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# Analysis of the Wilderness Experience on Commercially Guided Trips

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# **Analysis of the Wilderness Experience on Commercially Guided Trips**

A study in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, Montana

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Research Report 2002-9

July 2002

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by

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&

Clint Cook

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July 2002

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Wilderness Research Institute

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Funding was provided by the Irene Evers Undergraduate Research Grant awarded to Clint Cook. This funding allowed Clint to spend the summer interviewing wilderness clients. In addition, funding was provided by the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute to transcribe the interviews from tape to paper.

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe commercially guided wilderness visitor experiences and the factors that influence the experience.

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (BMWC) was the area chosen for the study. Forty-one clients were interviewed at the trailhead exit immediately following their commercially guided horsepack trip into the BMWC. Interviews were transcribed and entered into the qualitative software program, N-Vivo, for data organization and analysis.

Results showed five common Experience dimensions emerged from the data:

Education/Conservation & Interpretation: Visitors were educated about the Leave-no-trace practice and how to treat the land in an environmentally sound way. In addition, outfitters provided interpretation of the flora and fauna as well as the history related to the Bob Marshall. Many visitors indicated that this dimension of their trip was the best part.

Nature Based: Nature itself provided the experience or nature was used as the mechanism to provide the experience. With nature as the experience visitors related to the scenery, wildlife, immersion in the area, and a chance to be there before it disappeared. With nature as the mechanism, visitors experienced accomplishment, escape, adventure/challenge, family togetherness, and activities such as horseback riding and fishing.

Small Groups and Personalized: Interaction between the visitors within the group played a significant role in the overall wilderness experience. For most visitors the experience was enhanced. For a few, it was a difficult part of their trip. The outfitter was able to personalize the trip for the visitor through explanations of the area, concern for the environment, and through sharing experiences.

Sharing the Space: The effects of seeing others while in the BMWC varied. Some visitors enjoyed the contact with other groups while others felt it was infringing on their experience. Most visitors did not mind seeing others on the trail; however, when camping or at a special fishing hole, visitors were more likely to view the other people as crowding their space.

Making it the 'Bob' – In the Eyes of the Beholder: Visitors compared their experience to other similar experiences and either felt it was very much the same, or it was unique. The size of the wilderness area contributed to an experience not felt in other areas.

Findings showed that nature, the outfitter, and the individual all influenced the wilderness experience. Nature provided the experience through scenery/wildlife or was used for the experience in the form of activities. All wilderness users have nature as a common thread. Outfitters, however, enhanced or “made” the experience for the visitor through education/interpretation and personal attention. Visitors took the opportunities presented by nature and the outfitter, and, based on past experiences, their perceptions/expectations, and their personality, made it into what they experienced.

The highlights within the findings show the significant role the outfitter played in the experience. It is an added dimension not seen in other outdoor recreation experiences or by independent wilderness visitors.

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# **Analysis of the Wilderness Experience on Commercially Guided Trips**

A Study in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, Montana

## **Introduction**

Researchers have been studying wilderness use for decades trying to understand use patterns, motivations, satisfaction and so forth. In these studies, the independent wilderness visitor has been the sample subject (see for example: Brandenburg & Carroll 1995; Borrie & Roggenbuck 2001; Bultena et. al 1981; Hammitt & Patterson 1991; Loker-Murphy 1996; Loker-Murphy & Pearce 1995; McAvoy & Dustin 1983; Murphy 2000; Patterson & Roggenbuck 1992; Scherl 1990; Watson & Landres 1999; Watson & Niccolucci 1992; Williams 2000; Roberts 1996; Williams & Stewart 1998). These studies have contributed greatly to understanding the wilderness visitor – but this visitor is the independent wilderness visitor. Few studies, if any, have studied the experiences gained by those visitors who travel the wilderness with a commercial guide or outfitter.

This gap in data related to guided trips is beginning to widen. In Montana alone, the 2000-2001 Montana Travel Planner lists 540 outfitters/guides from which visitors can choose the practice of entering the wilderness with a guide/outfitter. Besides providing a unique wilderness experience, this type of activity is a form of ecotourism that contributes to the economy and the conservation efforts in the area. Very little is known about the visitor experience on a commercially guided wilderness trip.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to describe commercially guided wilderness visitor experiences and the factors that influence the experience.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Area and Population**

For this study, the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex (BMW) was chosen. This area consists of the 1,009,356-acre Bob Marshall Wilderness, the 285,000-acre Great Bear Wilderness, and the 239,936-acre Scapegoat Mountain Wilderness. Within these wilderness areas, elevations vary from 4,000 feet to over 9,000 feet along the Continental Divide. Roads, timber harvest, and motorized travel are not allowed within these areas. Camping and hiking is very popular, along with horse pack trips. A number of commercial outfitters and guides help provide access to the wilderness for those who do not want to explore on their own.

## **Survey Methodology and Response Rates**

### **Methods**

This project employed qualitative-interpretive research methods. Qualitative in this case refers to the kind of data gathered (interview texts rather than numerical data) and interpretive refers to the theoretical framework that guides data analysis. For this particular study, qualitative methods were preferable to quantitative survey techniques because: 1) Quantitative survey techniques require that the researcher determines the important dimensions of experiences before the survey is conducted, while qualitative interview techniques allow participants to specify the important elements of their experiences; 2) The goal of quantitative surveys is statistical generalizability, while the goal of qualitative interviews is depth of understanding; 3) Interviews and qualitative data are useful for situating the meaning of experiences in the larger context of participants' lives; 4) The collection and presentation of qualitative data "speaks" to people in ways that quantitative techniques often do not. There is a clear need to approach wilderness experience research in more innovative ways. A qualitative interview approach designed more like a guided conversation than a structured questionnaire allowed the visitors themselves to determine and describe the most important dimensions of their experiences.

### **Sampling**

Sampling was purposeful rather than random, and the sample was relatively small, with emphasis placed on depth of understanding rather than statistical generalizability. The sample set consisted of 41 visitors who accompanied a commercial guide/outfitter into the BMWC. Visitors were either contacted on their last evening in the wilderness or at the trailhead on the last day from late-June 2001 to mid-August 2001.

Interviews were facilitated by use of an interview guide that listed topics to be covered and related potential lead-in or follow-up questions (Appendix A), (for further discussion see Patterson & Williams 1998). This allowed participants to identify the important dimensions of their experiences while ensuring that previously identified important issues and specific items of concern were addressed in each interview. The ultimate goal of the interviews was to elicit holistic "stories of the trip" so that individual trip elements (encounters with other groups, weather, wildlife interactions, etc.) could be evaluated within the meaningful context of the experience as a whole.

### **Data Analysis**

All interviews were tape-recorded in their entirety and transcribed verbatim. Having a permanent text record of interviews allowed for the use of qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, for organizing the large volume of data and facilitating the rigorous, iterative reading and analysis process described below. In addition, the database of interview texts served as empirical evidence for claims or conclusions drawn from this study. It may be further analyzed in the future to address issues that are not the focus of this project.

Each interview (transcription and tape-recording) was thoroughly reviewed to gain an understanding of the important dimensions of the experience and to understand the meaning or significance of the experience (or, more accurately, the visitor's account) in its entirety. Analysis across interviews to identify significant common themes was also conducted. Interviews were re-read and analyzed numerous times in an iterative process aimed at identifying deeper meanings.

This report, the final product of this study, details the range of experiences that commercially guided wilderness visitors had in the BMWC. Experiences are described in terms of major themes or dimensions, and influences on those dimensions. The report also contains a discussion of important meanings or values ascribed to the BMWC as revealed in visitors' descriptions of their experiences. Ultimately the results of this study will be compared to the results of a similar study in an Alaska wilderness conducted by the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Institute. The comparison will look at visitor experiences of commercially guided visitors in a remote area of the Alaskan wilderness compared to visitor experiences in the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex.



## Results

Common dimensions/themes of the experience are analyzed and discussed. The five dimensions/themes as identified below were prevalent in nearly all of the wilderness clients interviewed for this study.

- ?? Education/Conservation and Interpretation
- ?? Nature Based
- ?? Small groups and Personalized
- ?? Sharing the Space
- ?? Making it the 'Bob' – In the Eye of the Beholder

A brief introduction is given at the beginning of each component

### Education/Conservation & Interpretation

To facilitate discussion, this component was broken into two separate dimensions, environmental education and interpretation.

#### Environmental education

Use of an outfitter to travel provides visitors with an introduction to environmental education. Several themes mentioned by the visitors that pertain to education were Leave-No-Trace (LNT) camping ethics and native vegetation identification. Clients also mentioned learning ways to avoid conflict with the wildlife while they were in the wilderness area.

Numerous visitors referenced how they were taught to treat the land. The outfitters exemplified the idea through their continual day-to-day observance of 'walking softly' on the land. Clients were aware of the need to take care of the land and were well aware of the concern the outfitter had toward their impact on the land. Some of the clients felt that learning LNT added to their experience. Those clients felt that they came out of the Bob Marshall with a greater appreciation for the area. Another visitor mentioned he enjoyed learning how to keep it good for future generations. Learning the native vegetation also added to the visitors' experiences. Some visitors enjoyed reading through the vegetation identification booklets while they were sitting in camp. Others claimed the best part of their trip was when the outfitters would point out and describe the vegetation as they passed it on the trail.

M: It was an excellent trip, very well organized, very well planned, leave no trace is the motto of the group and I think we've pretty well fulfilled that.

R: [This trip was] adventurous, educational, something that I've never done before. And I have done other organized trips, but this area was just breathtaking.

L: All the other wildernesses that I've been in and the thousands of miles that I've ridden won't compare to this one because this one was educational.

M: I don't know, [the outfitter] is just real good. He's got lots of stories and you feel good when you leave the campsite because, you know, he picks everything up, cleans everything up real good.

S: I think [the outfitter] does a really nice job of sort of pointing out how to travel easy on the land, which really helps I think to appreciate it, this type of area. I think you come out with a lot greater appreciation of what we have here.

T: Learned a lot of how to, not ruin it for everybody else so that you can't tell we've been there with horses.

T&D: You guys have excellent rules and regulations and that no trace is, I love that. Don't ever change that.

Z: Mostly like for the most part what we saw was more, [the outfitter], for one thing, was real concerned about leaving our campsite clean and nice and neat and all that kind of stuff, naturalized. There's just more of an attitude towards that, and an emphasis on that. Learning this added to the trip. There was catch and release and most of us practice that already, so...we felt right in step.

Z: Wednesday, a gorgeous bear, big old, dark cinnamon black bear came through camp. It jazzed up the trip, greatly. We were prepared. We were told not to interfere. In fact, [the outfitter] had given us a big lecture about interaction with bears.

J: I don't know what else to say, except for the fact that these people also made it more enjoyable, talking about the plants and the flowers that we saw, the different ones. [The outfitter], you know, gave us a demonstration of various ways of building fire if you don't have matches and all new things for me the experiences with the horses.

L: Oh, I loved knowing the vegetation and the history. I would have to say this was the best.

M: ...I was especially interested in the flowers; the wildflowers were most impressive. [The outfitter] was good enough to explain the names and it was just very, very gratifying to see this.

D: And they had some books with them about the plant life, and wildflowers and birds identification. A book about the Bob Marshall was interesting to read in camp.

## **Interpretation**

Learning the history of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex was an important part of the visitors' experiences. The use of an outfitter to travel through the Bob Marshall allowed the visitors to take a glimpse into what life was like in the "Old West." As the travel parties passed historic areas, the outfitters would detail the lore that surrounded it. A few of the areas mentioned were Sentinel Mountain, Danaher meadows as well as the Bob Marshall as a whole. The visitors were introduced, not only to the areas within the Bob Marshall, but to the people who once occupied the area as well.

Interpretation of the area brought meaning to the visitors' experiences. Traveling through areas where Native Americans had once lived, and where early colonial settlers homesteaded, brought the area to

life for the visitors. Many enjoyed learning the history of the Bob Marshall. In some cases, the interpretation is what set their trip through the Bob Marshall apart from other backcountry trips they had been on.

A: I think part [of what made this trip] is the history of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area.

L: [The outfitter] is a wealth of knowledge and has a history book in his head. He took us on a lot of day rides and we got to learn a lot of the history of the Bob Marshall where we were.

L: Oh, I loved knowing the vegetation and the history. I would have to say this was the best.

M: I told him we went to Sentinel, saw the ice cave up there. Besides being introduced to all these geographical and topography of the land, [the outfitter] was kind enough to fill us in on the history, wildlife. I was especially interested in the flowers. The wildflowers were most impressive. [They] were good enough to explain the names and it was just very, very gratifying to see this. We came out here expecting to have a good time but this was just a wonderful vacation, I loved it. I'm coming back next year. We also saw Sentinel Mountain and where the Ranger Station used to be up there. We found a marker, fossils and then the Indian lore that makes it Sentinel Mountain - the Flathead and the Black Feet. And you know how they maintained their surveillance on everything. They were sentinels, checking their lands and who was around at the time. I felt like I was part of the old West - really came alive to me. You know, you read about it back East for sure and you just can't imagine what the old West was about until you come out and experience it yourself. And [the outfitter] just brought it alive for us. I think they are carrying on the legacy beautifully.

D: [The outfitter] told us the story of the wreck in the Danaher and settings and gave us a little background. C: Did that seem to add to the trip? D: Um-huh. T: Always, history, they talked about Young as you come up.....D: Yeah, past the old, I think it's a trapper's cabin. Young Creek's named after him. T: And the mountain there, [the outfitter] gave us a little history of a fur trapper. It's always good to know some of the history of Bob Marshall and some of the first people back there.

## Nature Based

Obviously nature is a strong theme shared by all clients on the wilderness trips. The nature-based component of the theme, however, provided some interesting results. In some instances nature was the experience. In other instances, it seems that the client chose nature as his/her mechanism to provide the experience. With nature as the experience, four areas mentioned were scenery, wildlife viewing, immersion, and experiencing wilderness before it disappears. Using nature as the mechanism to provide an experience was related through discussion of gaining a sense of accomplishment, escaping the busy life in the city, and a chance for adventure. Additional motivations mentioned were sharing the experience with family, the chance to fulfill a dream, horse riding and a chance to do some fishing.

### Nature as the Experience

#### Scenery

The use of an outfitter to travel through the Bob Marshall allowed the visitors to take in more of the area. The trips generally were from eight to ten days long, and covered over sixty miles. With that amount of time in the backcountry, the visitors had an excellent opportunity to see what the Rocky Mountains had to offer. From the many peaks to the valleys and meadows, the visitors were surrounded by some of the most beautiful scenery available in the lower forty-eight states. One respondent recalled her experience while traveling along the base of the Chinese Wall. The experience of riding along the base

was spectacular to her because the Wall was gigantic, and it reminded the traveler just how vast of an area she was in. Other areas that were mentioned were the Danaher Meadow, Lena Peak, Big and Little Apex Mountains, as well as Big Prairie.

For some of the visitors, the scenery was the best part of their trip and being on a horse allowed them to enjoy it more. Perhaps one visitor captured the splendor of the Bob Marshall when he said, "It might sound a little corny, but now I know what the song, "America the Beautiful," was written about." A few of the visitors also recalled traveling through burned areas as being memorable. Although the areas didn't carry the same attractiveness as the other parts of the Bob Marshall for them, the respondents commented on the vegetation growth in the areas. They thought it was interesting to see the areas a year after the fires, and to see first-hand the effects fire had on the vegetation.

B: Oh, it was spectacular, the most beautiful scenery I've ever seen. Seeing it from the horses is great, beautiful.

B: It's the most beautiful scenery you'll ever see, you know, some of it compares to the Alps and you have beautiful meadows, wildflowers, snow-covered mountains.

Ch: The best part of the trip was the Chinese Wall. We spent one afternoon and one morning riding along the base of it on the east side. It was just particularly spectacular because we were so close to it, and it's so gigantic. Oh, yeah. The biggest impression we got is the vastness of the wilderness area. And Larch, the view from Larch Pass was really beautiful, Rainy Peak and then of course the view from upper Holland down across the Swans...

Ci: The best part of the trip is the scenery...Pearl Basin and the south end of the Chinese Wall and Junction Mountain.

D...going through the burn area, that was very interesting, seeing the burn area. Having experienced a burn a year after it happened to see virtually that nothing has grown there yet. I was really surprised by that. I thought there'd be a lot of vegetation on the ground but really nothing or very little plant life so far.

F: Lots of forest, beautiful country, the sky is very blue and the rivers look like rainbows.

M: We saw some good stuff. At Big Prairie, we saw a plane wreck out there. The Danaher Valley is beautiful. We saw the burn when we came in. I guess that was '86 or something like that? I'm not sure when it was and then we saw the burn from last year today. And that was pretty interesting. I'd never seen it like that. I mean, I didn't want to ride to it...too long, a day is about enough of it; but it's just beautiful up there.

R: There's several "best parts" of this trip. Where we laid over, right near where the White River and the South Fork of the Flathead come together was just a fantastic place. Beautiful place, fishing was great. Where we stayed last night was up on Lena Peak, beautiful scenery, I mean, it was fantastic up there, really nice.

R: Ohhh, boy, we saw some vistas that are undescrivable. It might sound a little corny but now I know what the song, "America the Beautiful," was written about. We saw wildlife and just gorgeous scenery.

T: The view of Danaher Mountain and Big and Little Apex was great. Saw historical sites and just wonderful country, wonderful country.

## Wildlife Viewing

The Bob Marshall is home to a number of different wildlife species. The species range from the marmot to the moose to the grizzly bear. Many of the visitors were excited to see the wildlife they encountered and stated that it had added to their experience. Some of them had favorites that they were hoping to

see, such as elk or grizzly bear. Others were grateful for having the opportunity to watch the animals in their native habitat and to take pictures while doing so. Even the common animals to some, such as mule deer, captured the attention of the visitors, for seeing even these creatures in the wild added to the experience of those who regularly see them. However, some individuals were disappointed in the few number of animals that they saw on the trip.

C: And how'd you feel about seeing (the wildlife)? Ch: Grateful.

Ci: Well, the goats were at noon time and we were up at Junction Mountain so we sat there and ate our lunch and watched them for a long time. The elk, of course, I watch elk all the time, you know, she was just one. We couldn't watch her long. She got up and took off. Oh, that's always the best part - elk are my passion, not my obsession. The more wildlife I can see the better.

D: I thought it was impressive to see a multitude of animals. It's a neat place. It's a wildlife mecca back there. It did not surprise me not to see very many deer or elk because it was real hot the whole time we were in there, you know, and the critters just weren't in the open. They would have been in the shade, I'm sure.

D: It was great to see the elk especially. It added to the value so...it was nice to be in the wilderness and actually see wild things.

E: I was surprised to see them. I had hoped to see some more wildlife, I think, but in some respects my expectations were kind of unreasonable because I had this little picture in my head about what the wilderness would be like. You know, we saw a bunch of stuff, you know, kind of all these animals milling around. So, I was glad to see them. We wanted to see some elk or perhaps a bear but that didn't happen.

J: I was surprised about the birds and ducks. I wouldn't think there'd be any up here.

M: It's nice to see [wildlife] because eventually they are not going to be there anymore.

R: For me, the animal I thought was interesting was two mink. I've never seen one of those in the outdoors before. I've seen deer and elk and stuff but they were on a riverbank we hiked in to where we were fishing and I'd never, besides on Discovery Channel, I'd never seen a mink outside. I thought that was kind of neat.

R: It was nice, just knowing that this is their home and we're visiting.

T: Oh, it's great to see them in their habitat - it's the best. Knowing that they are up there and they are surviving, with all of the predators.

Z: Wednesday, a gorgeous bear, big old, dark cinnamon black bear came through camp. It Jazzed up the trip, greatly. We were prepared. We were told not to interfere. In fact, [the outfitter] had given us a big lecture about interaction with bears. We went for a ride last night specifically looking for wildlife, saw the white-tailed buck and that was part of the reason we were there. The first two nights in camp, we had deer right in camp, which was awesome. I guess I'm surprised we don't-see more wildlife.

## Immersion

An important aspect of a wilderness experience is the sense of isolation. The ability to go to an area and not see too many people allowed the visitors to feel immersed in the wilderness. While the "number of people" depends on one's values, many of the respondents from these trips felt there were few enough people to allow them to feel isolated. This was one aspect that set the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex apart from other areas the visitors had been to previously and for a few respondents, it was the best part of the trip. The ability to become immersed in a new surrounding, as commented by one

respondent, "changes you." When one group was coming out of the wilderness, a motorboat was running on a nearby lake. That one sound of civilization announced an end to the visitors' feeling of immersion.

A: It's a big, massive wilderness area, and it's wilderness. It's true wilderness. People need to understand that if they are going to go in there and be there. But go see the big vast country, you're 35 miles deep in the heart of the wilderness and you're it. That's it.

M: The BMWC was nicer than other areas. It was unique and nice in the sense that you just don't bump into people out there. You're isolated. If something happens, you're, you have trouble. That's what I liked about it most.

R: It was beautiful country and very tranquil, very. You feel like you are isolated when you are back there, which is kind of cool and it was a lot of fun, enjoyable, lot of stuff we don't get to see.

R: The one thing that was neat is that we didn't run into any people hardly. Near the end we ran into a couple groups but basically it was just us, which I thought was pretty neat.

T: Oh, I would describe this Bob Marshall Wilderness trip as an experience of a lifetime. It changes you. When we came out and saw a gravel road, it just makes your heart drop. We heard a powerboat on Holland Lake - it's like, [darn], we're back.

Z: The best part, I think is getting back where lots and lots of other people haven't been. It's a neat feeling to feel like you're there where very few others have been. The trails weren't too... I didn't see that many people.

#### Experiencing Wilderness Before it is too Late

Several of the visitors felt the wilderness may not last much longer, and wanted to see it before it was gone. In one case, it wasn't only the visitor who wanted to experience the wilderness before it was no longer available; he wanted his child to be able to experience the area as well.

S:... It's been something that I've wanted to do for a long time and my son was able to join me. It's an experience that I wanted him to be able to have. I worry that this area may not always be around and I think I wanted to come back and see it and I really wanted him to be able to see it.

C: And why'd you decide to come? T: Just because it was a wilderness trip and I am afraid the wilderness is going to be going away....Just because of the traffic, the logging, politics, all the things that are against it. I hope they [forest managers] make good decisions - make it real tough for humans to get in there.

#### Nature as the Mechanism to Provide the Experience

With nature as the mechanism to provide the experience, visitors highlighted accomplishment, escape, adventure, family, and activities. In other words, nature was "used" for either personal gain or personal enjoyment. Horse riding and a chance to do some fishing were the primary activities mentioned. These activities were generally the catalyst for accomplishment, escape, adventure and family togetherness.

#### Accomplishment

Gaining a sense of accomplishment from traveling through the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex was important to several of the visitors. The visitors had set goals for themselves and wouldn't let a hard days ride stop them.

Ci: Well, there's two things I've always wanted to do in my life: see the Chinese Wall and Gunsight Pass. So I've just completed my second thing I wanted to do. It was pretty awesome, yeah.

C: ... trying to ride that many miles. It's tough, it is, but it's not so tough that it won't keep us from coming back - it's worth it.

M: I've been planning this for 15 years after seeing their pictures, and it was always a lifetime dream and this year I was able to go.

## Escape

For many visitors, the best part of being in the BMWC was the ability to get away from civilization. The absence of phones, computers, cars and other signs of civilization left them in a surreal surrounding. Many of the visitors were from large cities and found the wilderness to be an area where they could relax and escape from the pressures they had left behind.

A: The best part of our trip was being on horseback for five days in the wilderness, no cars, no work, no people. We didn't see any other person. Well, we saw one backpacker today. There's no motorized vehicles. There's no motorized equipment. You are mostly on your own except for people who carry cell phones. You have to navigate on your own and there's not help right around the corner. And that it's mainly getting away from things we do in life - phones, computers and all those things.

J: Well, I think I would tell [others] that it [BMWC] is something they should definitely consider because it is absolutely unique. We live in an area in California which is being developed faster and faster so the contrast between a place like this and home is terrific. I think there is something very nice about getting away from the urban area. You really do relax. You can't help but relax because there is no stress. It's beautiful and quiet and tranquil and all of the things that life should be I guess, but very often, isn't at home.

M: I came to the Bob Marshall for the remoteness and a pristine environment, the isolation. I enjoy that. The best part of this trip is being away from civilization. I wanted to be away from civilization and my husband wanted to fish and so we came to do this.

R: The best part of the trip...I just think being out there, getting a chance to get out in the forest, being from the city and everything, D and I are from Portland so we like the city but it's definitely nice to get away from that and into a wilderness area.

R: The Bob Marshall Wilderness is different in the fact that it's not what I'm used to seeing. I'm from New Jersey. I see short trails; it's in and out in a day or two. You can make it a little longer but it's not wilderness. You'll always be in contact with some sort of world. Here, it's not desolate but it's remote. Did anybody say anything about the noise? The rivers are so noisy...the stars are so bright...I couldn't sleep at night, and there's no sirens... It was, it was awesome.

## Adventure/Challenge

The opportunity for an adventure lured some of the visitors to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. Trips were generally eight to ten days long, which allowed the visitors to take part in the recreational opportunities that abound in the wilderness.

D: I came here for the adventure.

R: I came just for the adventure and the outfitter was highly recommended and he is also a legend and that I can understand. He is very, very knowledgeable.

Ch:...And you're really left to your own resources and your own devices and your own common sense and respect.

M: The Bob Marshall gets you in an area where you are on your own totally and you don't get that in very many places, so I guess that's probably one of the biggest differences I know. It's kind of like being on a deserted island, which I have been on. It's that feeling that you have to figure things out. I think it'd be really good for inner city kids to come here, guided, of course - scare them to death.

A: You have to navigate on your own and there's no help right around the corner.

M: It was unique and nice in the sense that you just don't bump into people out there. You're isolated. If something happens, you have trouble. That's what I liked about it most. The isolation. If you get hurt out there, you're in trouble. You're seriously in trouble unless you've got some high-speed communication - you're in trouble.

Ch: I'm not sure, I don't think there are enough provisions, I know there's a phone line and [the outfitter], I'm not sure it's working and I'm not sure it's in the best of conditions that would allow it to work. So, from the safety perspective, I'm not sure. You know, people already know precautions about bears and other kinds of things that you go in but if something unexpected happens, how do you deal with it?

M: It builds this sense of self-reliance that we all need to experience.

## Family

The ability to experience the Bob Marshall with family was important to several visitors. For some of the respondents, the trip was a way for them to bond with their family. For others it was a way to teach their children certain skills. One visitor had spent time in the wilderness prior to this trip and talked about the area to his family. However, it wasn't until the family experienced what he had been talking about first hand, that they could appreciate the area for all that it is worth. Another visitor enjoyed being able to teach the next generation the art of fly-fishing in the Bob Marshall. Those who were taught wanted to come on the trip to do some fishing and the lessons played an important role in their experiences.

A: One of the other things that was nice was to visit Big Prairie for my family. I've visited many times and know the place and come home and talk about it. And they just don't have an appreciation for it so they finally got to see it. That was neat getting to Big Prairie and to the Chinese Wall. I've been there, taken lots of pictures and come back and say, look at this, and they go, uh, you know.

D: The best part of our trip was going up to Pearl Basin with my mother and father. We went to see the Chinese Wall because my father's been there several times through his work. He's talked about it all my life, so I finally got to experience it with him.

C: The best part of the trip was teaching my daughter and [a friend's] daughter how to fly fish and seeing them catch fish for the first time. Complete, not just hooking a fish and landing it for them and stuff like that from laying it and setting the hook, bringing in and releasing the fish. That was great.

E: Oh, my dad, he's been before and he wanted to take me. He asked me if I wanted to go and I had been wanting to come and do some sort of wilderness thing - to do some fishing and riding.

C: I wanted to experience it with my son.

C: I wanted to have a good experience with my husband.

C: The best part of our trip was getting to spend it with my family.



## Activities – Horse Riding

Some of the respondents mentioned they were on the trip because they enjoy horse riding. The ability to ride horses to access the back country was the best part of their trip. The use of horses allowed the visitors to cover more of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex in the time they were there. Those who weren't on the trip for horse riding had a somewhat harder time with the horses. Those visitors mentioned long days of riding as being a possible "worst" part of their trip. It wasn't that they didn't enjoy having the horses as much as they weren't used to riding for long periods of time.

B: The horses were just an amazing part of the trip. They're just real wonderful creatures.

D: I've done a lot of backpacking and this was a lot more enjoyable being on a horse. You get a chance to see things instead of just your own feet plodding along.

E: I really liked the horseback riding and the fishing was fun, just seeing everything, 'cause it was so beautiful and so natural.

J: Well, I guess my reason for coming along was because I enjoy the horseback riding and I really enjoyed getting up into the backcountry and seeing a whole new world of wilderness that I really couldn't even imagine until I got here. So it was the overall experience of just being here and I certainly enjoyed the horseback riding since I'm not a fisher lady.

R: This trip with the horses gave us the mobility to see more in a time frame that I normally wouldn't be able to see yet I think we went about seventy-five miles and that in itself tells me that there are other ways to see the world than this. This is the first time that I've done this type of travel.

Z: The worst part of the trip was getting used to the long ride on a horse. Coming back today was a cake walk compared to upper Holland. I think, bottom line mostly, people don't ride horses everyday. You're going 28 miles in and 28 miles out. That's a long ways for tender .... greenhorns.

## Activities – Fishing

Many of the respondents said the fishing was the best part of their trip. One chose the area to teach a novice fisher the techniques of fly-fishing, while others were there to enjoy the water and spend their days casting. Some of the respondents came to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex because there is a lot of water to fish and it is some of the best fishing available in the lower 48 states.

A: The best part of the trip I would have to say from my point of view, my intent was to get in some great fishing and I'd have to say that it was the fishing along Young's Creek, the Danaher and the South Fork, maybe...cutthroats are spectacular.

Ca: I came here to recreate. I had such a great time the last time, and I had a great time this time. Even though there were more people, the fishing was absolutely fabulous. There's a lot of water here to fish and it's an excellent area to teach a beginner how to fly fish.

D: The fishing was the best part. One of the main reasons I came was to really get into some trout fishing, fly-fishing. That was enjoyable, the best part.

C: And what would you say is the best part of your trip? G: Fishing.

G: A friend of mine was here seven years ago and had a marvelous time and suggested we come along this time, specifically for fishing. It has much better fishing than we're accustomed to in California.

J: I guess the trip is basically for fishing because my husband is a fisherman and so are our two friends....

C: And what would you say is the best part of your trip? J: Probably the fishing, there were big fish.

N: Well, obviously the best part of the trip to me is the fishing.

T&D: That's what we came for - the fishing. We came for the fly-fishing in the Bob Marshall and we fished the Danaher, Young's Creek and the South Fork of the Flathead. The fishing's just awesome, awesome. We'd have to say the fly-fishing is just the best in the lower 48 that we've ever seen.

T: The best part of the trip - Probably the fishing, really good fishing. I'd tell them [friends] it was great, great fishing.

## Small Groups and Personalized

Use of an outfitter to go into the backcountry places the visitor in the company of strangers. For the duration of the trip, the interactions between the visitors played a role in their experiences. For the most part, through these interactions, a sense of camaraderie was built, so when the trip was completed they had made life-long friends. A few of the respondents, however, felt that getting along with others in the group was the most trying part of the entire experience. The outfitter seemed to make the trip a better trip for the clients. In fact, without the outfitter, the experience would be gone.

### Small Groups

M: The best part of the trip was the people, camaraderie, yeah. Friendship, fellowship, it's like one big, happy family. We met some great people on these trips...lifetime, you know, still friends with them. And it's great, it's just super and they do such a super job.

T: Actually going in with the team like this, the camaraderie and the education that came out, I think that would be the most valuable. I mean, it's an incredible place but unless you had the formula that comes with an outfitter, it wouldn't-have happened.

C: And why did you decide to come here? Z: These crazies - friends dragged me, right. The best part of the trip - camaraderie, friendship, fishing - you can get good fishing in lots of places but the combination of camaraderie and friendships. For a lot of us, this is a second visit together.

C: I think just the magnitude of the Bob makes this a little better than other backcountry trips. And again, us all being able to be out there, we can't do that very often.

B: I've never been on a backcountry trip. The worst part is [trying] to get along with everybody else.

D: This trip had a lot more social activity with the people involved - the group was bigger than other trips. We had, you know, about nine people on this trip and four on the other, so the social part was a lot more fun on this trip and a lot more animals [horses] made it quite a challenge.

D: Part of the experience is getting together with good people who really love this area. Good group, good camaraderie, amongst the folks that we brought, in addition to the outfitters.

J: The best part of the trip? I think it was, besides the awesome scenery and everything, I think it was getting to know these people because I came up here by myself and knew nobody and we just kind of all clicked, and I think that was the best part. The rest was great but that was also good.

L: All the other wildernesses that I've been in and the thousands of miles that I've ridden won't compare to this one because this one was educational, nobody got mad at each other, and people were patient. I

would have to say this is probably the best trip I've ever done. Just because of that, no, there wasn't any belittlement.

C: The best part of the trip was just sharing the outdoors with people who have similar interests.

#### Personalized

For many of the clients, the outfitter contributed to their experiences. The outfitters were responsible for setting up the itinerary, preparing the meals, and ensuring the safety of each client. While doing this, the outfitter also informed the visitors of the proper handling of the stock and the ways to clean up the campsites after they had left. The outfitters were also reported to have given out information about the plant and animals of the area as well as some history.

Appreciation for the outfitters' services showed in the respondents' remarks. Some visitors claimed that the outfitters made the trip come alive for them. Learning about the history of the Bob Marshall, as well as the different plant and animal species, added to their enjoyment of the area.

Ch: So, from that perspective, my outfitter really made this a very good experience.

Ci: Well, I've been on a couple of other backcountry trips and this is much better. The outfitter is more organized, tells the people what they're going to do, what they're not going to do, just there's more professionalism with the outfitter than other outfitters I've been with. You know what their plan is, what they don't want you to do with their stock, what they want you to do with their stock and stuff. And so that just helps you to know what they want done.

C: And what would you say is the best part of the trip? D: I think the outfitters, they really did a great job.

J: This trip was awesome, that's all. I don't know what else to say, except for the fact that these people also made it more enjoyable, talking about the plants and the flowers that we saw, the different ones. [The outfitter], you know, gave us a demonstration of various ways of building fire if you don't have matches. All new things for me [especially] the experiences with the horses. I've never tightened a cinch or put a bridle on a horse before. It was quite a learning experience for a city boy.

M: [The outfitter], I can't praise them enough and I'm going to recommend it to everybody back home because I'd like to share all the joy and wonder that I experienced. And I think that they are the ones that brought it alive for me.

R: I would say to someone thinking about visiting it seems like a beautiful country, it seems like you kind of go back in time a little bit... The outfitters did a really good job making sure that you participate and help. They made sure you enjoyed yourself and the whole tribe of people were enjoying themselves. I really thought that added a lot to the trip.

R: The best part of the trip, I think, was probably the way [the outfitter] treated us in the surroundings. They told us of plant life, of stories, cowboy stories, and actually, the scenery was on the top.

C: And what was the best part of your trip? S: Oh, I don't know, I enjoy horses, I love riding in the Bob Marshall. I really enjoyed the people that we met. I think [the outfitter] really does a first-class trip. I think they certainly make it easy on us. I think that we think we are out here roughing it but we really aren't. I really appreciate the fact that they help you come out with a lot greater appreciation of what we have here. Right now, I think that the more people who even know that these are precious areas and they should not be fooled with, the better off we are.

## Sharing the Space

The effects of seeing others while in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex varied among respondents. The respondents' attitudes toward seeing others depended on where the others were and what the respondents' motivations were for taking part in the trip.

While analyzing the data, the factor that played most heavily into the feeling of intrusion was the respondents' motivations for taking part in the trip. For some whose motivations were fishing, seeing others on the river gave them the feeling of intrusion, decreased isolation or simply competition. This feeling could be attributed to a resource conflict. Those respondents who were fishing felt that others would interfere with their enjoyment of the river or that their fishing would decrease their own opportunity to catch fish. However, not all respondents who were there to fish felt the same way about seeing others on the river. Other respondents were happy to see people enjoying the area and wished them luck. One commented that, "...it's their land as much as it is anybody else's and it's there for us all to enjoy." -

Scenery was another motivation for taking part in the trip. For those respondents, seeing others in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex didn't take away from their trip. In fact, the respondents were glad to see others enjoying the area as they were.

### Sharing the Fishing Space

A: I was glad to be in my fishing hole before the other guy was. But I had no feeling of intrusion, didn't have a nimbli feeling.

G: I'm kind of a loner, prefer to fish relatively alone although the fishing here is excellent so it's kind of a psychological problem that I have.

R: As long as they weren't catching more I was OK with them fishing!

J: Yes, some people came and fished right around the corner from where we were camping the other day, which everybody was kind of upset about. They thought that was their fishing hole. But other than those people, what was that, what was that they were supposed to?

T: We saw a few people who had backpacked into there and were fishing. It made it a little less lonely, I guess - a little less remote. It took a little bit away from the trip, but not that bad.

C: And how'd you feel about seeing them fishing? J: OK, I guess.

Cl: Hey, they've got as much right to be there as I.

A: Yeah, we saw one, two, I guess we only saw two parties actually fishing. I wished them luck. Fishing was good, they need to have a chance to enjoy some good fishing.

E: It didn't bother me to see others fishing. It was the same thing I was doing so good luck for them. It's OK with me, it looked like they were having fun.

T: I'm going to go back there and fish. No, I have no problem seeing others fishing at all. It's their land as much as it is anybody else's and it's there for us all to enjoy.

### Sharing the location space

The location of others while traveling through the BMWWC played a role in how the respondents felt about encountering them. When the others were seen on the trails, many of the respondents didn't mind

them. Their presence didn't take away from the trip. However, several respondents were surprised to see so many people using the trails. Some respondents were glad to see others using the area.

When the respondents saw others near their campsite, it began to feel crowded to them. In most cases, respondents were surprised at the number of people they saw while sitting in their campsites. One respondent had the expectation of going into a wilderness and not seeing anyone else, so they were a little disappointed to see so many others using the area.

B: It was nice seeing people who are out there, I mean, especially we saw this one woman with her little daughter. She was maybe seven, wearing a big backpack and it's nice to see people appreciating the outdoors and the wilderness.

C: It didn't bother me to see others. I personally think it's more important to have the wilderness there so people can enjoy it. It certainly hasn't been damaged at all from the people.

G: I was surprised to see so many people here, considering that it's such a chore to get here.

J: I was fine with seeing others, although I was pretty surprised because I wouldn't expect to see a lot of people on the trail.

T: It's wonderful that other people are in there. Yeah, I had no problem with seeing other people in there. That's what it's there for.

T: It's nice to see people enjoy the country.

M: I was glad somebody else was out there enjoying themselves.

E: Oh, it was kind of nice to see some people every once in a while, you're not completely away. It was OK. We just kept moving on, it's not very crowded, so it didn't bother me at all.

C: Ahh, like I said, I was surprised to see that many numbers back here, the use in the Bob Marshall has definitely increased from my experience in here.

D: Well, you know, I was a little surprised thinking that it was a wilderness area that I wouldn't see anybody. But I guess the area does get use and because it does get use, I guess you'd expect to see people.

E: It was a little disappointing seeing others. We didn't really have much contact with them but I think I had envisioned the wilderness being a little more isolated than it really is. It seems like there are a lot of people who use the area.

N: Well, I was surprised at the number of people that were here. I mean you go back 10, 20 miles into the wilderness area and see several different groups of people camping. I got concerned about it because it seemed like there's a lot of pressure to come in here. When I was here before in the '60's, '50's, late '60's, we'd go all over this area and not see anybody.

T: Ummm, it didn't feel as wilderness when all of a sudden they [others] were around the corner. It started to feel more like camp. C: So do you think that took away anything from the trip? T: Not huge, but it would have felt better if there was a separation that was a little bit wider so that we wouldn't run into each other.

W: We saw a bunch of people - a lot more this time than in '95. It was a lot more crowded. It took away from the trip slightly.

G: The lack of a wilderness experience - too many people was the worst part of the trip.

## Making it the “Bob” – In the Eyes of the Beholder

The respondents came from all parts of the U.S. They had different past experiences with wilderness use throughout the U.S., and yet, many of them felt their trip through the Bob Marshall was unique. The size of the Bob Marshall was the most impressive aspect many of the visitors commented on. The ability to return time and time again and still see new areas impressed a number of the respondents.

Some of the visitors chose to compare the Bob Marshall to other areas where they had been. Interestingly, a number of visitors mentioned the ‘sameness’ in comparison to other parts of the country, while others were awestruck and had not experienced such grandeur. From another viewpoint, some visitors compared the difference between the Bob Marshall and urban areas they had come from, yet others compared it to other wilderness areas. It simply shows that everyone sees things from different eyes. What we like and what we see is truly dependent on past experiences, expectations, and personality.

B: It's definitely a unique place but it's hard to say. I've never seen anything quite like it but then, I lived in Oregon for a long time and you know there are beautiful areas there and some compare to parts of this and parts of that.

D: I enjoyed seeing the plant life and the differences between plant life here and the plant life in Michigan. Some of it is very much the same, some of it is quite a bit different. I have never fished for cutthroat trout before so that was interesting - all I caught was cutthroat. So that was an experience. I'd like to probably do it again some time. I'd like to take my daughter on a trip like this.

D: The mountain areas are very similar to a backcountry trip I took in Maine on the Appalachian Trail. Except on the Appalachian Trail, we walked. The scenery, the streams and the wildlife you see are very much the same, so it was similar to that.

D: Yes, I've spent a lot of time in Alaska and I think what's really neat about the Bob is you can get in there. You can get in there, yet it takes effort and that makes it special because it's not overrun. Yet, if you're willing to put forth the effort, you can get in there and see it and there's a lot of places. For example, in Alaska where I was, it was just absolutely raw, inaccessible country. You can fly over it and see it all day long but to get in there on foot and experience the wildlife and the scenic beauty and the peace and the quiet – it's hard to do up there. Here you can do that so that's to me what makes it [the Bob] different.

E: The Bob Marshall Wilderness is very secluded and it's just like - open. You can be by yourself, you know, think, very new to me.

G: This trip was very similar to other trips. In fact, it reminded me of the backcountry in California where the population density is a lot higher. I spend most of my time in California and I've already said that the Rockies in general are geographically older, higher, although this area isn't, has more topsoil, different plants. It doesn't seem to be that much different than a lot of other areas in the Rockies in Montana from what I've seen.

J: I think I would tell others that this area is something they should definitely consider because it is absolutely unique. We live in an area in California which is being developed faster and faster so the contrast between a place like this and home is terrific. I think there is something very nice about getting away from the urban area.

L: All of my backcountry experiences are all kind of the same except the Bob Marshall is so big. Some areas you see more game. I'm a little disappointed not to see any elk. I thought we would see some

goats at Limestone Pass. Some of the other wilderness areas that I've been in, there's been a lot more types of fish, a lot more game.

M: Our mountains are like foothills, the Pocono Mountains. I've been up in the White Mountains, anthills - up in New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine. The Montana Rockies are impressive. There's no equal, there's no equal. You know, that burn area was really interesting, I thought. In most of the wilderness I've been in, you didn't see anything like that, especially the stuff we rode through today. I guess I'd never seen anything like that, the way the bark, you know, peels off the trees and it just curls up into the spirals like that, that was pretty interesting. I thought that was nice.

C: And how would you describe the Bob Marshall area to somebody thinking about visiting? M: It depends where they were from. If they're from the East, I think they would have a very hard time understanding what it really is like. If they're from the West, I could make parallels, I mean to say, hike the Missions, very similar—hiking certain parts of the Bitterroot, very similar. But if you're from an environment that doesn't have this kind of, this look, I probably would say it's kind of like going to Glacier Park without the people.

R: Well, I don't know. I really don't know how to express it. I know the feeling I get up in the mountains is like no other. I mean I go fishing and I can sit down and think and just kind of absorb, you know, the mountains, I don't know how to explain it. But it's really something.

T: This is the best trip I've been on. I've done a lot of backpacking, done a lot on the East Coast, up in the Presidential Range, and there's no comparison between the two. It's fabulous. This is my first time in the Bob Marshall. Compared to the East Coast - it's about half, everything's half. Except for the people you'd probably run into each day maybe a hundred people there. Here it's ten.

T: Most of the things we just described about wilderness, I've never seen that before. And it's vast. It's just that there's a lot of space. You know the trail you're taking - there are hundreds of others and you're never going to get on them.

T: The Bob Marshall is a lot different from west Texas where I came from. The giant pine trees, the wildlife is just a big, it's almost like a whole different country.

C: And how would you describe the Bob Marshall Wilderness to someone thinking about visiting? Z: Big, rugged, awesome, unbelievable. See it to believe it. Nothing else like it. I don't know, I think this one's different because its setting, you know, south of the park [Glacier], it's huge. And I think it's so diverse and yet it just rolls from one vista to another. From my perspective, I've never seen anything with just that much variety to it. Yet there's sameness. I don't know. That doesn't make any sense. Eventually it balances.

## Summary & Discussion

The five dimensions/themes represent the range of experiences visitors had while on their commercially guided wilderness trip. The visitors' experiences provide an interesting point for summary and discussion. In this chapter we will discuss what all this means through analyzing the dimensions and the influences on those dimensions, as well as important meanings or values ascribed to the BMWC as revealed in visitor experiences.

### Summary

The range of experiences, as seen through the interviews, represent five major dimensions. These dimensions included:

- ?? Education/Conservation and Interpretation
- ?? Nature Based
- ?? Small groups and Personalized
- ?? Sharing the space
- ?? Making it the 'Bob' – In the Eye of the Beholder

These dimensions emerged as each visitor reflected on the experience he/she had just completed in the BMWC. The first three dimensions (education/conservation & interpretation, nature based, and small groups and personalized) flowed from the visitors' discussion with only broad sweeping prompts such as: "tell me about your trip." "What was the best part or worst part?" "What did you see," etc. The dimension of 'sharing the space' was prompted by, "Did you see or meet any other people?" and, "Did you see anyone hunting or fishing?" Finally, the dimension of "Making it the 'Bob' – In the Eye of the Beholder," was prompted by the main question, "What was this trip like compared to other (backpacking/floating/ wilderness/backcountry) trips you have been on? Other Bob Marshall trips?"

It is important to note, however, that visitors did not present a simplistic, unified, or uncritical perspective on their experiences in the BMWC. While the majority of the visitors were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about their experience, they did recognize and share concerns related to their experience.

### Discussion

Nature, the common thread for all outdoor experiences, is either the experience itself, or is the catalyst for the experience. In the case of commercially guided wilderness trips, some visitors were simply there for the scenery, wildlife and immersion. Nature provided the experience. In other cases, nature was needed to supply the experience for fishing, horse riding, family togetherness, accomplishment, adventure, or escape. With nature as the experience, the BMWC provided vistas and remoteness. Visitors were able to immerse themselves in the 'Bob' and feel complete. Their experience *was* the 'Bob'.

When nature supplied the opportunity for the experience, being in the 'Bob' was secondary. It would have been possible to get their experience somewhere else as long as the experience happened in nature. However, even in some of these cases, the BMWC was perceived as *the* place for the experience. For example, some visitors who were there to fish felt the best fly fishing in the country was



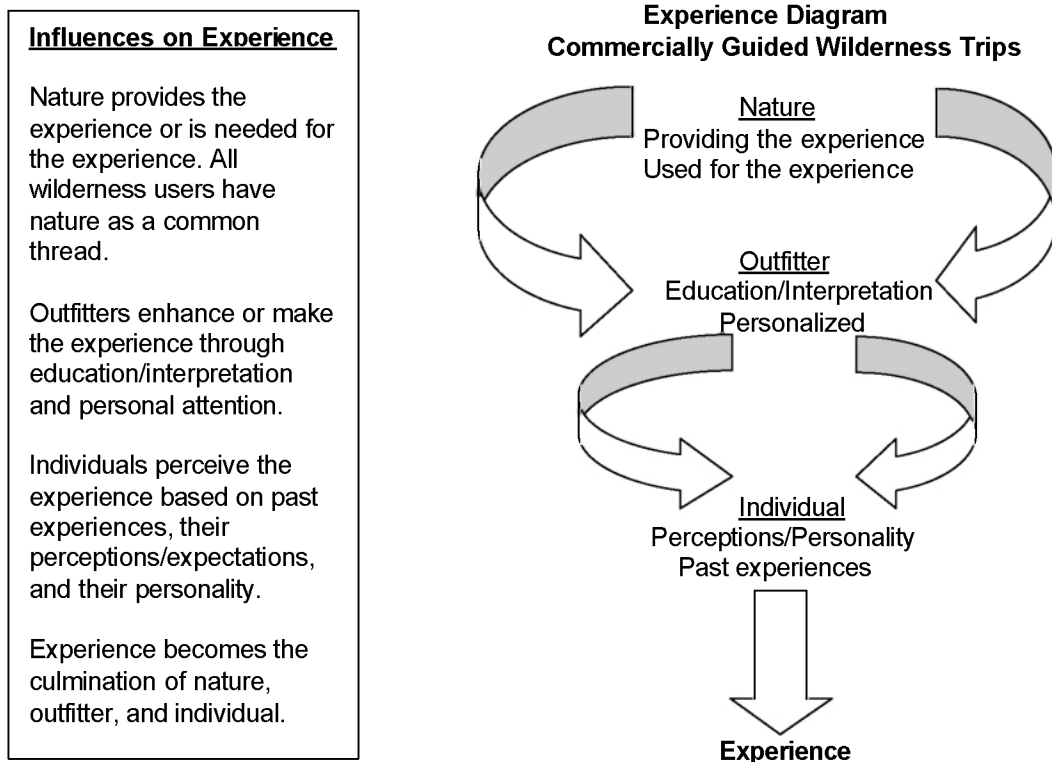
right there in the 'Bob.' While they could fly fish elsewhere, it would not have been the same. Additionally, some of the visitors mentioned the large size of the wilderness area which provided the adventure and challenge they perceived as unique to the BMWC. The size and hence the remoteness of the BMWC was part of the adventure.

The dimension of 'Education/Conservation & Interpretation' was a strong point throughout the interviews. First of all, visitors were appreciative of the concern shown by their outfitter toward the environment. They learned how to 'walk softly,' not only by listening and watching, but by 'walking softly' themselves. In one case, however, the visitor mentioned that watching the outfitter clean up camp gave the impression that the outfitter was the only one taking care of their surroundings. Secondly, visitors were grateful for the interpretation of plants and animals as well as the historical background of the area.

Education and interpretation provided by the outfitter appeared to be a bonus for most of the visitors. While they could have simply enjoyed the scenery, the ride, and the fishing, many mentioned that the outfitter made the trip what it was. It was almost as if the trip was already excellent but the outfitter moved it from the excellent category to fabulous. This is further highlighted in the 'small group and personalized' dimension, where visitors time and time again mentioned that the outfitters made it a good experience. "My outfitter really made this a very good experience." "I can't praise them enough." "The best part of the trip, I think, was the way the outfitter treated us in the surroundings." "I think the outfitter really does a first-class trip." In the life-circle of a wilderness trip, the outfitter completed the circle.

Figure 1 (below) outlines the influences on the experience. These influences are nature, the outfitter, and the individual's perception, personality, and past experiences.

**Figure 1:** Experience Diagram of Commercially Guided Wilderness Trips



The two dimensions, of “Sharing the space” and “Making it the ‘Bob’ – In the Eye of the Beholder,” are provided within the Individual component of the experience diagram (Figure 1). When experience differences *were* found between wilderness users on these trips, it generally emerged within these two dimensions. These two dimensions are directly related to past experiences, personality and perception (PPP). For instance, some visitors viewed this trip better or worse compared to other wilderness trips. Some visitors enjoyed seeing other people while others were more selfish about “their space.” Some visitors commented on the space, the open feeling, and the sparse numbers of people, while another mentioned there were too many people.

While we suggested that many of the experiences could have been obtained in any wilderness area, many visitors referred to aspects of the ‘Bob’ that are not available elsewhere. The value of the BMWC came through in discussions about the Chinese Wall, Larch Pass, Rainy Peak, Danaher Meadow and Big Prairie to name a few. These geologic sites held significance and meaning to the visitors. Whether it was the grandeur previously unseen elsewhere, or the sense of vastness, visitors attached emotion to the BMWC. In trying to sum it up, one visitor went from one extreme to the other, “I think it’s so diverse and yet it just rolls from one vista to another. From my perspective, I’ve never seen anything with just that much variety to it. Yet there’s sameness. I don’t know. That doesn’t make any sense. Eventually it balances.”

Perhaps for some, the balance was not in the landscape but within - the experience in the ‘Bob’ facilitated a sense of self and calmness. Perhaps for others, the ‘Bob’ is a useful piece of landscape with good fishing, far from civilization.

While the ‘Bob’ is meaningful and can provide a good wilderness experience, it appears the thread that brought it all together was the outfitter. The commercially guided wilderness experience as presented by these visitors is not just a wilderness experience. It is an educational experience. It is a social experience. It is an adventure and challenge provided by horses and terrain, led by a knowledgeable guide. The outfitter was able to facilitate and influence the experience by taking visitors to the ‘best’ fishing hole, by providing mobility through horses, by routing the trip through outstanding geologic areas, by explaining and interpreting the surroundings, by being conscientious about the environment, and by facilitating (in most cases) a group atmosphere of camaraderie and life-long friendships.

## **Future Research**

Experiences on commercially guided wilderness trips were explored in one wilderness area. While the results of the outfitter influence on the experience appear to be universal, it would be interesting to conduct the same research in another wilderness area outside of Montana to compare the results. A comparison of this type would “cement” the contribution that outfitters have to the overall wilderness experience.

Another interesting comparison would be to interview independent wilderness visitors who have also just completed their trip. Ideally, these visitors would also be on horseback to facilitate across-the-board comparisons. It is speculated that the range of experiences would not include the education/conservation & interpretation or the small groups and personalized aspects.

Finally, the experiences as shared by visitors should not be limited to wilderness trips. In-depth interviews can provide further meaning to any form of visitation. The scope of information can be used to guide tourism policy, tourism marketing, and tourism planning. It is recommended that in-depth interviews be used to enhance our understanding of the traveler and the industry in which the traveler is immersed.

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## **Interview Guide**

## Interview Guide—Bob Marshall Wilderness Experiences on Commercially Guided Trips

Hi, my name is Clint. I'm an undergraduate student at the University of Montana. Did [your outfitter] tell you that I was going to be here to ask questions about your trip? Good... (or explain it). What I will do is ask a number of fun questions about your trip which we'll record on this little tape recorder. You will be anonymous so could I call you \_\_\_\_\_? Great – do you have any questions of me before we get started?

### Nature of visitor experiences

- 1) Can you describe the trip you just completed?
- 2) Where did you go on your trip? (How many days out?)
- 3) What did you see?
- 4) What was the best part of the trip?
- 5) What was the worst part?
- 6) What was this trip like compared to other (backpacking/floating/wilderness/backcountry) trips you have been on? Other Bob Marshall trips?
- 7) Did you see or meet any other people?  
[probes]
  - a. Where were you when you encountered the other people? [probe # of days out when they saw people].
  - b. What happened?
  - c. How did you feel about seeing/hearing/meeting them?
- 8) Did you see anyone hunting or fishing?  
[probe]
  - a. How did you feel about seeing them?
- 9) Did you see any wildlife? (*if they already mentioned wildlife, lead into that by saying...you saw "elk" so....*)  
[probes]
  - a. What did you do when you saw (—)?
  - b. How did you feel about seeing (—)?

### Meaning of the Bob Marshall Wilderness setting

- 1) How did you find out about Bob Marshall Wilderness complex?
- 2) Is this your first visit? (if no, how long have you been visiting/how many times?)
- 3) Why did you decide to come here?
- 4) How would you describe the Bob Marshall Wilderness area to someone thinking about visiting?
- 5) Do you think of it as wilderness?  
[probes]
- 6) What does/does not make it a wilderness?
- 7) Is there anything about the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex that makes it different to you?

Thanks so much.....Is there anything else you'd like to add or tell me about this trip and the experience you had?