

If Burke had been a naturalist...: telling and retelling national narratives

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Abstract

Myth plays a role in shaping the way outdoor educators develop pedagogy and curriculum, and its influence needs to be critically evaluated in such processes.

In mythic narratives about Australian culture the Burke and Wills Expedition of 1860 is an icon: a story whose significance has often been evoked in discussion of a national ethos and relationship with nature. As an expedition and an exploration it also shares a strong element with a significant outdoor education practice, the *journey*.

I argue that the mythic status of the ‘explorer’ story as journey is a significant influence on outdoor education curriculum and practice in Australia. This practice and the assumptions about educational value that surround it have not been a fruitful guide for outdoor education curriculum and practice. Its uncritical acceptance limits development of an Australian approach to Australia and actually reinforces an ultimately destructive set of ideas. Approaches that depend on journeying for their rationale and shape are insufficiently concerned with developing knowledge of *place* that would enable us to better explore the full weight of our interdependence with the land.

However, mythic ideas are contestable, and in that contest can be found other ways of seeing and relating to Australian nature.

If Burke had been a naturalist ... : telling and retelling national narratives

Does outdoor education have an Australian curriculum?

This question was posed, amongst others, a couple of years ago in the Journal of Curriculum Studies (Brookes 2002). Brookes’ answer, crudely summarised was: in its present form, no.

Should it have? Does it matter if it doesn’t? Brookes argued that the need for reconciliation with Aborigines and a less destructive relationship with the environment are two powerful reasons why it should, indeed must engage more powerfully, thoughtfully and explicitly with Australian place, knowledge and experience.

If this is so then what attention does the de facto Australian curriculum give these matters? Although I can’t go into details here, Brookes argues that by failing to pay proper attention to the nature of the places outdoor education uses in its activities, and by relying too much on abstract, universalist ideas in conducting these activities,

outdoor education theorists and practitioners have fallen into the trap of essentially continuing a kind of ‘colonizing mind set’: that is, they behave much as nineteenth century colonisers did, and in so doing demonstrate the same insensitivity to the Australian bush and indigenous culture as most colonisers—but with presumably fewer excuses.

The view that colonial culture could have taken different paths, approaches or ideals in engaging with Australian nature and people is currently attracting attention. Griffiths (1996), Bonyhady (1991), Hill (2002) and Duyker (2003) all explore a more complex reality than that presented by colonial ideologues and as such offer neglected insights, overlooked encounters, missed opportunities, effaced commitments and diverse relationships. Brookes also briefly suggests, for example, that club bushwalking until the mid-1980s pursued individual and collective building of local knowledge and narratives, a kind of indigenising of the landscape (Brookes, (2002).

My purpose in this paper is to have a look at one of the best known and influential colonial encounters with the Australian reality, the Burke and Wills Expedition of 1860. The story has taken on mythic dimensions, that is, cultural significance greater than itself, and through this imaginative engagement it informs attitudes and values about Australian identity and place in an historically evolving process. I want to examine the myth to show how explorer values have informed outdoor education practice and to see whether some recent revised or varied versions of the myth offer other ways of relating to Australia for outdoor educators in the twenty first century.

But outdoor education isn’t an expedition

Whilst an expedition isn’t a field trip, and exploration isn’t education, there are many similarities between arguments about the Burke and Wills Expedition and the debates and dilemmas that are the bread and butter of outdoor education discourse. Even the terms ‘expedition’ or ‘exploration’ derive from colonial practices that also include military practice, Outward Bound and Scouting, forming part of what Payne (2002) calls activity histories for outdoor education. The typical common characteristic of expeditions, exploring and outdoor education is the self-sufficient extended experience or journey¹. Characteristic issues common to all three are ideas about styles of leadership and travel, group dynamics, approaches to risk and safety, the importance of survival skills in difficult settings, the constraints or opportunities imposed by the setting or activity, the role of specific skills needed for exploration and discovery, including making maps, or making attentive use of those made by others, with a consequent focus on certain kinds of artefact or pattern in the landscape.

Within outdoor education there is no agreement as to which of the inherited elements of this model offer a best fit to various claims for *educational* benefit, or should be paramount. Adventure therapists (Brand & Smith, (1999, 2000) and Handley, (1998) accept the journey as the framework of their practice without analysis. The journey

¹ By this I mean any experience that involves covering a distance during more than a few hours in the bush: most Australians would rarely experience this in daily life. A journey can be short, as in climbing a cliff or paddling a stretch of river, or an extended experience.

should be long and difficult enough to need use of managed stress and risk to achieve self-knowledge and independence in the ‘harsh and often unforgiving environment’ of undefined ‘wilderness’ settings. Here the role of the leader is to make the experience *appear* to be like a colonial exploring enterprise. They advise leaders to ‘keep the whole group occupied and allow little free time’ including strategies to ‘pad out the day’ if the group threatens to arrive at a destination too early, by faking getting lost or an injury.

Socially critical outdoor educators such as Martin and Thomas (2001) and Thomas and Thomas (2001) propose other kinds of journey, devised to stimulate general emotional or aesthetic responses to nature that are intended to enable us to critically re-evaluate the everyday world. These journeys sometimes include environmental education as a way to less impactful or more appreciative relationships to nature, looking at ‘sites’ or ‘issues’ or at specific fields such as geology, botany and anthropology. It is not clear the extent to which movement over distance or self-sufficiency are important here. Brookes argues that neither form of practice adequately offers an Australian curriculum because both are a simulation of an insufficient reality. Neither is sufficiently concerned with developing knowledge of place that is at once spiritual and factual in a way that explores the full weight of our interdependence with the land.

This is not to ignore the ‘confusing tangle of influences and associations’ that come from other cultural influences (Brookes 2002). But here I intend to argue that the mythic status of the ‘explorer’ story as journey is a significant influence on outdoor education curriculum and practice in Australia. Its uncritical acceptance limits development of an Australian approach to Australia and actually reinforces destructive ideas. However, mythic ideas are contestable, capable of changing with changing realities, and in contests over their meaning can be found other ways of seeing and relating to Australian nature.

About the Expedition

The Victorian Exploring Expedition was the most elaborately planned and equipped in Australian history. Sponsored by the Royal Society and paid for by public subscription, its objectives were both scientific and economic, as the aim was to cross the continent from south to north, finding new territory and opportunity.

There were doubts from the first about the skills and experience of the leader, Irishman Robert O’Hara Burke, and the chaotic nature of the departure and difficulties in organization and people management in the early stages did nothing to allay these fears. The expedition carried with it over 21 tons of equipment, transported by 26 camels, 21 horses and several wagons. It was designed to meet every eventuality in the unknown interior. Items included an oak table, a copper bath, a library of books, scientific equipment, a cart that could convert into a boat, fishing equipment, limejuice for scurvy, waterproof coats, dandruff brushes and rum for the camels, beads and mirrors for the ‘natives’ (Bonyhady, 1991; Moorhead, (1963). In other words, the expedition was intended to spend a lot of time living in and investigating the country it passed through. For this reason there were two German naturalists—artist Becker and doctor Beckler—and a surveyor, Wills, as well as twelve other men, including camel expert Landells who was second in command.

It took two months for the over-equipped expedition to struggle to the limits of settlement at Menindie on the Darling, shedding equipment and men as it went, including Landells who quarrelled with Burke. Burke split the party, taking a lightly loaded group of eight men on to Coopers Creek to establish a base camp, and leaving the bulk of the expedition in the hands of a newly appointed local, Wright. He left behind the naturalists, having already made it plain that there would be no time or support given to scientific work and that these specialists were to work as labourers like the rest.

At Cooper's Creek he split the party again, leaving William Brahe in charge of three others there, with confused verbal instructions, to await the arrival of the rest of the party and supplies any day. With little equipment and enough food for three months, he headed north into the desert at the height of summer with three others, Wills, young ex-soldier King and former sailor Grey. In an extraordinary effort of endurance and forced marches they crossed the continent in less than two months, but began to struggle with scurvy and starvation early on the return, resulting in the death of Gray. Having spent a day painfully burying Gray, the party staggered back into the camp at dusk on 21st April, to find from the note buried under the now famous DIG tree that Brahe had left that morning, after 4 months and five days. Brahe had waited in vain for relief and support from the south, and his own party was suffering from the onset of scurvy. After resting a couple of days and recouping their strength a little from the stores left by Brahe, Burke, Wills and King set off to find their way to safety down the creek towards Adelaide on an unknown route.

To the south, at Menindie, Wright, whom Burke had appointed in charge in a very impromptu manner, had done almost nothing, having inadequate transport or funds to pay for it, with no confirmation for his appointment by the Royal Society, and some room for doubt about what was expected of him. An effort to send a message to Cooper's Creek with Hodgkinson, Purcell and an Aboriginal guide Dick resulted in the near death of the two Europeans, who were rescued by Beckler after Dick went for help. Wright then made a belated and disorganised attempt to move the whole party north, was strongly harassed by Aborigines concerned for their water supplies, lost four men including Becker to scurvy and general debilitation, and was forced to retreat. Brahe's retreating party overtook Wright's in a pitiable state half-way between Cooper's Creek and Menindie. He and Wright then returned briefly to Coopers Creek but saw none of the small signs that Burke's party had returned. They did not disturb the DIG tree under which Burke had buried an account of their state and intentions, and returned to Melbourne to raise the alarm. The Royal Society responded by sending Alfred Howitt to find the explorers.

Burke, Wills and King had been unable to find their way through the maze of dry creek beds on the lower Cooper. Despite attempts of the Yantruwanta people to help them with food, both Burke and Wills died in late June, leaving King living a tenuous existence with the Aborigines until found by Howitt. The public greeted news of the disastrous expedition with extraordinary interest and emotion, and the details were the subject of furious debate from the time they began to emerge, and throughout the subsequent Royal Commission. This enquiry attributed mild censure in roughly equal proportions to Burke, Brahe, Wright and the Royal Society and because of its narrow

terms of reference did substantial collateral damage to the reputation of others involved, particularly Beckler.

Howitt later returned to bring back the remains of Burke and Wills to a grand funeral, but the bodies of the other five members of the expedition were left where they lay.

Reactions to the events

Neal Ascherson takes myth to mean a historical narrative that is used to support wider assumptions about moral worth or national identity (Ascherson, 2002). The Burke and Wills disaster quickly became an example of this process. The myth's main theme as it emerged immediately after the disaster was the pre-eminent achievement of the officers and leaders, Burke and Wills, which necessitated concealment of some aspects of the story that did not easily fit the heroic image (Bonyhady 1991, 205-13). It overshadowed King and Gray's role as merely the 'men' who contributed through obedience. Suffering and death in leadership was evidence of superior experience. King was even belittled by the *Argus* on the grounds that his endurance was a mere physical accident, not to be compared with the moral heroism of his leaders (Bonyhady, 1991).

Grand monuments and portentous art works ² reinforced this hierarchy of significance by omitting Gray and or King, aggrandising Burke's stature, incorporating the Aborigines as attendant admirers of the dying heroes, dramatising and glorifying scenes of the explorers in a quasi-religious manner in which hell is Australian nature. The massive canvas commissioned from Longstaff of the scene at the DIG tree enshrines an enduring image of the explorers trapped in a wasteland, betrayed by lack of loyalty.

Popular estimations of the journey ignored or denigrated the naturalists and others who didn't make the crossing along with their various qualities and styles of contribution. Although attention was drawn by a few to the fact that neither the geographical nor the scientific objectives of the Expedition had been achieved, as Burke and Wills' brief notes supplied scant evidence of the detail of what they had seen or where they had been, such concerns were swamped by official view of 'success' (Bonyhady 1991, 198).

The story was soon presented in standard school texts as a tragic but necessary event in colonial achievement (Long, 1903), and the Scouting movement, in search of Australian paradigms, also kept the story alive, celebrating Burke and Wills as 'pioneer scouts' illustrating the virtues of 'self-sacrifice, chivalry, courage, good temper, and cheeriness' (Bonyhady, 1991:225).

Even from earliest times there were some serious cracks in this façade. That Howitt was able to negotiate easily the country which had been so pitiless to Burke was impossible to ignore. The obvious fact that the Aborigines lived with relative ease in a land so murderous to the European conquerors also posed questions about cultural

² Examples of works by Short, Scott, Strutt, Longstaff and Greig can be seen in Bonyhady (1991).

realities.

For almost a century these questions were kept at bay by one form or another of cultural blindness resulting in some contradictions in the main accounts. Frank Clune's best selling account *Dig* (Clune, 1981, (1981) described the Aborigines in a welter of racist epithets as hostile or pathetically innocent. Although he notices that the Aborigines prospered in a country where his heroes died, he takes refuge in a patronizing joke: the Aborigines 'amused themselves by the age-old Australian pastime of watching the other bloke work' (Clune 1937, 70). Amusingly, this observation inadvertently promotes the Yantruwanta to a central place in Australian culture. Clune's observation meshes with a later one by Moorhead (1963) who notes how 'the Cooper's Creek blacks had again caught sight of these incredible bearded white men who dragged themselves along on their aimless journeys as though bewitched by some fetish.' (Moorhead 1963, 93) But despite this insight, for Moorhead, the Aborigines' behaviour is at the same time noble but untrustworthy, primitive but capable, hospitable yet unaccountably aggressive.

In these populist accounts, nature is an independent and unknowable entity, reinforcing the view that central Australia was 'the ghastly blank'³ where nature was unnatural. Both Clune and Moorhead comment on Burke's aversion to Mootwingie, now a remarkable and significant national park and destination in itself. 'Becker would have delighted in all this' but Burke and his party appear to have gone by 'almost with a shudder' (Moorhead 1963, 60). These authors present the landscape very much as Burke would have seen it: like a Greek god, nature is an indifferent but willful and temperamental element in human's affairs. On Burke and Wills repeated attempts to save themselves in the maze of anabranches on Coopers Creek, Moorhead becomes indignant at its injustice. He allows that their missing Brahe and Brahe missing them on his return to the depot were unfortunate but 'comprehensible twists of fate', but reserves his severest judgment for nature:

'But this remorseless hostility of the land itself was unfair, perversely and unnaturally so.' (Moorhead 1963, 121)

Although both Clune and Moorhead acknowledge that as a leader Burke was at least rash, unnecessarily callous and tough and lacking judgement, the other participants are more wholeheartedly denigrated as cowardly, treacherous or self serving in not following Burke or making up for his inadequacies with unquestioning loyalty⁴. A more decisively critical view of Burke is offered by artist Sydney Nolan whose interpretation for the cover of Moorhead's book in 1963 is a powerful departure from earlier artistic impressions. He shows the explorers as half-crazed victims of their single-minded vision, weirdly out-of-place figures journeying and dying in an empty landscape that suggests a matching inner emptiness.

The revisions continued to creep into myth of tragic grandeur in the 1980s and 90s. The 1987 film, *Burke and Wills*, a critical success and box office flop, makes an effort

³ Title of Chapter 1, Moorhead (1963).

⁴ Clune's view was closely followed in Ivan Southall's pernicious children's version, *Journey into Mystery* (Southall, 1961, (1961) which runs the line that anyone who questioned Burke in any way was a traitor.

to convey something of the genuine beauty and diversity of the Australian landscape, but could not resist a climactic scene—woefully inaccurate, historically—in which the explorers cavort on a white sandy beach in their moment of explorational triumph. In this scene nineteenth century imperialism meets twentieth century beach fetish in a welter of improbability, since everyone who knows the story knows that the exhausted and frustrated Burke and Wills turned back when they saw the rise and fall of salt water in the mangrove swamps and were robbed of this kind of destination-focused satisfaction. In the populist television program *Bush Tucker Man*, Major Les Hiddins is at pains to show how the land in which the explorers perished was to the educated (that is, aboriginal) eye, a ‘supermarket’ of good food: his program, however, makes its point about our relationship with the land more powerfully with its signature scenes of his huge 4WD rig rocking around bends in a cloud of soil, and in his remark that this country is best visited in a helicopter (Hiddens, 1996).

It seems that the great disaster has been capable of spawning interesting variations on the myth, showing as much about changing Australian society as the events themselves do: from macho imperialism to beaches and four wheel drives, all have found their place.

Contesting a myth

A spate of recent accounts, in the form of academic analyses: Bonyhady (1991), Murgatroyd (2001), previously unpublished material: Tipping (1979), Beckler (1993), and fictionalised history: Attwood (2003) all focus on the alternative or previously unexplored perspectives of what happened and why.

Bonyhady’s detailed account *Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to Myth* focuses on the role of the story in the national consciousness and identity. Murgatroyd’s *The Dig Tree* emphasises the entrepreneurial motivation for colonial acquisition of new territory and land opportunities as a reason for Burke’s irrational haste. Tipping’s beautiful presentation of Becker’s art and diary shows the lasting value of descriptions, paintings and drawings. A translation of Beckler’s diary was published for the first time in English as recently as 1993. Attwood’s fictionalised retelling of King’s story *Burke’s Soldier* reflects on the events as seen by the underdog. It also highlights a highly critical opinion on the expedition through Howitt’s persona.

These versions focus on the story as opportunity lost, emphasising previously ignored or undervalued achievements made through other approaches to exploration and discovery. They describe Becker and Beckler’s scientific interests and activities, their acute interest and appreciation in the setting and the remarkable artistic record left by Becker. They give credit to Beckler’s quiet heroism in rescuing McPherson and Lyons and unselfish attempts to look after dying members of Wright’s party, and note how Becker, Howitt and King used the exceptional opportunity to observe and learn from the Aborigines. Thus recent authors are motivated by their belief that these lesser known explorers offered personal qualities, observations, perceptions and skills that were given scant attention at the time, but could have encouraged a mythology that celebrated a different kind of journey, one that encouraged a more positive relationship to place than the threatening and hostile ghastly blank and futile courage of the earlier accounts. Unencumbered by the need to glorify conquest or immolation, these writers see Burke’s leadership for what it was: a sad and wasted opportunity,

contrasting it, for example, with Howitt's leadership and relationship with nature. Moorhead was the first to explore his qualities from a modern perspective:

[Howitt] was full of curiosity and vigour, everything on the Cooper fascinated him, the tribesmen, the rocks and plants, the meteors that kept trailing sparks through the night sky. He moved easily and confidently through this primeval world, and he possessed a quality that is very much lacking in the determined, embattled world of the Australian explorers - a touch of humor. There was no disagreement in his camp, they were all eating and living well. The condition of the horses and the camels had actually improved since they left the Darling. All at once the dark threatening atmosphere of the Cooper is lifted, and this is now a place where white men can live in safety and look at the scene around them rather than at themselves. (Moorhead 1963, 150)

This aspect of Howitt's methods is also used by Murgatroyd and Attwood to show how 'hostility' emerges from the mind of the explorer rather than the intrinsic situation. They focus on Howitt's over-riding mastery of both landscape and people: his own party and the Aborigines. In catching the train to Bendigo and the Stage Coach to Swan Hill to begin his rescue mission, Howitt exemplifies economy of style (and a sense of modern day political correctness) that gave him the time and energy to be curious and attentive on his journey.

That the naturalists *saw* more is tellingly, if fictionally explored by Attwood in a piece of careful myth-contesting, a view supported by Tipping's publication of Becker's long overlooked collection of drawings. He describes his persona, King admiring the sketches back in Melbourne:

They were delicate things. I marveled that he found the time and energy to finish these, with all the labour he had been obliged to do as well. Becker the artist painted things I had never seen.' (Attwood 2002, 139)

In searching in vain for an image of himself, King notes that very few of the sketches were of the expedition. Becker concentrated on painting the world they were in rather than themselves. King recognised none of the landscapes Becker had seen, except the

stars more numerous and brilliant than any I'd ever seen before. Diamonds on purple velvet. Becker and I saw the same skies, but that was all. Perhaps if he had done more sketches of camels' rumps, or my dusty boots taking one endless step after another, or Charley Gray rolled up in his blanket at night like a child, his pictures would have seemed more familiar. (Attwood 2002, 139)

Whereas Beckler was there to reveal nature through science, Burke 'waged war against the emptiness of the interior' and tried to show his own worthiness through winning this war (Attwood 2002, 140-1). Through Howitt, Attwood contrasts 'exploring properly' with 'rushing about like madmen' (Attwood 2002, 94).

Murgatroyd, Attwood, and Bonyhady focus on Burke's self-destructive racism. They contrast it with Wills' and King's gradually dawning appreciation and Howitt's effortless recognition of and interest in the Aborigines' cultural difference. Murgatroyd (2001, 150-54) deplores Burke's lack of ordinary good manners in

encounters with the Yantruwanta, suggesting that what was needed was recognition of simple protocols for sharing space and resources, rules of hospitality that are universal and often similar, but do depend on recognition of common humanity, a requirement that Burke lacked.

Burke's intellectual and physical capacity compared with the Aborigines is brought into perspective by the outcome. Attwood cites *The Age* report following Brahe's return to Melbourne 'the entire company of explorers has been dissipated out of being, like dewdrops before the sun' (Attwood 2002, 268), highlighting the essentially ephemeral nature of the explorers' presence in the desert landscape. It would be impossible to describe Aborigine's presence in these terms—inter-related with that reality, not superimposed on it.

Realities and Myths

What does all this offer in the way of answers to Brookes' assessment that Australia outdoor education curriculum has lost its way?

Two alternative mythologies of the Burke and Wills expedition emerge from this brief overview of its changing image in the memories of following generations: one is of the courageous, decisive servant of Empire, confronting the savage land and conquering it even in death. The other is of a desperate farce, in the margins of which unrecognised heroes tried to find an understanding of the land and their place in it. Here, the broader frame of reference is the way in which a nation's identity is constantly negotiated, being 'secured and legitimated' through appeals to the 'common heritage of its people', in formal history or elsewhere (Soper, 2003) The education system has always been a strong carrier of national myths about the explorers, and the current 'history wars' in education and public debate revolve around many of these questions (McIntyre & Clark, 2003).

Recent narratives about the expedition can be seen as part of what is called the history wars, or perhaps even 'black armband' history. However these histories are not negative in the sense of rejecting the value of what has been achieved by the settler society of the nineteenth century. Rather, they try to find in these achievements dimensions which retain value into a non imperial age, in which nature and its values and limitations are more widely recognised. In elevating new qualities of skill, empathy, perception, or environmental response they suggest new models to be admired and perhaps emulated and offer new ideas about our identity to the education system by which we explore and extend this identity.

What can outdoor education offer?

In outdoor education, the important myth of 'exploration' has supported some practice which values use of the journey for its physical and social qualities over understanding of contexts. Both the myth and the vision are open to contest and new curriculum directions.

In myths about exploration, the wider moral value or meaning relates to what journeying meant: establishing ownership and identity through naming and mapping, defining national potential through identifying uses and usefulness of land, but also

through evaluating the potential for human growth and fulfilment in the landscape. Interpreting exploration as conquest and discovery has been a problematic idea, and are certainly no longer useful in the process of building sustainable relationships with land.

But outdoor education still tends towards discovery and exploration narratives and patterns of behavior, even though it also recognizes that only people who did not and do not live with or in the landscape could 'discover' and explore it in the mode of Burke and Wills. When it accepts the journey as a key idea, outdoor education also accepts the implicit quality of the journey for settler cultures: that in going somewhere else you also have to bring with you what you need rather than develop means of subsistence from what is already there. Colonising people are the true wanderers who have spread their presence well beyond their place of origin (Brody, 2001), whereas stay put people, ironically often characterized as nomads, are in fact deeply connected with fixed country, and do not make unnecessary journeys which are inherently expensive in terms of energy and efficiency. Time has to be spent in journeying that is then not available for living in the landscape: the time needed for the equivalents of preparing nardoo, jerking camel meat, looking for water. Even the means of Burke and Wills death, poison from thiaminose blocking Vitamin B absorption, would have taken years to discover: detailed interactions and knowledge are required. The historic and current relationship between Australians of European descent and those of Aboriginal origin perhaps continues because of our genuine incapacity to envisage another way of 'being' in the landscape.

Journeying creates difficulties through the struggle to find 'the' way and to pass by hindrances and obstacles. Whilst claiming achievement for itself in surmounting such problems, journeying is also parasitic on the knowledge and goodwill of stayput people. In Australia the Aborigines often took on an information, guiding and custodial role as explorers were literally handed from group to group by guides who also acted as envoys and negotiated the explorers' passage for them (Reynolds, 1980). Even Burke's resistance did not prevent this from happening repeatedly: at the Gulf of Carpentaria whilst floundering in bogs Burke and Wills were shown a hard well trodden path, water and yams.

Exploration, discovery and documentation were important colonial activities that had their own very specific demands and skills. Vague assumptions about the value of the journey ignore that several of these imperatives have ceased and new ones have developed in the meantime. Among those that have ceased or diminished are the prospect of getting lost, the need to cover a certain amount of distance or find a particular destination, the likelihood of discovery, except in the personal sense, the economic motivation that made exploring valuable, the technical skills of survey and mapmaking, meteorological recording, the danger from provoking hostility in indigenous people, the inadequacy of equipment to deal with various circumstances. Like Burke, outdoor educators tend to assume that the 'real' journey starts and ends at arbitrarily defined points. For Burke, this meant that most of the expedition members never even got to the starting point. For outdoor education trips, the longest and most impactful journey is often the bus trip to the 'start'.

Myths infuse practice in subtle ways. In the nineteenth century physical achievement and scientific discovery were allies in conquest and discovery when 'Dominion of

markets, natives and nature all went hand in hand' (Finney, 1993). Acquisition of new world products was part of what the colonial enterprise was about, and, in part, was the reason for the inclusion and good treatment of scientists, especially botanists, on exploring expeditions. In this enterprise, the links between the journey's purpose and the skills, structure, techniques and discovery that support the practice are clear. Thus Charles Kingsley describes in *Glaucus: Or the wonders of the shore*

Our perfect naturalist should be strong in body; able to haul a dredge, climb a rock, turn a boulder, walk all day, uncertain where he shall eat or rest; ready to face sun and rain, wind and frost, and to eat or drink thankfully anything, however coarse or meagre; he should know how to swim for his life, to pull an oar, sail a boat, and ride the first horse which comes to hand; and finally, he should be a thoroughly good shot, and a skilful fisherman; and if he go far abroad, be able on occasion to fight for his life. (Duyker, 2003, 4)

Such situations explicitly aligned physical skills and 'knowing' in a way that is hard to define in outdoor education practice today. The physical capacity and qualities needed to explore and colonise were intrinsic to the purposes of being in a place: to document and collect its natural attributes for both scientific and economic purposes. This raises the question of what competencies for what knowledge?

(Kiewa, 2000,) suggests that the bridge between 'high adventure' and environmental appreciation is competence, but in her short 'Viewpoint' piece she doesn't spell out competence. Acceptance of the myth of journeying leaves out the question of which competence is relevant, a changing arena. In discussing the role of 'bushmanship' in 19th century exploration (Cameron, 1999) describes it (or its lack) largely as if it were equivalent to leadership qualities such as decision-making confidence, organization of supplies, management of horses, and also as 'reading the landscape' for comfortable campsites, negotiable routes, food and water sources for men and animals, openness to local knowledge and avoidance of various hazards. These are all close to skills valued and taught in outdoor education, but are they relevant or productive? There are additional conflicts in the detailed application of theory to practice for educational reasons: do we teach canoeing or stargazing, do we explore from a base camp or backpack over distance, do we stay in a tent or a lodge, do we develop field guides or personal journals, do we return or go somewhere else.

Myths are open to contest. As suggested by Attwood, Bonyhady and Murgatroyd other versions of achievement, relationship, heroism and competence could have been told as part of the Burke and Wills story but have usually not been. Most people have never heard of Becker and Beckler, few of Howitt, yet in terms of lasting contributions to a national culture, to a culture of engagement with the outdoors, their contributions arguably outweigh those of the heroic Burke and Wills. The value of Burke and Wills achievement related largely to objectives about exploration and discovery that were fulfilled in only in the narrowest possible interpretation of those terms: they were the 'first' to be somewhere, they left a very rudimentary account in Wills diary and the recollections of King, they established some minimalist understanding about the geography and commercial possibilities of part of the inland, their actions led to their unnecessary deaths and cost other lives as well as their own.

The recent alternative versions of heroism and achievement in Burke and Wills narratives boil down to admiration for a certain openness to the world outside of the self: a state of mind capable of deriving enormous interest from staying put. They reject aims centred on realities that are carried with the self rather than found independent of it. They praise curiosity about various versions of structured reality of the external world as an agent, as a source of intrinsic interest. Howitt and Becker and Beckler's attitudes have in common that they express this.

Although many elements in the story will always attract attention, others have waxed and waned with fashions about how we relate to the land, what we expect of people in it, what are worthwhile ways of exploring and living in it. Exploring myths about the heroism of the journey of conquest form a strong but contested thread in the tapestry of an Australian self-concept. Outdoor educators should critically examine their assumptions about heroes and journeying and join this contest.

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