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Whose Journeys?

The Outdoors and Adventure as Social and Cultural Phenomena

**Critical explorations of relations between
individuals, 'others' and the environment**

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The Rationalisation of the Irrational: Conflicts between rock climbing culture and dominant value systems in society

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The impact of the rationalisation processes identified by Weber (1976) and discussed, in its modern application, by Ritzer (1993) has been identified as a way of looking at leisure development (Ritzer, 1993; Rojek, 1993; 2000; Smart, 1999). Here it is argued that 'rationalisation' is a process whereby activities such as rock climbing, which are perceived in society as being outside the 'norm' or irrational, are encouraged to conform to its dominant value systems.

In the case of rock climbing it is argued that predictability, controlability and objectification, as identified by Heywood (1994) and safety, as identified by Furedi (1997) are elements of the dominant social value system that conflict with the climbing values of adventure and intrinsicity. Rationalising and counter-rationalising influences within mountaineering culture are explored both through academic texts and mountaineering literature. In this case mountaineering culture is treated as the common value system of the group of people involved in the lifeworld or, as Giddens (1991) termed it, *lifestyle sector* of mountaineering.

In order to examine explicitly the conflict between the process of rationalisation and the fundamental motivation for rock climbing the works of Laski (1961), Maslow (1964), Csikszentmihalyi (1975) and Mitchell (1983) are used to identify six *fundamental elements* proposed as essential if the fundamental motivation for rock climbing is to be generated. These are anomie; individual responsibility; wilderness and societal isolation; reason and overbelief; risk, uncertainty and adventure; feelings of competence and control.

Four elements from within mountaineering culture are identified as *rationalising factors*. These are guidebooks, equipment, training and professionalisation. The impact of these on the six *fundamental elements* and, through them, on fundamental motivations for rock climbing is examined. Some of the ways in which mountaineering culture in turn rationalises the incoming influences to match the dominant values of rock climbing are identified together with counter rationalising action by mountaineering culture.

Peak experience

In order to explore the influence of rationalisation on rock climbing, it was necessary to identify aspects of rock climbing culture to be the focus of discussion. To constrain such discussion to manageable proportions, aspects of motivation in

rock climbing have been used. Writing about experience in mountaineering, Mallory, a prominent explorer of the Everest region, demonstrates the problems of writing about one aspect of motivation for mountaineering, the visually aesthetic:

We do not think that our aesthetic experiences of sunrises and sunsets and clouds and thunder are supremely important facts in mountaineering but rather that they cannot be separated and catalogued and described individually as experiences at all. They are not incidental in mountaineering but a vital and inseparable part of it; they are not ornamental but structural; they are not various items causing emotion but parts of an emotional whole; they are the crystal pools perhaps, but they owe their life to a continuous stream.

(Mallory 1914: 36)

What he has to say is equally true of motivation in all aspects of mountaineering, a vital element to the discussion in this paper.

To catalogue individual elements is to deny the wholeness of the experience, implying that a positivistic and atomistic approach may threaten the validity of any conclusions using such an approach. The purpose of this paper is to begin to construct a theory about influence of rationalisation on individual elements within mountaineering. The inter-relationship of these elements is identified in places in an attempt to view mountaineering holistically, however it is not claimed that this can be generalised to the whole mountaineering experience.

The peak experience itself is difficult to explain or define despite its crucial importance to this study. Participants describe it as a 'wow' experience or a 'buzz'. In discussion everyone who has had the experience seems to understand what is meant, but it seems to transcend the rational and for that matter transcend the descriptive. However, attempts have been made to define what this experience is, and these explanations appear to have much in common.

As the experience is a profoundly personal one a range of feelings is probably more valuable than an attempted definition. Writers have attempted to encapsulate this feeling in short phrases despite Mallory's warning. Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggest that it is identified by a narrowing of focus, limiting the individual's stimulus field. It is a fusion of mind, body and action leading to a feeling of control and power. Mortlock (1984) refers to a feeling of wonder, freedom and exhilaration whilst Laski (1961) refers to an intense out of body experience. The words ecstasy, flow, peak experience and self actualisation are frequently found in these descriptions and will be adopted in order to identify this experience and move to discussing its contributory elements.

The 'fundamental elements' supporting the 'peak experiences'

Examination of writing in mountaineering literature and in academic works on the subject identifies a number of key elements that contribute to the achievement of peak experiences. These will be referred to as the 'fundamental elements'.

- Anomie
- Individual responsibility
- Wilderness and societal isolation
- Reason and overbelief
- Risk, uncertainty and adventure
- Feelings of competence and control

It is around these fundamental elements that the following argument will be constructed.

The fundamental elements

Mitchell (1983) argues that an essential element of mountaineering and peak experiences is *anomie*, the freedom from all constraints, allowing free entry and unrestrained exit. Therefore a climber can start at any time and retreat at will. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) argues that climbing is in fact divorced from societal norms. He describes climbing as having its own reality separate from everyday life, and one that to the climber is more meaningful. The lack of rational reward, that is considered to be useless to or subversive of social and cultural values, is perceived to be central to climbing by participants. He suggests that rock climbing lies firmly in the realm of 'deep play', defined by Jeremy Bentham the eighteenth century philosopher as an aspect of life that is irrational, in that the risks far outweigh the potential rewards.

There is support for the importance of the 'deep play' concept to climbing within the literature of mountaineering, although the recording of such ideas may in itself be recognition of societal standards to meet the dictates of editor or publisher. Paul Pritchard (1997) using the title 'Deep Play' typifies this maverick approach to climbing. Pritchard tells us of the wave of new routes given names like 'Doleman' and 'Dolite' celebrating this doubly subversive activity of climbers living on the dole whilst celebrating irrational activities, a situation that in Pritchard's view could not have come about in a healthier economic period. This concept of anti-social activity is further reinforced by Jim Perrin's article 'Street Illegal' celebrating the fusion of climbing and drug taking (Perrin 1978).

Mitchell's (1983) analysis of a freely entered activity supporting anomie is also the basis for acceptance of individual responsibility without the need for extrinsic rewards or pressures (which could be thought of as negative rewards); thus the volition is complete. Mitchell (1983) suggests that flow exists where the activity is defined as an end in itself. This is further explored by Csikszentmihalyi (1975), who identifies understanding of self as an important element in flow. Clearly understanding of self, one's limits, confidence and abilities is vital in rock climbing when one has a crucially difficult few metres of rock to overcome on an exposed rock climb.

Reports in mountaineering literature state or imply that those who don't take full responsibility are lesser mountaineers. This applies to those who are guided to summits by professional guides who, in the words of Joe Simpson (1997:60), 'pander to the egotistical ambitions of individuals who would not otherwise dream

of attempting such an ascent". Here Simpson emphasises the importance in mountaineering of independence and of the intrinsicity of the activity. This is reinforced by the fact that official guidebooks at one time recorded first guided ascents of mountaineering routes and first unguided ascents (although this practice has now discontinued); thus the difference in the quality and prestige attached to the climber was signified.

Wilderness and societal isolation link closely to both anomie and individual responsibility as both may be more easily achieved in societal isolation, divorced from the mores and support of society. The influence of the environment on achieving peak experience is indicated by Maslow (1970), who reported that his group of high self actualisers enjoyed solitude and privacy more than the average person. These experiences Maslow (1964) refers to as 'peak experiences or ecstasies'. Laski (1961) investigated the influence of wild areas and naturalness on the experience of 'ecstasy'. In her investigation Laski (1961) lists thirteen triggers (as she termed elements that promote ecstasy) to experiencing ecstasy including natural scenery.

Laski (1961) discussed natural scenery in some detail as an important 'trigger for ecstasy'. In this case natural is an area where nature dominates even though 'man made' artefacts are present. Thus an old stone wall or ruin is dominated by nature and the natural wilderness does not lose its power, whilst an electricity pylon may be viewed as dominating and thus be an anti-trigger to ecstatic experience. This perspective is supported by Lewis's (2000) contention that sports climbers, by placing bolts, attempt to dominate nature and thus detract from the naturalness of the adventure ethic. Agreeing with this from the perspective of the climber rather than academic, Littlejohn (1997) says, with bolts 'you dictate to the rock rather than the rock dictating to you'. In this way both climbers and academics assert the importance of natural wild surroundings.

Reason must be suspended and overbelief take its place in order to accept the irrational basis for the activity and outcome. Laski (1961: 183) warns 'every feeling loses its strength in the measure that it becomes intellectual'. This suggests the power of reason to be what she terms an anti-trigger, that is a factor detracting from the achievement of ecstasy. It is suggested here that reason represents control and organisation in any form. Reason also influences wilderness in the form of societal intrusion into the wild environment (the issue of whether reason is natural is not considered here). This seems to suggest that reason reduces the propensity for ecstasy and peak experience to occur. According to Laski (1961) once it occurs, ecstasy blots out reason. Heywood's (1994) interpretation and application to rock-climbing of Weber's (1974) treatise appears to support this concept.

Weber (1974) argues that the development of aesthetics and eroticism is an attempt to 'erode the constraints of rationalisation ... to escape ... reason's iron cage' (Heywood 1994:183). This seems to imply that in order to achieve ecstasy and peak experience reason must be suspended and replaced by overbelief, or a belief in something not supported by any tangible evidence.

According to Donnelly's article in 'Mountain Magazine (1982 No.80: 40) 'risk is fundamental to the culture of climbing'. A survey of current mountaineering magazines shows risk and uncertainty as 'normal' elements of mountaineering culture. The hallmark of published obituaries (a regular mountaineering magazine feature)

demonstrates the acceptance of death and the lack of any attribution of blame or fault, treating risk and death as natural parts of mountaineering. This is amplified by Lewis (2000) who discusses the naturalness of adventure climbing and death as part of an organic whole. So in mountaineering risk of death is an accepted part of the lifeworld culture that separates mountaineering from the standards of the wider society.

Mitchell's (1983) study of mountaineering points out that uncertainty supports the previous preconditions for achieving a peak experience in that uncertainty is a quality that tends to divorce the activity from societal standards, particularly predictability and control. Exploring the idea further Mitchell (1983: 156) asserts, 'creativity requires a degree of uncertainty'. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) identifies risk as a crucial element in deepening focus and leading to the achievement of flow.

In Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) research, a key element contributing to flow was a feeling of *competence and control*; this feeling is in his view the predominant factor leading to flow experiences. 'Danger is accepted as a part of the 'gestalt' of climbing in which feelings of competence and control dominate' (Csikszentmihalyi 1975: 83).

The importance of planning is further developed by Csikszentmihalyi and Kleiber (1991:96), who state the importance of 'matching of challenge and skill with clear goals'. The importance of this match in the context of rock climbing is demonstrated by the preoccupation in mountaineering circles with accurate grading systems. These systems have become increasingly sophisticated, making it possible for a climber to make a precise match of his or her skill with the difficulty of the route. Mortlock's (1984) argument states that preparation and planning are important prerequisites that enhance his Stage 3 'frontier adventure'. This argument asserts that satisfaction at gauging a level of activity that is truly challenging becomes an important part of this 'peak experience'.

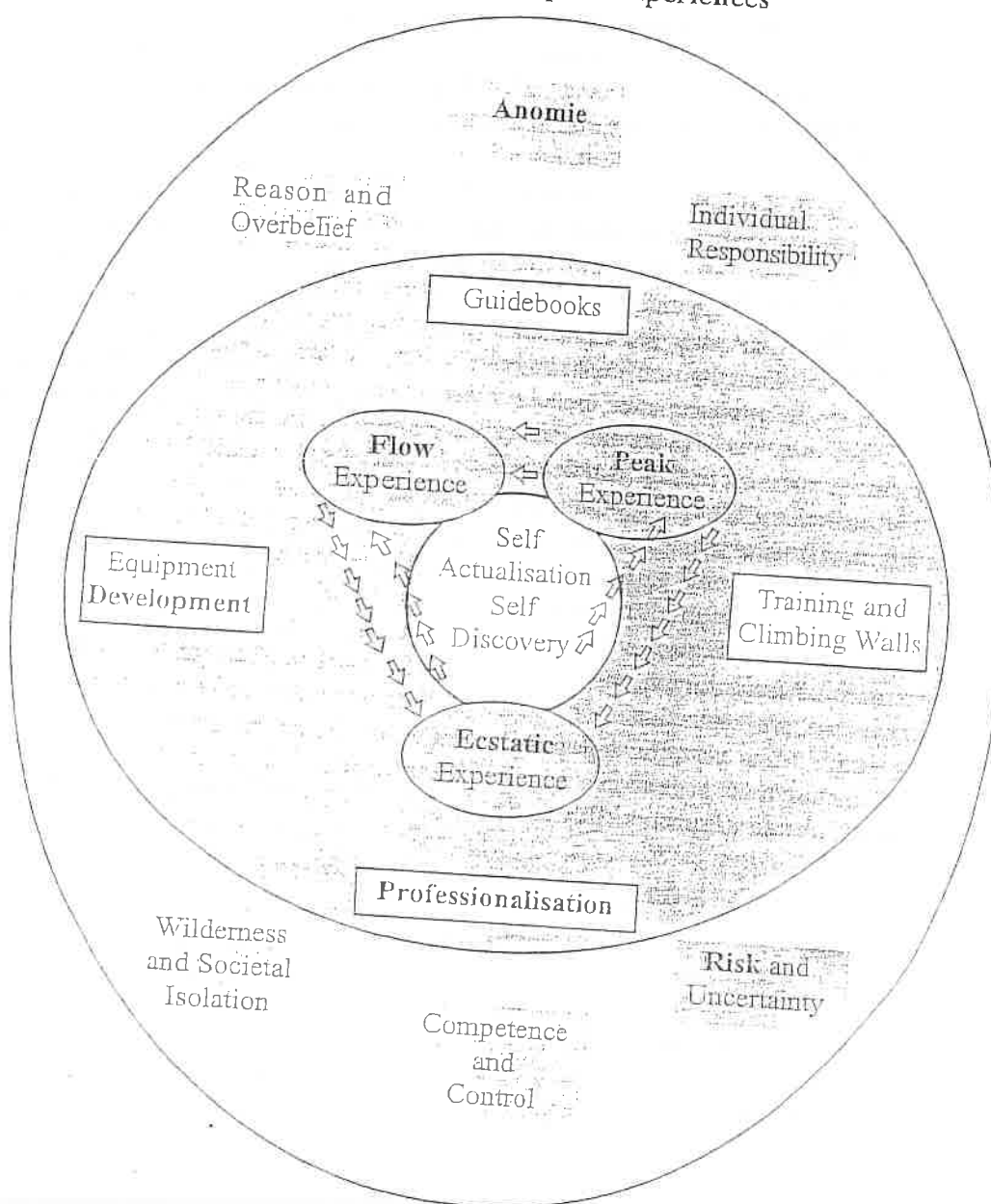
Mitchell (1983:180) refines the argument further: 'Flow is found in using a full measure of commitment, innovation and individual investment to perform real and meaningful tasks that are self chosen, limited in scope and rewarding in their own right,' thus asserting that these identified elements are not suspended in some lacuna, but must be held in a dynamic balance with each other if they are to contribute to the development of flow.

Rationalisation: a danger to the ethos and fundamental motivation for mountaineering

In the first part of the paper, I identified elements which I argue underpin values that are fundamental to the culture of rock climbing. The argument moves on to discuss the influence of rationalisation on rock climbing and rock climbing culture. There are two questions. Is it, as Ritzer (1993:23) suggests, that rationalisation extends so that 'even the escape routes have been rationalised'? Is there evidence to support Heywood's (1994:187) qualified statement that 'adventure climbing has itself already gone a considerable way towards its rational transformation'?

The discussion now examines the effect of objectification, predictability and control, the three rationalising influences, on the fundamental elements of rock climbing motivation through guidebooks, equipment, training and professionalism.

Figure 1
A concept map showing the fundamental elements supporting peak experiences in mountaineering and adventure tourism and the potentially rationalising factors working against achievement of peak experiences



Historically rock-climbing *guidebooks* have not only been a way of passing on information but also a means of communicating the ethos and meaning of the sport. They record the history and development of climbing in the area and special conditions, such as ecological considerations, applying to the route.

However guidebooks can and do have rationalising influences. Firstly they grade the difficulty of the route. For example, a typical UK description:

'The Maelstrom' 205 feet Hard Very Severe (1958)

A serious route, protection is poor and the rock friable. Other than that it is an excellent route...

...1. 60 ft. 4c

(Pretty, et al. 1989 :126)

The grade 'Hard Very Severe' gives the overall level of seriousness, that is the risk of death. The '60 ft. 4c' indicates the length and technical difficulty of the first section in relation to steepness, size of handholds etc. The juxtaposition of the grades tells me that 4c is normally too easy to merit Hard Very Severe and thus the seriousness referred to in the text is emphasised. This in itself could be taken to bring the individual climber into a clear rationalised structure at the cost to anomie and societal isolation. At the same time the climber selects a climb that, once completed, is arguably objectified by becoming a commodity named 'Maelstrom' whose value is 'Hard Very Severe 4c'. Thus the route can be acquired as a sign by the climber and climbing becomes an extrinsically rewarding activity, consequently influencing the path to achieving peak experience.

The ways in which guidebooks have developed in recent years also provide evidence to be considered in relation to rationalisation. The development of guidebook semantics reflects Hausler's (1996) continuum, applied to mountaineering on Everest, moving from exploration to aesthetics and finally consumerism. During the early exploratory stage information is given in a precise but anecdotal form, as in Whymper's (1893) classic *Scrambles Amongst The Alps*. The guidebooks published in the post-war period include detailed description; however, this was normally supplemented with aesthetic and cultural information. The Climbers' Club series (Newton 1990) is a good example, including information on natural and mountaineering history in the guidebook. More recently the popularity of guidebooks such as the *Rocfax* series suggests a move away from the aesthetic and mystical towards concern with what can be objectified, consumed and rationalised. These guidebooks depict precisely and efficiently selected climbing routes in a graphic form which conveys extremely high levels of information with little historical or aesthetic influence.

Increasing numbers of guidebooks that select the best routes in a large area have been published in the last thirty years, such as *Rock Climbing in Snowdonia* by Paul Williams (1990) and *Classic Rock* by Ken Wilson (1978), thus discouraging exploration and independent route selection. *On Peak Rock* (Dawson, 1996) makes decisions for the climber by categorising routes on the basis of 'evening crags' and 'family and picnic crags'. In addition almost all guidebooks use a starring system grading climbs from one to three stars, with more stars signifying higher quality.

All these elements could be seen to lead to higher degrees of objectification and predictability as argued by Heywood (1994), who in his analysis suggests that guidebooks allow climbers to objectify, predict and control, thus leading to a rationalisation of climbing.

The discussion shows that the opportunity exists for climbers to rationalise their sport as they are able to control levels of risk and can be assured of higher levels of predictability and opportunity for commodification. This does not mean they necessarily do so, just that these developments make the possibility more accessible. While the evidence does seem to show some obstruction to elements encouraging peak experiences, at the same time it opens up others. The details of the guidebook allow the climber to select a route at a level of difficulty that develops the elements of competence and control and a level of risk that gives optimum stimulation. Thus the climber selects a climb that he or she knows will result in completing a climbing route that keeps to what Csikszentmihalyi (1975) describes as the edge of control between anxiety and boredom.

Uncertainty remains, merely changing its positions and focus. What becomes predictable is the selection of a climbing route that is almost certain to lead the climber into areas of uncertainty and risk. Only the type of unpredictability becomes predictable. One climber interviewed argued that a guidebook with climbs selected from a wide range of geographical locations would encourage climbers to explore new areas, to be faced with unfamiliar terrain that would present fresh uncertainty and new adventure. Another, that guidebooks allow him to select an easy route in an isolated setting and so develop his aesthetic sense one day, whilst testing the threshold of his control the next.

The guidebook may often interpret the application and influence of other potentially rationalising factors. The style of early ascentionists is described together with what is now considered a 'fair' means of completing the climb. Thus in some ways one rationalising influence, guidebooks, may control or influence another, equipment. In his consideration of *equipment* Heywood (1994) suggests, with some hesitation and qualification, that higher equipment standards, such as improved climbing footwear, make climbing more controlled, more predictable and relatively safe. In other words it is more rationalised. This could be taken to indicate that competence and control elements would encourage peak experience, but that reducing uncertainty and thus reducing risk would discourage peak experience. Good equipment could be considered also to reduce individual responsibility, which would discourage peak experience. Whilst superficially this seems true, a closer inspection reveals a range of issues that need consideration from within the mountaineering culture.

The process of equipment development is often the result of the involvement of individual climbers, for example: the Whillans harness by the Himalayan climber Don Whillans and 'friends' by the Yosemite climber Yvon Chouinard. (Yvon Chouinard discontinued production of rock climbing equipment when climbers using his equipment attempted to sue for compensation following injuries – a sign that some climbers do not subscribe to accepting personal responsibility and search for a rationalised transfer of blame.) This process could be argued to be an example

of developing competence and control that would lead towards achieving a peak experience. Although the examples quoted are outstanding exceptions, they represent the process that many climbers go through in extending their control and exploring their limits through equipment organisation. Thus the development of equipment could be seen not just as some external commercial influence but also as part of the process leading to the dynamic development of competence and control. A survey of manufacturers will demonstrate that most climbing equipment is designed and made by climbers.

The use of runners to limit fall potential on rock climbs has long been an accepted technique. More recently the development of equipment devices, nuts and camming devices in particular, has made this process of limiting the fall easier; thus climbing is now safer. Heywood (1994) suggests that this tends to lead towards rationalisation as the element of risk is reduced and the climber becomes more dependent on technology. Drasdo (1969) counters this argument, suggesting that these advances should be seen as being supports to improvements in performance rather than determinants of the margins of safety. Anecdotal evidence does not seem to support a move towards a risk-reducing culture evolving in mountaineering. Observation at any popular climbing area will show that the average climber is now climbing at a much higher technical standard than would have been evident twenty years ago. This seems to show that climbers are not reducing their risk, but are, as Drasdo (1969) suggests, selecting a level of risk that gives them an optimum balance between uncertainty and control for achieving the stimulation that they desire. Wilson (1998a) identifies bolt placement with a 'changing cultural preoccupation with convenience'. He argues that bolts replace the development of all-round mountaineering skills with easy ready-made solutions, placing enjoyment above adventure in the hierarchy. This is supported by top climber Pat Littlejohn's (1997) observation that roadside bolted crags are like 'fast food' and are a denial of the natural affinity between the climber and the rock that mediates the activity of rock climbing.

The climbing community's response to these rationalising influences is to reassert those values as described by Tejada-Flores's (1967) article 'Games climbers play'. Climbing ethics control a range of problematic areas in mountaineering, including protection of the environment, but here we are concerned with only a small selection that influence the equipment issue. The relevant ethic here is the maintenance of uncertainty, as 'from this very uncertainty stems the adventure and personal satisfaction of climbing' (Tejada-Flores 1967:20). Thus, as the environment changes, and the development of equipment and knowledge changes in relation to the environment, so the relevant ethic or game rule changes. The mountaineering press, which has become one of the media for forming, reporting and propagating ethics has reported many examples from around the world.

For example, after much debate, bolting has been accepted in certain areas (mostly limestone) in the UK, as the rock does not yield natural cracks that would allow the placement of removable leader placed protection. Without this agreement the margin of risk in these areas would be disproportionately high, so bolts are agreed in order to maintain the margin of uncertainty.

In Yosemite, California the big walls of El Capitan were once climbed using prussiking, sack hauling and other siege tactic techniques. As equipment and knowledge of the routes developed and the effective difficulty was reduced, the climbing community of the area arrived at a consensus. It was agreed that, to preserve the margin of uncertainty and the opportunity for peak experience, the ethics of the route should be to climb with less equipment than earlier climbers. The climbing 'game' with fewest rules is the expedition to the major ranges where the natural difficulty is considered sufficient in itself to preserve the margins of uncertainty and ensure stimulation.

The 'game' is self-policing and so cheating can and does occur and is accepted as long as it does not either damage the environment or challenge the definition of the ethics. Drasdo's (1974) article 'In praise of cheating' discusses cheating in relation to what he calls 'competition ethics.' He identifies the pre-eminent ethic to be that the activity must allow 'the catharsis of exertion and fear'. Whether to cheat is therefore a personal decision, so long as it does not offend the environmental ethic of mountaineering and is accepted by the individual as cheating. Challenging the definition of the ethics by openly acting against the rules would expose the climber to criticism, putting him or her into Huizinga's (1949) 'spoilsport' category. In recent years the controversy over bolting has been the most obvious example of this phenomenon with disputes ranging geographically from Siddiqui's bolting on Harpur Hill, Derbyshire (Siddiqui, 1994; Walker and Bennett, 1995; Ward, 1994) to Cesare Maestri bolting on Cerro Torre, Patagonia, both issues that were vigorously pursued by climbers anxious to preserve the ethics of the sport.

So, as the forces for rationalisation work to commodify and rationalise the activity, the culture, ethos and ethics of the sport work to preserve the values of the 'game'. In this way mountaineering ethics preserve levels of risk, competence and control and individual responsibility in supporting peak experiences.

Training is another area for possible rationalisation as increasing numbers of climbers build their own climbing training facilities at home in lofts and garages, while the increasing accessibility of climbing walls around the UK makes training easily available to others. Heywood (1994) has argued that improved training leads inevitably to better preparation and improved ability to attempt particular routes with greater predictability.

However, the outcome tends to be that climbers climb more difficult routes and so, as suggested by Tejada-Flores (1967) and Drasdo (1969), margins of safety remain unchanged.

However the climbing wall itself could be argued to be a rationalised form of mountaineering *per se*. Routes are carefully graded by coloured handholds so that two or three different standards of climb can be completed on the same section of wall, all in a heated and well lit environment. Bolts are placed at regular intervals and checked regularly by engineers. Judgment on the part of the climber is redundant. The predictability of climbing walls makes them the perfect venue for climbing competitions. Competition sponsors are identified and a rank order is established. Thus a complete rationalisation of climbing is achieved via convenience of facilities, predictability and clear extrinsic rewards.

The problem here may not be the potential for widening safety margins proposed by Heywood (1994) but the influence of this rationalised environment on the ethics that climbers may subscribe to in the future. These ethics are particularly exposed, as in the view of Tejada-Flores (1967) and Drasdo (1969). They are controlled by the views of the average climber rather than by some considered debate, although this does have some influence. Wilson (1998b) points to the danger that climbing competitions could transform the sport into something more like 'conventional athletics.' Marstad and Moffat, (2000) warn against the effect on climbing of the influence and attitudes from the messed up world of international sport. The impact of litigation consciousness on U.K. climbing walls is reviewed in *Summit* (2001, Nos. 22 and 23). The articles by climbing wall professionals discuss how they can protect themselves from litigation by imposing safety tests on their visiting clients. This, it could be argued, would interfere with the individual responsibility of the climber at the time but perhaps more importantly may tend to rationalise the developing ethos of the climbing community that provides the counter rationalising influences.

The issue of the rationalising influence of climbing walls results in part from the fact that they are organisations, and rationalisation to some extent is an inevitable result of this status. This must lead to discussing if a *professionalised* and thus rationalised organisation, in this case the BMC, can be expected to protect climbing; the ultimate irrational activity.

The work of the BMC is hugely varied and includes training, guidebooks and equipment, issues already discussed. To identify if the balance promotes rationalisation would not be possible, however, some indications may be evident from an examination of a recent copy of *Summit*, the BMC official journal. An abbreviated summary of page content indicates that of 48 pages in total the following pages were predominantly devoted to the topics noted here:

Safety and risk reduction	7 pages	Action	4 pages
Access	6 pages	Advertising	19 pages
Equipment development	3 pages	Others	9 pages

(*Summit*, No.18 Summer 2000)

On the surface this seems to lead the reader towards a rationalised view of mountaineering rather than supporting the ethos of an anomic mountaineering that thrives on uncertainty. The journal satisfies the reader by giving technical information, and establishing and advising on responsible and predictable actions. In addition it supports economic development via adverts. Thus there is evidence to support the argument that the journal tends to encourage objectification, principally via adverts, predictability and control via equipment and safety articles thus leading toward rationalisation. Of the two action articles, one describes an official BMC international meet in Slovenia. The other describes the involvement of the BMC in developing sponsorship to support expeditions under the *Excellence in Sport* strategy, in line with Sports Council policy. These both lead to extrinsic

motivation or objectification of the activity. The access articles are all connected to the current negotiation of the Countryside Act and include pictures of BMC access negotiators out walking with John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, a clear link to the predictable and rational.

Recent copies of 'Summit' (2001 Nos. 21, 22, 23, and 24) include a range of articles that seem to encourage a rationalisation of rock climbing. Commenting on the development of the BMC young persons training scheme Anne Arran (2001:40) claims 'the BMC does not have a training model This might be seen as unacceptable for a responsible national body' which could be taken to mean that the BMC is introducing the scheme in response to pressure. Issue number 23 states 'our sport is not above the law' (Summit 2001, No23:14) arguing that rock climbing may have to accept the dominant social values of society under the pressure of litigation. Also, Roger Payne, the BMC general secretary, reports that the International Year of the Mountain 2002 initiated by the UN is an opportunity to remind government of the educational, economic, health and social values of mountaineering. Thus the boundaries between mountaineering culture and those of wider society are blurred.

Summary

The discussion so far identifies changes that encourage predictability, control and objectification within the culture of rock climbing and suggests that these changes have the potential to interfere with a fundamental motivation for rock climbing. Is this, as Heywood (1994) suggests, the process where dominant social values force all into Weber's 'iron cage' of rationalisation?

Equipment development has resulted in safety gaining a more prominent place in mountaineering culture. This could indicate that climbers are searching for higher levels of safety, persuaded by the dominance of safety as powerful social influence, as suggested by Furedi (1997). This development could equally be attributed to climbers searching for novel unpredictability, leading to that stimulation to be found only at the very edge of control and exploration. Many current equipment manufacturers including Denny Moorhouse of DM Mountaineering, Hugh Banner of HB climbing equipment are themselves climbers actively involved in using, developing and producing the equipment. Following Weber's model, these developments could be the rationalising of rock climbing via the forces of production. This is contradicted by the developments taking place to aid the search for the aesthetic and mystical which, according to Weber, rationalisation strives to destroy.

Weber asserts that the most powerful tool in rationalisation is through institutions whilst Ritzer (1993) states that the pressure to rationalise in the modern world comes from persuasion and consumption rather than the forces of production. If this were so the evidence discussed shows the influence of persuasion tending to rationalise the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) in line with Anne Arran's exhortation for it to be seen as 'a responsible national body' (Summit, 2001 no. 21:40). However it could be that the BMC acts as a rationalised buffer organisation between the irrationality of mountaineering and the highly rationalising influence of other sectors of society.

Weber identifies economic goals as replacing mystical and religious goals at the top of the value system of society, '...material goods have gained an increasing and inexorable power over the lives of men' (Weber, 1976:181). Thus Weber suggests that society imposes a dominant culture of objectification supported by a positivistic rationale that devalues mystery and the intrinsic. The reported meetings between BMC officers and the Deputy Prime Minister could be an example of this process at work. It could however be the representatives of the mystical and aesthetic dominant value culture of mountaineering (BMC officers) attempting to rationalise wider society to accept its values (via the Deputy Prime Minister).

This last point would agree more closely with Bhabha's (1998) postmodern view of culture as a collection of contestable views, in which case, the culture of mountaineering and rock climbing should not be viewed as separate to society's dominant social value system, as it has been represented in this paper, but rather as one of the many elements that contribute to the formation of balance within those dominant social values. Alternatively, if Weber and Ritzer are correct that rationalisation is at work, the result could be the de-differentiation discussed by Rojek (2000) in relation to a tourism context. Escape from Weber's 'iron cage' into a dedifferentiated society may be pointless, as there is nowhere to go!

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