If 'environmentally responsible tourism' has a goal of providing a quality tourist experience without causing intolerable ecological and social damage, then the tour leader has a very special role to play. This paper draws on the results of a research study on nature-based tourism. The research examined the role(s) that the tour leader should play in environmentally responsible tourism, the qualifications (knowledge, skills and attitudes) that are needed to fulfill these roles, the actual qualifications and roles of tour leaders, and the training, support and evaluation that is and should be provided for tour leaders. The gaps between what 'should be' and what 'are' the roles of the tour leader are discussed, with implications for the tourism industry in general and the training and education sector of the industry in particular.

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Acknowledgment
This paper is based on research conducted by Tracey Johnson as part of her studies towards a degree in Coastal Management at the University of New England – Northern Rivers.

Jost Krippendorf, The Holiday Makers: Understanding the Impact of Leisure and Travel. Krippendorf notes that the common goal of 'soft tourism' (also called appropriate tourism, alternative tourism, responsible tourism, softpath and ecotourism) is 'to develop and promote new forms of tourism, which will bring the greatest possible benefit to all the participants – travellers, the host population and the tourist business, without causing intolerable ecological and social damage'. Clearly, the emphasis is on a quality experience, but from more than just the visitor's perspective.

Krippendorf and others have identified a number of factors that need to be considered to achieve appropriate tourism development and have suggested various planning and management strategies. These include, for example, involving local people in tourism planning, keeping control in the hands of locals, controlling the scale and rate of development, and educating the tourist as to 'appropriate' behaviour.

One aspect that has received relatively little attention is the role of the tour guide or tour leader. The focus of this paper is on the role of the tour leader in achieving environmentally and socially responsible tourism. The importance of, and the diverse roles played by, the tour guide in mainstream tourism, and more recently in cultural tourism, have been acknowledged and systematically investigated by Schmidt, Cohen and Dearden and Harron. Cohen's model (see Figure 1) is often cited as a basis for examining tour guide roles.

It should be noted that Cohen's four roles of the tourist guide are oriented to providing a quality experience from the tourist's perspective. By providing organization and management (organizer role) and by facilitating interaction with host populations (group leader), the tour guide meets those group and individual needs that must be met with resources from outside the tour group (what Cohen refers to as 'outer-directed'). By providing leadership in the form of social interaction (entertainer) and education/interpretation (teacher), needs that can
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Figure 1. Roles played by the tour guide/leader in mainstream tourism


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOUR MANAGEMENT (focus on group)</th>
<th>OUTER-DIRECTED</th>
<th>INNER-DIRECTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original guide</td>
<td>Animator</td>
<td>Professional guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• organizer</td>
<td>• entertainer</td>
<td>• teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT (focus on individual)</td>
<td>Cultural broker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• group leader</td>
<td></td>
<td>• teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

be met from within the group ('inner-directed') are also fulfilled. In all four roles, the orientation is toward the individual and group needs of the tourist, rather than the needs of the host population or the environment. The present study examines the relevance of this model of tourist guide roles to nature-based tourism, and explores the need to extend the model, recognizing that the tour leader also has some responsibility to the host environment. The paper's first objective, then, is to identify roles that nature-based tour leaders can and do play in contributing not only to a quality tourist experience, but also to an environmentally and socially responsible tourist experience.

The need for better understanding of tourist guide roles and the need for better tourist guide training have been identified in several studies. As with the previous examples cited, the underlying assumption of these studies is that tourist guides contribute to a better quality experience. A second objective of the present paper is to address the need for training for nature-based tour leaders, focusing in particular on training that facilitates environmentally responsible tourism.

For the purposes of this paper, nature-based tourism is defined as travel that is 'primarily concerned with the direct enjoyment of some relatively undisturbed phenomenon of nature'. The focus is on group travel experiences organized by a tour operator and led by a guide. A tour leader or tour guide is someone responsible for the delivery of the nature-based tour experience in the field.

Study objectives and methods

This paper reports on the results of an exploratory study of nature-based tours and tour leaders carried out in 1990 in Australia. In order to achieve the first objective of identifying appropriate roles for nature-based tour leaders, the study addressed the following questions:

- What can the tour leader do to facilitate environmentally responsible nature-based tourism?
- What roles and qualifications of nature-based tour leaders do tour operators promote in their brochures?
- What qualifications do nature-based tour operators look for in their guides, and what roles are they currently expected to play?

To meet the second objective of identifying training needs, two questions were asked:

- Where are the gaps between what nature-based tour leaders are currently qualified to do and what they should do?
- What training and support are needed to fill these gaps?

Secondary data sources for the first two questions included the Code of Environmental Practice produced by the Australian Tourism Industry Association (A1IA) and nature-based tour brochures. The latter were obtained by systematically reviewing advertising in Australian-based nature and outdoor-oriented magazines as well as newspaper advertisements in selected Australian newspapers. A list of potential nature-based tour operators was assembled, supplemented by a Queensland
National Parks and Wildlife Service database of operators currently holding or applying for permits to operate within the parks system. Finally, university and non-profit tour operators were identified from an existing database of educational study tour organizers.10

A letter was sent to each of the 59 operators identified, requesting tour brochures and inquiring about willingness to participate in a survey of operator attitudes. The final sample of brochures was received from 55 tour operators and described a total of 402 nature-based tours.

A content analysis of these brochures was supplemented by primary data collection using a mail survey. Completed surveys from 27 operators (a response rate of 45%) provided answers to the latter three research questions.

While the study was exploratory and not intended to be representative of nature-based tour operators throughout Australia, it does provide insight into tour promotions and tour leader roles, qualifications and training. The reader is cautioned, however, that the sample of brochures collected may be biased toward those who perceive their target markets to be newspaper readers on the east coast and in urbanized parts of Australia (where most Australians live), and that the results of the survey of operators may be biased toward those who responded because they consider themselves to be environmentally responsible.

Results

Question 1: What is environmentally responsible tourism and what can the tour leader do to facilitate environmentally responsible nature-based tourism?

Environmentally responsible tourism, for the purposes of this study, was defined as that which meets the guidelines developed for the Australian Tourism Industry Association (ATIA) and known as the Code of Environmental Practice. This Code was drafted by an Environmental Advisory Committee composed of environmentalists, government officials and tourism representatives and was sent out for public comment. Over 200 submissions were considered in the revision of the Code, and annual reviews with public input will continue to be conducted.

The Code outlines a basic philosophy that recognizes tourism as a legitimate and valuable use of resources, but includes a series of affirmations that stress the need for policy and action that ensure the protection of the resource base.

The Code does not as yet provide specific guidelines for tour operators, but aspects of the general Code are of relevance to nature-based tour operators. The two items that pertain particularly to the role of nature-based tour leaders are responsibility and information. The tour leader’s responsibility can be seen to be to monitor and minimize the adverse effects of visitor activities on the environment so as not to ‘use natural ecosystems beyond their sustainable capability of human activities’. This suggests that the tour leader’s role is to modify and correct visitor behaviour to ensure that it is environmentally responsible. In addition, with respect to information, the tour leader’s role is ‘to enhance visitors’ appreciation and understanding of their surroundings within the conservation objectives for the area’.12

In order to perform such roles, the tour leader needs to be knowledgeable about ecological and conservation principles, and skilful in environmental interpretation. The latter is a process by which visitors learn about the environment. More specifically, environmental interpretation is an educational, illustrative and entertaining activity which

11 ATIA, op cit, Ref 9.
An exploratory investigation into the roles of the nature-based tour leader

Table 1. Results of content analysis with reference to role of the tour leader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Private operators</th>
<th>Non-profit/universities</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification of the tour leader by name</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mention of tour leader's environmental qualifications</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mention of tour leader's style of guiding</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mention of environmental content of tour</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two objectives of interpretation are particularly pertinent here:

- To assist the visitor to develop a keener awareness, appreciation and understanding of the area he/she is visiting. It aims to make the visit a richer and more enjoyable experience.
- To accomplish management goals, first through thoughtful use of the recreation resource on the part of the visitor, and second through minimizing human impact on the resource by guiding visitors away from fragile or overused areas into more robust areas.

According to the environmental interpretation literature, attributes or qualities needed for interpretation are mainly communication skills, enthusiasm, a sense of humour and perspective, self-confidence, warmth and credibility. Clearly, a nature-based tour leader with such qualities and particularly with good communication skills can play a major role in influencing both on-site visitor behaviour and visitor attitudes (and therefore, hopefully, long-term visitor behaviour) with respect to the environment.

Question 2: What roles and qualifications of nature-based tour leaders do tour operators promote in their brochures?

The degree to which nature-based tour operators promote their tour leaders by including them in promotional material gives an indication of their importance in the eyes of tour operators, but also gives us some idea of the expectations that consumers will have of these tour leaders. The mention in promotional material was determined by analysing 402 tour descriptions, 336 of which were privately operated tours and 66 of which were non-profit/university-based tours. Since there were some interesting differences between these two types of operators, the results of the brochure analysis will be presented separately for these two groups of operators.

The content analysis was based on a number of questions about the tour descriptions, and required coding of information such as whether the tour leader was identified in the brochure, whether the brochure described the tour leader's qualifications, and whether the style of tour leading was mentioned.

Only 18% of private tour descriptions identified the tour leader by name, as opposed to 67% of non-profit/university tour descriptions (see Table 1). The tour leader's 'environmental' qualifications were mentioned in only 9% of private tour descriptions, while 67% of non-profit/university tour promotions described the tour leader's qualifications. In both cases, experiential qualifications were mentioned more than twice as often as were educational qualifications.

Typical educational qualifications were science qualifications (e.g. botanist, geologist, zoologist, ecologist, PhD, and so on) while typical

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Experiential qualifications were 'local or bush knowledge or experience', 'environmental knowledge' and 'environmental interpretation'.

The most revealing aspect of the brochure analysis with respect to the role of the tour leader was in terms of the style of tour leading. As discussed under Question 1, the use of environmental interpretation to communicate with visitors is a key element in achieving environmentally responsible tourist behaviour in both the short and the long term. Yet, most tour descriptions do not stress the tour leader's style of guiding. Non-profit/university tour descriptions give somewhat greater attention to the tour leader's style (38%) than do private tour descriptions (20%). Of course, this lack of focus on the tour leader's style of guiding may be simply a reflection of operators' perceptions that the decision to purchase a nature-based tour is motivated by factors other than quality and style of tour leadership.

On the other hand, 34% of private tour descriptions and 73% of non-profit/university tour descriptions made some comment about the environmental content of the tour, with various brochures claiming that the tour 'will help you understand the natural world', 'provides intimate knowledge of environment', 'will introduce you to ecological concepts' and 'aims at increasing your enjoyment and appreciation of the bush'. Clearly, operators, and particularly non-profit operators, see environmental content as an important attribute of the product when potential consumers are selecting a nature-based tour.

One final comment should be made regarding the results of the content analysis of tour brochures. The quantitative approach taken here fails to illustrate the quality of the promotional material of tour operators who do emphasize the tour leader's role. Certainly there is some excellent promotional material that is very environmentally and tour-leader oriented. For example, one operator's brochure notes that their guides, 'besides being master interpreters with an intimate knowledge of their individual environments, are also protectors of their specific locations'. Another describes their guide as 'an experienced adult educator with a wealth of expertise and a great love of the Australian bush. He makes every safari a pleasure of discovery and learning . . .' And a third brochure states, 'our leaders are all experienced outdoor leaders; enthusiasts with love and respect for wild places, who are happy to share their skills and knowledge with you'. These quotes illustrate the kind of expectations that some operators have and pass on to their customers regarding the role of their tour leaders.

Question 3: What qualifications do nature-based tour operators look for in their guides, and what roles are they currently expected to play?

The actual qualifications of tour leaders hired by nature-based tour operators provide an additional perspective on their importance and potential role in environmentally responsible tourism. This question is answered using the results of the survey of nature-based tour operators. Nearly all of the 27 respondents to the survey were owners or managers and were personally responsible for the selection of leaders for their tours.

Respondents were asked to rate on a scale from 1 to 5 the importance of a number of skills when selecting a tour leader. They were provided with a list of skills that corresponded to Cohen's four tour guide roles, with some explanation and adjustments to make the skills relevant to nature-based tourism. Two further roles, motivator (encouraging visitors to behave in an environmentally responsible manner) and environmental interpreter (helping visitors to understand and appreciate their environment), were added to reflect the findings in the earlier part of the study with respect to environmental objectives. The results were that respondents rated (in descending order of importance) organiza-
An exploratory investigation into the roles of the nature-based tour leader

Table 2. Skills looked for in a nature-based tour leader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Mean ratings (5-point scale)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizer</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental interpreter</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivator</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Main roles of the tour leader in nature-based tourism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Mean ratings (5-point scale)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizer</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group leader</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental interpreter</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivator</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainer</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 4: Where are the gaps between what nature-based tour leaders are currently qualified to do and what they should do?

Again using Cohen’s model of the roles of the tour guide, respondents were asked to rate the importance of each of the four roles, organizer, group leader, teacher and entertainer, on a scale of 1 to 5. The results indicated that tour leaders are expected to play all these roles, although entertainer is the least important. As can be seen in Table 3, respondents were asked to rate two additional roles: motivator (contributing to environmentally responsible behaviour while on-site) and environmental interpreter (contributing to environmental appreciation, long-term knowledge and attitude change). These two roles rank as being relatively more important than the roles of teacher and entertainer, but slightly less important than the roles of group leader and organizer. This might explain in part why qualifications such as ‘first aid’ are frequently mentioned as important for tour leaders.

In any case, it is clear that nature-based tour operators expect their tour leaders to perform the full range of roles, although they look particularly for individuals with organizational, interpretive, motivational and teaching skills when hiring. They also look for individuals with environmental knowledge.

Question 5: What training and support are needed to fill these gaps?

Tour operators were asked if they provide training for their tour leaders: 77% stated that they did, ranging from informal to relatively formal training programmes. Most emphasize pre-trip and on-the-job training.

Given the roles that tour leaders are expected to play, and the skills and knowledge that tour operators expect, there appears to be a considerable need for tour leader training. Individuals with excellent communication/interpretive skills, organizational and leadership abilities, as well as environmental expertise and knowledge are surely few and far between. One solution perhaps is to have two individuals share the responsibilities of tour leading, but this would add considerably to the cost of nature-based tours.

In Australia, education and training in the area of environmental knowledge is available through universities and colleges. What appears to be lacking, then, is training in the area of tour leadership and environmental interpretation techniques. Industry support is needed, in that such training needs to be recognized and rewarded in hiring practices. Both the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, which manages Kakadu National Park, and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service have taken initiatives to include tour operator training in their tour permit issuing procedures. There have been initiatives in tour guide training elsewhere such as PATA’s Tour
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TOUR MANAGEMENT (focus on group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTER-DIRECTED (resourced from outside the tour group)</th>
<th>INNER-DIRECTED (resourced from inside the tour group)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;organizer&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;entertainer&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT (focus on individual)

| "group leader"                                        | "teacher"                                           |

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (focus on environment)

| "motivator"                                           | "environmental interpreter"                         |

Figure 2. Roles played by the tour guide/leader in nature-based tourism.

Guide Training Course (publication pending) and Canada's two-year Adventure Guide Training Program at the University College of the Cariboo, but none focused on nature-based tour guiding.

This is an area in which tertiary institutions and/or the industry as a whole must contribute, as most tour operators will not have the resources and expertise to provide adequate in-house training. Organizations such as the Ecotourism Association of Australia may need to lend support to such initiatives. In the long term, certification or accreditation of individual tour leaders may also need to be considered.

Discussion and conclusions

This paper has focused on the roles that tour leaders should, and do, play in contributing not only to a quality tourist experience, but to an environmentally responsible tourist experience. The roles that tour leaders should play are based in the first instance on Cohen's model. A closer look at the dimensions in Cohen's model of tour guide roles reveals that the tour leader must be focused on the group (tour management roles such as organizer and entertainer) and must be focused at the same time on the individual (experience management roles such as group leader and teacher). As a leader in nature-based tourism, the tour leader must have a third focus, thus the addition of the third dimension, resource management, shown in Figure 2. This requires the tour leader to focus on the environment, and involves two roles: motivator (the modification of tourist behaviour and impacts on-site), and environmental interpreter (the understanding and appreciation of environmental issues to facilitate responsible tourist behaviour in the long term). Future research should examine further not only the relative importance of these six roles in nature-based tourism but the implications for tour promotion and for tour leader recruitment and training.

The tour leader is expected to play a number of important roles to facilitate a quality experience for the visitor. S/he must be an organizer, a group leader, a teacher, and even an entertainer. In nature-based tourism, the tour leader must also be responsible for maintaining environmental quality, by motivating visitors to behave in an environmentally responsible way during the tour, and by interpreting the environment in such a way as to promote long-term attitude and behavioural change.

It is apparent that nature-based tour leaders require appropriate environmental qualifications and expertise. These include mainly environmental knowledge and communication/interpretation skills, which
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have traditionally been acquired informally through experience and on the job training. In addition, tour leaders as role models for visitors must exhibit environmentally responsible behaviour, must hold environmentally responsible attitudes and, most importantly, must have the skills and abilities to promote these attitudes in visitors.

All of these roles and responsibilities suggest a need for more formal education and training of nature-based tour leaders. There needs to be a commitment on the part of educators and the industry itself to provide appropriate training and to move toward some sort of controlling measures that ensure that only those with the appropriate environmental knowledge, skills and attitudes will be allowed to take on the important role of nature-based tour leading.