

# Camping to change the world

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## Abstract

As well as providing amazing recreational experiences, camping can nurture our connection with both nature and one another. The development of such deeper relational competence is needed for our species to take the next step in our psychosocial evolution. Without this we can expect ongoing environmental degradation, social strife and personal anxiety. By being aware of the philosophical underpinnings and possible practical applications of these ideas, we can all be in a better position to appreciate and experience camping at a much deeper and rewarding level. This holistic view of camping aims to integrate humour, humility and hope.

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As a youngster I remember laughing at the definition of camping as "loitering with-in-tent". In this presentation I want to reframe and examine deeply what that 'intent' might be, how it gets constructed, and what the consequences of different 'intents' might be.

As indicated in my title, I believe that camping – along with many other activities – has the potential to change the world (for the better). Camping can be both a means for developing our 'good intent', and for taking meaningful action to create the better world(s) we would want to live in, and that we would want to pass on to future generations.

Perhaps I should first tell you where I am coming from, a little about my association with camping, and about some of my assumptions and the frameworks I use to think about topics such as the one we are dealing with.

I was born in Aylesbury in the UK during WWII, and we camped throughout my youth – both with my family and through the Cubs and Scouts. I did some camping with my children in North America, and I camp occasionally now with my partner in Australia, where I have lived since 1995. In addition, each year a group of us take our Social Ecology undergraduate students for a one-week camping trip in the Blue Mountains (at Glastonbell, near Bell, NSW).

I looked up 'camping' in the 'Oxford Book of Quotations' and the only reference was to H.G. Wells, who in his novel *Bealby* (Part III, p. 7) stated:

The life of breezy freedom resolves itself in practice chiefly into washing up and an anxious search for permission to camp.

This certainly was an important part of my memory of camping with my family.

It is interesting that in Lancashire, where my father comes from, the word 'camping' is used to refer to situations when someone engages you in conversation, for example, when you meet someone unexpectedly on the street. I also remember having numerous meaningful conversations with other campers.

One meaning of the Latin word *campus*, from which 'camping' is derived, is 'level ground'. I certainly remember much time spent searching for such ground – and also sometimes crawling into my sleeping bag only to find that the bit of ground I was on was far from level.

One of my father's entertaining stories relates to a camping trip that he made as a young Sea Scout. On the last day of the trek he arrived about midnight on Chorleywood Common (Hertfordshire). It was pitch black with no moonlight, and he had no torch, so it was difficult to find a suitable site, until by chance he came upon a piece of flat ground. He pitched his tent quickly and, being exhausted from the long trek, went to sleep immediately. He was awakened in the morning by a very angry local – an early morning golfer. He had pitched his tent on the golf green of the 9<sup>th</sup> hole! An innocent mistake, but one he would never make again.

With my love of nature, I did an undergraduate degree in zoology and a PhD in ecology – which involved spending two years studying life in a bat-inhabited cave in Trinidad. There my camp was a hammock covered in a mosquito net strung between two trees close to the cave mouth. Occasionally I shared the trees with a three-toed sloth, several snakes (some poisonous), hundreds of tree frogs, and a

diverse range of insects, spiders and their relatives.

I also became a psychotherapist, a social and environmental activist, served on numerous governmental and non-governmental committees, appeared regularly on a television show called *Summer Living*, which often featured camping stories, and in 1996 I was appointed Foundation Chair of Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney.

Social Ecology (SE) is providing the main framework for this presentation (Hill, 1999). It is concerned with issues of ecological sustainability, social justice, processes of change, personal and community development, values-based decision-making, and our psychosocial evolution as a species. In doing this, SE takes into account personal, socio-cultural (including, but not privileging economics), ecological and 'spiritual' considerations and their interrelationships. I regularly use this framework to reflect on the past, engage in the

present, and to vision, plan, make decisions and take actions in relation to improved futures.

This perspective is reflected in the following tables, which summarise many of the values upon which my framework for thinking and acting is based. Note particularly the implied mutualistic relationships in Table 1 between personal, social and natural capital, between the rich diversity of one's personal relationships with both cultural diversity and biodiversity, and between personal, cultural and ecological development (underlined and in **bold**) (Hill, 1980, 1991, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Mulligan & Hill, 2001). My challenge to campers is to ask in what ways are your camping activities contributing to (or conversely, undermining or setting up barriers to) each of the areas listed in these tables. If we regard camping as being still at an early stage in its development, it may open up our thinking to a vast range of largely undeveloped opportunities and possibilities for the future development of this activity that we value so highly.

**Table 1: A social ecology approach to broadening and contextualizing the activities associated with camping by means of applying critical 'testing questions' to all initiatives**

<p><b><u>Personal – Does it (every aspect of camping: the equipment we use, where and when we do it, our thoughts about it, and all our activities associated with it) support:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• empowerment, awareness, creative visioning, values and worldview clarification, acquisition of essential literacies and competencies, responsibility, wellbeing and health maintenance, vitality and <i>spontaneity</i> (<u>building &amp; maintaining personal capital</u> – personal sustainability)?</li> <li>• caring, loving, responsible, mutualistic, <i>negentropic relationships</i> with diverse others (valuing equity and social justice), other species, place and planet (home and ecosystem maintenance)?</li> <li>• positive total life-cycle <i>personal development</i> (lifelong learning) and 'progressive' change?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Socio-Political – Does it support:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trust, accessible, collaborative, responsible, creative, celebrational, <i>life-promoting community and political structures and processes</i> (<u>building &amp; maintaining social capital</u> – cultural [including economic] sustainability)?</li> <li>• the valuing of 'functional' high <i>cultural diversity</i> and mutualistic relationships?</li> <li>• positive <i>cultural development</i> and co-evolutionary change?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Environmental – Does it support:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• effective <i>ecosystems functioning</i> (<u>building &amp; maintaining natural capital</u> -- ecological sustainability)?</li> <li>• 'functional' high <i>biodiversity</i>, and prioritized use and conservation of resources?</li> <li>• positive <i>ecosystem development</i> and co-evolutionary change?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>General – Does it support:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>proactive</b> (vs reactive), <b>design/redesign</b> (vs just efficiency and substitution) and <b>small meaningful collaborative and individual initiatives</b> that can be achieved (vs heroic, Olympic-scale, exclusive, high risk ones) and their <b>public celebration</b> at each stage -- to facilitate the spread of concern for wellbeing and environmental responsibility?</li> <li>• focusing on key opportunities and <b>windows for change</b> (pre-existing and contextually unique change 'moments' and places)?</li> <li>• effective monitoring and evaluation of progress (broad, long-term, as well as specific and short-term) by identifying and using <b>integrator indicators</b> and <b>testing questions</b>, and by being attentive to all <b>feedback and outcomes</b> (and redesigning future actions &amp; initiatives accordingly)?</li> </ul>
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**Table 2: Comparison of ecological understandings and the prevailing assumptions and practices within industrial societies that are likely to be influencing our thoughts and actions in relation to camping**

Ecological understandings	Prevailing assumptions/practices
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Responsive to early indicators</li> <li>2. Cyclical, regenerative relationships</li> <li>3. Growth subject to limiting factors</li> <li>4. Most resources used for maintenance</li> <li>5. Based on solar and renewable energy</li> <li>6. Mutualism favoured</li> <li>7. Functional diversity and complexity confer stability</li> <li>8. Rich diversity of specialists, generalists, roles and niches within communities</li> <li>9. Uniqueness of time and place (reflected in all structures and processes)</li> <li>10. Gradual co-evolutionary structural change, with occasional bursts of creativity</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wait for crises</li> <li>2. Linear material flows</li> <li>3. Unlimited growth (unsustainable)</li> <li>4. Production overemphasized</li> <li>5. Reliant on fossil fuels and nuclear power</li> <li>6. Competition emphasized</li> <li>7. Simplified, highly controlled systems (dependant and unstable)</li> <li>8. Few specialists and roles valued</li> <li>9. Structures and processes universalis everything the same, everywhere, all the time</li> <li>10. Rapid, forced change with few beneficiaries a many 'casualties'</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Cultural and personal imperatives</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building personal, social and ecological capital and well-being, and a sense of enough; and living off the interest</li> <li>2. 'Conserver Society' (equitably meeting basic and aesthetic needs)</li> <li>3. Appropriate scale, resource efficient (solar renewables); structures processes and technologies minimizing waste and impact</li> <li>4. Values-based decision making by an informed, participatory population (public education, access, transparency and inclusion) – for the greatest good (social justice)</li> <li>5. Regional self-reliance, shared leadership and responsibility; and context sensitive and specific designs, products and services</li> <li>6. Right to meaningful work (sense of purpose, place and valued roles within vibrant communities)</li> <li>7. 'Understanding', creative, and design focused science, technology and arts, and their integration</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inequitable and accumulating personal wealth (unsatisfiable and unsustainable); living off the capital</li> <li>2. Growing consumption (increasingly emphasizing compensatory wants)</li> <li>3. Mega, powerful resource consuming; structures process and technologies waste producing and impacting</li> <li>4. Market forces (political and consumer manipulation through advertising and exclusion; short-term narrow focus, with neglect of externalities) – monetary system of values (economic rationalism)</li> <li>5. Transglobal corporate managerialism and hierarchical control; homogenized designs, products and services</li> <li>6. Mobile, disposable workforce (loss of sense of purpose, meaning, connection to place and community)</li> <li>7. Controlling and problem solving, specialised science and technology (understanding science and arts as disposable luxuries)</li> </ol>

It is as if we were hypnotised twice, firstly into accepting pseudo-reality as reality, and secondly into believing we were not hypnotised.

Such a hypnotised mind would be likely to be unwilling to take the time to reflect on the points raised in the above tables, and on this presentation as a whole.

I have also found the following three quotations helpful to keep in mind.

Suddenly I realised that nobody knew anything and from that point on I began to think for myself (Maurice Nicoll, 1952)

The task is not so much to see what no one has yet seen, but to think what no one has yet thought about what everybody sees (Arthur Schopenhauer, 1890).

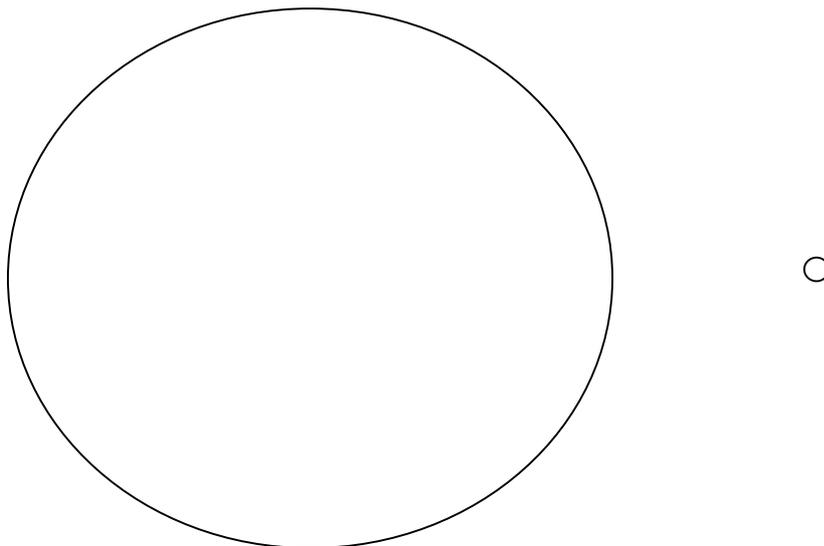
It ain't what we don't know that gets us into trouble, it's what we know that ain't right (Will Rogers, USA Comedian).

We so often accept information uncritically and postpone or remain fearful of doing our own thinking.

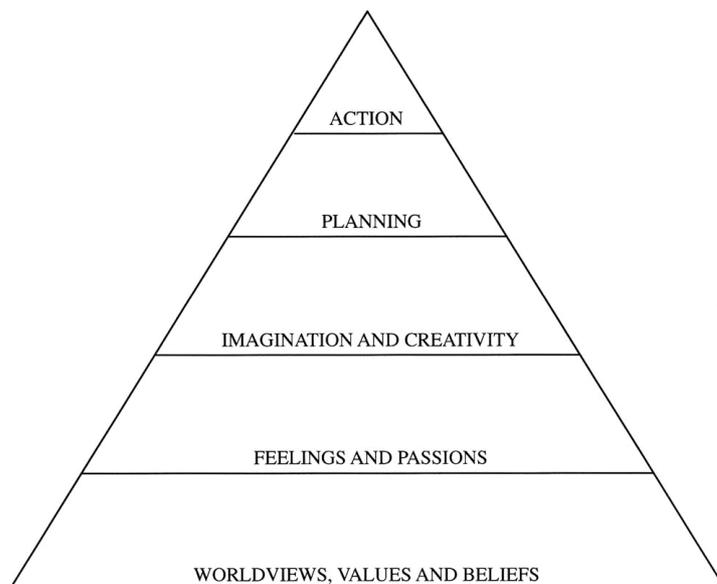
I have also found three images useful to keep in mind when opening up my thinking. The first is from a French agronomist, Andre Voisin (1959), the second is from John Heron (1992), and the third from Lloyd DeMause (1982).

Voisin (1959, see Fig. 1 below) reminds us powerfully with this diagram that most of what is remains a mystery, and that if we intend to be fully in the world it is this as yet 'unknown' (or poorly known) realm that we must find ways to engage with. Tragically most of our attention, and nearly all formal education, is concerned with the small dot!

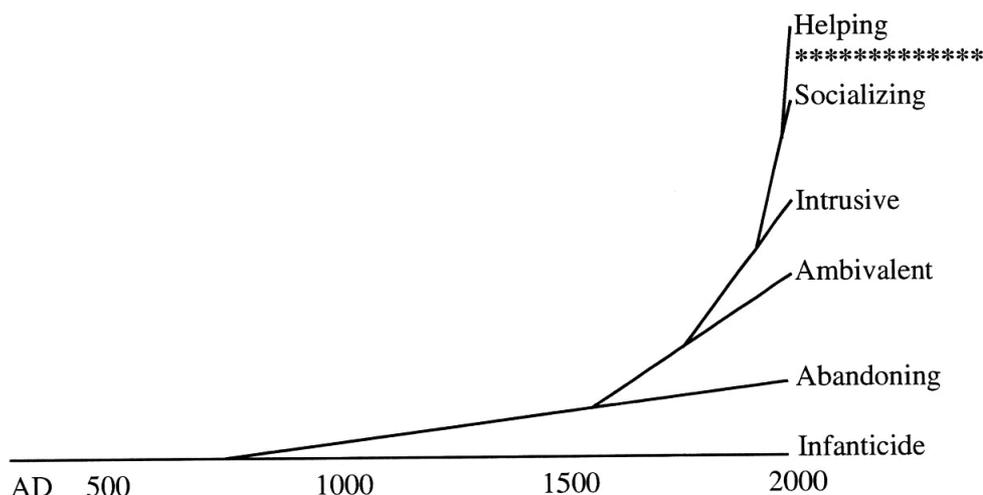
Heron (1992, Fig. 2 above) similarly observes that our attention is biased towards planning and acting, and that we neglect our imaginative world, upon which all 'good' plans are dependent, and also our feelings and passions, which are the source of our direction, energy and persistence. I have added a further layer, which relates to our worldviews, values and beliefs, which provide our frameworks for decision-making. Ideally, this should be drawn as a cycle or spiral, with the outcomes of our actions providing feedback to our worldviews, values and beliefs, thereby permitting their ongoing development. The challenge for us in all of our endeavours is to keep in mind our values and passions, and to build on these creatively to develop wise plans for responsible actions.



**Fig. 1:** The sum total of human knowledge is depicted on the right, the rest on the left



**Fig. 2:** Levels of consideration in relation to action (the top two usually being overemphasised)



**Fig. 3:** One view of the psychosocial evolution of our dominant approaches to child rearing (whereas 'Helping' recognises each child as a social, potentially benign being capable of developing his/her own agenda and is supportive of this developmental process, all other stages involve the imposition of adult agendas on children, thereby undermining their potential development).

DeMause (1982, see fig. 3 above) argues, equally profoundly, firstly that our species has undergone progressive psychosocial evolution, and secondly that we are at a critical stage of moving from 'socialising' to 'helping' (I prefer 'enabling') our children in their development. The former, like all previous stages, involves the imposition by adults, and society in general, of foreign agendas (invariably inappropriate in content and with respect to time and space) on children who have their own benign, uniquely personal and contextually fine-tuned agendas.

This oppressive process results in their disempowerment, loss of awareness, the development of adaptive non-benign thoughts and behaviours, and a sense of disconnectedness, both from their external and internal worlds. In contrast to this, 'enabling' child-rearing strategies have the potential of supporting the development of individuals who are empowered, aware, loving, caring, responsible, creative, visionary, knowledgeable, competent, wise, and with a zest for life. Such individuals are likely to be much more capable

of acting alone, and in collaboration with others, to radically transform and redesign our institutional structures and process, and our lifestyles, to make the world a better place for all.

In whatever ways that we have been raised, we all retain this capacity for benign action, and in our own ways are always endeavouring to do our best to act on this capacity. But, too often, for most of us, because our efforts to do this have repeatedly been thwarted, and because the dominant cultural pressures make this difficult, we commonly settle for going along with things and postponing such action, and for substituting 'adaptive' and 'compensatory' behaviours. These involve compromising our values, seeking stimulation to feel 'alive', consumptive lifestyles, obsession with appearance and impressing others, loss of purpose and direction, and denial concerning all of this. Camping is certainly not immune from any of these tendencies.

The current state of the world, with its environmental degradation, conflicts, inequities, prejudices, and other negative characteristics, is the collective result of all of these adaptive and compensatory expressions of thinking and acting.

So the challenge for our thinking and acting in relation to camping is to reflect on the ways in which it expresses our benign potential, and also the ways in which it might be adaptive and compensatory. To what extent is camping an escape, or a way of impressing others? In what ways does camping enable you to relate to nature and others, or conversely to remain separate from and in control of such engagement? In what ways does it support you to 'help' your (and others') children to discover and develop their own unique agendas, and to what extent does it involve imposing your (and society's) agendas upon them?

I realise that these are challenging questions, and difficult things to think about, especially when it is likely that most of us have come to this conference with already thought-out agendas to present and promote (some compatible with these ideas --- for example, many of the ideas in Tom Slater's 1984 book *The Temporary Community* -- but others possibly not). But if we are to change our world for the better, then these are the sort of questions that we must be willing to consider. Furthermore, camping provides us with amazing opportunities to take what I call 'small meaningful steps that we can guarantee to carry through to completion' towards thinking and acting in ways that reflect our benign potential.

For most of us it is a lot easier to develop such benign behaviours out in nature than in our mostly urban homes and places of work, where

so many negative cultural pressures influence our thinking and action.

This may all seem very idealistic, and even unrealistic. However, all that I have said derives from my own experiences, and from those of others who have dared to engage in such thinking. The experiences of Drs Williamson and Pearse (1980) and colleagues in the Peckham Experiment in the UK around the time of WWII have been particularly encouraging for me. They found that when people, especially children, were treated in the ways I have suggested above, amazing things happened. During their 8-year experiment with nearly 2,000 families who were using the facilities of a community centre in a suburb of London, there was not a single marriage breakdown, not a single case of bullying between children, children rarely chose to play competitive games or if they did, they de-emphasised their competitive aspects, and their abilities to relate and care for themselves, one another and the environment improved enormously (Stallibrass, 1989). Others have reflected on what this might mean for child rearing (Jackins, 1997; Sazanna, 1999; Solter, 1989), education (Hill, Wilson & Watson, 2004) and relationships (Josselson, 1996; Shem & Surrey, 1998).

I want to elaborate a little more on 'relationships', and on how we develop relational competence. I have been particularly influenced by Ruthellen Josselson's (1996) recognition of how, in most Western societies, this seems to involve eight successive and overlapping 'stages', the first four being sensory and the second four being cognitive. I have constructed a table to summarise these and extend her framework by using it to suggest that it may also help to explain how we develop abilities to relate to nature, the environment, and other species (Table 3, see also Hill, 2003).

Camping has the potential to provide numerous opportunities and experiences relevant to each of these eight 'stages', and so facilitate the ongoing development of our relational competence. I have been particularly impressed by the work of those associated with the Stone Centre, which is reflected in the writings of Shem and Surrey (1998), who regard the development of relational competence as the construction of an integrated 'we', as distinguished from a still separate 'I-Thou' way of relating.

I have come to use the adjective 'deep' to distinguish benign expressions of each of these activities that have their roots in our benign potential from the more common 'shallow' approaches that have developed as a result of oppression by means of adaptation and compensation (e.g., Hill, 1998). Similarly, I distinguish radical 'redesign' approaches to

**Table 3:** A framework for understanding the development of autonomy, relational competence, mutualism and sense of place within Western cultures (modified from Josselson, 1996). Material in *italics* relates to experiences of the author.

Josselson's Eight Expressions of Relational Learning in Western Cultures	Associated Expressions of Relationship with Nature and Place (modified from Hill, unpublished curriculum material)
<b>Sensory Grounded Experience (from beginning of life)</b>	
<p><b>Holding:</b> provision of safety, security and assurance; someone being there for you.</p>	<p>Safe, non-frightening early experiences lay foundation for expectation of support, feeling secure, at home and physically connected with nature and place. <i>Helped by time spent laying on the grass looking at the clouds and leafy branches and listening to the birds, with a carer near by.</i></p>
<p><b>Attachment:</b> acknowledged; reliable emotional (and material) connection(s).</p>	<p>Recognition of primacy of our dependence on, and relationship with, 'nature'; emotionally connected; beginning of 'sense of place'; nature as 'sanctuary' with also a therapeutic role; special and favourite places, basis for subsequent familiarity with physical and bio-ecological characteristics of particular environments. <i>Helped by ritual, childhood haunts, bush walking and camping.</i></p>
<p><b>Passionate Experience:</b> encounter intense pleasure e.g., through respectful physical contact.</p>	<p>Experience of multifaceted, holistic pleasure of nature; fascination and joy with its diversity, mystery and 'otherness' stimulation, excitement and deep love of nature; basis for development of sense of stewardship and responsibilities. <i>Helped by intense experiences such as rock climbing, white water canoeing, backpacking, sleeping under the stars and skinny dipping.</i></p>
<p><b>Eve-to-Eve Validation:</b> communication of authenticity; confirmation, encouragements, understanding and empathy for one's 'being'; and later also conditional approval of one's 'doing'.</p>	<p>Positive (and negative) feedback from interactions with nature (pets, other domesticated animals, wildlife and plants); becoming aware of both the predictable and knowable, as well as the spontaneous, emergent and mysterious properties of nature. <i>Helped by spending relaxed time with nature, including eye-to-eye contact with other primate species etc.</i></p>

**Table 3: (cont) A framework for understanding the development of autonomy, relational competence, mutualism and sense of place within Western cultures (modified from Josselson, 1996). Material in *italics* relates to experiences of the author.**

<b>Dependant on Meaning Making and Cognitive Processes</b>	
<p><b>Identification and Idealisation:</b> recognition and respect for others' desirable qualities (and of the undesirability and repulsion of others); key drive for personal development and transcendence; basis for attraction to mentors and partners.</p>	<p>Recognition of the amazingness, wonder and power of nature, and of the value of models in nature; its use of metaphors and mythology; basis for respecting its limits and working with its potential; needed for managing one's desire to contain, control, own and domesticate nature; and for designing and redesigning with nature. <i>Helped by totems, sacred sites, mentors, cultural stories, vision quests, sweat lodges and other intense and special experiences; and by opportunities to interact responsibly.</i></p>
<p><b>Mutuality and Resonance:</b> simultaneously recognising similarities in one another's experiences, thinking and feeling and being willing to share them openly, thereby experiencing connectedness, communion and sense of 'we'; finding oneself in 'the other'.</p>	<p>Through awe, compassion, integration and collaboration, learning to recognise synergy, synchronicity and mutuality in nature; further deepening of respect of limits and realisation of diverse possibilities and opportunities; involves letting go of competition and desires to control; deepening one's connection with 'the other'; described well in some nature poetry. <i>Experienced through playing with and taking responsibility for pets, horse riding, swimming with dolphins, witnessing thunderstorms, torrents of water, mountains and glaciers, also through shared creative expression.</i></p>
<p><b>Embeddedness:</b> identification with our connectedness, and also recognition of our being a small part of a larger grouping; enables us to speak from our particular roles, groups and places, and also to contribute to them and feel that we belong; basis for interest in history, and a concern for inter-generational and global equity, 'others' needs and for meaning on one's life.</p>	<p>Deep connectedness to the planet and it's other inhabitants; spiritual and soulful experiences within nature, and sense of our lineage and place within it; deepens our evolving sense of meaning, and of the wonder of life. <i>Helped by our ongoing relationships with nature, journaling these and trying to convey them in poetry, creative writing, music and art</i></p>
<p><b>Tending and Caring:</b> our experience of this enables us to choose to offer ourselves in the service of others; being there for them, particularly in times of need; involves diverse expressions of empathy and sensitivity to boundaries.</p>	<p>Recognition of the joy experienced in caring for nature, specific habitats, biodiversity, ecological cycles and processes, and protection from invasive species and materials. <i>Helped by diverse expressions of caring for nature and place: from recycling to fundamental redesign of one's lifestyle and ways of interacting with nature and others.</i></p>

situation improvement from the more common focus on trying to make inappropriately designed systems to work a little better by increasing their operational 'efficiency' and/or by 'substituting' more benign interventions (e.g., Hill, 1998, 2000b). So the challenge I leave you with to reflect on throughout this conference, and afterwards, what might be the key characteristics of 'deep camping', and what 'redesign' initiatives this might imply? At the personal level this might best be examined by reflecting on the following questions:

- In what specific ways is your current thinking and acting compatible with such 'deep' approaches to camping?
- What have you wondered about doing next in this regard?
- What resources and supports might you (or your group) need to actually act on such intentions?
- What barriers might get in the way, and what might you need to overcome them?

- Refine these intentions, particularly by converting them into 'small meaningful initiatives that you (or your group) can guarantee to carry through to completion'.
- How will you know when you have been successful, or when you have made significant progress?
- How will you publicly celebrate and communicate your effective processes and 'successes', to facilitate their spread?

One radical way to progress our thinking in this direction is paradoxically (in a workshop context) to boldly 'lie' about changes that you have already brought about. This enables us to vision in relation to our benign potential, rather than settle for tinkering with the *status quo*.

By daring to engage in such 'deep' reflection and initiation of small meaningful changes in our thinking and actions, I believe that we can significantly contribute to changing the world for the better through the ways we engage with camping. 'Deep camping' can, indeed, change the world.

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