

**Travel Takes Off in the '80s**

**'The Visitor Experience'  
What Do We Really Mean?**

**America Faces Middle Age**

**Travelers Increasingly Favor  
Weekend Trips, Survey Finds**

**Middle Age May Not  
Suit Baby Boomers**

# **TRAVEL PATTERNS OF THE EIGHTIES**

**Americans pummel parks  
with conflicting goals**

**Can national parks  
outlive the century?**

**National Parks: Preserves  
or Playgrounds?**

**Higher park fees  
don't deter visitors**



# United States Department of the Interior



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IN REPLY REFER TO:

March 31, 1990

Memorandum

To: Park Superintendents

From: Assistant to the Director for Science and Technology

Subject: "TRAVEL TAKES OFF DURING THE EIGHTIES"

The following observations are from the plenary session of the 1989 Travel Review Conference held last month in Washington. I have extracted information on a number of travel and tourism changes recorded during the eighties that seem particularly relevant to NPS managers, . . . i.e., information derived from national travel and tourism statistics that suggests, for example, shifts toward increased regional and day use of parks and other recreation facilities; shorter vacation stays with a premium on leisure time; a growing desire for intense and meaningful recreation opportunities; and increased importance placed on traditional values and on the quality of the recreation experience. If these in fact are representative of current national trends, they serve once again to reemphasize the unique and essential role of the National Park System in satisfying the recreational needs, preferences, interests and values of the American public.

Some observations from the Travel Review Conference follow:

LEISURE TRAVEL IS EXPANDING. The number of person-trips greater than 100 miles from home increased 30 percent over the last five years. Week-end travel grew 25 percent and vacation travel grew 21 percent over the period. The Southeastern region of the country again dominated the scene, accounting for some 30 percent of all domestic travel.

As a point of reference, the number of recreation visits recorded at more than 150 NPS rural area parks located greater than 100 miles from a major population center increased 21 per cent during the 1985-89 period. Thus, for the second half of the eighties, the changes in recreation visits reported by Superintendents at NPS rural area parks mirrored the changes in total vacation travel reported on a national scale.

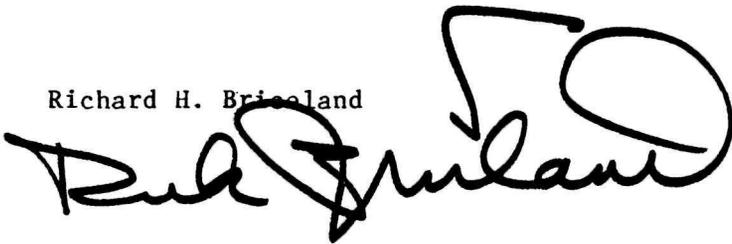
ECONOMICS ARE IMPORTANT. During the first half of the decade, the combined effects of a sluggish economy together with an emphasis on using discretionary personal income to accumulate material goods, resulted in relatively stable travel behavior at the national level. Travel plans were scaled back or deferred under the economic uncertainties that dominated the 1980-84 period, probably contributing in a significant way to the unusually strong travel growth that occurred during the second half of the decade.

MINI-VACATIONS ARE IN. Discretionary time available for travel is at a premium, resulting in shorter but more frequent trips. The average vacation stay on a national level dropped a significant 18 percent over the last five years, from 5.7 nights per trip in 1985 to only 4.7 nights per trip in 1989. There was a clear trend during the decade toward mini-vacations and weekend excursions, particularly among two-income families that constituted a major segment of the leisure travel market.

QUALITY IS IMPORTANT. The eighties witnessed a rise in cultural attractions, a strengthening of the theme park product, and new scenic byways and rural tourism initiatives. Vacationers are placing increasing emphasis on service, quality and value, and on the experiential nature of leisure travel.

FINAL NOTE. The recreational values and leisure time services that seem to be becoming more important on the national travel level are precisely the values and services that the National Park Service traditionally has offered. If these national travel trends continue, it will not be surprising to see substantially increased use of parks in the years immediately ahead.

Richard H. Briseland



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- #3: The Yellowstone Fires: An Assessment of Economic Impacts, Jan 4, 1990
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- #6: Older Adults and the National Parks, February 6, 1990
- #7: Social Science Program: Items of Interest, March 12, 1990
- #8: Social Science Training for Superintendents/Managers
- #9: Travel Takes Off During the 80's, March 31, 1990