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Mediating technologies on the move: tourists' automobilities through the Limestone Coast, South Australia

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Abstract

The Limestone Coast is a popular tourist region located on South Australia's southeastern border with Victoria and home to several nature-based tourist attractions, including Naracoorte Caves National Park (NCNP). Through the acquisition of qualitative materials from 29 self-drive domestic tourists that visited NCNP, this study observed that many tourists' automobilities were punctuated by periods of "connection" and "disconnection" with the technologies that permeated their motor vehicles. Mediating both statuses posed paradoxical dilemmas, as embracing connectivity could reduce the risks of disappointment or "missing out," whilst rejecting connectivity stimulated feelings of adventure as their encounters of rural Australia remained relatively unpredictable

Introduction

Australia is home to a substantial domestic tourism market that is expected to grow for the foreseeable future. According to statistics released in 2019 by Tourism Research Australia (TRA, 2019), overnight trips by domestic tourists increased by 9% on the previous year to 105.6m trips and contributed AU\$72.7bn to the national economy. TRA's *Tourism Forecasts* (2017) revealed that domestic tourism growth is expected to continue at a steady average of 2.2% per year despite an ageing baby boomer generation (i.e. those born between 1946 and 1964) being less inclined to travel after they reach the age of 75 (TRA, 2017). Significantly, it has been observed that more than half (55%) of all domestic tourism spending occurs in regional settings as opposed to major urban centres, highlighting the important role that domestic tourism continues to play in stimulating regional economies throughout Australia (Mahadevan, 2014; Patterson, Pegg, & Litster, 2011; TRA, 2017; SATC, 2019a). Whilst air travel accounts for approximately a quarter of all domestic trips in Australia (TRA, 2017), a significant proportion of domestic tourism still relies heavily on the motor vehicle. This is in part due to Tourism Australia's active promotion of Australia as a self-drive tourism destination, as well as a lack of tertiary transport infrastructure such as airports in many regional destinations. Thus, for most domestic tourists engaged in long-distance journeys, there is a propensity to travel via personally owned or hired cars and campervans. Many of these domestic tourism mobilities, or *automobilities* as they will be referred to from this point forth, involve the 'grey nomads', a term frequently applied to Australian retirees who engage in long-distance travels across the country (Leonard & Onyx, 2009; Onyx & Leonard, 2005, 2007; Patterson, Pegg, & Mahadevan, 2015). The importance of the grey nomads and their experiential demands has been increasingly reflected in academic discourse over the past decade or so (see Leonard & Onyx, 2009; Mahadevan, 2014; Onyx & Leonard, 2007; Patterson et al., 2015) yet the specific role of the motor vehicle in enhancing or enabling experiences to be attained has remained comparatively overlooked.

Although motor cars represent the primary instruments for tourist automobilities to take place, limited attention continues to be afforded to the "hybrid geographies" of "human-and-machines" (Urry, 2007, p. 35) that occur on a daily basis in Australia. These hybrid geographies, as Mimi Sheller observed (2004), are structured around the notion that personal motor vehicles do not just permit corporeal movements between places but also facilitate a range of emotions, sensations, feelings, and social performances to occur. Indeed, cars can make other modes of transport *feel* rigid and inflexible and, as Urry (2007) noted, permit a sense of 'time-space desynchronization' as the driver can reject the timetables of public transport and travel both beyond and between the limited range of waypoints they stop. Thus, the motor vehicle owner can structure their own personalised temporalities, especially when

in pursuit of leisure due to the dilution of commitments they frequently experience throughout daily life. In the context of Australian domestic tourism, the role of the motor vehicle remains overlooked, especially when observing its potential to do significantly more than simply transport – in the literal sense - the driver and his or her passengers. In support, as Lew and McKercher (2006, p.404) posited, there remains a continuing need to understand how tourists ‘move through time and space’ and an obligation to critically examine how time and space are negotiated so that experiential demands are met. Although academic discourse has continued to further explore tourist performances *between* destinations (see Butler & Hannam, 2012; Lew & McKercher, 2006), the technological advancements that shape and modify *what* moves people require continuous and organic enquiry (Law, Chan, & Wang, 2018). These technological advancements include inbuilt car technologies including Global Positioning Systems, WiFi and Bluetooth connections, and remote sensors that all inform and modify the driving experience (see Beckmann, 2001; Germann Molz, 2012; Lamsfus, Wang, Alzua-Sorzabal, & Xiang, 2015). Indeed, a growing body of research has begun to investigate how tourists can be either empowered by technologies when on the move (see Dickinson et al., 2013; Germann Molz, 2012; Gretzel, 2010; Wang, Xiang, & Fesenmaier, 2016) or experience a range of negative emotions and a reduction in control (see Dickinson, Hibbert, & Filimonau, 2016; Paris, Berger, Rubin, & Casson, 2015). Consequently, this paper endeavours to position itself not only as a contributor to existing discourse on tourist automobilities but as a conduit to further discussions on how emergent technologies facilitated by motor vehicle travel shape contemporary automobilities in rural landscapes.

Tourist Automobilities

Promises of Freedom

‘Automobilities’, as Featherstone (2004, p.2) observed, are considered “modes of autonomous, self-directed movements” characterised by a desire for intense flexibility not just in day-to-day life but also throughout leisure experiences. The benefits of automobility, most notably its ability to permit feelings and sensations of freedom, have been explored at length in existing literature and have frequently examined the values of ‘autofreedom’ (Meyer, 2015), whereby the driver exerts a sense of freedom and control as they navigate and negotiate their surroundings (Butler & Hannam, 2012, 2014; Edensor, 2004, 2007; Farber & Paez, 2009; Featherstone, 2004; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Hannam, Butler, & Paris, 2014; Huijbens & Bendiktsson, 2007; Sager, 2006; Urry, 2000). Recent discourse has done much to dispel the notion that motor vehicles are merely vessels that transport tourists from waypoint to waypoint and has instead framed them as intrinsic facilitators to the attainment of a range of experiential demands. As Butler and Hannam (2012, p. 292) observed, motor vehicles can act as “central

constructs to the fulfilment of true mobility and autonomy when travelling between locations” and can foster both emotional and physical exchanges with the landscapes they traverse. Similarly, Larsen (2001, p 85) argued that cars especially, provide a distinctive form of “spatial and temporal emancipation”.

Freedom, or at least a belief that one has freedom, remains a core component of many tourists’ automobilities as they seek a “relative freedom of choice, open ended exploration and autonomy over the travel episode” (Moore, Smallman, Wilson, & Simmons, 2012, p. 635), including control over the routes and itineraries developed before and during their journeys. Here, it is argued that being in control of components of the journey, including velocities between waypoints, length of stays, and the company they engaged with are important factors of their travel goals (Oh, Assaf, & Baloglu, 2012). Previous studies observing tourist automobilities have additionally explored the fluid and dynamic trajectories tourists engage in when on holiday (See Butler & Hannam, 2012; Edensor 2007, Hagman, 2010; Huijbens & Benediktsson, 2007; Lane & Waitt, 2007; Larsen, 2001; Page 1999; Trauer & Ryan, 2005; White & White, 2004) and that many journeys encapsulate Larsen’s (2001, p.85) assertion that automobilities illustrate “a metaphor for nomadism... as they roam independently and unpredictably in, alongside and outside tourism’s beaten tracks”.

The value of automobility is further reinforced by the growing ownership of personal motor vehicles and the continuous (re)structuring of societies that are increasingly framed around the ‘system of automobility’ (Urry. 2004). Indeed, as the movements of motor vehicles between and within destinations continue to be prioritised, Hannam et al. (2014, p. 173) highlight the proliferation of “distinct social spaces or ‘moorings’ that orchestrate new forms of social and cultural life”. Given the continuing paucity of transportation networks throughout rural Australia, beyond limited bus and train routes, automobilities may represent the only way in which certain moorings can be reached, leaving them especially vulnerable to the provision of goods, materials, services, and indeed the whims of tourists as they traverse the country. Therefore, the freedoms of automobility do not just empower tourists but also serve as important lifelines to many rural towns throughout the country.

Paradoxes of Contemporary Automobility and Emergent Technologies

Despite the promises of freedom, contemporary acts of automobility are increasingly exposed to a range of paradoxes. The motor car has frequently been positioned in direct contrast to the organised and structured mobilities of the travel networks that primarily represent trains, buses and other modes of public transport. Travel networks have prompted ‘unreflexive endeavours’ (Edensor, 2007) and occur in ‘rhythmic fashion’ (Butler & Hannam, 2012), as

passengers are insulated from the outside world and disposed of the many challenges automobility can present, including making decisions on which routes to take, and where to stop or visit.

By removing these challenges, it has been argued that travel experiences and demands are increasingly banal and normative and can lead to feelings of “disempowerment, powerlessness, and dehumanization” (Oh et al., 2016, p. 205) most notably in the pursuit of velocity between destinations (see Butler & Hannam, 2012; O’Regan, 2012). However, as improvements in automotive technologies continue to advance, and new structures that facilitate automobilities more effectively emerge, the experiential dichotomies between private and public transport appear to be increasingly fragile constructs.

Recent literature has begun to explore several issues that challenge the very essence of automobility, as the proliferation of motor vehicle ownership and its subsequent usage erode both the promises of flexibility and velocity. Many contemporary movements associated with road travel are also considered banal and mundane as motorists must traverse and obey the structured systems of the road (Dickinson et al., 2009; Edensor, 2007; Urry, 2004; 2007). Many car journeys will also frequently encounter traffic jams, road works, and other issues that increasingly permeate experiences and can often lead to intermittent or extended encounters of immobility (see Beckmann, 2001; Featherstone, 2004; Hannam et al., 2014; Sheller, 2004; Thrift, 2004). Indeed, the motor vehicle may now promote its very own set of unreflexive endeavours for the driver and his or her passengers.

Although inbuilt car technologies have been positively framed because of their ability to direct the driver through unfamiliar spaces (see Lamsfus, Wang, Alzua-Sorzabal, & Xiang, 2015; Wang, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2012; Wang et al., 2016) and find solutions to practical problems mid-journey (Gretzel, 2010), they undoubtedly alter how vehicle users experience being on the move. The increasingly standardised apparatus of the modern motor vehicle, most notably Global Positioning Systems (GPS), can arguably dilute feelings of control as they become normalised tools of tourists’ automobilities. As Hannam et al. (2014, p. 176) suggest, the increasing use of inbuilt car technologies have potentially eroded the joyous sensations of discovery as they “enable the effective navigation of complex urban entanglements of motorways, roads and backstreets... [and] they can also locate hidden attractions, restaurants, tourist information centres and hotels without the need to unfold the almost redundant road or tourist map”. What is especially noteworthy here is that the impacts of emergent car technologies can be interpreted quite differently depending on the individual user. Indeed, Urry’s (2007, p. 202) assertion that “it is almost impossible to get lost these days”

may bring a sense of calm and relief to the automobilists of some and yet impede the experiential demands of others that seek adventure and a thirst for encounters with unfamiliar landscapes.

The 'problems' of car technologies, however, are not limited to those that are inbuilt. The car is increasingly home to a range of ancillary devices such as smartphones and tablets that are brought on board by drivers and passengers as part of the performances of everyday life. Mobile communication technologies allow passengers to access a range of web mapping services and tourist-centric social media platforms, such as Google Maps, Wikitravel and TripAdvisor. These platforms not only perform similar functions to the GPS but are designed to share additional information on destinations and advise or 'recommend' to users potential sites to visit and places to stay or eat (Dickinson et al., 2013; Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2011; Gretzel, 2010; Pearce, Wu, & Chen, 2015; Timothy, 2016). Although mobile communication technologies may help tourists make better-informed decisions, they too can impede the feelings of autonomy many may experience when travelling. Instead, they streamline the complexities of decision-making processes that include selecting accommodation, activity choices, and the development of itineraries (Gretzel, 2014; Moore et al., 2012; Neuhofer, 2016; Paris et al., 2015). Moreover, as Wong and Yeh (2009) note, increasing access can prompt tourists to experience 'dilemmas' and hesitation due to fears of making wrong decisions or bad purchase. Thai and Yuksel (2017, p. 38) similarly observed that greater access to more choices may in turn lead to many tourists feeling 'overwhelmed' when planning and structuring their journeys. Thus, the implications of how mobile technologies modify tourism practices and consequently alter experiences remain an important progression in future academic enquiry (Germann Molz & Paris, 2015; Gretzel, 2010; Hannam et al., 2014). Further to this, as Hopkins and Stephenson (2016, p. 92) argue, the factors that "replicate or reduce automobility" need to be more carefully examined due to "rapidly changing socio-economic, cultural and technological landscape[s] in which mobility decisions are now made".

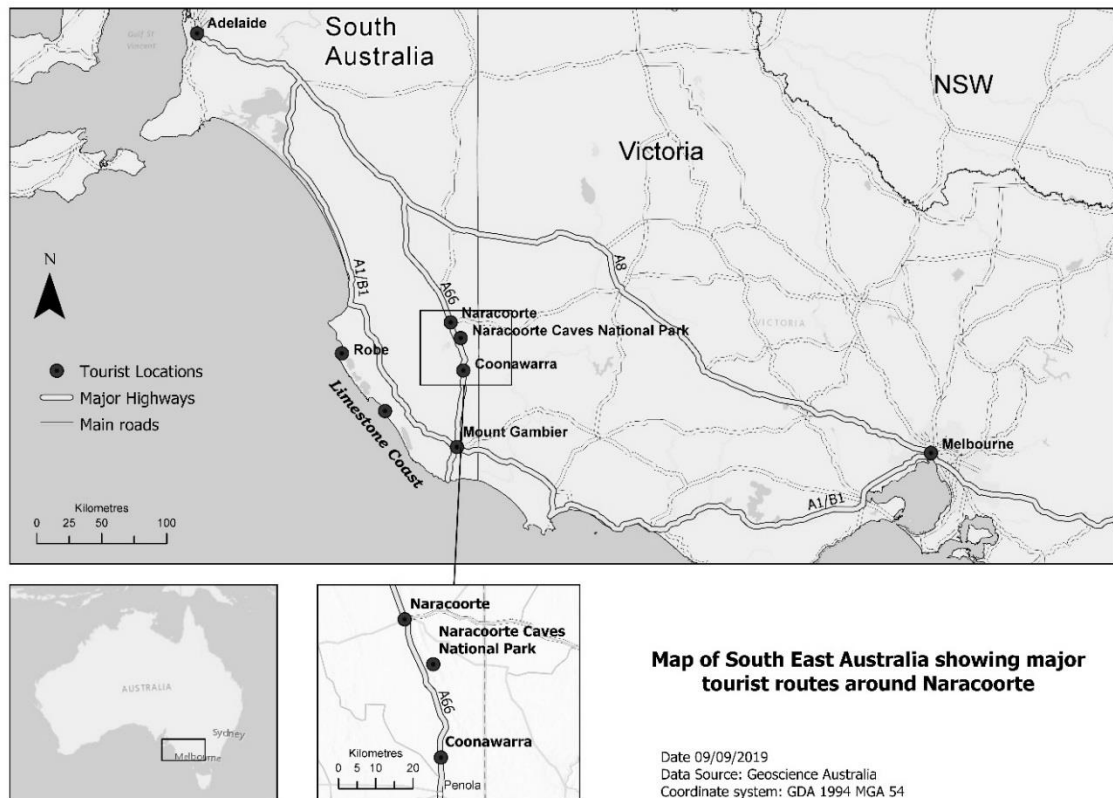
The Nature and Value of Tourism in the Limestone Coast Region

In South Australia, regional tourism (i.e. that beyond the Adelaide metropolitan area) plays an important role in supporting the state's tourism economy. Although the majority of tourist spending still occurs in Adelaide due to its close proximity to the airport and a range of established tourism assets and accommodation, 42 cents out of every dollar are spent in regional South Australia (SATC, 2019b). Visitor expenditure in regional South Australia is currently valued at AU\$2.8bn and has been predicted to reach AU\$3.55bn by the end of 2020 (SATC, 2019a). Consequently, tourism continues to stimulate rural economies across the

state and accounts for 1 in every 13 direct jobs in regional areas compared to the state-wide average of 1 in 23 direct jobs (SATC, 2019a, 2019c).

Visitor expenditure in the Limestone Coast region (Figure 1) has also grown considerably from \$AU268m in 2013 to AU\$340m in 2018 and could reach AU\$457m by the end of 2020 (SATC, 2019d). By 2030, State government targets predict that tourism could be worth AU\$609m to the region (SATC, 2019b, 2019e). However, whilst outlooks on economic growth have remained positive, the region remains heavily reliant on domestic tourists. Due to its geographical position on South Australia's border with Victoria, the Limestone Coast is of significant distance from both states' capital cities (Adelaide and Melbourne respectively; see also Figure 1) and therefore continues to primarily attract self-drive domestic tourists because of its relative isolation (SATC, 2019f). To emphasise this point, in 2019 it was reported that 93% (573,000) of the 617,000 overnight visits to the region were undertaken by domestic tourists, with almost a third from Adelaide alone (31%) (SATC, 2019f). Thus, the South Australian government has acknowledged that a prominent challenge to the region is indeed its remoteness, and this has prompted the development of the strategic priority to attract more self-drive international tourists, including those using popular tourist routes such as Victoria's Great Ocean Road. When comparing the Limestone Coast region to metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia's most visited tourist region, the differences in scale and origin of tourists are clearly illustrated as the city reported 3.17m overnight visitors, with 13% (406,000) originating from overseas during the same period (SATC, 2019g). Nonetheless, both international and domestic arrivals to the Limestone Coast are anticipated to grow in both the short-term and medium-term future (SATC, 2019b, 2019e) especially as evidence suggests that nature-based tourism attractions are important factors for many visitors, most notably Naracoorte Caves National Park and the geological tourist attractions at Mount Gambier (SATC, 2019f).

Figure 1. Map of Study Site



Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative methodology, underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm that “emphasises the meanings individual actors give to social interactions and uses symbols such as language in the creation of that meaning” (Walter, 2013, P. 17). As suggested by Jennings (2010) and Walter (2013), the study focused on the role of meanings and how participants interpreted social life through in-depth interviews. In further support, Singh (2007, p. 64) asserts that “exploratory research is the initial research, which forms the basis of more conclusive research”. Indeed, the very nature of exploratory research is to “explore or open up new areas of social enquiry” (Walter, 2013, p. 8), such is the nature of this paper.

This research was undertaken over two distinct phases between April 2017 and February 2018 either on site at Naracoorte Caves National Park or in the town of Naracoorte itself. In selecting participants, a systematic random sampling technique (Tranter, 2013) was employed whereby researchers selected every second visitor in their location. Participants were selected if they self-identified as Australian and if they were currently engaged in a journey consistent with contemporary literature on conventional forms of automobility. Participants were all self-confirmed as drivers or passengers of personal motor vehicles (either owned or hired), and

were therefore deemed, to some extent at least, to be in control of their automobiles. Due to the exploratory nature of the research, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were utilised because of their ability to produce perceptive insights into the decision-making processes and motivations that influenced participant automobiles (Hsu & Huang, 2008) and because in-depth interviews are of particular value when exploring phenomenological themes (Dunn, 2016; Hayllar & Griffin, 2005; Seidman, 2006).

Participants were asked to discuss the evolution of their itineraries both before they had left their point of departure and mid-journey, as well as the sources of information they had used prior to selecting to visit NCNP. Typically, interviews lasted for a duration of 25-30 minutes and were specifically designed to make the participant feel at ease and reflect on their views and experiences without fear of scrutiny or judgment and so that they could essentially “tell their own stories” (see Onyx & Leonard, 2007; Palmer, 2005). On completion of the semi-structured interview phases, all content was then transcribed into text, facilitating an additional period of immersion and reflection on the part of the researchers. From here, consistent with conventional interpretive approaches (see Creswell, 2007; Jennings, 2010; Veal, 2006), the transcribed interview data was uploaded to QSR NVivo for coding and discourse analysis. According to Neuman (2014) and Ezzy (2002) coding is an integral part of data analysis in qualitative research, with the use of computer-assisted software such as NVivo now commonplace (Dunn, 2016; Neuman, 2014; Willis, 2013). For the purpose of this research, NVivo was selected as it purports to improve the quality and efficiency of qualitative interview analysis and interpretation, particularly when working with larger data sets (i.e. more than 15 in-depth interviews) (Willis, 2013). From this analysis, emergent themes were identified that form the basis of our key discussion points. For the purposes of confidentiality, all participants were assigned a respondent number (R#) and are identified by their number only in the Findings section of this paper (see also Table 1).

Findings

Overview

A total of 29 participants were interviewed as part of this research (see Table 1). The sample was deemed sufficient as per Jennings' (2010) assertion that the researcher determines the 'cut-off' and that a cessation of research material collection emerges as an outcome of the research process itself. In addition, it should be reiterated that there are no pre-set rules on the number of interviews required for qualitative research (see Travers, 2013). The participant sample revealed a balanced ratio of males to females (14 to 15 respectively) and a broad range of age groups that were distributed evenly with the exception of those aged 18-24 who

represented just 2 of the 29 respondents interviewed. The majority of participants had travelled from either from South Australia or Victoria (26 out of 29) and, as previously discussed, due to the isolated location of Naracoorte had typically elected to choose the town as a convenient waypoint to either briefly explore or stop overnight. It was discovered that many automobilities were punctuated by unplanned stops and meanderings that were rarely the quickest or most efficient trajectories between departure point and destination. These observations are consistent with automobility literature on the freedoms of control exhibited and experienced by the driver and passengers. However, an unexpected observation derived from the interviews was the relative absence of awareness of Naracoorte Caves National Park (NCNP), especially when taking into account the Park's status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Indeed, 7 of the 29 participants in this study revealed that they were unaware of NCNP prior to the commencement of their journeys from their original point of origin. By extension, they were therefore unaware of the existence of a UNESCO World Heritage Site either directly en route or close to a route that they were taking, further underlining the absence of planning and preparation some had afforded their journeys.

The analysis of the key observations from this study is structured in two parts. The first, explores the automobilities of tourists that happened to encounter NCNP mid-journey and were previously unaware of the site on departure from the starting point of their journeys (i.e. home for all 29 respondents). These automobilities frequently reaffirmed the value of freedom and control when engaging in automobilities through rural South Australia and commonly exhibited ad hoc decision-making processes between stops. The second, which does not distinguish between those who were aware or unaware of NCNP prior to departure, examines the conflicting relationships participants encountered with the technologies that permeated their automobilities. Throughout these journeys, periods of 'connection' and 'disconnection' were found to emerge as they attempted to mediate the positive and negative outcomes of using GPS, web mapping services, and tourist-centric social media platforms. Consequently, some respondents elected to consciously 'disconnect' for temporary periods to help preserve the experiential sensations of freedom and discovery during their automobilities.

Table 1: Respondent Profile Summary

Respondent #	State of origin	Gender and Age group	Aware of NCNP before commencing journey
1	South Australia	Male, 55 – 64	Yes
2	Victoria	Female, 35 – 44	No
3	South Australia	Female, 35 – 44	Yes
4	South Australia	Female, 35 – 44	Yes
5	Victoria	Male, 25 – 34	Yes
6	Victoria	Female, 18 – 24	No
7	Victoria	Male, 25 – 34	No
8	South Australia	Female, 45 – 54	Yes
9	Victoria	Female, 55 – 64	No
10	South Australia	Female, 25 – 34	Yes
11	South Australia	Male, 35 – 44	Yes
12	South Australia	Male, Over 65	Yes
13	South Australia	Female, 55 – 64	Yes
14	South Australia	Female, 55 – 64	Yes
15	Victoria	Male, 55 – 64	Yes
16	South Australia	Male, Over 65	Yes
17	South Australia	Male, 25 – 34	Yes
18	South Australia	Female, 45 – 54	Yes
19	Victoria	Female, 55 – 64	Yes
20	South Australia	Male, 45 – 54	Yes
21	South Australia	Male, Over 65	Yes
22	Victoria	Female, 45 – 54	Yes
23	Victoria	Female, Over 65	No
24	South Australia	Female, 18 – 24	Yes
25	New South Wales	Female, 35 – 44	No
26	Queensland	Female, 35 – 44	Yes
27	South Australia	Male, 25 – 34	Yes
28	South Australia	Female, 35 – 44	Yes
29	New South Wales	Male, 25-34	No

The Experiential Joys of ‘Unplanned’ Automobilities

Consistent with observations from similar studies that have observed the autofreedoms of self-drive tourists, in the context of this research many respondents exhibited a range of similar

positive experiences through the use of motor vehicles that helped them navigate and 'desynchronize' time and space (Urry, 2007). The car ventured beyond simply a 'functional use' (Hopkins & Stephenson, 2016) and was in itself a source of pleasure and enjoyment as motor vehicle users exerted simultaneous control over when they departed or stopped and also the routes they selected. Speed and efficiency between destinations were rarely cited as important factors and only intermittently influenced decisions. Many of the respondents in this study additionally exhibited traits consistent with Dickinson and Lumsdon's (2010 pp.1-2) notion of the slow traveller, in that they engaged in journeys that were not focused on minimising the time taken between destinations, valued the experience of the journey *between* stops, and were more likely to immerse themselves for longer periods of time at the places they visited.

The 'unplanned' nature of respondents' automobilities were heralded especially by those that were unaware of NCNP prior to their departure from home. Discovering 'surprises' en route were deemed to be rewards for their willingness to avoid making detailed plans in advance. At this point, it is important to define the term 'unplanned' in the context of these particular respondents. Here, 'unplanned' journeys constituted those that had been typically structured on a day-by-day basis from the respondents' point of origin to a final destination or indeed, their return to home. It is also important to acknowledge that engaging in 'unplanned' automobilities was largely self-determined by the respondents as they implied that from their perspective, 'planned' journeys involved substantial levels of research and preparation and were trips that were largely structured *prior* to leaving their original point of origin. However, in numerous discussions with respondents, it was evident that a degree of planning had taken place but that the latent nature of their decisions made their journeys *feel* unplanned or absent of structure.

In the specific cases of the seven respondents that were unaware of NCNP before leaving their original points of origin, the site was only discovered through brief stops at visitor information centres or during conversational encounters with fellow self-drive tourists. These encounters typically occurred in regional towns such as Robe or Mount Gambier and the Coonawarra wine region in South Australia (Figure 1), no more than one or two days before they were scheduled to travel through or near to Naracoorte. For example, R9, who was travelling back from the Coonawarra wine region to her home in Melbourne, only became aware of NCNP during a chance encounter with a staff member at winery the day before, whilst R25, travelling from NSW discovered the attraction when stopping at a visitor

information centre at Mount Gambier to enquire about “things to do on the way to Adelaide”. The use of the internet on smartphones, especially Google searches, TripAdvisor enquiries, or ‘scanning’ Google Maps as two respondents termed it, were also cited as a common practice to discover potential attractions before travelling onwards. In these scenarios, Google searches were largely broad in nature and focused on regions rather than specific towns and were rarely undertaken more than 48hrs before moving onto the next destination. For example, R2 and R6, who were both travelling towards Adelaide from Victoria, only happened to learn of NCNP the day before they were scheduled to pass through Naracoorte when searching for things to do in the Limestone Coast region. The ad hoc nature of these discoveries was exemplified via the following brief passages of conversation:

I looked up Mount Gambier [on Google] and things to do on TripAdvisor for Mount Gambier and then this came up as a suggestion... I looked into it and thought “wow! I’m really interested in visiting” so it was on my list... from there just the NCNP website and that’s pretty much all the research [we did] (R2).

We were just coming through here [the Limestone Coast]... I was Googling what to do on the way to Adelaide and this [NCNP] came up... we had no idea about until yesterday (R6).

For others, using Google Maps to perform searches or ‘scans’ for things to see and do was undertaken between waypoints. Whilst these actions also demonstrated a form of pre-destination planning, they were often framed as being spontaneous and reactionary in nature rather than structured rituals of their travel experiences. Examples of these performances were illustrated in the following three accounts by respondents that had also used web-mapping searches briefly before moving on towards Naracoorte:

We found it [NCNP] on an online map. We were just looking at a map and we were like “oh caves, caves are there”... then we Googled it and said, “let’s go!” (R4)

I just have a quick scan [of Google Maps] each evening before we leave. I check a few potential routes and then look for any landmarks or attractions that pop up... there’s no science involved, it’s just pot luck I guess! (R27)

I had no idea that it [NCNP] existed until I went on Google Maps when we were stopping somewhere else... I'm a bit of a map nerd since I was a kid so I love just looking at places and wondering what's there... It feels more exciting that way, I suppose. (R29)

The above comments reveal that for those that discovered NCNP only a day or two before, preferred journeys that were fluid in structure and flexible to whims and “gut instincts” as R27 added. Indeed, these approaches frequently permitted plans to change and reduced the need for advanced planning prior to departure, enhancing feelings of adventure and unpredictability. The experiential benefits of this approach to travel was particularly evident in discussions with R7, whose positive experience from a visit to NCNP was indicative of those that sought a sense of freedom in movement and allowed encounters to take place largely by chance:

So, we were just passing through this town [Naracoorte] to get to Adelaide... as I was driving into the town, I saw the sign and that's the first time I'd heard of this [NCNP] or even knew it was there. Before that I didn't have a clue... my partner was just like 'oh let's just go in there' and then that was it and we just came here. Actually, we drove past it first and she was like 'oh you've got to turn around!'... I wasn't expecting caves. (R7)

It could be additionally argued, based on the interviews undertaken with those that had discovered NCNP during the midst of their journeys, that many observations were consistent with Oh et al.'s (2016, pp. 205-206) assertion that some tourists endeavour to ‘decelerate’ as an act of “mental resistance to ever-accelerating patterns of lifestyle”. As R27 suggested, the “pressures” of travel were significantly reduced when he “worried less about where we are going and more about the simple things, like what you see, and what life looks like beyond the city”. In this scenario, experiencing alternative temporalities did not relate just to the velocity of the journey itself, but also the opportunity to observe (or perceive) life in rural settings moving at different speeds to those of home. R6 added that they were rarely in search of the “big attractions that heaps of people already visit” and that innocuous experiences and visits to “small, obscure places” could be equally, if not more rewarding because that was where “you find hidden gems, like a new café or a quaint bakery that locals only know about”. In support, as Pearce et al. (2015, p. 25) observed “everyday places, activities and behaviours matter as much as the extraordinary ones, and engaging in such activities and with such

places brings key rewards for participants in terms of personal identity, security and a way of ordering the world". As Pearce (2012, p. 271) also reflected, a sense of "mundane authenticity" may emerge whereby the minutiae of everyday life are absorbed with as equal readiness as the landscapes of otherness they encounter. The automobilities of these particular respondents revealed that motor vehicles were essential components of their journeys. This was not only because automobilities could provide a sense of control in terms of the speed and direction of trajectories they organically structured or the surprises they offered, but also because of the motor vehicle's ability to act as a platform to witness – and enjoy – encounters of everyday life that contrasted automobility routines back home.

Mediating the Technologies of Contemporary Automobility

Many of those engaged in automobilities suggested that they were in search of a sense of freedom and enjoyed the flexibilities their motor vehicles offered. Nonetheless, all respondents at various stages of their journeys actively sought and engaged with mobile technologies to source information, even if these acts were deemed to be 'unplanned' or sporadic in nature. There was a consensus amongst a number of respondents that the technologies they used in situ yielded positive experiential outcomes. These technologies generally offered two main advantages to motor vehicle users. First, and consistent with a range of other studies (see Gretzel, 2010; Lamsfus et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2012; Wang, Xiang, & Fesenmaier, 2016), they were used as navigational aids and could assist the user in unfamiliar settings or when they were required to adjust itineraries. Second, and more pronounced based on respondents' views in this study, these technologies could assist with making decisions on where to rest, explore, stay, or eat, especially when using smartphones on the move (see Dickinson et al., 2013; Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2011; Wang et al., 2014). In many scenarios, the technologies of the car were not primarily utilised to work out *how* to get to places but rather to establish *what* to do hours or a few days before they arrived. Gretzel (2010, p. 193) reinforces this notion by stating that "mobile technology has considerable utility in the tourism domain since tourists are on the move in unfamiliar environments and seek information to resolve practical travel problems and to enrich the tourist experience", and this was evident on numerous occasions.

Although motor vehicles evidently provided a degree of control, some respondents discussed the heavily embedded routines of their automobilities such as R21, who spoke of a series of rigid actions that preceded each movement between the places they visited. For R21, checks would be performed on equipment and the vehicle's engine before carefully selecting the route

he would take “like any normal person would do”. R1 also spoke of a distinctive planning phase that would be carried out before each leg of their journeys and of how these approaches could mitigate the ‘risk’ of missing out:

It’s quite fun [to plan an itinerary] and I like to learn about the places I’m passing through by going on Google and Wikipedia... it’s amazing what you can find and it’s also amazing what you can learn... I’d hate to think we drove by something that would have been incredible to see (R1).

R8 openly discussed their reliance on mobile communication technologies and jokingly referred to her use of “Uncle Google” to plan both prior to the journey commencing and during the journey for “everything” from accommodation choices to the best places to visit. Whilst these respondents were comfortable with the idea of leaving little to chance and acknowledged that their journeys were heavily structured with pre-determined waypoints planned, others appeared to subconsciously downplay or overlook their engagement with sources of information to make decisions. Indeed, automobilities rarely seemed as unstructured or as organic as respondents frequently assumed them to be when responding to questions on how they planned their journeys. For example, R11, who suggested that he would “usually just get in the car and go” in an attempt to highlight his flexibility when engaging in automobilities across Australia’s rural landscapes, then proceeded to list a range of information gathering techniques that included online searches and visits to information centres because of the perceived risks associated of being unaware of things to do. Similarly, R18 believed that she had not “really done anything” when asked about predeparture plans before going on to acknowledge her “research on the [NCNP] website”, numerous visits to “tourism websites”, an engagement with a “little bit of information from Google Maps” and even the acquisition of advice from both a former colleague and a friend for recommendations. The views of R3, however, perfectly exemplify the plethora of information sources some used when travelling and the simultaneous contradictory belief that their journeys were unplanned or unstructured:

I found that we’re not super organised... but yeah... we start maybe with the tourist information and then just go over the internet and that’s pretty much how we do it, that’s all really... but I use social media if I can’t find anything... maybe TripAdvisor if there are things that we’re vacillating on staying... we’ll read the reviews and then we’d use Facebook if you know, the business has nothing else [information on facilities or images of the accommodation, etc.]... I often do a Google search... I did call them [NCNP] today because I suspected they’d be busy and I was wondering if it was

open... that was pretty much all, we didn't really do anything else [by way of planning].
(R3)

Although it was evident that many automobilities were not as unplanned as they had perhaps been framed, there was a conscious awareness amongst others that connections with the technologies of the car required managing from an experiential perspective. In these scenarios, it was also acknowledged by some respondents that the technologies of the car could erode the sense of freedom they enjoyed if they used them too frequently. Therefore, an emergent theme throughout this study was the dualities many experienced between periods of 'connection' and 'disconnection' as well as the 'risks' that emerged when they remained disconnected for too long. Here, 'risk' was framed not from the perspective of a perceived or real danger but rather the risk of missing out or experiencing something disappointing. It was noted on several occasions that whilst being 'disconnected' from both the inbuilt and mobile technologies that permeated motor vehicles could yield feelings of adventure and excitement, they could also conjure feelings of angst. This angst would often then foster periods of (re)connection and exemplified the challenges that many experienced when attempting to mediate the costs and benefits of the motor vehicle's inbuilt technologies and the driver or passenger's mobile communication technologies.

For example, whilst R4 enjoyed the spontaneity of travel to some degree and did allow for periods of their journey to be "open-ended" and to "show up at random places", the long distances she and her family were travelling meant that they were less inclined to take too many risks by visiting attractions they knew little about on a regular basis. In an attempt to find a balance, R4, like several others, occasionally made decisions on where to visit based on travel reviews through platforms such as TripAdvisor or after observing user reviews that could be found for many attractions on Google Maps. Although this practice was often undertaken using her smartphone as a passenger on the move and was rarely performed on a daily basis, it revealed the complexities of trying to simultaneously experience feelings of adventure whilst improving the likelihood of attaining positive experiences when they stopped.

As Dickinson et al. (2013, p. 199) have argued, there is "limited evidence that specifically supports whether digital disconnection takes place" however, at least to a superficial level, evidence did emerge during the automobilities of some domestic tourists in our study. For example, R11, framed his experiences driving through South Australia's rural landscapes as

a combination of “relaxation and peace” but only when the GPS was switched off and when mobile communication technologies were set to silent. R16 attempted to avoid using GPS and web-mapping devices when trying to retain a sense of autonomy between destinations, suggesting that there was “little fun” in being told where to go or how to get there. R16 additionally acknowledged that there was need for “a balance between when we use them and when we don’t” because mobile technologies could add experiential value, especially on occasions when part of the journey had become tedious and they were in search of something to see or do. In a separate interview, R27 discussed the need to balance periods of connection and disconnection and pointed out that he and his partner had “switched off the temptations of Google” so that their experiences felt more spontaneous and fluid in nature. Adding further context, R27 referred to his previous inclination of trying to plan leisure experiences by reducing “risks” of visiting poor attractions or accommodation. Thus, based on several of these conversations it could be posited that to be less informed was a form of empowerment in itself and that these approaches were more likely to encapsulate Larsen’s (2001) feelings of nomadism through journeys that exhibited independence and unpredictability.

Conclusions

The authors would like to stress the exploratory nature of this research as the study originally focused on tourist motivations and how people learned of NCNP. However, the organic nature of the qualitative methodology led to the emergence of additional themes that were not explicitly explored in some interviews. Notwithstanding the limitations of this exploratory research, such as the geographically narrow focus and the engagement with an eclectic range of demographic profiles, the study forms an important basis for future research on the nexus between technology and the automobilities of tourists. Specifically, this study endeavoured to further interrogate the nature of domestic tourist automobilities in a rural South Australian context and attempted to critically examine how motor vehicle technologies – both inbuilt and external – can pose experiential dilemmas for the drivers and passengers that use them. The idea of *genuinely* engaging in ‘unplanned’ automobilities (i.e. a complete rejection of the use of car technologies to make decisions on where to go and how to get there) was not deemed a worthy endeavour by many participants in this study, however, evidence did emerge to suggest that a number of self-drive tourists encounter fluid states of ‘connection’ and ‘disconnection’ during their journeys. Indeed, access to the myriad of information sources now available are not desired constants, especially if the promises of autofreedom, such as spontaneity and adventure are to remain in some capacity. Through our findings we have additionally touched on the need to further explore the ‘selective non-use of smartphones’ (Pearce & Gretzel, 2012), and we have identified conflicting problems similar to those in

studies that have explored mobile communication technologies and their (over)use by tourists (see Paris et al., 2015). However, we argue that *how* mobile communication technologies challenge the automobilities of tourists warrants further examination, especially as contemporary motor vehicles are now increasingly designed to facilitate their use through Bluetooth and inbuilt Wi-Fi connections.

As Hall has previously noted (2015), whilst the rapid growth of international tourism flows has remained firmly in focus throughout tourism scholarship, predictions of domestic tourists exceeding 9bn globally by 2030 perhaps serves as an important reminder that academic discourse should remain attentive to the implications of increasing domestic tourist flows. In the rural South Australian context, it is especially important that the automobilities of domestic tourists are further explored given the scale and the importance of the sector to rural communities throughout the State. These automobilities of domestic tourists will undoubtedly continue to shape an eclectic array of rural towns or 'moorings' that not only act as waypoints of leisure but may additionally become moorings of dependency for the communities that reside there. This is a particularly salient point, as rural locations will remain susceptible to the technologies that lead tourists to them or if they are located in WiFi 'dead zones' that have limited connectivity (Pearce & Gretzel, 2012). After all, as Lew & McKercher (2006, p.420 suggest, "knowing which tourists prefer which paths and destinations can be used to better define existing attractions, plan new ones and market them more effectively". Consequently, the dynamic nature of automobilities in rural Australia requires additional exploration, most notably at a time when continuous domestic tourism growth is anticipated for the foreseeable future.

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