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*Sense of place in conservation agencies:
Understanding the role of emotion in the
organisational culture of protected area
management*

A case study from Parks Victoria

Penny Davidson
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Research into Professional
Practice and Learning
and Education



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Alexandra Knight

RIPPLE
Institute of Land Water and Society
Charles Sturt University
With support from Parks Victoria
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*Yeah, I love Mount Buffalo. It's a great place, probably for a couple of things. In terms of the environment, it's a lovely environment, you know that's no surprise, everybody thinks it is. But it is a special place. But I love the whole of the alps. But Buffalo has got some unique characters about it, especially on the rocky plateau, the little nooks and crannies, and the tors and the little snow plains and lots of this stuff that is quite unique you know compared to other parts of the alps. And I really do love that environment, the Buffalo environment. ... and always feel a really close connection to that environment.
(Staff 10)*

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are solely the authors', and do not necessarily reflect the views of RIPPLE, Charles Sturt University, Parks Victoria or people consulted during the research project.

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Mt Buffalo (A Knight, P Davidson)

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Executive summary

We now freely talk about attachment to place or sense of place as an experience that many or most of us have, relating perhaps to the places we grew up in, or the places we holidayed in. This report outlines the results and management implications from a study that explored the sense of place Parks Victoria staff whose role was to care for the place of Mt Buffalo. Mt Buffalo's physical separation from other alpine landscapes has resulted in unique flora and fauna, and meant that management has continued to maintain an office located on site. Mt Buffalo has also had a long indigenous history, as well as being an early site for colonial tourism. Interviews were undertaken with eleven Mt Buffalo staff – people who either currently or previously worked there in the role of Ranger, Ranger in Charge, Ticket collector, and Administration officer. Two broad questions were asked:

1. Are, and how are, sense of place emotions manifested within an organisation?; and
2. How are the identified emotions incorporated into professional practice, decision making and organisational culture?

Two aspects of sense of place were common across all staff interviewed. All staff held a strong sense of pride for Mt Buffalo and the work that they did there, and all held some level of care or affection for Mt Buffalo. In this case study sense of place or relationship to place was often intertwined with relationships to people. That is, a sense of belonging to work or local communities contributes in some way to the development of a sense of relationship to place for many people.

Sense of place for people working at Mt Buffalo was fostered by their knowledge and familiarity with the mountain; the regular contact driving to the office on top of Mt Buffalo everyday, developing weed or track projects, being part of fire management teams, liaising with visitors and local communities all continued to build this familiarity. As a result there is an overall sense of belonging to the community and place, and sense of being involved in something that is worthwhile. Significantly attachment to place helps to build and maintain the strong intrinsic motivation that Parks staff have for their work. Overall the interactions with Mt Buffalo, the place, were characterised by pleasure and enjoyment.

The development of a sense of place relationship is interrupted or eroded when the organisation requires relatively frequent relocation of staff, or when the organisation is only able to offer short-term contracts. In the past Australian park organisations have required staff to frequently relocate in order to maximise their familiarity with the breadth of issues faced across the whole state, and to minimise the negative outcomes that might arise from strong attachment to one place. In this sense organisations have acknowledged the sense of place experience, but have hoped to contain it in order to foster a commitment to the organisation as a whole that is greater than a commitment to place.

There was undoubtedly some level of frustration held by staff with respect to the organisation's response to sense of place. Staff were aware that Parks Victoria benefited from the passion, care and commitment that individual staff brought to the job partly as a result of this attachment, and were frustrated when the organisation would ask staff to not be attached (such as in a regional meeting). They were also frustrated by being on temporary employment contracts which they felt encouraged them to choose work projects that met short term goals rather than long term goals. Staff were very proud of their professional and strategic approach to park

management. We suggest that part of any existing tension around sense of place is a result of the dominance of rationality in Western culture, and whilst having logical and clearly explained and justified processes and decisions is a necessary approach in public management, there is a danger that the more emotive elements of human relationships and behaviour are required to be invisible or un-named even though they will continue to exist. Where this is the case any issues that arise from say attachment to place are less able to be dealt with, that is, the organisation won't have the mechanisms or language tools to articulate and explore both the pros and cons of sense of place emotions. The report therefore concludes that the passion and determination that are part of sense of place emotions in the workplace are valuable to the organisation's goal achievement, and that discussions around the positive and negative consequences of staff connection to place would be of benefit to both the staff and the organisation.

Introduction

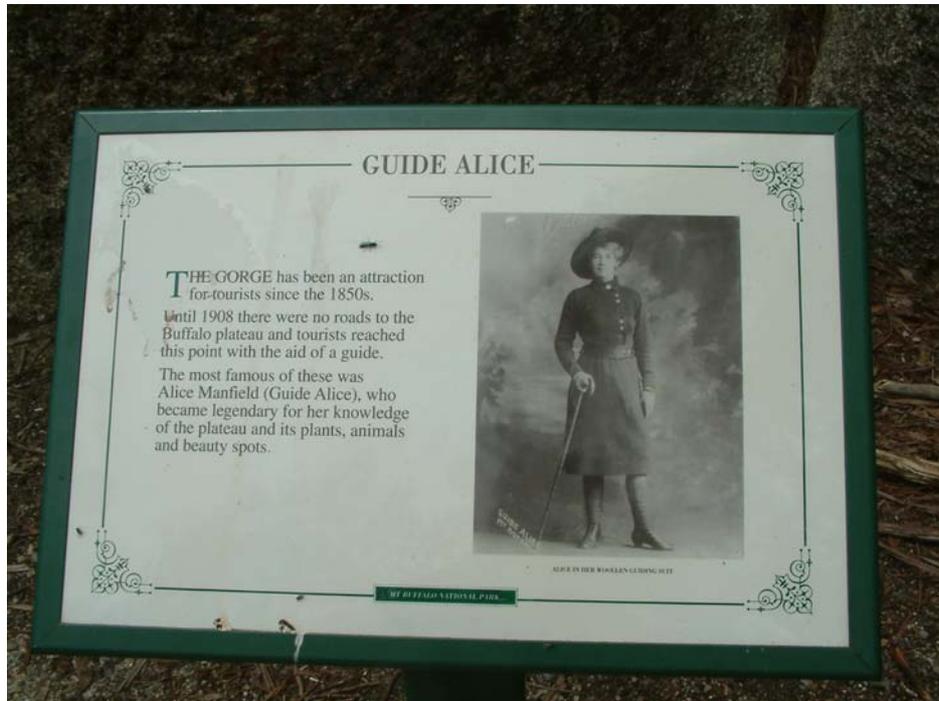


Figure 1: Interpretation sign celebrating Guide Alice

It seems obvious to assume that people working as caretakers of places such as national parks would develop a sense of attachment to the places they are responsible for. This research began with questions around whether caretakers in Australia develop emotional attachment to the places and spaces under their care and the implications this has on management practices. We have focused on emotional attachment to place which we have interpreted to be akin to 'sense of place'. Tom Woods (2005) suggests that people develop a sense of place as a result of their experience and knowledge of a particular area whether that is knowledge of the ecology, the human history, the geology or climate. Woods also highlights that physical experience of the place, the sensing and physical contact, as well as the shared experiences and stories contribute to the development of sense of place. This project has, in an open-ended (inductive) way, found similar dimensions in the work-based place experience.

This report outlines how we have explored sense of place for people working to manage and care for Mt Buffalo National Park within the organisation of Parks Victoria. This analysis is based on interviews with staff who worked there in December 2004 through to January 2005, and some staff that had previously worked there. There are no quantities of emotion offered here and it has been hard at times to 'grasp' the emotion – to pin it down and provide it with a label that would allow us to then share our interpretation with others.

Eleven staff who either currently work at Mount Buffalo or have previously worked there participated in the project. We found that participants immediately understood

the concept of “sense of place”. At our initial group meetings with staff based at both Mount Buffalo and Bright staff responded with understanding and enthusiasm towards the concept of sense of place and the idea that it had importance for both themselves, their identity and their work role. Sense of place appeared to be linked to both relationships with the natural environment of Mount Buffalo and also relationships with the human community of Mount Buffalo - that is other staff, resort and chalet staff, park visitors and the wider Bright and Alpine community were part of what is Mount Buffalo the place. Emotions associated with sense of place were manifested in a variety of ways in the interviews. All participants spoke of a meaningful connection with place. This varied in intensity (which we made no attempt to measure) but did seem to be related to the amount of time that they had spent at Mount Buffalo. They spoke of enjoying the place and most spoke of their pride in the place. In fact a whole range of emotions ranging from awe, love and passion to guilt and frustration were expressed. It was a privilege to hear such strong expressions of care and commitment towards a workplace.

Attachment to place or the development of a sense of place is not the preserve of park rangers. Many times in the interviews Parks Victoria staff referred to people outside the organisation – local community members or visitors – who have a strong attachment to the place Mt Buffalo. For example one ranger said:

We have people staying at the Chalet or Lake Catani camping ground or local people who drive up from Porepunkah who have lived, worked, and recreated in and around Mt Buffalo for a long time and have a very, very strong sense of connection to the place, and they sometimes don't hesitate to remind you of that, which is good (Staff 6)

This report has tried to reflect the full breadth of the human–place connection that exists between people and the amazing place that is Mt Buffalo that staff talked about.

Background to Mt Buffalo National Park

Mt Buffalo is a mass of granite rising 1350 metres above sea level. The plateau is a mosaic of snow grass plains, sparkling streams, and snow gum forests, punctuated by granite bolder outcrops. A number of species are exclusive to Mt Buffalo: the Alpine Silver Xenica butterfly and the eucalypt Buffalo Sallee. At the time of European settlement in Australia Mt Buffalo was the traditional summer hunting ground of the Minjambutta people. The first Europeans ventured on to Mt Buffalo to find additional feed for stock in hot dry summers, and towards the end of the 19th Century new settlers to Australia began to look to mountain areas for relief from hot summers, and engage in winter sports of skiing and ice skating in the winter months. As such Mt Buffalo was an early tourist site and was gazetted as a national park in 1898, evidence of its significance as a recreation site is the building of the historic Mt Buffalo Chalet in 1910 (Webb & Adams 1998). Mt Buffalo National Park now covers 31,000 hectares.

Research questions

This research raises questions around the taken-for-granted nature of the importance of place-relative emotions and values for those people whose work centres on place.

Two key questions directed this project:

1. Are, and how are, sense of place emotions manifested within an organisation?
2. How are the identified emotions incorporated into professional practice, decision making and organisational culture?

Our organisation and place of choice was Parks Victoria and Mt Buffalo respectively; chosen because of ease of access, and because Mt Buffalo park is a clear and separate entity to other national parks, but relatively small in area and staffing, and as a 'place' clearly identifiable and recognisable.

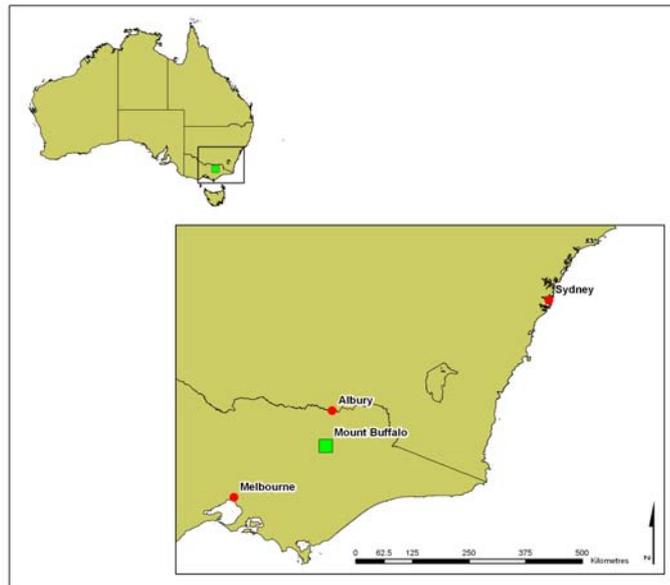


Figure 2: Location of Mt Buffalo

Research approach

The project has taken a qualitative approach to the collection and analysis of data, seeking to uncover experiences in some depth and detail, rather than measure and count the experiences for a large number of people. Common responses or experiences from all respondents in the research are noted, along with experiences or feelings more specific to individuals or just a few respondents. Our goal in recounting and reflecting on emotional attachment to place was to cover the full range of sense of place emotions, and consider the impact of these on professional practice.

The data was collected through loosely structured interviews held on site. These were then transcribed and analysed. The analysis process was one of looking for data that answered the research questions and other relevant common themes.

Emotions can be difficult to discuss. In this research project the researchers spent a short time with each participant - generally undertaking one interview of an hour or an hour and a half. It was challenging to phrase questions in a way which could evoke emotional responses. At times too it was difficult to decide whether participants were talking about their emotions or their values, or the relationship between these. However, despite these conceptual and interpretive challenges all the participants provided an informative insight into the emotions they felt for Mount Buffalo.

Results

The shape of sense of place emotions

The answers to the research questions are presented under themes that emerged from the interviews. Excerpts from the interviews are given as examples of the themes. We have chosen examples that demonstrate and provide evidence for the points we are making but we also attempt to make clear whether this experience and/or response is common across the whole group or only relevant to some. Clearly articulated and also common sense of place emotions were 'pride' and 'care' for the park.



Figure 3: Mt Buffalo Ranger Office nestled into snow gums, with staff

Emotions associated with sense of place

As you would expect in such a project responses were not limited to emotions surrounding sense of place but also included feelings associated with work generally and specific work practices and projects. The recent fires on Mount Buffalo provoked part of the emotional response to questions about feeling in the work place and these emotions arise intermittently through out the analysis. The three new staff responses were focused on the challenges and excitement of establishing themselves in a new job in a beautiful, complex and iconic national park. For others, feelings emanated from work experiences: the ups and downs associated with the different teams they had played roles in and their frustrations and occasional conflicts with the larger organisation.

Two emotions stood out with respect to place, and were clearly evident across all the interviews:

- pride in the park and work achievements, and
- love and care for the park,

culminating in a practice of care and a sense of responsibility. The potent feelings of place have significant consequences for the task of place management and undoubtedly contribute to a strong commitment to the job. This will be explored later in the report. Some examples of pride and care follow:

Yeah, I do like speaking with people in the park. I like wearing the badge on your arm, I like what we represent. (Staff 8)

I can put it down to pride in your park and in your organisation, and believing in this changing world, everything changes so much, and yet the beauty of a national park is that when you and I are both old we can take our grand kids to a place like the alpine park or Mount Buffalo and say this is what it was like before the white man came to Australia. This is what it was like when I was here, and this is what I hand over to you. (Staff 4)

The people, and you could look at, you could open the window and have real bush outside, and I'd come from working in the city so, um, and I think that the passion of the people I worked with really rubbed off, how much they loved it up there at that time and how much they really cared for the mountain. (Staff 7)

We were interested in whether or not the attachment to place was a 'hidden entity' in people's lives or whether it was something freely talked about. We found that informal discussion between park staff and their friends and family clearly reflects the pride that all participants felt for the park and their work, for example:

There are those informal discussions about why you enjoy the place you're in at the moment and why there is value there, and that might be things like it's just great being in the alpine park because there's big open spaces or it's fantastic to stand up on Buffalo and see the main range from there. You know that sort of thing. It does sort of invoke a bit of competition too. A bit of that rivalry. You know, our parks got this and your park's only got this sort of thing. So that's interesting and I think that's all part of that sense of place you're developing, that sense of place for yourself. (Staff 3)

Comprehension of sense of place

As researchers we did not offer a definition of 'sense of place' but instead aimed to reflect participants' understanding of this phrase. Some participants quickly offered their own meaning of sense of place which fitted well with our own appreciation of the term and with the literature that informed the research proposal. Some examples of how participants explained their own 'sense of place' for Mt Buffalo follow:

it gets under your skin... you get a very strong sense of ownership, you get a strong sense of connection, and that comes through in both enjoyable and, for want of a better term, unenjoyable experiences. You get the good with

the bad, it all builds a sort of web around you and ties you into that area. (Staff 8)

It's more like a friend, does that make sense? It's somewhere where you feel safe, trusted. It's similar to a relationship you would have with a good friend. (Staff 4)

because the park's got such a sort of, not an aura or anything, it's got, you know, a certain placing in people's hearts for different reasons, so as I get around and talk to people... I see how important the park means to people which sort of makes me enjoy it a bit more, and realise how lucky we are up here. And it definitely means different things to different people. (Staff 11)

I have an affinity, a connection. Attachment. I don't know where I'm going to live ... in 2 or 3 years time. I wouldn't be surprised if it dragged me back. It's that sort of thing you know.... its just Buffalo's presence itself. It's just the air it's just like you come up the Hume highway, you look to the right and as soon as you see Buffalo in the distance, you're coming home. If I can explain it that way. So yes an attachment, yes definitely. (Staff 5)

These excerpts demonstrate the very real sense of place that the staff felt and introduce us to the shape that sense of place takes for each person. So whilst sense of place is not a common 'everyday term' the connection to place, and the sense that Mt Buffalo has a 'place' in their lives was clearly articulated. In summary what these excerpts exemplify, and this is revealed throughout the interviews, is:

1. a self-awareness about connection to place
2. an ability to articulate the affect and attachment to place
3. the positive affect that sense of place has, and
4. that sense of place conjures different emotions for different people.

Sense of place as connection with the natural beauty and features of Mount Buffalo

All participants expressed a sense of connection with, and an appreciation for, the natural beauty and diversity of Mount Buffalo. Participants who had only worked on the mountain for a short time suggested that their feeling for the place was just beginning or that they could sense the potential for a relationship with Mount Buffalo. Those that had worked there for a longer period of time expressed a strong connection with Mount Buffalo. For some people Mt Buffalo appeared to be the central focus of their 'sense of place', connected to their sense of identity and giving substantial meaning to their working life. Others said that they had a strong connection with other places as well or that, for instance, the whole of the Alpine National Park was where their affinity lay. For all, Mt Buffalo was presented as much more than a 'workplace'.

not only is it gorgeous views and ... why I like Mount Buffalo say over Wilson's Prom, there is just too much happening at the Prom,... It might be due to the climate as well, but this park will see all four seasons, and I'll get

to experience it a bit more, it's just I don't know, pure beauty. It's different beauty than say the Grampians. I don't know how to explain it ... (Staff 1)

It's pretty unique and you know it's referred to as the island in the sky and that's from a geological point of view as much as anything but you really do feel that uniqueness I think, I mean you drive along the Hume freeway near Glenrowan and you see Mt Buffalo sticking out there on its own and it is disconnected from the divide so it has that sort of uniqueness and because it's an old park, I think I really value that. It has a real sense of history to it, aside from the environmental history it has that real sense of historical presence (Staff 6)

Oh we go and look at the gorge and we go and feed the birds, we've got things to do. We go exploring, that's generally what I do these days We go exploring, we go on adventures....not even so much off the track but find a few rocks that are leaning against each other and create tunnels and holes and things and we go on adventures, so those sorts of things are good fun. And go up for a swim in the lake maybe, if it's not too cold. (Staff 7)

Working at and with Mt Buffalo provides an intimate knowledge of the place that encourages and sustains any existing interest in Mt Buffalo's ecology, geology or outdoor activities. Each staff has their own knowledge about Mt Buffalo; it might be familiarity with the plants, the rock types, or what is at the bottom of the lake. That familiarity feeds the connection talked about by Tom Woods (2005) – the familiarity 'helps define a place and anchor you in it'.

Sense of place as connection with the human community

Some participants included in their 'sense of place' their relationship with, and connection to, the community of Mount Buffalo. This community was described in terms of work colleagues, chalet and resort staff, the Bright community, and park visitors. That sense of place was expanded to include the cultural place demonstrates the interconnectedness for people between the natural and the social worlds – we don't always separate the two in our minds: sense of belonging and meaningful experiences occur with other people in these places; and it is these meaningful experiences that help build place attachment.

Essentially I got a very strong sense of community here and just talking about community ... my primary community was the rangers here, the staff at the chalet and the resort and I was probably for the first time in my life able to make a very clear space for myself in that community where I felt that I was taken on board as myself. (Staff 2)

I think the thing that makes it special for me is that it is from a work sense it is like a community, the people that work there are like a community even the non Parks people, you get the chalet people, the camp ground hosts, or the ski-field people and even though you are working for different organisations you are still like the Buffalo community when you are up there and I think that makes it quite special because you don't get that in many

work places, unless you take the Prom or somewhere like that where you've got people that live there and work there, On its own, its it just sits out there on its own, its surrounded by plains and I guess that's what makes it special, rather than it's just joined onto something, it's joined onto someone, ... (Staff 7)

it has a real sense of history to it, aside from the environmental history it has that real sense of historical presence ... the sort of history that I'm talking about is really the non-Aboriginal history in the sense of the attachment that the local community has to Mt Buffalo is very, very strong, probably stronger than any other park I've worked for ... We have people staying at the Chalet or Lake Catani camping ground or local people who drive up from Porepunkah who live work recreate in and around Mt Buffalo for a long time and have a very very strong sense of connection to the place and they sometimes don't hesitate to remind you of that, which is good (Staff 6)

It is important to remember then that a connection to a physical place can be embedded or linked to social relations. The social connectedness might trigger or provide the foundations for overall place connection or it might provide a supportive context for the connection to place. Later on we will explore the separation of community and place, and work and place, and we raise the question 'if there are strong links between physical place and social relations is it possible to connect to a place if the work community or broader community is disharmonious?'



Figure 4: Visitors at Mt Buffalo lookout

Influences on sense of place emotions

This section outlines the answers to the questions:

What influences sense of place emotions?

What are the most important influences?

What things positively contribute to formation and maintenance of sense of place emotions and/or values?

For the eleven people who talked about their work and sense of attachment a number of influences emerged as common and/or dominant to the development of sense of place.

The following influences were common across all the interviews and we suggest that these have made a significant contribution to the development of sense of place emotions. Wherever there was an attachment to place there were also experiences of:

- Considerable knowledge or familiarity with place
- Actual contact with place
- A sense of belonging to the place and associated community
- Enjoyment
- Conservation values and a sense of meaningful activity

There is an element of circularity with these factors. Does enjoyment come before or after a sense of attachment? Does enjoyment grow with sense of attachment? We make this point mostly to articulate that these factors aren't necessarily starting points for a sense of place to grow, rather, that in some way they go 'hand-in-hand' with the significance of place in our lives.

Knowledge of place

The more you know about something the more connected you are to it. Tom Woods, a researcher into sense of place, argues that contact with place is central to what 'sense of place' is.

People develop a "sense of place" through experience and knowledge of a particular area. A sense of place emerges through knowledge of the history, geography and geology of an area, its flora and fauna, the legends of a place, and a growing sense of the land and its history after living there for a time. Woods (2005).

We found this was so for the Rangers and staff working at Mt Buffalo who have jobs that require them to develop specific and detailed knowledge of the place. It is part of their job to know what vegetation communities grow there, and in which places, what fauna live there, who uses the park, who lives nearby and so on. Logically then, this knowledge and familiarity with Mt Buffalo will contribute to a strengthening sense of attachment to the place. The following quotes are indicative of the detailed knowledge of place that Parks Victoria staff develop.

That's where I'm going to take my kids, up there walking there soon, introduce them to Buffalo. I have my secret spots up Buffalo that no-one knows about, because not only did I work up there but I lived up there as well. I was out there every day and I had time to go and explore secret spots, finds nooks and crannies, climb rock formations and look through

things, find lookouts that no-one knows about. I think you carry Buffalo with you. ... Buffalo just grows on you. (Staff 4)

Part of that connection is that I can go to Buffalo and I know what most things are, and I really enjoy that. I can walk through and I know what that plant is, and what that plant is and a bit about the geology and you know that sort of thing. I think that sense of connection is really important, knowing the landscape you're working in. (Staff 10)

And it's a sense of probably belonging and feeling that I'm comfortable with this place to a point, so it's having that familiarity and from a park point of view probably Buffalo would be the park, the only park, I reckon that I would have that connection to. (Staff 3)

I think there is an element of knowing it and understanding it from having done a lot of the interpretations and walks there for the public, but I think personally I see my attachment is (based) more (in) memories and recreation, long term rather than (a) spiritual sort of connection (Staff 7)

You can feel that sort of connection whether you're working for the parks service or not, I mean there are visitors who have as much, if not more, emotional connection and knowledge about Mt Buffalo than I do (Staff 6)

Familiarity, far from breeding contempt, fosters a relationship to place. Knowing and understanding how Mt Buffalo looks over various seasons, for example, provides satisfaction and enjoyment. Quite often the accumulated knowledge resides in a bank of memories linked to far more than 'information', knowing the 'nooks and crannies' and being able to share those with your children is another opportunity to further develop the 'relationship' that exists with Mt Buffalo. These excerpts demonstrate that knowledge of place is linked to personal experiences and shared experiences, and helps construct a sense of familiarity and intimacy with place.

Contact with place – time in that place

Closely linked with knowledge and familiarity is the idea that accumulated 'time' and 'contact' build familiarity. For the people interviewed knowledge about place doesn't come out of a book, it doesn't arise from just one visit (although we are not suggesting that this isn't possible) rather it arises from being there, and having multiple experiences there. In this sense then contact with place might be a foundation stone for the development of sense of place.

Coming into contact with Mt Buffalo is an inherent part of the job for Rangers and ticketing staff associated with Mt Buffalo. The level of contact seems to be an influencing factor in the development of sense of place; the greater the contact the greater the sense of place.

And from a management point of view, ... it's nice being relatively close to alpine environments. And I guess on a really simplistic matter the office is in the park, and that to me is a really big attraction because you're a bit

closer, you're a bit more in touch with what you are managing, and what you do. So you don't have to go far to be in an area where you need to be from a management point of view. And also from a personal point of view if you need head space or you need to have a bit of natural area time, you're right there, your office is in the park. ... simply by going to work you are driving in the area you are managing (Staff 3)

Buffalo is a pretty place easy to make a connection to and living up there makes a lot of difference. Another fellow started with me at the same time and he lived off the mountain and it was just easier for me to make a connection to place because I was surrounded by the place and could soak up some things about the place a bit faster than he was able to because he lived off the hill - when he finished work he went home (Staff 6)

One thing I used to love about Mount Buffalo was I could always look out the window and see snow gums. And you'd feel, well I'm doing all this stuff but I'm actually in the park, I'm here. ... with the rangers that work in Bright, they're not in the park, they travel everyday if they're going to the park, and consequently on many days, they don't even go into the park. And most of our work centres are like that, they're in the local towns. Which has its advantages, but places like Buffalo and the Prom are some of the few where the people working there are actually working in the park because many of them live in it as well. And in terms of connection, it's really strong because you're just living there, it's there all the time. So I think that the interaction, that connection between the environment and what you do does become stronger when you're working in the environment like that all the time. That thing about looking out the window and seeing a snow gum ... there's the park, going off into the distance behind you, that's really good I reckon. (Staff 10)

There were instances of where staff would choose to get involved in the 'hands on' aspects of their job. They might have the option of simply allowing a contractor or other staff to complete work associated with a particular project but they saw a number of benefits from staying connected at a practice level – for example hands on work such as the rebuilding of tracks, or other maintenance work spending time with the contractors, helping the contractors, being available to the contractors, discussing the work with them on-site served to ensure that a good job was done, but also helped to maintain a connection to place.

In the interviews a distinction between head office and field staff emerged which related to contact and familiarity with place. The field staff felt that metropolitan staff had little understanding of what went on in the regions. Occasional contact between the place of Mt Buffalo and metropolitan staff was presented as being important to the metropolitan staff's development of sense of place and understanding the work environment for people who worked on site.

I have to say that senior managers that come into contact with parks, especially those associated with fire, those that come into contact with rangers about those events, interestingly they do change their feelings about rangers. Those managers that are not involved with rangers tend to see them as anachronisms, those that get involved with them start to understand the depth of their knowledge experience and commitment, and of course when

they do get involved with them you can see there's a change, there's all of a sudden a recognition that these people are highly skilled and they begin supporting them actively through better systems and service, (Staff 2)

Even occasional and brief contact with place was thought to 'sow the seeds' of connection in the work context, and contributed to more effective communication and relationships between head office and regional staff. What staff were suggesting was that a positive working relationship is helped by an understanding of each others work and work place.

Community influence on sense of place development

Sense of place can be inextricably tied to sense of community, and/or belonging in the community. As previously noted a number people in discussing the place of Mt Buffalo (or other places of personal connection) referred also to the community associated with that place, and the sense of belonging and connection they felt to place and community. There were examples of how place as a physical entity might 'stand alone', but the frequent reference to community reminds us that our lives and attachments aren't easily compartmentalised. In these interviews attachment to the park was linked strongly to attachment to the community associated with the park.

There's two levels to it all. More than 2 levels really. There's the connection to the park, and a connection with friends and community, people you know and you've loved and that sort of stuff, and then a connection with a sense of place. ... It's [Mt Buffalo] got a strong sense of place, because of what it is. It's a special place. (Staff 8)

I got a very strong sense of community here ... The place still grabs me, surrounds me, it still has an entity and a lot of people say that about Buffalo, it has a spirit, it has an entity, which invites you in and holds you. There's all sorts of theories about that and I'm not going there but even when it's quite heavily burnt like it is now, it still has that energy about it, it might be as I say, singed around the edges. ... And whenever I came back here and that energy combined with a sense of acceptance to become a very strong anchor for me. (Staff 2)

It's really difficult to explain any sense of place, really I think Mt Buffalo is the plateau areas and those big rock slabs, it's just gorgeous it's just spectacular and after the fires it just keeps on keeping on, its beauty doesn't seem to be much tainted, for me, by the fires. It has own energy, which is I suppose a connection, but I suppose the other part of the connection is that real sense that it has its own culture as well. It has a unique culture, the ski culture combined with the guest house culture (Staff 2)

Often sense of place is a sense of belonging that is inextricably linked with other people associated with that place. It might be the community of staff, the neighbouring local community or even community of visitors. The connection between place and community highlights that our work and non-work lives overlap and interlink in many respects. The strength of this interdependence seems to vary across individual experiences with some people clearly separating place from people, but others

indicating that a diminishment of work place relationships for example erodes the connection to place. A question remains though, given the importance of community to place, whether a strongly negative experience with community might erode or change the sense of place that is felt; our data provides no clear answer.

I reckon the people involved have an enormous amount to do with it, you can have a place like Buffalo where anyone with their eyes or ears open would recognise that it's a pretty special environment, there are lots of recreational opportunities all those sorts of thing, but if the people that worked here didn't match up with the way you liked to work or there were personal clashes it wouldn't matter how good the place was, and I think that would really detract from your ability to attach emotionally and get that sense of place because it would always be associated with the problems you might have with the personalities involved. (Staff 6)

... we were all caught in this whirlwind of terrible terrible situations and angry things happening and stuff. Even then, it wasn't the park, I still cared and maintained and looked after the park as much as I would otherwise. (Staff 4)

Enjoyment

Sense of place is developed as a result of pleasurable experiences with place and community – this is perhaps stating the obvious but so ‘obvious’ it is in danger of being forgotten.

One of my favourite places would have to be (national park outside Mt Buffalo) ... and it's just like there's a spiritual connection there. You know, you sort of get there and you think 'wow, I'm really somewhere special!' ... probably it is something that individually grows on you but also the first time you get there, there's an aura about the place (Staff 9)

we would go there every summer to climb (Staff 7)

I really enjoyed the weeds. It was something that you could physically see and achieve and I believed that it was achievable and worthwhile, whereas there were a lot of doubters. A lot of people just didn't think we could win the battle with weeds, but I felt you always could and I [proved] the doubters wrong (Staff 4)

I've worked in 5 other park areas. And I must admit that when I was on holidays or on my days off I never went near those parks. But here I will come and recreate. Here I am happy to come and walk, I am happy to go for a ski, and I don't get moved by that 'oh bloody hell that signs still not the way it should be, because I can still be immersed in the place. The place still grabs me, surrounds me, it still has an entity and a lot of people say that about Buffalo, (Staff 2)



Figure 5: Ladies Bath Falls

Many work or non-work activities centred on the place of Mt Buffalo provide considerable pleasure and help to construct a connection to Mt Buffalo. It is hard to imagine that an unpleasant or distressing experience might result in a sense of attachment to place, but it is also unlikely that experiences with a particular place will be positive all of the time. This is a question that could be explored further. What each of us finds pleasurable is a consequence of our own personal interests and values. The next section explores the interest in the natural environment that Parks Victoria staff hold and how these values contribute to a sense of place.

Conservation values or ethic and a sense of meaningful activity

The majority of people interviewed spoke about their concern for, and interest in, the environment. On the whole people enjoyed and appreciated the natural environment and had an interest in learning and contributing to its ecological health. The consequence of this set of values or interest is that the job itself is potentially:

- more pleasurable – being in spaces and places that one enjoys – and
- more meaningful – doing work that one sees as valuable and worthwhile.

The interest in the natural environment has influenced each person's choice to work for Parks Victoria and is reflected in their choice to recreate in the natural environment. Many interviewees indicated that an affinity to the outdoors was fostered when they were children.

I've always had an interest in the bush, (when I) grew up, my old man was renovating a house in an old gold mining town in the bush, and so all our weekends were spent you know, we'd go up there to work on the house and

while my folks were working on the house, my brother and I would just disappear into the scrub all weekend. They had no idea where we were. (Staff 8)

I think I just really respect natural areas and whether mountainous or coast line or rainforest or desert I think tend to have a bit of a connection with all of them really. I like the mountains ... (Staff 10)

... what I've done in my spare time was to go out camping and walking, and fishing and things like that, with a couple of friends. When we grew up, we used to have boats. I used to get our parents just to drop us off somewhere and we'd go off on boat adventures and things with all the camping gear. So I've always been, you know, a fair bit interested in it (the environment), and seeing plants and animals and want to know what they are, and what they're like, and all that kind of stuff (Staff 11)

I had pretty romanticised views of what rangers do from watching skippy as a child and things like that but I also spent a lot of time in the bush as a kid and it's just where you feel most comfortable and I think it's just such a real opportunity very few people get to live and work in this sort of situation (Staff 6)

I guess I got some of the passion from my parents, they, I mean we went out and we did camping trips etc, you know like some families do, it wasn't like every year we're going camping, it was just that they did introduce me to camping. They did introduce me to, you know "oh let's put some bird feeders up, and see what birds are attracted' (Staff 1)

Many of the Parks Victoria staff interviewed had a childhood that brought them into contact with the natural environment. All the Parks Victoria staff interviewed valued the natural environment and felt comfortable being in an outdoor environment. Therefore subsequently working in, and for, environments such as Mt Buffalo is perceived as being a meaningful and worthwhile pursuit; it is also the kind of place they enjoyed recreating in. We suggest that valuing the outdoor and natural environment facilitates the development of a sense of place attachment for the people that work as carers and managers of this environment, and that additional contact with these beautiful places reinforces the environmental ethic and connection to place.

The interviews revealed common experiences of place associated with pleasure, value, care, links to associated community, contact and knowledge of place which build connection to place. These connections were made in a work and non-work context. It is understandable then that people whose lives centre around caring for place and whose job brings them into contact with that place in ways that are rewarding and pleasurable will develop quite strong connection to that place.

Blocks and constraints to sense of place

The previous section explored factors that contribute to the development and growth of a sense of place. The interviews with Parks Victoria staff suggested two factors that might erode or limit the development of sense of place. These were a policy of limiting staff time in any one place or community, and a concern for rational processes.

Policy of moving people around

Across Australian park agencies there have been formal and informal policies of moving people across parks with the aim of not letting them get 'too attached' to any one place. This policy is based on the premise, which is confirmed by this study, that familiarity and knowledge of a place facilitates place attachment. But the policy is also based on the premise that place attachment impedes or has a negative impact on the overall management of national parks. As we didn't talk to all levels of management a strong sense of place may well 'impede' management processes in some ways. But frequent relocation of staff or having uncertain tenure not only interrupts development of sense of place, but also makes it harder to settle into the job and be able to contribute to what staff see as a 'maximum' level.

I had this discussion as an example with [a senior manager] a couple of years ago now and he is very strongly anti what he calls patch mentality and we had that discussion about the really important role of the ranger-in-charge to manage their area, be protective of it and argue for it and all that sort of stuff and his view is that that's just a load of rubbish you know, [his view is] people in this organisation have to think strategically and you putting your argument up for your area is just threatening what might be important somewhere else. My argument is that that's important but there are other people who will deal with that, that will make those calls and unless that person does put up their bid or their challenge or their argument for their local area, who else is going to do it, you know, so that's an example, that's his view and well I think he's pretty good at his job really, but he's got that particular view, he believes that patch mentality or parochialism, whatever you want to call it, is the enemy of the organisation and I think he's only half right. (Staff 10)

It's taken some time (to develop sense of place) and part of that probably is because of the uncertainty of not knowing whether you're going to stay here or not ... it's kind of hard to make that commitment on a work level if you think oh I'm only going to be there for six months. (Staff 6)

The speaker continued to explain that being employed on a temporary contract made it harder to manage their everyday work, for example taking on long-term projects was difficult because they wouldn't be sure they would be able to see them through, and they were concerned that it might make the job harder for the next person who would have to try to pick up the job mid-way. Another staff member explained:

there were plenty of examples of people who have been in the same job for fifteen years or more. Usually at the senior ranger level, that's important because you get the links in the community, and you get the background, which is so important for the work that we do. If you don't have your links with the community, and the community onside, and the contacts, and the background, it's really hard to work effectively within your boundaries and it's really awkward. So it's a bit of a two-edged sword - yes it (moving staff every 3 years) does give younger people or newer people, those generally that are in the base grade ranks the opportunity to move to different parks and try different things, and see different issues, not get too narrow focussed, but when you come into a new area and you turn up at the local footy club or whatever, they go 'oh another bloody parky. You'll be gone in six months', and they have no respect for the government department because they move their people around so quickly. (Staff 8)

we've been at information sessions and the question's been asked: 'Do you think you should spend more time in the park and with people?' Of course. And it's a matter of if we are going to manage the place then we've got to know what the place is, and how the place responds and what the place does and all those sort of things. You only learn that through being in the park so if it means sacrificing another job, if it means for an afternoon you go for a 4km walk on the track then that's what you do (Staff 3)

It seems then that the chief impact on sense of place is the hindering of its development through policies of relocation or need to maintain a flexible workforce, ie by employing people on contract positions. If we reflect on our own lives and special places do we ever lose a sense of connection with those places? Perhaps this is the focus for a further research question? In the research we couldn't find evidence of other substantial 'eroder's of place', indeed what we found were strong statements that connection to place was greater than the negative experiences.

Rationality and emotional control

The articulation and expression of sense of place for people working at Mt Buffalo is constrained by a desire or concern, in the work context, to do the job in a rational and logical manner. Staff wanted to make the best possible management decisions, they had pride in doing a good job, and this meant being logical and being able to substantiate their actions within the broader context of the park, or the organisation. In response to a question about how they made their work decisions staff said:

Most of those things if you plan your project properly and you're taking a strategic view of your pest plant or animal management then I don't think there's much favouritism or bias that comes into it. I think in terms of visitor services there's potential for that because there is a bit more subjectivity that creeps into some of those things where you perhaps might do a bit more work or provision of services to visitors or say with an interpretation program you know you will talk about the things that interest you (Staff 6)

Simple things like that, increasing our monitoring effort, and trying to update our information systems so that we have got good information about where our threatened species are, and how they went after the fires, ... And

then being able to make decisions based on that information, whether that is a change of management decision or not, (Staff 3)

Staff operate within the organisational framework and priorities of the organisation, and pride themselves on being strategic.

Its probably not that we choose what we do, it's probably choosing when we do it and how we do it because what we do is pretty well established and agreed upon, and then its just a matter of when we do it and how we do it. So that's just a matter of priority setting I guess. Bearing in mind there are priorities from visitors, the weather or there are priorities from the management so you can balance that up against what I think is a priority, based on balancing all my projects together. And those priorities will also be determined by seasons, seasonal variations, so you know the camp ground is a high priority for example in October November, because it opens in November so you've got to have that right to go. Interpretation is a priority in January because that's when the people are there. Ski trails are a priority in winter. Those sort of balances you make up. (Staff 3)

There were times when we talked about what we can do to improve the presentation and the access and so forth to the place, but I don't think that was driven by any sort of inner desire around the place from a personal perspective, I think it was as much driven from a business case. ... if I pushed funding for one place over another, it's because of business reasons not personal reasons. Because if I did, then I wouldn't be doing my job properly. (Staff 9)

I think amongst most of the senior managers in this organisation they wouldn't have much time for people saying they've got strong connections and they want to just stay in a certain place or arguing issues about their place. Parks Victoria people are encouraged to think strategically (Mmm) so I think that's probably chips away a little bit at [your sense of connection]. (Staff 10)

Staff therefore talked about a need to control their emotions – or to be objective rather than subjective in their approach to their work. The above quotes give examples of where this relates directly to sense of place. At other times emotional control was needed to perform the work tasks that in themselves provoked considerable emotions.

Especially if you are there for the couple of search and rescues like I have been involved in. We have processes and things happening and ... I guess from a logistical point of view, on the ground on the day, it's pretty difficult to manage ... so [you] stop all your contractors and I will go and do this other job, which is a high priority and then police [arrive] and these other sort of things that happen. And then there's the emotional part of it to deal with at the time and its probably only later on when you start to process it that, because at the time you're thinking of trying to increase the operation, of trying to do the process, not of the dying person or whatever happens to be happening, and so then when you've gone through that and you might be

out searching or whatever you're doing, you might have a little bit of space to start thinking about the emotional response to it and that becomes really difficult. I find anyway, (Staff 3)

The trick is not to take it personally. Rule number one is respect the other person's opinion. The moment you take a criticism personally you compromise your role and your position. It can lead to an argument, it can lead to all sorts of problems. But I've always found that if you listen to a person's criticism or issues and be honest about it. If they say "Well you're not doing that very well" or whatever, and it's true, then you say "Yeah, yeah you're right." Then you can qualify it by saying "We don't have the funding to do it any better, or we don't have the time, or there are external factors," that seems to work really well, (Staff 4)

At a personal level, [the fire] was really difficult. You know, from day one till day end, like most of my colleagues, it wasn't just me, ... you know sort of twelve fifteen hour days, six days a week, and on top of that, when your house is at risk from burning down, and you're driving around with your financial records and your photo albums in your car, and your family have packed up and moved to Melbourne, there's a fair bit of pressure at a personal level and a work level. And that went on for sort of three months. And I've got to say on reflection, I was emotionally spent for probably about eighteen months after that (Staff 9)

[regarding the fires] when X and I were driving up and we saw the devastation that the fire had done, we were really upset, both of us, close to tears and all that. But that issue was compounded by the fact that we'd been out fighting fires and seen some pretty horrible stuff, and working 16 plus hour days. But the next day, X and I were talking about it and I'd had time to think back to 1995, and I said this is a natural process and within 12 months you'll be amazed how much of the bush comes back. And that sort of consoled us and made us realise, helped us to deal with what we saw. It still affects me now, but there is an upside on it. (Staff 4)

There were comments on the ability to separate the work and organisation from the place. Clearly relationship to place is linked to work that is done but at another level what goes on within the organisation is considered to be separate from this relationship. As staff 7 indicates below frustration with the organisation would not necessarily lead to frustration and negative feelings toward the place.

As occurs in other organisations, it is not so much that emotion or passion is absent from the workplace or does not make a contribution, rather it is often masked or considered minor in comparison to rational processes. We are not arguing here that this isn't appropriate, but the consequence of 'containing' sense of place emotions is that the positive contribution is potentially not acknowledged or built on, and any negative contribution will be harder to name and overcome.



Figure 6: Burnt Ash forests after the 2003 bush fires

Strength of sense of place

Sense of place can be more powerful than the organisation culture. In many ways the organisation is seen as a separate entity to the role of park stewardship, and that a negative relationship to the organisation would not destroy the connection to the place.

We went through some really terrible times up Buffalo for various reasons, but I was always able to distinguish between the park and the bad times. It wasn't the park's fault. And just the beauty of Buffalo. Buffalo to me is a place where you can go out in the bush and you won't see anyone for a day. Or you walk around the corner, particularly in my early years up there, and there'd be something amazing that you'd see. Whether it's a tree, or a rock formation, or an animal, or whatever. There was always something new and interesting and really pretty about it. And I was doing something that I really liked. (Staff 4)

People are proud of what they do. They may not be proud of their department, and the way the department may operate, all the systems and processes of management and stuff. But they're usually pretty proud of what they do. Because the people in the area that we work in are pretty passionate people. ... I think it would have to be a pretty ordinary situation for you not to get a connection with a place. You'd have to not get along with your work colleagues, and just simply not enjoy coming to work to not get that connection with the place. (Staff 8)

Buffalo as a place is always mystical and magical and always will be. Buffalo as a working place ... was not the best place to be. But it wasn't really their fault either, it was just the situation we were in. (Staff 5)

In response to a question about whether particular jobs or time away from Mt Buffalo would erode sense of place one staff said:

I don't think that would erode how I feel about buffalo itself, it might erode how I felt about Parks Victoria, but not about how I felt about the mountain. And I think at the moment because I'm quite happy, I see them very connected. My work organisation and the place, but if something was to go pear shaped, with Parks, I'd like to believe that I could separate my employer from the place, and I think I'd still have a strong feeling for Buffalo. You know its...I knew Buffalo before I worked for the organisation and it will always be there after I left the organisation. (Staff 7)

Incorporation of sense of place into the organisational culture, professional practice and decision making

This section outlines how sense of place fits into the organisational culture, professional practice and decision making.

Culture is what is created from the messages that are received about how people are expected to behave in your organisation. (Taylor 2004: 6)

Part of our exploration of sense of place in the practice of park management involved reflecting on how sense of place might be situated in the organisational culture. We feel we can make some comments about this, but need to stress that our focus was on 'sense of place' and we have not done a thorough exploration of the organisational culture itself. We are able to identify multiple positions that sense of place takes within the un-stated rules and behaviours that make up the organisational culture.

These multiple, and sometimes contradictory, positions include:

1. An acceptance that sense of place exists
2. An expected commitment to the organisation over place
3. Valuing of the rational and devaluing of 'emotion'
4. Valuing of flexibility in work practices (ie short term contracts)
5. An appreciation and valuing of sense of place when it results in quality and committed work practices
6. A separation of metropolitan and regional cultures

Before explaining how Parks Victoria's organisational culture incorporates sense of place it is worth discussing how organisational culture comes about. Taylor (2004) suggests that there are three key sources of messages that indicate what the expected behaviour is. The first is the behaviour of the management team and those people considered important in your organisation. These people are watched carefully by others; they are role models and they send 'messages' about what is 'expected around here'. Taylor adds: 'these messages are much stronger than any spoken messages from the management team' (Taylor 2004: 7).

The impact of senior management in any organisation is critical to the culture that then develops, and the impact of senior management of various Australian parks was recognised in the following quotes:

He (new manager) certainly wasn't making inroads with any of the staff so I didn't feel I was alone. So there was a change of culture (compared to the previous regional manager. And that was pretty hard to take ... (Staff 8)

I think if we were in a formal management type meeting or gathering or whatever, I think it's far more encouraged to talk more objectively and strategically. ... I think my reading of it is, it depends a bit on who the senior manager is really, but you know, with most senior managers in this organisation that wouldn't be encouraged (talking openly about your attachment to place), or seen as being relevant. (Staff 10)

It is clear then that the personalities and rules made by people in senior positions will influence the extent to which 'sense of place' is articulated or made explicit in the organisation (we assume here it will exist but perhaps not be talked about). It also emerged that people in higher management positions seemed to lose any connection with place that they might have had, once they took on the higher level positions and worked well away from the parks themselves.

I feel a bit sorry for people that are senior managers that haven't really developed a sense of connection, ... and a lot of senior managers haven't come through the same pathway that I have. They've come out of other organisations, sideways or they moved up the corporate ladder quite quickly. So they're in sort of senior manager roles that have never had the opportunity to develop a sense of connection with anywhere really in terms of a park, in terms of work sense. And I think that's a shame because it must reflect their outlook on how they judge things. You can get a little bit too cold and calculating and a little bit too objective perhaps. Well, I think it affects their decision making. They become a little bit, there's really no, not much emotion in things. And also when you're dealing with issues, ... you can tell a reaction from some people, they just don't see it, (Staff 10)

The following points outline how sense of place ties in with the organisational culture of Parks Victoria.

Acceptance that sense of place exists

The first point is that there is an acceptance of the idea that staff might develop an attachment or sense of place to where they're working. Proposing the research to Parks Victoria and to staff within the organisation met with nodding of heads about the concept of sense of place; there seemed to be a general belief that we would indeed find sense of place in amongst staff. That is, there is an unwritten acceptance of attachment and commitment to place. Following on from this point, for all staff that we talked to the idea of attachment to place seemed appropriate to the job. As the quotes below indicate some of the staff argued that it is an essential ingredient for competent park management.

In response to the question as to whether or not the organisation acknowledges sense of place staff replied:

Look I think they do, its probably difficult because what's Parks Victoria? Is that my direct managers? Is that the CEO or is that the regional management team of 10 people or whatever that happens to be? So actually defining that is really difficult and it probably will vary according to who you talk to at those levels because in the end Parks Victoria is just a group of people and the management board over it. And I sense the people towards the top, you know the CEO and the management board, really value those senses of place, that connection. And for the people from there and in between it probably varies, to a point, because of the position they hold in that management structure, (Staff 3)

They acknowledge the commitment and they acknowledge that they could not do it for the price, and they acknowledge the commitment and that it could look very bad otherwise but it makes them look very good constantly,

because of that commitment but when it comes to flexibility it often then becomes a thorn in the side (Staff 2)

They really don't get it,... there are even some chief rangers I know who, I don't know whether they feel threatened by it, but really it's quite a negative thing for rangers to be attached emotionally because they think you're being too subjective at what you do you're not doing your job properly. I think that's bullshit it's really not the case at all. I think you're far more likely to do a good job if you're passionate and committed than if you're kind of blinkered and look at everything objectively but yeah there's been times when I've been dealing with that middle manager level about some of these asset and infrastructure .. they're seeking information from you and the attitude that seems to come across sometimes is that firstly that rangers wouldn't necessarily know about those sorts of things because they deal with cute furry animals and looking after plants (Staff 6)

An expected commitment to the organisation over place

So whilst sense of place is acknowledged and valued by many in an organisational context there exists a tension between the perceived benefits and dis-benefits of sense of place to the organisation. A few staff raised concerns around the potential for sense of place to interfere with a broader commitment to the organisation and decision-making in the best interests of all Victorian parks; they felt that holding a strong sense of place would bring an inappropriate emotional influence to discussions and decisions.

You know the ownership and the protection and the stewardship and the interest and the knowledge (that rangers) develop in their park or their patch is a strength, but the other side of that, and every strength has its weakness, is that they tend to be able to fail to look up and around, and realise that they're not there just for their patch, they're there to work for the organisation (Staff 9)

You need to have rangers in charge with a strong will and to a reasonable level, some sense of patch mentality. As long as it doesn't go over the top, you don't want to become totally parochial and you know, big wool around the area (they're) managing, it's about balance. (Staff 10)

Organisational culture is built around the organisation's goals or agenda; at one level the organisation's agenda is to achieve its goals and objectives but it also needs to survive as an organisation by setting up processes that facilitate ongoing recruitment of different staff at on-ground and management levels. There is the hope, therefore, in Parks Victoria that some of its staff will want to develop management skills, which from Parks Victoria's perspective includes being able to understand the broad set of issues across regions and the state – to 'see the big picture'. Moving to management positions mean being less connected to 'hands on' activities and place; and less involved in activities which provide inherent meaning in the job. The following quote from Staff 8 reflects the potential loss of working closely with the on-ground issues of park management which for many staff makes the job meaningful. A similar concern was found in research which talked to women working in national parks across

Australia where some women were reluctant to continue through to management positions because the costs to their job satisfaction and lifestyle would be too high (Davidson & Black 1997).

there's always been a fairly strong view that certainly rangers should be experienced in a number areas that they work in, including geographically, so that a ranger has had an opportunity to work in different environments with different issues so they don't become connected to one place and that's all they do. I think years ago we were less concerned with EO and stuff like that, people were often just shuffled all over the place because Oh you've been there two years, it's time you moved on. (Staff 10)

... when I was meeting with this regional manager, and I've had this a couple of times now, about leaving or moving on they say 'oh well you're obviously ambitious', and I go 'what do you mean?'. 'Oh you know, you've obviously got ambition and career prospects within the department'. I go 'well, no, I'm not ambitious'. I have no desire really to climb the ladder, I am quite happy to basically to stay on in many respects, there's just less responsibility and stuff. You have a lot of freedom to do what you want to do, so it's an amazing perception that management have of their staff that they should be ambitious, they should learn to climb the tree. And not all of us do. Sometimes it would be nice to be higher up because you could have more influence in decision making. (Staff 8)



Figure 7: Snow grass plains

Valuing of the rational and devaluing of ‘emotion’

Whilst sense of place was an accepted part of managing national parks such as Mt Buffalo the process of decision-making reflected a concern and culture of making the best decisions for the park in an objective and rational fashion. The tasks that were described and processes of determining job priorities (as has been discussed above) suggest a work team and work culture that values rationality and objectivity. Returning to the definition of ‘organisational culture’ – the practice of unwritten codes of behaviour – what is expected in the organisation (and our society) then is the ‘rational’, and being seen to be rational. We are not suggesting that being rational and objective is problematic but the consequence of this focus is that practices or behaviours that were felt to have no rational basis are questioned and devalued. The quotes below demonstrate how the organisation has gone through phases of seeing little benefit of staff attachment to place, but from their perspective there are clear positive outcomes. These benefits include: knowledge of place, intrinsic motivation, commitment to quality of work, and development of trusting relationships with the local community.

... to give you an example, if I was trying to argue for Buffalo in a forum with other people trying to argue for their areas, I'd be very careful not to put the argument forward that shows any real emotional connection because that would be seen as a weakness straight away in your argument. So I need to argue for those things purely from an objective basis, you know, good strong arguments about why things need to be done. If I start bringing more of an emotional local connection to things or if I see others do it, you can see they start to lose credibility pretty quickly. (Staff 10)

There have been moves to move the rangers (out of parks). In fact a few years ago they actually moved the rangers out of Tidal River and put them outside the park. And that's been reversed now and they're back. ... Perhaps the more corporate senior management view of the world saw no need for that connection. 'Why would you need to be up there?' 'What can you objectively tell me on the white board as the reasons for having to have a ranger up there?' And you can put a few down, but really, what are the emotional and the intrinsic values, you know the less tangible, you can't sort of score them or write them on the board, but they're there and they're really important. And ... it's hard to argue those things isn't it? (Staff 10)

Flexibility in work practices

The high value of a flexible and moveable workforce contributes to the labelling of place attachment as ‘patch mentality’ or failing to ‘see the big picture’. The term is used by the organisation when staffs are believed to focus on, or prioritise, their park to the detriment of other parks. One staff member felt this label was not deserved, and that what was actually happening was a clash of values or cultures, rather than staff not being willing to see the big picture or help neighbouring parks.

... they often call it (sense of place?) parochialism when they see it as patch mentality. It is often poorly labelled as that when it's not that at all, it is actually just about the values that are there, patch mentality is when you refuse to help your neighbours. You feel quite denigrated within Parks Victoria particularly by middle managers. Organisations very much value

flexibility over anything else, it's about flexibility to do one thing this year and not do it next year (Staff 2)

when I first started as a ranger it was quite clear when I was at Buffalo that I wasn't - although there was a ranger position offered at Buffalo - going to get it. It was expected that I would go somewhere else because I needed to experience somewhere else. Which I think is fair enough, it's a reasonable thing. So there was a quite deliberate thing (to move rangers around). I think these days it's not so much that but there's a very strong encouragement that people should get experience in a number of places and I think that's not unreasonable. I think if people are going to be good rangers, become managers, get involved with chief rangers or planners or whatever they're going to do you probably can't do justice by just working in one place because ... your view of the world based on one place will probably mean you don't have a wide range of experience and thoughts and judgement about things. I think it is important, it's a bit of a balance. You also don't want people that have got no connection to the place and that just sort of go from place to place and never really have a good connection or understanding of being close to an area. (Staff 10)

The organisation's management culture aims to build a flexible work force, which will enable the organisation to shift focus in reasonably quick time to the various and diverse issues across the state. This can result in a negative experience for staff themselves. There was an example given where an organisation (not Parks Victoria) wanted to retain flexibility of a position and would therefore not guarantee to hold it for one particular past employee, and there were other examples of staff being employed on short term contract or as casual labour. The interviews revealed that an occasional consequence of this approach is that staff indicated that they did not feel valued by the organisation.

An appreciation and valuing of sense of place when it results in quality and committed work practices



Figure 8: Rocky tors and visitors on Mt Buffalo

The benefits of sense of place are most acknowledged and valued because of the commitment to the job and quality of the work that it facilitates in staff. A high commitment to job becomes a part of the organisational culture, or an expected behaviour and therefore hard not to adopt (comply). However, as one interviewee articulated and as has been discussed earlier – the commitment is not based on sense of place alone, but is also a commitment to the role that is being filled – irrespective of place.

We didn't really talk about it but I think we acknowledged each other's connection with the place. You know, like we don't walk around hugging trees or whatever, but we will say. "Oh you should have seen such and such today it looked spectacular" or "What a great spot that is" or "Look at that". We do that, so in a way we do acknowledge it but I think because of our job we all make sacrifices and no one asks us or forces us to make sacrifices. So in a way that's acknowledgment of our - I don't know if it's our attachment to the park or to our role in the park. (Staff 4)

But as a ranger and doing ranger type work there probably is a sense of place or a set of guidelines that says 'yes we'll do our best for the protection

of the park'. And that's the bottom line. In whatever sense that is. Whether that means when you're out walking fixing a walking a track and picking up rubbish as well, or if you see weeds, you know you probably make an effort to get them or if I'm in another part of the park, or in the district, and I see something that's important then I can report that back. Those sort of things are probably the unwritten things. (Staff 3)

Parks Victoria every year has a staff function and awards day which is a large gathering of Parks Victoria staff in Melbourne and I think in those sort of things is partly about getting together with your comrades because that's how it feels and I think there is a genuine recognition from people like Mark Stone, the CEO, because his background is through the ranks so I think perhaps he does understand (Staff 6)

The commitment is not so much stated in policy as part of the 'culture'. This commitment and interest is a double-edged sword as it results in people who are knowledgeable and prepared to argue about what they see as the best decision and processes to be used in their park; is not always seen as a good thing. It also results in a workforce that has a high level of intrinsic motivation; a workforce that values the responsibilities they have and tasks they are required to do, and will undertake these tasks outside the formal work hours where necessary. Parks Victoria at many levels does value and recognise the commitment and passion that many staff have for their position. It was also suggested in the interviews that the organisation relies on this intrinsic motivation, potentially leaving staff feeling frustrated or disillusioned when they also receive messages that they shouldn't be attached to their park as much.

It is [commitment] certainly acknowledged individually, for instance, I had a senior manager come up to me after last summer's program and he thanked me for my hard work and he said I know how hard you work and you went way beyond what was asked of you and good on you. So, at a personal level it's acknowledged. I think the people I work with acknowledge a lot of the hard work I do at the same time they also acknowledge my faults as same as I do. As a corporation Parks Victoria certainly sees that but I sometimes wonder if they have the real understanding of what it's really like. I'm paid for 7.36 hours a day and I average 8.5 to 9 hours a day, and I'm not paid, nor do I get time in lieu for that (Staff 4)

A separation of metropolitan and regional cultures

Although there is considerable acknowledgement and respect for the work done by other people in the organisation, intra-organisation relationships are also characterised by frustration as a result of different parts of the organisation not understanding or agreeing with actions and/or decisions from another section. There was an element of 'us and them' between people in regional areas and people in the head office. This is an understandable cultural difference between people with different roles, and different immediate goals. Where head office staff might be responsible for computer systems, or promotion, or website management park staff are the interface between park and visitor, and are responsible for doing or organising the doing of tasks such as feral species control and track management (to name a few).

People in head office were not expected by regional staff to have a sense of attachment to any of the parks unless they happened to be places they visited in their own leisure time. We have previously listed the key factors that contribute to the forming of sense of place as:

- a. contact with place,
- b. sense of belonging to place and associated community,
- c. pleasure associated with place
- d. knowledge of place,
- e. a sense of meaningful activity associated with place, and
- f. a conservation ethic.

In their normal work day head office staffs would not be expected to experience contact with place, a sense of belonging to place and associated community, and pleasure associated with place. They may or may not experience the other place building factors. At times though, head office staff do visit the parks and park staff and head office staff get to see what park staff do; subsequently head office staff become familiar with some of the places that they are working to protect. Park staff felt that these experiences were extremely positive for all involved, and were partly as a result of head office staff experiencing 'place'.

But the majority of time they're (head office staff) in Melbourne ... their life is about doing the job and catching the train home or sitting in the traffic on the way home. It's just a different system. So there's still an 'us and them' but that can be overcome. This changes over time as the people in the office get to know us as rangers on the ground and visa versa. So that changes with these sort of meetings when those guys come up here a little bit. And it's probably more an appreciation of what their role is and what their job is with the organisation, rather than previously before coming out they might not have had those environmental values. Their job is to run computers or to develop contracts or whatever it happens to be so it's just understanding and recognising what their job is and what it's meant to be and then for us as well. So then they recognize what we're doing and where we fit in apart from managing contracts or fighting fires. And for them to see the park when we go out in the park and take them on tour, wherever that happens to be, for them to see the passion or the connection that we have to the landscape in the individual park and I think a lot of them might find that a bit different to what they thought, that for us it's not just get to work at 8 and leave at 4 and that's it, the day is done. (Staff 3)

There continues, however, to be an 'us and them' culture.

... they spent \$200,000 on a fire works display and they called it a Parks Victoria birthday party. They did that for two or three years, but there were parks you couldn't get into because the roads were so bad but they were spending \$200000 on fireworks, things like that to buy off these recalcitrant hicks in the country, 'we'll show them what a corporate organisation can do for them', (Staff 2)

... there's a lot of good things in Parks Victoria about the value of its staff and recognising that people have a commitment and passion. There are some great things said and written in various documents and you read the start of the corporate plan about the value of staff and that sort of thing, so I

think there is a genuine effort to recognise it. But there are certainly times when you're dealing with, particularly some of the people, not just out of Melbourne, but some of the people dealing with the asset infrastructure, leasehold, statutory planning issues who probably don't come, well almost certainly don't come, from a ranger or land management background, who just don't get it. (Staff 6)



Figure 9: Weekly planning activity

Conclusion: Sense of place and practice

Are sense-of-place emotions manifested within an organisation such as Parks Victoria? The first and most obvious conclusion is that staff with positions directly responsible for caring, and providing access to the public (ie park entry ticket sellers), do have a sense of attachment to place – in this case a sense of attachment to Mt Buffalo. For staff working, or having worked at Mt Buffalo, a sense of place arose as a consequence of the physical contact and familiarity with Mt Buffalo, from the pleasurable experiences that occurred there, from the sense of community and belonging that was found there, and as a result of personal interest and commitment to environmental values which meant that the work they did was personally meaningful. Frequently the discussion of place introduced the sense of community and belonging, and whilst there were explicit statements that the attachment to Mt Buffalo was strong enough not to be eroded by a dislike of the work organisation, there were also statements that uncomfortable interpersonal relationships would erode or diminish the overall attachment to place; suggesting an inter-dependency between attachment to the physical site and attachment to the human community.

We suggest that staff come to their positions with high intrinsic motivation to be involved in the management and care of natural areas such as Mt Buffalo and that a growing connection to place is a natural consequence but also contributor to this commitment and intrinsic motivation. On site at the park level a culture exists that recognises and values sense of place; this was manifested in the discussions between staff and others about their park, and also reflected in the acknowledgement and value of the commitment and attachment given by direct supervisors. Undoubtedly sense of place and high levels of intrinsic motivation are of overall benefit to the organisation and care of places such as Mt Buffalo. But, as with many things, sense of place, is seen as a two-sided phenomenon. The organisation, via the middle managers sent messages that attachment was a hindrance to effective park management potentially producing staff that would be narrow in focus and unable to see and address the organisation's broad goals. In the past various state park agencies have aimed to limit the development of sense of place by frequently relocating staff, moving them to different parks and communities. This policy whilst having advantages of broadening staff experience has meant that the organisation is at risk of not receiving the benefits that sense of place produces; benefits such as depth of knowledge of a particular site and the 'corporate knowledge' associated with that site, the development of strong and trusting relationship with the community, and development and commitment to long term projects and high quality work.

Such a policy is willing to trade the development of some management skills for benefits that result from familiarity and links to place such as maintenance and enhancement of staff intrinsic motivation. It is clear from the literature that intrinsic motivation is a powerful form of motivation (Kohn 1993; Springer 2006; Hsiu-Fen 2007) and so we suggest that work places need to be careful about implementing policies that have the potential to erode intrinsic motivation. We wonder if there is a more satisfactory approach where sense of place is accepted, and the contributions that it makes are recognised and not devalued. The managing organisation can ignore sense of place, respond to it in an adhoc fashion or value and accept it. The danger of the first two strategies is a risk of staff disillusionment, lack of trust and feelings of being used. Not to acknowledge the existence of sense of place openly also means that problems that arise from sense of place are more difficult to address. Organisational theorists Argyris and Schon (1996) argue that a problem first needs to be made explicit before it can be adequately dealt with; whilst ever a process or rule

remains tacit it can't be 'grasped' or discussed in a way that is open to a broad range of solutions. We believe that it is possible that passion and determination to care and argue for 'one's park' can be treated as an expected part of the job, but that the organisation also needs to allow and facilitate discussions around the positive and negative consequences of staff connection to place.

Sense of place for staff working at and for Mt Buffalo revealed itself to be a very real and influential experience, by its very nature or definition it is a positive experience and results in positive consequences for the management of the place, Mt Buffalo. However, the position of place attachment in the organisational culture is ambiguous and potential exists for a clearer and more satisfactory approach for staff and the organisation.



Figure 10: Mt Buffalo Gorge lookout

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