

# **Tracking Tourists:**

## **Movement and mobility**

**Anne Hardy**

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# Contents

Foreword	vii
About the author	ix
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
A short history of understanding mobility and tourism	3
Evidence of journeying, mobility and tourism	4
Technology, disruptive innovations, big data, smart tourism and understanding mobility	7
Understanding mobility and spatiotemporal behaviour through technology	9
The ethics of tracking tourists	13
Structure of the book	14
<b>2 The Ethics of Tracking</b>	<b>21</b>
The development of an ethical tracking framework	23
<b>3 Understanding Tourists' Movement via Survey Research</b>	<b>29</b>
What surveys tell us about tourists' movement	30
Advantages of survey research	37
Challenges of survey research	37
Ethical implications for survey research	39
<b>4 Tracking Using GPS Technology</b>	<b>43</b>
Development of GPS technology	44
Use of GPS for tracking	46
Conceptual findings that have emerged from this technique	47
Methodological studies using GPS data	52
Advantages of GPS technology	53
Limitations of GPS technology	53
Ethical considerations of this approach	56
<b>5 Tracking via Geotagged Social Media Data</b>	<b>61</b>
Using crowd sourced geotagging to track tourist mobility	63
Conceptual findings that have emerged from geotagged social media data	66

Methodological findings that have emerged from geotagged social media data	70
Advantages with social media apps	72
Limitations with geotagged social media data	72
<b>6 Tracking via Volunteered Geographic Information</b>	<b>89</b>
What has been explored using this method	92
Methodological explorations of VGI data	94
Advantages of using VGI data	96
Limitations of using VGI data	97
Ethical considerations	99
<b>7 Mobile Phone Tower Tracking</b>	<b>105</b>
How data is collected from mobile phone towers	106
Methodological understandings that have emerged from this method	108
Conceptual understandings that have emerged from this method	110
Limitations	112
Advantages	114
Ethical issues	115
<b>8 Tracking via Bluetooth and Wi-Fi</b>	<b>119</b>
How tracking using Wi-Fi and Bluetooth works	120
Methodological insights from this method	122
Understandings that have emerged from this method	124
Advantages	125
Limitations	126
Ethical considerations of these approaches	127
<b>9 Tracking via Bespoke Research Apps</b>	<b>135</b>
How bespoke apps work	136
Conceptual findings that have emerged from bespoke tourism tracking apps	139
Methodological findings from this approach	141
Limitations	146
<b>10 Tracking Tourists' Mobility via the Internet</b>	<b>153</b>
How tracking via the Internet works	154
Conceptual understandings that have emerged from web-based tracking	156
The use of bespoke internet-sourced data sets	160
Limitations and ethical issues	161

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<b>11</b>	<b>The Future of Tracking Tourists' Behaviour and Mobility</b>	<b>167</b>
	Physiological and emotional tracking	168
	Machine learning, AI and predictive modelling	170
	Emergency management	171
	Hype, expectations and plateaus: the future challenges for tracking technology	172
	Bringing ethics to the forefront	173
	Not all data is perfect data	174
	Selecting the best method	175
	<b>Index</b>	<b>181</b>

## Dedication

This book is dedicated to my parents, Robert and Elaine Hardy,  
who have never stopped questioning and innovating.  
And for those gifts, I am truly thankful.

## Foreword

Many years ago, when I was working at the University of Northern British Columbia, a colleague and I were discussing the mobility of recreational vehicle users (RVers) on the Alaska Highway. We noted that while research had explored their socio-demographic status and length of trip, almost nothing was known about their travel itineraries. No one really knew where these tourists went. This thought stayed with me until 2015 when I was living in Tasmania and an opportunity arose to apply for research that used technology to assist the tourism industry. I recalled this data dearth, applied for research funding through Sense-T and one year later Tourism Tracer was born.

Tourism Tracer is a bespoke research app that tracks tourists for their entire journey using GPS technology, and syncs this with their socio-demographic and travel experience data. The app and data dashboard drew the attention of many tourism industry bodies who enjoyed its ability to collect data and visualise it in close to real time. It was suggested that the app was one of the first of its type to track tourists for their entire journey through an entire destination, with their consent. Tourism Tracer gained so much attention that myself and my research team were suddenly thrust into many new research and industry realms – the tourist tracking research world, the innovation world, the pitching world and when interest came from potential investors, the commercial world. It challenged the way we thought about collecting, analysing, visualising data, and as time has progressed, it has also challenged the way we think about how tourists travel.

But in addition to the accolades, Tourism Tracer challenged us as researchers. Technology is a difficult beast to tame. When you combine research and technology with tourists, there are many things that can go wrong. And I have experienced this on many, many occasions! App technology can fail, mobile networks can fail, phones can fail, and tourists can so ‘no’ when asked to participate in this form of research. Moreover, new technologies can emerge which challenge existing ones and in differing contexts, can perform better than their predecessors.

Almost all the technologies and methods for tracking tourists that are detailed in this book did not exist twenty years ago. More significantly, for tourism researchers, research using these new technologies is scarce at best and disparate at worst. I am constantly being asked to compare methods and find that their strengths often differ, depending on the

research question, context, research team and project circumstances such as budget and time. I am also constantly being asked about the ethics of tracking tourists' mobility.

This book is designed to try and bridge these gaps. It is designed to assist those who wish to learn about different tourist tracking methods and compare their relative pros and cons, plus consider the ethical considerations that these methods demand. While technological change is imminent and is constantly discussed openly, I find that there is increasing concern about the ethics of these methods. This book seeks to tackle this issue head-on by assessing the relative strengths and weakness of each method, both in terms of its ability to collect data and its ability to be applied in an ethical manner.

The development of Tourism Tracer and my interest in tracking tourists' mobility was not a solo endeavour – there are many people who were behind the inception of Tourism Tracer and my research into tourist tracking. I am truly grateful for their input. In particular, I thank those involved in the design of Tourism Tracer. I thank my co-lead Richard Eccleston and project manager, Sarah Hyslop. I also thank the rest of the Tourism Tracer team – Jagannath Aryal, Brady Robards, Dugald Tinch, Kate Booth and Tommy Wong, plus Ulrike Gretzel, Bob McKercher, Dan Wang, Amit Birenboim and Noam Shoval. I also thank Bruna Silva Ragaini, Martha Wells and Elleke Leurs for their involvement in our data analysis and recruitment. I would also like to thank Ruth Steel from the University of Tasmania, plus the business development team for their ongoing support, plus the staff from our research office who have so patiently assisted me with my tracking research. Importantly I thank our industry partners: Gulliver and Ionata, who created the wonderful technology for us, and our funders: Sense T, the Tasmanian government, the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania, the Federal Group and the four regional tourism organisations who funded early tranches of Tourism Tracer. I also wish to pass my very warm and special thanks to Sally North from Goodfellow for approaching me and putting her faith in me when asking me to prepare this manuscript. And finally, I thank Alice, Peter and Hannah who have always supported me, particularly as I have prepared this book.

I hope you enjoy it.

Anne 14/9/2020

## About the author

**Anne Hardy** is an Associate Professor in Tourism and Society and Co-Director of the Tourism Research and Education Network (TREND), at the University of Tasmania, Australia. Anne grew up in Tasmania, undertook her PhD at the University of Queensland, and worked at the University of Northern British Columbia before returning to Tasmania. She is currently interested in three research areas: tourism and social justice; sustainable tourism; and understanding tourist behaviour via technology. Anne leads the Tourism Tracer project ([www.tourismtracer.com](http://www.tourismtracer.com)) that has received international acclaim, won numerous awards and has recently been commercialised. Her research has been published widely in academic journals, books and via the media. Her approach to research seeks to extend knowledge in a two-way direction between the tourism industry and academia.

