

CHAPTER FIVE

CONFORMING TO ORGANISATIONAL CODES OF CONDUCT

Organisations trade in illusions at two levels. The first is public image - broadcast to potential recruits and customers. The second illusion is to maintain, within the organisation, a clear, strategic, managerial view of what the organisation should be. Mission statements, appeals to the wisdom of founding fathers, logos and training sessions are harnessed for this purpose (Fineman and Yiannis 1996: 51).

This chapter explores the ways individuals in the umbrella organisation of the Savannah Guides decide to maintain and retain their membership in the organisation. Ongoing membership includes organisational choices regarding professional presentation of the organisation, manipulation of members and ritualistic behaviour. Individuals are initially attracted to the group through ideals such as group cohesion and professional development, but also by marketing opportunities for themselves which is intended to lead to identifiable recognition by tourists. Standards of interpretation are another measure of identification and recognition aimed at the satisfaction of tourists. The attractions of regimented organisational conduct reflect a willingness of conformity and acceptance, but also a marked culture of submission and uniformity within the structure.

Inculcation, ritual, initiation and belonging are all factors essential to maintain a group's structure and cohesion. The motivations and experiences of the guides are analysed to provide an 'insider' account of conformity within this organisation. An examination of the overlap between the guides as individuals, and the guides as group adherents highlights the common characteristics between organisational structure and individual agency (or, in this case, the lack of it). Not all these people originally planned to become a member of the Savannah Guides organisation.

This chapter also explores the ways in which the tour guides impart the information they have accumulated about the outback of Australia to the tourists. Interpreting for a tour group can be seen as a process of education and learning. The tourist guides believe they are imparting valid and precise information to their tourist clientele.

The analysis in this chapter also pinpoints one of the marketing tools the guides use to perpetuate a professional façade. The usage of 'world's best practice' or, 'best practice', both as an exterior presentation of the group and as an explanation of how they articulate their position on interpretation, is also explored.

Presenting a Professional Organisation

Individual organisations have their own standards and rules that define them as different from other organisations. Suitability and affinity with other members of the cohort help fledgling members to adjust to group norms and regulations. New members' acceptance and inclusion in organisational activities requires adjustment by the new initiates and tolerance from the older adherents.

The Savannah Guide association has a number of different levels of accredited or recognised guide status for individuals to attain. To begin with, there is the level of trainee Savannah Guide. Then, there are the levels of Site Interpreter and Roving Interpreter, both of which are considered by the Savannah Guide organisation to be of equal status. A Site Interpreter interprets a particular 'site' for the tourists. A Roving Interpreter interprets various sites and flora and fauna for tourists as they move through the savanna country. Finally, there is the level of full Savannah Guide. A Savannah Guide can be either a static guide or a 'mobile' guide, who has achieved the higher status level (see Table 5.1).

TABLE 5.1

Individual Savannah Guide Membership

Savannah Guide Level	Description of Level	Accreditation Requirements
Savannah Guide	Senior guide with supervisory duties or capabilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attendance of at least two guide schools over a two year period 2. Minimum two years as a Roving/Site Interpreter 3. Current First Aid Certificate 4. Aussie Host attendance 5. Met all requirements to be a Savannah Guide
Site Interpreter	High level professional guide with in-depth regional knowledge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attendance of at least one guide school 2. Current First Aid Certificate 3. Aussie Host attendance
Roving Interpreter	High level professional guide with in-depth knowledge across a wide area	As above
Trainee Guide	A guide with a career vision committed to Savannah Guides and undertaking continued training with a Savannah Guide mentor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Potential acknowledged by a member of the Joongai to progress to a higher level 2. Attendance at one guide school 3. Current First Aid Certificate 4. Aussie Host attendance

Source: Kleinhardt-FGI Pty. Ltd. (1988: 15 and 22; Fieldnotes 18.04.99 and 29.10.99).

Within the company, or as the Savannah Guides refer to it, the 'enterprise' level of accreditation, there are also a number of levels that contribute to the make-up of the group. The first group, the mobile operators, has two levels. The first is the Savannah Guide Operator accreditation, which is the lower level and which is followed by the more prestigious and up-market level of Master Operator. To progress from one level to another, specific companies must be recommended for inclusion and/or up-grade by other members of the Savannah Guide network.

There are also two other levels within the business or enterprise level of operators, called 'location levels'. The first entry level is that of the Savannah Guide Site. The second, and higher level, is that of the Savannah Guide Station (see Plate 5.1). To gain admission to the first level, the area must be recommended by another Savannah Guide. To be accredited at the higher level the same conditions apply. The entire acceptance, accreditation and up grade procedures only take place at one of the two Savannah Guide Schools held each year (see Table 5.2).

PLATE 5.1

Savannah Guide Station

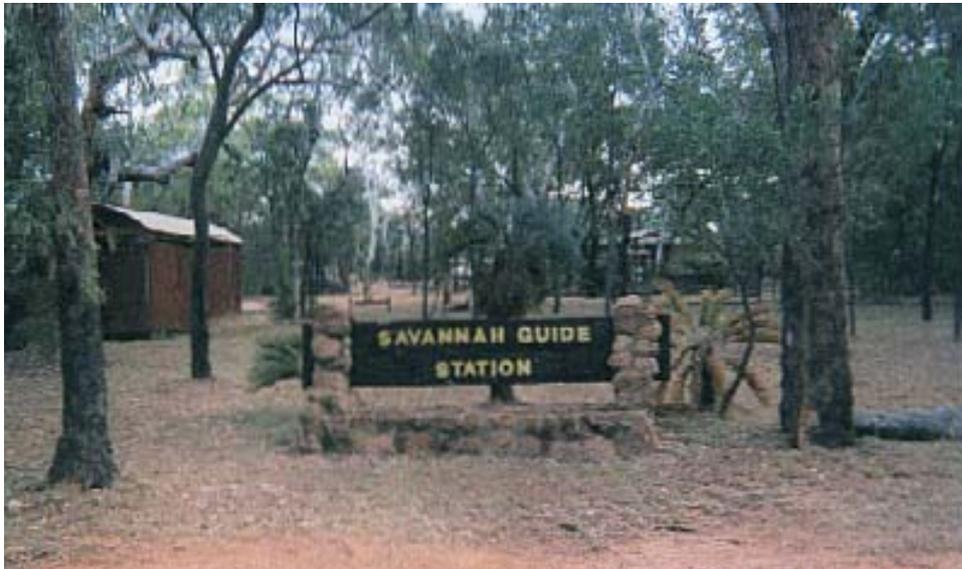


TABLE 5.2

Savannah Guide Enterprise Membership

Category Level	Entry Requirement	Entry Description
Savannah Guide Station	1. Tour of substance involving natural and/or cultural assets 2. Camping and/or accommodation facilities 3. More than 100 kilometres from another Savannah Guide location	A location of major significance and high level commitment to Savannah Guides' philosophy
Savannah Guide Site	Part time tour involving natural and/or cultural assets	A location of developing importance
Savannah Guide Operator/ Operator	Tours into the Savannah Gulf region	A promoter of the Savannah region through tour/transport operations

Source: Kleinhardt-FGI Pty. Ltd (1988: 14).

A number of associated levels of membership are connected to the Savannah Guide organisation. These include social membership; corporate membership; and Friend of Savannah Guide membership. Importantly, if a Savannah Guide Site or Station is sold the enterprise level connected to Savannah Guides does not transfer to the new owners. They must apply and proceed through the normal channels as the other members have done (Fieldnotes 29.10.99).

These 'levels' of membership are an important sociological component of the Savannah Guides fellowship. However, they were not in place initially, and members became Savannah Guides by virtue of adherence to Savannah Guide rules and regulations and of their individual acceptance by other members of the association. In other words, originally acceptability did not include a test of capability.

Appointment to a level of Savannah Guide status can include recognition of guides' prior learning. Recognised prior learning (RPL) is a theme relevant to all levels of Savannah Guides. Three of the guides spoke of 'recognised prior learning'. One explained that the levels within the organisation are important in order to recognise different skill levels. He added that there needs to be a system of recognition for people who bring different but relevant skills to the Savannah Guide network. Use of this type

of category of RPL is indicative of the marketing and managerial rhetoric that the organisation has adopted within the last four years.

I think recognition of previous skills and learning is a good way to go, because you can't just become a guide overnight. It shows that you're dedicated, that you're going to do your time, and you're dedicated and, after doing it for a couple of years, you do pick up a lot of learning. What do they call it? Prior learning recognition [sic]. Because you're out there for years and years doing it. There is an amount of prior learning and no amount of book knowledge or reading can give you that hands on experience. So, the prior learning, I think, is very important (Guide 25, male, Employee, Site Interpreter).

This guide conducted a tour for the entire cohort attending one of the Savannah Guide Schools, which was the first one I attended. He clearly displayed his expertise and knowledge of his tour site and geographic area. His accumulated prior learning was apparent in his interpretation of the tour. However, he was not officially inducted as a Site Interpreter, into the group, until three Schools later. Normally, he would have been inducted that evening, at a peer group assessment. There appears to be an inconsistency and flaunting of the written rules when it comes to making decisions about membership within the association. The members seem to just 'accept' these circumstances. Rule and norm breaking appear to be common practice within the organisation. Recognition of members' skills base and prior learning achievements are acknowledged but can sometimes be overlooked and left to be revisited later when circumstances and memories are recalled.

Each new member of the Savannah Guides has their own set of values and norms to bring to the association. Members of the group bring personal agendas to the new group situation – activities and ideas to be accommodated – the actions and beliefs having been developed from previous group interactions. In other words, the organisation does not begin as ‘value free’ because individuals bring their own set of ‘baggage’ to the situation. Pre-existing outlines of behaviour, including both explicit and implicit approaches, will steer the initial actions of the group (Bogdan and Taylor 1975: 15; Gladstein Ancona 1990: 337). The notion of something being value free is contentious for sociologists and the groups they study. All bring ‘baggage’ to a situation, whether they are on the outside looking in, or in the inside looking out. For example, preconceived ideas about organisational processes and management may be deeply ingrained in some guides’ attitudes to group performance and execution of management initiatives and decisions. Guides in positions of power in the group are more able to influence their preferred ways of performance and management during decision formulation.

Research into aspects of organisational life offers insight into how the culture, individual and group interact and transact to sustain themselves and one another (Parker 2000: 132). Moreover, as with any bureaucracy, this organisation only uses group rules when it suits. In doing so, the organisation eradicates individuality and individual subjectivity to create

workers who will follow organisational norms and subscribe to codes of conduct imposed by the organisation.

As has been shown by Hochschild (1983), notions of individual subjectivity are inseparable from work practice analyses in service work that has an interactive component. In this case, the leaders of the group are able to exert some form of impression management over each individual. Hochschild (1983) has underlined the distress felt by employees who have been subjected to exploitation of their feelings and personalities by an organisation, but not all the employees comply by allowing their inner selves to become governed by organisational requirements and decrees. Instead, many employees try to create interpretations of their roles in the workplace that do not harm personal beliefs of themselves (Leidner 1993: 23). Therefore, the employees internalise the group norms, and to some extent, accept the appropriated forms of self-identity as given. For example, I noticed that many of the guides did not conform to the rigid standards of compliance with wearing and presentation of the Savannah Guide uniform. Many of the guides wore individualised versions of the uniform, such as a different hat or added adornments like feathers or alternative hatbands. This was a source of distress to the then president, who voiced his opinions at Savannah Guide Schools. But the practice allowed each recalcitrant guide a small feeling of autonomy and individuality.

PLATE 5.2**Savannah Guides in Uniform**

The Savannah Guides are at the front line of service organisations because they deal directly with tourists who wish to purchase the experience or product they have to offer. To purchase this type of service is to purchase a particular sociological or social experience. Many services related to tourism have extremely high contact arrangements. For example, a guided tour by one guide for a specialised group of two people is hard to rationalise because the guide is given over to supplying every whim or impulse of the small tour group. This personalised service provision can be understood as an aspect of bonding, and fits with Hochschild's theories of emotional labour because the guide is directing all their attention to the well-being and desires of the tour participants. Parts of the purchase are specifically made up of those working

in the front line, such as the booking clerk, the bus driver, the tour guide, or the accommodation manager. Therefore, the service is filled with certain social characteristics of class, education, gender and race (Hochschild 1983). Furthermore, what is purchased in a tourist-related service includes a certain kind of social arrangement with other customers. The use of the service takes time, it is often experienced in close proximity to other consumers, and its social significance is not clear, except through the 'markers' supplied by the social characteristics of co-consumers (Urry 1990; Urry 1991: 52-53).

In this service organisation, the attitude, appearance, speech and thought processes of the guides are fundamental to the outcome of the guided tour. This type of employment requires what Hochschild (1983) defines as 'emotion work', that is, the heightening of emotional awareness in their tourist clients, often through the manipulation of the guides' own feelings. Such emotional labour may be essential, because it is part of the service being offered for sale (Leidner 1993: 26). When I took part in one of the guided tours, emotional labour was most apparent when the tour was conducted through a gorge, on a river, by the ecotour guide. The guide even commented on the fact that most people become emotional when on the river. He obviously projected and sought that response from the tourists.

Ritual Initiation

In order to become a member and begin upon the first levels of acceptance into the Savannah Guide fraternity, ecotour guides must be willing to be assessed by their peers. The Savannah Guides association utilises a mechanism called 'peer group assessment' which means that new guides must take a number of already accepted, and thus qualified, Savannah Guides on tour with them. There may be as few as three or four experienced guides or there may be the entire contingent participating in the ecotour.

The Savannah Guides are currently devising their own up-graded program of assessment and training. These will be carried out solely within their association.

In the tourism industry, there are many different and increasing numbers of accreditations, licences, endorsements, associations and so on. Many of them are a little bit artificial, or don't seem to have the substance or, the realism that Savannah Guides prides itself on. Peer group assessment seems to really be at the core of that. So, building that into assessment, whether it's, well, peer assessment being one element of it, but the whole support network ... The idea is to try and balance those criteria, so there's some formal learning, training element, there's some experience and association with the organisation, so that you know why you want to be part of it, and there's some that's just bonding. And, the peer assessment overlaps between the skills side and the bonding side. And, it's really interesting to see new members when they come in, how they are really accepted into the fold and, I think, the peer assessment is really a big part of that (Guide 34, male, Employee, Savannah Guide).

Peer assessment has been seen by some as an extremely daunting and overwhelming experience, while others see it as a very positive occurrence,

which provides them with feedback and constructive criticism about their ecotours.

We had hot seat sort of things, where you would go out with a guide all day, put the guide in the hot seat, and then everybody else would tell him [sic] what they liked and what they disliked about what he [sic] did. Now you've got to be a pretty big person to accept that, but you learn very fast. It was a way of very quickly getting attitudes as to what was right and what was wrong. You had to be gentle, but basically, you could deny them. Then, you could get back at somebody because they really razzed on you last time (Guide 21, male, Honorary Guide).

Guide 7 believes that analysing other guides' competencies in the art of interpretation is an applicable mechanism as a rite of passage into the group's alliance. However, he makes the qualification that no one within the organisation is actually an 'expert' when it comes to knowing what is right or what is wrong with another member's interpretative skills. But he believes in this current form of assessment. Guide 33 also agrees with this method of assessing recruits and, further, sees it as an essential part of how the organisation functions. The ritual of assessment helps define who they are, as a group. Compliance with the ritual behaviour also defines their levels of acceptance within the group structure.

[The mechanism for assessment of guides is] evolving rapidly; as we speak, and it's evolving in the right direction, taking more account of the existence of formal training, although that should never be the be all and end all. The peer assessment is, I reckon, the most important part; it validates the Savannah Guides' process. I found that really interesting to watch the first time I saw it, and I think it's really, really valid, provided it's never compromised. One thing that's missing, is some kind of reassessment. Also, a method of assisting members to better themselves. Professional development programs, if you like (Guide 33, male, Tour Operator, Savannah Guide).

Peer group assessment is open, as are many other forms of acceptance criteria, to risk. If an individual or group is deemed unfit to belong to the Savannah Guides, then he or she can be denied admittance during the peer group assessment stage. However, it is probable that a guide would not reach this part of the process, as first right of refusal would most probably come from the Joongai, the executive management committee (see Appendix H, Kleinhardt-FGI 1998: 51-52), upon initial application and subsequent investigation. The Joongai invites individuals and groups to participate in the Schools and at their workshops. The Joongai apparently only invites those people who fit their undisclosed and unadvertised selection criteria. To clarify this point, I contacted one of the members of the Joongai and asked him if anyone is denied access and membership in the Savannah Guides. His answer was, "Yes", but he did not elaborate upon this or explain how or why certain people were not deemed acceptable for membership of the association.

Guide 39 sets out quite clearly and succinctly the importance of peer group assessment and how the process works for the organisation.

I believe in the concept of peer evaluation, which is the cornerstone of Savannah Guide beliefs. It must be won, not a token gesture. The Site Interpreter must be able to interpret the site or area they cover, to the standard set by their peers. Then, having experienced the schools, with the camaraderie and stimulation, there is the option of becoming a Savannah Guide. This is usually taken up. Remember, Savannah Guide status only has real value for those who wish to

open their own business, or who wish to fully participate in the running of the organisation. ... I feel peer assessment is vital. However, it must be comprehensive and done by more than one person (Guide 39, female, Employee, Savannah Guide).

Even though this guide has stated the correct rhetoric pertaining to the desired training and assessment process of each guide, she was unaware that, frequently, many of her peers are not assessed according to the rules. Many recent inductees have seemingly by-passed the intensive, formal process of accreditation, and have been assessed by a single guide, or a combination of one guide and another individual, who may have minor links to the organisation and who has some knowledge of Savannah Guide protocol. This haphazard approach to peer group assessment was undertaken, in one case, by a single long-term member of the Savannah Guides. The single guide who assessed the potential Site Interpreter travelled to his region and assessed both him and his ecotours over a two-week period (Fieldnotes 26.10.00 and 29.10.00). According to the Savannah Guide *Constitution* (1999) and the Savannah Guide *By-Laws* (1999), this is not the correct procedure for the evaluation of potential inductees.

Guide 12 recounts that because the Savannah Guide Schools are an open and public forum, he does not think that peer group assessment is the most expedient or honest assessment process. He told me that in previous years when the membership was smaller and seclusion was possible, the peer group assessment was probably appropriate and the best method to

use. This guide believes that in the current environment, assessment should be done in private, between the nominee and the accreditation panel. He suggested that the public forum part of the process would then become a celebration of acceptance. In fact, I have witnessed the move to this newer form of assessment. Almost from inception, the Savannah Guides used assessment practices that included and involved all members of the group participating in the assessment of each new and potential recruit. The newer assessment practices include a shortened form of the peer group ritual assessment practice where three or four guides 'have a say' about the positive and negative experiences of the potential guide's tour and the interpretation of that tour. I have since learnt that all the verbal assessments are staged productions, agreed upon ahead of time by the three or four guides involved (Fieldnotes 28.10.00).

Many of the extended group of guides believe the older, more personalised form of assessment is being lost in the push for more bureaucracy, and they wish for a return to the older more friendly and informal style of assessment. To illustrate, I took part in a simulated tour when attending my first Savannah Guide School, when one of the guides presented his tour structure on a whiteboard, with accompanying photographs. The Savannah Guides' *Strategic Plan for the Proposed Expansion of the Savannah Guides Network* (1998) states that

Field assessment is currently undertaken by either two members of the Joongai or three Savannah Guides. The assessment gives emphasis to: interpretation skills, professionalism, personal presentation and interpersonal skills and, commitment to Savannah Guides' philosophy (Kleinhardt FGI 1998: 22-23).

However, this potential inductee was encouraged by the Joongai to present his ecotour in an abbreviated and animated form using 'props' to simulate the intricacies, arrangements and itineraries of his tour. No authentic ecotour was undertaken. Even though this contravenes and contradicts the rules and the Constitution of the group (see Appendix F, *Savannah Guides Constitution* 1999: 10-12) and the *Savannah Guides By-Laws* state

Members seeking Site/Roving Interpreter status are required to undergo an assessment of an actual tour presentation by an Assessor nominated by the Company. Members seeking Savannah Guide status are required to partake in a formal interview by an Assessor nominated by the Company (Appendix G, *Savannah Guides By-Laws* 1999: 15)

Nevertheless, the guide was inducted at the next School, as a Site Interpreter. The Joongai obviously have quandaries with transparency and accountability for the induction of new members into the group.

Guide 3 and Guide 8, who operate their own business together, reported that when they were assessed as Site Interpreters, they thought the examination was not as difficult as had been intimated. They felt the process was simpler because the association was seeking new members. They also reported that the assessment process has never been made clear to them. For

example, they are not sure how to progress from being a Site Interpreter to becoming a Savannah Guide. They do not know if they must attend more Savannah Guide Schools and whether or not they will be reassessed at their own site or at any one of a number of other sites. They lack direction in this area.

Guide 13, like many others, feels the peer group assessment is quite a harrowing experience. But it also has the added effect of the unquestioned support of her equals.

It allows us to say to our mates, "You missed this. You missed that", without offending each other. Although we walk around here talking all day long, when it comes to peer group assessment we nurture each other on the day (Guide 13, female, Employee, Site Interpreter).

According to one authority in this area:

Assessment of a Savannah Guide's performance has traditionally been oral and conducted by peer review. For example, [names guide], was appointed to full Savannah Guide status following a uniquely interpreted guided tour of one of the Undara tube cave systems at the Guide School held at Undara in April 1998. I have taken part in six of these peer review sessions. They tend to be forthright and frank, but also encouraging and praiseworthy (Hynes 1999: 11).

Another of the guides argued that it would be better to have individuals assessed by all the other guides, rather than just three or four of the group. This is the older system of assessment, which is now being discarded. He stated that if someone is going to be a Savannah Guide, then a knowledge of

business practices is essential. This guide believes that continued peer group assessment will be the future direction of the organisation and that steps to retain this assessment mechanism have already commenced. Hynes adds, 'there is value in maintaining peer group assessment as an integral part of the assessment system; a part that can be creatively merged with more formalised techniques' (Hynes 1999: 11).

PLATE 5.3

Newly Accredited and Upgraded Savannah Guides



Peer group assessment provides a standard for other guides and for prospective members to judge their own competency and skills. This type of assessment is also a way of binding the group together, as it is a type of ritualistic rite of passage. A particular guide will always remember who

made the comments at the group discussion level of their own peer group assessment. For example, only four or five guides spoke in favour of one particular guide being inducted into the group. They made many positive comments about the scope and informed interpretation of his tour. Negative comments and suggestions for improvement of the tour were not discussed (Fieldnotes 15.04.99). Obviously, the tour and the guide were of a significant value and calibre to be accepted into the group without question or dispute. Therefore, those guides who believe implicitly in the Savannah Guide process of assessment consider it develops a particular ethos that helps bind the guides as a group. Outsiders would find it difficult to judge the feelings of allegiance and bonding this process brings to those within the organisation unless they, themselves, had been in a similar situation.

Formally recognised accreditation has been a significant issue for the Savannah Guide organisation for quite some time. They have been associated with a number of other organisations that provide short course type tests of their skills; for example, obtaining the Aussie Host badge or mandatory First Aid certification, and other more formal affiliations, such as the Inbound Tourism Organisation of Australia (ITOA).

New Site Interpreters are encouraged to apply for Inbound Tourism Organisation of Australia (ITOA) accreditation. It is the policy of Savannah Guides Ltd to have all site interpreters and fully qualified Savannah Guides ITOA accredited. ITOA have a national guide accreditation system which is seeking to improve the standard of guiding service available in this country (Collins 1996: 65).

It must be noted that this adherence to an outside accreditation standard was before 1998, the time when the new regime with more managerial ways of conducting organisational business came to power in the group.

Once Site Interpreters, or Roving Interpreters have been accredited, they are encouraged to be present at Savannah Guide training schools that are held twice a year at various locales in the area. The schools are shifted around the area to permit a procedure of Guide Station performance assessment to be undertaken and to refine the common geographical knowledge of all guides. A trainee who has Site Interpreter accreditation and who has been present at a minimum of one guide school a year for two years can be chosen for elevation to completely approved Savannah Guide. The appointment is determined by the administrators and an appraisal of the candidate's guiding capability is analysed. If the application is approved, the guide in question is encouraged to become a Savannah Guide as determined in the Constitution and articles of the Savannah Guides organisation (Collins 1996: 66).

Some respondents argued strongly against the notion of accreditation for the Savannah Guide group. Nevertheless, they believed in the current approach of the group, where they control their own forms of procedure and promotion.

I think accreditation actually is rubbish. Bureaucrats are absolutely crazy about it. It just gives them something else to run down. But the reality is, I don't know where the guides would go, but my thought on it is that Savannah Guides [should] accredit themselves. You develop a profile high enough, ... I mean, why would you ask somebody who has just received a global award, whether or not they have accreditation. I mean, how bloody stupid, right? I just think it's up to the organisation to accredit themselves, and to be rigid with who [sic] you train. And, if you train people, and you get a good product, then if you don't, then you have ways of censuring and excommunicating, and that sort of thing. But, I think it's up to the guide organisation to run a high degree of proficiency (Guide 21, male, Honorary Guide).

By keeping hold of their own 'brand' of accreditation, the guides create their own standards and competencies to which newcomers must adhere. This also serves to reinforce the notions of exclusivity and superiority held within the association.

Guide 37 commented on the fact that organisational experience counts as a measurement of achievement in the tourism industry.

It [Savannah Guides] is a world leader, because we look at ecotour accreditation level as the entry level and then, build on that. Peer assessment takes theory out and puts practice back in. You get appropriate assessment by demonstration (Guide 37, male, Tour Operator, Savannah Guide).

Accreditation is part of a continuing process of political change. The purpose of accreditation is to improve standards of professionalism, management and quality in the service sector. In this respect, accreditation can be partly perceived as a way of lessening product risk, by indicating that the tour provider has a certain competency of knowledge and skills (Harris and Jago

2001: 386). However, it also promotes notions of exclusivity within the group and, as an adhered 'right of passage', places the group, at least in their minds, above other ecotour guides.

These simple types of affiliations and credentialing have not, thus far, provided any outstanding endorsement of peak performance for the tourists. Savannah Guides has sought, in recent times, to gain formal, easily recognisable accreditation, that is complementary to their own brand of peer group assessment, and that is also of importance to the guiding group themselves, and not just a drawcard for the clients. Through contact with the Ecotourism Association of Australia (EAA) and active participation in the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP), the Savannah Guides are well advanced with their plans to formulate and implement a system that is within the parameters of a national scheme.

Membership Indoctrination

As with any organisational structure, explicit standards are expected and adhered to by members. Savannah Guide Schools, lectures, training, badging and camaraderie all form separate parts of the indoctrination of new members.

Part of the general beliefs, rules and regulations of the Savannah Guide organisation is that they come together, twice a year, for what they

term 'Savannah Guide Schools'. All guides are required to attend two schools every two years as it is considered integral to their training. Therefore, attendance at two out of every four schools is compulsory, or their membership will lapse. However, it is clear that the Constitution of the Savannah Guides is frequently breached, as even though I attended four consecutive guide Schools, there were some guides who did not attend within this timeframe and, yet, their membership has not lapsed, and does not appear to be in doubt.

These schools provide an opportunity for the guides to exchange ideas and information, become familiar with other locations throughout the Gulf country and, in general, catch up with one another and, of course, have a good time. The Schools are also a venue for the guides to be seen by members of the public such as academics, biologists, geologists or other ecotour guides, who are either invited to the Schools or attend to deliver a presentation at one of the scheduled workshops.

The understanding within the group is that the Savannah Guide Schools bring together experts in all types of fields concerned with relevant issues for the guides themselves. Many of the guides believe that the Schools deliver and share information.

For me, I think, the best thing about the Savannah Guide Schools is the satisfaction of seeing the process work. Seeing new people being introduced to the Savannah Guide organisation and seeing the

friendships grow and the development of Savannah Guide culture, if you like, as individuals, 'cause it's great to, it'd be great to get involved, to get involved in the training and the programs and those sorts of things, because they're important. But, I think, the entanglement, there's a little bit more to it, that's what really makes the Savannah Guide organisation what it is (Guide 14, male, Tour Operator, Savannah Guide).

A number of the guides are seen as making valuable contributions to the knowledge base of the Schools, by adding information from their areas of expertise such as history of a certain area, or botanical identification of native species. At one of the Schools I attended, one of the original members gave an oral account of the history of the Savannah Guides organisation. At another School, a geologist from the Northern Territory University (NTU) gave an informative account of geological structures. Many of the guides commented afterwards that the geologist's presentation was one of the most interesting that had been delivered to them at recent Schools.

Many of the guides were very positive about the Savannah Guide Schools and the sorts of knowledge provided. The majority of them see the schools as an opportunity to glean knowledge from each other and to also impart their own particular range of knowledge to the other participants.

Well, I think that there's a lot of very good things about them [the Savannah Guide Schools]. Not least of all the lectures we have there. The big thing, I think, is also the fact that we're meeting with other Savannah Guides and discussing things. It helps us become familiar with other people's products, and other Savannah Guides. And we can recommend that people come to your camp [place of business]. Even with those other [Savannah Guide] places, you know the standard is going to be the same as yours. Maybe even further than

that, maybe even better. People take their time to discuss the finer points of what they get up to, and what they do, as well as learning from these schools. So, there's a lot of learning to be done there for all of us (Guide 29, male, Tour Operator, Site Interpreter).

Interaction between all participants at the Savannah Guide Schools provide a mechanism for training, learning and assessment practices while the guides enjoy the links of friendship and attachment. The interactive processes and bonds of fraternity were, for Guide 15 and Guide 18, the important aspects of the Schools they attend.

Oh, they [the Savannah Guide Schools] are usually a fairly good party. Good get together with everyone and catch up. We're just spread out across the country, so that's how you get to meet a lot of interesting people from around the country. And, we're all interested in the land and what's going on around, so we've all got a common basis. They're just really enjoyable to get together with those sort of people. It's like the Lions Club and some of those sorts of groups, where you just come together with common interests (Guide 15, male, Employee, Roving Interpreter).

The learning. ... The undescrivable [sic]. There's no easy way to say what it is about the schools. It could almost be likened to a religious experience. There's more to it than that (Guide 18, male, Employee, Savannah Guide).

The sense of unity and bonding generated by the holding of Savannah Guide Schools appears to serve as a unifying mechanism between all the guides. The Schools offer time to reflect on their guiding practices, engage with new people, both guides and outsiders, and learn new skills, information and ideas. These schools are seen by the group as an integral part of their 'best practice' and serve to unite them as a coherent and supportive network

throughout their large and diverse work area of the tropical savannas of northern Australia. For many of them, the schools have a kind of 'home coming' effect as they are renewing their ideals and friendships with like-minded individuals.

Some of the guides commented that a number of the abstract presentations provided for them at Savannah Guide Schools had no relevance and were a waste of time because they received no outcome for the time and effort they had expended.

I think that instead of giving [names presenter] an hour and a half, ... it would be nice to say that ..., "We might not have the whole day to be spent with you". So we can start and finish it [the exercise]. Not just put some notes in, where we don't discuss it with everybody, and not finish it, and have somebody else [the presenter] do the final results for us. And, I know that it is pretty difficult at this sort of school type situation, ... [but] it would be nice to see the results (Guide, 17, male, Freelance Guide, Savannah Guide).

In this case, the lecturer delivered the lecture material in such a fashion that the guides could not work through the assigned material in the given time and, more importantly, could not receive feedback on their completed components of the project. The participants could not see the relevance of this presentation because it had no practical application to their lived experiences.

Cohen (1985) argues that, typically, many of the guides learnt their craft in academic instruction rather than simply through previous experience

and unofficial, on the job preparation. Albeit, a number of the better fundamentals and 'deceptions' that make for worthwhile competence in the occupation are gained by informal socialisation into the career and exchange of ideas with more proficient colleagues. While the characteristics and extent of academic training of guides is diverse, a tendency towards finely tuned formalisation and aptitude of guides is found in most countries; this is emphasised in the origin of unique courses or schools for guides, which grant awards; the control of entry into the job by the licensing of guides; and the important initiation of expert organisations of guides (Cohen 1985: 21 - 22).

The schools are the face of the organisation that is presented to the public as a united and cohesive group. Even though there is contradictory evidence about rules and exacting standards from the president and Joongai, the group are able to market themselves as a professional organisation to the public and maintain their public profile as a measure of best practice ecotourism and interpretation.

The importance of training for each guide is something the group takes very seriously. Training is a way in which they can show their clients the credibility and value of the skills they have acquired and refined during their time conducting ecotours. Training also forms part of the accumulative assessment for the levels and status within the Savannah Guide organisation.

Training began with the idea of acquiring knowledge of the Gulf region and being able to translate that from a 'working on the land' situation to an 'interpreting the land' situation. Training is a way of socialising the individual into the group norms, and thus exerting some form of control over them. For example, the demonstration of acquired knowledge about indigenous flora and fauna of a region is mandatory for each guide. General and expanded knowledge of a guide's region and in the case of Roving Interpreters and mobile Savannah Guides, information about numerous areas, is not only condoned; it is expected. The expertise of each guide's learnt skills is accumulated and displayed in a 'test' of suitability during the execution of the ecotour during the assessment phase.

Guide 23 was very positive about the training.

I think it's brilliant. Because, as I said, it gave me an opportunity. I didn't have much of an education, or anything like that. But the training part of it was ... I enjoyed it. Actually, it gave me the opportunity to get into [the Savannah Guides] (Guide 23, male, Employee, Savannah Guide).

Guide 28 talks about the specifics of training and development. He sees the current group ideals as being effective.

There is a structure. You can't please all of the people all of the time. Everybody accepts that. But yeah, the structure, as it is at the moment is okay (Guide 28, male, Tour Operator, Roving Interpreter).

There were also a number of general comments about training that give some further insight into what it means to the guides and how it operates to provide recognition for the group and those belonging to it.

Up to date our training has been at guide schools. So, it's been general information about a lot of subjects, rather than detailed specific information on individual subjects (Guide 6, male, Tour Operator, Savannah Guide).

What our training committee is doing is constructing the Savannah Guide training around those state and federal guidelines that have already been written for ecotourism (Guide 6, male, Tour Operator, Savannah Guide).

The last comment contradicts the fact that the Savannah Guides were seeking accreditation from the Ecotourism Association of Australia (EAA). The EAA has written a set of guidelines and assessment for accrediting tour guides. The Savannah Guides have taken an elitist and superior stance on this issue and have decided they will train and accredit themselves. For example, the attitude of superiority stems from the fact that if they train and accredit themselves, they can award certificates and badges to whomever they choose. Guides then only have to comply with the Savannah Guide standard of training. Self-accreditation of trained guides will be possible, as the Savannah Guides are seeking recognition as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) (Fieldnotes 17.04.99) which will make training and self-accreditation easy and bureaucratically self-sanctioned.

Guide 24 trains and assesses trainee guides usually at the beginning of the season or at any other time, if there are new guides to be trained. She stated that, in order to be recognised as superlative ecotour guides, the entire association has to have the correct training procedures and the correct promotional procedures. However, she did not elaborate how the group should go about providing this level of expertise.

New guides commence as trainees, irrespective of previous guiding experience, except in the case where they have worked at associated Savannah Guide Stations. The trainee is then trained on the job for a minimum training period before accreditation as a Savannah Guide Station site interpreter (Collins 1995: 251).

Guide 33 reported that the schools are an important element of the Savannah Guide interaction and commented about the training components with regard to new initiates:

The genuine peer interaction, I suppose, but that's not the most important to me. Well, I'm also a business owner and an employer and trainer of guides. So, I see its training component as important and valid and valuable. I mean, it's expensive to send people to the schools, not to get them in the door, but to get them to [the schools]. So, it's got to have a really valid and interesting training component. That's more important for the less experienced guides, you know, the new entrants and so on, to help them get to the standards we're looking for (Guide 33, male, Tour Operator, Savannah Guide).

Pearce reports that there are noticeable distinctions in the levels of training of guides. In sum, the guides are self-trained and pursue their own curiosity in reading about and comprehending a given setting (Pearce 1984: 142).

The amount of time spent on training seems to be minimal. However, Guide 30 and Guide 16 elaborate on the time spent on instruction and preparation and have totally opposing comments about the training.

Well, at the moment the training's basically to attend two schools a year. So, it's what you get out of those two schools. I mean, you couldn't really get much more time than to do two schools anyway. So, I think it's sufficient, nothing's perfect. It's as good as you'll get. Better than ... There's no other training mechanism (Guide 30, male, Tour Operator, Roving Interpreter).

Training? It's virtually non-existent. That's why the reliance is so poor, just from the schools I've attended (Guide 16, female, Tour Operator, Site Interpreter).

Guide 16 has only attended two Savannah Guide Schools. She clearly sees a need for a more focused, comprehensive form of training at the Schools. She is correct in acknowledging that attendance at Schools does not equate with training excellence.

The process and management at the Schools does not necessarily reflect the requirements of the individuals and their connected organisations attending the Savannah Guide Schools. One of the male guides believes that, for a time, the training at the schools did not reflect the needs of two distinct guide groups: the owners and managers of ecotourism businesses and the guides themselves. Differences in training requirements and learning abilities are commensurate with the levels in the organisation itself, which highlights importance of different skill levels of Savannah Guides and in the

association itself. The guide also reports that there needs to be a system of recognition for people who bring with them different, relevant skills to Savannah Guide Schools and to the group.

Some of the guides had interesting comments to make about the right to wear the Savannah Guide uniform and badges and about their progression through the levels of attainment. Other Savannah Guides had definite opinions about the way in which levels were gained and bestowed upon people.

It's knowledge, professionalism. When I go to work, I'm going out to do a job. If I don't do it right, it reflects on me. You're not just representing yourself. If you let the team down, you'll get a kick in the arse. You've got to be worthy of the badges to start with, before they'll give it to you [sic]. You've got to go through a baptism of fire, peer assessment, that's what I was doing (Guide 12, male, Tour Operator, Site Interpreter).

Well, I think you have to have this [the levels]. I think you have to go through different stages and each person has to work towards getting to, attaining the next stage. I think that if you just let everyone become a full Savannah Guide, you might tend to, a lot of people might tend to say, "Well, I'll rest on my laurels and do what I like". But, you have to go further, you can go further, it gives you a goal to work towards (Guide 29, male, Tour Operator, Site Interpreter).

The reason why the members of any given group decide to adhere to a certain set of insignia to signify their status could be connected to their individuality, to their existence within a specific culture and to group norms.

Let's be honest, there are people wearing the badge today that wouldn't get it today, and they should be helped to be capable of

getting it today. You know, the guys who got it in the days when the criteria were nowhere near as strict. And, although they may be really knowledgeable about the flora and the fauna and the environment locally, and the culture and the history, the Savannah Guides are also supposed to have a really good knowledge of the workings of the tourist industry to link that environment and culture to tourism realities and most, many of the old ones, haven't got that. Older as in longer term. There's quite a few [sic] and we should help them to get it (Guide 33, male, Tour Operator, Savannah Guide).

Founding members of the Savannah Guides (the older, more pragmatic section of the membership) were able to join the organisation and almost immediately achieve Savannah Guide status. The initial members all knew each other well and knew one another's strengths and weaknesses when it came to bush craft and interpretive skills. There was no need, at that time, for a rigid and inflexible set of regulations pertaining to training and assessment criteria. Consequently, most of the initial members express dislike for the newer, more rationalised format of the association and believe the group should get back to basics and to its original foundations.

To standardise the interactive components of service jobs, including emotional labour, organisations can impose dress standards (uniforms) or other controls on personal demeanour and rules about the correct way to treat clients. This can sometimes be accompanied by attempts at psychological reorientation, as in the military (Leidner 1993: 27). That is, as the identified leader of the tour, the guide, dressed in their own distinctive uniform, and through the use of certain directions of impression

management, exerts a particular kind of pressure or power over the tour group, and in return receives the desired emotional response. Thus, the visitor pays for and receives the 'ecoexperience'

The notion of camaraderie calls into question the feelings and attitudes the Savannah Guides have for one another. Further, camaraderie is one of the reasons they feel so strongly about the attendance at the Savannah Guide Schools and it is one of the main reasons the schools are still 'working' after more than ten years. According to a long-term member of the group, the overall ethos of the schools, and the cohesive way they are facilitated, develops the camaraderie and is a significant part of the association as it is today.

Guide 25 reports that the camaraderie he has experienced from attendance at Savannah Guide Schools has been a positive and uplifting experience.

I think there's a lot of camaraderieship [sic] you get from here and there's not a person here that wouldn't do something for you, if you needed them. So, it builds a camaraderieship [sic]. I think it's important, building up belonging. You always come away from these schools fresh and re-invigorated, sort of like, energised again. You get a lot of energy from the course and become energetic and often you do need a bit of a pep up because you can grow stagnant. It's good to be with people and get excited about what you're doing then (Guide 25, male, Employee, Site Interpreter).

Guide 34 believes that camaraderie is integral to other parts of organisational development. He reports that you cannot have an association that will continue to grow and expand unless you have this type of 'time out' and friendship appropriation built into the group and its dynamics.

In any business these days, there doesn't seem to be time to stop and have a cup of tea and a chat, and talk about other, how things are. I mean, business doesn't work like that now. This is one of those rare opportunities, where you can actually talk to people and say, "Hello". Rather than passing them for two minutes on the road. And, you know, the memories that happen here, are the sort of things that you will remember for years and, that form the basis of recollection and reminiscences and all that. You know, we are creating nostalgia (Guide 34, male, Employee, Savannah Guide).

'Like-minded' seems to be a stock phrase which is brought out to explain the closeness and the bond between the members of the group. But it was never used as part of any of the 'official' meetings and schools that I attended.

Well, obviously there's the opportunity, at remote sites, to get together with like-minded people who work in tourism and who have the same ideas as you ... a friendly environment. I do feel that that's a very good thing, particularly when you get to all those remote sites (Guide 16, female, Tour Operator, Site Interpreter).

I guess, trying to analyse it would be the meeting of like-minded people. I guess anywhere, when you have like-minded people, you have this feeling of common goals and the bonding (Guide 18, male, Employee, Savannah Guide).

Another member believes that the schools provide the platform for the camaraderie and the networking to take place. However, he also thinks that it could lead to some guides becoming stagnant when they stay at one place for too long.

Guide 30 did not like the social aspect of the schools at all. He felt that there was not enough time to allow for the 'friendship side of things'. He just wanted the information from experts to use in his ecotourism business.

He talks about his feelings on camaraderie:

I'm in it for the training, for more training. Like, the lecture today in geology, the function of the organisation is to network. I want to learn more and I want to hear from experts. The camaraderie is okay, but I'm here to learn. If that stops, if it gets too political, I'm out. I don't have the time to just live on fuzzy feelings. So, we're going out with the guides for dinner. They want it. They say it's a good part of it. I could do without it (Guide 30, male, Tour Operator, Roving Interpreter).

Camaraderie is a reflection of the closeness this group feel toward one another, as members of the same organisation, even though they may only see each other twice a year. Camaraderie is also connected to the fact that they all 'know' there are others 'out there' who have the same problems and concerns about their ecotour guiding and the tyranny of isolation that reinforces these feelings. But it is also indicative of the cohesive force that binds them together as a group, with each individual embracing common ideals. Further, camaraderie is one of the controlling mechanisms used by the Joongai, the executive management committee, to instil implicit notions of exclusivity and elitism in order to keep the group cohesive in its attempt to be perceived as the most unique ecotour guide association in the world.

The Savannah Guides often make the comment that, “We are unique in the world”. What they mean by this is, that it is unique, because **they** believe there is no other ecotourism organisation to compare to theirs worldwide. This is partly due to their adherence to practices of exclusivity and superiority. If they see themselves as unique, it can become part of their rhetoric and part of their marketing image. Professionalisation leads to legitimisation. However, Guide 21 reported at one of the schools that there are other similar organisations in existence; one in Tonga and one in Victoria, Australia (Fieldnotes 26.10.00).

Informed, Authoritative Interpretation

Interpretation of the areas or locations the ecotour guides work in is the cornerstone of their profession. The more informed and informative they are, the higher the praise and recognition from both inside and outside the tourism industry. That is, recognition comes from both their peers and their tourist clients. In fact, the interpretive process plays a major part in the formation and conduct of their guided tours and without informative and accurate information the tour would not exist. According to Cohen, ‘interpretation and not the mere dissemination of information, is the distinguishing communicative function of the trained tourist guide’ (Cohen 1985: 15). The Savannah Guides use managerial speak when referring to processes they undertake during the day-to-day working hours of the

ecobusinesses. 'World's best practice' is the phrase they often use to describe their expertise in all areas, including interpretation.

There are also other elements involved in the interpretation of the various areas for the tourists by the ecotour guides. If the location they are interpreting is a static site, then there is only the history, geology, botany, flora and fauna of the one locale to be learnt for the purposes of the interpretation. However, if the ecotour is of a significant duration, such as seven to fourteen, and up to twenty-one days, there are a plethora of facts and information to be learnt and remembered by the guides. Clearly, the ecotour guides in this study are aiming to provide a marketable product that is an informed, authoritative style of interpretation for the ecotourists.

PLATE 5.4

An Interpretation Session



Even though guides have their own particular style and mode of delivery, the interpretation of each area or site is based upon five distinct categories. These are a mixture of the following: history, biology, geology, botany and mythology. Components of each of these categories were included in every tour in which I participated. Guide 38 reports the types of delivery he uses when interpreting for tourists.

It really depends. A big part of that is purely where your customers lead you. Sometimes it's factual, sometimes, you know, they are more interested in the stories of the area. Sometimes they want to know botanical names. You have to be adaptable. You can't go in there with one set format. It's not everyone's cup of tea. So, you have to be adaptable with interpretations and be oriented towards the history of the area. So, you've got to have a history guide. You've still got to be able to pass on the other information, but your bias is going to be history orientated, or it's going to be flora or fauna orientated. You have to be fairly flexible in how you interpret whatever. The group dynamics is the basis of it, especially when you are dealing, it's a bit different say, with the likes of Undara, where you've got those people for two hours, and you need to pass over certain information to the group. We are talking about being with those people for sixteen days, twenty-four hours a day. There's a lot of other different aspects involved in that. So, it's possibly not only interpretation, it's the basic thing of getting along with people and presenting, giving them a good time (Guide 38, male, Employee, Savannah Guide).

Interpretation is, in practice, like a game of chance: at a given time, a particular experience may prove 'right' – and could significantly influence an individual's life, while for others, it may contain little significance. Generating positive feelings and emotive experiences is a crucial component of any interpretive activity and, as such, remains a largely unexamined facet

of interpretation. Investigating the practical features of components that affect tourists could make positive advances in the area of interpretation, and enable it to become more effectual – and stimulating (Howard 1998: 67; Muhlhauser and Peace 1998; Peace 2001).

An historical basis for interpreting was a common and popular mode of delivery by the guides for the tour groups. Ecotour guides perform certain tasks in the delivery of interpretive tours to create verisimilitude and authentic atmosphere. Guide 8 relates her ideas about interpreting the historical tour site where she works. Another added factor here is the notion of ambience, or impression management.

The cemetery tour is done in the form of story telling. I dress in a pioneer costume and usually do the tour at night with lanterns to create atmosphere. We visit about seven graves. There is some factual information such as dates, excerpts from court reports and details from burial registers, but most of the information was obtained from oral history interviews. Some of the stories given to me by the descendants of the pioneers may not be one hundred per cent factual, but they would have been founded on fact some time in the late 1800s. The mine tour is more factual, although it's impossible to know if some of the stories about the old explorers are accurate. The dates and figures and accounts of mining processes are factual and documented. We try to keep the tours 'conversational' so that they don't become rote and boring. We encourage visitors to get involved and ask questions. Most of our groups are small and this can be achieved. We try to involve guests in our project, and to an extent in our lifestyle. At the end of the mine tour we all sit on our deck and have tea and coffee and cake and a chat. This may go on for three hours! (Guide 8, female, Tour Operator, Site Interpreter).

Similarly, Guide 16 believes that the historical component is the most important part to get across in an interpretation for the tourists, but it is not the only factor.

It's the history of the area, the Aboriginal history of the area, the bush tucker, the wildlife and the vegetation. We present it widely. We don't just concentrate on one thing. And again, it may vary; it depends on the type of group. You may have a group of bird watchers. There are different spots for looking at the birds (Guide 16, female, Tour Operator, Site Interpreter).

The ecotourism site where this guide works has many bird hides and places of cover for the tourists to peruse and observe birds with ease and in relative comfort. Furthermore, this particular site also places a strong emphasis on relating the local indigenous and colonial history as accurately as possible.

Uniquely, nature-based tour operators must also possess strong knowledge of and an even stronger affinity for natural areas. This knowledge extends to the natural history of the area, flora and fauna, an understanding of ecological process, the area's geology, and about Aboriginal and post contact history (McKercher and Robbins 1998: 185).

Guide 24 believes that story telling is the way to make the connection between the factual and the lived experience. It also helps to explain the historical background to a tour or site.

Story telling. Well, ... I don't know about you, but if somebody is telling a story, I listen. And, if you can make it all fit into place, it's not just the lava tubes, it's not just the eucalypts, everything is there for a reason, and each thing compliments each other. So, if you do it in a story fashion and say, "Okay. This is here because of this and because of ..." People will listen and understand. My whole tour is based on getting people to understand and appreciate what we've got, and to look after what we've got (Guide 24, female, Employee, Savannah Guide).

In national parks, botanical gardens and zoos, it is frequently necessary for guides to talk about botany, geology, zoology and anthropology. Bus tour and city guides might explain only particular areas or buildings, but they will require background knowledge about both the history and the flora and fauna of the locale in order to address inquiries (Grinder and McCoy 1985: 7). The Savannah Guides strive to use accurate and authentic information when leading and interpreting a tour. They believe they are adhering to 'world's best practice' in doing so and are upholding and fulfilling the obligations that have been set in place by the overarching organisation.

Grinder and McCoy (1985) note that, '[g]uides often believe that the best use of their time is to provide visitor groups with as much information as possible' (Grinder and McCoy 1985: 62). Moreover, research undertaken by Holloway suggests that most tourists seek or expect a unique encounter of some variety on their journey. Occasionally this anticipation is met, and the locality or occurrence itself completely matches the expectation of the tourist. Guides, however, desire to ensure that their clients delight in an experience

that is more than authentic (MacCannell 1976), and they may use their dramaturgical skills (Goffman 1959) to rearrange the excursion (Holloway 1981: 387).

Guide 39 remarks that ecotour guides will use every interpreting technique at their disposal. This guide uses body language, analogies, maps, drawings and entertaining stories; anything she can think of to allow the guest to learn through enjoyment and thus, allow her own passion and enthusiasm to flow through her interpretation. However, she did add that each interpretive session does vary with the type of tourist, ranging from children at one end of the scale to academics at the other end.

It is a combination of these things, which requires adjustment for different groups, for example, ages and backgrounds. Historical is the best, involving character stories, like the Jardine brothers (Guide 36, male, Employee, Savannah Guide).

Thus, communication abilities are a necessary element of the guide's skills. One of the best components of guided tours for tourists is the freedom to relate to someone who has information and perceptiveness and who can respond to questions in an intelligible fashion. Knowledge is transmitted more efficiently from individual to individual, particularly when it correlates specifically to the learner's own experiences. It is this component that makes the interpretation unforgettable and significant (Grinder and McCoy 1985: 6; Peace 1998). The transmission of interpretive facts highlights the differences between the two groups within the Savannah Guides organisation. There is

that of the 'old school', who wish for a return to the original concept of Savannah Guides, where mateship and experience sharing and story telling were the main basis for membership. Informal friendly banter was used as a basis for informing ecotourists. This position is opposed by the newer cohort, or the group who prefer the rationalised approach to ecotour guiding and interpretation. The newer and younger cohort, prefer a more factual and disguised regimentation in their delivery of interpretive information and tour logistics. The rationalised approach to interpretive tour guiding includes an agenda where all tours and interpretation must follow a strict set of guidelines and maintain certain standards and acknowledged levels of competence in order for the guides to retain their membership of the umbrella organisation. In this more rationalised approach, there is less scope for allowing the more individualistic side of the ecotour guides to emerge. Strict approaches and rules about guided ecotours are also a way of exerting and maintaining an authoritative position over the tourists.

There are a plethora of ways to interpret a site or a location or flora and fauna to the tourists (Mulhauser and Peace 2001). These range from uninformed hearsay to technologically produced slide and sound shows. Some of the guide Stations and Sites have fixed interpretive displays, but the art of interpretation is the personal preference of each guide.

As you are aware, there are infinite methodologies to interpreting from participatory, story telling, straight factual presentations, audio visual interpretation, experiential and value challenging. Amongst

the crew ... we have practitioners of each of these. Personally, I use a combination of straight factual and experiential learning. I think individual styles must reflect the nature of the interpreter – any departure from that results in a superficial interpretation, and not particularly believable (Guide 9, male, Employee, Savannah Guide).

Guide 4 also likes to use the geology of the area to begin his interpretation. He then speaks about how it influences the area, and once created the gorge and the water in that location. He then links that to the geology of the Riversleigh fossil field, which is quite close by, and explains how geology is forming today. He uses a geological base for his technique of interpretation with story telling and some historical components included.

Within the scope of many guided interpretive tours, the guides make a great effort to include and involve the tour party they are guiding. Often, this is an easy and painless process. However, there are times when, for no apparent reasons, the tour guides seem unable to engage with the tour group. Whether or not this is based upon the personality of the people constituting the group it is impossible to determine. But it is always a point of dismay with the guides when this does happen.

Yes indeed, I get those that are not interested, who like to go and sit down under a tree. I had one lady once, it was a real surprise to me, she looked bored stiff. She was fiddling around with her hands, looking around, trying to talk to other people that I was trying to talk to. Everyone else was interested, but she wasn't. She absolutely wasn't interested. Until I got to the old machinery, and I started explaining how the old machinery worked. She ended up standing on my feet [laughter]. She wouldn't leave me from then on. So, I don't know what triggered it. All of a sudden she decided that I was talking about something interesting. She came right over and was

standing about that far away from me [indicates] (Guide 11, male, Employee, Site Interpreter).

Howard argues that, '[a]s interpretation is a leisure time activity participants make a choice about whether they participate' (Howard 1998: 67).

One of the Savannah Guides relates that sometimes it is very difficult to acquire genuine information to impart to the tourists. Frequently, the guides are unclear about what is authentic information and what is of a spurious origin.

I like to tell them the facts, or as close to it as possible. There are some times when you can be misled too. Even by someone whose books you read. I've got two books there, about birds, a particular bird, and a kind that are not even, you know, I mean, in one book it says that there are none of the birds west of here, and the other one claims they go as far as Hells Gate. The purple crowned wren. These two books have got two different stories about where the birds are (Guide 11, male, Employee, Site Interpreter).

The content of the interpretive performance can be best defined as a type of 'verbal communication'. The discourse occurring between the guide and the tourists can have many variants such as expressive, metalingual, poetic, and standard functions. As well as the accepted notion of ecotour guides as messengers of informational discourse regarding site features, the tour guides employ emotional discourse about their own feelings and attitudes toward the site, and a directive discourse to lead the participation of the tourists. Sometimes, tour guides use fictional genres, such as stories, myths and superstition, which utilise poetic licence. Informal chatter often

punctuates the more formal levels of discourse as the guide becomes acquainted with each tourist. When guides comment on previous tours they have guided, ask tour participants to add to and enhance tour information and concentrate on developing a particular 'thread' to their narratives, metalingual discourse occurs (Fine and Haskell Speer 1985: 77; Muhlhauser and Peace 2001).

Conclusion

This group of ecotour guides is arguably elitist, even if this runs counter to many guides ideas and wishes. They strive to be 'the best' in the world and unique in their field. They use their dress code, forms of interpretation, accreditation, camaraderie, peer group assessment and organisational codes of conduct to sustain and reify their own particular 'brand' of tour guiding. They use the rhetoric, borrowed from business, of world's best practice, stakeholders and sustainability. They are also a 'network' of tour operators, owners and employees who appear to be only interested in their own forms of ecotourism, interpretation and accreditation. The guides perceive all outside tour companies as inferior and substandard. It is apparent that membership of this organisation can only be attained through what potential members can offer them, not through what the organisation can offer the members. Prospective members have to be prepared to accept the organisation's rules and regulations. The rules and regulations are also a mechanism for inculcating new members into the association and ensuring

the perpetuation of elitism and exclusivity. Many of the group's members appear to be charmed by the rhetoric and have succumbed to the managerial expressionism and ritualistic performance.

Even though the Savannah Guides present themselves as a structured, organised and competent association, it is also apparent that they are somewhat disorganised. The guides do not always adhere to their own rules, frequently use 'damage control' methods of management and take a haphazard approach to identification and initiation of potential inductees.

These guides have adopted their own group philosophy of the interpretation 'product'. The tourists are paying for the 'experience' of being introduced to nature and having nature interpreted for them in return for a price. Thus, the guided tour has been assigned a value. It has evolved as a means to an end. The final product is a vast appropriation of 'reflexive experiences' which blend emotion and reality into the continuing perceptions of the everyday world (MacCannell 1976: 23).