



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

N26-N

November 9, 1970

## Memorandum

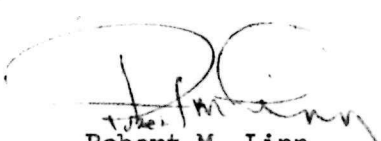
To: Directorate and All Field Directors

From: Chief, Office of Natural Science Studies

Subject: Office of Natural Science Studies Reports

The Office of Natural Science Studies conducts, from time to time, sociological studies to determine the characteristics of people who go to our national parks. The purpose of these studies is to obtain baseline data necessary for additional studies which will be undertaken later. While these data are 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, ONSS 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. ONSS will be available, of course, to answer any questions about the information contained in these reports. The reports are provided for administrative use only.

  
Robert M. Linn

Enclosure

### PEOPLE IN THE PARKS

A recurring theme of these reports has been an emphasis upon the importance of the social group for any understanding of human behavior in parks. Social groups vary in terms of a number of dimensions. In this report we want to examine some of the properties shared among the social groups engaged in going to a park. We want to identify some of the group characteristics which set such groups apart from others and to examine some of the consequences of such differences for the process of park management. As before, the data presented are from studies conducted by the Office of Natural Science Studies. Information regarding study design, statistical techniques employed, sampling procedures, etc. can be obtained by reference to earlier reports. Additional technical information about the studies may be obtained by individual inquiry to the Office of Natural Science Studies.

#### Background

Social groups are more than the totality of the individual members. That is to say, with respect to human behavior you are not likely to be able to account for much of the social behavior observed in social groups through knowledge of individual psychology including personality assessment. The reason is simple. Social behavior involves at least two individuals. In the process of interaction, behavior repeatedly occurs which could not or would not occur if but a single person were present. Moreover, because of the body of custom and traditions shared among people in a society, the manner in which the social interaction takes place between these two individuals tends to become patterned. It is these patterns which sociologists study in their efforts to understand how human societies function, change and remain stable.

Broadly speaking, social groups can be thought of as two major types. There are those groups in which the individuals are members not by their own choice and there are those in which membership is exclusively by choice. An example of the former is the family into which we are born. An example of the latter is a work group. Sociologists and anthropologists know that the patterns of social interaction characteristic of these two major types of groups differ in many important ways.

The data we have obtained from the studies of park-going in contemporary American society suggest that the social groups which characteristically engage in the behavior are of the first type. That is, they are relatively more closed than open to new members when compared to the second

type. We have learned also about a number of other characteristics which will comprise the balance of this report.

### Group Size

The data in Table 1 enable a comparison between local and non-local parks with respect to the prevalence of groups of particular sizes. The data are presented in detail so they may be of maximum advantage for your own purposes. Notice the percentages add only to a sub-total. Reference to Table 2 will show that these sub-totals are for non-organized groups. Thus, 78.6% of the social groups in a local park were non-organized groups. In non-local parks, 85.3% of the groups were of this type.

Returning to Table 1, we notice that about 43% of the groups in both local and non-local parks included 4 or fewer persons. About 25% of the groups incorporated from 5 to 8 persons. Finally, about 12% in each type of park were groups which were larger than 9 persons. The average number of persons in a group in the local park was 4.3 and in the non-local park 5.1. As can be seen, groups of 5 persons are somewhat more prevalent in the non-local park, thus pulling the average in that direction.

Table 2 is a further refinement on a table in Report #11. It shows social groups in both kinds of parks as mentioned above - closed and open. Most social groups are non-organized (i.e., like family or friendship groups) but organized groups (i.e., like tour groups, church groups) are found in both kinds of parks. Clearly, those adults who went to either kind of park as a member of a latter group were unusual. That is, most adults go to parks as a member of a relatively closed social group. Despite the low prevalence empirically of the organized group, these may present special administrative and management dilemmas for a park staff. The reasons are not just size alone, but also lie in the social structure of such groups.

### Group Social Composition

Among the socially closed groups found in parks, there are two major types - the kin group and the friendship group. Table 3 shows the distribution of these groups within the two kinds of parks.

Kinship groups are comprised exclusively of individuals who are related to each other by blood and marriage. All members of such groups are relatives of all other members in the group. Friendship groups may include some members who are also related by kinship. However, there is at least one member of these groups who is not related through kinship and is recognized by the others in the group as a friend. Some

friendship groups, of course, do not include any persons related by kinship. It is sometimes said that one inherits his family, but can choose his friends. Comparatively speaking, family groups are more closed than friendship groups. Friendship groups are more closed than organized groups. That is, the nature of the social relationship among friends is quite intimate and exclusive of non-friends. You can join a tour group by paying your money but you cannot join a friendship group for either money or just the asking. Friendship, as a particular kind of social relationship among two persons, requires time to develop and involves the sharing of knowledge about each other not ordinarily shared with others. It is in this sense that friendship groups, like kinship groups, tend to be more closed than other kinds of social groups. These characteristics have important consequences for social behavior as it is transacted in parks.

Sex is an important aspect of social life. In this context we do not mean sexuality in its sensual connotation, but as social fact. That is, some humans are male and some female. In a similar manner, some humans are adults and others are children. We already know that some adults go to some parks alone. Each adult is of a particular sex. Among social groups, all of the members of a particular group might also be of a single sex. Table 4 shows the distribution of social groups in the two kinds of parks, based upon the sexual composition of the group. Notice that in local parks almost 25% of the adults (single sex groups plus alone) did not interact with group members of the opposite sex. The percentage in non-local parks is less. The importance of the sexual composition of a social group is similar to its age grade composition. It sets certain sociological limits within which the interactions among members are likely to occur. Men, alone, tend to behave differently than when with other men. All male groups tend to behave differently than social groups in which both males and females are present. Similarly, all female groups tend to manifest characteristic patterns of behavior not common to mixed sex social groups.

## Discussion

The materials contained in this report suggest the importance of recognizing that people in our parks are not there at random. Nor do they constitute a mass of unrelated individuals with which park administrators must somehow cope. To the extent that knowledge about human behavior which occurs within and among social groups can be incorporated in management action, then perhaps new opportunities for administrative creativity and innovation may also be enhanced. Recognition that on-the-ground management is dealing with relatively closed social groups, largely kinship groups made up of certain numbers of people, is an important step in that direction. Let's consider some of the implications.

Much of the supervision of behavior occurring in the parks is done by the groups themselves. Closed groups tend to maintain fairly continuous and close monitoring of the behavior of members, particularly the young. Given that many of the parks, being somewhat unusual settings, provide chances for untoward events to occur, why do so few happen? That is, why aren't more people lost, given the vast numbers in our parks? Why doesn't more vandalism and damage occur, given the vast array of people in the parks? Why don't more bodily injury cases occur? The answer, in part, is because of the social control exercised over group members by others in their own groups. One of the consequences of this social fact is that park staffs cope with the management of many, many more people than could possibly occur if all persons going to parks did not do so as members of some social group. Management actions which tend to recognize and build upon this inherent mechanism of human social behavior will be likely to facilitate organizational flexibility.

In a similar fashion, we often notice, when in parks, that people seem to move about in bunches or clusters. Closed social groups tend to regulate spatial distances among members rather closely. It is unlikely that such groups disperse their members physically very far from each other while in a park. These and other factors will be considered in a later report.

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Neil H. Cheek, Jr., Research Sociologist  
Office of Natural Science Studies  
National Park Service  
November 9, 1970

Table 1. Distribution of Non-organized Groups in: %

# Persons in Group	Local	Non-local
2	16.3	15.8
3	10.2	10.9
4	16.2	17.5
5	8.7	12.6
6	8.4	6.4
7	4.2	4.4
8	3.2	2.9
9 or more	11.4	14.8
Total	78.6	85.3

Table 2. Distribution of Social Groups in: %

Type of Group	Local	Non-local
Organized	7.3	9.1
Non-organized	78.6	85.3
Alone	12.4	3.3
No reply	1.7	2.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 3. Distribution of Social Groups in: %

Social Composition of Group	Local	Non-local
Alone	12.4	3.3
Organized Group	7.3	9.1
Kinship Group	57.1	56.7
Friendship Group	21.5	29.0
Don't recall	1.7	1.9
Total	100.0	100.0



Table 4. Distribution of Social Groups in: %

Type of Group	Local	Non-local
Single Sex	12.4	11.1
Mixed Sex	73.5	83.3
Alone	12.4	3.3
Don't recall	1.7	2.3
Total	100.0	100.0

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Northeast Region  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pa. 19106

In reply refer to:  
N26-NER(PS)

July 31, 1970

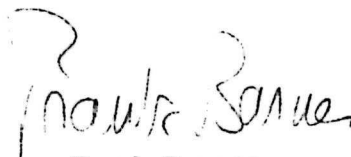
Memorandum

To: Superintendents and Division Chiefs, Northeast Region

From: Acting Assistant Director, Park Support Services,  
Northeast Region

Subject: Office of Natural Science Studies Reports

We are enclosing memorandum of July 16, 1970 from Chief, Office of Natural Science Studies, Linn on the above subject, together with Report No. 10, which is one of a series to be issued periodically. As noted in Dr. Linn's memorandum, the reports are provided for administrative use only.

  
Frank Barnes

Enclosures

This memorandum is cancelled when brought to the attention of all concerned.