

# The Effect of Technology on Outdoor Experience

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## What is Technology?

"Broadly speaking, technology is how people modify the natural world to suit their own purposes. From the Greek word *techne*, meaning art or artifice or craft, technology literally means the act of making or crafting, but more generally it refers to the diverse collection of processes and knowledge that people use to extend human abilities and to satisfy human needs and wants."  
(Excerpt from *Standards for Technological Literacy*, ITEA, 2000)

## Some of the ways technology influences outdoor experiences

- Access to outdoor environments – roads, vehicles...
- Clothing, sleeping, camping gear – goretex, fleece, metal alloys...
- Activity specific gear – bikes, surfboards, canoes/kayaks, skis...
- Venue – accommodation has changed dramatically to incorporate modern technologies eg. smoke detectors, sewage systems
- Safety gear – radios, phones, GPS, compasses, maps...
- Pre and post trip images – how we get information about an area - without visiting it - and how we capture and store information for recall after a trip

## Interaction with Other Dot Points

### 2.1 Impact on people

2.1.1 motivations for seeking outdoor experiences

2.1.2 images of outdoor experience

2.1.3 social responses to risk-taking

2.1.4 *the effect of technology on outdoor experiences*

2.1.5 commercialisation of the outdoor experience

**Technology and motivations for seeking outdoor experiences** – often the experience of technology in everyday life that motivates people to seek outdoor activities that offer a simpler, less complex experience. But, paradoxically, many of the pursuits people engage in in outdoor settings have a heavy requirement on access to specific technologies.

For example, we might go back country ski touring to “get away from it all” but rely on technology to get us there, rely on technology for the specialist clothing we wear, and rely on technology for the ski gear that enables us to get out there.

**Technology and images of outdoor experience** – consider the images of *people* engaged in outdoor activities. How reliant are they on technology? What aspect of the activity requires a reliance on technology? Consider images from different periods in history and how technology differs.

**Technology and social responses to risk-taking** – it is often technology that allows us to rescue people who get into trouble in outdoor activities. Technology also allows us to create new outdoor experiences/activities eg. para-gliding, kite surfing, snowboarding. Technology also allows us to simulate outdoor settings indoors – with wave pools and indoor climbing centres.

**Technology and commercialisation of the outdoor experience** – consider the growth of the outdoor 'gear' shops; visit the website of International Mountain Guides (<http://www.mountainguides.com>) to see how mountaineering has been commercialised.

Outdoor gear provides another example of the relationship between technology and commercialisation of the outdoor experience. In many places outdoor gear has become the new 'hip' clothing to be seen in – and it is marketed in this way. In much the same way that 4wd cars are now marketed to people who may never take them off-road, outdoor gear is marketed to people who may never use them in their originally intended outdoor settings – particularly shoes and clothing.

An example that brings together many of the topics within Unit Two, consider the Brink Expedition. Three young Australian guys are travelling the world using only human power and the natural elements. Yet each step of the way they are recording their journey and sharing it using the latest high-tech gadgetry. An interesting mix of simplicity and complexity. [www.brinkx.org](http://www.brinkx.org)

### **Technology Themes**

If we recall the definition we are working under - *the diverse collection of processes and knowledge that people use to extend human abilities* – it may be helpful to adopt a theme which allows the students to identify a progression in technology. Navigation is one such area.

Throughout history humans have required an ability to find their way and there have been many novel ways of doing this. By identifying the many ways in which people can choose to navigate it becomes apparent how technologies have changed – and not always for the better.

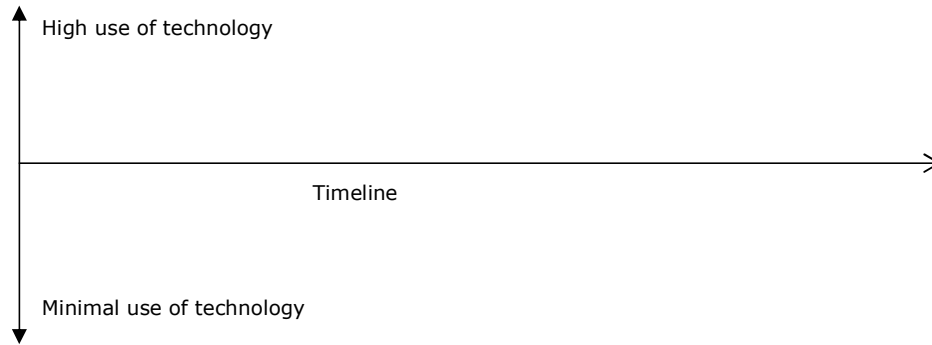
Here are some navigational aids common in different eras:

Stars – Captain Cook, Frank Worsley (Navigated the Antarctic with Shackleton)  
Maps – a wide range of types  
Compass  
Global Positioning System

A great navigation website for teaching map and compass interpretation is [www.mapzone.co.uk/](http://www.mapzone.co.uk/)

### **Activity Ideas**

- Have students remove their watches during an outdoor experience – or for part of the experience.
- Use different means of navigation during an outdoor experience. For example, verbal directions from the teacher/instructor, map only, map and compass, GPS. Doing this as a progression may add to the experience.
- Ask students to list the features of modern life that might motivate them to engage in outdoor experiences.
- Using a continuum ask your students to record when technology impacted on their outdoor experience during a trip.



- Get students to utilize a range of capture devices during an outdoor trip – video, still photos, audio and consider how these might influence and/or effect their experiences. Does using such technology change the experience?
- Develop a list of the ways in which technology influences outdoor experiences.
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the different navigational aids?

### **Assessment Ideas**

#### **Report Writing**

Using the following headings ask students reflect on a recent outdoor experience and the effect of technology on that experience. What differences did they experience as a result of the use of technology?

*Differences in Ecological Footprint*

*Differences in Community*

*Differences in Activities*

*Differences in Experience of the Environment*

These headings are taken from an article by Andy Bridle called “*Reflections on the Influence of Technology on Outdoor Education Experiences*” published in the February 2004 edition of *Journeys* – the VOA quarterly news-journal. This article can also be found on the VOA website [www.voea.vic.edu.au](http://www.voea.vic.edu.au). It may be useful for students to read this prior to their outdoor experience.

#### **Web Research**

Students could do a web research task looking at images and records from past journeys to examine the ways technology has changed over time. For example, exploration of Antarctica from Scott to Hillary to today’s adventurers.

For example, exploration of Antarctica has changed from the early days. Students could examine the changing role of technology in Antarctic expeditions by doing internet searches. They could examine photos taken from any number of expeditions, including Frank Hurley’s images on Shackleton’s Endurance trip. Comparisons could be made between early and more recent expeditions and discussions/analysis could be conducted.

Some possible resources include:

Scott Polar Research Institute – Expeditions Photo Library  
<http://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/library/pictures/expeditions/>

Scott Polar Research Institute – Index to Antarctic Expeditions

<http://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/resources/expeditions/>

The Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914-1917

<http://www.south-pole.com/p0000098.htm>

The use of the web could be made for many areas.

- Historical development of particular gear and equipment could be examined.
- Examination of the effects of changing technology on accessing environments – such as alpine environments (mountaineers and their technology), or ocean environments (sailors or surfers)

### **Digital Capture Devices**

How does the use of these change an outdoor experience?

Get students to utilize a range of capture devices during an outdoor trip – video, still photos, audio, etc. – and consider how these might influence and/or effect their experiences.