

TODAY'S PARK VISITOR
WHO IS HE AND WHAT FACILITIES DOES HE NEED?

by

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In a way, today's park visitor is very much like yesterday's park visitor from a sociological stand point. This statement says everything, and it also says nothing. I think it says everything in the sense of exactly the things that Bill Mott was talking about this morning -- in the place and the importance of parks and how they fit into the day to day lives of people in a society. You know, there are a number of very interesting animals that are known as unicorns, minotaurs and other mythological beings. I think the average park visitor is worthy of being included in that list of mythical beings. There is no such animal because, since we live in a complex society, going to parks as a kind of human behavior is a very complex thing. Added to this complexity is the fact that for years we have compared the "average park visitor" to ourselves or to people we know. That's a pretty good way of doing it if you don't have any other basis for information, but in a management situation, and with a population as varied as ours, it may make for invalid conclusions. I don't think I'm going to show you anything that you have not already seen. I hope we will provide a different perspective in an attempt to probe a bit under the surface.

I'm not concerned about "average" park visitors. I'm more concerned about the question of what is the nature and the characteristics of the social behavior that we call going to a park -- how does that relate or fail to relate to the other aspects of the behavior of the human beings that are engaging in it? Going to a park is not an isolated kind of incident in the life of human beings. Some people go to parks more frequently than others because of differences in life styles.

This first Table (A) is a summary chart to identify the variation in sociological characteristics of park visitors among adults 18 years and older in the United States. These are all studies which were conducted using national probability samples. Interviews were

TABLE A
PARK-GOING AGGREGATE

<u>SOCIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTIC</u>	<u>OFTEN</u>	<u>OCCASIONAL</u>	<u>RARE</u>	<u>NEVER</u>
Social Class (Income)	Middle	Middle	Lower	Lower
Education	High School	Less Than High School	Less Than High School	Less Than High School
Social Age	Adult	Adult	Mature Adult	Mature Adult
Residence Pattern	Large Urban	Small Urban	Small Urban	Small Urban

obtained in people's individual homes. None of these data were drawn from people actually on site. The reason for doing that is a very simple one. It is as important to know about the people who aren't going to parks as it is to know about the people who visit parks frequently. From the statistical standpoint there are problems of generalizing from on-site studies, so the national probability design gives you a certain additional flexibility.

The sample is drawn in such a way so that it is representative of (characteristics) the known population of the United States during this period of time. It's drawn on the basis of the census and is technically sound and feasible. We found that there are certain kinds of sociological characteristics for example, social class as measured by income shared among various aggregates of park visitors. Referring to Table A when we say middle income, we're talking about those families with reported gross incomes between 5 and 10 thousand dollars per annum. Lower are those under 5 thousand dollars.

Another sociological characteristic is education -- high school is 12 years completed -- less than the category/means less than 12 years. We all have chronological ages, at the same time we also have social ages -- we're either an old fogey or a kid to somebody almost all our lives. Certainly there are different stages in a human life cycle. For example, we distinguish young people between the ages of 18 and 24

as sub-adults. Essentially, it means a period when people are completing their education, beginning to establish their families and getting going. Adults are 25 to about 49 years of age. By this time the careers have been established, families have been started, children have grown up, etc. The problems of raising children and getting a career solidified are usually the main thrusts during this period of time. Then the age beyond 50 we call mature adults because the situation changes -- the family has frequently dispersed and there are grandchildren. Now, the members of the family of origin are once again concerned with adjusting to a new phase in their life and they take on new, cultural characteristics. So, adults are 25 to 49, mature adults are over 50. Finally, residence pattern refers, essentially, to those areas (in which the respondent resided) in terms of a population base. In this case, large urban refers to areas of 500,000 population or over, small urban are 25,000 population or less.

The social aggregate is a very simple idea, a lot of people do a lot of things the same way but never talk to each other about it. This means you don't have to interact directly with somebody else in order to do the thing; you do it simply because of the culture, the traditions you live in, your lifestyle, habits you learned as a child, etc. But the behavior is the same and this is the idea of the aggregate. You're pulling people together and these aggregates are on the basis of the frequencies with which they went to parks. I'm not just talking about national parks or state parks or local parks or anything like that -- all parks. These are divided in terms of Often, Occasional, Rare, and Never. Now those who fall in the category of "Often" report that when they go to parks, they go as frequently as once or more per month. Those people who say they go "Occasionally" are those who go at least once a year but not as frequently as once or more per month. Those who go "Rarely" go sometime beyond a year but it may be once every two years or five years. Then there are those who say that they never go to parks at all. In just a moment I'll show you what the breakdowns of these are in terms of their proportion in the population as a whole.

Now, taking these sets that we have just talked about and looking at the adult population as a whole, Table B shows the percent of the persons who went to some park within the year at the known frequency.

Approximately 28 percent of the adults reported that they went as frequently as once or more a month, 44 percent went occasionally, 22 percent rarely, 6 percent never. In short, about 72 percent of the

TABLE B

Frequency of Going During Year	Percent of Persons Going To Some Park Within Year-At Known Frequency %
OFTEN	28.0
OCCASIONAL	44.0
RARE	22.0
NEVER	6.0
	<hr/> 100.0

adult population said they were in some kind of a park at least once during the year before the study. What's the moral of the story at this point? The moral, obviously, is that people who go to the parks are not only differentiated in terms of sociological background but they are also differentiated in terms of the frequency with which they go into parks. For us, as people who are concerned with management problems, we have to remember that there is a possibility that maybe these quite different kinds of fish are in the same pond at the same time. Therefore, you have the beginnings of certain kinds of management problems.

What kinds of parks do they go to? Here are some data from a different study done the same way but changed slightly so that some of the figures will change. These are figures for people who went to one of these particular kinds of parks at least once during the last two years. The figures read this way (Table C). 69.5% of the adult population in the United States 18 years and older, were in some local park at least once during the two years preceding the date of the study; 57% were in a non-local park; 44% in a zoo, and 43% were in a museum.

TABLE C

Type of Park etc.	Percentage There At Least Once During Last Two Years
Local	69.5
Non-Local	57.7
Zoo	44.3
Museum	43.0

We have a number of very important ways in which we distinguish among our parks in this society. One of the major ways that we distinguish among ourselves, on an administrative basis for public parks, is by the public agency that is charged with the responsibility of administering that park. So, we talk about national parks and state parks and we talk about local parks and county parks and city parks. We also have other areas that are recreational land as well -- forest land, etc.

However, people who are not park managers don't distinguish among parks in the same way or, at least not very frequently. They distinguish among parks in other ways and in trying to find out some of the ways we discovered that a local park is any kind of park that is within 2 miles of their home no matter what agency administers it. Among other characteristics park goesers use, is that a local park may be considered to be one that doesn't require any previous planning to get there -- they're much more likely to go on the same day that they decide to go. In contrast a non-local park is a park in which they decide to go but they go on a different day. Another characteristic is the days of the weeks during which they are likely to go. Not surprisingly visitors are more likely to be in non-local parks on weekends and in local parks on weekdays. So these are some of the ways in which people tend to distinguish between the notions of the local park and non-local park. That's how we classify them throughout all the data you're going to see today.

To a sociologist the most intriguing thing about going to parks is that it occurs almost entirely in social groups. Here is a chart showing some of the distribution of different kinds of groups in local and non-local parks (Table D). Organized groups are those groups like

TABLE D
DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL GROUPS: %

<u>TYPE OF GRP.</u>	<u>NON-LOCAL PARKS</u>	<u>LOCAL PARKS</u>
Organized Grps.	9.1	7.3
Non-Organized Grps.	85.3	78.6
Less Than Five	44.2	42.7
Less Than Nine	26.3	24.5
Nine or More	14.8	11.4
Alone	3.3	12.4
No Reply	2.3	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0
X Non-Org. Grp.	5.03	4.3

tour groups, school groups, church groups, social club groups etc. Non-organized groups are those that we're most familiar with in terms of family or friends. This table shows the distribution internally within each of these cells of the group size -- the number of people who are in those groups reporting at the time they went to a park. So that 44.2% were in non-organized groups of less than 5 people total, 26% less than 9 or more. Clearly some people do go to parks alone; you've been there alone at times and so have I. You can see that more people go to local parks alone than they do to non-local parks. The arithmetic mean of the non-organized group was just over 5 for non-local parks and just over 4 for local parks. These kinds of things suggest to us, from a statistical standpoint, that there are some statistical differences between these numbers. For example, the local park is different by virtue of the fact that more of the people that go to it are likely to go alone than the non-local park. Similarly, there is a difference

between organized and non-organized groups in proportion to the total number of groups that are in a park.

One of the most interesting things that comes out here is the comparatively small proportion of essentially organized kinds of groups. I think that makes good sense, sociologically, in terms of what a park experience is. One of those commonalities that says today's park visitor is like yesterday's park visitor, which will be like the future park visitor, comes about from the essential social meaning of going to the park. We often talk about it among ourselves as a recreation experience and we talk about it in a lot of different ways. But certainly a very important part of going to a park, and one of the things that is almost unique in some ways about parks as they exist in this kind of society, is the exchange of particular kinds of sentiments among the members of the group. It's a way, for some of them, of removing themselves from certain kinds of social roles.

Now why might that be? Well, here is something that tells us about another way of looking at these social groups in terms of their sociological composition. Now we take the non-organized group and break it down (Table E). They are essentially kinship groups and

TABLE E
DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL GRPS. IN: %

<u>SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF GRP.</u>	<u>NON-LOCAL PARKS</u>	<u>LOCAL PARKS</u>
Alone	3.3	12.4
Organized Grp.	9.1	7.3
Kinship Grp.	56.7	57.1
Friendship Grp.	29.0	21.5
Don't Recall	1.9	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0

friendship groups. You can see once again that there are some differences between local parks and non-local parks with respect to this portion of the parks' utilization. The thing that's important to

recognize is that there is a very limited set of other human beings with whom you're likely to go to a park. It is, if you will, an intimate experience. You're yourself; you do your own thing.

There's something else that we want to begin to think about. That is the nature of the social relationships which exist among the people who are in these groups. This is very important in terms of determining and controlling, managing their behavior if you will, while they're there in the park. I am now beginning to suspect that from a law enforcement standpoint, that most law enforcement is carried out in all parks not by ourselves but by the groups themselves. We'd never make it if we had to attempt to put a sufficient number of law enforcement personnel in a park and did not build upon the inherent kind of social dynamics which control the behavior of people in these groups.

For example men behave differently in a male group, than they do in presence of females. What goes on in female groups is not at all the way females behave when there are males of any age present, particularly those that are close to the same age group even if they are related. So we wanted to find out something about the distribution of social groups with regard to the sexual composition of the groups (Table F). When you

TABLE F
DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL GRPS. IN %

<u>TYPE OF GROUP</u>	<u>NON-LOCAL PARKS</u>	<u>LOCAL PARKS</u>
Single Sex	11.1	12.4
Mixed Sex	83.3	73.5
Alone	3.3	12.4
Don't Recall	2.3	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0

combine people who go to a local park alone with those who go there in single sex groups, you're talking about almost one quarter of the people who are in the park and who did not, as a planned part of their behavior, necessarily intend to interact with members of the opposite

sex. The kinds of activities they wish to engage in will be, not surprisingly, quite different. Yet without a shadow of a doubt, in both types of parks, the dominant motif is that of the mixed sex group. Now, as the anthropologist and the sociologist know, the behavior of the mixed sex groups as we just mentioned is much different from that of single sex groups in important ways. To the extent that we're capable of appreciating these differences, we can utilize this knowledge in the better management of human behavior in parks.

If we're going to manage people, perhaps one of the most important things that we can learn is to manage by exception. By this we mean -- let the system percolate by itself until it goes out of phase and then do something about it. We can begin to recognize that human beings are in parks in social groups and that those groups perform very important kinds of behavioral control functions without our assistance. They are likely to perform those things irrespective of the kind of social group -- whether it's a bunch of so-called hippies or a group of older people or whether it's a family or it's friends in family groups.

Now, let's go just a little bit farther and talk about some of the internal dynamics in these groups. We asked who suggested that these people go to a park. Here's a chart showing the distribution (Table G).

TABLE G
PERSON SUGGESTING GOING TO: %
(NON-ORGANIZED GRPS. ONLY)

<u>TYPE OF PERSON</u>	<u>NON-LOCAL PARKS</u>	<u>LOCAL PARKS</u>
Self	36.5	35.0
Others	46.8	52.6
Spouse	13.9	12.5
Child	7.3	14.8
Relative	14.5	12.2
Friend	10.7	11.4
Other	.4	1.7
Don't Recall	16.7	12.4
Total	100.0	100.0

About 35 or 36 percent of the time it was the respondent himself who had suggested that they go. But in about 50% of the cases, across both kinds of parks, it was somebody other than the respondent. We then wanted to know who it was. This is the breakdown showing whether it was the spouse, another relative, a friend or someone else, such as a worker, a co-worker, or a neighbor. There are some things that can be said about this. One of the most interesting, is that the study suggests the presence of a social system which is characterized by intra-group-suggestability. Particular members within the group itself have the capability of motivating the group. And it's not connected solely with a particular kind of social role where the father says he wants to go so everybody's got to go. It shows that, interestingly, other kinds of people -- other social actors in these groups -- can also bring about the action of going to a park.

What does that mean? Well, it means that authority in the control of the behavior within the group is fairly widely equilibrated among the members. It's a different kind of thing than it is if you're in an organized group where you have an appointed leader. People have to respond and if they don't certain kinds of sanctions are exercised. It means the structure of social sanction is different. It's because of this that we sometimes hear the story of the law enforcement officer who says that if there's a fight going on between a man and his wife, stay out of it because they'll come after you.

Now let me show you some data to substantiate this. We followed up to be sure whether the interpretation that we were giving to these kinds of data seemed reasonable and plausible under the circumstances. We went back and asked those people if they had really wanted to go (Table H). You see that, substantially, most reported that they went because they wanted to do so, very few felt that they had to, some were ambivalent. The right of a person other than themselves to move the group to engage in this behavior is validated with this data.

One of the myths that I have observed is that when you talk to some park planning people, they agree that everybody does go as a group -- but once they get there, they disburse and so we have a different

kind of problem. Administrators ask -- how do I manage these groups in the park?

TABLE H
DISTRIBUTION AMONG SOCIAL GROUPS IN: %

<u>TYPE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT</u>	<u>NON-LOCAL PARK</u>	<u>LOCAL PARK</u>
Wanted to Go	86.0	80.0
Felt Had To	5.9	8.6
Ambivalent	6.8	11.0
Don't Recall	1.3	.4
Total	100.0	100.0

We took the opportunity at this time to investigate the extent to which the groups that go into our parks disperse once they move into the park setting. It doesn't make any difference whether you're talking about local parks or non-local parks (Table I). You can see

TABLE I
DISTRIBUTIONS AMONG SOCIAL GRPS. IN: %

<u>GRP. REMAINED TOGETHER</u>	<u>NON-LOCAL PARK</u>	<u>LOCAL PARK</u>
Yes	91.4	89.5
No	6.4	9.2
Don't Recall	2.2	1.3
Total	100.0	100.0

that the majority of groups do tend to remain together. Again, for very good reasons. They are not afraid of the outdoors, of being lost or anything like that. Apparently, one of the important factors is why they go to parks to begin with. It is the nature of the experience in these situations which is almost totally absent at any other time. It

is incredible to hear people talk about their park experiences. They discover new dimensions of personalities among those people who are with them, that are devoid and separated from their particular roles. For example, a woman said one time, that she found their 11-year-old boy could build a fire better than anybody else no matter how many adults tried. Nobody thought he had it in him, much less that he knew of a fire was about or how to do it.

Now what about the cross-overs between parks. Is the situation such that people go only to one kind of park and don't go any place else? We attempted to find this out by assessing the extent that those people who went to the non-local parks during the year, also went to local parks (Table J). As you can see 72% did. 28% of the people who went

TABLE J
DURING SAME PERIOD WAS AT: %

<u>DURING YEAR RESPONDENT WAS IN</u>	<u>NON-LOCAL PKS.</u>	<u>LOCAL PKS.</u>	<u>%N.</u>
Non-Local Pk.	28.0	72.0	(50.6)
Local Pk.	71.5	28.5	(64.5)

to non-local parks said they didn't go to local parks. The figure remained remarkably the same when you reversed the question -- so that of the local park people, 72% went to non-local parks and about 28% went solely to their own local park. The figures in parentheses refer back to the earlier chart of the percentage of the population as a whole which went to these kinds of parks.

There's another kind of dimension which cuts across all these considerations when we begin to think about going to parks. You not only have different kinds of groups with different periods of expectation -- with different utilization intensities -- but you also find some that we might call "locals" and those who tend to "appropriate" a park and feel about it as their park. They are likely to respond to the behavior of other people or the intrusion of other people into their

social space in a way that is different from those people who say that the parks belong to everyone. These are some of the things that we have been attempting to find out about. We want to be able to establish for ourselves some kind of parameter values as to the extent to which these situations occur over certain periods of time. We need to begin to think about some of the ramifications of these social structural characteristics of parks, so that we might utilize them in our own work as park management people.

One of the things that we're always curious about is substitutability of activities. That is, maybe all those kids come to a park because they haven't got anyplace else to go and they're not really there to appreciate the true park values. How many times have we said and heard -- "People aren't here to really appreciate the value of the park so perhaps they could engage in that behavior some place else"? We tried to find out what some of those other things were that they did when not in a park. (Table K) these are the percentages of the people

TABLE K
PERCENTAGE OF PERSONS IN A PARK BY TYPE, WHO ALSO ENGAGED IN
ACTIVITY DURING SAME TIME PERIOD

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>NON-LOCAL PARK</u>	<u>LOCAL PARK</u>
Attended Classes Lectures	47.3	44.8
Went to a Play or Concert	49.5	45.0
Went to a Zoo or Museum	49.0	48.0
Played a Sport	53.7	48.8
Went Fishing, Camping, Hiking, etc.	59.4	51.7
Went to Nightclub or Bar	59.4	53.3
Was a Sport Spectator	61.2	56.7
Went to a Movie	73.8	71.2
Went Boating, for a Swim, Picnic, Drive	92.7	86.7
Visited a Friend, Relative, Etc.	98.7	97.0

who were in a park of that type during the year who said they also engaged in the activity which is shown on the left. Thus 47.3% of those people went to non-local parks also attended classes and lectures in their community throughout the year. They've just done it at least once; the refinement of the data are not available but we do have this chart. They went to a play, they went to a museum, played a sport, went fishing, camping, hiking, etc. About 73% went to a movie; many went boating, for a swim, picnicking, or for a drive; these are all put together because we know on the basis of the ORRRC Report and the BOR studies that these are some of the most important kinds of activities in which everybody engages. You find that 92% or 85% of the people say that they have done that at least once. It's not surprising; we expect to find them that way. The last category shows that 97% of people who visited a park also visited at least one friend during the same period of a year. Visiting a friend, is from a sociological standpoint, very much like the kind of experience people have or report that they have when they're in parks.

Human life in society is organized on the basis of several kinds of principles. Their social organizations tend to differ. We have come to recognize this fact, particularly as we've had more and more concern with formal organizations that embody different kinds of personnel activities. For example, major corporations now seem to embody both sides of these two principles of social organizations which seem to cut across almost every kind of animal society and particularly human society. That is, on this side of the organization we work and we make things but we have another part of our organization and in that part of the organization we dance and sing and drink beer and have a good time. The same people are involved but they do things quite differently with quite different kinds of people. I remember in the last couple of years asking a friend how many times he'd gone to a local park with his boss. He was horrified. I said, "Why not, you know him well, you're colleagues, you're professional people?" "But yet," he said, "he's not my friend." "To take him to the park means that I have to open up to him in some ways, certain aspects of another part of me that perhaps is very important in keeping that part that he sees alive and going and creative." He said, "Oh, I'll go to the race track with

him though." So going to a park is not like going to a race track in terms of the people that you'll go with.

Now then, one last kind of information that we've found which is interesting and comes full circle to the kind of notions of frequency with which we began. That is, the number of times at one of these kinds of parks that were reported by the people who were there (Table L).

TABLE L
NUMBER OF TIMES AT PARK DURING YEAR, BY TYPE: %

<u>TYPE OF PARK</u>	<u>SIX OR LESS</u>	<u>MORE THAN SIX</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Non-Local Park	80.0	20.0	100.0
Local Park	65.0	35.0	100.0

As you can see 80% of the people who went to some kind of non-local park six or fewer times a years, 20% went more frequently than that to local parks, 6 or less, 65%, etc.

This merely brings us back to the material that we began with in the sense that it probably makes good sense from a managerial stand point to begin to try to identify on site those particular kinds of groups that are most frequently found in our areas. We should expect that they will differ from time to time. We're not finding anything in this study which are peculiar to this country alone. The Canadian National Park Service has been engaged in a number of studies in some ways similar to this over the last couple of years. We have attempted to coordinate with them so that when we get around to doing comparative kinds of work, we will have sufficient points of comparison. One of their very interesting findings was that 15% of the people produced more visits to more kinds of parks in a single year than the other 85% did in three years. They found that the average number of visits to a park, in this case the medium size, that is the 50th percentile, was about 4.5 per annum. While we haven't gotten around to doing these kinds of calculations ourselves for the data that we have at this point, I'll be very surprised if we're far from that figure at all. What kinds of changes are really going to take place in the parks and in the systems

that we have to manage next year, in the next 15 - 25 - 30 - 50 years? Certainly some of those kinds of things are the things that Bill Mott articulated so very well. But one of the other kinds of things that we have to ask and have to be aware of is changes in the rates of going. In other words, if you merely change the average of four visits per adult per year to some kind of park any place, to 5 visits, you have made a tremendous change in the impact on the system as a whole and what we have to respond to. If it goes up farther, it's going to change more. We just don't have the kinds of figures from previous studies on a national basis to be able to accurately predict this.

You know as well as I that a "visit" is not a "visitor." We create administrative statistics by counting visits, and it makes sense for administrative systems -- we have to do it -- but it is not an accurate count of the number of persons present during a particular time period.

I believe that we, as park managers, are the most effective instrument for the change of the social meaning of parks in this society, within a short period of time, than anything else. The visitors can't change it that fast because they're not changing that fast. They seek the same kinds of things that they sought before -- although they may do it in a different or peculiar kind of way. Our public parks are unique historically -- supported by public funds available to everybody because they happen to be a member of society. Maybe some of the people who are coming into the parks today and behaving in a way differently to those that we have seen in the past are making the parks more "public" than they ever were before. They bring in new and different kinds of social definitions of what they want and what they experience in the kinds of parks. We know, and this is not the place to go into it at this point, that there are quite different definitions of social space shared by middle class people, upper class people and lower class people. Similarities and differences will substantially influence our lives as park managers in the future. So perhaps we should learn as much about them as possible.