A Case Study Investigation of Adventure Tourism Operators in National Parks

by

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Abstract

As the demand for adventure tourism in national parks increases, the number of adventure tour operators also increases, and the debate regarding their presence in national parks ensues. Conservation then competes with adventure tourism supply and as such is of growing concern to national parks management, particularly in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. This thesis focuses on the operators’ subjective interpretation of adventure tourism supply in NSW national parks, and explores why the operators have particular foci in and perspectives on the supply of adventure tourism in national parks. This thesis draws on role theory and selected motivational theories as a foundation for exploring values and behaviours. A qualitative case study design was employed and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 adventure tour operators based in four NSW national parks. Research results indicated that the interviewed operators were motivated by multiple factors, with lifestyle being the overarching and most important motivator driving them to engage in the supply of adventure tourism in national parks. This thesis found the operators played a variety of roles in the supply of adventure tourism in national parks. These roles were played out in relation to their concerns for clients, the natural environment and their businesses. The role of being an adventure tourism professional was the most salient identity for most operators in this thesis. This thesis also found participants ultimately placed their businesses at the centre of their value systems. Therefore, operators’ endeavours with regard to conservation were not initiated from a concern for the natural environment, but, rather a concern for their businesses. Despite this central focus the operators expressed strong biocentric values and a strong desire to contribute to conservation of national parks. The findings of this thesis were examined in light of this juxtaposition between business values and conservation values and how these impacted operators’ decisions and behaviours. This thesis concludes by examining how the findings challenge current approaches to the management of tourism in national parks and makes recommendations for further research.