



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION
1100 OHIO DRIVE, S. W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20242

APR 16 1987

Memorandum

To: All Superintendents and Associate Regional Director,
White House Liaison, National Capital Region

From: Associate Regional Director, Operations, National Capital Region

Subject: Visitor Services Project

Enclosed is a package describing the Visitor Services Project, a sociological research program developed by Dr. Gary Machlis. This kind of project can supply a great deal of information of interest to park managers: who our visitors are, where they come from, where they go and what they do in our parks, how they feel about the resources and services provided, etc. With this information we can tailor our services to match the interests and needs of park visitors, as well as more effectively direct their activities to minimize resource impact.

Please look over the material, share it among your staff, and let us know if you are interested in this or some other kind of sociological research. The cost can be reduced considerably if several parks are studied at the same time. The costs vary according to how much and what types of information are desired; something between \$3,000 and \$7,000 per park is likely.

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park will be implementing the Project this summer.

Those wishing to obtain more information or to participate in a study such as the Visitor Services Project should contact Interpretive Specialist Sam Vaughn at 426-6770.

Samuel V. Thurgill

Enclosure

AN INTRODUCTION
to
THE VISITOR SERVICES PROJECT

Introduction

The Visitor Services Project is a long-term research program of the National Park Service. Its purpose is to develop a practical method for gathering information about visitors and visitor services that park managers can use themselves. The Project began in 1982, and work has been conducted in several parks and in several regions of the country. The Project has had numerous sponsors, with resources coming from the NPS, several cooperating associations, and concessioners.

What is Involved

There are at least three kinds of sociological information useful to park managers. The first is knowledge about the kinds of services, activities and opportunities available to the public. The second is knowledge about visitors: who they are, where they go, what they do, and so forth. The third is understanding the relationship between services and visitors; i.e. are visitor needs being met in the most efficient way, while protecting resources.

Techniques have been developed to allow park managers to collect such data quickly, reliably, and with a minimum of effort and cost. Much of the information is provided to the manager in simple graphs, charts and maps.

How the Project Works

The technique for gathering data on visitors provides an example of how the Project works. Once a park staff decides to participate, they are sent a design package for the visitor survey. The staff can choose from a selection of pre-tested questions, and can add special questions as well. The staff is sent the completed surveys and all necessary materials, including a sampling plan to guide the distribution of questionnaires to visitors. The questionnaires can be distributed by volunteers, campground hosts, or park staff. If needed the University of Idaho CPSU can take over this task. A training video will soon be available.

Visitors fill out the questionnaires, which are mailed directly to a facility for coding and analyzing the data. Within 90 days, the park staff receives the results in a graphic format that is easy to use. Managers can also order special analysis from a "menu" included in their report. A workshop is conducted in the park to aid the staff in applying the results.

HOW THE VISITOR SERVICES PROJECT CONTRIBUTES
TO THE 12 POINT PLAN

The Visitor Services Project has a unique objective: to develop a flexible method for gathering visitor data that park managers can use themselves. Techniques have been developed to map visitors and interpretive services.

The project has been supported by the Divisions of Interpretation and Visitor Services and Recreation Resource Assistance, WASO, the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Northwest Regions, several natural history associations, and the Conference of National Park Concessioners. It is described in detail in "The Visitor Services Project: Visitor Data for Park Management" (Trends 22(4):12-18, 1985).

The Visitor Services Project can directly contribute to the National Park Service's new 12 Point Plan. Specifically:

Point 3: STIMULATE AND INCREASE OUR INTERPRETIVE AND
VISITOR SERVICE ACTIVITIES FOR GREATER PUBLIC
IMPACT

- Interpretive mapping can describe the distribution of visitor services available. This information can suggest ways to improve service to visitors--such as relocating an exhibit or including a new topic.

-Interpretive mapping can illustrate gaps in the interpretive program or reveal ways to diversify it. For example, new services could be developed so that they did not overlap with existing ones.

-Visitor mapping can help answer specific management questions: Do areas of a park have few interpreters on duty at times when visitor numbers are high? Are foreign visitors a significant population, requiring a bilingual staff?

Point 7: SEEK A BETTER BALANCE BETWEEN VISITOR USE AND
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

-Visitor mapping can help locate key places and times that visitor concentrations occur--where visitor use may influence significant resource problems.

-Visitor mapping data can be combined with biological data to help managers make informed resource decisions.

Cost

The cost will vary according to the size and duration of the survey, the kinds of special analyses the park staff may desire, and the services requested from the CPSU.

Benefits of the Project

There are several benefits associated with the Visitor Services Project. Foremost is that NPS managers can gain valuable information about visitors and services quickly and at low cost. This information is useful in many ways. For example:

- *Managers can compare where and when services are offered with the needs and activities of visitors.
- *Visitor data can be combined with biological data to help make informed resource management decisions.
- *The maps, graphs, and charts can be easily used in general management plans, resource management plans, interpretive plans, and so forth.
- *Visitor mapping can provide concessioners, cooperating associations and nearby communities with valuable marketing information.
- *Managers can gain an appreciation for visitors' attitudes and opinions regarding proposed developments, new regulations, controversial issues, and so forth.

The techniques developed through the Visitor Services Project may not meet all the data needs of park managers, and for some areas the mapping approach may be inappropriate or unneeded. But for many, participating in the Project may provide a practical way to gather useful and important information.

For More Information

To learn more about the Visitor Services Project, please contact Dr. Gary E. Machlis, Cooperative Park Studies Unit, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho 83843. Several reports describing the Project are available.

Summary of Visitor Mapping Studies

Year	Park	Visitors contacted	Acceptance rate	Response rate	Sample size
1983	Yellowstone	538	93%	51%	255
1984	Glacier	196	98%	40%	77
1985	Crater Lake	1,046	99%	51%	522
	North Cascades	791	97%	43%	333
1986	Gettysburg	1,115	98%	41%	454
	Indepen- dence	1,393	93%	40%	525
	Valley Forge	789	99%	45%	353
		5868	97%	44%	2489

**Point 8: ENHANCE OUR ABILITY TO MEET THE DIVERSE USES
 THAT THE PUBLIC EXPECTS IN NATURAL PARKS**

-Visitor mapping can describe the diversity of visitors and their behavior within a park. Managers can compare where and when services are offered with the needs and behaviors of visitors. Visitors' preferences and needs can be identified.

**Point 11: DEVELOP A TEAM RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
 CONCESSIONERS AND THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

-Interpretive mapping can suggest where joint training of employees, complementary services, or co-sponsorship of programs are appropriate.

-Visitor mapping can provide concessioners with valuable marketing information.

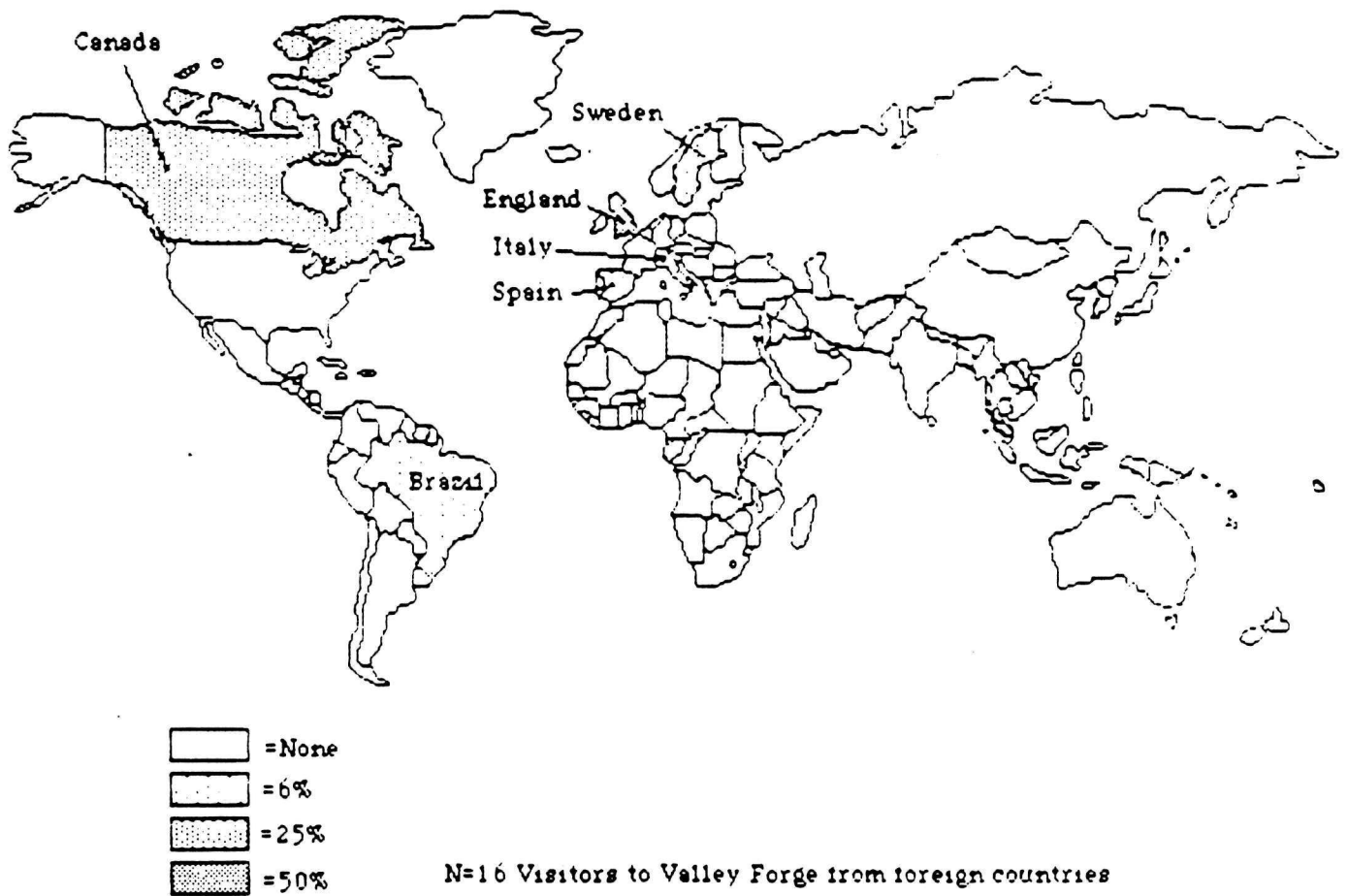
**Point 12: FOSTER AND ENCOURAGE MORE CREATIVITY, EFFICIENCY,
 AND EFFECTIVENESS IN THE MANAGEMENT AND
 ADMINISTRATION OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

-Interpretive mapping can help managers evaluate interpretive programs.

-Visitor and interpretive mapping can be conducted efficiently and inexpensively, with information quickly returned to managers in a useful form.

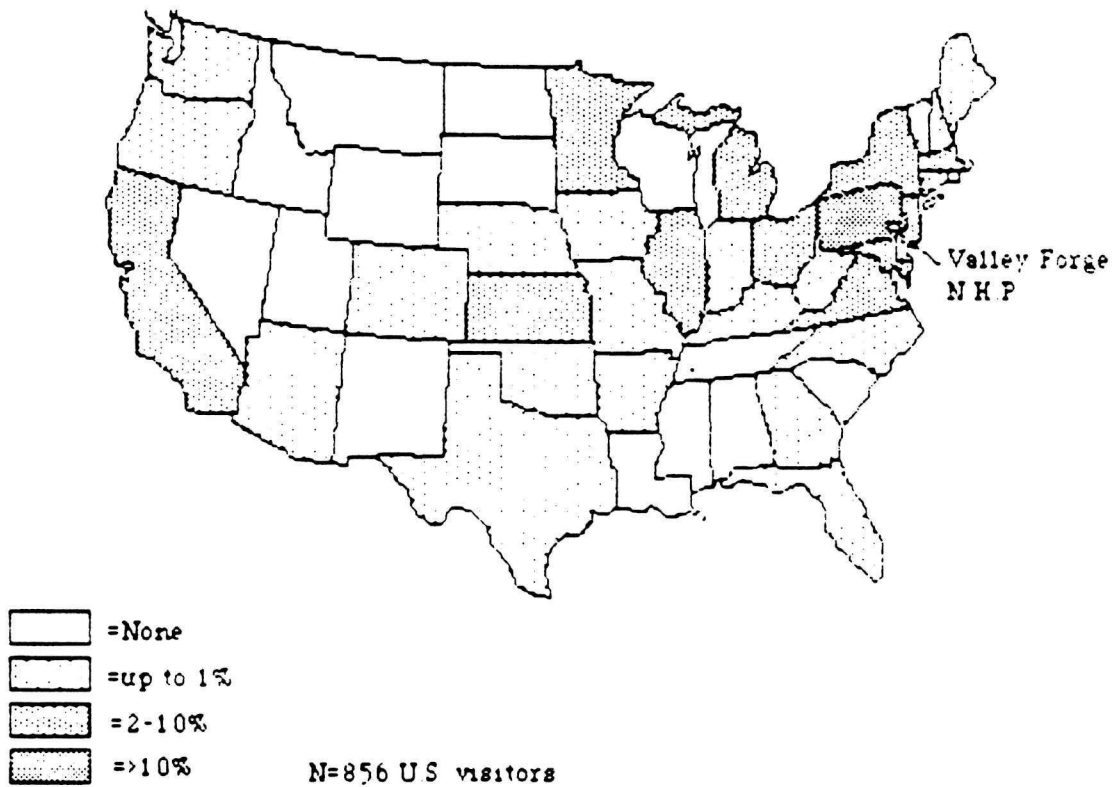
For more information on the Visitor Services Project, contact Dr. Gary E. Machlis, Sociology Project Leader, Cooperative Park Studies Unit, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho 83843.

B. Visitor characteristics (continued)



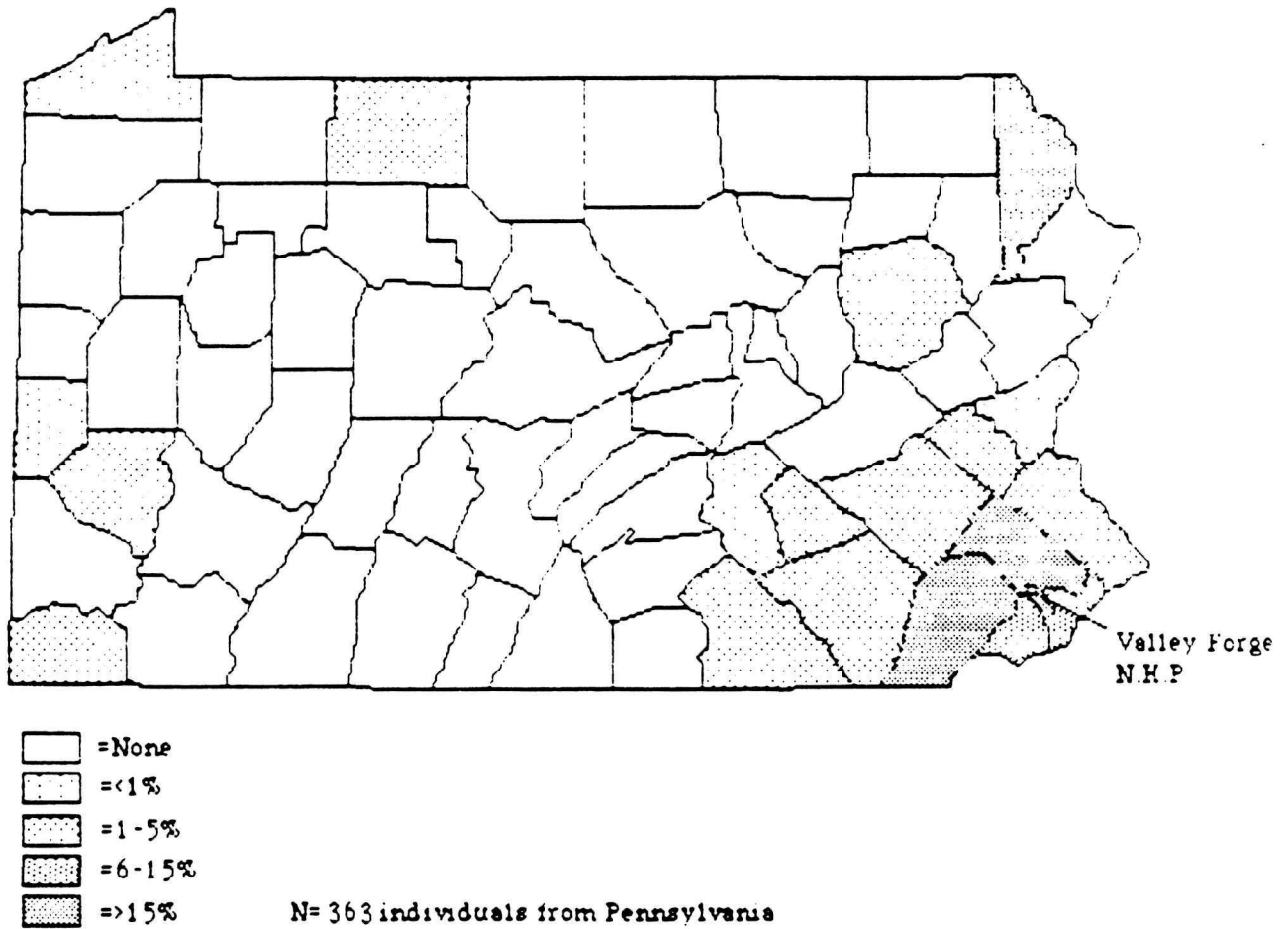
**Map 2: Proportion of visitors from each country
--foreign visitors**

B. Visitor characteristics (continued)

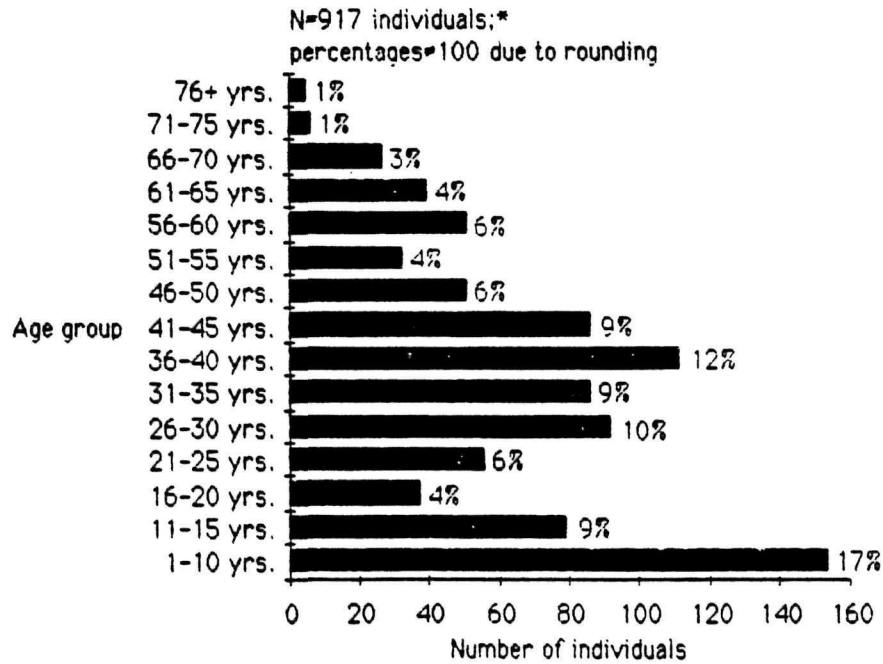


Map 3: Proportion of visitors from each state
 -- U.S. visitors

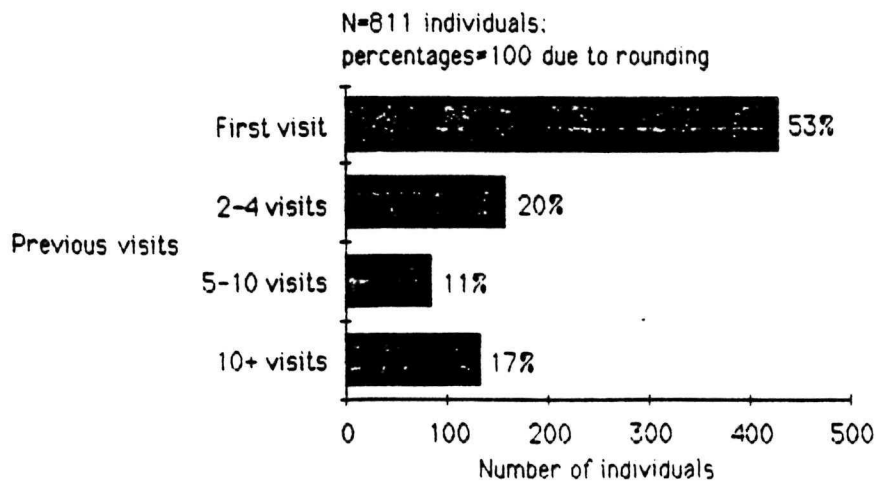
B. Visitor characteristics (continued)

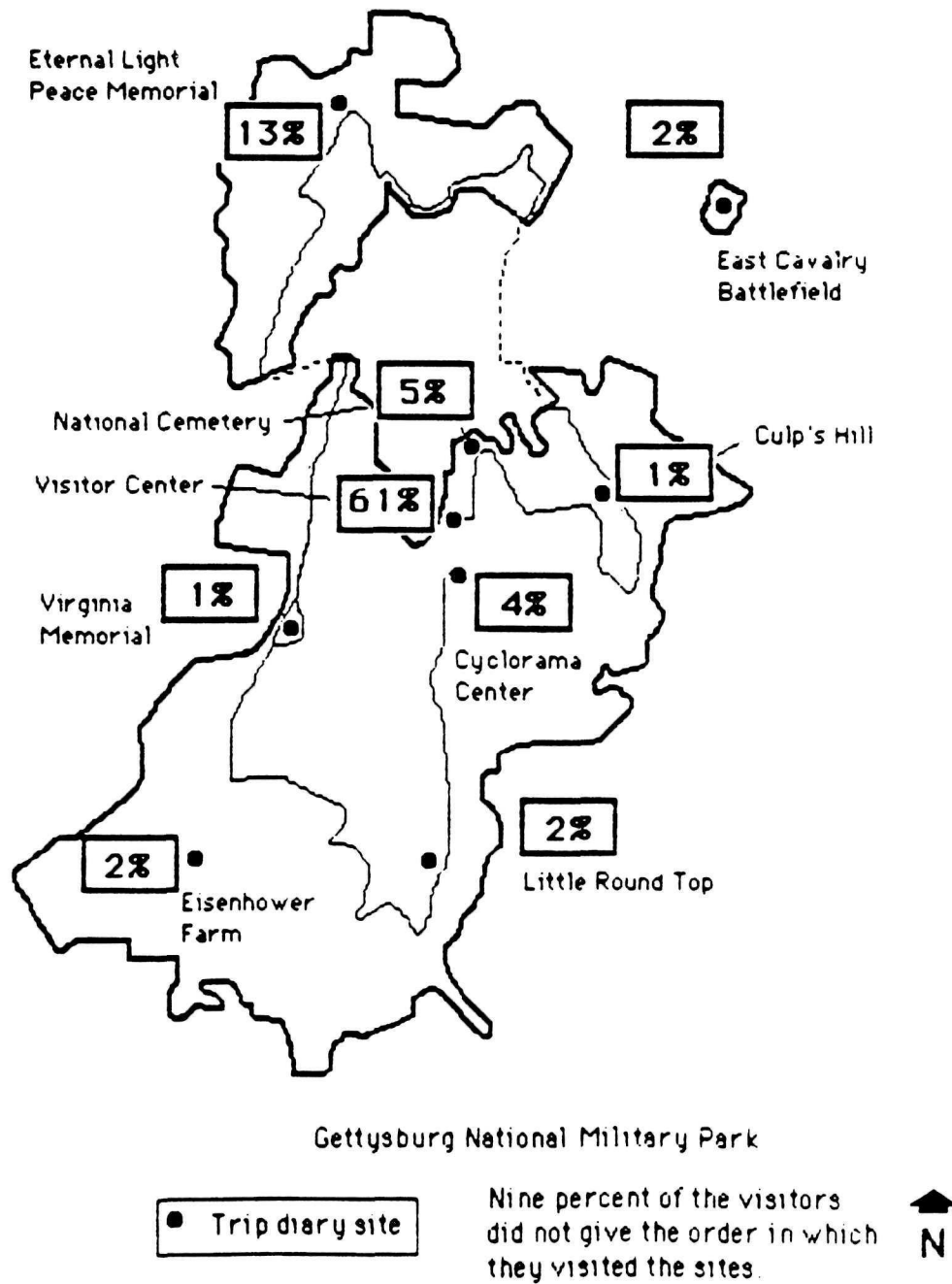


**Map 4: Proportion of visitors from each county
--Pennsylvania visitors**

B. Visitor characteristics (continued)**Figure 3: Visitor ages**

* Ages, zip codes, and previous visits were asked of individual group members

**Figure 4: Number of visits**

E. Visitor locations (continued)**Map 5: Proportion of visitors who visited each site first**

F. Activities and use of time compared (continued)

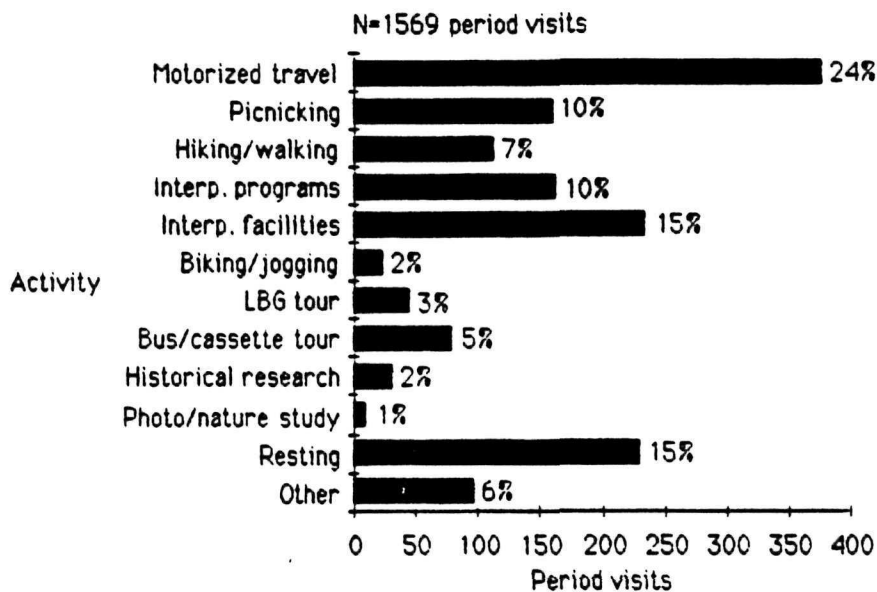


Figure 25: Period visits for each activity
--Day 1 of visit

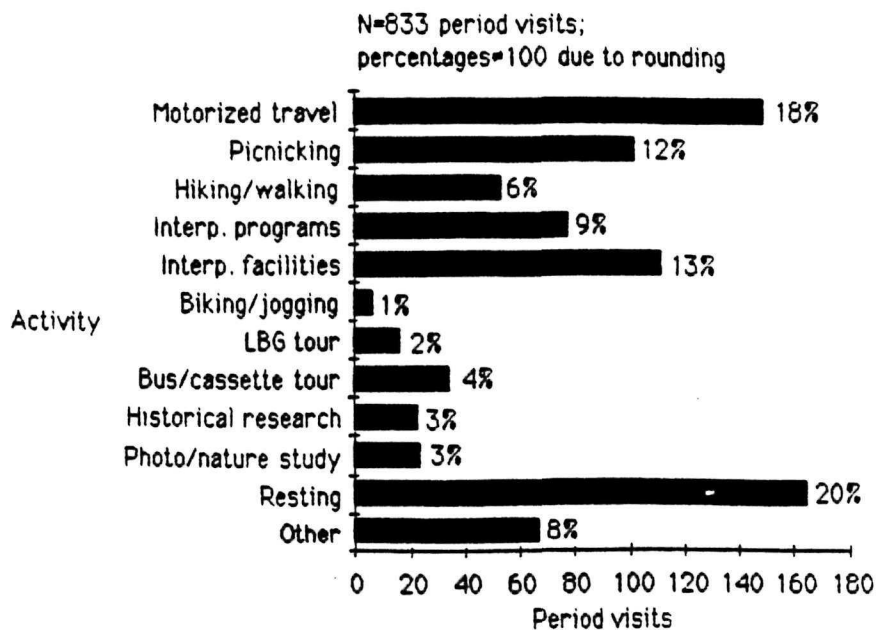
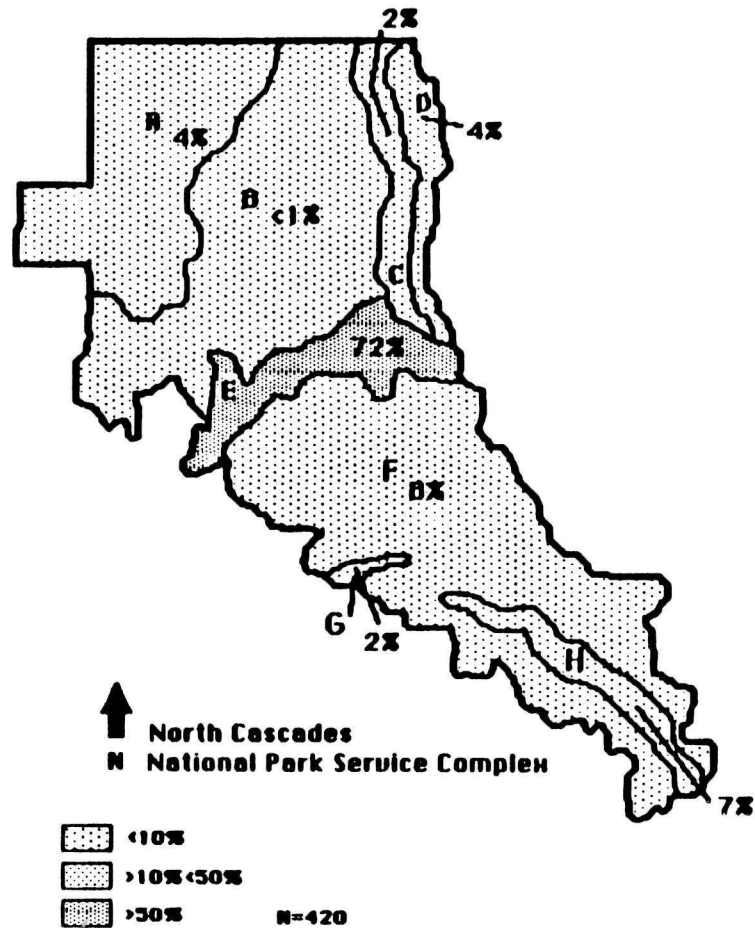
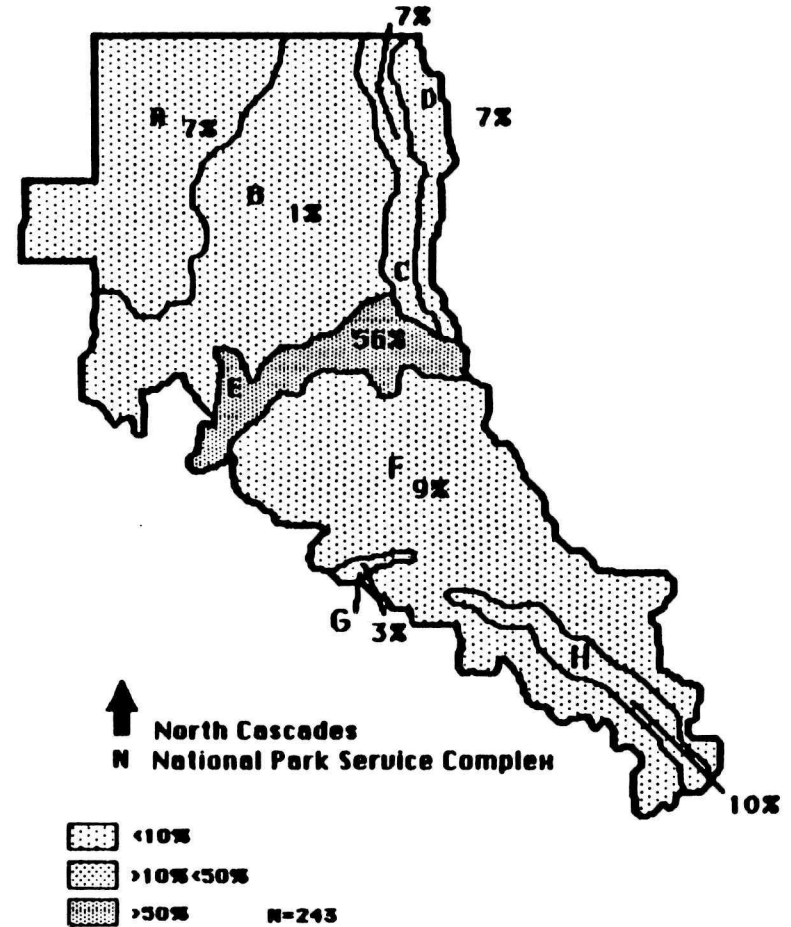


Figure 26: Period visits for each activity
--Day 2 of visit

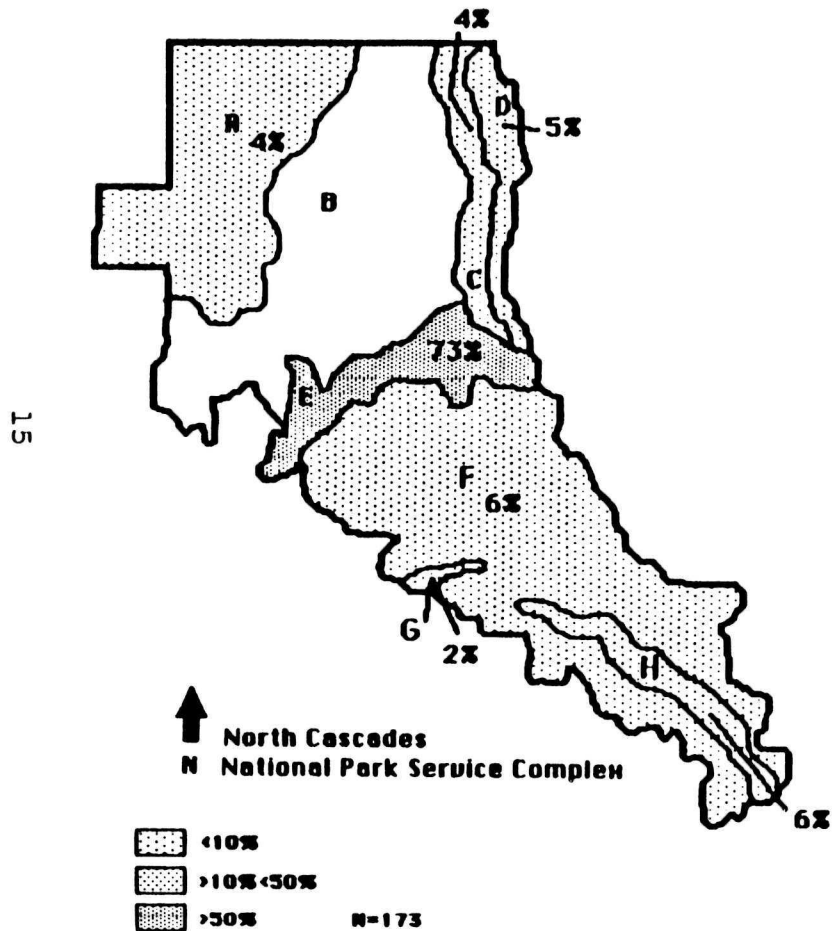
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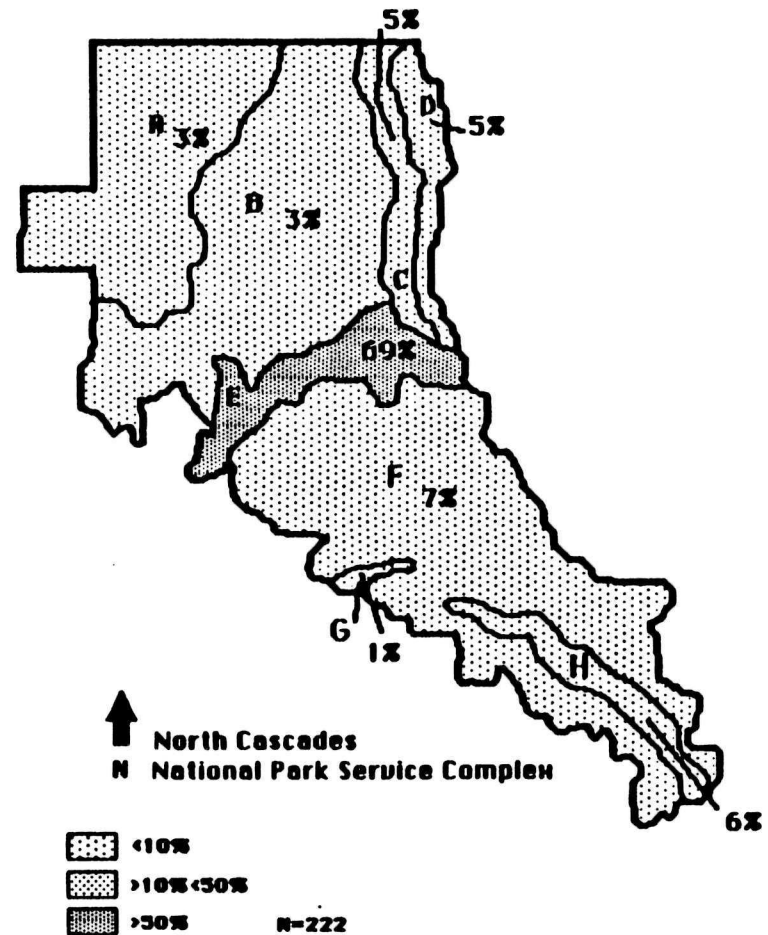
Map 2.8: Proportion of period visits to each zone by Highway visitors--day 1 of visit



Map 2.9: Proportion of period visits to each zone by Highway visitors--day 2 of visit



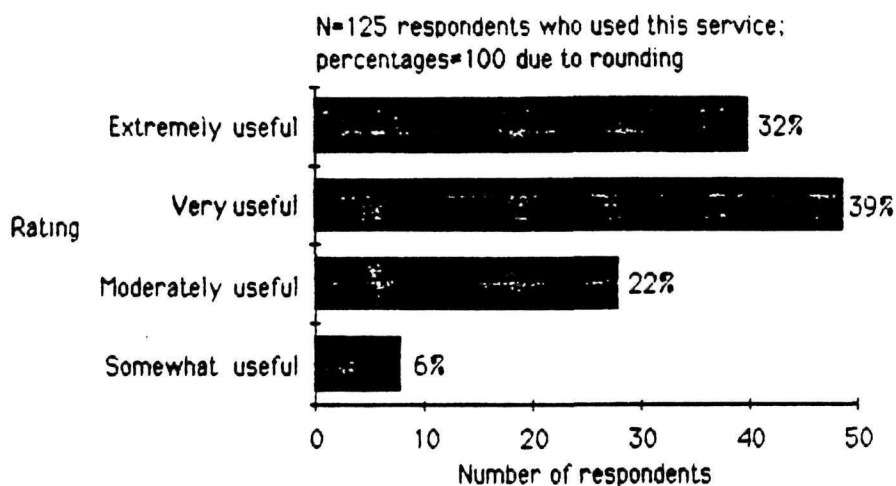
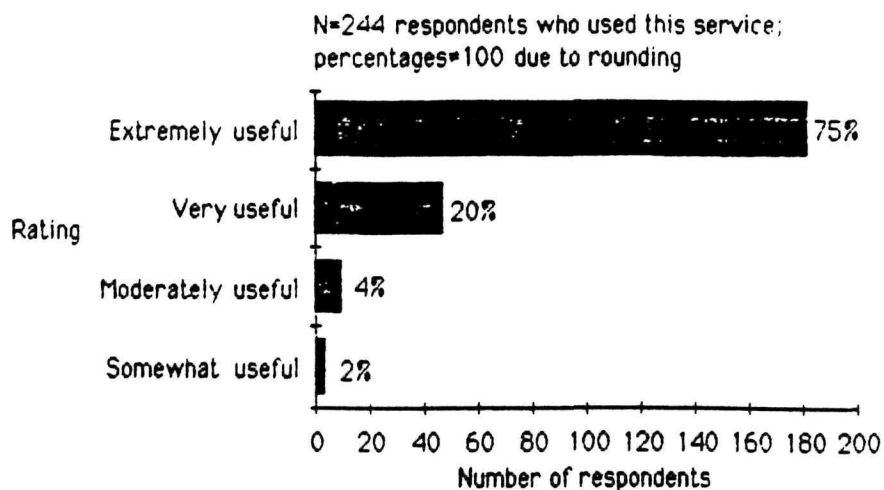
Map 2.3: Proportion of period visits to each zone by
Highway visitors--morning period



Map 2.4: Proportion of period visits to each zone by
Highway visitors--afternoon period

Summary of Highway visitors' suggestions for the future of North Cascades and additional comments.

Type of comment	Number
<u>Comments on favorable impressions of the area</u>	(97)
1. Beautiful, scenic, enjoyable	93
2. Appreciated dam and/or Seattle City Light tour.	4
<u>Comments of facilities</u>	(90)
1. Add to or expand existing facilities (including roads, trail system, rest areas, etc.)	39
2. Facilities, roads are nice, well maintained	24
3. Improve campground facilities	12
4. Improve quality of roads	10
5. Maintain facilities as they are	2
6. Eliminate an NPS facility	1
7. Improve security at parking areas	1
<u>Comments on preserving area</u>	(59)
1. Preserve natural resources; keep wild; as is	58
2. Protect quality of fishing areas	1
<u>Comments on visitor information</u>	(35)
1. Additional information along highway useful (identifying geologic features, flora, fauna)	14
2. More information on trails needed	8
3. Additional information needed upon entering park	5
4. Additional interpretive programs, topics useful	5
5. Sign facilities and trails better	2
6. Additional safety information needed	1
<u>Comments on visitor services</u>	(22)
1. Add to or expand existing types of services (such as new campgrounds, etc.)	12
2. Add new types of services (ski areas, souvenir shops, etc.)	9
3. Cooperate with U.S.F.S. in developing services	1
<u>Comments on negative impressions</u>	(13)
1. Crowding	3
2. Horses damage backcountry	3
3. Too much noise	2
4. Too many motorcycles, trucks	2
5. Poor concession facilities, services	2
6. NPS dominates Stehekin village	1

I. Special question 2--Visitor services (continued)**Figure 33: Visitor ratings of the audio messages****Figure 34: Visitor ratings of the Electric Map**

L. Special question 5--Distracted by modern structures?

Question 9 (see questionnaire, Appendix A) asked visitors if they were distracted by the presence of modern structures near the historic battlefield scene. Twenty five percent reported that they were distracted. A review of the visitor comments revealed that nine percent specifically mentioned being distracted by a tower.

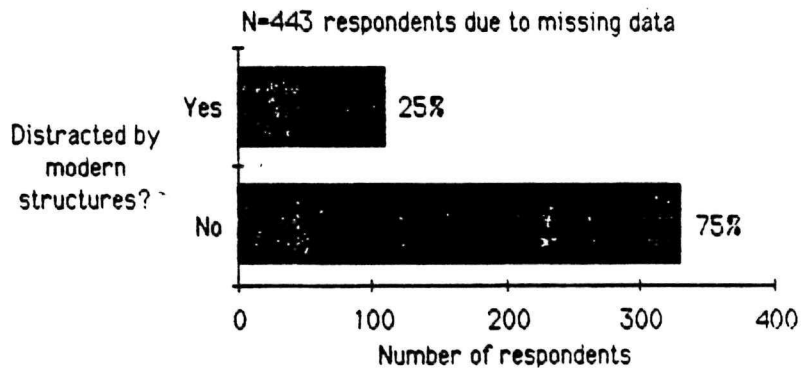


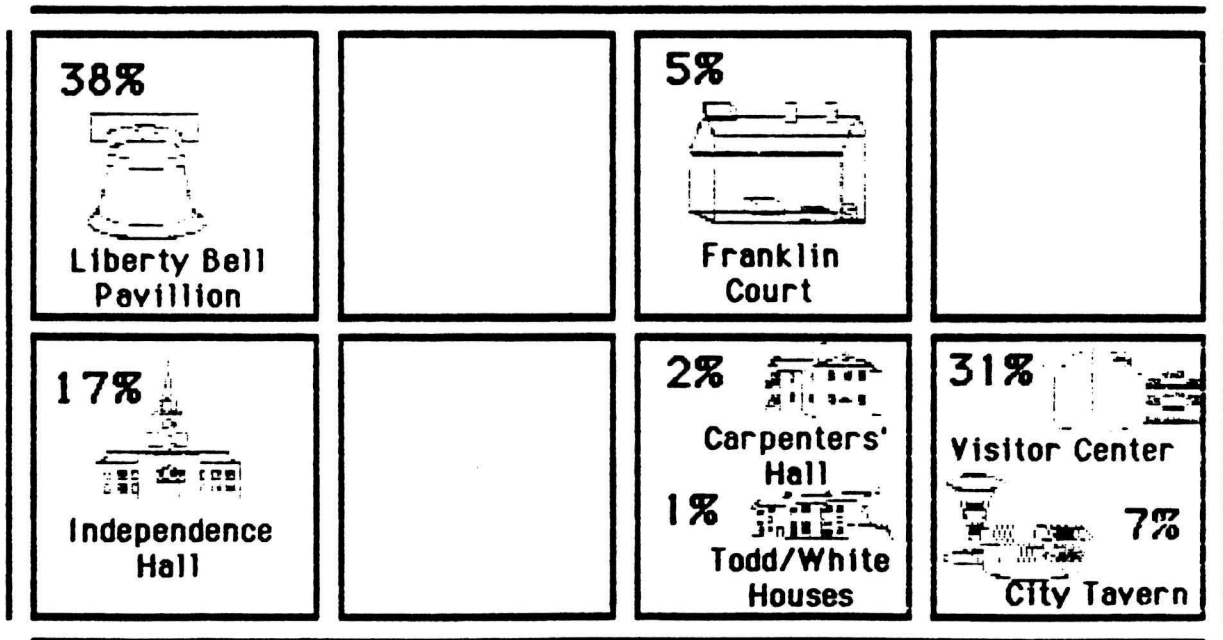
Figure 40: Visitors who were distracted by modern structures

COMMENT SUMMARY

Comment	Number
<u>General impressions</u>	(224)
1. Wonderful	97
2. Interesting, informative, educational	36
3. A place to return to again and again	22
4. Wish we had more time	13
5. Too commercialized	11
6. Impressed with area	20
7. Inspirational, moving	8
8. "Thank you"	8
9. Too hot	3
10. Please expand size	2
11. Traffic circle a problem	2
12. Keep developers out, keep as is	2
13. A place everyone should visit	1
14. Practical	1
15. GNMP should remain like a cemetery to show that war contains no heroism and is nothing but a stupid massacre	1
16. Need to extend hours	1
17. Would like to see more commercialization of the immediate area	1
18. Evening traffic terrible	1
19. Unique experience	1
20. Would recommend to all Pennsylvania residents	1
21. Wouldn't bring kids to this area	1
22. Lincoln Train Museum is a ripoff	1
*N=278 responses; visitors often made more than one comment on their questionnaire.	

COMMENT SUMMARY (continued)

Comment	Number
<u>Visitor information, Visitor Center, and Interpretive Programs</u>	(78)
1. Electric map excellent	9
2. Need more improved brochures	8
3. Need more living history	7
4. Living history interesting and informative	6
5. Need additional emphasis on the Confederates	5
6. Auto tour extremely well done	4
7. Need more people in costume	4
8. Increase frequency of movie	3
9. Visitor Center or Cyclorama should be open until 8 or 9 pm during summer	3
10. Need to inform people on what to see first to understand the tour	3
11. Longer stopping time at sites	2
12. Visitor Center should be first step	2
13. More meaningful if Cyclorama was first	2
14. Need more mile markers to the sites	2
15. Visitor Center excellent, educational	2
16. Excellent historical tour for children	2
17. More meaningful if rental car tour	1
18. NPS should rent audio tapes	1
19. No attempt was made to describe the methods and policy of burying the dead	1
20. Need more audio messages	1
21. Visitor Center needs to be toned down or more landscaping	1
22. Evening programs were instructive and interesting	1
23. Need more personnel at Visitor Center to guide smaller groups and families	1
24. Two-hour ranger talks should be expanded	1
25. Need more walking tours	1
26. Self-guided tour should begin where the battle started rather than where it ended	1
27. Seeing the Electric map first made self-audio tour more understandable	1
28. Was not aware of Park Traveler Radio Station	1
29. Need better or improved explanation about cemetery and who's buried there	1

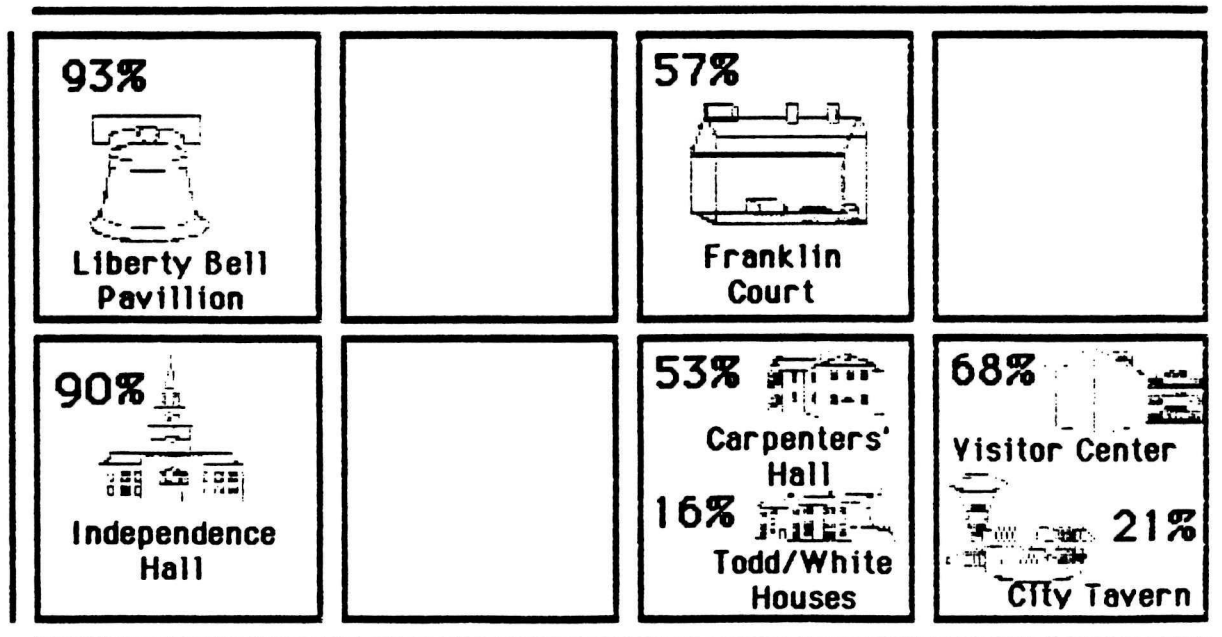
E. Visitor locations (continued)

Independence National Historical Park

N

N=525 respondents

Map 5: Proportion of all visitors who went to each site first

E. Visitor locations (continued)

Independence National Historical Park

N

N=525 respondents

Map 4: Proportion of all visitors who went to each site

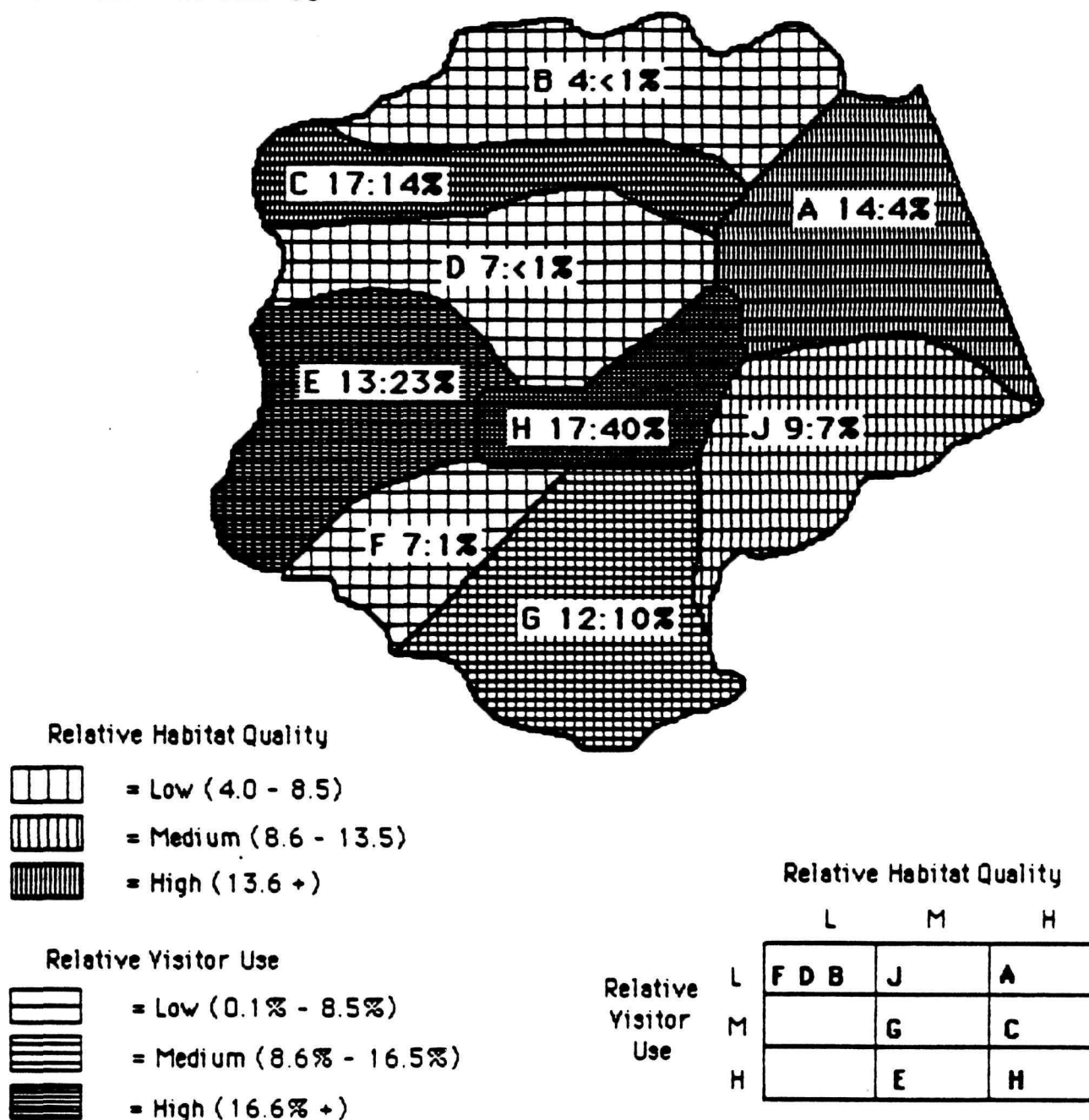


Figure 7: Relative Habitat Quality Compared with Relative Visitor Use

The Visitor Services Project
1987-88

A Proposal

The Visitor Services Project is ready for use by interested units throughout the National Park System. The next set of challenges are to:

- 1) increase its availability while maintaining efficiency and further improving the techniques,
- 2) smoothly transfer its management from the University of Idaho CPSU research program to operations within the NPS,
- 3) integrate its use into management and planning activities within the Service.

These objectives can be accomplished in FY87-88. By FY89-90, the technique could be even more widely used, and for several distinct and important purposes:

- 1) As an integral part of each park's resource management, general management and/or interpretive planning activity.
- 2) As a standard way to gather data necessary for carrying capacity and visitor impact management efforts.
- 3) To routinely gather data on "indicator parks," in order to chart national trends in NPS visitation.
- 4) As a significant tool for marketing, useful to both NPS, concessions, and local communities.

Two options are presented: Option 1 describes what could be accomplished with existing CPSU staff; Option 2 describes what could be accomplished if an additional assistant was employed.

Training NPS employee(s) to take over management of the visitor studies is a major part of this proposal. It is crucial that they be fully trained; this requires at least three months of on-site training at the UI CPSU. A systematic training plan will be developed.

OPTION 1 (existing CPSU staff)		OPTION 2 (expanded CPSU staff)	
	PRODUCTS		COST
FY87	4 visitor studies ¹	6 visitor studies ¹	\$44,000
FY88	6 visitor studies and train NPS staff	12 visitor studies and train NPS staff	96,000

¹This is in addition to the three studies (VAFO, GETT, INDE) already underway in FY87.