

*School of Tourism and Hospitality Management*  
*School of Tourism and Hospitality*  
*Management Papers*

---

*Southern Cross University*

*Year 2004*

---

The experience of the bandit

Johan Edelheim  
Southern Cross University

This paper is posted at ePublications@SCU.

[http://epubs.scu.edu.au/tourism\\_pubs/15](http://epubs.scu.edu.au/tourism_pubs/15)

Edelheim, J 2004, 'The experience of the bandit', *Third Asia Pacific Forum for Graduate Students Research in Tourism*, , Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, China, 22-24 September.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BANDIT

Johan R. Edelheim  
Lecturer at the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management  
Southern Cross University, Coffs Harbour, Australia

PhD candidate at the Department of Critical and Cultural Studies  
Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

### ABSTRACT

The methodology used in this study is hermeneutic phenomenology as the intention is to show how the method can be used to illuminate tourist experiences that would be hard to fathom in quantitative terms. By describing the tourist experience of Thunderbolt it is not claimed that all experiences from that or any other attraction, would be similar, or even that they will include the same features. The intention is to use it as a metaphor for other experiences. The different features each attraction has have certain resemblances that should be highlighted in order to manage them better. The method used in this paper is to distinguish existentials that enable the reader to perceive the meaning of the separate parts of the attraction.

Two fundamental life-world themes called *existentials* of the experience are described in the paper. A *corporeal* experience is found in visiting the bandit's tombstone at the cemetery, as it is claimed that physical presence of something tangible is needed for visitors to accept as true that a person has a connection to a place. An account of *relational* experience between the visitors and the information personnel shows how the tourist is never alone in the world. The way any attraction is experienced might be impossible to manage, as thoughts that the visitors are thinking when visiting an attraction does not need to have anything to do with the actual site, but they still shape the experience of it.

In order to understand the enjoyment of experiencing one of the attractions it is suggested that the concept of '*suspension of disbelief*' should be used. Tourists visiting heritage attractions are involved in experiences that are similar to being an audience at the movies or theatre. They know approximately the narrative of the events that was played out at the place they are visiting, but they have to use their imagination to transform the scenery into the historic context of the attraction. The value of the attraction is understood as an intrinsic feeling, mostly depending on the tourists willing suspension of disbelief.

Key Words: tourism, hermeneutic phenomenology, suspension of disbelief, life-world existentials,

## INTRODUCTION

Few researchers have used phenomenology in tourism (Ingram, 2002) and the intention here is to show the value of the method as an illumination of tourist phenomena that otherwise would be hard to describe in quantitative terms. The form of phenomenology that this paper will utilise is hermeneutic phenomenology which has so far mostly been used in pedagogical studies and to a lesser degree in psychology (van Manen, 1990). It is a combination of hermeneutics – to interpret, and phenomenology – to describe.

A group of noticeable elements amongst Australian roadside attractions are quite different from attractions found in other parts of the world. This is not because they are impossible to construct anywhere else, and not because they lack history to base them on. Rather it is because they say something about the cultural identity of Australians that cannot as easily be found, or is not as openly displayed in other countries. These elements are bandits from the 1800s, in Australia called 'Bushrangers', that nowadays have several popular myths built around them, and that play a role in tourism promotion in many places.

There has been lots of writing about bandits in popular media, but surprisingly little academic tourism research has featured the group. The aim of this paper is to present Captain Thunderbolt, a bushranger from Uralla in New South Wales (NSW), using hermeneutic phenomenology and discuss whether this attraction could be seen as a contributor to cultural identity confirmation and possibly also construction.

Conclusions drawn in this paper will help practitioners in tourism management roles, plan and execute promotional tasks from a more holistic perspective. By taking in consideration that they are acting as identity constructors on a larger scale and not merely as tourist promoters and entrepreneurs. The study will also help researchers by functioning as an allegory in the description of tourism attractions and their constitutive parts

## BACKGROUND TO CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY

This paper is a part of a PhD candidature. The main methodologies being used in the PhD thesis are hermeneutic phenomenology, narrative-analysis and deconstructionism. There are four parts / chapters of the PhD study, each analysing one conceptual sociologic theory used in tourism in order to give each of the theories stronger conceptual links. In addition suggestions for future tourism studies will be made. However, due to the space constraints of this paper, only one of these methods will be used here, namely hermeneutic phenomenology. It has been suggested that 'using a nontraditional method provides a way to see things that have been obscured by the repeated application of traditional methods - all ways of seeing are also ways of not seeing' (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 16).

Tourism studies have been developed from a variety of established disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, marketing and others (Echtner & Jamal, 1997). The current emphasis on positivist methods in tourism studies is possibly based on the fact that the science is relatively young, and still often seen as mundane in its topics of research. Academics from 'established' science fields are questioning the validity of studying leisure activities as an academic field on its own. Tourism academics are answering by 'proving' their findings with hard data such as statistics, economical development or ecological impact studies.

Introductory tourism textbooks for tertiary education often start with one chapter solely proving the validity of the study with statistic data about the increase in tourism and economic significance. There is frequently also a quote from a significant world-known person stating the importance of tourism for the state, nation or world economy, ecology or peace, depending on what point is being made, see for example Hall (2003) or Weaver and

Lawton (2002). Leak refers to Barthes's early writings in pointing out that writing is all style, a highly conventionalised activity, which if deconstructed exposes how the society codifies reality in its own image (Leak, 1994). Researches on tourism from for example statistical or dispositionalist motivational viewpoints say as much about the phenomenon i.e. tourism, as it says about the researcher who has done the research. The moment reality is 'produced' this way the author proceeds to 'believe that it is the only reality possible' (van Manen, 2002). If this argument is accepted then one might see positivist studies as nothing more than circular arguments reconfirming their own being.

By basing this research on qualitative humanities methods I am consciously taking a step away from the dominant tradition in order to critically question the way tourism is currently being analysed. My own background is initially working in the Hospitality field for nearly ten years before continuing with higher education in fields as diverse as Education and Business Administration. That I am now doing my PhD study in Cultural Studies is because I felt that Tourism Studies in many respects lack a solid base to build upon. Motivated by Husserl's slogan for phenomenology 'Wir wollen auf die "Sachen selbst" zurückgehen' – *We want to return to the things themselves* (Kersten, 1989, p 5) I set out to construct that solid base at least for myself to build upon.

With the risk of being seen as 'un-scientific' in my approach I firstly refuse to be restricted to third person in my descriptions. When an author uses him/herself as the object of studies, a great portion of readers finds the study straight away unreliable, as it is supposed that it has to be biased. On the other hand, any theory relies on acts of inclusion and exclusion, even when the writing is conducted in third person or as an anthropological spectator. The apparent objectivity in those cases might in actual fact be much more biased than the outright personal narrative, which does not claim that it is objective. By using an immediate conscious framework, a case can be studied from several dimensions without the problems of gathering questionnaires, doing interviews, filming tourist behaviour, studying statistics or any other methodology, all of which have their own strengths, but do not lack weaknesses in reliability at the same time.

I do not in any way claim that I have found the only right way to do a study, or that my findings might or might not in some points be totally misunderstood, but I do on the other hand not see any other methodology as infallible either. The multiple ways of forming questionnaires, the multiple ways of understanding and answering questionnaires, the problem with language barriers in interviews and the possibility of behaviour modifications in interviews or participant observations are all examples of unintended biases that might lead so called objective studies astray. Willis (2001) gives the following argument for the usage of phenomenology in research:

It is not uncommon for researchers to seek validation of a hypothesis derived from a particular theoretical approach by doing fieldwork in search of evidence to substantiate it. This quest for what one has decided to look for can cloud the researcher's gaze so that significant elements of the human activity being researched can be overlooked. The phenomenological stance seeks to approach events and activities with an investigative mind deliberately open, consciously trying to 'bracket out' assumptions and remain attentive to what is present (Willis, 2001, p 1).

By consciously taking on an approach that is rejecting pre-suppositions regarding any phenomenon's essential nature, I am in this research aiming on laying bare the constitutive elements of tourist attractions as they are presented to the viewer and how they are simultaneously perceived. The original description of the phenomenon is naturally subjective in that it describes vividly one phenomenon, the goal is however to reflect on the phenomenon and thereby 'generate some echoes in others, particularly those with similar

experiences' (Willis, 2001, p 3). The phenomenological account will later be counter posed by a narrative analysis of the promotional material that is produced by the tourism authorities in the region of the cases and by a view of the sociological construct the attraction makes up (Edelheim, 2004 - forthcoming).

## PHENOMENOLOGY IN GENERAL

Phenomenology has been used extensively in, for example, medicine and education (Willis, 2001), but has hardly at all been used in Tourism studies which is somewhat surprising taking into account the discipline's closeness to other humanistic studies, and dependency on individual experiences. Suvantola (2002) has in his work paved the way for more holistic studies of tourism, by using human geography, post-structuralism and phenomenology as a basis for his work. I will to some extent follow his existential phenomenological approach in this paper. Ingram (2002; 2003) is using 'new phenomenology' (Willis, 2001) as her main method of studying tourism in Australia. This means that she uses deep-interviews of stakeholders in tourist experiences and draws conclusions from how the participants make sense of their experiences. Schönhammer uses transcendental phenomenology when describing youth tourism (Schönhammer, 1992) and the ways it can be seen as an appropriation of the world, while Wu (1991) in a related topic looks at himself as a foreigner in a new country and what that means to him in relation to being unsure of the foreign context and missing the familiarity of home.

Phenomenology traces its roots to the declaration by Husserl saying 'Ego Cogito Cogitatum' – I think something (Stumpf, 1994, p.496) and thereby highlighting the relation he saw between consciousness, thinking, the thing thought and the element of intentionality which creates the phenomena of experience. According to Husserl it did not make sense to have an abstract mind doing the thinking cut off from the lifeworld. In his account of phenomenology, thinking is always done by a person that personally experiences things and all thinking has to be of something that is possible to experience (Willis, 2001). Phenomenology bases its practice on three foundational concepts, *introspection*, *bracketing* or *epoché*, which could be seen as consciousness without presuppositions, and finally *naming essential themes* (Becker, 1992). Van Manen (1990) suggests that it is more suitable to talk about retrospection rather than introspection since a phenomenon cannot be analysed at the same time that it is being experienced: it is always recalled afterwards.

What this means in practice is that researchers using phenomenology are trying to gain understanding of a true meaning or an essential theme of experiences / phenomena by reflecting on, for example, situations experienced, pictures seen, texts read and drawing out from that what is essential in the phenomenon while not letting any preset beliefs influence the outcome (Martin, 2002; van Manen, 1990). On a basic level one might turn to Shapiro (1985) describing Husserl's technique when he distinguishes between the *noematic* features of a phenomenon, the object and its context, and the *noetic* features, the way the subject is experiencing the phenomenon. The dialectic of the two entities is the relation between them, 'neither is the cause of which the other is result, rather, there is a circularity of influence' (p 12). The conscious awareness of the dialectics between the noematic and the noetic features is what distinguishes an experience.

I can for example as a tourist take a 'step back' from an experience and reflect not only on the attraction and its settings that I am visiting, but also on the involvement I have myself with the attraction, the personal closeness I have to an icon, the pictures I have taken of it, the souvenirs purchased for later re-consumption of the same experience. Shapiro sums it up by saying 'experience is not somehow only a direct presentation of the object, nor is it merely subjective or mental. It is bodily in that the *body-subject* or individual must actively participate or engage himself in the situation of any moment' (1985, p 13). This last point is

important, as an experience cannot ever be the same while the subject is never the same at two different moments, or as expressed already by the Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus 'You can never step into the same river twice' (Younis, 2003).

But what is lost in Shapiro's appropriation of Husserl is the division between different orientations that presently are used in the field of phenomenology. Van Manen (2002) divides the orientations into transcendental; existential; hermeneutical; linguistical; ethical and experiential each of these having different methods of using reduction, the 'bracketing' of an experience to suspend all personal beliefs. The end result of phenomenological enquiries is quite diverse depending on which orientation the author using it is subscribing to. I will briefly describe some of these orientations and will explain which one I have chosen to follow.

Transcendental; is the phenomenological orientation that follows Husserl's writings most closely. The transcendental practitioner is searching for the essences of the phenomena under investigation. Close to a structuralist perspective, it is assumed that each phenomenon has a core 'meaning' – essence, which is possible to find if all pre-suppositions are initially removed and the experience is laid bare.

The existential perspective was founded by Heidegger and differs from transcendental phenomenology in the sense that the essence is not seen to have an apriori meaning that can be found, but rather is something that the person experiencing it is a co-author of. In this view it is assumed that people have a freedom to make choices within certain parameters. People are continuously reflecting on their acts in the world knowing that they are responsible for what happens to them, not depending on divine guidance. 'Unique experiences generate common themes that enable phenomenologists to illuminate the essential structures of life' (Becker, 1992, p23).

Van Manen describes hermeneutical phenomenology as a combination of hermeneutics, 'the theory and practice of interpretation' and phenomenology the study of describing phenomena (2002). According to van Manen, a practitioner using this approach is 'attentive to how things appear', letting the 'things speak for themselves' by describing them as carefully as possible. The action of drawing out the essential themes of the lived experience is thereafter a natural process while 'there are no such things as un-interpreted phenomena', a fact in the lived experience is always meaningfully experienced (van Manen, 1990, p. 58)

## PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD USED IN THIS WRITING

Willis (2001) uses phenomenology to study adult education but signals that the practice is equally applicable to any other humanist study. I have in the following section tried to adapt his methodology to a tourism setting. Tourists can, when they reflect on their experience of an attraction ask themselves two separate types of questions, 'what was it like as a lived experience'? in which they as Willis calls it 'identify their objectivised subjective feelings'. Alternatively they can ask 'how they felt while in such an experience'? in other words they 'identify their subjectivised subjective feelings'. The answers to the two questions gives the reader an idea about *what visiting a tourist attraction is like* in the first place and *'what the person having the experience is like'* in the second place (Willis, 2001, p 8). Willis quotes Crotty in naming the first approach classical phenomenology and the latter new phenomenology.

Van Manen reminds that after describing an experience the phenomenologist has to discern the essential themes from the incidental ones, as

Not all meanings that we may encounter in reflecting on a certain phenomenon or lived experience are unique to that phenomenon or

experience. And even the themes that would appear to be essential meanings are often historically and culturally determined or shaped (van Manen, 1990, p.106).

What I therefore will do is to describe my experiences of the phenomenon using a classical approach, trying to portray what experiencing a tourist site is like. I will use a rich text and intend to point out the essential elements of those descriptions. To be critical of my own experiences is naturally hard, as the experience is a mental dialogue between my surroundings and me. I have to differentiate between simply doing a travel account and on the other hand over-theorize the account too much so that it doesn't give the reader any new insights. I will reflect on my experiences by using two out of four fundamental lifeworld themes, also called existentials; lived body *corporeality*, and lived human relation *relationality* (van Manen, 1990). While a subsequent paper on this attraction will give examples of the following existentials; lived space *spatiality*, and lived time *temporality* (Edelheim, 2005 - forthcoming). The reader is the final judge if I have added anything to their understanding of experiencing tourist sites through my accounts, or if they think that my account is too subjective to be used as a metaphor to understand how tourists experience attractions in a broader context.

## BUSHRANGERS - THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BANDIT

The Australian history holds many stories about rural outlaws called bushrangers, common in the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the time Australia functioned as a prison colony for Great Britain. Although many of the bushrangers brutally terrorized the population, 'they often held the status of folk heroes among the poor' (Columbia Encyclopaedia, n.d.). Amongst the most famous ones were Ned Kelly and his gang, who are seen as the last major bushrangers in the history (Boxall, 1899/1974).

A somewhat less famous bushranger was the lightly built Frederick Wordsworth Ward alias Captain Thunderbolt, who made his fame by stealing racing horses and then riding away from his pursuers (Boxall, 1899/1974). What connects these bandits is the fact that the tourism industry is using them to promote the regions they came from, committed their crimes in and / or where they finally met their end. Because of the magnitude of conflicting narratives surrounding the Kelly-gang and the dimension of the region where different destinations are offering tourist products based on their history I have here decided to concentrate on Captain Thunderbolt.

My first encounter with 'Thunderbolt' was on a Christmas holiday that I spent driving from Sydney to Queensland in Eastern Australia. While driving on the tablelands that make up the rich pasture area of New England, approximately 550km north of Sydney I suddenly saw three things that at the time did not have any meaning to me. The first was a sign on the left-hand side of the road simply stating 'Thunderbolt Rock'. The second thing was a large stone boulder on the right-hand side of the road covered in colourful graffiti. The final thing was opposite the boulder, again on the left-hand side of the road, a sign wishing me welcome to New England, and in smaller text underneath 'Uralla' "Thunderbolt Country". The only thing that really stuck to my mind was the graffiti-covered boulder, as I just then had written an article about tourist sites and graffiti (Edelheim, 2002), I wondered why that special boulder was so popular to tag. While entering the township Uralla, there was again a sign on the left-hand side of the road welcoming the travellers to 'Uralla – Historic Thunderbolt Country'. Not long after that was yet another sign, this time on the right-hand side of the road, pointing to 'Thunderbolt's grave'. Passing the town's tourist office a little later I saw a statue of a man riding a horse, but did not stop at that time to find out anything more about the story.

Three weeks later, on my way south again I happened to come to Uralla when the sun was setting and reluctant to continue driving in darkness I found one of the town's camping grounds and set up my tent for the night there. This time I did go to the tourist office, which however was closed for the evening, and picked up a brochure about the town's tourist attractions that was available outside. I learnt that the town counted its history back to 1834, then as an outback sheep station, and that the shire nowadays has approximately 5900 inhabitants. The town's shops and hospitality enterprises are using the area's (in) famous person to their full extent, there is a 'Bushranger Motor Inn', 'Thunderbolt Inn', 'Thunderbolt Fuels', 'Thunderbolt Country Kitchen', 'Thunderbolt Gallery' and the town has even named one road that crosses the town 'Thunderbolt's Way'. The image a first-time visitor like I got from the town was that the person must have been, and still is, a local hero that had helped the region in a way that would make him such a symbol of the area.

When I returned home from my journey I did some more research and found to my surprise that Thunderbolt was a criminal, a horse-thief that had escaped from prison, held-up travellers and kept away from the police for six and a half years until finally being shot by Constable Walker some kilometres south of Uralla in 1870. The question that was bothering me and I wanted to find an answer to by experience was, 'Why does a town celebrate a criminal like a hero, naming hotels, roads and galleries after him and at the same time not naming one place in the whole town after the police officer who finally caught him?' I assumed that the experience of the bandit must be extraordinary to survive more than 130 years and still be strong enough today, for most people to be able to connote the town and the bandit to one another if only one of them is mentioned first. My suspicion was also that it might tell something about how an Australian cultural identity is formed through the re-enforcement of selected narratives in the tourist discourse.

Having read much more about bushrangers, and about hermeneutic phenomenology as well, I returned to Uralla a year and a half later with the intention to experience the sites that are connected to Thunderbolt. Hermeneutic phenomenology uses retrospection, bracketing, and the naming of essential themes to describe a phenomenon and give the reader a chance to recognize themselves in similar experiences. By seeing the phenomenon as a metaphor for other experiences, the reader can use the description to consciously apply the essential themes to other cases, still constantly aware of the fact that every experience is individual and generalisations are impossible to do from them (Becker, 1992). As I knew some parts of the Thunderbolt story when returning to Uralla and also having read about and experienced many of the tourist enterprises surrounding Australia's most famous bushrangers, the Kelly-gang in Victoria, I had to bracket out all presuppositions and enter the sites with an open mind.

## THE GRAVE

The first of the sites connected to Thunderbolt I visited was his grave. After the sign by the highway no other signs directs the traveller to the Pioneer's Cemetery where Thunderbolt's grave is situated. The cemetery is however just a couple of blocks off the main thoroughfare, easy to see on the left-hand side of the road. I parked where some other cars already were parked next to the fence limiting off the cemetery from the roadside, and looked around over the cemetery to see if I could recognize the grave from a photo in a brochure I had earlier found in my motel. As I did not see the grave straight away, I decided to walk systematically along the graves and read the inscriptions on the tombstones. There were no other visitors at the cemetery at the time.

The cemetery is not in active use; most graves are old and not attended to anymore. Some inscriptions are so faint that it is only possible to guess the names of the people buried there, other are cracked or even in pieces on the ground. After a first round from front to back

of the little field without finding the grave, I started a second round, this time including the graves closest to the fence on all sides. I found Thunderbolt's grave shortly thereafter, next to the only opening in the low wooden fence surrounding the cemetery, that I earlier had stepped over. The tombstone was smaller than I had imagined from the photo, and there was a small information plaque with a roof just behind the grave, which made me even more surprised that I had missed it on my first round of the cemetery. The tombstone's text reads:

Erected by  
NEW ENGLAND RESIDENTS  
TO MARK WHERE LIES  
THUNDERBOLT  
[FRED WARD]  
CALLCOTT                      ARMIDALE  
DIED MAY 25.1870  
AGED 36 YEARS

While looking at the tombstone my original question returned to me, 'Why does a town celebrate a criminal like a hero', in this case a whole region – New England Residents? I also wondered when the tombstone had been erected, if it was erected when Thunderbolt originally was buried, or at a later stage, and in case of the latter, when? And why?

The plaque next to the grave gave a partial answer to my questions, claiming that the 'public generally had a "soft spot" for him' as he never was violent but always courteous towards ladies. There was however no mention there when the tombstone had been erected, or why the plaque's heading is 'You are now in "Thunderbolt Country"', instead of possibly calling the area 'Constable Walker Country', more analysis of the narratives will however be made in a subsequent paper (Edelheim, forthcoming). I later found out from the visitor centre that the tombstone was erected in the 1920's, some 50 years after Thunderbolt's death. The essence of experiencing the cemetery was to see the tombstone, it became a corporeal evidence of Thunderbolt's being in the world, and the cemetery would not have been enough to make the story tangible. This was apparently something that had been discovered early last century when the tombstone originally was erected, visitors were not satisfied by visiting the cemetery and knowing that Thunderbolt was buried there - somewhere, they needed a tangible point to see and that had been provided in the tombstone.

#### THE VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

The following stop was at the town's tourist office where I enquired about what there is to see and experience of Thunderbolt in the region. Mr. Hobbs, the information centre's manager asked me why I was interested in the bandit, and what I knew about him from before. I told him that I was interested in bushrangers as attractions, and said that I knew the main points of the story about Thunderbolt, how he had been a horse-thief who had been a very good rider, a courteous person and that he had met his end near Uralla. Mr. Hobbs asked if I would mind getting an alternative version of the history, a small booklet that he called a 'family account' of the history (Sinclair, 2004). I was happy to collect all material with narratives that could help me to understand the phenomenon in a more holistic manner, and got the booklet and approximately ten other publications relating to the Uralla area or to Thunderbolt directly that were available for free at the office.

Mr Hobbs outlined in broad terms the alternative version, telling that it possibly was not Fredrick Ward that rested in the grave with his name, but possibly his brother, William 'Harry' Ward. According to Mr Hobbs the brothers were both acting as bushrangers and both calling themselves Captain Thunderbolt, he claimed that this was one of the reasons for 'Thunderbolt' to commit crimes that were far apart in the colony in a short period of time,

not the fast race-horses that are assumed in the official accounts. Another reason for Thunderbolt not to get caught was according to Mr Hobbs that the bandit had married an aboriginal woman and that she and her clan had taught Thunderbolt how to stay hidden in the Australian nature. The alternative version also tells that the loot from 6.5 years of bushranging which is estimated to have been approximately £20.000, or A\$ 1 million in today's money value, was never found and that some of Fred Ward's closest relatives disappeared from public records at the time of 'Thunderbolts' death.

Other travellers came to the office while I was there and they listened in on the story and asked questions about possible hiding places of the loot. Mr Hobbs assured that 'Every possible square meter between Armidale and almost down to Sydney' had been dug up in search for the gold and silver that the bandit's loot was supposed to contain. When I left the office I realised that parts of why Thunderbolt is so popular still today might have resided in the alternative story that I heard. Popular films are often depicting the criminals as the actual heroes of their narratives, and no story is more popular than the ones where the hero in the end comes out as the 'winner', outsmarting the law-officers and living happy 'ever-after' – as in for example the American blockbuster movie 'Shawshank Redemption'. That Thunderbolt had kept away from the law-enforcers for six and a half years after his escape from prison was already noteworthy, few bushrangers' careers were longer than some months on an average (Boxall, 1899/1974).

That he had been courteous and non-violent has equally lead to a reputation almost like an Australian Robin Hood. The essence of the visitor information centre, as part of Thunderbolt - the tourist attraction - was therefore the relational space it provided. The interaction between the visitors and other visitors and equally between the visitors and the information personnel formed a new dimension to a story that so far had felt one-dimensional. The information could of course have been provided in written form, but the interaction between the present people made the narrative appear as a shared secret, something to guard and keep safe, while the official account was open and public.

## THE ROCK

From the visitor's centre I drove five kilometres south to Thunderbolt Rock, the boulder I had passed by on my previous visit. This time I came from the north and had therefore not passed it on my way into town. I could see that it was still covered in graffiti as I remembered. After parking the car and walking towards the rock I realised that it in reality consist of several large boulders resting on and next to one another. The boulders are on a small mound 7-8 metres off the New England Highway, dominating the landscape. The rest area has no amenities except for a rusty, graffiti covered barrel that acts as a waste container, and a wooden table with benches. The mound, on which the boulders are situated, is covered in grass, short on the side where visitors enter, long and un-kempt behind. The most impressive feature of the boulders is not their size but the graffiti; it virtually covers all areas of the rocks that are easily reachable and flat enough to function as a 'canvas'. Some of the graffiti dates back to the 1970's according to the years painted, but the majority are from year 2000 and later. No 'graffiti-etiquette' has been followed, there are layers painted over what was there before. I did not find any graffiti that would have referred to Thunderbolt, but one that in an ironic way said 'Acquire KODAK film at the gift store'.

I had no feeling of awe when walking around the rock, it reminded me of the rocks I used to climb as a child and the games I played around them or on them. That a well known bandit would have used such a visible landmark as his hiding place felt silly, or that he would have stood on top of it while waiting for carriages to hold-up. The boulders were of course at that time surrounded by many more trees than they are today, but to relate them to a criminal that was not captured for 6.5 years of action felt less likely than to relate them to the games I

played as a kid, possibly about outlaws as well. The feeling I got from the boulders was more that they are famous for being famous (MacCannell, 1999), the marker, their name in this case, makes them famous.

That the whole area was so un-kempt with graffiti, uncut grass, no amenities, no information about their significance, broken bottles at the boulders' bases, and smell of urine between the rocks made the attraction into a 'so-what? being'. I had possibly expected the opposite to the negative features I mentioned; information, amenities, walk-paths, a general feeling of care, but as these were not there the whole site felt somehow insignificant. As with so many heritage sites, this site does not have an extrinsic value of splendour or scenic features, it's value is in it's intrinsic being – 'this is the rock where Thunderbolt, the bandit, used to hide and also where he was shortly before his death', or at least that is what the narratives claim. Suvantola comments,

Optimally, the experience of places and sights should teach us to recognise the structures, which make us experience something the way we do. If those places and sights do not live up to the expectations the narratives of the tourist discourse have aroused in us, we could still take delight in examining those narratives and discerning the processes in which they are created. Ultimately, this examination could be furthered to the examination of self. Our own reactions and experiences are also results of certain structures and circumstances that have contributed to what we have become (1999, p 271).

Based on Suvantola's suggestion that we should take delight in the narratives and that an examination should be furthered to one self: How and why did I expect more of the 'rock'? I had firstly not bracketed out enough of my pre-suppositions, I had had expectations when I came there. Maybe I am simply too used to visiting tourist attractions that are 'over-narrated', so that I as a tourist do not have to use any of my own imagination to realise their intrinsic value? So when standing next to Thunderbolt's Rock I wondered if the site would have been better in any way with the staging that is so common at tourist sites, or if it's charm was to be found in it's non-commercial, un-maintained appearance. The boulders are reminders in themselves of their suggested history, however only to people who know the history they refer to. If I had stopped at the boulders on my first journey I would not have known anything more about Thunderbolt and the area than I knew before, except for the physical facts of the site's appearance. Therefore nothing very positive.

In order to understand the enjoyment of heritage sites I would therefore like to introduce the concept of '*suspension of disbelief*' (Berger, 1997) to tourism studies. Suspension of disbelief is the willing attitude for example the audience of a theatre has when they enjoy a play, without the conscious awareness of watching actors acting out the play. What tourists visiting heritage attractions are involved in is in many respects similar to being an audience at theatre. A basic narrative is known, the stage is defined and the story is acted out around the tourist in a virtual play. Some attractions supply the visitors with more cues for them to imagine the story, others less. The value is in any case intrinsic, and simultaneously depending on the tourists willing suspension of disbelief.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Becker (1992) quotes Romanyshyn (1982, p. 153) in characterizing the psychological reality that is found in human experiences as being metaphorical.

A metaphor, is not essentially a way of seeing how one reality is like another. It is a way of seeing one reality through another. Its resemblance, if we should call it that, is the resemblance that a reflection bears to the reality of which it is a reflection. It is not a real (factual) resemblance but a resemblance where likeness is a difference. (p. 20).

By describing the tourist experience of Thunderbolt I do not claim that all experiences from that or any other attraction, are going to be similar to mine, or even that they will include the same features. What I want to do is to illuminate it as a metaphor for other experiences. The different features each attraction has have certain resemblances that should be highlighted in order to manage them better. The method used in this paper has been to distinguish existentials that enable the reader to perceive the meaning of the separate parts of the attraction.

The experience of the cemetery was to see the tombstone, being a *corporeal* evidence of Thunderbolt's existence, which merely the cemetery would not have provided. The *relational* experience between the visitors and the information centre's personnel made the narrative appear as a shared secret, while the official account was open and public. A tourist is never alone in the world; there are often other tourists and employees around. The site is visited alone or together with other people, friends, relatives or possibly tour-groups. The way a person experiences any place is depending on factors that are impossible to manage, as they refer to thoughts that possibly have nothing to do with the actual site, but still shape the experience of it.

In order to understand the enjoyment of experiencing the Rock, I introduced the concept of '*suspension of disbelief*' (Berger, 1997) to tourism studies. My suggestion was that tourists visiting heritage attractions are involved in experiences that are similar to being an audience at theatre. They know approximately the narrative of the historical events that were played out at the place they are standing, but they have to use their imagination to transform the scenery into a context where the narrative was played out. The value of the attraction is understood as an intrinsic feeling, mostly depending on the tourists willing suspension of disbelief.

## REFERENCES

- Becker, C. S. (1992). *Living and Relating: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Berger, A. A. (1997). *Narratives in Popular Culture, Media, and Everyday Life*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Boxall, G. (1899/1974). *The Story of Australian Bushrangers*. Hammondswoth: Penguin Colonial Facsimiles.
- Columbia Encyclopaedia. (n.d.). Bushrangers: Columbia Encyclopaedia.
- Echtner, C. M., & Jamal, T. B. (1997). The Disciplinary Dilemma of Tourism Studies. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24(4), 868-883.
- Edelheim, J. (2002). *Rock Carvings and Graffiti in Natural areas*. Paper presented at the Ecotourism, Wilderness and Mountains Conference, August 24-27, Dunedin, New Zealand.
- Edelheim, J. (2004 - forthcoming). *The Narratives of the Bandit*. Paper presented at the Tourism and Media Conference, 24 - 26.11, Melbourne.
- Edelheim, J. (2005 - forthcoming). *The Experience of the Bushranger*. Paper presented at the CAUTHE 2005, Alice Springs.
- Hall, C. M. (2003). *Introduction to Tourism - Dimensions and Issues* (4th ed.). Frenchs Forest: Pearson Education.

- Ingram, G. (2002). Motivations of farm tourism hosts and guests in the South West Tapestry Region, Western Australia: A phenomenological study. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, On-line journal available at <http://ipjp.org>, Volume 2(1), 1 - 12.
- Ingram, G. (2003, 08-11.12.2003). *A Phenomenological investigation of tourists' experience of Australian Indigenous culture - stage 1*. Paper presented at the Taking Tourism to the Limits, Waikato University, Hamilton, NZ.
- Kersten, F. (1989). *Phenomenological Method: Theory and Practice*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Leak, A. (1994). *Barthes Mythologies*. London: Grant & Cutler.
- MacCannell, D. (1999). *The Tourist - A new theory of the leisure class*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Martin, R. M. (2002). *The Philosopher's Dictionary* (3 ed.). Peterborough: Broadview.
- Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: investigating processes of social construction* (Vol. 50). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Schönhammer, R. (1992). Youth tourism as Appropriation of the World: A Psychological Perspective. *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, Vol.10, pp19-27.
- Shapiro, K. (1985). *Bodily Reflective Modes, A Phenomenological Method for Psychology*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sinclair, B. (2004). Captain Thunderbolt, The Gentleman Bushranger - Family Stories & Significant Dates. Uralla: Visitor Information Centre.
- Stumpf, S. E. (1994). *Philosophy - History and Problems* (5 ed.). San Francisco: McGraw-Hill.
- Suvalola, J. (1999). Turismi unelmien maantieteenä. *Elore*, available on-line at [http://cc.joensuu.fi/~loristi/1\\_99/suv199.html](http://cc.joensuu.fi/~loristi/1_99/suv199.html), 6(1).
- Suvalola, J. (2002). *Tourist's Experience of Place*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience - Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. USA: The State University of New York.
- van Manen, M. (2002, 20.04.2004). *Phenomenological Inquiry*, from [www.phenomenologyonline.com](http://www.phenomenologyonline.com)
- Weaver, D., & Lawton, L. (2002). *Tourism Management* (2 ed.). Milton: John Wiley & Sons Australia.
- Willis, P. (2001). The "Things Themselves" in Phenomenology. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, On-line journal available at <http://ipjp.org>, Volume 1(1), 1-14.
- Wu, Z. (1991). The Lived Experience of Being a Foreigner. *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, 9, 266-270.
- Younis, R. (2003). Meeting 2; Socrates and The Pre-Socratic Philosophers, : Sydney University Centre for Continuing Education.