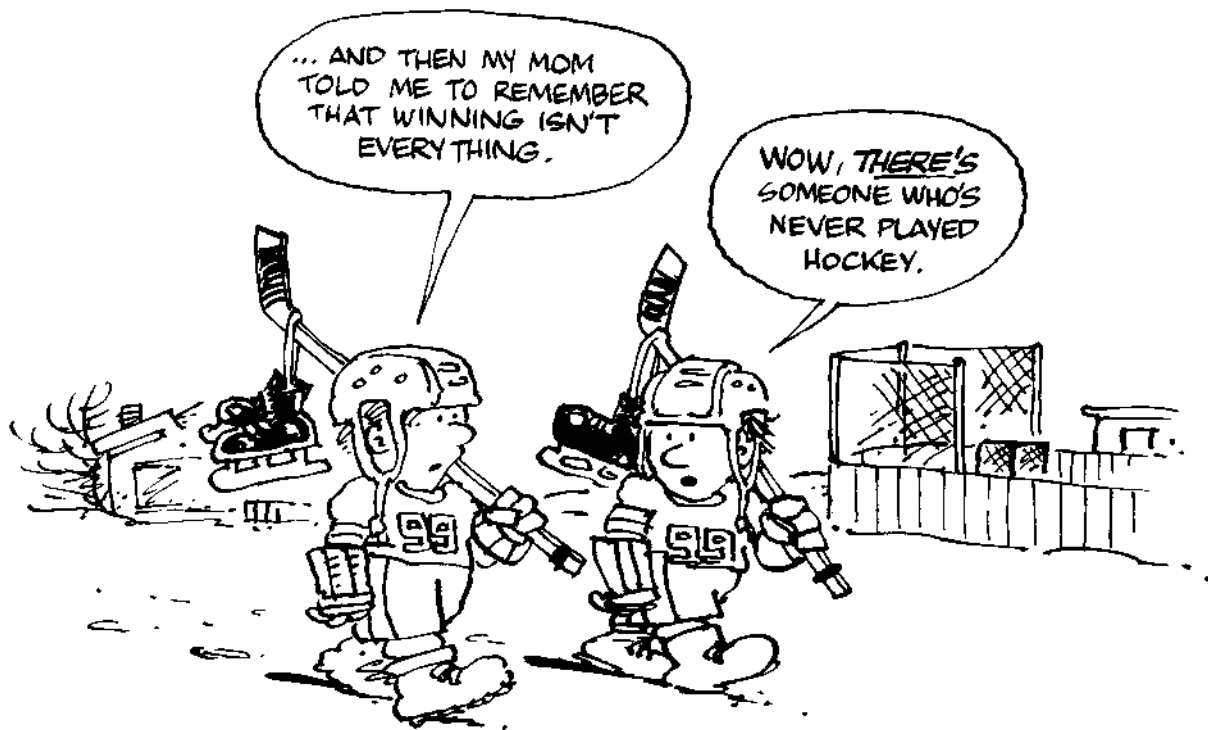


A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1984 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks No. 17

LEISURE PATTERNS IN 1984

This is the seventeenth bulletin in a series, published by Alberta Recreation and Parks, which looks at the leisure behaviours and views of Albertans. In this issue, the major findings of the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* are reviewed. Information is also provided about two topics which have not been covered in previous bulletins, namely membership in private clubs, and views about competitive issues in sports.



Alberta



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INTRODUCTION

The 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* is the latest survey in a series conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks. The purpose of the survey was to collect current information on the recreation behaviour of Albertans, and to examine Albertans' views about recreation issues. Several topics in the 1984 survey were similar to those addressed in the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*. It was therefore possible to compare some of the findings from the two surveys and to examine some aspects of recreation trends in the province.

Survey questionnaires were mailed to over 8,000 households in the province, and responses were received from 3921 households. The survey responses were obtained from all areas of Alberta, and the distribution was quite similar to the actual population distribution in the province.

The survey looked at household participation in seventy-one recreation activities, and at respondents' preferred outdoor and sports activities. There were also questions about activities which respondents recently started and recently discontinued. The major findings for these recreation participation topics are reviewed in the first section of this bulletin. Some of the important factors which influence leisure participation are discussed in the second and third sections. This is followed by information about expenditures, membership in private clubs, and a discussion of Albertans' opinions about competition issues in sports. Some general implications of the study findings are also outlined. In the last section of the bulletin, a complete listing of *A Look at Leisure* publications, and major reports based on the surveys, is provided.

PARTICIPATION PATTERNS

The findings related to recreation participation in 1984 were discussed in detail in Bulletins 13 through 15, in the *A Look at Leisure* series. One measure used in the survey was household participation in a broad range of social, creative, cultural, outdoor and sports pursuits. The ten activities with the highest household participation rates are shown in Table 1. In general, these activities are social and passive in nature, do not require a high level of physical exertion, and often provide personal entertainment. They may also be enjoyed year-round, and may be done spontaneously, without the need for extensive facilities or equipment.

Although these types of pursuits have the highest household participation levels, information from the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* suggests that they are not necessarily favorite activities, or among the activities which respondents would most like to start.



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Table 1
Ten Top Activities

1. Visiting friends	6. Cards, board games
2. Watching TV	7. Pleasure walks
3. Radio/records	8. Reading
4. Dining out	9. Picnicking
5. Driving for pleasure	10. Attending movies

Some of the more active pursuits which had relatively high levels of household participation were swimming, bicycling, overnight camping, gardening, and ice skating. Over one-half of the households reported some participation in these activities during the previous year. Softball/baseball was the most popular of the team sports.

These findings for household participation were very similar to the patterns observed in the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*. There were some differences, however, which suggested some possible trends in recreation participation in the province. As shown in Table 2, there were several activities which showed increases or decreases in the percentages of households participating from 1981 to 1984.

Table 2
Changes in Household Participation:
1981 to 1984

Increased Participation	Decreased Participation
Swimming	Ice Hockey
Video/ electronic games	Social dancing
Gardening	Bowling
Organized groups	Roller skating
Golf	Reading
Bicycling	Camping
	Jogging



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The survey also looked at the outdoor and sports pursuits in which respondents had participated most frequently in the previous year. The activity preferences mentioned by the highest number of respondents are summarized in Table 3. It is interesting to note that six of these pursuits were also highly ranked as favorite activities in the 1981 survey.

Table 3 Preferred
Outdoor and Sports Pursuits

1.	Walking for pleasure *	6.	Bicycling
2.	Swimming *	7.	Aerobics/ fitness
3.	Overnight camping *	8.	Softball/ baseball
4.	Fishing *	9.	Hunting
5.	Golf*	10.	Curling *

* *Highly ranked favorite activities in 1981.*

Another approach to understanding emerging trends in recreation participation is to look at new activities started by respondents during the previous year. Close to one-half of the survey respondents had started a new recreation activity. Sixty-five different activities were identified, and the activities which were mentioned most frequently are shown in Table 4. With the exception of creative activities, the most frequently started activities were all outdoor and sports pursuits.

When activities started were grouped into eight general categories, it was found that one-third of respondents had started pursuits which could be labelled as "exercise-oriented". Creative-cultural/social and passive activities, outdoor activities which were mechanized or extractive (e.g., fishing, hunting), and team sports were each started by approximately 13% of respondents.



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Table 4
Activities Most Frequently
Started and Ceased in 1984

Rank	Started in 1984	Ceased in 1984
1.	Fitness/aerobics *	Curling ** Downhill skiing **
2.	Swimming	Racquetball, squash
3.	Pleasure walking *	Bowling Baseball **
4.	Bicycling *	Swimming Hunting, shooting **
5.	Golf	
6.	Body building/weights *	
7.	Racquetball, squash	

* Activities which appear to have gained participants in 1984.

** Activities which appear to have lost participants in 1984.

Another aspect of recreation behaviour which the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* examined was ceasing participation in activities. One-half of those answering the survey had discontinued a recreational activity in the previous year. For many people, however, discontinuing an activity is likely part of a process of substitution, since slightly more than one-half took up a new activity during the same time period. The activities which were discontinued by the highest number of respondents in 1984 are listed in Table 4.

By comparing the percentage of people ceasing an activity in 1984, with the percentage of people starting the activity in 1984, we have another indication of recreation participation trends. Based on this type of comparison, it was possible to identify several activities which appear to have lost or gained a noticeable number of participants in 1984 (Table 4). About three times as many people had discontinued curling and downhill skiing, as had started these activities in 1984. This pattern was also observed for baseball and hunting. On the other hand, there were several activities which appear to have gained participants in 1984. These activities were physical fitness/aerobics, bicycling, weightlifting/body building, walking for pleasure, and handicrafts. These patterns suggest some recent changes in recreation participation, and perhaps some trends to watch in the future.



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FACTORS INFLUENCING PARTICIPATION PATTERNS

It was also possible to look at some reasons or factors which help to explain the types of participation patterns observed in the survey. There were three major influences which were assessed in the study. These were: motivations or reasons for participating in activities; reasons for discontinuing participation; and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. Other studies have shown that these are among the important factors which are associated with recreation behaviour.

The main motivations or reasons for starting new recreation activities are shown in Table 5. The most important reasons for participation in recreation activities reported in 1984 were almost identical to those observed in 1981. It was also found that different activities were selected to satisfy different needs. For example, respondents who started creative, social, or passive activities identified reasons such as learning and using skills, and being creative as quite important. Enjoyment of nature, and excitement, were among the highest ranked reasons for respondents taking up mechanized and extractive outdoor activities.

Table 5
Reasons for
Starting Recreation Activities

Rank	Reasons for Starting
1.	Physical health and exercise (73%)*
2.	To relax (70%)
3.	Something different from work (55%)
4.	To learn new skills (55%)
5.	To do things with friends (54%)
6.	Enjoy nature (48%)
7.	Use skills and talents (45%)
8.	Excitement (41%)

* Percentage of respondents considering reason to be important.



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Table 6
Reasons for
Ceasing Recreation Activities

Rank	Reasons for Ceasing
1.	Work commitments (43%)*
2.	Family commitments (39%)
3.	Another activity (28%)
4.	Facilities crowded (25%)
5.	Admission, charges (23%)
6.	No opportunity near home (23%)
7.	No others to participate with (22%)
8.	Cost of equipment (21%)

* Percentage of respondents considering reason to be important.

It is also important to look at non-participation, and to identify factors which may limit participation in recreation programmes. The 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* examined one aspect of non-participation by asking respondents why they discontinued participation in a recreation activity. A different approach to the issue of non-participation was taken in the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*, where respondents were asked about barriers preventing their participation in desired activities.

The reasons for ceasing participation which were of greatest importance are shown in Table 6. It appeared to be combinations of reasons, rather than individual reasons, however, which contributed to ceasing participation in activities. The reasons for ceasing participation also varied somewhat with the type of activity which was discontinued. For example, lack of partners was a concern for participants in non-mechanized outdoor activities, racquetball/squash, and creative-cultural, social, and passive activities, whereas physical inability to participate was a particular problem for curlers.

In both 1981 and 1984, work commitments were identified as the most important reason for non-participation, and overcrowding of facilities was an important concern. Three reasons which appear to have increased in importance from 1981 to 1984 are family commitments, the cost of admission and other charges, and physical inability to participate. Overcrowding, which was the highest ranked barrier for racquetball participants in 1981, appeared to be much less of a problem in 1984.



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SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Recreation research has shown that patterns of recreation behaviour are often related to socio-economic characteristics of respondents, such as age, education, income, and location of residence. This influence of these factors on recreation behaviour was also found in the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*.

By relating participation in activities to the socio-economic characteristics of respondents, it was possible to develop a series of profiles to describe the most likely participants in twenty-five different types of activities. Age was found to be a particularly important factor related to participation in outdoor and sports pursuits. Participation in vigorous activities tended to decline with age. On the other hand, there were some activities, such as curling, fishing, golf, hunting, picnicking, and walking which showed greater participation by older respondents.

Location of residence was often a factor influencing recreation participation. Rural residents were more likely to participate in curling, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, and horseback riding, while urban residents indicated more involvement in activities such as bicycling, golf, racquetball, tennis and body shaping/weightlifting. Regional differences in participation were also identified (see Bulletin No. 16).

Activity choices also varied with the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. Golf, for example, was twice as likely to be started by males than females, while physical fitness/aerobics activities were five times as likely to have been started by females. People in younger age categories tended to choose exercise-oriented activities, team sports, physical fitness/aerobics, and non-mechanized outdoor activities. On the other hand, older respondents were more likely to select creative-cultural, social, and passive activities, outdoor activities which were mechanized, and fishing or hunting.

The study also found that the obstacles to recreation participation varied for different socio-economic groups. It was evident that adults under 35 years of age, seniors, females, single parent families, and those with lower education and income levels experienced the greatest difficulties. In particular, adults under 35 years of age, and those from single parent families appeared to be encountering even more obstacles to participation than they did in 1981.



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EXPENDITURES

Respondents were asked to identify their yearly expenditures on newly started recreation activities. The average amount which respondents reported was estimated at \$550. Almost one-third of this (31%) was on equipment costs, followed by travel costs (27%), miscellaneous costs (23%), and membership, entrance fees (19%). This was quite similar to the breakdown for favorite activities in 1981, although the proportion spent on membership and entrance fees was slightly higher in 1984 than in 1981, and the amount spent on travel was slightly lower in 1984. Expenditures varied noticeably with the type of activity which was started. Total expenses were highest for camping, followed by mechanized outdoor activities, downhill skiing, and extractive activities such as fishing and hunting.

Understandably, income was an important influence on leisure spending. Expenditures also increased gradually with age up to 64 years of age, and were higher for males than females.

MEMBERSHIP IN PRIVATE CLUBS

Recreation programmes and services are provided by a variety of agencies and organizations. One aspect of the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* looked at respondent membership in private clubs. The information obtained was quite general in nature, and did not provide any data about the types of clubs or their activity focus.

It was found that one-quarter of the survey respondents belonged to private recreation-oriented clubs. Most of these people belonged to one club, while about one-third reported that they belonged to two or more clubs. The average annual expenditure on private club fees was approximately \$400 a year.

Respondents who were private club members tended to be single, urban residents with higher education and income levels. Calgary area residents, in particular, had the greatest proportion of private club members. Although rural residents had a greater tendency to belong to more than one club, it was urban residents who reported greater expenditures on club memberships. Senior citizens also tended to report multiple club memberships. The relatively low expenditures which they reported, however, likely reflects the lower rates and fees offered to senior citizens in many recreation settings.

COMPETITION ISSUES

Opinions about two sports competition topics were examined in the survey. Respondents were asked to indicate their views about the importance of Alberta's amateur athletes winning medals in competitions, and about competition in organized sports for children.



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The majority of respondents felt that having amateur athletes winning medals in interprovincial and national competitions was important. Opinions on this issue were unchanged from those expressed in the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*.

Opinions tended to be more varied on the subject of children's competition in organized sport. Forty-four percent of the respondents felt that there was too much emphasis on competition in organized sports for children. A slightly smaller number (38%) felt that there was enough emphasis. Again, these views seemed to be quite consistent with those expressed in the 1981 survey. Opinions did not appear to differ much according to whether or not there were children in the respondent's household. Respondents who were most likely to feel that there is too much emphasis on competition were females, rural residents, and those with higher education and income levels.

OVERVIEW

The 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* obtained information on a variety of recreation-related topics, and the major findings have been presented in Bulletins 12 through 16 in the *A Look at Leisure series*. The survey looked at participation patterns and opinions at a province-wide level, and also identified regional differences in recreation behaviours. By looking closely at responses of different groups in the survey sample, the analysis helped to provide a clearer picture of recreation markets. This type of "market segmentation" provides a description of recreation participants, "where" they participate, and "why" they participate.

It is also important for recreation practitioners to look at these market factors within their local communities. With such information, recreation agencies will have a better understanding of the public that they serve, and a sound basis on which to develop recreation programming and marketing strategies.

PUBLICATIONS TO DATE

A complete listing of the issues in the *A Look at Leisure series* published to date, and a listing of the major reports on which the series has been based, is provided below.

i) Publications discussing findings of the 1980- 81 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*.

A Look at Leisure Bulletins No. 1-11:

1. A Look at Leisure



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2. A Look at Participation
3. Favorite Recreation Activities
4. A Look at Expenditures
5. Barriers to Participation
6. A Look at Issues
7. Voluntarism
8. Leisure Attitudes
9. A Look at Social Settings in Recreation
10. A Look at Recreation Service Providers
11. A Look at Leisure Patterns in 1981

Major Reports:

1. *Recreational Activity Preferences, Reasons for Participating and the Satisfaction of Needs.*
2. *A Study of Barriers to Recreation Participation.*
3. *A Study of Voluntarism in Recreation.*
4. *A Study of the Social Setting in Recreation.*
5. *Data Monograph - Summary of 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation.*

ii) Publications discussing results of the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation.*

A Look at Leisure Bulletins No. 12 - 16.

12. A New Chapter-The 1984 Survey
13. Participation Patterns
14. Choosing Recreation Activities
15. Ceasing Participation in Recreation Activities
16. Regional Variations

Reports:

1. *Synopsis of Final Results*
2. *Summary of Final Results*
3. *Analysis of Results (Major Report)*

FUTURE

A Look at Leisure will continue to present information on a variety of recreation- related topics, incorporating findings from the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation.*



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