

## **A Picture and 1000 Words: Using Resident-Employed Photography to Understand Attachment to High Amenity Places**

Richard Stedman  
The Pennsylvania State University  
Tom Beckley  
Sara Wallace  
University of New Brunswick  
Marke Ambard  
Canadian Forest Service

Research on attachment to high amenity places has usually focused on visitors, despite the fact that many of these settings also may hold permanent residents. Visitor employed photography (VEP) has been used to understand landscape elements that increase the quality of the recreational experience. Our research applies the techniques of VEP to analyze local elements that foster place attachment among permanent residents of high amenity areas. We provided single use cameras to 45 subjects in two communities located in and adjacent to Jasper National Park, Alberta, instructing them to take photos of elements that most attach them to their community. Our results reveal a complex relationship between ecological and sociocultural factors in attachment; these elements are not separate, but help define each other.

**KEYWORDS:** *Sense of place, visitor employed photography.*

### Introduction

Considerations of sense of place and place attachment have become increasingly common in research on natural resource recreation sites and activities. Sense of place research has employed a variety of approaches, including surveys and personal interviews, but has not used photo-based methods. Visitor Employed Photography (VEP), used to capture visitor perceptions of landscape and recreational quality, represents a potential innovation in place research methods. Many high amenity landscapes are experienced not only by visitors, but also by year-round residents, who may have different sources of attachment. In this paper, we describe and implement a research

---

Address correspondence to: Richard C. Stedman, 111 Armsby Building, University Park, PA 16802, 814-863-8644, rstedman@psu.edu  
Do not quote or cite without author permission.

A previous draft of this paper was presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Meetings of the International Symposium on Society and Resource Management, June 2-5, Bloomington, IN. We acknowledge the financial support of the Sustainable Forest Management Network, The Rural Sociological Society, and the Canadian Forest Service, and would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Associate Editor at the *Journal of Leisure Research* for their editorial assistance.

protocol for using a photo-based approach to understand resident place attachment to the Jasper National Park area in west-central Alberta, Canada.

We seek to accomplish several things in our work: first, to explore the meanings held for the local landscape, paying special attention to the respective roles of nature and culture, and how they are linked. Second, we examine how these meanings are produced through experience with the physical and social landscape. Third, we compare these meanings between parks communities and working forest landscapes, based on the idea that particular land management strategies and regulations shape experiences and subsequent meanings.

### Literature Review

#### *Sense of Place/Place Attachment*

A "place" is a spatial setting that has been given meaning (Tuan, 1977) based on human experience, social relationships, emotions, and thoughts. Common to most definitions of sense of place is a three component view that integrates the physical environment, human behaviors, and social and/or psychological processes (Brandenburg & Carroll, 1995; Relph, 1997; 1976). Place terminology is somewhat vague. For example, "social and/or psychological processes" encompass a wide spectrum of potential specifics. Nor is it clear how human behaviors, the physical environment, and social and/or psychological processes are supposed to combine. Several distinctions need to be clarified. First, there are important differences between evaluative and descriptive domains of sense of place. Simply put, a great deal of research has addressed *how much* a setting means to a person; less research has examined the particulars of *what* the setting means. Although there are distinctions made in the place literature between concepts such as attachment, dependence, and identity, they share one common feature. They are all evaluative constructs: different ways of emphasizing the degree to which a setting is important (reflecting attachment), is useful for achieving goals (reflecting dependence), or supports one's sense of self (reflecting identity). These domains are all fundamentally evaluative in that a setting can succeed or fail to meet these criteria. This paper does not engage distinctions between these concepts. We use the somewhat generic term "attachment" or a strong positive bond between a person/group and a setting (Altman & Low, 1992). Readers wishing to explore these distinctions further have many options available to them, including Jorgensen and Stedman (2001), Moore and Graefe (1994), Stedman (2002), and Williams et al. (1992).

A more crucial distinction explored in this paper is that between evaluative elements, such as attachment, and symbolic place meanings as descriptive statements about "what kind of place" a setting represents. Is, for example, a certain multiple use forest area a wilderness? A playground? A workplace? A homeplace? Symbolic meanings underpin place attachment: we attribute meaning to our settings, and in turn become attached to the meanings (Stedman, 2003).

Experience in the setting drives evaluations such as attachment and descriptive meanings. All settings are imbued, to varying degrees, with multiple place meanings, based on mode of encounter. Some suggest that because meaning emerges through individual experience, e.g., "my camping trip"—place meanings are completely individualistic: a given setting will contain as many different meanings as there are people using the setting (Relph, 1976; Meinig, 1979). Others (e.g., Grieder & Garkovich, 1994) assert that meanings are based on social categories and therefore potentially shared by others within these categories because people construct and share the categories used to describe and understand the environment. For example, farmers as a group will share certain meanings for a plot of land that are distinct from those of real estate developers or hunters.

Place attachment is built through experience. Relph (1976) describes an experience-based continuum of sense of place based on a steady accumulation of experience. According to this view, those who have spent the most time, have participated fully in the life of the home or community, or have accumulated a series of "humble events" in a setting will have the strongest attachment. "Extended residence in a place tends to make us feel toward it almost as a living thing . . . the place has become a shaping partner in our lives, we partially define ourselves in its terms, and it carries the emotional charge of a family member or any other influential human agent (Ryden, 1993, page 66). However, Tuan (1977) notes that a sense of place may also develop quite rapidly in "chosen places", where dramatic landscapes and intense experiences can lead quickly to attachment. Many settings, especially those that attract visitors, may simultaneously exist as home places and chosen places.

#### *Meanings May Be Based on Nature or Culture*

Leisure research on place attachment has tended to utilize as subjects visitors to high amenity recreation areas (e.g., Williams et al., 1992; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000). These approaches have typically focused on attachment to the physical environment or the recreation experience. Less often has sense of place been measured for permanent residents of high amenity places. We suspect that the process by which attachment is created may differ between visitors and residents. If so, then research on high amenity places may have been privileging the visitor experience to public lands at the expense of other types of encounter and attachment (Hay, 1998).

In contrast, community attachment research (e.g., Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Ladewig & McCann, 1980; St. John et al., 1986; Theodori, 2000) has examined resident attachment to the sociocultural aspects of community (e.g., social linkages and community services), to the relative neglect of the physical environment. This approach, therefore, has not been well integrated with place attachment to high amenity recreation areas. This disconnect has

led to the relative isolation of studies that focus primarily on *either* ecological or socio-economic bases of attachment (Beckley, 2003). Eisenhauer *et al.* (2000) and Stedman (2003) use survey methodology to compare social and environmental factors in attachment (see also Kaltenborn, 1997). Eisenhauer *et al.* (2000) asked respondents in southern Utah to identify special outdoor places on public lands and provide reasons they were attached to these places. Responses were divided into "family/friend related reasons" and "environmental features/characteristics of place." Stedman (2003) modeled the causal mechanisms by which the physical environment contributes to place attachment and satisfaction. Although useful, these studies have measured social and environmental factors as analytically distinct, rather than examining how they may influence each other and work *jointly* to foster attachment.

### *Power and the Creation of Place*

The typical treatments of place and community described above assume that social actors have a great deal of freedom to choose their own experiences, interpret them, and subsequently create their own symbolic meanings and attachment. Such treatments, however, may neglect social context; place meanings are not necessarily products of individuals freely interpreting experiences of their own choosing. Rather, meanings may be imposed on landscapes by a variety of social forces. For example, Urry (1995) notes that place myths comprise a number of place images, but those embraced by the ruling classes are more likely to determine the character of the landscape. Place meanings may therefore be shaped by goals and desires of power-holding individuals or coalitions, such as the growth machine or other interests (Pred, 1983). Once set into motion, these forces may continue to influence what is considered "normal" for a given landscape Molotch *et al.* (2000). Greider and Garkovich (1994:17) also address the role of power in the construction of landscape: "In the context of landscapes, power is the capacity to impose a specific definition of the physical environment, one that reflects the symbols and meanings of a particular group of people." These definitions may not remain at the symbolic level but may result in change to the physical landscape that reflects them.

Institutional actors such as land management agencies may play a large role in the creation of place meanings: official mandates that "freeze" a landscape at a particular point in time, interpretative signs directing tourists to particular views (while also telling them what they are supposed to be seeing) directly affect the meanings that National Parks visitors may glean from their visit. Other policies, such as restricting access to certain areas (i.e., camping only in designated backcountry campsites) or specific types of activities (i.e., allowing hunting in National Forests but not National Parks) can indirectly affect the meanings attributed to the setting via influencing the behaviors that support these meanings.

*Photographic Methods for Understanding Sense of Place*

Much research on place attachment described earlier has made use of survey research methodologies and multivariate modeling. These approaches are useful to be sure. Other researchers (e.g., Kruger, 1996; Hummon, 1992) suggest a holistic, phenomenological sense of place that cannot be broken down into specific, measurable components and then "reassembled" using multivariate models. Regardless of which approach is preferred, it is clear that we are dealing with a complex phenomenon. Photo-based approaches may offer an advantage for understanding such multifaceted constructs. The fields of visual anthropology/sociology have used photographs to assess a wide range of concepts such as inequality, the construction of reality, power and conflict. Photographs are ". . . cultural documents offering evidence of historically, culturally and socially specific ways of seeing the world" (Rose, 2000, page 556). Goin (2001) suggests the need for researchers to move beyond considering photos as "supportive" of data. Rather stand-alone images are expressions of the ideas themselves. Methodologically, these approaches often analyze previously taken collections of photos to understand phenomena (as in Rose, 2000), or entail researcher-taken photos as objects for research participants to analyze, with these analyses serving as data (Goin, 2001; Harper, 1986).

Visitor employed photography (VEP) is a photo-based approach that has been popular with leisure researchers. It places cameras in the hands of participants, and has primarily been used to assess the perceptions of visitors to parks and recreation places. Cherem and Driver (1983), in a useful summary of research to that date, emphasize the utility of VEP for understanding scenic values of recreation visitors. Physical settings are seen to have certain attributes that can create, for example, "perceptually exciting nodes" based on the density of stimuli at a given site, or energy gradients where there are distinct edges, such as between forest and field (Cherem & Driver, 1983). Haywood (1990) describes several benefits of VEP. Photography (1) is an enjoyable, familiar activity to tourists; (2) helps to sharpen observation; (3) helps to identify specific locations that are important; which (4) gives clearer ideas on elements that are liked or disliked; and finally (5) facilitates comparisons between places.

Such methods have not been used to understand sense of place, even though they seem positioned to make a strong contribution. We modified VEP-type methods to address place attachment. In so doing, several methodological issues were considered. First, *who should take the photographs?* VEP, as the name suggests, puts cameras in the hands of research participants. We support the idea that research participants should take the pictures to represent their own experience. VEP research typically involves visitors or tourists (e.g., Cherem & Driver, 1983; Chenoweth, 1984; Markwell, 1997; Haywood, 1990). However, when applied to questions of attachment to a community, this approach has potential pitfalls. Chenoweth (1984) notes that research subjects may take photos that are non-representative of their

entire recreational experience. This tendency probably relates to unfamiliarity with the setting. For example, when researchers assign the task of photographing a travel route with which respondents are not familiar, participants may save too many pictures and then "burn" them at the end if there is not suitable material. Markwell (1997) noted an opposite tendency in his study of pictures taken on a nature tour: beginnings of excursions were over-represented, due perhaps to the initial novelty of the trip. Haywood (1990) suggests that compressing the photo taking period into a single day (as he did in his work) may result in an over-representation of tourist icons rather than ordinary vernacular places. In contrast to these approaches, Yamashita (2002) examines local resident perceptions of water quality, noting that residents may have more difficulty expressing aesthetic quality than visitors, precisely *because* they are insiders and less conscious of aesthetic qualities. When addressing complex attachment to landscape, we would expect, however, that familiarity ought to increase the validity of the items selected to represent sources of attachment. We also expect that pictures taken by local residents may represent a wider range of phenomena than pictures taken by transient visitors.

*Where should pictures be taken and what should they represent?* Most VEP has focused on scenic beauty and other elements that affect the quality of the recreation experience (e.g., Chenoweth, 1984; Zube *et al.*, 1982). If we are to expand VEP to include sense of place, the interplay between nature and culture may be crucial. It is easy to borrow from the theory in visual sociology/anthropology to expand the range of phenomena potentially captured by photographs to include socio-cultural bases of sense of place: multiple meanings, the experiences that give rise to them, and the social forces that shape these meanings.

*How should the photos be interpreted?* Goin (2001) notes that with every photo taken ". . . a fiction is created. . . .but presents to the uniformed, an overwhelming conviction of fact" (p. 363). By implication, what photos appear to be and what they really represent may be very different things, and some follow-up helps to uncover the intended meanings of the participant. Chenoweth (1984) and Yamashita (2002) note the utility of asking respondents to provide written descriptions of each photo in a notebook or diary. These elaborations are helpful, but in cases of complex phenomena, an interview may help participants clarify their intentions, and probes may permit deeper insights into the meaning of the photos (see Markwell, 1997). This is especially relevant for understanding attachment: people are able to tell stories through photographs of their experiences: what they've done, where they've done it, with whom, and what it has meant to them.

*Our approach.* Photographic methods represent a logical progression in cumulative efforts to understand sense of place. Survey research approaches allow quantitative hypothesis testing, while interviews permit in-depth understanding. Missing are the images themselves and the meanings embodied therein. Although we did not specifically set out to counter-pose our work to VEP, we find much of merit in the method. We assert that maximizing

the effectiveness of the research requires several things. First, research subjects should take the photographs themselves, rather than analyzing photos that have been taken by researchers. Second, subjects should include local residents, rather than limiting research to visitors. Resident experience with the landscape may be broader and deeper, including connections to diverse phenomena such as the natural environment, social relationships, workplace, and local history. Third, if participant experience can transcend aesthetic appreciation, methods should reflect this to elucidate a broader range of lived experience. Finally, the researcher should not assume that the content of the picture is revealed simply by examining it. Rather, the photographer intent should be revealed by triangulating through an interview process that allows feedback with the researcher. It is not that the photos support the interviews (or vice-versa): both are valid forms of data that need to be reconciled to form a coherent understanding.

With these modifications, we believe that VEP offers significant advantages for the study of place attachment: (1) it is capable of conveying multilayered meanings, as photographs can represent multiple things (e.g., experiences, settings, and social domains) simultaneously; (2) photographs can serve as a reference point and a focus of the interviews. Without the photographs, and more importantly the research participants' experience of taking them and thinking about what to select, our interviews would have been much shorter and far less contextually rich. Interviews allow researchers to better elucidate the content of the photo and the degree to which it represents sociocultural or ecological phenomena, and how these combine in potentially unique ways; (3) photographs are "placed" in ways not easily captured in survey research: a photo is necessarily taken at a specific locale, which allows more setting specificity than asking people to provide general assessments of their community or recreation setting. In the study of place, it makes sense to learn a bit about the specific *places* to which people are attached.

### Research Questions and Setting

In this research project we examine how the meanings are held for the local landscape (including the interrelationship of nature and culture); the experiences that give rise to these meanings, how they differ between parks communities and working forest landscapes; and whether social forces such as contrasting land management strategies have differentially shaped them. We have a methodological meta-question running through our work as well: is the photo approach useful? Does it capture important place sentiments, and how do the elements of the method (photos and interview data) complement or contradict each other?

Our project involved six communities in three locales, but in this paper, we report only on two sites chosen in the province of Alberta. One of our study communities is located within a National Park (Jasper, Alberta, within Jasper National Park), and one community is located outside the park

boundary and is dependent on natural resource jobs such as mining, energy, and forestry (Hinton, Alberta). Ambard (2003) provides more detail. The communities differ on many indicators of socio-economic sustainability (see Table 1 for a summary). It is important to note that these communities are located in relatively close proximity to each other (~30 miles), and therefore share relatively similar physical environments, although Hinton is located in the foothills of the mountains, rather than being surrounded by mountains, as is Jasper.

Canada differs from the United States in that it is relatively common for entire communities to be located within the boundaries of national parks, rather than adjacent to the boundaries of parks and protected areas (Kranich & Petrezelka, 2003). In Canada, the rules for living in Parks communities are complex. People own their homes but not the land they sit on, but the land is leased from the Federal Government. The mountain parks (e.g., Jasper) have a "need to reside" clause that essentially allows only those with jobs within the Park to reside there. This regulation has a number of impacts: unless you are a long-term resident you cannot retire to a Parks community. This clause also results in very low unemployment within these communities because the unemployed cannot reside there. That said, there are many temporary or short-term residents of these places, often disproportionately represented by young adults in their early to mid-twenties. These communities have an interesting (and informal) status hierarchy based on length of time in the community. True natives to Jasper, who were born and bred there, often descending from families that came early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to work on the railroad, differentiate themselves from "transplants." In turn,

TABLE 1  
Summary of Communities

Site	Description	Population (2000)	Unemployment (1996)	Net Migration (1991-1996)	Family Poverty (1996)	Median HH Income (1996)	N
Hinton AB	Resource dependent community based on coal and forestry, but also a "gateway" to Jasper National Park	9,961	6%	10%	8%	\$59,000	22
Jasper AB	International tourist destination located within Jasper National Park	4,301	4%	21%	5%	\$52,000	23



year-round transplants differentiate themselves from summer employees. All of these groups distance themselves from tourists or park visitors.

### Methods

In each community, more than 20 residents (total  $n = 45$ ) were given 24 exposure single use cameras and instructed to take two photographs each (in case one photo was of poor quality) of 12 things that (in our words) "most attach" them to their community, that "mean the most" to them, or that they would "miss most if they were to move away." Participants were selected to reflect the variation of sentiments that existed in each community, drawing from a wide range of gender, age, length of residence in the community, and occupation. Snowball sampling based on previous contacts in the community was combined with respondents to public notices, and "cold contacts" where individuals were approached in certain contexts linked to their characteristics of interest (i.e., workplaces to identify those employed in the forest industry), or simply approached in public settings (i.e., coffee shops or town parks). We encountered a great deal of enthusiasm among potential participants; only one person among those contacted refused to participate. In hopes of maximizing the diversity of participants, we asked those who agreed to participate to suggest someone with a potentially contrasting view. Our intent was not to be perfectly reflective of the composition of each community, but to maximize the likelihood that most points of view present in the community were represented.

We attempted to keep the instructions of what/where to photograph somewhat open to avoid unduly affecting both the content and the location of the pictures, but mentioned that anything was appropriate, such as photos of people or things right in the town site (e.g. their home, their church), nearby places that they visit or recreate (e.g., trails, lakes, fishing spots). To increase the odds that the pictures taken were well-thought out expressions of attachment, we encouraged participants to make a list of the places/photos/activities they wanted to capture prior to taking any of their photographs. In so doing, we hoped to avoid the tendency of participants taking unimportant photos to finish their roll of film. We do not know the extent to which these instructions were followed, as participants were not required to submit their list. Several participants mentioned that they did so and that the list was helpful in helping them to avoid taking "impulse" photographs.

Our field researchers arranged with the subjects a time to pick up the completed cameras and conduct a follow-up interview. We made two sets of prints, one for the research team and one for the participant to keep. This set was placed in a small photo album as a "thank you" for participating. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and three hours. We began with respondent personal history in the community to put them at ease and provide us with important background context. We then examined the 12 photos one by one and asked the participant to describe the content of the picture, what they were attempting to represent, and why they took it. We also asked

them to locate the photo on a detailed map of the area, allowing us to examine the spatial distribution of important places to respondents. All of the interviews were digitally audio-recorded with the permission of the participants, who were instructed that at any time they could ask us to turn the recorder, or do it themselves. This occurred several times in the interviews; such occurrences were usually tied to protecting the privacy of specific individuals.

## Results

### *Sample Characteristics*

In total, 45 people participated in the project: 22 in Hinton and 23 in Jasper (Table 2). This research produced a large amount of data in the form

TABLE 2  
*Sample Characteristics, Hinton and Jasper*

	Hinton (N = 22)	Jasper (N = 23)
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	9	13
Male	13	10
<i>Age</i>		
18-24	0	2
25-34	5	4
35-44	10	8
45-64	5	6
65 and above	2	3
<i>Length of Residence in Community</i>		
0-2 years	0	4
3-9 years	6	5
10-29 years	11	6
30 years and more	5	8
Born here	8	6
From away	14	17
<i>Occupations of Respondents</i>		
Forestry and Mining	8	0
Parks Canada	0	7
City Employee	4	1
Canadian National Railroad	0	3
Small Business Owner/self employed	2	3
Other services (education, health, church)	4	6
Provincial Government	1	0
Retired	2	2

of over 600 photographs from the two communities and more than 50 hours of accompanying interview text. Participants were as likely to be male as female, and spanned a wide range of ages and length in the community. Participants also represented a range of occupations, including those dependent on the extractive industries in Hinton, and in Jasper, those employed by Parks Canada, the Canadian National Railroad, and the tourism industry.

### *Findings*

Many stories could be told from the richness of these qualitative data. We try to maintain focus on the meanings held for the local area and (1) the degree to which these meanings depend on the interpenetration of the natural and the social; (2) the process of cumulative experience by which these meanings are produced and give rise to attachment; and (3) the importance of the social context of each particular community that drives experience and meanings. In distinction to previous approaches that have tended to dichotomize sources of attachment into either social or natural elements, we found that in high amenity settings that include permanent residents, these elements are not so easily divided: whether hiking with a long-term group of friends or viewing spectacular mountain scenery as one goes about his or her daily routine, it is clear that nature and culture inform each other.

Some meanings seem dependent entirely on social relations: the spectacular physical environment appears nearly irrelevant. In some ways, and to some people, these *are* ordinary places. For example:

*This is my alley. I love my alley. Like no kidding, we are out here with coffees, breakfast, beers. . . it's like our social meeting place. Someone comes out and chats, and it's really fun. We have really good conversations out in this stupid alley. It's really a unique little spot. (Figure 1, Jasper)*

*That's my neighbors putting in their new driveway. . . I spent many a happy hour out on my knees helping them. And as you can see from here, lots of other people too. And that's really important to me. (Figure 2, Hinton)*

Some of these meanings are tied to traditional images of small town living, both in Hinton and in Jasper. Respondents from each place emphasized the importance of the small size and livability of their communities. Another Jasper participant (picture not included) placed his bicycle in the foreground of every picture as a confirmation of the importance of not needing an automobile to get around town. Similar sentiments were expressed by other participants in both communities:

*This is my downtown, my post office, my bank. . . I can walk to all these places. I can walk to the post office, I can walk to the bank, I can walk downtown. I live in a pedestrian community. That is critical to me. (Figure 3, Jasper)*

*This picture is of one of the major intersections here in town, at 730 in the morning on a typical workday. This picture is to represent the type of traffic that you have to fight*



*Figure 1.* Jasper Alleyway



*Figure 2.* Hinton Neighbors



Figure 3. Pedestrian-Friendly Downtown Jasper

*with on a regular basis. There's no road rage. . . You don't waste a lot of time going to work. Five minutes whether you ride your bike or take your car. (Figure 4, Hinton)*

In some instances, the neglect of the natural surroundings a source of attachment seems deliberate. This may serve as a form of resistance to the emphasis on nature-based tourism that dominates the local community. Jasper participants placed particular emphasis on their community being more than just a "tourist town." One Jasper participant, in taking a picture of a local church (not pictured), said "It is extremely important to me to communicate to you that citizens live here, as opposed to tourist-serving robots I am just a citizen. . . I'm going to show you the mundane." In the words of another Jasper resident:

*[The] Post office. This is where everybody meets. That is very, very important. I bet you've gotten pictures from everybody on the post office. . . This is where the locals can meet locals. (Figure 5, Jasper)*

These Jasper participants emphasize the distinction between local and non-local people and how important it is for residents to have sites in the community that are not overrun by visitors. Many public spaces such as restaurants and parks no longer meet this need. This stress on public sites seems tied to the strong visitor presence in Jasper, as no such statements were uttered by Hinton participants.



*Figure 4.* Morning "Rush Hour" in Hinton



*Figure 5.* Jasper Post Office: "Where Locals Meet"

Attachment to the social landscape accumulates through repeated experience. Participants emphasized that ordinary places can become meaningful over time as memories are built through their use:

*The Rec [recreation] Centre. It's not a real attractive building or anything. . . It's a good community building and you can do a lot there. . . My kids went to that daycare until they were six. So for quite a few years I was usually there twice a day every day. My kids took skating lessons and hockey, and swimming lessons. Besides home, it's the building where we spent the most time in. (Figure 6, Hinton)*

These ordinary places are the sites for important social connections: another Jasper resident, discussing a local coffee shop (not pictured) says “we used to go down there at about 12:45 pm and have coffee and meet people down there, and have lunch. That's why we go. It's not that we can't make coffee at home. . . But no, we go down there, meet people and yack. Stay about an hour.”

Day-to-day community attachment is created through repeated encounters with family, friends, home, and work. Many of these encounters occur in public spaces such as those described above. We received more photos of these types of public spaces from Hinton participants than Jasper participants. Jasper's public facilities are both more numerous and (to an impartial observer) of higher quality. However it is likely that these facilities don't foster as much attachment for Jasper residents simply because such places must be shared with thousands of visitors.

The preceding suggests that resident photography is capable of capturing a wide array of mundane phenomena (i.e., neighbors, coffee shops, alleyways) that contribute to place attachment. However, these communities



Figure 6. Hinton Recreation Centre

are located in spectacular landscapes that draw in visitors from the world over. What role does nature play in the day-to-day experiences of Jasper and Hinton residents? The photographs and their descriptions make it clear that the physical landscape surrounding both communities is a significant source of attachment. Many responses focus on mountain scenery and wildlife, differing little from what we might have found had we given cameras to Jasper visitors. One Hinton resident (picture not included) told us *"We always look at the mountains and we're just in awe. I've been driving through here for just about forty years. I never get tired of this at all. . . I don't know what it is about them. It just feels good driving through and you just see something different every time."* Another participant emphasized wildlife:

*This next picture represents the wildlife, we see so much wildlife here, you see it everyday. I took this picture one day when we were on the way to the Hot Springs. It is just so easy to see wildlife here. . . the animals here feel safe and protected, they are being preserved.*  
(Figure 7, Jasper)

The rivers, mountains, and forests in the Jasper region are of course not merely scenic, but also important resources for myriad recreational activities. These recreational opportunities were photographed and emphasized in the interviews with Jasper and Hinton participants. For example, one Jasper participant (no picture) gushed: *"how could I ever live anywhere else? Hiking, biking, skiing, I can do it all here. . . I'm not much of a fisherman, but I hear that's world-class too. . ."*



Figure 7. Wildlife in Jasper National Park



Such statements might suggest that these views of nature really aren't that different from those of tourists. However, despite photographs of wildlife and mountains, we suggest that many resident experiences and meanings go beyond those of visitors. For most participants, nature is intertwined with everyday elements. This conjoining of elements is a major driver of place attachment in these communities. One linkage that quickly becomes apparent is the spatial link between nature and home. The proximity between outdoors and home emerged repeatedly in comments made by residents of both communities: nature, because it is so close by, is also not simply "out there," but becomes an extension of home.

*I took three pictures on this bike trip. This one I thought was kind of neat because you can see the town site behind it. That's just to show you how close to town you've got such a cool opportunity to do stuff. (Figure 8, Jasper)*

*This was taken on their trail system through town. [we] hike 4 miles everyday on the trail system through town. . .can get on it right outside our house. . .we like the wildlife still so close at hand, and the availability of the trails. (Figure 9, Hinton)*

Another element that differentiates resident recreation-based photos from what we might expect from more typical VEP participants approaches is the layered nature of their recreational experiences: attachment is driven by accumulated experience and the expectation that there will be more such experiences. Consider the following:



Figure 8. Biking Near Jasper Townsite



Figure 9. Trail Closure in Hinton Townsite

*Pyramid Mountain. Like, I did so many things up there. It was a beach when I was a kid. It was the party place when I was a teenager. You know, bush parties and that sort of thing up there. Uh, skating parties in the winter. . . Just a lot of really good memories up there. (Figure 10, Jasper)*

*This next picture is. . . on the Bald Hills trail. We come back to this area, at least once every year. I hike this with my Thursday hiking group, which can have anywhere from 4-6 people, but this day there was only 4 of us. It's always nice to have more people come along, see it more people to share with. . . the people I hike with, they're just other people that I've met. Some of them have grown up here, but they were older than me so the only common denominator really is the fact that we love to hike. (Figure 11, Jasper)*

*This is a view of the Athabasca river, I don't know what km it is on the Emerson Lakes Road, but it's right near Emerson Lakes actually. My grandpa used to take me fishing here all the time as a kid, fishing for Jack Fish and white fish, and then we would go to Emerson Lakes and fish there. [INT: And you still go to the spots. . . for tradition?] Yep. (Figure 12, Hinton)*

For long term residents especially, it is very difficult to separate out the social and the natural landscape into "either-or" labels: the degree to which these interpenetrate, and the memory of past events mixed with current ones, might foster increased attachment among residents of these special places.

Our research reveals the way nature-based meanings differ between parks communities (Jasper) and working forest communities (Hinton). The policies and land management strategies that differ between parks and working forests shape peoples' experiences of and meanings held for these set-



*Figure 10.* Pyramid Mountain Memories



*Figure 11.* "Thursday Hiking Club" Trail



Figure 12. Fishing Spot with Grandpa

tings. Fairly strong differences emerged between Jasper and Hinton residents vis-à-vis their preferred recreational landscapes. Jasper residents rarely, if ever, mentioned recreating outside of Jasper National Park. Many Hinton residents, in contrast, preferred to recreate in the foothills area outside of the park, rather than in the park. These preferences appear to be based on the activities allowed or restricted in the two areas. Jasper, like most National Parks, restricts camping to designated sites and hiking to designated trails, prohibits the use of off-road motorized vehicles, does not allow hunting, and places stringent restrictions on fishing (including mandatory catch-and-release on most waters). No such restrictions exist on the nearby working forest landscape: “random camping” (in the words of forest managers) or “bush camping” (to use the local vernacular) is very popular, as is hunting, fishing, and motorized recreation.

Although in the minority, some Jasper participants were uneasy about restrictive regulations and how they may shape experiences. For example, one participant (no photo) mentioned that “hiking in a national park is a little bit like hiking through a corridor bubble” that separated her from the natural world. Another participant photographed a trail and stated:

*Sometimes if I want to get to a particular outcropping or something I will just cut through the bush. A lot of people aren't okay with doing that though. It's almost, like, even when people come to get close to nature, they are separate, they don't step off of that pathway (Figure 13, Jasper).*



Figure 13. Stay on the Trail!

These sentiments are apparently felt even more keenly among Hinton participants who often avoided recreating in Jasper National Park. One respondent said plainly: “[I] like being in Hinton because there are not as many rules and regulations.” Another Hinton participant (no picture) elaborated “I use the area around Hinton more [for recreation]. Also, I’m thinking about getting a couple quads. . . [vernacular for motorized all terrain vehicles], it seems like all the really beautiful spots that are tucked away are now becoming restricted areas were you cannot take quads. It’s an irony is that you’re able to build these cabins and lodges for tourists to go hike in the Wilmore Wilderness area and things like that, but can’t quad. . . there’s little bit of a double standard there.” Another participant photographed a family picnic:

*It’s up at Mountain Park [an area outside Jasper National Park]. We were having a wiener roast. . . that’s the third time in three months that we’ve gone to Mountain Park, and it’s a long drive over a rickety road, but we go and we take our European guests out there. . . just to show them that there’s more here than the [National] Park. And you can always stop out there, and have a picnic, there’s no one coming out to saying you owe me for this and you owe me for that (Figure 13, Hinton).*

Although exceptions exist, Hinton participants emphasized “hands-on” recreational activities that included fishing, hunting, and motorized recreation. They resent being told what not to do and where not to go. Jasper participants are willing to make these sacrifices for the sake of recreating in a world class landscape. These differences may be linked to employment patterns

and associated community culture. Jasper is unequivocally a “parks town,” while Hinton is a community that, although struggling with developing its image as a gateway community to Jasper National Park, has an economy based on logging, mining, and energy. For example:

*the mill [is] important for keeping the town running. . . [it is] the main employer and it's important for the prosperity and continuance of the town. We have a healthy respect for industries that can keep towns going. (Figure 14, Hinton)*

Participants, many whom are employed in resource industries or linked to them through family, view this utilization of resources for economic development in a positive light. This resource employment culture extends to recreation preferences such as hunting, fishing (and keeping one's catch), riding off-road vehicles, and camping where one wishes rather than in designated sites. The lands that are used for these activities may be preferable to National Park lands. Although not as visually spectacular, these lands offer low price, no crowds, and relative freedom to pursue chosen recreation activities.

#### Summary and Discussion

Our paper has demonstrated the power of placing cameras in the hands of local community residents and asking them to show us and tell us about the elements that attach them to their local landscape. Our research utilizes



Figure 14. The Weiner Roast Spot



*Figure 15.* Hinton Pulp Mill

a traditional methodology usually used in the study of recreational visitors and applies it more broadly, to understand place attachment of community residents. This approach reveals a different side of the high amenity Jasper region: although we received pictures of elk, mountains, and rivers, we also were shown images of churches, cemeteries, post offices, bicycles, and pulp mills. Residents of both communities have a multiplicity of types of ties to the social and natural environment. Somewhat in contrast to studies that used quantitative survey research to compare the importance of these ecological and social factors, we find that these elements are exceedingly difficult to separate out into either/or components. These elements inform each other: the natural world is peopled and everyday social relations are never far from nature. While this conclusion may speak most strongly to permanent residents of high amenity settings, it is hardly limited to them. Residents may come to feel quite passionately about the role of nature in more ordinary landscapes as well.

For residents, home meanings include the nearby spectacular natural surroundings. Nature is not a place to where one must travel, but rather is part of an expanded everyday community. This view of home differs from the views of Jasper visitors: the spectacular environment and its recreation activities are *not* part of everyday life for tourists, but may stand in strong contrast to their image of home. There is another way in which the physical environment cannot be separated from the social environment: social relationships are played out in these natural settings. Friendships are built through activities like hiking and bicycling groups; the stories that keep these

relationships strong include stories of things that happen when people are together in nature. Although the visitor experience of nature also includes social relationships, these relationships are portable in the sense that they largely occur with the friends and family with whom one is traveling. As a result, they transcend the Jasper setting.

The accumulation of experience appears to be crucial to developing place attachment. Although we did not seek to test the strength of attachment, participants repeatedly revealed to us the special places that are made special not solely on the basis of their visual beauty nor outstanding recreational quality, but based on the memories of accumulated experiences and social relationships. These themes emerged from both communities: despite one being a parks community and the other dependent on forestry and mining, the interaction of people with nature and with each other, over time, was of major importance to residents. This differs from the visitor experience in several important ways: most obviously, visitors will have spent less time in the setting than permanent residents. However, the expectation of spending additional time in the setting may also foster attachment. Referring back to the expanded conception of home described above, if people know that they can return to a special place—if it becomes tied to home meanings—that place appears to be even more cherished.

Although participants from both communities emphasized the relationships described above, the particulars of community context appear to foster different types of interactions with the natural world. Despite the close proximity of the communities, residents tended to not overlap in the settings they preferred for recreation. This is particularly true of Jasper residents who rarely, if ever, mentioned recreating in the working forest surrounding Jasper National Park. A fair proportion of Hinton residents, in contrast, mentioned that although they recreated in the park, many tried to avoid peak times and the most popular destinations. Other Hinton residents expressed strong preferences for recreating outside of the park, because of concerns about crowds, fees, or restrictive regulations. Parks policies appear, therefore, to contribute to a "nature under glass" meaning. Many of those who live in a cultural context that includes occupations based on cutting trees and digging coal find this meaning off-putting.

Irrespective of our substantive findings, this method seems potentially quite useful for understanding place attachment. Although photo-based approaches such as VEP have often been used to capture the experiences of visitors, these approaches are readily expanded to community residents and their range of place experiences and meanings. Our subjects participated enthusiastically and without reserve; many mentioned that taking pictures of their home area allowed them to see it with a fresh eye. Some participants expressed that they had lived in their community for decades and loved it dearly, but had never explicitly tried to articulate "why" until we asked them. And for doing so, they were grateful to us.

In response to some of the earlier-identified challenges of studying place attachment, photographs can represent multiple elements simultaneously, and hence this approach avoids the problem of having to dichotomize phe-



nomena into discrete categories of nature and culture. Photographic methods also anchor the participant in specific sites in the landscape: we are able to see and locate the special places to which participants are attached. Our ongoing work involves mapping the spatial distribution of the particular locations where each photograph was taken. For example, how many were taken within the town site boundaries versus areas outside the town site? For photographs of natural elements, what role is played by particular land management strategies or recreation regulations?

Participant photographs should be paired with interviews, lest the meaning of the photograph be misinterpreted. The meaning of a photograph is not always revealed simply by looking at it. For example, the spectacular scenery captured in Figure 11 suggests a relationship between the participant and the natural world. The interview revealed a very different story, as the woman spent a great deal of time discussing her "Thursday hiking club," and the time she has spent with this group.

Beyond incremental methodological advances, we believe that our approach of putting cameras in the hands of local residents may have important implications for the management of high amenity areas. The views of local residents may be crucial to incorporate into management of protected/recreation areas: politically, they are increasingly demanding a voice in management of special places. Our approach may be considered as a potential tool for public participation, and it may surpass conventional approaches such as public meetings and survey research: it is tied to "real places" on the landscape that may be cherished or controversial. Our approach should provide hints to those interested in protected areas that attachment can accrue to sites that are neither ecologically pristine nor visually spectacular.

## References

- Altman, I., & Low, S. M. (Eds.). (1992). *Place attachment* NY: Plenum Press.
- Ambard, M. (2003). A photo-assisted exploration of sense of place in Hinton and Jasper, Alberta. (Unpublished MS Thesis, Department of Rural Economy, University of Alberta, 2003.)
- Beckley, T. M. (2003). The relative importance of sociocultural and ecological factors in attachment to place. . In *Understanding community-forest relations*, USDA Forest Service General Technical Report PNW-GTR-566. (pp. 105-126).
- Brandenburg, A. M., & Carroll, M. S. (1995). Your place or mine?: The effect of place creation on environmental values and landscape meanings. *Society and Natural Resources*, 8, 381-398.
- Bricker, K., & Kerstetter, D. (2000). Levels of specialization and place attachment: An exploratory study of whitewater recreationists. *Leisure Sciences*, 22, 233-257.
- Chenoweth, R. (1984). Visitor employed photography: A potential tool for landscape architecture. *Landscape Journal*, 3, 136-143.
- Cherem, G., & Driver, B. (1983). Visitor employed photography: A technique to measure common perceptions of natural environments. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 15, 65-83.
- Eisenhauer, B. W, Krannich R. S., & Blahna, D. J. (2000). Attachments to special places on public lands: An analysis of activities, reasons for attachments, and community connections. *Society and Natural Resources*, 13, 421-441.
- Goin, P. (2001). Visual literacy. *The Geographical Review*, 91, 363-369.

- Greider, T., & Garkovich, L. (1994). Landscapes: The social construction of nature and the environment. *Rural Sociology*, 59(1), 1-24.
- Harper, D. (1986). Meaning and work: A study in photo-elicitation. *Current Sociology*, 34, 25-46.
- Hay, R. (1998). Sense of place in developmental context. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 18, 5-29.
- Haywood, K. (1990). Visitor employed photography: An urban visit assessment. *Journal of Travel Research*, 29, 25-29.
- Hummon, D. M. (1992). Community attachment: Local sentiment and sense of place. In I. Altman & S. M. Low (Eds.), *Place attachment*. (pp. 253-278). NY: Plenum Press.
- Jorgensen, B. S. and Stedman, R. C. (2001). Sense of place as an attitude: Lakeshore owners attitudes towards their properties. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 21, 233-248.
- Kaltenborn, B. (1997). Nature of place attachment: A study among recreation homeowners in Southern Norway. *Leisure Sciences*, 19, 175-189.
- Kasarda, J. D., & Janowitz, M. (1974). Community attachment in mass society. *American Sociological Review*, 39, 328-339.
- Krannich, R., & Petrezelka, P. (2003). Tourism and natural amenity development: Real opportunities? In D. Brown and L. Swanson (Eds.), *Challenges for rural America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. (chapter 14). University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Kruger, L. E. (1996). *Understanding place as a cultural system: Implications of theory and method*. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Washington, 1996).
- Ladewig, H., & McCann, G. C. (1980). Community satisfaction: Theory and measurement. *Rural Sociology*, 45(1), 110-131.
- Markwell, K. (1997). Dimensions of photography in a nature-based tour. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24, 131-155.
- Meinig, D. W. (1979). *The interpretation of ordinary landscapes*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Molotch, H., Freudenburg, W., & Paulsen, K. (2000). History repeats itself, but how? City character, urban tradition, and the accomplishment of place. *American Sociological Review*, 65(6), 791-823.
- Moore, R. L. & Graefe, A. R. (1994). Attachments to recreation settings: The case of rail-trail users. *Leisure Sciences*, 16, 17-31.
- Pred, A. (1983). Structuration and place: On the becoming of sense of place and the structure of feeling. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 13, 45-68.
- Relph, E. (1976). *Place and placelessness*. London: Pion Limited.
- Relph, E. (1997). Sense of place. *Ten geographic ideas that changed the world*. In S. Hanson (Ed.). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Rose, G. (2000). *Visual methodologies*. London: Sage.
- Ryden, K. C. (1993). *Mapping the invisible landscape: Folklore, writing, and the sense of place*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- St. John, C., Austin, D. M., & Baba, Y. (1986). The question of community attachment revisited. *Sociological Spectrum*, 6(4), 411-431.
- Stedman, R. C. (2002). Toward a social psychology of place: Predicting behavior from place-based cognitions, attitude, and identity. *Environment and Behavior*, 34(5), 405-42.
- Stedman, R. C. (2003). Is it really just a social construction: The contribution of the physical environment to sense of place. *Society and Natural Resources*, 16, 671-685.
- Theodori, G. (2000). Levels of analysis and conceptual clarification in community attachment and satisfaction research: Connections to community development. *Journal of the Community Development Society*, 31, 35-58.
- Tuan, Y. F. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Urry, J. (1995). *Consuming places*. London: Routledge.

- Williams, D. R., Patterson, M. E., Roggenbuck, J. W., & Watson, A. E. (1992). Beyond the commodity metaphor: Examining emotional and symbolic attachment to place. *Leisure Sciences*, 14, 29-46.
- Yamashita, S. (2002). Perception and evaluation of water in landscape: Use of photo-projective method to compare child and adult residents' perceptions of a Japanese river environment. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 62, 3-17.
- Zube, E., Sell, J., & Taylor, J. (1982). Landscape perception: Research, application, and theory. *Landscape Planning*, 9, 1-33.

Copyright of Journal of Leisure Research is the property of National Recreation & Park Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.