

A Look at Leisure

We're Lovin' It!

Albertans' Favourite Recreation & Leisure Past Times

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Introduction

The *Alberta Recreation Survey* has been conducted every four years since 1981. The seven surveys in the series provide a wealth of data about how Albertans take part in recreation. In this bulletin we take a look at the favourite activities of Albertans as reported in the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey*. The survey asked Albertans to report their first, second and third favourite activities and to indicate the number of times they had taken part in each activity during the preceding twelve months. Complimenting this is a review of the reasons that Albertans take part in their favourite activities.

Many activities were identified as favorites but this bulletin focuses on the top ten. The bulletin also considers the favourites within specific activity type categories. Using categories is helpful when individual activities have relatively low participation rates.

Overview of Favourite Activities

Walking is the favourite activity of Albertans ranking first at 16.7% (Table 1). This is followed by golf (9.4%), camping (6.7%) and bicycling (4.1%).

Of the top five activities listed as second and third favourites, walking remains top of the list. Indeed, the top five activities listed under second favourite remain the same as for first favourites with the exception of swimming which ranks below gardening.

There is also one change in the top 5 list of third favorite activities with golf dropping down the list and being replaced by gardening.

Table 1
Favourite Activities (ranked by %)

Rank	Activity	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
1	Walking	536	16.7
2	Golf	302	9.4
3	Camping	214	6.7
4	Bicycling	131	4.1
5	Swimming	112	3.5
6	Jogging/running	101	3.1
6	Gardening	100	3.1
8	Reading	85	2.6
9	Fishing	82	2.5
9	Ice hockey	80	2.5

Profiling the Top Ten Favourites

Frequency of Participation

A closer look at how often Albertans take part in the top ten favourites helps us to understand the extent to which Albertans have the opportunity to satisfy their recreation needs. We can also look at the reasons Albertans take part to further understand why people participate.

Chart 1 shows how the relationship between favourite activities and frequency of participation reflect the relative accessibility of different activities. Reading, jogging and walking can all be done at or close to home and at any time. As a result, the majority of people identifying these activities as their favourites are able to take part more than 51 times per year, or at least once per week. Some activities have certain seasonal limitations, such as gardening, ice hockey and bicycling. Despite this, most participants are still able to find ways to take part on an almost weekly basis (Chart 2).

By contrast, golf and swimming reach a peak of participation at the 11 to 30 times per year mark and then flatten out after that such that about 25% of participants take part on a weekly basis. This may be a reflection of the relative accessibility and cost associated with admission to facilities for these activities.

Fishing and camping, however, reach a maximum participation level at the 11 to 30 mark after which very few people take part more often. These are good examples of how favourite activities are not always the activities with the most frequent level of participation.

Chart 1
Favourite Activity With At Least Weekly Participation

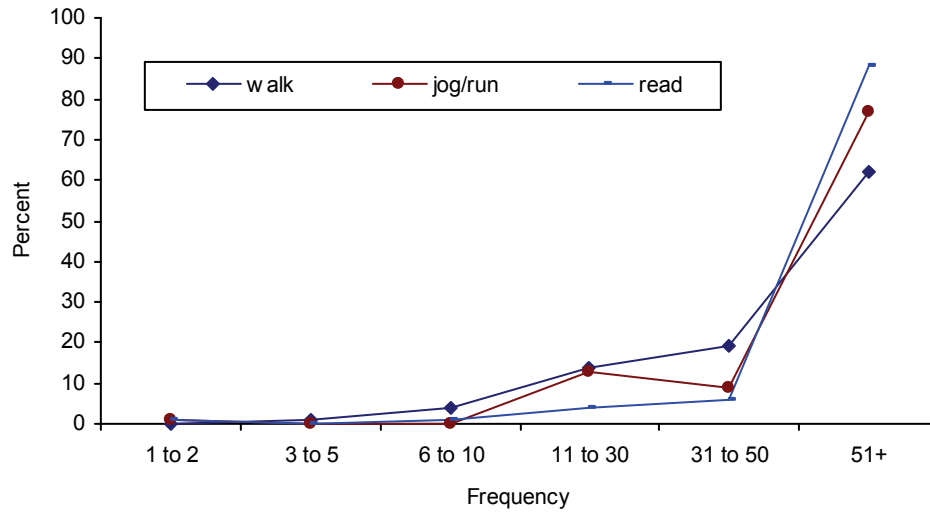
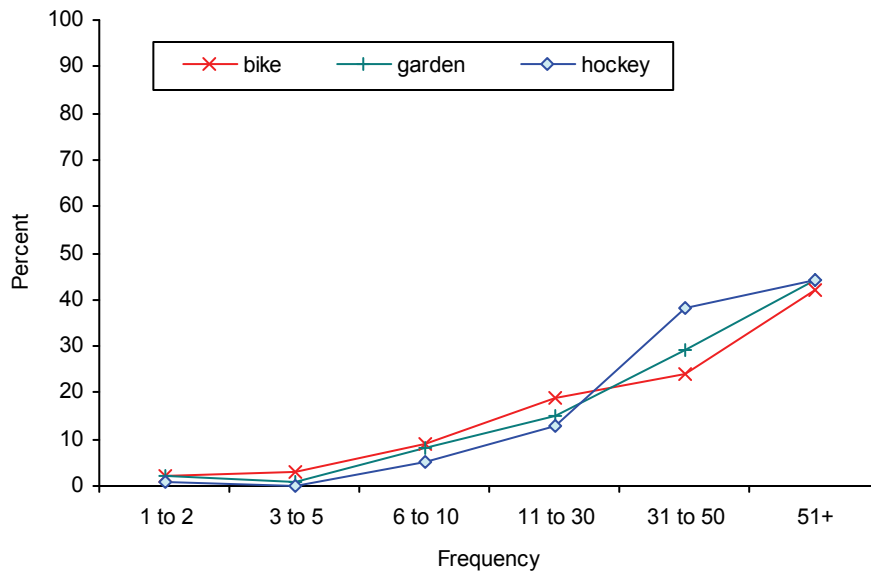


Chart 2
Favourite Activity With No More Than At Least Weekly Participation



Demographic Profile of Participation

There are some key links between each of the top ten favorite activities and the demographic profile of participants (Table 2). Walking, for example, is preferred by single females whereas golf is preferred by males who are over 45 years of age and have no children living at home. By contrast, camping is popular with males and families with swimming most likely to be popular with families and single parents.

Table 2
Demographic Profiles for Favourite Activities

Activity	Demographic Characteristics
Walking	females single
Golf	male over 45 technical education couples with no children
Camping	male 36-55 high school and technical education couples with children
Bicycling	male 26-55 university education single
Swimming	female 18 to 25 and 36 to 45 college level education couples with children and single parents
Jogging/running	female 26 to 55 university education couples with children and single parents
Gardening	female over 35 couples with no children
Reading	female over 45 university education single adults and single parents
Fishing	male 46 to 55 and over 55 high school and technical education couples with no children
Ice hockey	male under 45 technical and university education couples with children

Favourite Types of Activities

Besides looking at the leading individual favourite activities, it is also helpful to look at groupings of different types of activities based on all of the favourites that were identified. A comparison of the trends in participation rates for activity groupings reveals changes since 1981 (Table 3).

Exercise-oriented activities, such as jogging, aerobics and walking, have seen steady growth since 1981 from 25% to 39% in 2004. There has also been an increase for the creative-cultural group from 6% in 1981 to 11% in 2004, and a similar change for golf (6% to 11%).

Notable decreases have affected team sports, which were the favourite for 14% of Albertans in 1981 but are down to 8% in 2004. Decline is also evident for camping which has decreased from 10% in 1988 and 1992 to 7% in 2004, fishing/hunting (8% to 4%) and mechanically-assisted outdoor activities (6% to 2%). These shifts reflect both changing preferences for activities that are more easily accessible as well as the changing demographic profile of the population.

Table 3
Participation Rates for Activity Groupings
1981 - 2004

Groupings	% of Respondents Reporting a Favourite Activity					
	2004	2000	1996	1992	1988	1981
Exercise-oriented	39	37	32	38	30	25
Creative-cultural	11	10	10	8	10	6
Golf	11	10	11	9	8	6
Social-passive	10	9	8	6	6	12
Team sports	8	8	11	10	9	14
Camping	7	8	8	10	10	9
Non-mechanized outdoor activities	5	5	8	4	3	5
Fishing/hunting	4	4	5	7	8	8
Mechanically-assisted outdoor activities	2	3	4	5	6	6
Snow sports	3	3	4	4	4	5
Water-based activities	1	*	*	*	*	*

* Not reported separately

Demographic Profile for Activity Groupings

Females between the ages of 26 and 45 with university educations are more likely than others to take part in exercise-oriented activities. Non-mechanized outdoor activities such as hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding and mountain climbing are most likely to be the domain of males with post-secondary

Table 4
Demographic Profiles for Activity Groupings

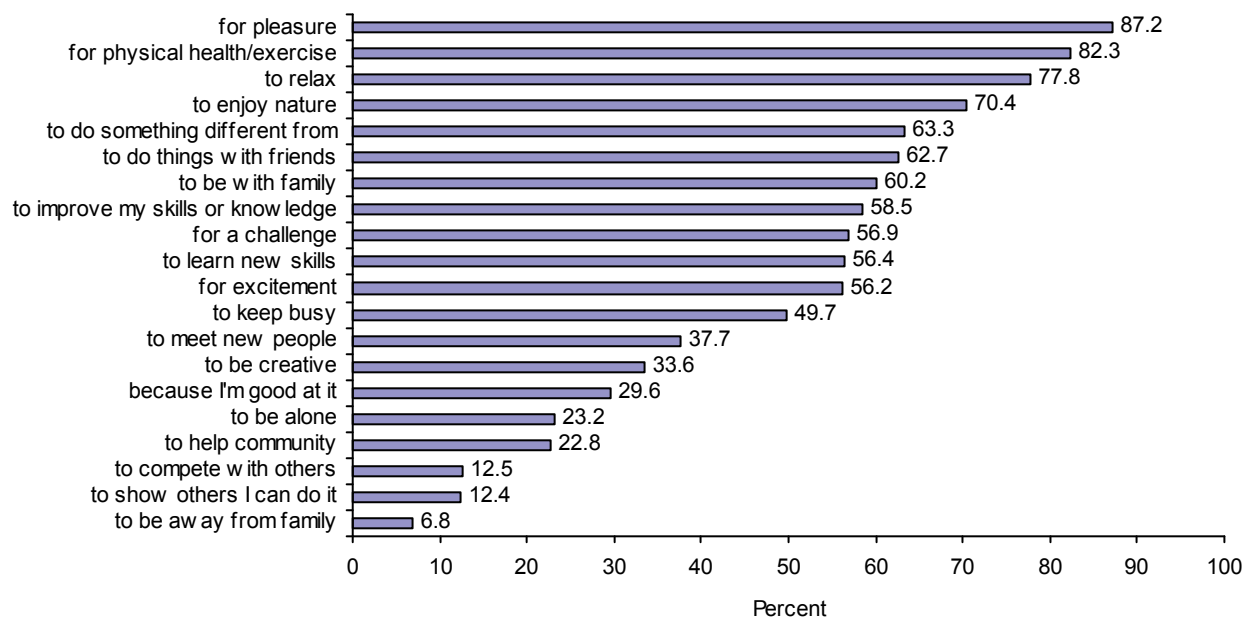
Activity Groupings	Demographic Characteristics
<u>Exercise-oriented</u> (includes aerobics, jogging, walking, racquet sports, weight training, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • females • 26 to 45 • university education
<u>Non-mechanical outdoor</u> (includes mountain biking, overnight backpacking, birdwatching, orienteering, mountain climbing, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male • 26 to 35 • college and university education
<u>Creative-cultural</u> (includes hobbies and crafts, dance and theatre, visiting museums, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • female • over 55 • couples with no children
<u>Golf</u> (includes golf, driving range)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male • over 45 • high school and technical education • couples with no children
<u>Team sports</u> (includes soccer, hockey, rugby, basketball, curling, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male • under 45 • couples with children
<u>Social-passive</u> (includes playing video/computer games, gardening, picnicking, attending educational courses, bowling, playing bingo)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • female • over 65 • high school education • single adults
<u>Camping</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male • 36 to 55 • high school and technical education • couples with no children
<u>Fish/hunt</u> (includes fishing, hunting, shooting sports, archery)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male • over 45 • high school and technical education • couples with no children
<u>Mechanically-assisted outdoor</u> (includes ATV/off-road vehicles, snowmobiling, motorized trial biking and moto-cross)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male • 15 to 25 and 46 to 55 • technical education • couples with no children
<u>Snow-based</u> (includes tobogganing, downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male • under 35 and 46 to 55 • college and university education • couples with children
<u>Water-based</u> (includes motor boating, windsurfing, river rafting, water-skiing, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male • 18 to 25 and 36 to 35 • technical and college education • couples with children

education between the ages of 26 and 35. Snow sports such as skiing and snow boarding are popular with the under 35 group but also those between 46 and 55. Other tendencies are evident in Table 4.

Reasons for Participation

Overall, Albertans take part in recreation for pleasure (87.2%) and for physical health and exercise (82.3%). Over two-thirds of Albertans take part for relaxation (77.8%) and to enjoy nature (70.4%). The least important reasons are to be away from family (6.8%), to show others can do it (12.4%) and to compete with others (12.5%).

Chart 3
Reasons for Participation



Some reasons are more likely to be related to specific favourite activities. Those people whose favourite activity is walking are more likely than others to be seeking relaxation, enjoying nature, being alone and being away from family. Hockey players, however, take part to compete, because they consider themselves to be good, to improve skills, for a challenge, for excitement, for physical health and exercise, and to be with friends.

The reasons with the strongest associations to each top ten favourite activity are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5
Top Ten Favourite Activities By Reasons for Participation

Activity	Reasons for Participation	
Walking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for pleasure • to relax • to enjoy nature • to be with family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to be alone • to be away from family • for physical health/exercise
Golf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for pleasure • for physical health/exercise • to do things with friends • for a challenge • to improve skills • for excitement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to learn new skills • to keep busy • to meet new people • because I am good at it • to compete with other
Camping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • because I am good at it • to show others I can do it • to improve skills • to learn new skills • to keep busy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to help my community • to be creative • to be alone • to be away from family
Bicycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for excitement • to do things with friends • to meet new people • to relax 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to do something different from work • to enjoy nature
Swimming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for a challenge • for excitement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for physical health/exercise • to be alone
Jogging/running	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to compete with others • because I am good at it • to show others I can do it • to improve skills • to learn new skills • for a challenge • to keep busy • for physical health/exercise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to do things with friends • to meet new people • to relax • to do something different from work • to be alone • to be away from family
Gardening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • because I am good at it • to show others I can do it • to improve skills • to learn new skills • for a challenge • for excitement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to keep busy • for physical health/exercise • to do something different from work • to be alone

Table 5
Top Ten Favourite Activities By Reasons for Participation
 (con't)

Activity	Reasons for Participation	
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • because I am good at it • to learn new skills • for excitement • to help my community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to be creative • to enjoy nature • to be alone
Fishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to show others I can do it • for a challenge • to do things with friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to relax • to enjoy nature
Ice Hockey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to compete with others • because I am good at it • to show others I can do it • to improve skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for a challenge • for excitement • for physical health/exercise • to do things with friends

Grouping activities into types and then comparing reasons for participation produces the summary in Table 6. Personal development, enjoying nature and being social are key motivations for those who take part in mechanically-assisted outdoor activities. The same reasons also associate with non-mechanical activities although physical health and exercise is more important than it is for those who prefer mechanically-assisted activities.

Table 6
Reasons for Participation for Activity Groupings

Activity Groupings	Reasons for Participation	
<u>Exercise oriented</u> (includes aerobics, jogging, walking, racquet sports, weight training, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for physical health/exercise • to be alone 	
<u>Non-mechanical outdoor</u> (includes mountain biking, overnight backpacking, birdwatching, orienteering, mountain climbing, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to improve skills • to learn new skills • for a challenge • for excitement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for physical health/exercise • to do things with friends • to enjoy nature
<u>Creative-cultural</u> (includes hobbies and crafts, dance and theatre, visiting a museum, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • because I am good at it • to show others I can do it • to improve skills • to learn new skills • to keep busy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to help my community • to be creative • to meet new people • to be away from family
<u>Golf</u> (includes golf, driving range)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to compete with others • because I am good at it • to show others I can do it • to improve skills • to learn new skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for a challenge • for excitement • for physical health/exercise • to do things with friends • to meet new people
<u>Team sports</u> (includes soccer, hockey, rugby, basketball, curling, etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to compete with others • to show others I can do it • to improve skills • to learn new skills • for a challenge • for excitement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to keep busy • to help my community • for physical health/exercise • to do things with friends • to meet new people • to do something different from work
<u>Social-passive</u> (includes playing video/computer games, gardening, picnicking, attending educational courses, bowling, playing bingo)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to improve skills • to learn new skills • to keep busy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to help my community • to be creative • to meet new people
<u>Camping</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for excitement • to be creative • to be with family • to do things with friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to meet new people • to relax • to do something different from work • to enjoy nature
<u>Fish/hunt</u> (includes fishing, hunting, shooting sports, archery)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • because I am good at it • to show others I can do it • for a challenge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for excitement • to do things with friends • to enjoy nature

Table 6
Reasons for Participation for Activity Groupings
 (con't)

Activity Groupings	Reasons for Participation	
<u>Mechanically-assisted outdoor</u> (includes ATV/off-road vehicles, snowmobiling, motorized trial biking and moto-cross)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to compete with others • to improve skills • to learn new skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for excitement • to do things with friends • to enjoy nature
<u>Snow-based</u> (includes tobogganing, downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • because I am good at it • to show others I can do it • to improve skills • to learn new skills • for a challenge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for excitement • for physical health/exercise • to do things with friends • to do something different from work • to enjoy nature.
<u>Water-based</u> (includes motor boating, windsurfing, river rafting water-skiing, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to compete • because I am good at it • to improve skills • to learn new skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for a challenge • for excitement • to do something different from work • to enjoy nature

Why People Participate

Research since the 1970's has identified a range of reasons to explain why people take part in recreation. The 1990s has seen this knowledge refined to explore and summarize the benefits that are derived from participation.

Hultsman (1996) has classified recreational benefits under four main headings:

- Personal: for example, disease prevention, improved physical health, improved socialization, physical and emotional release, and learning.
- Social: for example, being with other people, and helps eliminate social distinctions.
- Economic: for example, leisure and recreation activities support the economy.
- Environmental: for example, to support the maintenance and development of national, provincial, and municipal parks and recreation areas.

These benefits are derived from intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Craig, Russell & Cameron, 1995), where:

- Intrinsic motivations are the internal benefits to the individual, including personal satisfaction, feelings of well-being, and enjoyment.
- Extrinsic motivations are the external benefits affecting an individual's participation. Extrinsic motivations include monetary and material reward, trophies, social recognition, status, and acceptance.

Certain reasons associate directly with specific segments of the population. Females are more likely to identify the fitness and health benefits as their primary reasons for taking part in recreation (Phillip Gray & Associates, 2001). Youth can benefit from a range of factors including psychological and physical health, familial interaction, peer influence, academic performance, and community development are key benefits reasons that can encourage this particular segment to get involved (CPRA, no date).

The individual reasons investigated through the *Alberta Recreation Survey* include those that reflect personal experience (e.g., to keep busy, to be alone) as well as social reasons (e.g., to meet new people, to do things with friends). In addition, the reason 'to help my community' that is included in the *Alberta Recreation Survey* reflect a degree of economic value to participation, and the environmental element is covered by 'to enjoy nature'. So, the survey offers a broad perspective on why Albertans get involved in recreation and the benefits they derive.

Reasons such as 'for pleasure' rank high regardless of activity. Walking offers the benefits of being outside and providing physical health and exercise. Likewise jogging/running but with the added dimensions of competition, skill development and the opportunity to spend time alone. The social dimension is of greater importance for activities like fishing and bicycling while ice hockey adds the benefits of challenge and personal stimulation.

The same types of associations are found when individual activities are grouped. Social-passive activities offer skill development, creativity and helping. Skill development also associates with snow-based activities and non-mechanical outdoors activities while combining with challenge and enjoying nature. By contrast, camping reflects a desire to relax and enjoy social interaction with family and friends.

Studies specifically for outdoor recreation confirm that being able to enjoy and experience nature and to do something with family are the highest ranking reasons, with being with like-minded people and getting exercise representing secondary reasons (Robertson, 1998).

Implications for Practitioners

There are some clear associations between Albertans' favourite activities, the reasons for taking part and the demographic profile of participants. Knowing what these are is important to practitioners who design and deliver programming.

Albertans take part because of the benefits recreation offers, whether these benefits are passive (e.g., relaxation and socialization) or are active (e.g., for competition). These are important considerations for program development as they represent expectations some people have: bicycling programs should include the opportunity for socialization, and initiatives that encourage walking should focus on the combination of being outside and personal health and fitness. Team sports become more attractive when they offer a challenge and within a competitive framework balanced to participants skill levels.

We must also pay attention to the frequency with which Albertans can take part in their favourite activities. Camping and fishing are good examples of favourite activities that Albertans might do more often if they could. In cases where limitations exist, it is important that the value of the experience is of such a high

standard that participants gain enough satisfaction to want to continue their involvement in future years. Using the information offered in this bulletin provides a basis to help us understand Albertans' interests and needs and prepare us to meet them.

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