

SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES PROGRAM

by

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During 1968, the Office of Natural Science Studies began the development of a program of sociological studies. These studies are intended to complement the efforts in the biological studies program. The particular contribution of the sociological research program to the National Park Service mission is a heightened awareness and appreciation by Service personnel of how social interaction occurs among persons in the parks and some of the consequences of such social behavior for the various ecological systems within the parks.

Initially the identification of areas for investigation under the sociological program required considerable attention. Several general categories of studies were identified and preliminary work begun towards developing them into fully operational efforts. The first step was to obtain selected baseline data about persons in the national parks and how they compared with persons not currently in the parks. A national probability sample study of adults 18 years and older in the United States was conducted to obtain the necessary information. Since the study was conducted late in 1968, only preliminary interpretations of the results are presently available. These are considered in the attached report for WASO-S-100.

The preliminary interpretation of the results of WASO-S-100 suggest the desirability of several additional types of studies. First, it is clear that going to a park is a relatively widespread phenomenon in this society. It is also clear that different social strata in the society go to parks at different rates and intensities. Why such patterns exist requires further study. In particular, a study of how parks fit into the day-to-day lives of persons in the society will be important.

Second, the data of WASO-S-100 show that some 80 percent of the adults in the national parks go there with some relative. A mere 2 percent go alone. Clearly, going to a national park is a social phenomenon of importance to those participating in it. The natural unit of going to national parks among persons in the society is not alone as an individual, but as a member of a social group composed of persons related by family ties. The implications of this finding for the National Park Service are potentially quite large. From a scientific standpoint, the finding begs the questions of why this occurs, under what conditions, and how general this characteristic is with regard to other kinds of parks in the society. Answers to these and similar questions will help form the basis for future studies.

Finally, the data from WASO-S-100 show a large proportion of persons in the parks consider sightseeing as the single activity in which they

participated most frequently. The statistical disparity between this and the next most frequent activity is about 40 percent. A great deal more needs to be known about this and other activities. For example, what, if any, relationship exists between the frequency with which persons participate in a particular activity and the fact that persons come to parks in social groupings? What are the sociological and psychological components of sightseeing, camping, hiking, swimming, etc. These and other questions will be investigated in future studies.

During 1969, the sociological research section will attempt to begin studies to answer the questions discussed above and to identify additional areas for future studies relevant not only to the National Park Service mission but additionally contributing to a broadened understanding of human behavior.