

**EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEYS:  
MOTIVATIONS BEHIND FRONTIER  
TRAVEL EXPERIENCES AND  
IMPLICATIONS FOR TOURISM  
MARKETING**

Submitted by

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## Foreword

This thesis explores the extraordinary journeys that people have taken in some of the most amazing and remote places imaginable and, through their own words, analyses the motivations for these travel experiences. These ‘frontier travellers’ recognise the unique qualities and character of their journeys:

*“These extraordinary experiences that I’d had ...”*

(Harry, personal interview)

*“I knew that I was leaving something extraordinary behind me.”*

(Grylls, 2000, pg. 262)

*“None of them were surprised by our extraordinary journey.”*

(Asher, 1988, pg. 255)

*“Expeditions are extraordinary creatures ...”*

(Johnson, 1995, pg. 18)

Extraordinary journeys can occur in many guises. This thesis, while attempting to shine a light on some of the most unique travel experiences human beings can undergo at this point in history, also represents a personal journey for me; a journey that in some ways was as amazing and unexpected for me as those described by the frontier travellers whom I studied. The use of the metaphor of a journey to describe the research process has been used before (Thomas, 2004) but I felt it was an apt one to describe my own experience. By closely studying my participants’ own words, I hoped to reveal something of the motivations behind their journeys. Through this process, I also discovered my own need to explore my boundaries, to challenge myself and to learn more about the world in which I live. I travelled the road of a PhD scholar, a well travelled one, but strange and unfamiliar to me, and experienced setbacks, bumps and detours along the way, as I sought to pin down and refine my topic, select the correct methodology and walk alongside my study participants. There were times when I did not think I had ‘the right stuff’ (Wolfe, 1979) to continue, when I

struggled to stay focused and suffered crises of confidence, but there were the joys as well of unanticipated events, surprises and discoveries; findings I didn't expect, assistance which came 'out of the blue' and new people to become acquainted with. Looking back over the past four years, I have come so far, yet I am back again, in a sense, where I started, 'free' perhaps of the journey which was the PhD but eager to start on a new journey. The joy of learning is not sated for me and there is still a desire to pursue new paths of academic knowledge and to follow up unexplored areas of my research highlighted in this thesis. I am reminded of one of my favourite passages of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, where the character Bilbo sings a paean to the lure and mystery of the unknown that is travel (Tolkien, 1954a; 2001, pg. 47):

*“The Road goes ever on and on  
Down from the door where it began.  
Now far ahead the Road has gone,  
And I must follow, if I can,  
Pursuing it with eager feet,  
Until it joins some larger way  
Where many paths and errands meet.  
And whither then? I cannot say.”*

My expedition through the world of the frontier traveller has been a privilege and a source of satisfaction, as I finally reach 'journey's end.' Now I have to tell my tale, in the best travel tradition, of how I started, what happened during my journey and how it ended. This thesis is therefore both my narrative and that of the frontier travellers whose lives and experiences have been the subject of my study.

### **In Memory of Sue Fear**

## Acknowledgments

There are a number of people I have to acknowledge as having helped me during my PhD research but I would like to dedicate this thesis in particular to two very special people who are dear to my heart. Firstly, to my late mother, Margaret, an inveterate and enthusiastic traveller and reader with whom I shared many wonderful trips, both real and armchair, and who is now on the final journey of life. Mum, thank you for passing on to me the travel bug, a love of reading and an inquiring mind. And secondly, I would like to acknowledge my youngest niece Maggie, who has had some difficult challenges in her own personal journey but who inspires me daily with her sheer infectious joy of life and her beautiful smile. One day I hope to take you travelling with my other nieces, Sarah, Olivia and Charlotte, and show you all what a wonderful world we live in.

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This study would also not have been possible without the valuable assistance and time given by the frontier travellers who were interviewed in this study. They interrupted busy lives and often preparation for forthcoming travel to speak with me, and I believe they were open and honest about their experiences and trusted me to tell their story in a similar fashion. I hope that I have earned that trust and given their narratives the careful analysis and discussion that it deserves.

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## Abstract

Tourists are now visiting some of the most remote and amazing places on Earth, travelling to 'frontiers' on journeys that are psychological and emotional as well as geographical or physical. These extraordinary journeys to the Poles, the peaks of the highest mountains in the world, harsh deserts and even outer space test both physical and mental endurance and can be characterised as 'unique' even in the current era. Travelling largely without the aid of a commercial tour operator or guide, the frontier traveller usually invests a great deal of time and resources in their travel experience, often with the assistance of sponsorship, and generally takes part in an extensive and arduous preparation period in their quest for the extraordinary. While the search for new and unique tourism destinations and experiences appears to be relentless in this post-modern era, the frontier traveller appears to be searching for the 'authentic' beyond the 'tourist bubble,' both in relation to self and setting. These frontier 'trailblazers' are already being followed by guided adventure tourists and some of the former are supplementing their incomes and funding their own travel by leading tours or guiding others to the frontier. Studying the extraordinary experiences of the frontier traveller could therefore provide us with a glimpse of the future of travel, although likely to occur in a more structured and less risky guise. Uncovering the motivations for this form of travel will also assist with future marketing of these experiences, including elements of the marketing mix such as product development and promotion.

This thesis examines the motivations behind frontier travel and considers the implications of the findings for tourism marketing. Unstructured, long interviews with 37 individuals were used to uncover the motivations behind these experiences, supplemented by content analysis of narratives produced by frontier travellers, encompassing 50 autobiographies, two online diaries and online interviews with two individuals. The interview participants were largely selected through purposive sampling, in that they were screened as fitting the criteria of a past or potential frontier traveller before being interviewed. They were predominantly born and living in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, and 29 of the 37 individuals were male. Ages of participants ranged from 24 to 60 years of age. Interviews continued until saturation of categories of motivation had been reached. Texts were mainly located through searches of bookshops and libraries, including the author's personal library. A qualitative methodological approach was chosen in order to provide rich data and allow the researcher to enter the world of the frontier traveller. An interpretive paradigm based on a constructivist paradigm underpinned this study, with an ontological stance based on multiple realities and an epistemological position where participants and myself as the researcher created

understandings. The methodology outlined above was consistent with this position and was designed to identify different constructions of the data and seek consensus, where possible. The literature on motivations provides a complex plethora of theories and models, many of which contradict each other, so a principal objective of this study was to work from first principles, grounding a theory of motivations pertaining to frontier travel experiences in the data, rather than seeking to test out a pre-existing model or theory.

Overall, the research findings show that motivations for frontier travel can be analysed under the broad heading of ‘adventure,’ which is composed of a variety of sub-motives such as achievement and competence, challenge, thrill-seeking and sensation, ego, dreams or fantasies, self-actualisation, cognizance (exploration/discovery), freedom/escape motives (autonomy), isolation and solitude, spirituality, camaraderie and *communitas*, authenticity, prestige (external rewards), pro-social motives and a love of nature and wilderness. Risk or danger is an element of these experiences and feeds into many of the motivations identified in this study. A theory of motivations behind frontier travel experiences has been developed, covering intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, as well as achievement-motivated behaviour. Pre-travel influences and inspirations such as literature, cinema, visual stimuli, childhood games, heroes and mentors, family influences and educative influences are also considered with respect to their effect on motivational behaviour. An exploratory typology was then developed for frontier travellers, based on common motivations, which might be used to segment the market. Four basic types have been identified and labelled or categorised as ‘Seekers of Truth,’ ‘Enlightened Explorers,’ ‘Concerned Elitists,’ and ‘Freedom Seekers.’ Key motivations behind specific frontier travel experiences have also been identified.

Each frontier traveller will exhibit some, but not all, of the motivations highlighted in this study. Segmenting the market on the basis of motivations may therefore be a difficult, if not impossible task. However, marketers could use the information unearthed during this study in the marketing mix to develop new products aimed at satisfying some of the key motivations and use the findings as themes to be highlighted in promotional literature such as brochures and websites. This thesis also argues that the study of travel motivations in the future would be better served by considering motivations behind market niches such as frontier travel, rather than attempting to develop a comprehensive theory of motivations covering the whole travel industry.

## Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Human Ethics Committee of La Trobe University.

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