

# A Look at Leisure #46: Outdoor Pursuits

This bulletin examines the outdoor activities people enjoy, the reasons they participate and the barriers that limit their participation. This bulletin was developed in collaboration with the City of Edmonton. The primary data source for this report is the Alberta Recreation Survey conducted in 2000 by Alberta Community Development, in cooperation with the Alberta Centre for Active Living, Alberta Environment, and the Cities of Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge and Red Deer. Comparisons with the findings of previous recreation surveys show how preferences and barriers for outdoor pursuits are changing in Alberta.

## **Introduction**

*“Outdoor recreation is defined as the interaction between an activity and an outdoor natural environment that recreates an individual physically, psychologically, emotionally, and socially”* (Leitner, p. 338). In the early part of the last century outdoor recreation meant social gatherings, an escape from normal life and a time for solitude. Though these meanings are still relevant today Albertans have found many other reasons to participate in outdoor activities (Leitner, p. 18).

The 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey provides information about recreation practices and interests in Alberta. The survey also provides a look at what outdoor pursuits household members and respondents participated in, the outdoor activities favoured by respondents, the outdoor activities respondents desired, and the barriers that prevent or limit their participation. Since 1981 there has been a general decline in outdoor activities. Regardless, outdoor pursuits still account for approximately 50% of the respondents’ recreational activities, making them an important group of activities to explore.

## **Participation in Outdoor Activities**

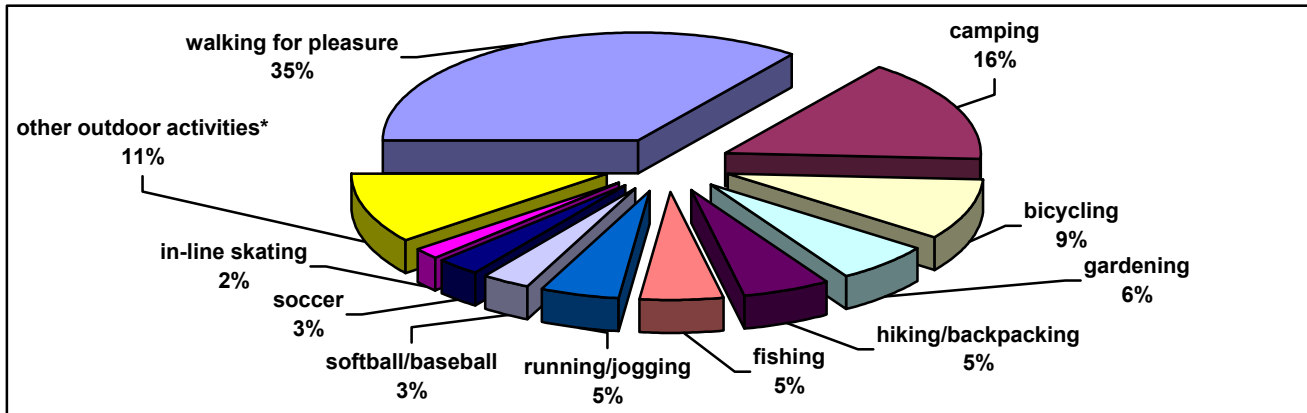
The top ten outdoor pursuits with the highest levels of household and respondent participation include:

- Walking for pleasure
- Gardening
- Bicycling
- Overnight camping
- Picnicking (in the countryside)
- Day hiking
- Picnicking (within a city)
- Swimming (in lakes, rivers, ponds, etc.)
- Jogging/running
- Fishing

Have participation levels for any of the above activities changed since the first recreation survey in 1981? Walking for pleasure has increased in participation by 4% since 1981 (from 87.1% to 91.3%). Gardening and bicycling have maintained their popularity. However, overnight camping (from 64.8% to 47.6%), jogging/running (from 53.6% to 32.9%) and fishing (from 54.7% to 31.5%) have seen significant decreases in participation.

Outdoor pursuits in which fewer than 5 percent of households participated in include motorized trail biking, archery, sailing, orienteering, rugby, triathlon, BMX racing, sailboarding/windsurfing and moto-cross.

**Graph 1: First Favourite Outdoor Activities 2000 (% is based on outdoor pursuits only)**



\* Other outdoor activities include boating, mountain biking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, tennis, water sports, canoeing/kayaking/row/rafting, birdwatching, picnicking, ATV off-road, motorized biking, football, rugby, triathlon, archery, BMX racing, track and field, and tobogganing/sledding.

***Favourite Outdoor Activities***

Respondents were asked to name their favourite recreation activities. In total, 29 different outdoor pursuits were mentioned. The top ten are shown in Graph 1 above. Outdoor activities ranked most highly as favourite activities are listed in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Favourite Outdoor Activities (2000)**

Favourite Outdoor Activities	Overall Percentage of Respondents*	Rank
<b>1st Favourite</b>		
Walking for pleasure	16.4%	1
Camping	7.2%	2
Bicycling	4.4%	3
Gardening	2.8%	4
Hiking/backpacking	2.5%	5
<b>2nd Favourite</b>		
Walking for pleasure	12.2%	1
Bicycling	7.7%	2
Camping	4.9%	3
Gardening	3.9%	4
Hiking/backpacking	3.5%	5
<b>3rd Favourite</b>		
Walking for pleasure	8.5%	1
Bicycling	7.2%	2
Camping	4.6%	3
Gardening	4.2%	4
Hiking/backpacking	2.9%	5

\* Overall responses include non-outdoor pursuits that represent 41.2% of respondents' first favourite activity, 38.2% of the second and 33.1% of the third.

**Participation**

- When asked to name their top three favourite activities;
  - 46.5% of respondents cited outdoor pursuits as their first favourite activity
  - 45.4% named it as their second most favoured
  - 40.5% their third favourite.
- It is important to note that the season and length of the season may have an affect on participation in some outdoor activities. Many outdoor recreation activities can only be done in specific months of the year making their popularity even more significant at that time.
- Respondents who chose walking for pleasure, or gardening as their first favourite activity, typically participated 51 or more times in the past year.
- Respondents who chose camping, biking or hiking typically participated 11-30 times in the past year.
- When favourite outdoor activities are looked at by gender, age, household type, household income, and geographic location there are notable variations.

**Gender**

- Females were more likely to mention walking for pleasure, gardening, in-line skating, and soccer.
- Males were more likely to mention camping, bicycling, fishing, boating, softball/baseball, and mountain biking (off-road).
- Males and females favoured hiking/backpacking and running/jogging equally.

- Males favoured all remaining outdoor activities slightly more frequently.

### **Age**

- Walking for pleasure was the favourite outdoor activity among all age groups.
- 18 to 25 year olds preferred camping, bicycling, mountain biking (off-road), baseball/softball and soccer.
- Bicycling, camping, hiking/backpacking, soccer and baseball/softball were favoured by respondents 26 to 34 years.
- 35 to 44 year olds preferred camping, bicycling, gardening, hiking/backpacking and fishing.
- Camping, bicycling, running/jogging, gardening and fishing were preferred by those 45 to 64 years.
- Respondents 65 years and over favoured camping, gardening, fishing and hiking/backpacking.

### **Household Type**

- All household types favoured walking for pleasure.
- Single people are more likely to participate in bicycling.
- Couples with children and without children participated in the widest variety of activities.
- Single parent families and households of two or more related adults participated in the least variety of outdoor activities.
- Team sports such as soccer and softball/baseball were in the top five favourite activities for single persons, households of two or more unrelated single adults and households of two or more related adults.

### **Income**

- Camping and bicycling were popular among all income groups.
- Those in households with an income of less than \$10,001 participated in the least variety of activities.
- Respondents with a household income of \$30,001-\$50,000 participated in the widest variety of outdoor activities.
- Participation in fishing was highest among respondents in the \$50,001-\$90,000 range.

- Jogging was highly favoured by households with incomes of over \$70,000.

### **Regional Variations**

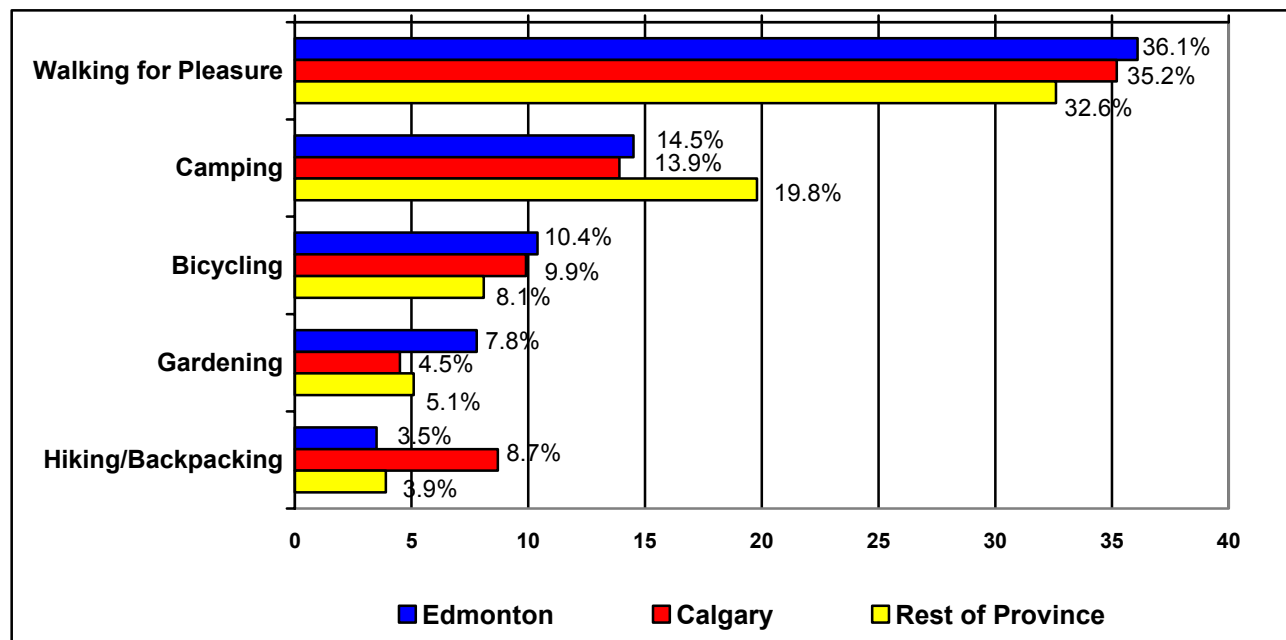
Recreation patterns may vary in different regions of the province due to such factors as socio-demographics of the residents, proximity to natural resource land and other facilities.

- Edmontonians had the highest rate of participation in gardening, and the lowest participation rates in mountain biking.
- Calgarians had the highest rates of participation in mountain activities including hiking/backpacking, mountain biking and mountain climbing.
- The remainder of the province reported the highest participation rates of all three regions in camping, water sports, fishing and ATV/off-road vehicle riding.

Regional differences in respondents' five favourite outdoor activities are shown in Graph 2.

- Walking for pleasure is the most popular favourite activity regardless of where people live (Edmonton 36.1%, Calgary 35.2%, remainder of province 32.6%).
- Regional variations are quite evident for the remaining favourite outdoor activities.
- Edmontonians prefer the activity of gardening (7.8%) more than Calgarians (4.5%) and the rest of the province (5.1%).
- Bicycling was favoured more by respondents from Edmonton (10.4%) and Calgary (9.9%) than the rest of the province (8.1%).
- Calgarians (8.7%) show a preference for hiking/backpacking by more than double that of Edmontonians (3.5%), and the rest of the province (3.9%).
- Camping is most popular among individuals living outside of the major centres (19.8%) as compared to Edmontonians (14.5%) and Calgarians (13.9%).

**Graph 2: Regional Differences 2000 - Favourite Outdoor Pursuit**



### **Variations Over the Survey Years**

Gardening, hiking/backpacking, soccer, and running/jogging increased in rank as favourite activities from 1981 to 2000. Softball/baseball and fishing decreased in rank as favourite activities between 1981 and 2000.

### **Favourite Outdoor Activities Profiles**

Profiles for the top ranked outdoor activities include:

#### **1. Walking for Pleasure**

Profile: Favoured more by females; age 45-64; participation is very high for single parent families; highest among \$30,001-\$50,000 and \$90,001 or more household income ranges.

Main Reasons: To be alone, for physical health/exercise, to relax, and to enjoy nature.

#### **2. Camping**

Profile: Slightly more participation by males; 18-25 and 35-64 age groups; households of couples with or without children; households with incomes of \$30,001-\$90,000; highest among rural respondents.

Main Reasons: To be with family, to do things with friends, to meet people, to relax, to do something different from work, and to enjoy nature.

#### **3. Bicycling**

Profile: More likely to be males than females; age 44 and under; a consistent favourite activity across all household types and income groups.

Main Reasons: For physical health/exercise, to enjoy nature, to be alone, and to be with family.

#### **4. Gardening**

Profile: More females participating; highest participation among those age 35-65 years and older; highest among couples with or without children; most frequently mentioned by respondents with a household income of \$70,001-\$90,000; highest among respondents living in Edmonton.

Main Reasons: To be creative, because I'm good at it, to enjoy nature, to relax, and for pleasure.

#### **5. Hiking/backpacking**

Profile: Participation by both genders; highest among the 26-34 age group; popular with all income groups over \$10,000; highest among couples and single parent families; Calgary has the highest participation.

Main Reasons: For physical health/exercise, to be with family, to do things with friends, for pleasure, and to enjoy nature.

#### **6. Running/jogging**

Profile: Participation by both genders; highly favoured by those aged 26-34 and 45-64; participation increases as household income increases.

Main Reasons: To compete with others, for excitement, for the challenge, to be alone, and to be away from family.

## **7. Soccer**

Profile: Favoured by both males and females; participation is highest from age 18-34, and decreases as age increases; couples with children and households with two or more unrelated single adults.

Main Reasons: To compete with others, because I'm good at it, to improve my skills, to learn new skills, for a challenge, for excitement, for physical health/exercise, to do things with friends, to do something different from work, and to be away from family.

### ***Benefits***

In a national survey on the benefits of public parks and recreation services in Canada, 97% of households reported that their local parks provide them with benefits (Harper, p. 23). Outdoor recreation is said to offer physiological, psychological and social benefits. Some outdoor pursuits, including cross-country skiing, hiking and running, offer the best form of aerobic activity. Outdoor pursuits can also offer psychological benefits (Leitner, p. 348) as:

- an escape from day-to-day stresses and responsibilities
- a means of coping with stress from an urban lifestyle
- a unique mental stimulus
- a learning opportunity
- enhanced self-esteem
- a means of expressing personality, and
- an opportunity for privacy and solitude

The benefits of outdoor activities have also been studied for their effects specifically for women. Findings show "*wilderness recreation can influence women's everyday lives in the form of self-sufficiency, a shift in perspective, connection to others, and mental clarity*" (Pohl, p. 415). Many outdoor pursuits from picnicking to climbing are social, and promote sharing an experience and making that connection with others. Outdoor activities can also offer opportunities for

cooperative efforts, can teach people to fill different roles in a group, and can promote greater self-understanding through interaction with people with similar recreational interests (Leitner, p. 348-49).

It is important to further note the effects of demographic change on outdoor pursuits. Over the past 25 years there has been an increase in outdoor recreation activities as the baby boom generation became active adults. In recent years, a high proportion of this same baby boom generation has shown an increased interest in walking and gardening. As a high proportion of the population ages and takes on busier schedules, participation in more vigorous activity will decrease. "*A nation of young people is a society of hockey and tennis players. A nation of older people is a society of gardeners and walkers*" (Foot, p.151).

### ***Desired Outdoor Activity***

Respondents were asked to name an activity they wished to start. Of the top ten desired activities, five are outdoor pursuits.

1. Canoeing/Kayaking/rafting/rowing
2. Bicycling
3. In-line skating
4. Hiking/backpacking
5. Running/jogging

### **Barriers to Outdoor Pursuit Participation**

Respondents identified barriers preventing or limiting their participation in their desired activities listed above. The main barriers include:

#### **1. Canoeing/kayaking/rafting/rowing**

Main Barriers: Cost of equipment or supplies, too busy with work, too busy with family, and no opportunities near my home.

#### **2. Bicycling**

Main Barriers: Cost of equipment, too busy with family and/or work, and facilities overcrowded.

#### **3. In-line skating**

Main Barriers: Cost of equipment, too busy with family, lack of physical abilities, and don't know where to go to take part.

#### **4. Hiking/backpacking**

Main Barriers: Too busy with work and/or family, no opportunities near my home, don't know where to go, and cost of admission to facilities.

#### **5. Running/jogging**

Main Barriers: Too busy with work and/or family, lack of physical ability, and don't know where to go to take part.

Although it is important to look at the barriers that limits participation in certain activities, it is also important to recognize the lack of a real desire, or an inability to give any reason for not participating (Curry, p. 13).

#### ***Volunteering in Outdoor Activities***

Volunteering is another way for people to become involved in outdoor pursuits. The 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey asked respondents if they did any volunteer work connected with, recreation, sports, parks or culture. The following are some results related to volunteering with groups that could be outdoor related:

- 14.6% reported that they give time to local sports teams or clubs
- 14.2% volunteer for community leagues or associations
- 4.8% to conservation, parks, or ecology
- 2% to recreation/parks boards

#### **Volunteer Profiles**

The following is a summary profile of those people who are most likely to volunteer with groups that could be considered outdoor related.

**Conservation, Parks, Ecology, etc:** The majority are males; age 45-64, with university level education; couples with children, living in a large urban centre, average household income of \$50,001-\$90,000. Most conservation, parks, and ecology volunteers give 1-5 hours in an average week.

**Community Leagues or Associations:** Males; highest among couples without children and single parent families; most likely in rural areas.

**Local Sports Teams and Clubs:** Males; highest volunteer rate is among those living in small communities or rural areas.

**Recreation or Parks Boards:** Males; aged 35-64; usually live in rural areas; these volunteers provided the highest number of volunteer hours per week.

#### ***Implications***

When planning programs for outdoor recreation pursuits, it is important for a recreation practitioner to determine what activities are experiencing an increase and those that are decreasing in popularity and the reasons behind these changes. Foot (1996) indicates "*projections show that resting (t.v. viewing, crafts, etc.) will be one of Canada's most popular leisure "activities".*" (p. 152) due to an aging population. What does this mean for future recreation services and programs? Studies have shown that Canadians are not currently active enough for optimal health benefits. If "resting" activities become more popular how will it affect the health of Canadians?

Although our population is aging, there is a proportion of our population i.e., children of baby boomers and immigrants who will be interested in more strenuous activities.

Location is also an important factor of participation levels of outdoor activities. Calgarians show high rates of participation in mountain activities, whereas rural residents are more attracted to wilderness pursuits such as fishing, hunting and camping.

Outdoor recreation activities are influenced by environmental factors such as weather and damage to natural resources. Natural resources must be effectively managed and protected against damage from use which could restrict future use. Limiting the use of certain areas for outdoor activities may create potential conflict between different outdoor activity enthusiasts.

The end goal for outdoor recreation planners is to "*provide people with the entire spectrum of outdoor recreation opportunities, minimize conflicts between people and their desired activities, and make sure that the environment will remain as natural as possible for the enjoyment of future generations.*" (Leitner, p. 357-60)

## **References**

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