn’t really experienced silence like that before.” For the interview participants, it was the senses of sight and sound that appeared to be most predominant or most involved in their physical interactions with the winter environment. Describing how her senses become more focused in the wintertime, Beth shared how this heightened sense of awareness affects her perception and interaction with place:

Even though there is less wildlife around, because a lot of them might be hibernating or down south, there is probably more that you kind of tune into. So what does occur, like a raven call would be noticed, whereas in the summer it might not be, it might be mixed in with other things. You’re noticing the tracks on the lake, so you probably are cluing into a lot more—the animal or wildlife—then you would in the summer…following tracks I think is very drawing into this sense of a winter trail. You start to feel like you are an animal too. You know, or maybe it’s like an inner animal, an inner wolf that has been released when you do that. (Beth)

Similarly, Kourtney made mention of the joy she felt in seeing animal tracks and of the snow’s ability to capture a story that had taken place and how the winter traveller can participate in that experience, “You are able to put yourself in their shoes and follow their tracks and you can see where they slept...you can see an otter slide all the way down a hill into its little hole that it
keeps open…it runs for a few steps and slides on its belly and it just makes me so happy (to see).” Based on these comments, and others relayed in my interviews with the study participants, I began to recognize that winter was being viewed as a place itself—that is, these participants spent far more time detailing characteristics and conditions of the snow and ice and winter landscape, than any description of a particular location or route. The choice to use terms like the “winter trail” or the Cree term Nastawgan (traditional travel routes) to describe place is very telling—being in nature or the “wilderness” during wintertime was far more important than being in a particular location or geographical area of some special or personal significance. As one participant explained, “it wasn’t about doing a lot of miles, it was just about being in the place in winter, and engaging in the environment and the places where we were in a new way, that I hadn’t really experienced before.” The collective features of winter in the northern woodlands were what connected participants to the land and probably why this winter-place or landscape is seen as personally and profoundly meaningful to them.

Component 2: History and tradition.

My analysis of the interview data revealed a secondary kind of connection to the land, one that has its origins in personal meanings linked to historical or cultural ideas. Through the comments of several participants, it became evident that they saw their camping experiences as less about maintaining a tradition and more about being part of a tradition. For example:

When I winter camp, with the wall tent and a woodstove, that is my most profound sense of belonging to the great Canadian traditions of winter travel and travel generally. That makes me feel part of the greater enterprise…I just feel it most profoundly when I’m hauling my own gear for winter camp. So, that just seems to be a stronger feeling in the winter than it does in the summer, that connection to something much larger than
yourself to be part of something that has a 1000 year tradition and is rich in story and you feel part of that story. (Bill)

And:

To be out of the wind, to put up the tent with some of the local materials like poles, to have to collect firewood. It makes you feel a bit more part of the land, I would say, and doing what people did a while ago. So if you feel the people in the past had a connection, I think for me that extends to… I feel like I have a connection because I am doing the same things. (Beth)

Carl commented in a more specific way about the historical connection that he feels most people take away from their winter camping experiences:

A lot of them, they are re-tracing the winter travel routes, the nastawgan in winter. So that’s really what the activity is all about. It’s about sledding, it’s about ice travel, it’s about camping with heat and it’s about connecting themselves with the land in an intimate fashion. (Carl)

Whether travelling on actual traditional winter routes or embodying some personal historic or cultural understanding of winter travel, participants’ connection to the land appears to take on a conceptual meaning, rather than something physical or tangible. This being stated, participants’ choice to also embrace tradition by wearing items of clothing more typical of the 1870s or by travelling on wooden snowshoes is not done for the purpose of reenacting or role-playing a bygone era, nor because it is thought of as simply more functional, but perhaps it can be viewed as another way of connecting with the land—to those who came before, to the spirit and tradition of the place.

(Component 3: Physical Restoration.)
In Theme 1, Component 2, I discussed how participants connected to the land through personal meanings related to history and tradition. I suggested that these meanings were generated through a conceptual or emotional relationship to the land, rather than through one involving a physical or visceral-type experience. Because the act of traditional winter camping is so very physical, it should come as no surprise to the reader that the physical aspects of being on the land and immersed in activity also possessed significant meaning for the participants of this study. This section describes those personal meanings associated with the physical experience of winter camping and travel and their contribution to participants’ perceived connection to place.

Participants repeatedly expressed how very physical an experience the traditional style of winter camping was—hauling toboggans, setting camp, and cutting wood were all common activities described by terms such as “arduous”, “exhausting”, and “difficult”. And although the interview participants were clear to point out the strenuous and burdensome nature of traveling and camping in the wilderness during wintertime, they also made it obvious how important this physical aspect was to their enjoyment of the activity. For example:

The activity of working with wood which is very profound and the activities of living seem so necessary and welcoming and belonging because you are engaged in really primal things, staying warm and eating and exploring and seeing things…it’s working with wood and being comfortable in this weird floating medium that is snow. (Bill)

Shawn declared that although traditional winter camping is always a physical experience, it does not have to be extreme or highly expeditious. He said that travelling and camping in “nearby nature” is significant and provides an opportunity to be outdoors and active in wintertime:
I was definitely probably in the best shape of my life in terms of hauling 250-pound toboggan for a month through the snow, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be that, you don’t have to go very far in order to get enjoyment out of it. And it’s also I guess just the whole idea of going out in the winter is you know…it’s just great to get out there and enjoy it, it’s a part of the whole thing—to get out in winter more. That’s a meaningful part of it for me. (Shawn)

Several other interview participants alluded to what they felt were the restorative qualities of winter camping—that being physically active was definitely a key feature, but that it also be experienced as a type of necessary or “meaningful” work. In addition, the idea of being out in nature was also very important. Participants saw the act of winter camping as a way of feeling “whole and connected” or “rejuvenated”. These ideas about being physically active, engaged in necessary activity, and outdoors in a natural or wilderness space, also combined with other expressions like “competence”, “freedom” and “feeling comfortable”. One participant said:

It will be -10 or something and they (first time campers) will be completely bundled up and be wearing way too much clothing and they start hauling these sleds and they suddenly realize that they are too warm and they start shedding their clothing, and they go “You know what? It’s not that cold, when I’m working, it’s really magical.” So I think that is really a big thing for (people). They think that they are just going to have to endure these cold temperatures for 4 days, but when they are working and they’re outside in those cold temperatures, it’s really pleasurable to be out there. (Kourtney)
Theme 2: Sense of Community

The second theme, sense of community refers to the meaningful social interactions and interpersonal experiences that participants’ attributed directly to their involvement in traditional winter camping. Each of the interviewees indicated that the feeling of community, which develops on trip, amongst fellow campers, is significant and meaningful and is in many ways a result of the activity itself. That is to say, specific characteristics of traditional winter camping, such as communal living in one large tent, the team or collaborative approach to travel and making camp, as well as environmental conditions both inside and outside the tent, foster strong interpersonal connections not experienced in other outdoor pursuits (e.g., canoe tripping).

Component 1: The canvas tent, a “home away from home”.

Many of the interview participants spoke at great length about the prospector-style canvas tent used in traditional winter camping. The tent, along with its accompanying woodstove, were described as a comfortable and home-like social space, in comparison to cold, survival-like shelter situations, such as cold tenting or sleeping in a snow cave. As one participant explains:

When you are wall tenting, you can stay out really the whole season and when you get warm weather or rainy weather, it’s not a survival situation; you just stay in the wall tent and hunker down until the weather changes. So those are pretty compelling things about the wall tent in terms of feeling like you belong in winter…Don’t get that with all those other techniques, the cold tenting, snow cave or the quinzhee. (Bill)

Warmth, hot water and space were all elements mentioned by participants to highlight the type of comfort they feel the traditional winter camping experience provides. Katja relayed that “having a wall tent and a woodstove and being able to heat up some water and have a proper
“wash” makes for a very “comfortable and enjoyable” experience; this idea was echoed more than once by the other interviewees:

The whole trip was warm and comfortable…it was almost two weeks. I washed my hair. I would never consider doing that on a (cold) winter camping trip. And you could stand up. You know, you are comfortable, you are probably sitting on something, you know just insulated and it’s just a much more inviting social environment. (Beth)

The canvas winter tents are warmed by small wood burning stoves and these stoves also provide a source of heat for boiling water and cooking meals. This “fireplace” near the front of each tent was described as a “special place”. As Beth says, it is the centre of much of the activity which brings campers together, “because you are also cooking on that woodstove, it has all of the community building aspects of (making and sharing) meals, it is all centered around that hearth”. Beth also commented on the turn taking that naturally evolves, in which each camper participates in collecting wood and maintaining the fire and how this adds to a sense of community and trust in one another:

When you are with a group, when you hear somebody else get up (at night) and start the woodstove and you know, feed it. That is kind of a nice feeling, because it is like people taking care of (other) people in the group. (Beth)

Also included in participants’ remarks, were comments that implied a romantic or aesthetic appreciation of the wall tent—it’s appearance and unique qualities were in some way impactful or important to the participant:

There’s something magical about the environment of a wall tent that’s heated. And there’s something beautiful too about the glow of the tent from the outside, when the candles are on in the tent and people’s flashlights are on and you are outside and it’s
cold and you are on the lake looking at the stars and you know that there is that warm
place to go back to. It just allows you to relax and to intervene with the stars or intervene
with the night and the cold and hearing the crack of the trees and knowing, it makes you
less afraid of that cold when you know there’s that warmth to return to, that glow that
anyway, it’s there. (Katja)

The comfort and safety, which the tent and stove provide, were seen as a means to an end for
the participants. Their ultimate goal is to spend time out in nature during the wintertime and the
specialized equipment and camping methods they use permit this, as Bill remarked, “I just love
the pure simplicity of throwing a tent and a stove and a bit of food onto a toboggan and feeling
like I can just go down and throw that tent up and just settle in and enjoy winter”. The wall tent
is a simple temporary shelter, but also warms, feeds, and brings campers closer together. The
tent’s shared space gives rise to a social phenomenon, forming group cohesion amongst the
campers. (Participants’ thoughts on living communally are discussed further in Theme 2,
Component 2).

Component 2: Sharing space, building community.

As touched on in Theme 2, Component 1, it is the sharing of a single shelter or the
communal nature of the traditional winter camping experience, which acts to help campers form
strong bonds while out on the “winter trial”. Although most tents are designed to sleep 4 to 6
individuals, some of the larger traditional winter camping tents can accommodate upwards of
15 people. In most cases, expeditions make use of a single tent to shelter all members of the
group while out camping—this method is in contrast to most camping done in the summer
months, where larger groups will bring several small tents, accommodating 2 or 3 individuals
each. The participants in this study all made mention of this intimate sharing of space and the
impact they believe it has on group formation or development. They made repeated comparisons to summertime wilderness camping experiences, and the use of multiple tents, when describing the “magic” or special effect that dwelling in a single shelter can have on a group of campers:

You don’t have the technology and the stuff, you’re really in nature and with each other and in a way that you’re not when you’re in any other situation. And summer camping does that too I think, but certainly as I said the magic of the tent, being squished in there together and eating in there together and laughing in there together and telling stories and playing music and telling jokes and that there’s just a magic to that coziness that isn’t there in the summer. (Katja)

And:

Another thing that stands out for me is the communal living. In the summer time, often you are sleeping with one maybe two people in a separate tent amongst a group of 10 people but in winter camping, you are sleeping all in one tent, you are eating in one tent, you are setting up one tent, and that initiates the bond that is so much deeper than you can achieve when you are summer camping I believe. (Katja)

And:

(I’ve had) 30 students all fitting in to one wall tent, or maybe not, 25 probably the most, and just knowing they are all leaning on each other, you know… having hot chocolate, laughing, telling great stories, singing great songs, so it is very group bonding that way. (Beth)
While revealing their thoughts aloud, the interview participants explored the reasons they believed the environment of the shared tent fostered community development. According to Katja:

(The) social experience is heightened when they’re cramped in together and there are people that they don’t know as well and they get to know each other. And it’s like whenever you are on a road trip with someone, you get to know them, when you are in a hotel room with someone, you get to know them that much better and it’s that aspect of being in a smaller place with a newer group is really unique. (Katja)

And Beth commented:

Because typically (in) winter, more people are sharing one tent, that I would say is where the group dynamics shift…So people have to find their own little space in amongst a crowded tent pretty much…and people’s tolerance you know, and people spill hot chocolate on your thermarest or you know, they are standing up and your drying boots are right in their nose. It can create humour and in some ways, the better part of the people’s tolerance comes out of humour because the people who don’t enjoy it as much or don’t return to doing it, they are the ones who struggle with that. They need more privacy. So, and like, there’s longer periods of time in that closer group dynamic. There is a better chance people are going to snore. You know, you can just kind of, the way I have seen it run typically, if kids are cold, (they) holler out “stoke it” and somebody else (the leader, teacher in this case) will stoke the woodstove for them. That can become a fun thing for a student, to know that they have that capability to get their teacher to get up. Or they see their teachers, or (fellow) high school students, they see their teachers needing to pee, needing to eat, needing to… (Beth)
These explanations make clear the correlation that the study participants make between the tight quarters and close company of the wall tent and the familiarity and sense of community that forms between campers. This sense of community or camaraderie that is nurtured by the winter camping tent is again a significant aspect of traditional winter camping and one that multiple participants indicated as meaningful or core to their experience.

Component 3: The gathering.

The preseason or pre-winter gathering is an important annual event for the traditional winter camping community. As described previously, these gatherings provide members of the community with an opportunity to attend a variety of workshops and presentations in order to share and learn from one another. These gatherings also provide a venue for newcomers to learn from experts and to try to integrate into the community. Nearly all of the interview participants had attended a preseason gathering at least once and all described their experiences in positive terms. The focus of their accounts centred on the rich learning opportunities offered and descriptions of the people whom they encountered at the gatherings. In general, the members of this community were depicted as “very friendly people” and welcoming of newcomers, but there were instances in which the interviewees described the integration process as “disconcerting” or “a little intimidating”. As Shawn explains:

It’s a good learning experience. I would say you feel like you are among friends, if you are a winter camper—in this traditional style. If you’re questioning or trying to maybe do (or be) both, or not quite sold on it—you might find it a little intimidating. (Shawn)

In describing the people encountered at a typical gathering, Bill shared his belief that they fall into one of two camps:
I would say (some of the) people are a bit obsessive, they really like this stuff. Like any field like this, there’s a collection of meticulous ‘gearheads’ and the equipment is thought through to a level that is shocking in terms of the attention to detail…People in the community really love the gear and tending to it and showcasing how comfortable they can be. The gear has never been my strength, but I have found (gatherings) to be gear heavy.

And:

They are very friendly people…There are also people who are very, very heritage-minded and very philosophical-minded and I tend to hang more in that camp. I love the attention to heritage and traditional ways of doing things. And there is a lot of that. That’s the group that I flocked to instead of gear-headed people, who would bring in traditional stuff, but somehow with a modern touch and you know, with stoves that are extra titanium as opposed to just the (regular) titanium, that kind of attention to detail.

(Bill)

Another participant compared these gatherings to other events or members of other recreational communities, where competition and a degree of boastfulness is more the norm for individuals. As described here:

Generally, these (gatherings) don’t have that many egos. Whereas, I would think you would get a lot more egos at a typical winter camping or you know, the Banff Film Festival—climbing, adventure sport kind of (event), where there is a reason for people to have always one-upped everybody else so they can finance a trip or do a speaker series on what they did. Whereas (these gatherings) are just a bunch of people who like
winter camping, who get together once a year, share stories, and tease each other about their tents during the tour of the tents. (Beth)

One of the assumptions made during the development of this research project, was that the traditional winter camping community possessed group behaviours consistent with those of other sport or leisure subcultures (Donnelly, 2007; Donnelly & Young, 1988; Thorton, 2005; Wheaton, 2000). Specifically, the social mechanisms used to identify, accept or turn away potential members—or in other words, the manner in which groups exhibit internal practices of “gatekeeping” in order to control or determine if a newcomer fits the established criteria to be accepted into the community. As indicated earlier, I myself had a personal experience where I felt as though I was being excluded from participating in the activity because a group member would not sell me the specialized equipment. This was also the case for Roger:

(The seller) was really hesitant at that point to think that, you know, to take others out was a huge responsibility in the winter time and it wasn’t to be taken lightly and I mentioned that I knew ‘Person A’ and that I knew ‘Person B’. Slowly he warmed up to the fact that, yes, maybe I actually did know something about what I was asking.

Eventually, as in my case, this participant was able to purchase equipment, but not before being vetted by the person who was selling the items. (Roger)

The participants of this study see the annual gatherings as an important aspect of their experience as traditional winter campers. These events provide them with an opportunity to converse with old friends and share stories, purchase, sell or trade equipment, and partake in the introduction and grooming of beginners. Although one participant highlighted the difficult experience they had trying to get started in the activity, for the majority of the interviewees their “initiation” process was positive and encouraging.
Theme 3: Personal Empowerment

The third and final theme, personal empowerment, speaks to the ways in which participation in traditional winter camping has led to an increased level of self-confidence for participants. Their involvement in winter camping and travel has provided them with a feeling of empowerment that has allowed them to not only take on successively more demanding expeditions, but also transfer this gained confidence and self-assurance into other arenas of their lives. For the participants of this study, traditional winter camping has had a meaningful impact on how they see, approach and engage in a variety of activities in their day-to-day lives.

Component 1: Strength and resilience.

For some of the study participants, the idea of personal empowerment was linked to the development and performance of physical skills. Examples of these included cutting wood, hauling a toboggan and setting camp—strenuous and demanding activities, which also require a degree of knowledge to execute properly. Katja described the difference between her initial experiences working with an axe as compared to her skill level at present:

At that time, I didn’t know yet that I would actually be leading trips, but I certainly didn’t have any of the skills, and splitting wood, I kept missing, I couldn’t swing an axe for the life of me, and it was not the experience it is now.

She then reflected on what this activity means to her presently:

I think as a woman, I really, I also really value being able to swing an axe and just role modeling that for younger women, is really important to me. (Katja)

For Bill, the physical aspect was described as “rewarding”, because he believed the work done by winter campers is such that it “lifts them away from their burdens and [everyday] lives”. He further explained:
I know this is going to sound counterintuitive, but our lives are so damn simple and easy relative to winter camping. You know, we switch on a light and we don’t even know where that energy is coming from. And so to know where that energy is coming from, because it is your own physical labour, because you are cutting the wood or what have you, it is so burdensome and it is rewarding. (Bill)

Participants also talked about developing resilience in the face of adversity or overcoming obstacles. Through the process of learning how to surmount these challenges, some of the interviewees noted that they experienced a “transformative” change. Such changes came about as a result of the physical work they completed as part of a group and also while performing independent tasks. Danny described the type of conditions faced when travelling in colder weather and the feeling that arises from doing it successfully:

Between the cold and the physical exertion, your hands can be cold, so you have to learn your knots better. It’s not quite as forgiving for little things. If you don’t have your snowshoes laced up well so that you can keep them on, your hands get cold every time you readjust them…Same with the toboggan, it keeps tipping over if you haven’t tied it on well or balanced it. It just becomes more physically tedious…Once you develop your own efficient system of doing things, you feel much more comfortable and confident on the trail. (Danny)

Kourtney describes challenging travel conditions and how meeting a challenge through teamwork can transform campers and build community, in much the same way as discussed in theme 2:

When you are in a group of people who have never done it before, you can really see the transformation happen…When a deep snowfall has happened, there’s always one person
in the front who’s breaking trail for everybody else and you know, the first person is really fast and the second person is really fast and then it gets potentially easier as you go down the line and it’s just like a flock of ducks or geese flying when the person at the front gets tired, they just pull over and fall back to the back of the line. And so it’s just a leapfrog effect. And everyone really bonds in that way because you know, when you stop for a glass of tea, you know, you don’t really talk during the day when you’re head down and you’re hauling, but everyone can sort of laugh about you know, the challenges or the beauty or you know, talk about what they saw. And it really brings the group together. (Kourtney)

For several of the interviewees, participation in the physical activities associated with traditional winter camping directly resulted in increased self-confidence and feelings of personal empowerment. Having the opportunity to develop and perform the necessary and important tasks involved in winter camping also contributed to individuals’ trust in their own abilities and awareness of the environmental conditions that they could endure. Several participants noted a deeper personal connection they felt with fellow campers and feelings of “trust” and “reliance” that develops when everyone is working together to overcome a physical challenge on the trail.

**Component 2: Do it yourself:**

For many of the participants, the opportunity to construct and craft a variety of items to be used while winter camping had important shared meaning and was seen as an embedded part of the traditional winter camping experience. For example, Kourtney remarked: “Well for me I think that one of the things that I really, really value is the opportunity to make much of the gear myself…I still get a lot of joy out of looking down and seeing moccasins on my feet that I made
and wiggling my toes and just thinking about how warm and comfortable they are.” The act of making and wearing a personal item of clothing such as winter moccasins or building and using a necessary piece of equipment like a wooden toboggan was described as “empowering” by several of the study participants. According to Shawn:

We have moved farther away from harvesting the materials and actually making things ourselves as we become more specialized in our trades and in our disciplines. And so then, we actually have less and less part in the things that we make and do…And so this is traditional winter camping, it’s a way to kind of step outside of that and look at kind of crafting a few things that we can actually use so that we can even harvest the materials and then make something and then apply it to the activities that we are dealing with firsthand and I think that is a really empowering experience.

The making of one’s own winter camping gear also means that the creator understands the design and could potentially repair it out on trip—this is another example of an empowering or confidence building aspect to this part of the experience. As Kourtney described here:

Because you made your own gear, you’re able to repair as well. And we believe that to be a safety precaution because, if you just bought a pair of footwear, you might not have that competence to do any field repairs and that becomes a safety hazard. To be able to repair your own gear in the field is a pretty rewarding feeling, and doing it with the old traditional patterns, it just makes you feel connected to where you’ve come from.

(Kourtney)

Several of the study participants noted that their winter camping related crafting activities have provided them with so much confidence that they were able to take on much
larger projects—that is to say, the confidence gained through their winter camping activities has transferred to other areas of their lives. As described by Danny:

Being able to make clothing myself, keeps me warm and comfortable in such a harsh environment. That has given me a lot of confidence that I can make so many other things myself from you know, other sort of craft or clothing type of items right up to you know a house or cabin myself that I have the confidence now that…I’ve made the little structure that can keep me warm on a winter’s day and I have the confidence now that I can make a larger structure or home that would also keep me warm on a winter day.

According to several of the interviewees, the “do it yourself” component of traditional winter camping initially arose because the required clothing and equipment was not easily sourced or available commercially. As a result, individuals decided to make these specialized items themselves. In recent years, much of the camping equipment used by traditional winter campers has become easier to find and can be purchased online. Although this change has occurred, many campers still choose to make much of their own gear, and for the reasons indicated above, see this practice as a significant part of the traditional winter camping experience.

Component 3: Resistance.

Although never explicitly specified, an underlying theme of resistance was present within the stories, thoughts and anecdotes shared by the study participants. That is to say, no one interviewee stated directly that they chose to winter camp in a traditional style because, for example, it was a way of actively resisting the highly commercial and consumptive patterns associated with typical wilderness camping experiences. But, the study participants alluded to situations in which they refused to accept typical camping practices, to comply with rules and regulations governing wilderness spaces, or to participate in purchasing behaviours consistent
with the dominant camping culture. This opposition was most evident in their usage of national and provincial parks:

So I tend not to (register and purchase a backcountry camping permit). And I’ve not been somebody that would go to a (provincial) park where you need permits. I find that’s something that would inhibit my involvement in the area. I would do it, and it’s not the permit per se and the money per se, it’s the having to be in place at a certain time that is just counter-intuitive and completely counter-in-logic with the outdoor travel experience. [It just doesn’t make sense] having to be somewhere on a certain night every night. (Bill)

Several participants also declared their noncompliance with some of the common rules that dictate how wilderness camping and travel should be practiced, such as the popular Leave No Trace camping protocol. According to Bill:

We are always leaving a trace. Just like caribous are leaving caribou trails everywhere on the land, we are too leaving trails on the land. I don’t like the leave no trace (movement). I do like camping responsibly and I do like aspiring to developing an awareness of place and feel that is facilitated the more you use natural materials responsibly. So I have a disconnect with the no trace movement. I think it is misguided.

Traditional winter campers’ choice of equipment and clothing was also discussed by interviewees and often positioned in such a way so as to demonstrate its difference in terms environmental impact. For example, Carl remarked: “People have done research studies on environmental impacts of using fossil fuels and using devices like (modern compact camping) stoves and where all the components of those stoves and fuel have come from, I think tracing them to the mine or whatever, as opposed to using wood to fuel a fire (for heating and
cooking).” This and similar comments were repeated by the study participants to highlight that an environmental impact does take place when camping, whether it is close by (i.e., at the actual campsite) or in a distant location where raw resources are extracted. Again described here:

But if you really look into it, there is contradiction everywhere and you know, being a (modern compact camp) stove with some refined fuel like white gas—where is that coming from? The same goes with all of the ABS plastics and Gore-Tex and factory-made things. I’m not trying to say that I’m sitting on a ‘high horse’, saying that traditional winter camping is necessarily better in that respect, I mean everything has downfalls. But I don’t think it’s any worse environmentally or sustainably. In fact, it could even be better because you are engaging with the landscape in the way you appreciate where the warmth is coming from, not just thinking about turning the switch an having heat or priming your MSR stove or whatever it is. (Shawn)

The act of traditional winter camping as a form of resistance was expressed through many of the activities and personal motivations that were described by the study participants. Although the interviewees did not directly state that their preference for this form of camping was specifically to oppose aspects of the typical wilderness camping experience, they shared a common opinion that traditional winter camping by its nature, did not fit with many of the established conventions related to typical wilderness camping culture and practice. And they valued that difference.

Summary

This chapter described the findings of the study and the main components that seem to characterize the traditional winter camping experience. These components were grouped into
three themes: (1) connection to the land (2) sense of community and (3) personal empowerment. I quickly learned that the study participants found their connection to land to be the most personally meaningful aspect of the traditional winter camping experience. This first thematic category was described in three ways: influence of the winter landscape, significance of human history and tradition, and the restorative impact on the physical self. Theme 2 explored the importance of community and interpersonal relationships that are embedded in the traditional winter camping experience. This was seen as being connected in many ways to the canvas wall tent and communal sharing of space. Finally, Theme 3 highlighted the personal positive effects that participants' felt resulted from their experiences traditional winter camping. I decided to draw attention to three of these: personal empowerment through experiences involving strength and resilience, handcraft and the do it yourself aspect of involvement in the outdoor pursuit, and the act of traditional winter camping as a form of personal resistance against the more dominant and incongruent practices of typical wilderness camping. In Chapter 6, I discuss the findings in relation to the literature review outlined in Chapter 2 and consider their implications for a variety of related outcomes, including further research.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

I started this research project with the expectation that the study participants would reveal very similar descriptions or accounts of the traditional winter camping experience. And my hope was, through this study, to uncover why traditional winter campers believe their methods and experiences differ in important ways from those of the typical wilderness camping community, i.e., how is this specific mode of camping a means of expressing a certain set of values that differ from that of the dominant wilderness camping culture? What this study has revealed, however, is that traditional winter campers experience this unique outdoor pursuit in different ways, attaching a variety of meanings to their participation. Similarly, the study participants did not share a universal motive for engaging in winter camping in a traditional way, but rather, the data highlighted multiple reasons why these individuals choose to partake in this specific activity. Although the results illustrated variation in the motives, meanings and experiences amongst those interviewed, many commonalities and complimentary ideas did exist and these were presented in Chapter 5.

In this final chapter, I revisit the three core themes and include my interpretation of the data presented therein and in relation to the body of literature reviewed in Chapter 2. It is here, where I reflect on those aspects of the traditional winter camping experience that I see as particularly significant. Based on the results I have gathered, I believe that there are several important things that can be learned from the traditional winter camping community; I discuss these and suggest how they might be applied to other contexts, in particular, to outdoor and environmental education. In the final part of this chapter, I outline areas for further research and
conclude with comment on the overall significance of traditional winter camping and its impact on participants’ lives.

The Three Themes Re-examined

*Connection to the Land*

There are many direct linkages that can be made between the meanings revealed in the first theme and the literature that was presented in Chapter 2. Within the first component, the winter landscape, the study participants repeatedly expressed feelings of connection to place. Rather than naming specific campsites or geographical locations, they attributed the human-environment interactions that had taken place within the winter landscape as the source of this attachment. That is to say, winter was the place of significance and meaning for the participants, not a particular travel route, park or wilderness area. As Stokols and Shumaker (1981) have suggested, places, or concepts like the winter landscape, can take on “shared meaning as a symbol endowed with social or cultural significance”. And as Garst (2005) posits, these sociocultural meanings are then likely relayed to other group members through social interaction. In this way, the winter landscape is clearly of important shared meaning to the majority of interviewees as the stories they recounted similarly highlighted experiences in the snow, on the ice, along the winter trail. They also highlighted the intimate interactions they had experienced with animals in wintertime. This strong connection to the land, as described by the study participants, has greater significance beyond any special affinity or attachment for a particular campsite or season. As David Gruenewald (2003) has suggested, “an understanding of it [place] is key to understanding the nature of our relationships with each other and the world” (p. 622). In this way, those who are connected to a place (e.g., the winter landscape) will
form a community around it, take responsibility for it, and protect it. Through their winter camping activities, the study participants have been able to develop and/or maintain a strong connection to natural environments, and may be avoiding some of the separation and alienation from the natural world that is experienced by many people in modern western society.

A connection to the land may be formed through a variety of outdoor recreational activities, including typical wilderness camping, as previously described in Chapter 2. However, it appears that traditional winter camping activities may possess the ability to foster a deeper connection to the land as a result of the constant and necessary interactions that take place between people and the environment (e.g., harvesting wood for fuel and building materials). Given this, a recurrent pattern could potentially exist in which campers take to the land for recreational reasons, are integrated into the landscape as part of those activities specific to traditional winter camping, develop a deep connection to the winter landscape, and then return to a location time and time again because of their connection to it. This deep connection to the land might in turn create adults, as Gruenewald (2003) has suggested, who are caring stewards of our natural environment. If this is true, it might be of particular interest to outdoor and environmental educators hoping to deliver learning outcomes related to environmental stewardship and sustainability. In the context of an educational experience, a traditional winter camping trip could provide rich and meaningful environmental learning experiences for students—fortunately, several teachers in the province of Ontario are already aware of this.

The restorative power of nature and special historical connections were also discussed in the previous chapter. Much in the same way that Knopf (1987) has described, several of the interviewees saw traditional winter camping as a restorative experience—highlighting the physical aspects of the activity, which, again they saw as connecting them to the natural
environment (e.g., harvesting and preparing firewood). Several of the study participants also described a historical connection to place. Either through their own ancestors or Canadian history, these interviewees felt a connection through the activities associated with traditional winter camping that are linked to historical practices and some older traditions.

Early on in the research project, it became clear that the participants in this study were benefitting in multiple ways from their participation in traditional winter camping activities. Several participants relayed significant accounts, in which they described experiencing a deep, perhaps even a spiritual connection to the land and wilderness. Only a few participants spoke pointedly about the direct link they believe exists between time spent in nature and improved health, however, each person did in some way comment about the health benefits they perceived or associated with spending extended time outdoors and in natural spaces. The physical benefits of recreating outside were described by the study participants on multiple occasions. However, what appears more significant is the impact that traditional winter camping activities also have on a person’s mental state. The people I interviewed, repeatedly made mention of how good it felt to be outside and in the wilderness during the wintertime and how it immediately calmed and focused them. These comments are very similar to those findings presented by Kaplan (1986), Roggenbuck and Driver (2000), Hine (2009) and others, which show that camping can provide an escape from stress and makes people feel refreshed, relaxed, renewed, and alive. The restorative aspect of the traditional winter camping experience is clearly important when we consider the negative health effects (e.g., extreme stress, anxiety) being attributed to urban environmental conditions. From the data I have collected, I believe there are potentially more mental health benefits associated with traditional winter camping, than say typical wilderness camping, mainstream adventure sports or other outdoor pursuits. By
its very nature, traditional winter camping immerses people into the landscape and requires them to interact with the environment in ways that would not be experienced in hiking, canoeing, or engaging in another form of camping. The essential activities of traditional winter camping (e.g., travelling on and through snow, harvesting wood for fuel and building materials, chiseling through lake ice in search of water, sewing your own moose hide moccasins) have the potential to create a deeper connection between the body and mind, as well as to the land and other living things. In this way, traditional winter camping could be described as a sort of holistic recreational experience that through its various practices connects people more closely to themselves and to the land.

*Sense of Community*

The second theme, sense of community, captured the meaningful social interactions and interpersonal experiences that participants’ attributed directly to their involvement in traditional winter camping. As indicated by several studies described in Chapter 2, social interaction is shown to be important to campers and many campers see their participation as a way of connecting with others, spending time with family and friends, and meeting new people (Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Fredrickson 1998; Pohl, Borrie & Patterson, 2000). The findings in these reports were echoed by the data presented in the previous chapter. What is more, the distinct aspects of the traditional winter camping experience, such as communal living in the canvas tent and the group approach to winter travel and setting camp, were seen as unique factors that fostered and enhanced the interpersonal connections between people. Several of the study participants commented that they have not experienced this type of group bonding or collaborative living situation in any other context, wilderness camping or otherwise.
During the data collection process it was immediately obvious how much the interviewees valued the communal living and group travel aspect of the traditional winter camping experience. And for the study participants who work in education and employ traditional winter camping trips in their courses of instruction, the educational impact of these experiences was again strongly emphasized. These study participants believe, just as Kellert (1998) and Lichtenstein (1985) have found, that camping activities aid in the development of many important interpersonal skills. However, the study participants see traditional winter camping as going beyond that which can be gained from typical camping experiences. They claim it is unique and multifaceted, in the different ways it challenges individuals and groups, bonds people together, and fosters community amongst classmates. They described their curriculum-based, traditional winter camping trips as an opportunity for students to work closely together to tackle authentic challenges out in the woods using the skills they had learned in school. Yet, it was also clear that these educators placed great value and importance on the social learning and developmental aspects of these experiences, which they saw as existing outside of the mandated learning expectations. That is to say, they believed that within each winter camping trip was the possibility for many rich learning opportunities that could nurture traits like compassion, tolerance, patience, and cooperation—areas not often explicitly taught or experienced in secondary school classrooms.

Personal Empowerment

Personal empowerment was a theme that emerged from the data repeatedly and in multiple ways. All of the study participants expressed meanings that mirrored those described by Knopf (1987): feelings of confidence, a sense of increased control, and improved personal competence. Through physical acts such as cutting wood with an axe in order to maintain a fire,
the participants noted gains in self-confidence and self-reliance. They became empowered by simply doing things for themselves—simple living tasks that were a necessary part of the winter camping experience. In addition, the handcraft or do it yourself aspect of traditional winter camping was also noted as contributing to feelings of personal empowerment. By being able to produce something of quality, having it work effectively on trip and possessing the skill to repair it, the individual who created a piece of camping equipment or clothing experienced a significant boost in their self-confidence. This increase was so significant that participants believed it transferred over into other aspects of their lives, giving them the confidence to take on greater tasks in other domains.

As highlighted at the end of the previous chapter, acts of resistance were identified within the interview data, however, the actions or behaviours that were described were never defined as such by the interviewees. Their resistance took the form of rule breaking and going against commonly practiced protocols and norms, e.g., low impact camping protocols seemingly do not apply to traditional winter campers when they cut down trees for wood to fuel their stoves or for posts to support their tents. Their resistance was a form of empowerment for these individuals, as they judged their acts to be morally correct and ethically acceptable. For example, because they saw traditional winter camping as no more environmentally damaging than typical wilderness camping, it was seen as reasonable to break established rules and regulations and follow the community’s own set of standards. In addition, the cutting of wood was justified because it is seen as an authentic, necessary and central aspect of the activity, which was seen as having little impact on the environment due to the small number of active traditional winter campers. In addition to materials and practice, place is also a site of resistance for traditional winter campers, as it is common for campers to not register or pay before
accessing wilderness parks in the wintertime or making use of designated camping sites. Although not fully revealed in the results of this study, it is likely that this choice is made in order to avoid explaining the nature of the activity, which would likely not fall within the accepted camping practices of many parks.

The purpose of this study was to examine the traditional winter camping experience from the perspective of the participant with the aim of describing the personal meanings that they attach to this specialized recreational activity. To that end I have investigated the following four research questions:

1. What are the personal meanings that traditional winter campers attach to their experiences?
2. What factors led to their decision to take up the activity of traditional winter camping?
3. How has participation in traditional winter camping affected changes in their own attitudes towards nature, wilderness travel, physical or mental health, personal identity and feelings of self-reliance?
4. What are the unique learning outcomes that could be achieved by including traditional winter camping activities as part of outdoor education experiences?

With respect to the first question, the data have revealed three discrete themes, which describe the personal meanings that the study participants attach to their traditional winter camping experiences. The second question, which addresses the factors that led to their participation in traditional winter camping, offered a look at each individuals’ reason for taking up this specialized outdoor pursuit. The data showed that the participants in this study shared many similar motives, including the opportunity to spend extended amounts of time outdoors in
the wintertime with comfort and security, and connecting with the land and others. The third question, designed to explore the effect of participation, provided rich data. Participation in traditional winter camping affected changes in the lives each of the participants interviewed. Through an increased awareness of humans’ consumptive patterns and use of natural resources, to an improved sense of awareness or feeling of connection to the land, to an increased level of self-confidence and self-reliance—the phenomenon of traditional winter camping has clearly had an influence on these people in significant ways. The final question considered the unique learning outcomes that might be achieved by including traditional winter camping activities as part of outdoor education experiences. Here, the data included several outcomes similar to those provided in response to question three (e.g., increased awareness of humans’ consumptive patterns and use of natural resources, an increased level of self-confidence and self-reliance), However, it was the strong community and group building aspect of the activity that was expressed and emphasized most frequently.

Implications for Outdoor Education

Outdoor Education is an ambiguous term for any activity taking place outdoors and having an educative intent. It is often used interchangeably with other terms including: experiential education, adventure education, outdoor learning and environmental education. Outdoor Education can include a variety learning activities such as: ecological field studies, games and initiative tasks, hiking, canoeing, rock climbing, high ropes or challenge courses, interpretive nature walks and camping. Conceptualized as the convergence between environmental education, outdoor activities, and social and personal development, Foster and Linney (2007) have defined the term through its four main goals that include: environmental
education; education in support of curriculum objectives; education for character development; and education for physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Outdoor education has gained momentum in the last two decades, as many educational stakeholders believe that it is a key component in educating for a sustainable future. In this way, outdoor education is seen as a means of fostering both a deep emotional bond with nature and an intellectual understanding of ecological systems—the result being that children grow into responsible stewards of the planet and are concerned with sustaining all life.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how several of the study participants saw traditional winter camping as a highly valuable learning experience for secondary school students. Specifically, it was those interviewees who work as schoolteachers and outdoor educators that offered their observations on the significant impact that traditional winter camping experiences have had on their students. Through these accounts, we can see how traditional winter camping goes beyond the learning outcomes achieved through a typical wilderness camping trip or standard outdoor education field trip, offering students a richer and more meaningful educational experience. Through the unique combination of activities associated with this form of winter camping, students can connect with the natural world; build strong interpersonal skills; and develop enhanced feelings of self-competency, resiliency, and confidence. In the context of a learning activity, traditional winter camping has the capacity to intensify all of what outdoor education is trying to achieve. It takes place outdoors and directly connects students with the natural environment—developing knowledge, skills, and a strong environmental ethic within students. Traditional winter camping is highly experiential and hands-on, integrating multiple subject areas together and relating curricular expectations to real life problems and ecological systems. It provides an authentic opportunity for personal and interpersonal growth,
including the development of traits like confidence, empathy, responsibility, communication and teamwork. And finally, traditional winter camping offers students the chance to be active outdoors and become physically, emotionally and spiritually engaged in a recreational pursuit that is personally meaningful and environmentally sustainable.

Exploring the value of traditional winter camping as an outdoor education activity at the secondary level was only a peripheral aim of this research study, however, based on the data collected, its importance has become a significant finding. The need for authentic and experiential learning experiences that deeply connect secondary students to the more-than-human world is critically important—traditional winter camping is one such experience. Although further research would need to be undertaken in order to determine the direct impact of traditional winter camping activities on secondary student learning, the many inherent benefits of this experience appear to transfer over when applied to outdoor education.

Implications for Further Research

Several new questions have emerged that could be explored by further research. First, this research study did not directly compare traditional winter camping experiences with other more typical wilderness camping experiences (i.e., canoe tripping, backpacking) or outdoor recreational activities (i.e., skiing, cycling). Given this, it would be interesting to determine the extent to which these same individuals find other outdoor pursuits personally meaningful and in what ways. Second, some of the same research questions used in this study could be applied again in order to investigate the secondary school students’ experiences traditional winter camping, and it would also be interesting to further explore the motivations and aims of outdoor education teachers that select traditional winter camping as a structured learning activity for
their students. A third area for further inquiry would be to explore the increasing commercialization of this activity (i.e., the availability to now purchase much of this specialized camping equipment online) and the reaction to this by members of the traditional winter camping community. And a fourth line of inquiry might involve a comparison between traditional winter camping and other nature-based sport and recreational activities, in order to assess how participants’ close encounters with natural environments have influenced awareness over environmental concerns (e.g., surfing communities who have formed action groups due to concerns over water pollution). I speculate that those doing research on activities that work to reconnect people with the land or to dissolve the dichotomy between humans and the “natural world” would find traditional winter campers as a rich source for data.

One of the instigating factors that drew me to this topic of research was my own experience as a newcomer, trying to become involved in traditional winter camping yet facing many impediments to doing so. Throughout the beginning of the research process, I was interested in knowing whether or not others had experienced similar barriers to participation and/or accessing the traditional winter camping community, and why this situation existed. This area of inquiry went unresolved as only two of the study participants described situations in which they felt as if they were “an outsider” or that they “didn’t qualify” or meet a specific standard, whereas the majority of the interviewees experienced few if any barriers in joining the community, feeling accepted or being allowed access to purchase the specialized equipment. And so, I believe that this line of inquiry remains inconclusive and in need of further investigation—obviously some sort of gatekeeping mechanism is in place, but when and why it operates is undetermined. Early on I had been interested in exploring traditional winter camping as a “subculture”. The traditional winter camping community as described by the interviewees,
may fit within Thorton’s (2005) description of a sport or leisure subculture, but again this is an idea that would require further investigation. Research done on other leisure subculture groups suggests that membership and identity are influenced by visual markers like the clothing worn and equipment used by a participant, as well as (and decidedly more crucial) their ability to perform an actual skill or demonstrate their level of knowledge and expertise. Traditional winter camping follows this pattern, as members of the community share a distinct, yet common aesthetic, choosing to wear “rustic” clothes when camping, such as canvas anorak-styled pullovers, woolen sweaters and moose hide mukluks. These clothing choices work to signify a member’s insider status and identify any individual not following this established approach to dress as less committed to the activity or lacking the prerequisite knowledge and authenticity revered by the community. Like the clothing worn, the equipment used identifies individuals as members of this specific community or as insiders. The canvas prospector-style walled tent and stove is the item most emblematic of traditional winter camping. Visually, it symbolizes the values most regarded by the community—the bottomless tent held erect by felled fir poles represent the unbuffered connection to the land; its uncomplicated design and plain material speak to the importance of functionality and simplicity. The freshly hewn evergreen boughs that cover the ground inside the tent demonstrate knowledge of indigenous practices. However, putting appearance aside, it is the actual level of skill and knowledge possessed by the individual that determines their status, authenticity and identity as a member of the community. And so, the ability of the camper to set-up the walled tent and to heat it continuously throughout the camping experience is a critical piece of performance required to gather status and be accepted. In addition, the demonstration of other skills are important, like: the ability to make ones’ own clothing or camping equipment, perform technical bushcraft skills or share
important folk knowledge are also revered and work to elevate status within the group. But, for an activity done in the wilderness and often without peer spectators, how does the community regulate itself, maintain boundaries and/or avoid slippages? Perhaps this is the role of the preseason gathering. Clearly, there is more here to consider.

Concluding Statement

The people I interviewed for this study shared stories of their traditional winter camping experiences. Their voices have revealed a unique and multidimensional outdoor pursuit that has significant and varied meaning for participants. What is more, this specific form of wilderness camping has impacted these people in different and important ways. This thesis has described many of the meanings and benefits associated with typical camping experiences, and in general, camping related activities are associated with many positive outcomes and possess important meanings for those who participate in them. The traditional winter campers that I interviewed relayed many of the same meanings and outcomes that were identified in the camping literature, however, they also identified several positive benefits that were significantly enhanced through this form of camping. Specifically, the interviewees indicated that traditional winter camping activities foster a deep connection to the landscape or wilderness spaces; promote strong interpersonal relations, community and camaraderie; and also empower participants through increased feelings of self-competency, resiliency, and confidence. It is these aspects of the activity that I see as particularly significant and the central finding of this work. Few recreational pursuits offer people as meaningful and multifaceted of an experience as this one clearly does. I initially assumed that traditional winter camping attracted a certain person,
seeking a specific type of recreational experience, but know now that different people are drawn
to this activity for different reasons, and take away multiple things from their experiences.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

To: [Name of Invited Participant]

Subject: Traditional Winter Camping Research Study – An Invitation to Participate

My name is Kyle Clarke and I am a Graduate Student in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen’s University. As someone who is actively involved in traditional winter camping, I am writing to request your participation in my Master’s research project which aims to gain a better understanding of the traditional winter camping experience and to learn what meanings this activity holds for those involved.

As part of this research, I am inviting you to participate in an interview. I have attached a Letter of Information that explains, in greater detail, this research and a copy of the Consent Form.

If you would like to participate in this study, please reply to this email (kyle.clarke@queensu.ca) or contact me at 613-545-5343 to discuss the details.

Sincerely,

Kyle Clarke
MA Candidate
School of Kinesiology and Health Studies, Queen’s University
28 Division Street
Kingston, Ontario
K7L 3N6
Tel: 613-545-5343
kyle.clarke@queensu.ca
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INFORMATION

An Exploration of the Traditional Winter Camping Experience

Dear Possible Participant,

This research is being conducted by me, Kyle Clarke, as part of my Master’s research, in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen’s University. This study has been granted clearance by the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans” and with the university’s own policies.

What is this study about? The general purpose of this research is to improve our understanding of outdoor recreational activity in Canada and to provide new research in this area. My specific goal is to gain a better understanding of traditional winter camping. To do so I will conduct interviews with traditional winter campers in order to learn what meanings this activity holds for them. The results of this project have potential value in assisting outdoor educators and recreation specialists in their planning, programming and instruction. In addition, this study would add to the body of knowledge pertaining to the evolution of wilderness-based recreational activity.

What will my participation in this study involve? Your participation in the study will consist of one interview of approximately 60 minutes in length. The interview will take place over the phone, via video conferencing (e.g., Skype) or in person at the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen’s University. The interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study.

Is my participation voluntary? Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason, without pressure or consequence of any kind, and you may request the removal of all or part of your data from the research. You may also choose not to answer certain questions during the course of the interview. To withdraw from the research you simply need to contact me to let me know. (Kyle Clarke: kyle.clarke@queensu.ca; 613-545-5343).

What will happen to my responses? I will keep your responses confidential to the extent possible. Only myself and my academic supervisor (Dr. Mary Louise Adams) will have access to the information you provide. While the results of the study may be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations or publications will maintain individual confidentiality to the extent possible. A pseudonym will replace your name on the interview transcripts. In any publications or presentations I will refer to you only by this pseudonym and I will also make sure not to include any other information by which you might be identified. I will retain the interview recording only until the completion and acceptance of
my thesis. I will retain the transcripts and any other notes or materials related to this project for five years, after which time they will be destroyed.

**Will I be compensated for my participation?** You will not receive any monetary compensation for your time. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of any findings that result from the study.

**What if I have concerns?** Any questions about study participation may be directed to me, Kyle Clarke, at kyle.clarke@queensu.ca, 613-545-5343 or to my academic supervisor, Dr. Mary Louise Adams, at mla1@queensu.ca, 613-533-6000 x 74723. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081.

**What do I do if I am interested in participating in this study?** If you are interested in participating in this study please reply to this email or telephone me, Kyle Clarke, at 613-545-5343 to arrange an interview. If you choose to participate, we will discuss this letter and the attached consent form in more detail at the beginning of the interview.

Sincerely,

Kyle Clarke
MA candidate
School of Kinesiology and Health Science, Queen’s University
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

Interview Participants

Name (please print clearly): ________________________________

1. I have read the affixed Letter of Information. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that my participation will take the form of a single interview, which will be conducted by telephone, by Skype (or similar technology) or in person at the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies, Queen’s University. The interview will last approximately one hour. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and that the recording will be transcribed. I understand that, upon request, I may have a full description of the results of the study after its completion. I understand that the researcher, Kyle Clarke, intends to make oral presentations and to write and publish articles that present the findings of the study.

3. I understand that my confidentiality will be protected to the extent possible by appropriate storage and access of data and by the removal of my name and any information by which I could be identified. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time and that I may request the removal of all or part of my data without negative consequences.

4. I am aware that I can contact the researcher, Kyle Clarke, by telephone at 613-545-5343 or by email at kyle.clarke@queensu.ca. I may also contact his supervisor, Dr. Mary Louise Adams, by telephone at 613-533-6000 x 74723 or by email at mla1@queensu.ca. I am also aware that any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081.

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Kyle Clarke.
Retain the second copy for your records.

____________________________________
I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Participant’s Name (Please Print):

____________________________________
Participant’s Signature:
Date: ______________________ Telephone:
___________________________________________________

Please check one of the following statements:
___ I grant permission to record my voice during the interview
___ I do NOT grant permission for voice recording during the interview
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the traditional winter camping/walled tenting experience to someone unfamiliar with it?

2. How did you first learn about this form of winter camping? What drew you to this activity? What was your first experience like?

3. What are some of your strongest memories associated with traditional winter camping?

4. What aspect(s) of this activity seem most personally meaningful or valuable to you?

5. How would you describe the traditional winter camping community and your participation in it?

6. What are your thoughts about other forms of wilderness camping in the winter (i.e., 4 season tenting, quinzhees/snow caves, etc.)?

7. How has your involvement in traditional winter camping changed over time?

8. How often do you go traditional winter camping? How much time do you devote to it (e.g., time spent out actually camping/average # of nights per year during the last 10–20 years, time you devote to construction/repair of equipment and related crafts, trip planning/preparation, etc.)?

9. What do you feel are some of the benefits from participating in traditional winter camping? Have any aspects of what you have learned while traditional winter camping transferred or carried over into your everyday life? (i.e., Has your participation in traditional winter camping changed any element of your everyday life?)

10. Participants in other research studies have indicated that wilderness camping experiences have affected their ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC, as well as PERSONAL CHOICES and ATTITUDES quite a bit or completely. How does this compare to your experiences with traditional winter camping? Do you agree or disagree?

11. What do your friends and family think about your winter camping activities? Have you introduced others to the walled tent style of winter camping? If yes, how did they respond? If no, why not?

12. What types of outdoor activities did you and your family participate in when you were a child (5-12 years of age)? What other outdoor activities do you do now? In the summertime?
13. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? What is your occupation? What is/was your parents’ occupation? Where do you live now and where did you grow up? How old are you?

14. Is there anything that I didn’t think to ask you, that I should have?