



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

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Memorandum

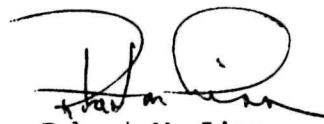
To: Directorate and All Field Directors

From: Chief, Office of Natural Science Studies

Subject: Office of Natural Science Studies Reports

During the latter part of 1968, the Office of Natural Science Studies conducted a nationwide study to learn about some of the sociological characteristics of the people who went to a national park during the preceding year. The purpose of this study was to obtain baseline data necessary for additional studies which will be undertaken later. While these data were obtained as an integral part of the scientific work being carried out by the Office of Natural Science Studies, they may also be useful to other divisions for any number of purposes.

Periodically, ONS will issue short reports similar to the enclosure, in which some information about people in the parks will be presented. These will be technical reports presenting the information and explaining it. How it may be useful to each division will, of necessity, be decided within the division. ONS will be available, of course, to answer any questions about the information contained in these reports. Should you require additional copies of this report, please contact this office directly. The reports are provided for administrative use only.



Robert M. Linn

Enclosure

PEOPLE IN THE PARKS

Our national parks and monuments stand for many important and cherished values shared by our countrymen. One of the important functions of the National Park Service is to create an atmosphere conducive to the maximum appreciation and enjoyment of these parks and monuments. As the number of persons, both foreign and domestic, who visit these parks has increased so, too, has the concern with what, if any, relationship might be established between the presence of others and an individual's appreciation and enjoyment of a visit. This is certainly a complex topic and as a recent report to the National Park Service from the University of Colorado documents, simplistic answers are just not possible. The Office of Natural Science Studies through this series of reports has presented some research findings which may be relevant to an increased understanding of some of the elements of this problem. In this report we will review some of this information and provide additional findings from another recently conducted study.

Some Background

At the outset it is important to recognize that going to any kind of a park is first of all a social event. Data previously presented indicates that 96% of the adults in the national parks went with others. (See Report #3.) Most frequently these others were members of the respondent's own family or close friends. A comparatively small proportion of persons went to the parks alone. This finding suggests that an individual's perception of any park is necessarily mediated by the presence of others. That is, his so-called "park experience" is probably substantially determined by these others. Any of us who have observed human behavior in the parks know that most persons move about as part of a social group. This observation is confirmed in a recent study where 90% of the respondents indicated that the group of persons they accompanied to the park remained physically together throughout the duration of their stay. It does not appear too unlikely that those very aspects of the parks which a person notices are in large part "decided" by the group he or she accompanies. Since we know that the majority of the persons who go to the parks engage in sightseeing and other recreation activities without contacts with interpretive programs, etc. (see Report #3) the "park experience" is apparently something which the presence of others does influence directly.

It is also worth noting that some 80% of those adults who went with others did so with members of their families. This suggests that it is not just any other person who may be thought of as appropriate when one goes to a park. Data from the most recent study suggests there is

a very limited set of other persons with whom one may choose to go to a park. In short, before an individual ever reaches a park the social relationships in which he is enmeshed strongly influence the conditions under which he may undertake his visit. Once in the park, where he goes and what he does is continually so influenced. Indeed, it is even possible that how he perceives persons outside of his own group may also be influenced by these factors.

It is apparent from these remarks that an individual's subjective responses to the presence of other individuals (of the same species) is not unitary. That is, in different social structures an individual responds differentially to the presence of others.

There are additional matters to consider whenever we begin to assess how the individual's experience in the parks is or is not influenced by the presence of others of his species. There are at least several different levels upon which an individual's response to the presence of others may occur.

First, response occurs on a physiological level occasioned, in part, through heat transference between organisms, breathing, olfactory stimuli, etc. Second, responses occur on a psychological level occasioned, in part, through apperceptive masses, perceptual processes, etc. Third, responses of an individual to the presence of others occur on the sociocultural level, mediated, in part, through his commitment to his subcultural values and beliefs.

It is clear that considerable variability can occur within each of these particular levels. For one individual, the press of others physically near is unpleasant, while to another it is a reassuring and comfortable experience. Scientists do not begin to have the data which will enable us to make accurate predictions about the individual's responses on any of these levels. Moreover, the interrelationships among these levels as reflected in any particular individual's behavior have only begun to be studied.

In the remaining portion of this report, we will consider some data primarily of a sociocultural level with respect to an individual's response to the presence of others as occurring in parks. It should be clear that such data cannot provide a complete answer to the questions concerning how the presence of others effects an individual's appreciation and enjoyment of a park. Thus, while not definitive, these data are one step in the direction of an understanding of the larger process.

The data consist of the responses of individuals to a set of items obtained through personal interviews. The respondents were all adults, eighteen years or older, resident in the continental United States and not institutionalized. Interviews were conducted in the respondent's

home. The sample was an area probability sample representative of all adults in the United States. The sample size was 2,101. The study design and statistical procedures employed met generally accepted scientific standards.

The limitations of these data remain for they constitute only one part of a person's "total" response to the presence of others in parks. It is for you to decide the appropriateness of these data for the operating problems of your Division.

Local Parks and Other Parks

Although there exist many administrative distinctions among parks, such as state or national, we found that for the purposes of this study the distinction was not viable. In a pilot study we found that people tended to respond to our inquiries about parks by distinguishing between "local" parks and "other" parks. It is perhaps this distinction which helps account for the sometimes amusing confusion between U. S. Forest Service, U. S. National Park Service and U. S. Corps of Engineers recreational areas in the minds of visitors. Local parks were, for the respondents, primarily parks which were nearby (under 3 miles) their homes where they could easily go without much previous planning and effort. Whenever there emerged the element of previous planning to go to a park, the respondents called them "other than local" parks. (This distinction between "local" and "other" will be developed more fully in a later report in this series.) What is important to notice, is that one way people distinguish among parks is in terms of the amount of previous planning required to make the trip. Their expectations of their own behavior and that of others in these two kinds of parks are different. In short, the "local" and "other" parks are different social structures and people respond to them accordingly.

To obtain some additional understanding of how parks are distinguished sociologically, we also obtained information about an urban equivalent of a park - the zoological park or garden. We sought information for each of the two kinds of parks and for the zoological park from the respondents. In order to focus the respondent's attention upon a particular event, we asked about their last time at one of the parks or a zoo. We ascertained how representative their expressed observations were of their general experiences in such places at other times. Thus, these data reflect the respondent's overall responses to the phenomenon under study.

The following table indicates the responses to the question of whether the respondent felt crowded or not during the last time at a local park, other park or zoo.

Last time felt:	Place - %		
	Local Park	Other Park	Zoological Park
Not at all crowded	78.0	69.0	59.0
Crowded	16.0	22.0	34.0
Both	5.0	7.0	5.0
No response	1.0	2.0	2.0
Total			

Several observations are apparent from these data.

First, on an average about 70% of the persons in any kind of park did not perceive themselves as having been crowded. Secondly, the perception of the presence of others as crowding is not the same in the three different social structures. Finally, the direction of the change in reported perception is unitary. That is, the proportion of adults reporting they felt crowded increases from local park, to other park, to zoological park. This suggests that these three social structures share some underlying dimensions worthy of additional investigation.

Although these data demonstrate that the majority of adults in the parks do not report the perception of being crowded, we want to learn whatever is possible from that part of the sample in which crowding was perceived. We want to examine some of the possible factors which might influence this perception. For simplicity, we will compare those who did not perceive crowding with those who did perceive it. Those who perceived both are a small part empirically and will be excluded. In addition, we will only report data for "other" parks since most of the National Park Service areas are those where some previous planning precedes a trip to them. Wherever "local" park data diverge from that reported we will so indicate. Based upon previous studies we will consider the social class (income), age, education and residence patterns as likely to be associated with these differences in perception (see Reports #6 and #7).

The data in Table 1 suggest that with respect to income there is a slight tendency for the proportion of those who reported being crowded to have incomes of between \$5,000 - \$10,000. In Table 2 we can observe that there is a tendency for those adults who reported crowding to have a larger proportion of the sub-sample in the 30-39 and 40-49 age categories. Similarly, those in the over 50 years of age category tend to be smaller. The data in Table 3 indicate that those reporting being crowded tended proportionately to have education beyond high school more than those who were not crowded. Table 4 shows adults reporting crowded conditions were somewhat more likely to have been raised in

Table 1. Annual Income - %

Perception of Being Crowded	Under \$5,000	\$5,000 - \$9,999	Over \$10,000	Total
Yes	12.4	50.0	37.6	100.0
No	17.6	42.0	40.4	100.0

Table 2. Age - %

Perception of Being Crowded	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Total
Yes	34.5	22.5	22.7	9.8	9.9	99.4
No	33.4	19.1	19.4	13.0	14.8	99.7

Table 3. Education - %

Perception of Being Crowded	Less Than High School	High School	More Than High School	Total
Yes	20.1	36.5	43.4	100.0
No	23.6	39.0	37.4	100.0

Table 4. Size of Place Where Respondent was Raised - %

Perception of Being Crowded	Large City	Medium City	Small City	Small Town	Rural Farm	Total
Yes	37.0	14.2	16.4	14.0	18.4	100.0
No	32.8	14.4	14.7	21.2	16.9	100.0

large cities and less likely to have been reared in small towns. All in all, these tables indicate some direction of potential differences among these two aggregates but without providing sufficient support empirically for us to consider these differences statistically significant. Apparently, other factors influence the individual's perception of being crowded beyond the variables considered thus far. In additional reports in this series other variables will be analyzed.

One additional aspect can be examined somewhat further. The perception of being crowded may or may not be uncomfortable for an individual. That is, even though an individual may respond that crowding was perceived, we would be incorrect to assume that such was unpleasant without further investigation. We therefore sought additional information from the respondents concerning their overall enjoyment of the last time at a park. We found of those who had indicated perceiving being crowded (22%) almost none perceived it negatively. That is, approximately 92% of those who had reported being crowded also reported they enjoyed the last time at the park.

The data in this report suggest that the relationship between the reports by individuals of the perception of crowding while in a park and its impact upon the enjoyment of the park is fairly complex. Until further analysis is completed, it would be premature to conclude the perception of crowding by an individual in a park is necessarily detrimental to his park experience.

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