

Research Reporter

Scholarly, research and creative activity

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Brock's tourism connection

The Niagara region is known as a tourism destination.

Yet the research of Brock's faculty members in the field of tourism is less well-known. In this issue, we highlight the tourism related research of Drs. David Fennell and Linda Bramble. While quite divergent in their focus, common themes do emerge: concepts of ethics and stewardship of the land. In their own niches, Drs. Bramble and Fennell are Canadian leaders and are known internationally for their contributions to scholarship and professional development. Moreover, in keeping with Brock's reputation for integrating teaching and research, Professors Fennell and Bramble are outstanding teachers whose scholarship informs their teaching, thus benefiting the educational experience of our students. Connecting research with the community is a long-standing tradition among Brock faculty. In order to assess how such linkages can be strengthened, Brock is collaborating with Niagara College, the City of St. Catharines and the Niagara Economic and Tourism Corporation to study the feasibility of establishing a "science and innovation" or research park. In other regions, university-related research parks have contributed significantly to local economic development and job creation while providing opportunities for faculty-created spin-out companies and attracting research intensive companies and laboratories to the research.



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Despite battles, confusion and lies, ecotourism thrives

Tourism is the world's largest industry with ecotourism becoming the fastest growing sector of the industry. However, very little research exists on this greener form of tourism.

David Fennell, an Associate Professor with Brock University's Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, conducts research to "discover how



"There is a big battle now over what is and what is not ecotourism."

Dr. David Fennell

ecotourism differs from other types of tourism and how ecotourists differ from other kinds of tourists."

"There are," Fennell explains, "over 90 different types of tourists. An ecotourist is someone who is primarily interested in nature and natural resources and values an element of environmental education in ecotourist ventures. The primary motivation of an ecotourist must be to learn about nature and the environment. This form of tourism helps to conserve biological diversity and sustainability, generate business opportunities, and share the benefits of tourism ventures equitably with local communities.

Numerous definitions for ecotourism exist, creating an ambiguity that has led to the mismanagement and misrepresentation of ecotourist operations.

"ecotourism these days," Fennell writes, "is far too sexy to be ignored by an industry bent on profit." Even activities such as helicopter sightseeing trips have adopted the banner of ecotourism. In these cases, Fennell says, "ecotourism has been modified, repackaged, and mass produced to the point where the line between what

ecotourism is and is not, becomes quite blurred. There is a big battle now over what is and what is not ecotourism and how it has been characterized to suit the needs of individuals. Ecotourism, particularly in Canada, lacks good leadership. There are many countries that are far ahead of us." Australia, for example, leads in terms of knowledge and understanding of ecotourism and has

set up an accreditation system for ecotourism ventures. Ecotourism is often confused with Cultural and Adventure Tourism. While it falls into the broader category of nature-based tourism, there are distinct differences between the two. Nature-based tourism can include such activities as hunting and fishing; activities that involve the consumptive use of natural resources. In ecotourism, on the other hand, an element of conservation is essential.

Fennell explains, "All forms of tourism cause some degree of disturbance, but ecotourism aims to minimize the impact on the environment, and minor environmental disturbances are not caused intentionally, whereas the prime intention in hunting is to cause harm. An ecotourist accepts nature in its own context and values it in that context. Operators need to act as good stewards of the land."

Fennell's most recent research interest is ethics in ecotourism, an area that he says, is "particularly important in an industry that grows by leaps and bounds each year."

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Ethical standards are absolutely vital. They would indicate that we have at least *thought* about the human animal relationships that are involved in ecotourism. In addition, a code of ethics would show that we have attempted to curtail the negative behaviour.”

Fennell’s research fills a giant gap in scholarship related to ecotourism. In addition to his other work, Fennell’s next project is a book on tourism ethics. He has had several requests to share his work with audiences around the world. In the last year, Fennell has attended conferences in Tunisia, Brazil and Finland, in addition to conducting a workshop for professionals, governmental representatives and non-

government organizations in South Africa. In December 2002, Fennell attended a symposium on ecotourism in the United Kingdom, celebrating the UN designated Year of ecotourism, where he launched his newest book, *Ecotourism Programme Planning*. This year, Fennell was also the guest editor of a special edition of the journal, *Tourism, Recreation and Leisure*.

The newly formed *Journal of Ecotourism*, edited by Fennell, is the first of its kind and as Fennell explains, “is the only journal devoted exclusively to issues associated with ecotourism.” *Ecotourism Policy and Planning Issues*, a book he co-edited with Ross Dowling, will be released this year. Fennell’s first book, *Ecotourism: an Introduction*, has been

translated into Portuguese, Greek, and Korean.

In addition to his independent research, Fennell is a co-investigator with Robert Huebert (University of Calgary) and Fikret Berkes (University of Manitoba), for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council funded grant on Integrated Resource Management. Fennell explains that this project focuses on complexity theory. “The project explores how natural resources can be used to enhance communities socially, economically and ecologically, and while ecotourism,” he says, “is only one small part of this grant, it can play a large part in this process.”

~ Erin Kaipainen

Setting new standards for Ontario’s winery tourism

Inspiration strikes in the most unusual of places, but for Dr. Linda Bramble to have a revelation while at a winery was nothing new. Nor was the misinformation that she overheard a well-meaning server pass on to the tourists at the next table. “If a visit to our wine region yields a bad experience, it taints the entire region. When I talked to the winemaker, I realized that staff training was perhaps the biggest obstacle for all of Niagara’s wineries.”

Bramble’s dedication to wine and specifically, Ontario wines, is prolific. Although she is internationally recognized as a wine author and sommelier, she chose to settle in Niagara where she is a faculty member in Brock’s Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute (CCOVI), and is Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Business.

An advocate of winery tourism, Bramble believes that while the products of Niagara’s wineries are excellent, in order for Niagara’s winery tourism to grow, a consistent level of quality of service, visitor amenities, and experience must be achieved.

“Winery tourism needs to not only reach customers, but satisfy their rational, emotional, and sensory needs. Front line personnel often make the first and most

lasting impression; it is important that they are both knowledgeable and well trained,” explains Bramble.

Travelers seeking an experience in wine tourism are those who are interested in authenticity. “People love to see where wine is made and meet the people whose lives are committed to nurturing it,” Bramble explains. In addition to income generated by visitors, “winery tourism allows wineries to facilitate new product testing, gather information, increase consumer education, strengthen brand loyalty, expand product outlets and distribution channels, and increase product profit margins. Natu-

rally, wineries want to first attract visitors and then develop a relationship with them to keep them coming back,” she says. Dr.

Bramble put her extensive experience in education to work and innovated *Excellence in Winery Tourism: Towards a Quality Assurance Program for the Wineries of Ontario*, the first comprehensive training program for people working in the Ontario wine industry. The program features a comprehensive six-week course that includes product knowledge as well as excellence in wine sales and service. The program is designed to help wineries address the needs of the

wine enthusiast and to teach them how to engage in a process of self-assessment in order to avoid complacency or oversight. Wineries also receive a source book filled with creative ideas on how to establish a relationship with clients, and how to draw clients to the winery. Although it was recently piloted in January 2003, Bramble has already been recognized for her important work, honoured with a \$10,000 Professional Development Grant from the Ontario Hospitality Institute in 2001.

Her goal to initiate a benchmark for quality standards in the Ontario wine industry began with extensive research including interviews, surveys, and visits to the world’s major wine regions to assess their levels of service. Future goals of Dr. Bramble’s program are to establish an external rating system in which wineries are rewarded for excellence. Eventually, the program will be self-directed with Brock University conducting a “train the trainer” program, enabling winery personnel to train their own staff. Ontario wineries have greeted the program with enthusiasm, reinforcing Bramble’s vision that, “Ontario can have the best informed and best quality wine service in North America.”

~ Kimberley Lee



“I believe that Ontario can have the best informed and best quality wine service in North America.”

Dr. Linda Bramble



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