

# A Look at Leisure

August, 1994

No. 34

## FAVORITE ACTIVITIES

This bulletin examines the activities people enjoy and the reasons why they participate in them. The primary data source for this report is the Alberta Recreation Survey conducted in 1992 by Alberta Community Development, in cooperation with Calgary, Edmonton and Randall Conrad and Associates. Comparisons with the findings of previous surveys in the series show how preferences for recreation activities are changing in Alberta.



**Alberta**  
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## LEISURE IS IMPORTANT

Leisure and recreation serve an important role in the lives of most people. People participate in activities to satisfy various needs, and receive personal benefits from their participation.

Leisure activities make an important contribution to personal satisfaction and happiness. Some of the general benefits associated with leisure are good mental health and personal growth. Leisure enhances life by providing a means of self-expression, choice, control, and a change from routine (Freysinger, 1987). In addition to these general benefits, there are many specific benefits (such as learning new skills) which people can enjoy. If practitioners understand the types of needs that are met through leisure and recreation, they are better able to design programs that satisfy the needs of consumers, and to market these programs effectively.

This bulletin discusses Albertans' favorite leisure and recreation activities. The discussion also looks at reasons for participating in these activities. It shows how the reasons for participation vary for different people, and how they are linked to different activity preferences.

## HIGHLIGHTS

Important findings which are discussed in this issue include the following:

Walking for pleasure, camping, golf and bicycling rank highly as favorite activities.

Pleasure, physical health/exercise, relaxation and nature enjoyment were most frequently mentioned as reasons for participating.

Reasons for participating vary greatly with age and family type.

## FAVORITE ACTIVITIES

Respondents were asked to name their favorite recreation activities. In total, 82 different pursuits were mentioned. The activities which ranked most highly as favorite activities are listed in Table 1.



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Table 1: Favorite Recreation Activities (1992, 1988, 1981)

	Rank in 1992	Rank in 1988	Rank in 1981
Walking for pleasure	1	2	6
Camping	2	1	1
Golf	3	3	2
Bicycling	4	6	15
Fishing	5	4	4
Swimming	6	5	8
Reading books/mag's	7	8	7
Ice hockey	8	10	5
Baseball	9	14	12
Handicrafts	10	9	n/a
Physical fitness (e.g., aerobics, yoga, etc.)	11	12	n/a
Gardening	n/a	13	26
Curling	12	11	10
Dancing	13	18	13
Horse riding/racing	14	15	18
Hunting/shooting	15	16	11
Hiking	16	19	n/a
Downhill skiing	17	7	3
Creative activities	18	17	n/a

n/a Not available.

How do Albertans' favorite activities in 1992 compare with those of 1981? Table 1 (above) ranks the individual favorite activities for the years. For these top-ranked activities, we found the following changes from 1981 to 1992:

- \* Bicycling, walking for pleasure, horse riding/racing, baseball, swimming and golf have increased in popularity as favorite activities (gardening probably has too, but it mistakenly got left off the 1992 survey).
- \* Downhill skiing, hunting/shooting, ice hockey, curling, reading, fishing, and camping ranked lower as favorite activities in 1992 than in 1981. As reported in A Look at Leisure #26, racquetball, bowling, jogging, tennis and cross-country skiing ranked in the top 18 activities in 1981, but no longer appear to be as popular.



Many of the activities were mentioned by a relatively small number of respondents. It is therefore necessary to group them into categories for further analysis. The activity groupings were the same as those developed for past Public Opinion Surveys on Recreation so that comparisons can be made across surveys.

The 10 categories used are shown in Table 2, along with examples of the activities included in each category. Activities in the exercise-oriented grouping were identified most frequently. This was followed by team sports, camping, golf, creative-cultural activities, extractive and social passive.

**Table 2: Favorite Activity Category Profiles**

1. Exercise-Oriented Activities	
Examples:	Walking for pleasure, swimming, bicycling.
Profile:	More often reported as a favorite activity by females; participation declines with increasing age up to 64 years, then increases slightly for those 65 or over; associated with higher education levels.
Main Reasons:	Motivated by pleasure, physical health and exercise, relaxation, an alternative to work, enjoyment of nature, and social reasons.
2. Creative-Cultural Activities	
Examples:	Crafts, hobbies, and performing arts.
Profile:	More likely to be enjoyed by females than males and by those 45 years or older.
Main Reasons:	Pleasure, relaxation, being creative, doing something different from work, and skill development.
3. Camping	
Profile:	Interest peaks between 35 and 64 years of age, and declines for those over 65. Less appealing to those with university/college educations.
Main Reasons:	Pleasure, relaxation, enjoyment of nature, being with the family, doing something different from work, and doing things with friends.
4. Team Sports	
Examples:	Ice hockey, curling, baseball, volleyball.
Profile:	Preference more likely to be expressed by males than females; interest declines with age.
Main Reasons:	Pleasure, physical health or exercise, excitement, challenge, doing things with friends, and doing something different from work.
5. Fishing/Hunting (Extractive) Activities	
Profile:	More likely to be favored by males than females; interest increases with age.
Main Reasons:	Pleasure, enjoyment of nature, relaxation, doing something different from work, excitement, being with the family, challenge, and physical health or exercise.



6. Golf  
 Profile: More likely to be favored by males than females; interest increases with age.  
 Main Reasons: Pleasure, physical health or exercise, relaxation, socializing, and skill development.
7. Social-Passive Activities  
 Examples: Board and table games, entertaining, reading.  
 Profile: More likely to be favored by females than males; interest is stable across age categories but increases over the age of 65.  
 Main Reasons: Pleasure, relaxation, doing something different from work, improving skills and abilities, learning new skills, and socializing.
8. Mechanized/Assisted Outdoor Activities  
 Examples: Horse riding, driving for pleasure, snowmobiling, boating.  
 Profile: Adults under 25 years slightly more likely than older adults to state a preference for this type of activity. Main Reasons: Pleasure, enjoying nature, relaxation, doing something different from work, excitement, being with the family, and socializing with friends.
9. Downhill Skiing  
 Profile: Peaks as a favorite activity between 25 and 44 years of age.  
 Main Reasons: Pleasure, physical health or exercise, excitement, relaxation, learning new skills, and enjoying nature.
10. Non-Mechanized Outdoor Activities  
 Examples: Hiking, cross-country skiing, canoeing/kayaking.  
 Profile: Interest quite stable across age categories and is linked with higher education levels.  
 Main Reasons: Pleasure, enjoyment of nature, physical health or exercise, relaxation, doing something different from work, and improving skills.

In Table 3, the favorite activity groupings are compared for 1981, 1988 and 1992. The data suggest that exercise-oriented and creative-cultural types of activities increased in popularity from 1981 to 1992. Team sports and social-passive pursuits were mentioned less often as favorite types of activities in 1992 than in 1981. The remaining categories were quite stable in popularity.



Table 3: Favorite Types of Activities

	1981	1988	1992
Exercise-oriented	25%	30%	38%
Creative-cultural	6%	10%	8%
Team sports	14%	9%	10%
Fishing/Hunting	8%	8%	7%
Social-passive	12%	6%	6%
Mechanical/assisted outdoor activities	6%	6%	5%
Non-mechanized outdoor activities	5%	3%	4%
Camping	9%	10%	10%
Golf	6%	8%	9%
Downhill skiing	5%	4%	4%

## WHY PEOPLE PARTICIPATE

What does leisure mean to people? What needs are being satisfied by leisure? Why do people chose to participate in certain recreational activities? These are important questions for the recreation practitioner. Knowing why people participate helps us to understand what people desire in their recreation activities. It also suggests the qualities in programs which will attract and satisfy participants.

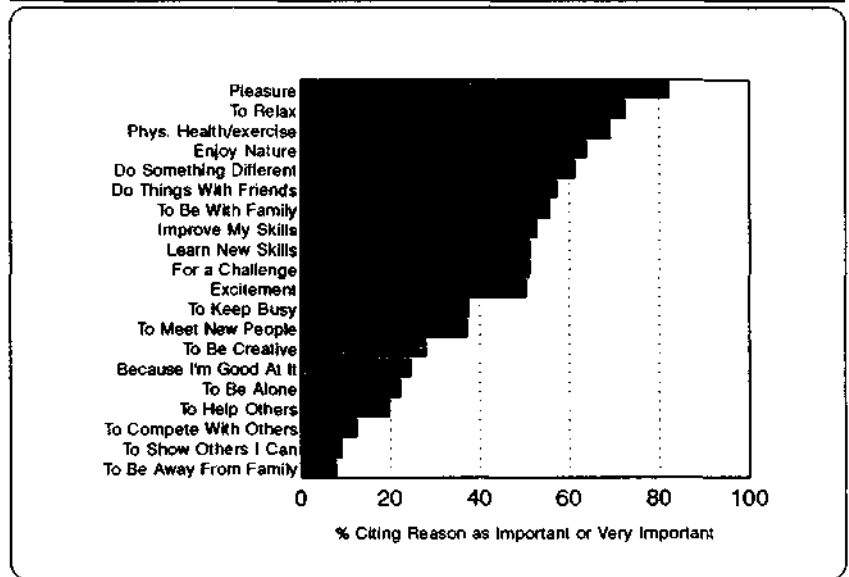
Reasons for participation (or motivations) are complex. These are some of the observations that researchers have made on this topic:

- \* Participation in an activity may satisfy a variety of needs for an individual.
- \* Different people may be participating in a given activity for very different reasons.
- \* Some reasons for participation may be very general (such as pleasure), while some reasons may be very specific (such as meeting new people) (Crandall, 1980).
- \* Even though preferred activities may vary for different cultures, people in various parts of the world have similar reasons for participating in recreation (Cato and Kunstler, 1988).



The Recreation Surveys have examined the importance of peoples' reasons for participation in favorite recreation activities. Figure 1 shows the percentages of respondents indicating that each reason was important to them.

Figure 1: Reasons for Choosing Activities



The highest ranked reasons for participation were pleasure, relaxation, physical health or exercise, doing something different from work, and enjoyment of nature. Reasons such as competing, showing accomplishments to others, and being away from the family ranked relatively low in importance.

Although the 1988 General Recreation Survey does not include a complete listing of reasons for participation, it does represent the key groups of reasons identified in other studies. For example, Beard and Ragheb (1983) found that reasons for participation group into four major categories. These are:

- o Intellectual - involving learning and creativity;
- o Stimulus Avoidance - relaxing and avoiding stressful situations;
- o Social - involving friendship and esteem of others; and,
- o Competence/mastery - including achievement, mastery, challenge, and competition, often physical in nature.





The surveys have also looked at reasons for participation in favorite recreation activities (A Look at Leisure #3, #26). The rankings of the reasons have been very consistent over the decade. Reasons for participation seem to be quite stable. Although some needs may vary with current social trends, it seems that basic human needs, as outlined in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, are quite constant (Cato and Kunstler, 1988).

## REASONS AND TYPE OF ACTIVITY

What are the main reasons for participating in different types of activities? Do different activities satisfy different needs? The most important reasons for participation in each of the 10 activity groupings were summarized in Table 2. Pleasure and relaxation seem to be very general benefits associated with most types of leisure activities.

On the other hand, there are certain types of activities which meet some needs better than others. Activities for which skill development is particularly important are creative-cultural and social-passive pursuits, golf, and downhill skiing. Social and family reasons are quite important to participants in exercise-oriented activities, team sports, fishing/hunting pursuits, golf, and camping. Types of activities most likely to meet needs of competence and mastery include: team sports; mechanized outdoor pursuits; downhill skiing; and fishing/hunting activities.

## HOW REASONS VARY OVER THE LIFE CYCLE

How do these reasons vary for different sub-groups of the population? Several studies have shown that the meaning and role of leisure varies throughout life (e.g., Freysinger, 1987; Osgood and Howe, 1984).

Data from the 1988 General Recreation Survey show how reasons for participation change with age. There are several age-related patterns. Examples of the following patterns are provided in Figure 2.

The importance of each of the following reasons declines with age:

- improving skills or knowledge
- learning new skills and abilities
- to be alone
- to be away from my family
- to compete
- for a challenge
- for excitement.





Importance increases with age for the following reasons:

to help my community to  
enjoy nature relaxation.

Importance increases with age for the following reasons:

to help my community  
to enjoy nature  
relaxation.

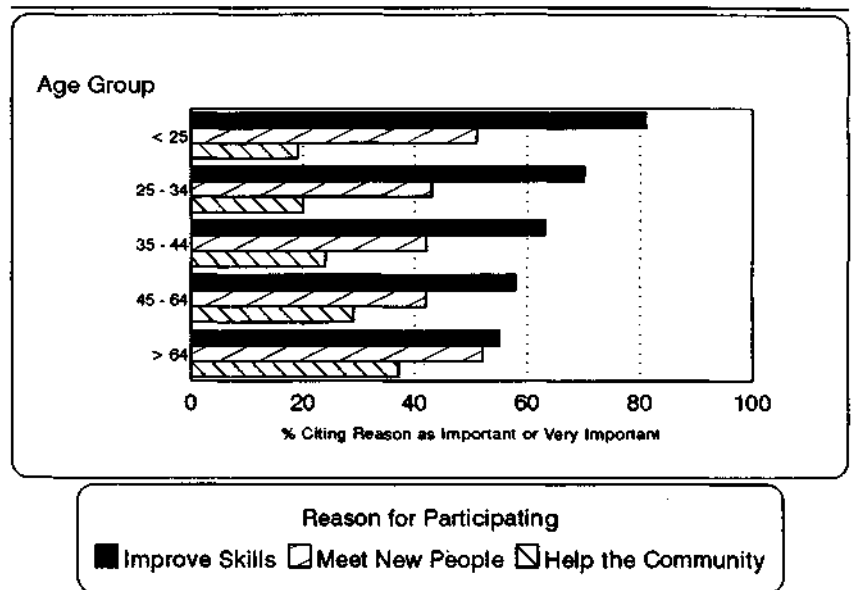


Figure 2: Changes in Reasons for Participation

Importance is greater for both young adults and older adults, but of less importance in the mid-adult years:

showing others I can do it to  
keep busy  
to do things with my friends  
to meet new people because  
I am good at it.

The importance of pleasure is very stable across age groups, while the importance of relaxation increases gradually until the retirement years. The importance of physical health and exercise declines slightly to age 65, then increases again for those over 65.



As the population ages, researchers have begun to look closely at the importance of leisure during the mid-adult and senior years (e.g, Freysinger, 1987; Tinsley et al, 1987). Freysinger has found, for example, that there is an increasing value placed on leisure as adults approach middle age. This is perhaps because of the scarcity of leisure, an increasing emphasis on enjoyment and personal satisfaction, a growing need for relaxation, and expanding interests. People also realize that leisure is necessary for a sense of wholeness (Freysinger, 1987).

There are some sex differences in the importance of reasons for participation. Reasons which seem to be more important to males than females are challenge, competition, and being good at the activity. Reasons particularly important to females are to keep busy, to be creative, to be with the family, and to do something different from work.

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE PRACTITIONER?

Many personal needs are met through leisure and recreation. If people are matched with activities that meet their needs, their overall satisfaction should increase (Crandall, 1980).

What motivates people to participate in your programs? This bulletin provides a good indication of reasons that may be important to your clientele. The importance of reasons varies somewhat for different people. It would be helpful to ask the participants in your programs to discuss the types of reasons which are most important to them.

Do your programs offer opportunities to meet the four basic groups of needs - intellectual, social, stimulus avoidance, and competence/mastery (Beard and Ragheb, 1983)? Do you know which of your programs meets each of these needs most effectively?

Have you tried to market your programs by informing people about the benefits to be gained from participation? Most promotional material simply provides a listing or description of program offerings. It might also inform people about the benefits they will receive from programs, such as learning new skills, doing something different from work, or experiencing a challenge. This type of information may help people to think about their leisure needs. It will also help them to select leisure experiences which will meet those needs.

Do you offer any services such as leisure counselling or leisure education which will help clients to identify their needs? What can you do to match them with programs which will best meet their needs?



The survey results show that reasons for participation change throughout life. For example, the need to relax increases in importance throughout the life span, but is not as important in the retirement years. In many ways, older participants are similar to the young adult clientele in terms of their reasons for participation. Social needs are very important to both of these groups. Do you try to design your programs to meet the main needs of each age group?

Client satisfaction is an important goal of recreation services. Clients are not simply participating in leisure activities. They are seeking experiences which will satisfy a variety of needs. Understanding these needs is an important tool for recreation practitioners concerned with developing programs that are appropriate and attractive to a varied clientele.

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#### THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue in the Look at Leisure series will focus on VOLUNTARISM. It will examine respondents' volunteer activities, what they do and how often they do it.

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#### MORE INFORMATION

Would you like more information about A Look at Leisure publication or the background research reports upon which the series is based?

Do you have any requests for future A Look at Leisure topics, or reports based on sub-provincial areas or subsets of the data base?

For further information about the survey, or to have your mailing address changed, please contact:

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ISSN 0715-2361



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