

WASO SOCIAL SCIENCE PROGRAM

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#46

ITEMS OF INTEREST VII

Higher park fees
don't deter visitors

America Faces Middle Age
ECONOMIC OUTLOOK FOR THE 1990s

Travelers Increasingly Favor
Weekend Trips, Survey Finds

Middle Age May Not
Suit Baby Boomers

Americans pummel parks
with conflicting goals

*As the Baby Boom looks toward
the Retirement Century, some
Cassandras predict a crisis*

Fiftysomething — and in Charge



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

P.O. BOX 37127

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20013-7127



IN REPLY REFER TO:

June 26, 1991

Memorandum

To: Park Superintendents

From: Assistant to the Director for Science and Technology

Subject: **ITEMS OF INTEREST VIII**

U. S. 1990 VACATION TRAVEL STATISTICS. Data published recently by the U. S. Travel Data Center indicate the following:

- Vacation Person Trips - - - i. e., one vacationing person traveling one-way more than 100 miles from home - - grew about two per cent in 1990. August became the most popular month for vacation trips, a shift from the usual July peak travel period. The preference for short duration trips continued - - - 62 percent of all vacation person trips lasted three nights or less. The Southeast region of the country remained the most popular destination area for vacation travelers. (Note. The Southeast Region also was the most frequently visited NPS region in 1990, accounting for about 22% of all recreational visits to national parks for the year.)
- Cost of Travel. Government statistics show very sharp increases in travel costs for 1990 - - - up an average 8.3 percent for the year and considerably higher than the 5.4 percent inflation rate for the year.
- Disposable Income for U. S. families grew only 1.1 percent in 1990, as compared with a growth of 2.4 percent in 1989 and 4.9 percent in 1988. These represent very substantial changes over a short three-year period.

TOURISM ECONOMICS. Literally hundreds of pages of articles, newsclips, etc., cross my desk each month dealing specifically with socio-economic issues in the national parks. Without question, the topic that gets the most attention concerns the economic impacts of parks . . . i.e., (1) the number of jobs and dollars that park tourism contributes to the local economy; or (2) the economic benefits



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that would accrue by establishing a new park, building a new visitor center, improving roads, adding new recreation opportunities, etc., etc., for purposes of increasing visitation levels or extending visitors' duration of stay in the local area.

With our primary focus on resource preservation and providing a quality experience to visitors, we sometimes don't call attention to the enormous importance of parks on the economics of whole communities, or even regional areas. Consider, for example, a couple of results from a recent study at Great Smoky Mountains NP carried out by Dr. Daniel Stynes from Michigan State University:

- While the Great Smoky Mountains NP's annual budget is only about \$7.8 million, the park generates some \$300 million in spending in the local area . . . i.e., the park results in approximately \$37 of economic activity for every tax dollar of park funding.
- Park tourism accounts for some 70 - 80 percent of lodging and restaurant receipts in the Gatlinburg/Pigeon Forge area, two very important components of the local economy.
- Direct and secondary park visitor expenditures support nearly ten thousand local jobs in the hotel, food, transportation and ancillary support and service industries.

The Great Smokys' situation is not unique by any means. For example, recent press releases talk about a proposed expenditure of \$100 million to preserve Civil War battlefields and make them available as tourism attractions; or they speak to tens of millions of dollars for new NPS visitor centers and infrastructure projects that will serve to enhance visitation. On the road building front, the National Park System is a major customer for Federal Highway Administration construction projects; not only does this create instant jobs, but better access to parks means increased tourism revenues for years to come. In the West we hear more and more about occupational shifts away from mining and ranching and into tourism-related activities, albeit with some apprehension as traditional lifestyles are altered. It all translates into economic impacts. We affect a lot of peoples' lives . . . not just through our programs and our incomparable resources, but also via the benefits provided to local economies. It is well to remember this.

RECREATION PREFERENCES. The Washington, D. C. based Recreation Roundtable has published information on the recreational preferences of adult Americans. In ranked order are: walking and jogging; driving for pleasure; swimming; bicycling; fishing; boating; camping; backpacking and hiking; and skiing. Some of the factors cited as significantly affecting participation in recreation activities: good health, and free time for those in the 18 - 40 age group, together with earlier involvement as a child, most often with another family member. Nearly 2 of 3 individuals would like to try an activity they don't now regularly enjoy, indicating the importance of recreational diversity. Over-18 younger adults, the next generation of recreators, have particular interest in taking up skiing, boating and backpacking. Costs associated with recreation were not identified as a significant concern.

THE NEW WAVE. The Wall Street Journal reports that the baby boomers are growing up, turning conservative, and beginning to emphasize basic values. People are starting to feel mortal. The generation that led the urge-to-splurge frenzy now finds itself up to its graying temples in responsibilities: children, mortgages, and retirement worries. Trendy materialism is retreating. The shop-till-you-drop mentality of the 1980's is fading away. Volunteerism is growing. 401 (k) plans are in. Living within one's means seems like an acceptable thing to do. The American middle class is finding its way back to traditional values.

As I said some months ago, these periodic shifts back to reality serve to emphasize precisely the qualities that our national parks uniquely offer . . . traditional family values, environmental stewardship, personal growth, an opportunity to learn, and a quality experience at a fair price. Not at all a bad product when you think about it.

VISITOR SURVEY AT INYO NATIONAL FOREST. Results from a recent visitor survey at California's Inyo National Forest indicate the following:

- Although 60% of the INYO visitors were from ethnically diverse cities of Southern California, only about 9% of the visitors were non-Anglos. Underrepresented groups included Orientals, Hispanics and Blacks.
- Over half of the survey respondents were repeat visitors; the principal reason for their repeat visitations was to get away from crowds.
- Activities most frequently participated in, in rank order, were: hiking; sightseeing; and fishing.
- Most important visitor experiences in rank order were: to enjoy nature; to escape noise and crowds; to escape personal or social pressure; family togetherness; physical exercise; and learning.

There is a message here: Whether visiting multiple-use Forest Service lands or units of the National Park System, the recreational goals of the American public are remarkably similar.

LOOKING AHEAD. The recreational interests of the 1945-65 baby boomers will be important to the NPS for decades to come. This group includes roughly 75 million persons and about 50 percent of the nation's disposable income. A very potent combination. The baby boomers have fairly strong opinions about wilderness areas, environmental ethics, resource preservation, physically demanding leisure activities, the value of time in a fast-paced work world, the need for frequent vacations, high-intensity leisure experiences, etc. As the maturing baby boomers begin to join the growing ranks of retired seniors in about 10 years, we likely will see some new and unique visitor expectations for recreational opportunities and services. If the past is any gauge for the future, the emerging group of seniors will maintain the same leisure time habits that they developed in their earlier years . . . e.g., as might be characterized as active, interested in new experiences, demand for quality, rigorous participation, physically challenging, a strong educational component, and a willingness to pay for services received.

REQUESTS FOR BACK COPIES. We receive numerous requests each week for back copies of this Superintendents' Memo series, often from park libraries or specific staff offices that wish to maintain a complete reference file. It is considerably easier and less costly for us to include an additional name on our mailing list than to xerox and send individual make-up copies. Either way, we will be happy to comply with your requests. Contact Jean Handsberry on FTS 343-8123 or (202)-343-8123.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dick Briceland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "B".

Richard H. Briceland