

Multi-sensory tourism in the Great Bear Rainforest

Bettina van Hoven*

ABSTRACT

This article draws on images and stories generated during filming for a documentary about the Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia, Canada. Specifically, I use material filmed during a trip with Spirit Bear Adventures, a First Nation-operated ecotourism venture. This journey provides rich material to rethink 'knowing' about the Great Bear Rainforest by reflecting on the varied experiences from the 'sensescapes' encountered. In this article, I discuss different, multi-sensory experiences and tourist performances in the context of hiking in the Great Bear Rainforest.

Keywords: Multi-sensory experiences, tourism, Great Bear Rainforest, First Nations, qualitative research

ÁGRIP

Ferðamennska og fjölpætt skynjun í Great Bear Rainforest

Þessi grein byggir á myndum og sögum sem urðu til við töku á heimildamynd um í Great Bear Rainforest í Bresku Kólumbíu í Kanada. Nánar tiltekið er efni sem fest var á filmu í ferð með Spirit Bear Adventures, vistvænni ferðaðjónustu frumbyggja, tekið til greiningar. Ferðalagið býður upp á ríkulegan efnivið til að endurhugsa hvað felst í að „þekkja“ Great Bear Rainforest, með því að velta fyrir sér hinum margvíslegu upplifunum sem fengust með skynjun á vettvangi. Í greininni fjalla ég um hina fjölpættu skynjun og athafnir ferðamanna sem eiga sér stað í gönguferðalagi um Great Bear Rainforest.

Lykilorð: Fjölpætt skynjun, ferðamennska, Great Bear Rainforest, frumbyggjar Kanada, eigindlegar rannsóknir

INTRODUCTION

This article emerged from the production of a video documentary on the Great Bear Rainforest (van Hoven et al. 2009). Using the voices of some of the stakeholders, the documentary explores different meanings and values assigned to the forest by these stakeholders. It utilizes a sequence and/or combination of spoken word, differently paced visuals, and music in order to relay an emotional dimension of the issues portrayed and engage the viewer more by offering these additional sensory experiences (e.g. when compared to a written, academic article). However, the standpoint is portrayed outside the landscape in question (see also Daugstad 2008). In this article, the focus is not on such representations but

on how the standpoints are practiced with (and within) the landscape.

During the production process, the forest was visited by myself and a part of the production team carrying three video and three photo cameras in order to collect data for the documentary. For a production team from the Netherlands, key challenges in gathering data *within* the forest were imposed by the remoteness of the location, its limited accessibility, and possible dangers resulting from venturing into grizzly territory without a guide. Since the area is located within First Nations' territory, it was necessary to negotiate access either by seeking permission from one of the Band Councils or by participating in

* Faculty of Spatial Sciences, Department of Cultural Geography, PO Box 800, 9700AV Groningen, the Netherlands. Email: b.van.hoven@rug.nl

activities organized by First Nations for a broader public. We chose the latter and joined the First Nations' operated ecotourism venture *Spirit Bear Adventures* as tourists (see Spirit Bear Lodge n.d.). This proved to be a fortunate choice because it resulted in the desired visual material for the documentary as well as providing an opportunity to rethink 'knowing' about the Great Bear Rainforest by reflecting on the rich and varied experiences from the 'sensescapes'¹ encountered. In this article, I seek to draw out multi-sensory experiences to explore the role and to some extent the interaction of all senses in co-constituting experiences in the Great Bear Rainforest. In so doing, multiple connections are created between different places, i.e. the self, the home, the forest and perhaps even the world, as well as different times (or rhythms), i.e. geological time, human time (the presence of First Nations in the past and now, our own presence) as well as non-human time (that of plants and animals). Tourists hook up with and may become aware of connections within different networks in which the elements of the forest "recommend themselves [...] through a variety of characteristics, [drawing] the person down into their world and make for an understanding of their concerns and a commitment to their care" (Power 2005, 48).

Before discussing multi-sensory experiences in the Great Bear Rainforest, I provide a framework of reference for interpreting and situating these experiences. I then, briefly, describe the geography of the Great Bear Rainforest and the organisational context of the trip. Then I invite the reader to embark on a journey to and into the forest. In the second half of the

article, I include hyperlinked video clips to provide more insights into the experiences of the group.

MULTI-SENSORY TOURISM

Until recently, the visual dominated tourist experiences (Rojek and Urry 1997), neglecting encounters through the other senses, i.e. the olfactory, the auditory, the gustatory and the tactile. Several authors have already pointed at the need to address tourism as a corporeal experience (Markwell 2001, Pan and Ryan 2009). Underlying reasons for this neglect include the emergence of mass tourism which markets places and place experiences as spectacle (see for example, Ryan et al. 2000). This is particularly the case where the tourism experience is one from within a tour bus and where the visual sense is prioritised by providing an environment in which the reach of other senses is reduced "to a framed, horizontal visionscape" (Larsen 2001, 89). Larsen (2001, 89) refers to the "protectionist sightseeing bus that functions as a mobile, transparent 'iron bubble' [...] which promises the tourist a risk-free, glancing 'voyage of voyeurism'". Indeed, Dann and Jacobsen (2003, 20) noted that

surely the worst way to take in [...] a place is in an air-conditioned tour bus, cut off from the natural street odors in an encapsulated 'sanitized, hygienic bubble' where the only activity is visual - that of passively 'looking down one's nose' at the Other through a tinted window.

In addition to the way in which tourism has been perceived, the neglect of the body is symptomatic of, Clarke (2002, drawing on Horkheimer and Adorno 1994), notes "civilization, the modern world, [which] has slowly and methodically prohibited

¹ The senses are "a kind of structuring of space and defining of place" (Rodaway 1994, 4). A number of authors replace the concept *landscape*, which prioritises the visual, with *sensescape*, in order to create room for the role of all senses in experiencing and knowing the environment (see references throughout this article).

instinctual behaviour” and “touching, feeling, smelling [is] something unhomey, uncanny.” As a result, “the [human] body [...] as a vessel of consciousness, [has become] ontologically sealed off from the world it is conscious of” (Carolan 2009, 1). When the seal is ‘broken’, opportunities are created for developing and experiencing a different sense of being in the world. Authors like Pan and Ryan (2009, 631) imply this by stating that multisensory tourism is an enrichment and stipulate that “the more interactive a tourist or traveller is with his or her surroundings, the more the senses are stimulated; that is, when a tourist decides to step out of the ‘comfort zone’, his/ her senses are liberated; hence the travelling experience is enriched”. In their article, which focused on travel accounts by journalists in New Zealand, they differentiate the impact each of the different senses has on the exact nature of the tourism experience. Specifically, they mention olfactory experiences “to be the most closely tied to memory, [smell] links the past to the present to linger to inform the future through recall” (Pan and Ryan 2009, 628). In their earlier study, Dann and Jacobsen (2003, 4) explore olfactory experiences in greater depth. They quote Tuan, who already claimed in 1977, that “odours often lend character to places making them easier to identify and remember” (Tuan 1977, 11) and remind us of an expression coined by Porteous (1985, 359): ‘smellscape’².

There are other studies, too, that highlight the role of sensory experiences in representing and knowing place. In sensory tourism and in other disciplines, the focus has however tended to be on one particular

sense, e.g. sound or taste. Feintuch (2004) considers how Cape Breton’s fiddle music helped shape local identity, Gibson and Connell (2007) discuss the role and meaning of music in tourism in Memphis and, in a similar vein, Schofield (2009) explores Manchester’s popular music as non-traditional heritage. These examples do not consider ‘unspecific’ sounds of nature, i.e. the aural (see Pan and Ryan 2009, 630). McCartney (2002, 1), however, has argued that

environmental sounds hold an unusual place in our imaginations. They make up the often unnoticed ambiances of our daily lives: they are so much with us and surrounding us that it takes a special effort to bring them into the foreground, and pay attention to them.³

This need for a special effort to foreground taken-for-granted sound might explain a focus on more readily accessible sound such as music.

Taste is mostly addressed in the context of food tourism but, interestingly, these studies do not necessarily foreground the *sensory* aspects of tourism (see, for example, Sims 2009, Lin et al. 2011). A notable exception is the work by Everett (2008, 338) who explicitly aims to use food tourism as “a conceptual vehicle with which to explore issues of multi-sensory experience, embodied engagement and non-representable knowledge generation”. Interestingly, she found that engagement with food sometimes occurred in a ‘sanitized bubble’ which prevented the engagement of other senses to enhance the gustatory experience. In any case, Everett’s study focused on the consumption of meals. In exploring the Great Bear Rainforest, gustatory experiences do

² The concept ‘smellscape’ “suggests that, like visual impressions, smells may be spatially ordered or place related” (Porteous 1985: 359).

³ McGookin et al. (2009) have proposed an interesting way of including urban sound in navigation systems by creating ‘audio bubbles’. For tourists who explore a city by way of ‘serendipitous wandering’, rather than by mapping out routes along tourist highlights using a map, this system helps users to combine their wandering with finding (multisensory) points of interest.

not concern meals but ways of engaging more fully with the forest and thus gaining deeper knowledge.

In the case presented in this article, mobility is an important factor in how the forest is experienced, both in terms of when and how sensory experiences are mobilized. Lewis (2000) appropriately describes the sensation of movement as a 'sixth sense'. Moving on foot is the main mode of mobility for Spirit Bear Adventure tourists. Edensor (2000a, 82) notes "walking articulates a relationship between pedestrian and place, a relationship which is a complex imbrication of the material organization and shape of the landscape, its symbolic meaning, and the ongoing sensual perception of moving through space [...] walking also (re)produces and (re)interprets space and place". Further, Edensor (2000a, 92), drawing on Wainwright (1969, 33), claims that "there are certain rural spaces in which walking is not fruitful", and Wainwright's quote specifies such spaces as forests for being confined, lacking living creatures and vision ahead. The forest provides "significant, contested and ambivalent affordances [that] constrain behaviour along certain possibilities, connected to bodily capacities and limits of the human organism" (Macnaghten and Urry 2000, 169). Yet, the case in this article suggests what Crouch advocates that precisely through walking (in its various forms), spatialities are "developed *in practice*, ontologically, discursively made sense and felt in an embodied way" (Crouch 2001, 63, original emphasis). Through walking in the forest, the boundaries between "people, plants, animals and places [are not thought of as] static, but instead as relational, active, dynamic, ongoing and fluid" (Waite et al. 2009, 44).

THE GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST

The Great Bear Rainforest is situated along the coast of British Columbia, Canada,

stretching roughly from northern Vancouver Island until the border of Alaska (see figure 1). It is the last and largest remaining, intact temperate rainforest in the world (Prescott-Allen 2005), and represents one quarter of the world's coastal temperate rainforest (Smith and Sterritt 2011). The Great Bear Rainforest is an exceptionally diverse area, both culturally and biologically. It includes "exceptional marshes, estuaries, hot springs, productive riparian plant associations, ocean-spray zones, karst habitats, and forests on recent postglacial volcanic landforms" (Prescott-Allen 2005, 2). The area supports tremendous wildlife diversity with grizzly bears, black bears, six million migratory birds as well as endemic and charismatic species, amongst which the 'Raincoast wolves' and the white Kermode bear, and a multitude of unique botanical species (Smith and Sterritt 2011). In addition, the Great Bear Rainforest is home to over 2,500 salmon runs (i.e. salmon populations that return to a specific river over a particular time period) (Temple 2005). It is important to note that the rich diversity in the Great Bear Rainforest includes rich human cultures as well as the area has been populated by 29 First Nations groups for over 10,000 years (Prescott-Allen 2005).

The abundance of ancient trees such as cedar and spruce, growing to about 60 metres tall, makes B.C.'s rainforests an important economic resource. However, timber harvesting has been done with little concern for ecological diversity, adopting clear cutting and retention logging as key method. In 1997, environmentalists, First Nations and forest industry clashed in the Great Bear Rainforest over destructive logging practices (see CBC 1997). When environmentalists targeted the international market, the forest industry saw their sales figures dwindling and agreed to begin negotiations over the future management and protection of the area. Negotiations over

Great Bear Rainforest

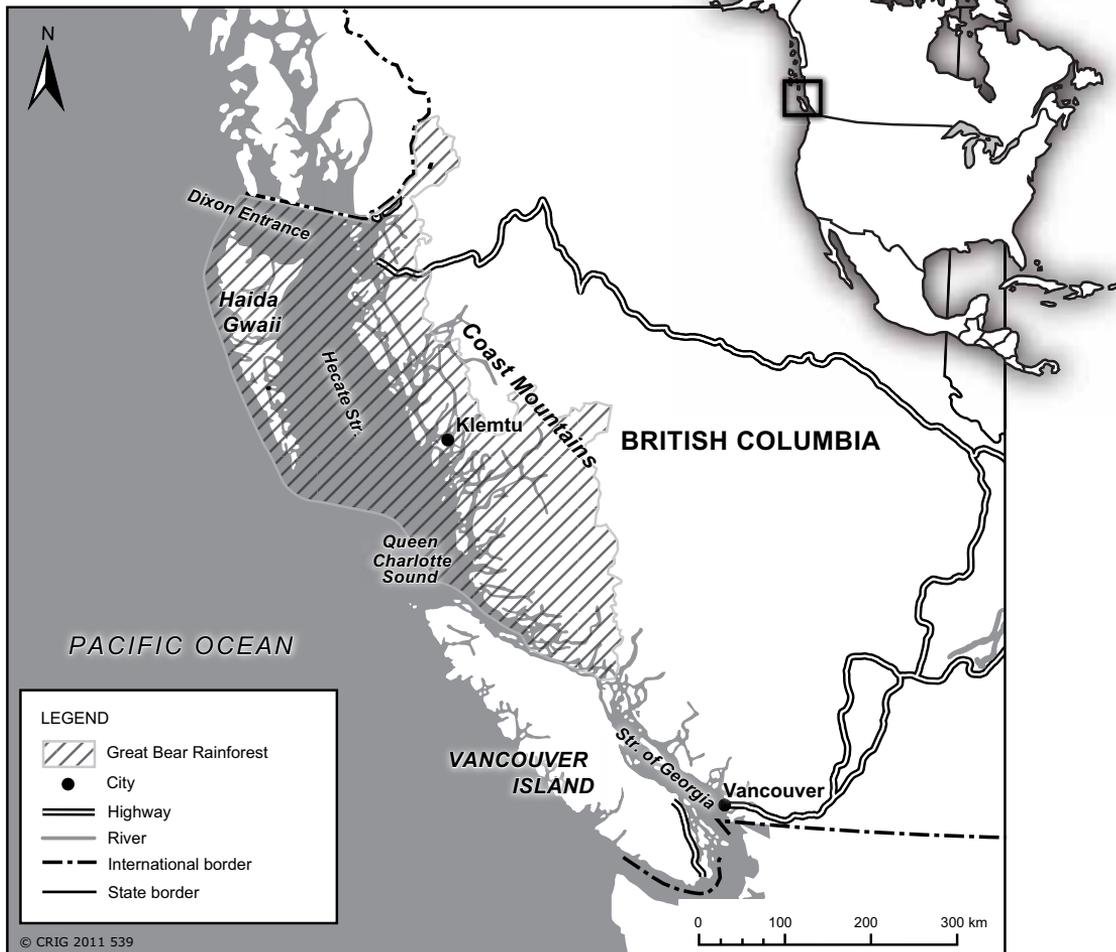


Figure 1 Location of the Great Bear Rainforest and Klemtu (source: CRIG 2011).

what should happen with the Great Bear Rainforest in terms of managing economy, ecology and culture between the provincial and national government, environmental-

ists, First Nations and various other stakeholders (among whom the tourism industry) took over ten years⁴.

⁴ See also Smith and Sterritt (2011), Clapp (2004), and Hoberg et al. (2004) for more details on the process of negotiating agreements regarding the management of the Great Bear Rainforest. For discussion of issues pertaining to ecosystem based management see, for example, Howlett et al. (2009) or Price et al. (2009). Rossiter's (2004) article additionally provides a useful historical geographical background on land and resource claims in the area and 'geographical imaginations' produced by environmental NGOs. These articles are important, too, because they also address the role of humans as a part of the Great Bear Rainforest's wilderness. Last but not least, Dempsey (2010) examines the role of non-human actors, specifically grizzlies in (unevenly) shaping the agreements regarding the management and protection of the Great Bear Rainforest. It is important to note that, at the time of writing, there were still conflicts that remain unsettled and began to emerge. In addition to uncertainties about the exact implementation of EBM, hunting, aquaculture and ongoing logging, a key issue was the planned oil pipeline by Enbridge from Alberta through the Great Bear Rainforest with oil tankers travelling through and stopping in forest.

TOURISM WITH SPIRIT BEAR ADVENTURES

The experiences discussed in this article were obtained during a four day trip facilitated by a First Nations-operated ecotourism venture called Spirit Bear Adventures. Spirit Bear Adventures operates out of the village Klemtu (see figure 2). Originally conceived to provide walking tours for people anchoring at Klemtu's harbour in 1996, Spirit Bear Adventures gradually began to incorporate cultural and wildlife tours by boat. In particular, the attention for the (white) Kermode bear (spirit bear) by the global media since the mid-1990s, accelerated developments in tourism. By now, most people that come to Klemtu, come to see bears. The company does emphasize bear encounters in both image and word but it sees a wildlife experience as an integral part of a cultural experience and even a personal-spiritual journey.

It must be noted that Klemtu is very remote; it cannot be accessed by car. A few possible ways of accessing the village are

by plane from Vancouver via Bella Bella to Klemtu, or by ferry from Port Hardy where Klemtu is a stop on the way to Prince Rupert. To undertake this trip from the Netherlands costs approximately 4500 euros per person (transportation and stay in Klemtu). It is therefore not a trip many people can or would consider. Nevertheless, Doug (Spirit Bear Adventures guide) describes visitors as "middle-class, outdoorsy people". He estimates that about 60-70 people join the organized boat tours per year, and that 75 to 80 percent come from Europe. Our group consisted of, apart from myself, two research assistants (Annemieke and Annalies), my husband Olaf, our two-and-a-half-year-old daughter Caitlin, Margot, a 67-year old woman from Vancouver Island and Lucas, a journalist in his 30s from Vancouver. From Klemtu, there were two guides, Doug and Vern, who accompanied the group, as well as Murray, who operated the boat.

Markwell (2001) argued that even though the advent of new technologies has enabled tourists to access more and more diverse



Figure 2 Klemtu. See fig. 1 for the location of the village. (Photo: Bettina van Hoven)

natural places, and even though promotional material promises wildlife encounters, the tourism industry often provides a structured and controlled form of tourism encounter with nature (e.g. through paths, boardwalks, boats etc). In so doing, the tourist is often separated from nature/wildlife. The Great Bear Rainforest is, I would argue, what Edensor calls a heterogeneous space, one that allows for or even demands unbounded performance, one that hosts “more vivid and varied sensual experience” and in which “haphazard features and events disorder the tourist gaze” (Edensor 2000b, 340). The Great Bear Rainforest does not accommodate an experience mediated from within “an encapsulated sanitized, hygienic bubble” (Dann and Jacobsen 2003, 20) because there are no roads on which to be transported by bus. In this place, the body touches and is touched – involuntarily and voluntarily – by natural elements in various sensory ways (Abram (1996, 68) calls this “reciprocity of the sensuous”). The trip by Spirit Bear Adventures was organized in a way that encouraged such experiences. The daily excursions were not planned precisely. The guides usually suggested a few possible locations that were good for wildlife viewing or important cultural sites, and the group then expressed their preferences. Once arrived at the location, the exact route was determined by the conditions imposed by the weather and the forest. Although the guides would aim for locations they knew bears spent time, there were no pre-established routes, boardwalks or viewing platforms as, for example, in the rainforests on Vancouver Island (Pacific Rim). Instead, the group hiked along bear-made trails,

sometimes more, sometimes less suited for humans. These trails included walking on uprooted plains, climbing over or under fallen trees and across rocks and boulders, moving through bear dens, shifting through shrubs (see figure 3) or overhanging, mossy branches, and wading and sliding through mud and rivers⁵.

In terms of recording data during and about these journeys, several sources were used. Visual data was captured and recorded with three video cameras and three photo cameras that were used interchangeably by three researchers as well as one of the Klemtu guides. In addition, the audio tracks on the video recordings composed data (e.g. people narrating what they saw as well as conversations between group members about their experiences as they were happening). Research diaries were kept that comprised written notes by the researchers as well as some video recordings served as such. The non-academic visitors were interviewed about their experiences, observations and meanings they ascribed to these during their stay at the Great Bear Rainforest after the walks. During the reviewing of all visual data when preparing the editing stage for the documentary, memories, observations and highlights were shared in discussing data. These discussions were taken into account in the analysis of all available data by the author of this article. This article is therefore to some degree built on auto-ethnographic data. In experiencing the Great Bear Rainforest and reflecting on these experiences, I must “acknowledge how [my] life histor[y], ... age, gender and the privileged position of [my] middle-class, academic background [...]

⁵ The trip incurred many possible risks and dangers. For that reason, tourists were required to sign a ‘Waiver of all claims, release from liability and assumption of risks’ form (the list of risks includes: (steep and slippery terrain, rough and dangerous water, wild animals, exposure to natural elements, food and water poisoning, and even the tour operator and other participants, all of which may cause injury or death).



Figure 3 Hiking through the Great Bear Rainforest. (Photo: Bettina van Hoven)

shape [my] engagement with this project” (Waite and Lane 2007, 160). I view this level of engagement as an asset without which it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to discuss the embodied experiences presented in this article.

In what follows, I begin by describing our approach to the Great Bear Rainforest by plane and boat because these allow for different “visual registers” (Franklin and Crang 2001, 13). I then want to briefly explore multi-sensory encounters with the forest and its elements. Although moving through the Great Bear Rainforest always engaged multiple senses at any point in time, and I sometimes point out these connections, I largely discuss each separately.

APPROACHING THE FOREST

When we first approached the Great Bear Rainforest, we did so by plane (see [video clip](#), van Hoven 2011a).⁶ In so doing, we

obtained a good sense of its spaciousness, its extent and the amount of forest. We also saw the amount of forest logged (clear cut) and the extent of the cleared site. In many areas in British Columbia, clear cuts are ‘masked’ by a green, forested strip along the roads from which they might be viewed and hence, for visitors like us, this was one of the rare occasions to witness a part of the conflict that took place before we visited. Accessing the Great Bear Rainforest by air provided a global connection – it illustrated what we, the visitors, may know as ‘green lung’ from the media, reminded us of the need for sizeable forests in light of climate change and alerted us to the rapid decrease of old-growth forests around the world.

During our four-day trip, all of our movements were preceded by boat trips. A different picture emerged as we viewed the steep mountains rising from and disappearing into the sea, a landscape intercepted

⁶ The video clip bears witness to some of the non-human actors that make up the landscape. Some spoken responses are audible, e.g. the 2,5 year-old traveler singing or narrating in Dutch a bear viewing (‘tourist performance’).

by wide, flat marshlands (see figure 4). Approaching our landing sites in this way, we connected with geological time, the snow-capped mountains being the most dominant reminder of geomorphologic processes during the last ice age as well as the area's mythical past (e.g. the Tsimshian legend of Moksgm'ol, the Spirit Bear).

Our mobility was significantly impacted by the forces of nature which was the main variable in determining when and where our routes started and stopped, what route we took, how we moved along it and how this felt (see also Cresswell, 2010). As we stepped off the boat, wherever tides allowed us to stop, we were increasingly engaged by the forest and its elements. It is important to point out that the landscape we see and experience today is made, to a large extent, by non-human-actors. Two key actors are bears and fish. Grizzlies dig up roots for their food supply and in doing so, air the soil. This then provides better living conditions for both animals and plants inhabiting this soil and eventually benefits

the bears again (Doug, personal conversation). Much less visually attractive perhaps but an important ingredient to the lush and tall growth of the trees is the salmon. It is dragged into the forest and left half eaten by bears, and further consumed by other animals. Eventually salmon nutrients are absorbed by plants and can be found in the highest tips of the highest trees. These provide shelter and shade for fellow forest dwellers and benefit the salmon that needs cool rivers to spawn (see e.g. Reimchen 2001 and Reimchen n.d.).

Bear viewing

Before we advanced into the forest, the guides provided a safety briefing as well as brief reports on what might be expected on the basis of a recent trip or recent wildlife viewings. These 'reports' were very influential in how we saw the forest and interpreted the wildlife we encountered. Our imagination of what we might encounter was additionally fuelled by our "virtual capital" (Curtin 2006, 311), i.e. previous



Figure 4 Khutze Inlet, Great Bear Rainforest. (Photo: Bettina van Hoven)

expectations, experiences and desires, or fears about wildlife based on “a large stock of knowledge and images assembled from sources such as television, film and advertising” (Curtin 2006, 311, see also Beardsworth and Bryman 2011). Margot, for example, had an imagination of bears as wild and unpredictable. She said during an interview:

I don't want to be overly romantic about it, but they are one of the wildest animals and the most unpredictable animals and they're obviously very wise and they don't like intruders and you don't quite know what mood they're in, how well fed they are, how irritable they are, so you're not quite sure ever what they're going to do. So walking on a trail was ... well not anxiety ridden, there was a sense of heightened awareness [...] the word grizzly just has a connotation of built-in fear.

Lucas, too, had some hesitations about grizzly viewing on foot. He recalls during an interview:

Well, to be honest I was probably more scared the day before the tour started because when I came on this tour originally I didn't realise that we were going to be walking on the same land that the bears were walking on, since I've been on a previous bear viewing trip where all the bear viewing was done from the boat. So when I found out we're going to be on land I thought, wow this could be challenging, [...] this could be scary.

During the walks, expectations sometimes persisted, or changed. For example, when Doug concluded his safety briefing with a comment on having seen a very large grizzly during his last visit, ‘very large’ was variably interpreted as fearsome or exciting, as the video-recorded group members’ comments revealed. The anticipation of bear viewing triggered bodily responses. Regardless of the cause (fear or excitement), excess perspiration was experienced by most of the group members.

During the interviews, Margot and Lucas recalled their bear encounters. For Margot this was sometimes ambiguous (when

viewing a grizzly) and sometimes mystical (when viewing the Spirit Bear) whilst Lucas’ experienced a changing emotional response from fear to excitement and even comfort.

Margot (narrating the grizzly encounter):

The one [day] that was the most thrilling, however, was ... we were sitting on a log by the water waiting for the bear and we were radioed from ... our boat driver, telling us that there was a bear heading in our direction. He said it was a grizzly and it was heading directly towards us. I must admit I was quite ... excited and nervous at that point. And sure enough the bear came through the bush and looked at us [...] and started heading towards us and that's when our leader, Doug, asked us to step forward and asked us to move away from the edge of the water and at that point the bear [...] reared up upon its hind legs, which was a scary site, and then very quickly turned and fled into the bush again.

Margot (narrating the Spirit Bear encounter):

...I could see the entire white, a kind of dirty blond, bear as he moved across our field of vision until he disappeared on the other side. And so it was a brief and almost mystical feel to it, it was so short but ... very real. And I don't know if that describes my feelings or not but it was, it was very exciting in a ... mystical, spiritual way. It sounds corny I know but... [doesn't finish her sentence].

Lucas:

When you're actually out there with the bears here, the coastal bears it's, I find, not all that scary especially if you're with an experienced guide, who knows what he's doing. And the bears themselves are pretty mellow. I mean if you're not bothering them then they're not going to bother you, as far as I can tell from my limited experience [...] I have to say today, seeing eleven bears in rapid succession that doesn't happen every day of the week. And especially to be able to be close to the bears in their natural environment that was ... exciting and we saw all kinds of different action today, including a large black bear that was very bad at catching fish and that provided some comic relief. So it was, it was all good.

Throughout the hike, the group stayed alert, as bears announced their presence through visual, audible and olfactory traces such as food, hairs, scratches, or faeces. These traces were pointed out by the guide (figure 5 and [video clip](#) on ‘bear viewing’, van Hoven 2011b) who then estimated when the particular bear that had left the trace might be encountered by us. When such an encounter occurred, often by binoculars or a camera first, most group members communicated with the animal(s). The video data provide several examples of talk to bears, mostly in the form of whispering, which included comments on their appearance and movement, and requests to approach the group (Annemieke) or to move away from it (Margot).

The data suggest, I would argue, that most group members ‘performed’ in a way that was appropriate in this setting: with a sense of awe, or as Edensor described in the case of the Taj Mahal, “solitudinous gazing” (2001, 72). There seemed to be an unspoken

agreement about this performance as being appropriate, at least for some visitors in our group, which may be attributed to a worry that noise may alert grizzlies to our presence or discourage wildlife from approaching. However, Caitlin, the two-and-a-half-year-old traveller, was quite oblivious to this kind of cautious or appreciative performance, she had not been ‘educated’ to adapt her behaviour and neither was she aware of “external surveillance [which] may restrict the scope of performances and help to underscore communal conventions about ‘appropriate’ ways of being a tourist” (Edensor 2001, 72). Instead, Caitlin sang to the bears or urged the rest of the group (loudly) to explain what we were seeing.

Undoubtedly, bear viewing comprised a significant part of the entire travel experience. Curtin (2006, 303, drawing on van Manen 1990), suggested, these experiences “can never be fully grasped in their immediacy. Instead, they gather significance as we reflect on and give memory to them”. In



Figure 5 Interpretation of traces by Spirit Bear Adventure’s guide Doug Neasloss. (Photo: Bettina van Hoven)

that context then, the group was important in ‘placing’ the bear viewing experience as the group offered opportunities to share experiences and thus “consolidate[d] the experience and transform[ed] it into a cherished memory” (Curtin 2006, 305). For most, if not all visitors, bear viewing can be considered a “wild-animal-triggered peak experience” (DeMares and Krycka 1998, xx)⁷. Having said this, I would emphasize that this encompassed all of the following: approaching the forest, imagining the viewing of the animal and all the multi-sensory impressions and stops along the way. It is also important to note that visitors are embedded in the wild animal’s territory and conduct the viewing as a part of the same network of beings whilst hiking (and stopping) in the forest. Ballantyne et al. (2010) also consider this broader context, at least to some extent, by taking into account sensory impressions, emotional affinity, reflective response and behavioural response in a study on marine-based wildlife in Scotland.

MULTISENSORY EXPERIENCES

Sound

In the case of the Great Bear Rainforest, sounds concerned both the unnoticed and ever-present ones and, less often, the ones announcing ‘tourism highlights’ such as a bear’s roar. The fact that many sounds were an almost taken-for-granted part of the tourism experience became clear only when analysis of video data took place which explicitly aimed at pulling the different sensory experiences apart. On video (see [video clip](#), van Hoven 2011c), the sound of wind on a speeding boat, the sound of a waterfall, seagulls and buzzing flies, and the sound of people whispering, shouting or cursing as a response to these was foregrounded (when compared to

experiencing the sounds in the field), and they became a powerful reminder of the presence of the aural (Pan and Ryan 2009). At the time of hiking through the forest the role of the ever-present soundtrack of nature was ‘drowned’ due to the presence of more immediate sensory input, or simply the strain of movement. Nevertheless, the role of sound was one that augmented emotions of joy as sound was ‘attached’ to the presence of wildlife and thus served as an announcement of experiences to come. In the forest, as McCartney (2002, 1) also pointed out, “environmental sounds form a powerful conduit to memory. Hearing a particular sound or ambience can launch a chain of related memories, whether experienced consciously or working subconsciously, that reconnects us with particular places and times in our lives”. However, for some the aural was cause for concern or even fear as in the case of a noisy waterfall, because our approach might not be audible by bears. In this case, sound combined with imagination and triggered a bodily response (goose bumps, increased heart beat, sweating). For example, Margot described during the interview:

And then we would walk up a trail which was usually a bear trail on the edge of the water, which is a bit nerve wrecking because walking along the water means that the sound of your hiking is ... drowned out by the water sounds and you might surprise the bear. So I'd always been told not to do that, but Doug knows what he's doing. So then we would get to a location where we would wait because it was a bear feeding location and there were salmon in the water and we would sit and wait for the bear to come, come to us if they weren't there, if they weren't there already.

Touch

As noted above, sound such as a grizzly’s roar, was met by an involuntary bodily reaction; it was *felt* as well as heard as the

⁷ Even though bear encounters are different from swimming with whales (DeMares and Krycka 1998) or dolphins (Curtin 2006) because of greater perceived (and possibly actual) danger.

body shivered, or the skin produced goose bumps. Indeed, Obrador-Pons pointed out that the haptic system is not limited to skin contact but it consists of “the entire sensory motor and cognitive components of the body–brain system” and that “the haptic system plays a central role in the constitution of feelings and habitual perceptions as well as in the formation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity” (Obrador-Pons 2007, 135 drawing on Paterson 2005; see also Oakley *et al.* 2000).

In the case of the Great Bear Rainforest, all experiences were framed by the haptic for, at all times, wind and weather touched our skin thus warming, cooling, moistening or stroking us. Touch provided connections with the forest as shrubs, ferns, mosses, or spider webs attached and detached as we passed. In addition, we were encouraged by our guide to reach out and explore forest elements such as tree bark, trace hairs, berries, different leaves or even dying salmon which had come to spawn and slowly disintegrated in the rivers. In a study on walks with people with visual impairments, MacPherson (2009) described how one of her visually impaired respondents feels *inhibited* to use touch in order to ‘see’ because it makes her look ‘too blind’. In contrast, in our case touch *enhanced* our seeing, gave it more depth and provided nuances to our view of the forest. Rather than just seeing lots of different sizes and shapes of leaves, we were able to name them and describe them in a personalized way, thus enhancing their meaning (see [video clip](#), van Hoven 2011d).

Touch also emphasized the experiences of the forest as one shared between travellers because we helped each other along across mossy logs, algae covered rocks, against the flow of a river or when stuck in the mud, or as we shared hugs upon successful hiking or wildlife viewing. This is important because in this way, the group also

became a part of the forest experience. The use of touch in experiencing the Great Bear Rainforest therefore “enhance[d] a sense of immersion and presence, of intimacy and proximity. Haptic modalities of perception reveal[ed] our *withness* with things” (Obrador-Pons 2007, 136, emphasis added), and imbued a sense of enchantment.

Smell

As implied above, smell is one of the sensory experiences that has received relatively more attention in tourism studies as it is believed, I reiterate, to “be the most closely tied to memory, [smell] links the past to the present to linger to inform the future through recall” (Dann and Jacobsen 2003, 628). In their discussion, Dann and Jacobsen made an interesting claim relevant to this paper. They noted that smells are most often described in terms of the thing they originate from and that the quality of a place is often expressed in the way it smells, i.e. “nice places smell good, nasty places smell bad” (Dann and Jacobsen 2003, 5). However, in the case of the Great Bear Rainforest, I would argue that this differentiation cannot be made as readily. Without a doubt, the predominant odour, once travelling on land, was that of “bear poop” (to quote Annemieke). In fact, this smell was so dominant that it was necessary to come right up to another object with a scent, say a berry or flower, to escape from it. In addition, the “bear poop” was so strong that it could virtually be tasted (this sentiment is also visible in the video link provided where Annemieke, when asked to describe the smell, ‘tastes’ the air before exclaiming “*berepoep!*” (bear poop; see [video clip](#), van Hoven 2011e). It is an odour that, in our ordinary lives, would not normally fall into the category ‘good’ but it still augmented the overall experience in the forest and helped it be conceived of as ‘nice place’. It is likely that

this reconfiguration of olfactory impression from bad to good was possible due to the unique situation in which it was obtained, namely whilst hiking through bear territory and in the close vicinity of large predators. In terms of providing a link between past, present and future, it is probable that this is the odour that will evoke memories of the Great Bear Rainforest.

Taste

With the exception of ‘tasting bear poop’ through smell, taste was a choice experience. Some experienced it more than others. It was also a guided experience since it needed to be pointed out to us by the guide which plants (or part thereof) were edible and when. The video data shows some hesitation by group members to put plant parts (e.g. berries, roots) in their mouths (see [video clip](#), van Hoven 2011f). I can only speculate that a reason may be the detachment of many humans from the origin of their modern processed foods. However, upon consuming the forest product, faces reveal pleasant surprise. The interrelation between an involuntary bodily reaction (e.g. raised adrenalin due to the suspense caused by eating unknown forest products, followed by the emotion of relief or achievement) and the actual flavour which unfolded on one’s taste buds likely consolidates memories of the forest carried into the future. It must be noted that taste was also the most ‘educational’ sense, because it was linked to the provision of aboriginal knowledge about and uses of plants. As a result of this kind of information about forest products, a connection was created between the past and the present and, more significantly, First Nations culture and our own (“this berry, that you are eating now, was used by our ancestors to...”).⁸ As a part of our gustatory experiences, we also

encountered power relations. In First Nations culture, some knowledge is owned by families and they need to give formal permission to the guides so they may share this knowledge. As a result, we were not shown plants and did not hear stories that were not sanctioned by elders to be known by outsiders. Nevertheless, this link to a human presence in the Great Bear Rainforest through tasting was significant as a way of integrating humans into the wilderness we experienced. Last but not least, taste could also be taken home; we could drink tea made from herbs that grow in the forest or eat chum salmon. Taste thus extended our experiences and encouraged us to revisit the forest in our imagination at different times and in different ways.

Mobility

All of the descriptions above of experiencing the forest through the senses are ways of ‘seeing’ the forest, as in a kind of “vision that happens through bodily immersion rather than detached observation” (Lund and Benediktsson 2010, 6). As Michael (2000, drawing on Ingold 1993) pointed out, “depending on the kind of activity in which we are engaged, we will be attuned to *picking up a particular kind of information*, leading to the perception of a particular affordance” (Michael 2000, 111, emphasis added). I will therefore conclude the sensory experiences with some observations of the role of mobility in sensing the Great Bear Rainforest.

As noted above, our routes were determined to a great extent by the conditions presented by nature; the tidal influence, the water level in rivers, the density of shrubs and so forth. These were our “conduits in space” (Cresswell 2010, 24). We carried neither map nor compass to determine routes or seek out ‘tourism highlights’ but

⁸ See also Moscardo (1996, 385) about the relevance of “generat[ing] visitor interest in a topic on-site by making connections to their experiences.”

relied on our guides for directions. They took us along invisible routes, retraced our steps when encountering a ‘dead end’ and knew detours. They assessed the suitability of viewing spots by monitoring the water level, the presence of fish and berries and other environmental cues that indicated that bears might want to come to this place to eat or rest. Due to the changing levels of water, fish etc., such locations could be different on a day-to-day or hour-to-hour basis. Due to the impact of nature, the weather, the growth of plants during times when routes were used less by guides, the routes taken offered different affordances, at times making it easy for us to pass through but not at others. Since we did not have a map (or GPS), we were not conscious of distance travelled. Having said so, map-distance would not have been as meaningful as felt distance. Considering the backing up, retracing, detouring and hiking up and down we were required to do, it was probable that we crossed greater distances than simply from A to B on a map. However, longer distance might appear shorter due to the richness of experiences encountered along the route. As a result, although our bodies might have become increasingly tired, they simultaneously came to life (see also Edensor 2000b)

The video data reveals the effort we undertook to move, trying to get across logs, or rivers, against the flow of water, and through mud - with our boots getting stuck (see [video clip](#), van Hoven 2011g). Annemieke’s research notes reveal:

Olaf and Caitlin are not coming along because the trail here [Powles River] is too rough [...] we follow the [Spirit Bear’s] trail through thick forest. Then we cross a river and our feet are increasingly becoming wet inside our boots.

Margot’s recollections of the trip highlight the physical strain as she explains:

Would I come back... I’ll certainly come back to this area, but would I re-do this trip? Probably not, but I would highly recommend it to friends and acquaintances who are fit enough, because it’s not, you know, I’m older and you, you would have to be quite fit at my age in order to do this and fit enough and not timid about the great outdoors. I mean if they didn’t... didn’t have some hiking experience I don’t think they should do it.[...] if I wasn’t fit I couldn’t have done it.

The physical strain of the hike is also visible (sweating) and audible (heavy breathing by the person operating the camera) when revisiting the video data. The experience was akin to what MacPherson (2009, 1048) observed: “Walkers have a temporal orientation to the present moment and to the demands of the terrain they are walking through”. The focus was very much on the now-moment, looking to the ground, the roots under our feet, or the algae-covered rocks in the water. The guides, through their multiple visits under different conditions, were very familiar with the terrain and all its ruggedness and slipperiness. But the tourists experienced difficulties negotiating the terrain, some more than others. Those who exercised regularly benefited as their bodies did not tire out as quickly, were more flexible or better able to balance. Those whose bodies were aged, or even impaired by inappropriate clothing were less mobile (see also Michael 2000). Our youngest traveller either had a viewpoint from close to the ground or from a baby-carrier backpack, which enabled her to look further ahead. None of us had the same view of the forest as we were moving through it. In spite of the strain of movement described here, there were also moments of standstill. However, during these moments, even though our legs did not move, we were not immobile. Instead, we extended limbs to grab plants for tasting, extended our senses by smelling, listening

or viewing, gazing through binoculars or cameras in order to spot wildlife (see also Lund and Wilson 2010). As is apparent from the description above, and in the words of Cresswell (2010, 25), “moving is an energy-consuming business. It can be hard work”. Therefore, as the number of hours hiked progressed, spots that were chosen as potential viewing spots inadvertently became resting spots as, finally, some group members’ bodies demanded relaxation and sometimes even sleep.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I presented different, multi-sensory experiences and tourist performances in the context of hiking in the Great Bear Rainforest. When compared to our first, Cartesian view of the forest from the airplane, it transpires that the hike made the forest multi-dimensional. Hiking turned out to be “a place-making practice” (Waitt et al 2009, 44). The hike helped recognize, understand and engage with landscape, the forest and its elements as something alive and as possessing the “ability to actively engage us and provoke our senses” (Abram 1996, 56). Dewsbury and Cloke (2009, 696) stipulated “landscape encapsulates embodied practices of being in the world, including ways of seeing but extending beyond sight to both a sense of being that includes all senses and an openness to being affected”. In performing tourism in the Great Bear Rainforest this is exactly what occurred, the travelling being was affected by the forest and its elements, and the boundaries between one and the other were blurred. As Lund and Benediktsson (2010, 2) maintained, “the land itself is imbued with an ability to transfer meanings to humans”. The transfer of meaning largely proceeded by employing the senses, by smelling, feeling, listening to and tasting the forest.

There are different modes of mobility that structured our experience, i.e. the use

of a plane and boat when moving towards the forest, and walking/ hiking/ wading when moving through the forest. Even when the walking stops, the body remains mobile in reaching out to the forest in different ways: touching, smelling, tasting and hearing. These modes are relevant because they provide barriers and opportunities for partaking in the multi-sensory experiences described. For example, planes and boats as means of transportation comprise a selection mechanism for potential visitors (e.g. those with sufficient funds to pay for and without fear of such means of transportation). Different routes to and in the forest required different mobilities, and different mobilities result in different distances (or nearnesses) to the elements of the forest. It is through these mobilities that relationships with the forest were felt, formed, interrupted, renewed and interpreted (see also Cresswell, 2010).

The context for this kind of tourism facilitated by Spirit Bear Adventures provides a specific experience that may not be mirrored by many ecotourism operators. In the discussion above, I noted that the structures controlling access and the level of direct contact with nature and wildlife was largely determined by the forces of nature themselves, rather than vehicles encapsulating the tourist, boardwalks, signs, viewing platforms etc. Having said that, some degree of control was exercised by the guides who were in charge of the routes we hiked as well as encouraged some behaviour such as tasting plants whilst cautioning against other such as wandering off alone in grizzly territory. Markwell (2001) commented on restrictions imposed by the tourism industry on human/ wildlife interaction. It is possible that a key difference is in the extent to which ecotourism operators perceive of nature as ‘Other’, fearsome, and risky, and of human guides as possessing both the knowledge worth conveying *about*

nature and the ability and means to do so. In contrast, Spirit Bear Adventures approaches nature as an active element in the tourism experience, as possessing the ability to convey knowledge. This may be attributed to the way in which the First Nations' guides defined the relationship between humans and nature. The following quote by a member of one of the First Nations in the Great Bear Rainforest illustrates this (Easterbrock, personal conversation:

Koeye [watershed in the Great Bear Rainforest] to me is just [...] a beautiful, spiritual place. It's a place that has a gift of teaching all of us life-lessons that will carry for the rest of our lives.

Ecotourism operators elsewhere might be encouraged then to offer more multi-sensory experiences, but this may require redefining the role of nature in the tourism experiences not in terms of a passive object to use as setting or admire from afar but as an active element to work *with*.

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