

# **'PROTECTORS AND INTERPRETERS OF THE OUTBACK'**

**A STUDY OF THE EMERGING OCCUPATION OF THE SAVANNAH  
GUIDE**

**By**

**Wendy Hillman**

**BA (Hons)  
M Soc Sc  
GCE (TT)**

**Thesis submitted for the research degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the School of Anthropology, Archaeology and Sociology  
Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences  
James Cook University**

**December 2003**



# STATEMENT OF ACCESS

I, the undersigned author of this work, understand that James Cook University will make this thesis available for use within the University Library and, via the Australian Digital Thesis network, for use elsewhere.

I understand that, as an unpublished work, a thesis has significant protection under the Copyright Act and;

I wish the following restrictions to be placed on this work:

In consulting this thesis I agree not to copy or closely paraphrase it in whole or in part without the written consent of the author; and to make proper public written acknowledgement for any assistance which I have obtained from it.

-----

-----

## STATEMENT OF SOURCES - DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

Wendy Hillman

December 2003

## **ELECTRONIC COPY**

I, the undersigned, the author of this work, declare that the electronic copy of this thesis provided to the James Cook University Library, is an accurate copy of the print thesis submitted, within the limits of the technology available.

Wendy Hillman

December 2003

## STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

For the undertaking of this thesis I received financial support from the Centre for the Sustainable Development of Tropical Savannas (TS-CRC) in the form of a PhD scholarship. I also received from them a scholarship extension and operational budgetary funding. *Australian Geographic* also provided me with additional monetary support for this project.

Dr Rosemary Dunn, from the Department of English, in the School of Humanities, James Cook University, proof read my entire thesis and offered suggestions for both structural and grammatical changes.

The Graduate Research Office, James Cook University also provided me with a PhD Completion Scholarship.

## ETHICS DECLARATION

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human Subjects* (1999) the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics, Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (approval number H969).

Wendy Hillman

December 2003

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This PhD thesis is the culmination of a dream I have had since I was a second year undergraduate student. There are many people who have struggled and triumphed with me to produce this final product. To all of them I owe my deepest gratitude and sincerest thanks.

Many thanks to my supervisor, Dr Roger Wilkinson, who once again provided me with encouragement, support, friendship, intellectual stimulation and a sounding board for my ideas and problems.

To my partner John, who as always, gave me strength, emotional support, fed me and looked after me throughout the duration of the thesis, even when his needs were greater than mine - my heartfelt thanks for making my life bearable, even on the days when it was not.

To the administrators, staff and officials of the Centre for the Sustainable Development of Tropical Savannas (TS-CRC), both in Darwin and Townsville, thank you for all the support you gave me. In particular, the scholarship, the scholarship extension and the operational budgetary funding. Thanks to Dr Ross Hynes, who drove me to all the Savannah Guides Schools, gave me copious amounts of information about the guides, and initially helped to establish and keep the lines of communication open with them. To Kate O'Donnell who always listened to my problems and who provided first class computer support and technical expertise; and to Kathryn Thorburn, who freely allowed me access to photographs of the guides that she had taken - Many thanks.

I also wish to acknowledge members of my family, who were supportive, even though they were slightly in awe of my ability to produce large manuscripts. Thank you all for your encouragement and unwavering strength, when I needed you - Melissa, Rod, Ashleigh, Michelle, Paul and Lachlan, also thanks to my brother, Michael.

To the Savannah Guides, who always displayed a sense of good humour, no matter what the day brought for them, thank you for participating in my project, and thank you for allowing me to participate in your lives. You taught me much about Australian bush lore, and the Australian environment. The contribution of each one of you has provided a rich tapestry for the basis of this dissertation. I could not have completed this work without your valuable insights.

Thanks must also go to *Australian Geographic*, who provided me with additional monetary support for this project.

To many numerous people and staff in the School of Anthropology, Archaeology and Sociology, I owe you thanks for your support throughout the undertaking of this thesis. Especially Audrey Logan, who went out of her way to provide both practical and emotional support at all times. Her willingness to 'look after me' is commendable and is above and beyond the normal calling of administrative staff. She deserves to be recognised for this. Thank you.

I also want to thank some other special people who provided me with emotional and practical support. Many thanks to Victoria Dyer, a student and a friend, who I taught as a first year undergraduate, and who blossomed into a Sociology Honours student, grew wings and flew away to a career, thank you for your practical insights and emotional strength. You were always there when I needed you. Also, in memory of one of my closest friends, Rika, who did not survive to see me complete my thesis, I thank you for everything; all your kindness, good humour, friendship and care. You are much missed.

To Darlene McNaughton and Annette Field, fellow postgraduate students and travellers along the precarious path of intellectual craftsmanship and academia, thank you for the many hours we spent trying to unravel the mysteries of 'life, the universe and everything'. Your willing ears made my journey so much easier. By the way, the answer is forty-two.

Extra special thanks and commendations must also go to Dr Rosemary Dunn, from the Department of English, in the School of Humanities, who painstakingly proof read my entire thesis and offered valuable insights and suggestions for both structural and grammatical changes - Many, many thanks.

Also, to the Graduate Research Office, thank you for the award of a much needed PhD Completion Scholarship. It was a necessary tool in the completion of my thesis.

Finally, to all the others I have not mentioned here, who helped me in any way, you know who you are, thank you one and all.



## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the emergence of the occupation of the ecotour guide as part of an expanding service economy. Qualitative methods, using participant observation and open ended, in-depth interviewing techniques, were used for the generation of insights and theory from the data.

From a sociological perspective, it is apparent that these tour guides provide an informed, interpretive guided ecotourism experience in the Australian outback. Their interpretive 'facts' are acquired from life experience in the bush. They are workers in an industry that, in some instances, offers little reward or return for extreme working conditions.

This study explores salient issues related to the perceived professionalisation of a collective group of tourism business individuals called Savannah Guides. The guides' philosophy is based on a collective sense of identity and recognition as an exclusive ecotourism organisation. This has been used as a means of positioning themselves in the competitive ecotourism market. Exclusivity and elitism are practiced by the guides to exclude individuals who do not conform to their organisational standards and codes of conduct. The organisation has regimented levels of attainment and can be considered as quasi-militaristic in its orientation. The guides have implemented various forms of assessment and training that serve as a measurement of competency and uniformity.

The guides present themselves to the public mainly through their individual tourism businesses. Emotional labour is one of the ways they interact with the public on their tours. They incorporate the emotional side of their interpretive work into their tourist products and tours, through the ways they impart both education and knowledge to the tourists. Their educative and cultural expertise is also informed by usage of emotional labour.

Concern for, and an extensive knowledge of the environment, are also components of their specialised form of guiding. Many of the guides see work in the ecotourism industry as a form of alternative employment, and as an option to the decline in rural employment. Others perceive a niche for this type of tourism and exploit the opportunity. This thesis details the guides' way of life as individuals within the Savannah Guides organisation and the ecotourist industry.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement of Access	i
Statement of Sources - Declaration	ii
Electronic Copy	iii
Statement on the Contribution of Others	iv
Declaration on Ethics	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Abstract	viii
Table of Contents	ix
List of Tables	xii
List of Plates	xiii
<b>CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION</b>	
Introduction	1
Situating the Study	3
A Short History of the Tourism Industry Responses to Ecotourism	19
Summary of the Thesis	27
<b>CHAPTER TWO - SOCIOLOGY, TOUR GUIDES AND ECOTOURISM</b>	
Introduction	30
Sociology and Tourism	33
Tourism and the Environment	43
Guiding the Tourists	66
The Contemporary Tour Guide	77
The Importance of Emotional Labour for Tour Guides	82
Conclusion	93
<b>CHAPTER THREE - RESEARCHING SAVANNAH GUIDES</b>	
Introduction	96
The Progression of the Study	99
Strategies Utilised for the Research	103
Issues of Methodology in Qualitative Research	114
Conclusion	123
<b>CHAPTER FOUR - 'IT'S NOT DIFFICULT TO BE A SAVANNAH GUIDE'</b>	
Introduction	125
Joining the Savannah Guides	127
Attributes of a Savannah Guide	138
Educational Level of Guides	147
Guiding As a Vocation	154

Balancing Work and Family Relationships	157
Gender and Race	166
Conclusion	170
<b>CHAPTER FIVE - CONFORMING TO ORGANISATIONAL CODES OF CONDUCT</b>	
Introduction	173
Presenting a Professional Organisation	175
Ritual Initiation	185
Membership Indoctrination	196
Informed, Authoritative Interpretation	211
Conclusion	221
<b>CHAPTER SIX - GUIDING ECOTOURS</b>	
Introduction	223
Ecotours	224
The Dynamics and Diversity of Ecotourist Groups	231
Ecotourist Numbers and Nationalities	240
On 'Becoming' an Ecotourist	249
Conclusion	260
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN - MANAGING AN ECOTOURISM BUSINESS</b>	
Introduction	263
Reasons People Become Ecotourism Business Managers	264
Marketing an Ecotourism Business	272
Restrictions on Managing an Ecotourism Business	284
Conclusion	301
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT - CONCLUSION</b>	
Summary of the Thesis	303
Sociological Implications of the Study	308
Theoretical Development	310
Future Research	314
<b>REFERENCES</b>	318
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
Appendix A - Letters of Support	
Appendix B - Letter of Introduction	
Appendix C - Informed Consent Form	
Appendix D - Examples of Open Ended Questions	
Appendix E - Table of Savannah Guide Demographics	
Appendix F - Savannah Guide Constitution	
Appendix G - Savannah Guide By-Laws	
Appendix H - Strategic Plan for the Proposed Expansion of the	

Savannah Guide Network  
Appendix I - Savannah Guides Marketing Literature

**GLOSSARY**

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1	Individual Savannah Guide Membership	176
Table 5.2	Savannah Guide Enterprise Membership	178
Table E.1	Savannah Guide Demographics	Appendix E

## LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1.1 Savannah Guides	6
Plate 3.1 Remote Gorge in Research Area	108
Plate 3.2 Remote Location in Research Area	109
Plate 3.3 Map of Tropical Savannas Research Area	110
Plate 4.1 A Savannah Guide in Uniform in a Lagoon Near Normanton	151
Plate 4.2 Savannah Guide Badge	168
Plate 5.1 Savannah Guide Station	178
Plate 5.2 Savannah Guides in Uniform	183
Plate 5.3 Newly Accredited and Upgraded Savannah Guides	192
Plate 5.4 An Interpretation Session	212
Plate 6.1 Artifacts in One of the Interpretive Ecotour Sessions	256
Plate 6.2 A Female Savannah Guide	257
Plate 7.1 Environmental Site Assessment	293