



# EMERGENCE OF MOUNTAIN-BASED ADVENTURE TOURISM

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**Abstract:** Mountains are attractive as tourism destinations. Mountaineering is a long established adventure sport predicated on physical activity, challenge, and risk-taking. It has been, hitherto, the preserve of an experienced elite whose approach is epitomized by self-reliance and independent operation in such destinations. Social boundaries separating mountaineers from tourists are becoming blurred. Existing tourist theory fails to capture the subtleties of emergent mountain-based tourism. Adventure tourism has accelerated a discernible move towards the commodification of mountains. Evidence suggests a dilution of the essential ingredients of “being a mountaineer” as a result of a democratization process facilitated by the arrival of some urban characteristics in wild mountain regions. **Keywords:** mountaineering, adventure, tourism. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Résumé:** La naissance du tourisme d'aventure basé sur la montagne. La montagne est une destination touristique attrayante. L'alpinisme est un sport d'aventure qui est établi depuis longtemps et qui est fondé sur l'activité physique, le défi et le risque. Jusqu'ici, ce sport a été le domaine d'une élite expérimentée dont l'approche est la parfaite illustration de l'autonomie et de l'activité indépendante à la montagne. Les limites sociales qui séparent les alpinistes des touristes deviennent floues. Les théories existantes du tourisme ne parviennent pas à capter les subtilités de la naissance du tourisme basé sur la montagne. Le tourisme d'aventure a accéléré un mouvement perceptible vers la commodification de la montagne. L'évidence suggère une dilution des éléments essentiels « d'être alpiniste » comme résultat d'un processus de démocratisation qui est facilité par l'arrivée de quelques caractéristiques urbaines dans des régions montagneuses sauvages. **Mots-clés:** alpinisme, aventure, tourisme. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

Most of the population in the developed world lives in urban areas. Mountains, lakes, oceans, jungle, desert islands, and other wild places represent escape locations that offer excitement, stimulation, and potential adventure. This dislocation of self from the ordinary to the extraordinary appears to provide a pleasurable experience that is central to tourism (Rojek and Urry 1997). Mountains in particular have

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long been sought after as tourism destinations but have, hitherto, remained predominantly in the preserve of mountaineers: people who actively and independently seek adventure and who would not consider themselves to be tourists (Collister 1984; Scott 1994). Tourism, however, has expanded to embrace adventure settings, and mountains feature prominently in such developments. Mountaineering holidays make up just one part of the adventure tourism business, but are indicative of the way boundaries between mountaineering and tourism have become blurred. These holidaymakers are tourists in so much as they buy an experience that is usually packaged for maximum efficiency. Existing theory purports to explain tourist behavior in relation to mass tourism (MacCannell 1976; Rojek and Urry 1997; Urry 1990), leaving the contemporary adventure tourist scene under-researched and thus under-represented in academic terms.

Adventure tourism brings together travel, sport, and outdoor recreation. It might be considered a growing subset of tourism (Christiansen 1990; Trauer 1999), but its experiential engagement makes it distinctive within the broader context. The topic is too huge and diverse for one article, so this paper focuses on adventure tourism in mountains, or "mountain adventure tourism" from this point on. The paper aims to explore ways that mountaineering and tourism appear to be merging. The distinctiveness of the former is, arguably, becoming subsumed by the latter within a more broadly defined consumer culture (Chaney 1996). This process has been accelerated by a fragmentation of mountaineering, with mountain adventure tourism extending its traditional breadth (climbing and walking). Today, in mountains throughout the world, mountaineering has been subdivided, re-invented and redefined. Climbing is now adventure climbing or sports climbing; abseiling has become an end in itself; hill walking in "exotic" places has been redefined as trekking; scrambling has emerged as a hybrid activity with its own definitive guidebooks; cycling has moved "off-road" as mountain biking; "canyoning" has emerged as an adventure activity, and bungee jumping is now well developed. Hudson (2000) has provided a study of the skiing industry, a sport that has undergone a similar fragmentation and diversification, to make it possible to even go "snow rafting" at Seefeld in Austria.

The argument presented here will explore theoretical dimensions relevant to the stated aim, and will draw upon examples, notably of mountaineering in Nepal, to illustrate key points. It will also draw upon research findings from company managers, clients' brochures, guides and mountaineering magazines in order to more fully illuminate the contemporary mountain adventure tourism scene. The paper develops a number of ideas that help explain what might broadly be thought of as a democratization of mountaineering through the possibilities opened up by adventure tourism. These include a process of commodification of mountains, attitudes to risk-adventure-challenge, environmental sensitivity, the impact of technology, and changing lifestyles.

Mountains are particularly attractive destinations for adventure tourism as they offer a range of activity options in a setting steeped in actual and symbolic representations of adventure: an opportunity to

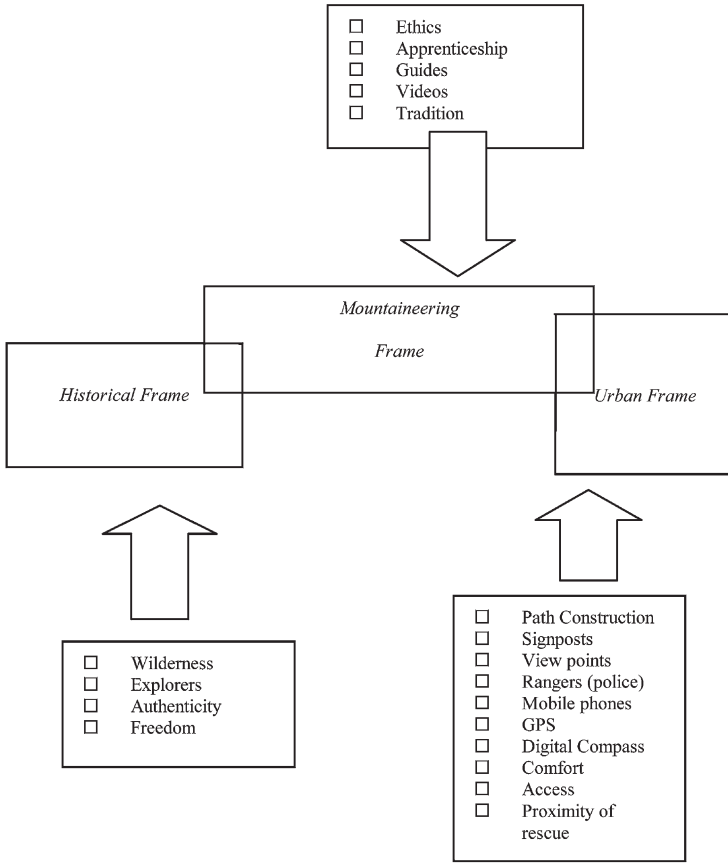
experience what [Hamilton-Smith \(1993\)](#) would call “serious leisure”. They are also wild rugged places that attract bad weather and contain objective dangers, such as exposure to extreme elemental conditions and loose rock, which make mountain recreation activities inherently risky and hazardous. However, it is this uncertainty and potential for personal harm that generates excitement by setting such undertakings in a context of challenge and adventure. Therefore, issues about marketing and management emerging from the growth of adventure tourism will be drawn out as the central discussion of the relationship between mountaineering and adventure tourism.

## MOUNTAIN-BASED ADVENTURE TOURISM

Perhaps the most significant factor in the development of adventure tourism is the extent to which one really engages in adventure. [Price \(1978\)](#) suggests that “adventure by numbers” cannot exist, as adventure is broadly accepted to be about uncertainty of outcome ([Miles and Priest 1999](#)). He argues that any outdoor recreation undertaking that is planned cannot be an adventure. Yet this is precisely how adventure tourism is marketed. There exists something of a paradox whereby the more detailed, planned, and logistically smooth an itinerary becomes the more removed the experience is from the notion of adventure. Three key factors have facilitated the emergence of adventure tourism, and these, in turn, impact mountaineering. These factors are a deferring of control to experts, a proliferation of promotional media including brochures, and the application of technology in adventurous settings. These factors have combined to create a cushioning zone between the normal, home, and urban location of everyday life and the extraordinary experience of an adventure holiday. This idea is illuminated in [Figure 1](#).

Most people in the developed world live their lives in an urban frame insulated from less desirable elements of the real world by warm houses, hot water, electricity, beds, hygienic food, and other comforts. Part of their expressive selves reacts against this through an attraction to the perceived adventure of activities in wild places. However, their “habitus” ([Bourdieu 1986](#)) travels with them, and it has been suggested that tourists rarely, if ever, actually leave the urban frame behind when they travel through the wilderness ([Greenway 1995](#)). Thus, it is not surprising to find clients on safaris in Tanzania expecting “fluffy white towels and snake-proof tents” (an informal yet enlightening comment made by a professional safari and trekking guide at a slide presentation evening for *Worldwide Journeys*), an example of the institutionalization of tourism proposed by [Cohen \(1972, 1973\)](#).

Mountaineering has its own frame of reference, predicated upon an immersion in mountains over many years. Thus, over a substantial period of time, mountaineers master skills (of rope-work and navigation, for example) and gain experience of climbing and trekking in mountains in ways that make possible independent, that is unguided, expeditions. However, truly independent operation has become increasingly difficult because frames overlap (as expressed diagram-



**Figure 1. Influences on the Boundaries of Mountaineering**

matically in Figure 1). Overlapping frames lead to ambivalent boundaries. As adventure moves closer to tourism, so boundaries become hazy. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that many adventure tourists are GRAMPIES (Christiansen 1990), that is, people who are “growing, retired, and moneyed, in good physical and emotional health”. The average age of explore clients is now 41 years and 77% of them are over 30 years. Hendon (1991) in his survey of the socio-economic characteristics of North American wilderness users suggests such people are predominantly “white, educated, and middle-class”. The capital transfer equation, money for experience, is positively correlated so that the more exotic and adventurous the holiday purchased, the more this will cost. Worldwide Journeys has five day safaris on the Skeleton Coast of Namibia from \$3,000 per person (Worldwide Journeys Brochure 2001:30); Naturetrek offers 14 days in Canada with an itinerary called “The Great Whales & Fall Migration” for \$4,000 per person (Birds magazine of the RSPB 2000:25); and a journalistic estimate of the cost of climbing Mount Everest for a group is \$250,000

(Observer Magazine 2000:7), with individuals pay ranging from \$30,000 to \$75,000. Of this total, \$70,000 is the cost of the permit required just to set foot on Everest, a clear example of the commodification of mountains. When clients are paying thousands of dollars for an adventure holiday, their standard of living, and by implication their expectation of comfort, are likely to be high.

Companies tread a careful line between selling adventure as an idea and delivering the same as an experience. In this respect, adventure is socially constructed and has been subjected to a process of commodification. In Nepal, most trekking itineraries will be tight, as the organizers want to be seen to be giving value for money. The route, the spectacular views, and the ensuing photo opportunities will have been determined for the trekker. The views may indeed correspond to what the guidebooks, coffee table books, and brochures identify as spectacular, the sight of K2 from Concordia, for example (Renouf 1990; Evans 1986), but equally they may not. So there is an element of social control that is linked to what is politically and economically expedient. The highlights of a trek are signaled and sign-posted by brochures, posters and ultimately personal photographs, and the informal exchanges among trekkers. These are mechanisms through which the need for a wilderness experience is generated. Figure 2 demonstrates the stages a client may move through in the journey from ordinary to extraordinary and back again.

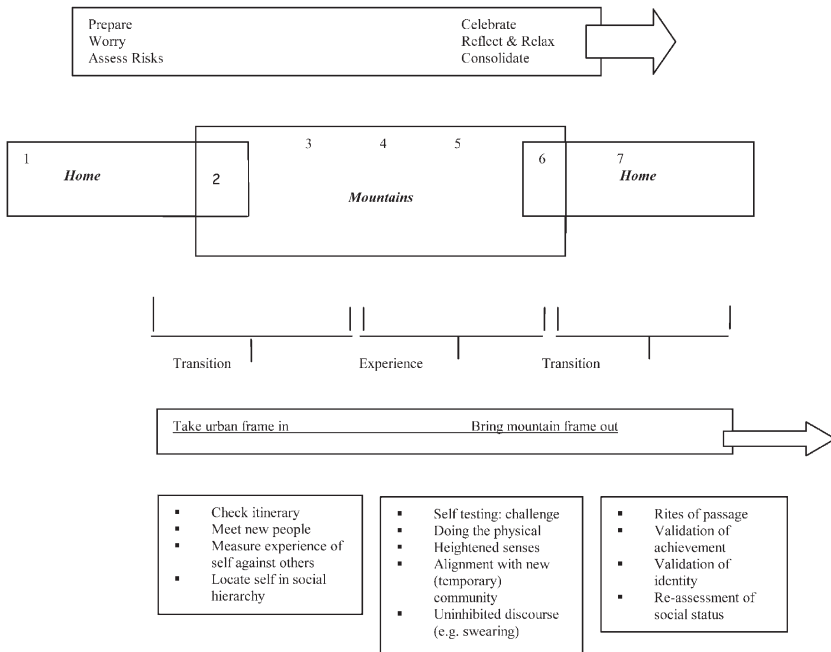


Figure 2. Leaving and Coming Back: The Extraordinary Experience

*The Adventure Experience*

A number of theoretical models describing the adventure tourism experience have been developed. Ewert and Hollenhorst (1989) proposed that adventure tourists moved along a continuum when engaging in such activities, from an introductory phase (or beginning level of involvement) to a commitment phase (the highest level). In a subsequent paper (1994), they identified four individual-based and four setting-based attributes as playing important roles in the adventure experience. These attributes included experience use history, skill level, locus of control, involvement, naturalness, social orientation, equipment, and level and type of risk.

Priest (1992) identified five concepts associated with the adventure experience: fear, eustress, distress, abilities, and attitudes. Priest, like Ewert (1993), and Ewert and Hollenhorst (1994), found that as the participant gains experience, perceptions of risk decrease and perceptions of competence increase. In this way, it is possible that clients "become" like mountaineers. Meanwhile, Robinson (1992) used a specialization framework to develop a model of risk recreation in which the overall experience is described in terms of antecedent conditions, perceptions of risk, cognitive and affective qualities, and post-performance appraisal, all of which move a participant from an initial attraction to enduring involvement, thereby offering further support to the findings of Ewert and Hollenhorst (1994). Robinson concluded, not surprisingly, that novice adventure tourists have a set of desired conditions that may differ from those of more experienced adventurers. McIntyre (1992) disagreed with Robinson, suggesting that the perceived importance of the activity was a better predictor of motivations for adventure recreation participation than were experience levels.

Beedie (2002) has, however, brought such disparate threads together through the articulation of his "client continuum". The basic argument is that clients must perform as "mountaineers" in order to engage with such activities because mountains are dangerous places that require careful, and, in the case of mountain adventure tourism, guided negotiation. The continuum is bounded by "tourist" on the left and "aspirant mountaineer" on the right. Clients do gain skills and competence through "doing" mountaineering and thus generally move from left to right across the continuum over time. However, "position" on the continuum is subject to many variables, which, in turn, may depend upon how a client's frame of reference has been constructed. One of the conclusions reached was that, despite some empowerment of clients as they move away from the tourist end of the continuum, its whole range is shifting leftwards as the characteristics of the urban frame gradually emerge in mountains. This raises questions about the relationship between mountaineering and mountain adventure tourism. In particular, independent mountaineering has long been associated with "peak experience" (Csikszentmihalyi and Selega 1990; Priest 1990). Peak experience is concerned with achieving personal satisfaction through a successful negotiation of a challenge that demands bal-

ancing risk and competence. One effect of the emergence of adventure tourism may be to change the equilibrium concomitant to peak experience.

### *Mountaineering and Tourism*

There is a great deal of discussion about definitions of tourism (Sharpley 1994:29–32), but few attempts to define mountain adventure tourism (Weber 2001). According to Whitlock, Romer and Becker, mountaineering is just one sector of “nature-based tourism”: “an encompassing term that refers to all the myriad forms of tourism that originate as a result of the natural appeal of an area” (1991:1). For purposes of discussion here, mountain adventure tourism encompasses several ideas. First, it has a focus that has a practical engagement for the tourist. There is, therefore, a physical effort involved, to a greater or lesser extent, which from some perspectives is closer to work than holiday. This embodied experience is an important point of discussion. Outdoor physical challenge, which may have positive image spin-offs like weight loss, physique development, sun tan and related stress reduction, may be influenced by cultural forces in developed countries, and thus reflect changing lifestyles (Chaney 1996). Visser, for example, discusses the way cultural perspectives of tanned skin have changed throughout this century (1994:16).

Second, mountain adventure tourism is a business enterprise. As with other industries, competition characterizes the adventure tourism market and big companies have a tendency to dominate. Small independent companies offering specific personalized itineraries such as White Peak Mountaineering find it difficult to compete with large international companies such as Explore, Himalayan Kingdoms, and Exodus. The range and diversity of the holidays on offer from the bigger companies is enormous, but some companies—Jagged Globe and Foundry Mountain Activities are two British based examples—have found a niche by specializing in mountaineering within adventure tourism. Fragmentation has helped the development of mountain adventure tourism.

Rubens (1999) describes adventurous activities as comprising either the “broad” or the “narrow” view. The former view of mountain adventure tourism encompasses activities such as multiday trekking expeditions which make sustained physical demands on the participant and in which the adventure element is present at a relatively low level. The narrow view is exemplified by activities such as abseiling and bungee jumping which offer an intense, highly charged but short-lived experience. In Hamilton-Smith’s (1993) terminology, the former might be considered the more “serious” form of leisure. Mountain adventure tourism embraces both broad and narrow activities and, thereby, maximizes its appeal to a full range of paying clientele. Trekking has been the commercial foundation for adventure tourism in Nepal, partly because it has a breadth of appeal across the spectrum of hard and soft adventure. It has been suggested that mountaineers (mostly focused on mountain conquest) paved the way for the emerg-

ence of adventure tourism in Nepal. Mountaineering expeditions are no longer the preserve of experienced mountaineers; anyone with money can now join one, although mountain guides retain leadership. A typical expedition to Nepal today may well contain “aspirant-mountaineers” and “tourists” side by side as formerly distinct frames of reference merge. Clients buying mountain based adventure holidays have the financial capacity to pay for these in common. Beyond this point the range of clients is as great as the nature of the activities on offer. Working and retired people are represented, and the extent to which the retired section of clients might go for longer is unknown. [Beedie \(2002\)](#) found no obvious correlation between working commitments and length of holiday taken.

There appears to be some debate as to how adventure tourism (and hence the mountain adventure version) should be classified. [Sung, Morrison and O’Leary \(2000\)](#) propose that activity should be one of the primary bases used to analyze adventure segments. Their study examined the most commonly provided such activities, and they identified six distinctive groupings: soft nature, risk equipped, question marks, hard challenge, rugged nature, and winter snow. The [Adventure Travel Society \(2000\)](#) also classifies this tourism type according to activity. They distinguish between “hard” and “soft” adventure tourism activities, where mountaineering is classified as a former activity along with activities like white water rafting, scuba diving, and mountain biking. Soft adventure activities include camping, hiking, biking, animal watching, horseback riding, canoeing, and water skiing.

### *Hard and Soft Adventure*

Based on a study conducted by [Travel Industry of America \(TIA 1998\)](#), 16% of Americans stated that they had participated in these “hard” adventure activities during trips in the last five years. Hard adventure tourists are more likely than the opposite type to be men (60% vs. 51%), single (40% vs. 26%); young (18–24 years 24% vs. 18%), college educated (82% vs. 73%) with higher household incomes of \$75k or more (25% vs. 19%). Furthermore, the TIA report looked at trip profiles of adventure tourists and found that both hard and soft participants averaged three activity vacations in the past five years but that the hard adventure tourist tended to focus on one activity per trip while the other group participated in multiple activities (37% vs. 28%). As the adventure tourism bug has spread to the masses, companies are drawing a growing number of people who are not necessarily passionate about one particular activity, and there is a strong trend in the industry towards multi-activity, soft adventure tourism packages in nature-based environments ([Sung, Morrison and O’Leary 2000](#)). In fact what is sold as the ultimate multisport adventure is the “Survivor” tour. The incredible success of the TV series has encouraged companies to launch Survivor-themed trips that offer participants multiple challenges, just like on the show ([Sloan 2001](#)). This way, mountaineering becomes an “adventure activity” attractive to clients who are not neces-



sarily aspirant mountaineers, as in Beedie's (2002) continuum, but who, nevertheless, might well be shaping the way mountaineering is developing.

Weber suggests that the classification of adventure tourism based on activity is naïve, and she argues that research on the subject has so far focused mainly on preconceived notions of scholars and practitioners. She suggests that individuals' subjective experience of adventure and their perceptions of what constitutes it have to be also researched and considered in the study of adventure tourism. Market segmentation based on psychographics may, she argues, result in the identification of "marginal" adventure tourists (2001:374). These individuals may currently choose products other than those offered by adventure tourism operators. Such a circumstance is facilitated by the encroachment of an urban frame into mountains, for one of the consequences of such a development is that less skill and experience are required to operate in mountains: constructed footpaths, sign-posts, and steel ladders are all found in popular mountain regions. In Nepal, as the "Everest season" begins each year, the Khumbu Icefall, a dangerous mixture of ice pillars and crevasses on the approach to that mountain, is equipped with ladders and fixed ropes by the first expedition each year (Simpson 1997). However, Beedie (2002) found that even clients who had considerable mountaineering expertise, and thus might be classified as "aspirant mountaineers", continued to defer responsibilities to the guides the company employed. Weber is right to suggest that the client perspective is under-researched; but evidence to suggest that clients may begin to operate "marginally" and thus more independently is currently lacking.

However one defines or classifies mountain adventure tourism, it is clear that a complexity of social, economic, and cultural factors are operating to facilitate commodification of adventure experiences in mountains: emerging tourism and more established forms of mountain recreations are combining in a melting pot of development. The frames containing mountaineering, adventure, and tourism are not fixed but fluid, and the complexity of this milieu is increased by the overtly environmental concerns of groups such as Mountain Forum. One constant in this rapidly evolving picture is the commodification of mountains.

### *Mountains and Commodification*

According to various sources, tourism is just another process undergoing commodification:

With the growing commodification of modern life, "leisure time", which is proclaimed and expected to be an escape from routine work, in turn often becomes another routinized, packaged commodity, thereby failing to be anything like a carefree, relaxed alternative to work (Watson and Kopachevsky 1994:645).

Commodification is the process by which objects and activities come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value in the con-

text of trade (Cohen 1988), in addition to use-value that such commodities might have. The function of tourism is to sell a commodity to a group of consumers (Frow 1997). Nepal in the Himalayan Mountains has commodified this setting through a process of administrative control and has a permit system of fees payable for ascents and trekking in some of the more "fragile" mountain environments. There are currently 150 peaks open for mountaineering, and the fees increase in relation to size and popularity from \$1,500 for a modest peak, to \$10,000 for one of the less popular giants, to \$70,000 for Everest.

Packages for mountain adventure tourism, like those in Nepal, have been created by companies that bring together people in two areas of expertise. First, a company needs mountaineers, preferably qualified guides (although local knowledge appears to be more important to some companies than qualifications which may be an irrelevance for some developing countries keen to exploit the economic potential of their mountains by attracting tourists). Second, a company needs marketing expertise, which can develop culturally embedded notions of a romantic "gaze" (Short 1991; Urry 1990, 1995). Mountain tourism, like other commodities, is packaged for exchange by advertising, much of which appeals to people's wants, desires, and fantasies, and is anchored in a dynamic of sign/image construction/manipulation (Watson and Kopachevsky 1994). Therefore, companies are run by experts with specialist knowledge (Giddens 1990), whose prime reward, according to Watson and Kopachevsky, is "not the extrinsic experience of 'fun', but the intrinsic reward of making money" (1994:649).

The packaging of mountain adventure tourism has also been influenced by changing lifestyles. There is evidence to suggest that people are working longer hours and have more fragmented and complex social lives than at any other time in history (Chaney 1996; Jenkins 1996). It is the relative effortlessness of booking a holiday in the form of a package that appeals to adventure tourists. By their own admission, many do not have the time to make the arrangements for themselves. It appears that the "time-deepening" phenomenon (Godbey, cited in Christiansen 1990) is operating, whereby people use technology to save time, which enables them to work longer but still maximize leisure activities. Adventure tourists are typically rich but have limited time: they want to squeeze as much experience into as short a time as possible. Ewert and Hollenhorst (1994) found that even for experienced rock climbers, getting to a site quickly was more important than finding remote and undeveloped locations. Lifestyles of clients thus reinforce the commodification of mountains by encouraging the package format. In Nepal, the principle of paying clients needing a degree of comfort (but not to the detriment of progress through the mountains) was established as early as 1964, when the first trekking agency (Mountain Travel) was registered with the Nepalese government and the owner put out advertisements in *Holiday* magazine. When requests for further information arrived, he had to send out handwritten replies, as Kathmandu did not possess a typewriter. This is a far cry from the instantaneous electronic communication that one enjoys worldwide today via fax machines and the web. Such a point is made

by one trekker in his observations of the main village of the Khumbu region below Everest:

Namche Bazaar is [now] a thriving and bustling community catering even for the most modern of trekker's needs including hot showers, freshly baked bread, and satellite communications (Evans 2000:34).

At the same time, mountain mythology is embedded with romantic notions of exploration, journey, and searching. Such ideas become attractive in the modern social world where fragmentation and complexity are the norm. This is because exploration implies finding, thereby suggesting potential stability in a world that is increasingly destabilized (Melucci 1996). Brochures and, increasingly, electronic media, are important reference points for adventure tourists. When purchasing holidays, they are paying for the expectation of gaining something: a suntan, greater knowledge, new experiences, and new (perhaps temporary) social identities, for example. This process of commodification has always included distinctive places such as cultural foci and beaches but mountains too are increasingly being viewed from this mechanistic and economic perspective (Johnson and Edwards 1994). The following quotation is taken from *High* magazine and sums up why this particular client chose a holiday in the biggest mountains in the world:

The prospect of a trek in the Himalayas stimulates the taste for adventure; the imagination can run wild before you go. Whatever the circumstances you are resolved to have a good time. Trips to the mountains are as much for talking about once they are completed as they are for the actual participation (Greaves 1990:38).

Technological advancements are also facilitating the development of mountain adventure tourism. For example, tourists may buy the latest ice axes, trekking poles, or climbing boots with the expectation that these will make them more accomplished climbers or trekkers. In this respect, the investment may be seen as a way of making progress within these activities. Furthermore, access routes into mountaineering are changing as a result of these influences. It is no longer necessary to serve an apprenticeship of walking and climbing in lower hills under the tutelage of experienced peers before being "allowed" to move into more challenging and demanding environments. Experienced mountaineers who have served their apprenticeships commonly voice their disapproval at such fast tracking (Collister 1984; Scott 1994). However, today adventure companies and the packages they offer create the possibility of bypassing this traditional social requirement and moving directly to the more exotic challenges of the highest mountains. This form of adventure tourism is superimposing itself on existing social structures in mountaineering: a recent documentary (BBC 2000) suggested that paying to be guided to the summit of Everest was now the accepted mode of ascent, an illustration of the social impact of adventure tourism.

Therefore, the emergence of mountain adventure tourism, which is no longer free from commodification, has had at least two conse-

quences. First, mountains, which formerly held few positive attractions, because they were considered the home of trolls and dragons (Bernbaum 1997), have been re-invented as locations through which it is possible to accumulate cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). Second, this capital potential is being packaged and sold by adventure tourist companies. A discussion of this process sheds more light on the subject.

### *Theorizing Mountain Adventure Tourism*

What people choose to do in their leisure time has much to do with how they see themselves as individuals and as members of groups (Goffman 1959; Jenkins 1996; Kelly 1983). Bauman encapsulates the relationship between “what we do and who we are”. He uses analogies such as “pilgrim” and “tourist” to theorize the cultural changes that have occurred concerning the central issue of identity. He suggests that the pilgrim (a conceptualization pre-dating the tourist) had a clear sense of place. Pilgrims, he argues, had a sense of direction but were always striving for the future, never living in the present. By contrast, the contemporary social world is characterized by a complexity, fragmentation, and ambivalence that makes it impossible to conceive a future with any sense of certainty and conviction (1996:18–26). As such, tourists live for the present: a conceptualization that explains the desire(s) for instant gratification, thrill and the “buzz” of the moment, the “narrow” component of Ruben’s (1999) model. Mountain activities, particularly those involving positions of exposure, clearly offer such potential.

Bauman’s (1996) work helps explain the ongoing dynamic between mountaineering and adventure tourism. Mountaineers that have served an apprenticeship appear closer to pilgrims in that they possess a clear sense of protocol and direction. Adventure tourists are closer to Bauman’s postmodern conceptualizations, or the post-tourist (Feifer 1985). Their experience appears to be different from that of the “true” mountaineer, something of a free roving spirit, sometimes flaunting rules and management strategies and remaining closer to the ideals of historical explorers. Mountaineers reject the notion of buying a guide and rely upon their own carefully constructed accumulation of skill and experience to explore mountains, while simultaneously avoiding the objective dangers inherent in such activity. Cooley discovered this rebellion against the commodification of tourism in his ethnographic study of backpackers, saying that “backpackers construct their travel lives in opposition to and as rejection of commodification” (1999:11). Adventure tourists, by contrast, have the nature of their experience defined for them through a combination of a dependence upon guides, existing sources of information about mountains, and a protection afforded by constantly improving equipment and other technology-resources (such as mountain rescue possibilities). One of the problems, however, is that it is increasingly difficult to operate independently. If people were to plan their own expeditions, they would still turn to guidebooks, chartered flights, and liaison officers

to facilitate their arrangements and would be, to no small degree, guided by these systems.

Such dependence becomes acceptable because of the capital potential of participation: it is the mountaineering objective that matters, so it becomes less logical to engage with difficulties that can be eliminated by utilizing systems that already exist. Moreover, this makes more sense because achieving an adventurous objective requires some kind of social validation to be meaningful. Through experiential engagement, adventure tourists accumulate physical capital, which, according to Bourdieu (1986), can be exchanged for cultural capital, the determinant of social "distinction". The main thrust of Bourdieu's theory of social distinction appears to be that: "the appeal of sport and leisure practices to social groups lies in distinctive uses of the body. These practices act as taste signifiers in a constant struggle to gain or maintain distinction" (Jarvie and Maguire 1994:184). For Bourdieu (1986), one gravitates towards those social fields that offer the greatest potential capital. Such appears to be the case in mountaineering where the highest, longest, and hardest routes require a greater "investment" that translates into greater "benefits" in the form of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986:20).

Nepal is attractive to tourists because it is an exotic location and it has spectacular, high mountains, an alluring combination of potential symbolic capital. To conquer such mountains inscribes physical capital on the body. The symbolic value of the mountain combines with the physical capital of gaining its summit to create cultural capital. Annapurna, Dhaulagiri, Kanghenjunga, Lhotse, Makalu and Everest (all mountains over 8,000 meters and located in Nepal or on its borders) attract the greatest tourism attention (trekking to and/or climbing up) because of their size, their fame, and the historical context through which they were conquered and with which people today seek to identify as a point of social distinction. The emerging pattern is consistent with existing theory in that the highest mountains appear to offer the greatest symbolic capital. What appears to be happening in mountaineering is that this capital has become more easily accessible to a greater number of people. In 2000, Nepalese authorities issued 300,000–350,000 trekking permits compared to 40,000 in 1987 (Nepal Tourism Board 2002). However, this growth is occurring in a context of control within which adventure tourism can be located. Guides are part of the structure of this control and paying clientele help sustain it. Thus, despite ongoing changes to the social scene, the "distinctive" position of guides is maintained and the guide changes his or her role from puritan or status climber to enabler. Guides are locked in to the commodification framework because they exchange their physical and cultural capital for economic gain.

One change that has facilitated this development has been the "urbanization" of mountain spaces. Edensor is concerned with tourism spaces. Heterogeneous space, he explains, is about freedom to move and self-expression. Enclavic space is about constraint and convention. Mountains are symbolic of freedom and adventure and thus seem more closely aligned to the concept of heterogeneous space (1998:45–

60). However, today one can see a shift to the enclavic: many mountains have “urbanized” footpaths and sign-posts, access agreements, bylaws, car parks, tea shops, and rangers (Figure 1). Nepalese tea-houses have multiplied along the standard approach trek to Everest, for example, and part of the region has been designated as a national park (Simpson 1997). Such developments are management responses to increasing demands upon a fragile mountain environment. However, adventure tourism has made a significant contribution to that demand.

Others have warned of the negative environmental consequences of continued growth in mountain adventure tourism. Whitlock, Van Romer and Becker (1991) suggest that as the supply of truly natural places dwindles, the demand by those wealthy enough to visit them will rise (because of the symbolic capital invested in such places), along with the price they are willing to pay. The result will be an exploitation of precious resources for short-term economic gain, and the future of natural resources, like the mountains, will be in jeopardy. Scott comments on the less welcome (to a Westerner) aspects of the development of a trekking infrastructure in Nepal. He is an internationally respected mountaineer with first ascents to his credit all over the world. Scott condemns the “high mountain tourist” (1994:57) and calls for severe constraints on trekking in Nepal. He argues that this commodification is causing harm to both the land and the culture. Additionally, he implies that the right to explore Himalayan Mountains should only be accessible to those who have served a long mountaineering apprenticeship (as he obviously has). There is clearly a tension between mountaineers and adventure tourists that might be captured by Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of social distinction. As Johnson and Edwards (1994) have suggested, mountaineers clearly see themselves as the guardians of the environment, in both social and physical senses. But there is a growth in numbers of people participating in mountaineering activities. The tension seems to emerge from the extent to which newcomers, who gain “access” through tourism opportunities, identify with the idea of “being a mountaineer”.

The British Mountaineering Council, the national body representing climbers’ and walkers’ interests, notes a rise in its individual membership from 6,829 in 1990 to 24,997 in 2000. Over a similar time span, the Council affiliated club membership has seen a more modest rise from 19,100 in 1990 to a peak of 27,467 in 1999, with a fall to 27,026 in 2000 (2000:22). New social forms may be superseding the (enduring) club structures. Johnson and Edwards (1994) also acknowledge a significant growth in numbers of those enjoying mountain recreation. Increasingly, they argue, this is closely aligned to changes in the relationship between people and mountains, with the latter becoming increasingly commodified. Clearly such an influx of UK participants has not been the sole responsibility of mountaineering clubs whose position appears to be declining in relation to the growth of a more individual approach to mountain recreation. Indeed, the enduring tradition surrounding the notion of “apprenticeship” appears out-

dated in the postmodern conditions that [Bauman \(1991, 1996\)](#) suggests people currently live in.

Therefore, it is more likely that any new social configurations that are recognizable under present social circumstances are closer to [Hetherington's \(1996\)](#) conceptualization of "sociations", groups of people who come together for a period of time because they share a common interest or goal. Typically socially heterogeneous, the characteristics of sociations are dominated by temporariness and transition. Perhaps the enduring message is to live for the moment, and this might account for a growing popularity of "narrow" adventure activities ([Rubens 1999](#)), such as bungee jumping. Paying clientele feed the commercial interests of mountain adventure tourism companies. They can control the process of capital acquisition from the "dream stage" (brochures and slide shows), right through the mountain experience itself (choreography of the trek or expedition or climb), and through reinforcement of achievements (post trip reunions). These in turn circle forward to the next "dream phase". Letting go of the independent mountaineering experience feeds this system.

## CONCLUSION

People in the Western world are living longer and retiring sooner. It is estimated that by 2040 over half the population in the developed world will be over 50, enjoying good health with a more informed global perspective. Thus, there will be more mountain adventure tourists. The lines between adventure and mainstream tourism are likely to become less clearly defined. Mountain adventures are likely to become more accessible and achievable for more people. Moreover, such holidays are likely to become more attractive as the collection of experiences begins to undermine the more materialistic elements of consumer society. This is consistent with [Bourdieu's \(1986\)](#) concept of cultural capital as the determinant of social distinction. Such is the momentum of the commodification process in Nepal, that commercial interests are likely to take a stronger position each year as the mountaineering infrastructure of contacts and guidance combines with improving technology to facilitate the growth of adventure tourism in a rapidly changing country.

The potential to operate independently in mountains is also likely to continue to diminish. Frames defining adventure tourists and independent travelers are likely to continue to merge in real terms, while at another more superficial level, the attractions of independent travel will be retained as an idea. The world is becoming increasingly familiar through media-generated symbols and images. Enclavic space, hitherto restricted to predominantly urban areas and tourist honey pots, is likely to continue to invade mountains. Additionally, in a social sense, the "old" school of mountaineers and mountaineering tradition is likely to diminish and will soon exist only in museums and heritage centers (although these are likely to become attractions). New social configurations, such as sociations, are likely to emerge as people become more playful in their sense of identity and become more confident in

enjoying the mountain adventure holiday in whatever way they like, secure in the knowledge that they have paid for protection from objective danger through the guides that lead them. The growth of mountain-based adventure tourism and its proclivity to reduce independent mountaineering activity relate to Beedie's (2002) continuum in ways that might benefit from further research. For example, the evidence presented in this paper suggests mountaineering, hitherto defined as a form of "hard" adventure, may appear to be getting "softer" as the emergence of enclavic characteristics in mountains effectively moves the whole continuum from right to left. One result of this is that mountaineering is becoming more accessible, both socially and physically, to more people than ever before; that is, it is moving closer to a position embraced by tourism.

Mountain adventure tourism is likely to become more akin to business enterprise, or even a sector comparable to skiing, as the market becomes dominated by a relatively small number of international companies. Each company will continue to retain a substantial nucleus of clientele who might be described as "serial adventure tourists": currently 60% of all Himalayan Kingdom clients have already completed at least one holiday with the company. The big firms will survive because of the breadth of itineraries they can offer, thus retaining the attractiveness of the novel and the new. Curiosity about adventure and the need to be challenged is unlikely to diminish. But, if the impact of adventure tourism outlined above is correct, the tension that currently exists between mountaineering and mountain adventure tourism is likely to become less obvious. This is because the mechanisms controlling how adventure is packaged and sold will probably become more sophisticated and the characteristics of tourism entering mountaineering more generally accepted. An example is the way that adventure tourist itineraries are currently packaged as environmentally sensitive, an idea that empathizes with Johnson and Edward's (1994) contention that these adventurers see themselves as guardians of the mountain environment.

Mountain adventure tourism will also continue to grow, and the risks inherent in the activities are likely to appear to diminish as knowledge, experience, and technical capacity increases. In fact, Ewert and Hollenhorst found that although such tourists seek out increasingly difficult and challenging opportunities, they paradoxically do not necessarily search for higher levels of risk. They speculate that this may be because of "unconscious self-assurance" (1994:189): that adventure tourists appear to have an implicit belief that they are in control of the experience and that they are not exposing themselves to risk and danger because they can control the situation. The use of high-tech equipment may also serve to offset this feeling of risk taking.

However, the integral dangers of mountaineering can never be eliminated. It is likely that there will continue to be disasters such as on Everest in 1996 when eight climbers comprising guides and clients died in a ferocious storm. The higher the profile of such tragedies in the media, paradoxically, the more attractive mountain adventure tourism becomes not least because, almost certainly, an immediate response



from management and other authorities re-affirms the perceived control over nature. The physical component of mountain adventure tourism is a crucial part of the attraction. This market segment is seductive and alluring because it makes tourists feel alive. It also allows the expressive and the irrational in everyone out to play, and the more people realize the exhilaration possible, the more they will want to do it. **A**

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